

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 475

1 Samuel 26

July 29, 2023

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Episode Summary

David spares Saul's life twice, showing his mercy and compassion. Saul is starting to realize that David is a threat to his throne, and he is afraid that David will eventually kill him and take over as king. The prophet Samuel anoints David as king, even though Saul is still the reigning king. This further angers Saul and makes him even more determined to kill David.

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 475: 1 Samuel 26. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin and he's the scholar, Dr. Ronn Johnson. Hey, Ronn! How ya doing?

RJ: Hey, Trey. Good to talk to you again.

TS: Yes, yes. And you have some other sad news to tell us about Dr. Carl Sanders.

RJ: I do. Many of the listeners here know Dr. Carl Sanders, a good friend of Mike's over the years. He's my brother-in-law. So there are several times that we talked together with Mike, often at ETS or SBL. We were always there together, but sometimes Mike would talk with us and make an episode. Well, Carl had cancer around the same time period that Mike did. For about a year and a half, he battled stomach cancer. And he passed away two weeks after Mike did. I'm going to be heading off to his memorial this weekend and back. So it's just an unbelievable turn of events. I would honestly say my two heroes of the faith—present-day buddies in the faith, I guess I'd call it... Buddies but heroes because of how they conducted their lives as well. I lost them both in two weeks, so... Unbelievable. It's a good reminder that we're here to get out of here in one sense and God is doing something bigger than us.

TS: Absolutely. I hate to hear that. Prayers for his family and you. And also, if you want to go back, we interviewed Carl, you, and Mike (all three of y'all together) at the ETS conferences. I think one episode was Episode 245 of the Naked Bible Podcast. So you can go back there and check that out. And then we have another one, and we have a picture of all three of y'all on the website (at

nakedbiblepodcast.com website), where you can take a look at y'all chatting it up. Those are good memories. I enjoyed those conversations, probably the most out of all of the conference because y'all were so close and friends and so y'all would kinda let your hair down and cut up a little bit. So that was always fun to listen to.

RJ: Yeah, that's totally how I saw it, too. Just a good time to shoot the bull in a theological sense and have a good time.

TS: Absolutely. Well, alright, we're here today for chapter 26 of 1 Samuel, and I'm ready if you are.

RJ: I am! Thank you.

So 1 Samuel 26. We're continuing the narrative of really what 1 Samuel 15:23 and on is doing, which is getting rid of Saul. God is replacing Saul, whom he has rejected as the king. And (as I said when I was last with you for chapter 23) from all indications, Saul was not a Yahwist from what I can tell. When you carry a divine council worldview into the biblical story, that makes a big difference, right? So at the end of Saul's life, it looks like the narrative will say in chapter 31 that he dies on Gilboa, but 1 Chronicles 10:13-14 says very bluntly that God killed him, which is not language that would remind you of a Yahwist. This is someone who has not ever claimed (I would recommend) Yahweh.

But anyway, today in chapter 26, the narrative is that David is running from Saul. He will refuse to kill him for the second time, but he's also going to be conversing with him. Wouldn't you know it again, but the Divine Council Worldview really makes a difference in how you interpret this chapter—both in how David acts and especially what he says. So let's get into it. Chapter 26, verse 1:

Now the Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah, saying, "Is David not hiding in the hill of Hachilah, opposite Jeshimon?"² Then Saul arose and went down to the Wilderness of Ziph, having three thousand chosen men of Israel with him, to seek David in the Wilderness of Ziph.

Dropping down to verse 5:

⁵ So David arose and came to the place where Saul had encamped. And David saw the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army. Now Saul lay within the camp [RJ: probably surrounded], with the people encamped all around him.⁶ Then David answered, and said to Ahimelech the Hittite...

By the way, that's an interesting name. Ahimelech is a Semitic name, but he has pagan ancestry. He's a Hittite. So he's probably a proselyte to the Jewish army and changed his name: "Ahimelech the Hittite."

...and to Abishai the son of Zeruiah, brother of Joab, saying, "Who will go down with me to Saul in the camp?"

5:00

And Abishai said, "I will go down with you."

⁷ So David and Abishai [RJ: that's his nephew, by the way] came to the people by night; and there Saul lay sleeping within the camp, with his spear stuck in the ground by his head. And Abner and the people lay all around him. ⁸ Then Abishai said to David [RJ: he probably whispered this, by the way], "God has delivered your enemy into your hand this day. Now therefore, please, let me strike him at once with the spear, right to the earth; and I will not *have to strike* him a second time!"

⁹ But David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him; for who can stretch out his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless?"

This is the second time (and he's going to say this numerous times) that Saul is Yahweh's *mashiach*—anointed one. Of course, *mashiach* is where we get the title "messiah." So just a bit about this. *Mesiah* or *mashiach* just means "to anoint" or "to smear" with oil. It's not a capital "M." In other words, there never was the capital "M" messiah in the Old Testament—"the one." In fact, the title, "the Christ," will be placed upon Jesus in the New Testament, but there's no text in the Old Testament that talks about THE Messiah.

So what you have is a pretty common idea of someone being chosen or anointed for a task. It's not a religious idea. In fact, we have priests, we have numerous kings, we have Saul here, David will later be called the *mashiach*, prophets... In 1 Chronicles 16, you have them described as anointed. So judges, kings, prophets, warriors... even someone like Cyrus, who is not a Yahwist, in Isaiah 44 and 45 is called a messianic figure or a messiah. So it's a growing concept throughout the Old Testament and a very Jewish concept to this day. A Jew today does expect a messiah to come. The difference between Christians and Jews is we believe he has come and they believe he has not yet come. They would say (this is again just speaking what a Jew would expect the messiah to be)... They would not expect him to be a deity, not a co-ruler with Yahweh by any means, not worshipable. They would argue that you would not worship a messiah. He would not be a source of individual salvation—these things that we attach to Jesus because of our Christian theology. In the sense of what a messiah would be

going forward or looking ahead in the Old Testament, a lot of those things are not part of their thinking when it comes to a messiah.

So whatever happens between 1 Samuel 26 and when Jesus is said by Peter (Matthew 16), "You are the Christ," or John 11, when Martha says, "You are the Christ..." So those kinds of phrases. Whatever happens between 1 Samuel 26 and the New Testament is certainly a maturing and even a traveling concept called "The Messiah." So we can't really go to the Old Testament for an entrenched idea of a coming person called a messiah. Now of course, we have "coming one" and we have a lot of other things we can say, like a "suffering servant" and other texts we can put together. But the word "messiah" that David uses for Saul here is rather limited in how much we can get out of it. And I wouldn't sanitize or romanticize the text or David. He was a brutal man. He was cruel as a warrior. And so when he says, "Let's not kill him," I don't romanticize that moment. I just see his Yahwism in action, as it were. He's saying... In fact, he even says it. Let's keep reading in verse 10:

¹⁰ David said furthermore, "As the Lord lives [RJ: kind of a creedal way of talking], the Lord shall strike him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall go out to battle and perish. ¹¹ The Lord forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the Lord's anointed [messiah]. But please, take now the spear and the jug of water that *are* by his head, and let us go."

So he takes his spear, the water jug, and they go across this rather deep valley. And here's where, if you visit Israel, you've got to go to En Gedi because you can see the gorge that would be probably in view here. You can literally stand across from someone, maybe 30 or 50 yards (not very far) and you can have a conversation with them, but the gorge is so steep and so deep that you know you're safe. If all they have is a spear, there's no way they can hurt you. So he teases Abner... We'll not read these verses, but he teases Abner by saying, "You should face the firing squad for being so lax. My five-pound Yorkie sleeping here at my feet could've done a better job." He probably is teasing him for not protecting Saul. Well, Saul speaks up in verse 17. He wakes up, sees what happens.

10:00

¹⁷ Then Saul knew David's voice, and said, "Is that your voice, my son David?"

Now there's where a good example of the word "son" (*ben* in Hebrew) is a term of endearment. It's not necessarily a word of begetting someone physically. We've talked in this divine council discussion of *bene elohim* or "sons of the gods." Again, "son" can be very broad in meaning. Intimacy can be, like in this sense, used there.

“Is that your voice, my son David?”

David said, “It is my voice, my lord, O king.”¹⁸ And he said, “Why does my lord thus pursue his servant? For what have I done, or what evil is in my hand?”

And as we come to verse 19, look for a divine council worldview that's quite clear in the text. It's in the mouth of David. I presume David to be (and this has been in my head for a long time)... David is the consummate theologian of the Old Testament, if not of all the Bible. The reason I can say that is because when you get to the New Testament (this is a separate discussion)... I think we often make the mistake of thinking of New Testament writers as theologians, more than what I would take to be more of midrashists, or someone who goes back into the story and expounds its meaning—searches, as in the idea of a midrash. You search the text to find meaning. And here's the point: you don't create new theology. I think one of the weaknesses of... May I even talk about my own evangelical tradition? We make Paul to be a theologian when Paul would, I think, turn over in his grave if he found out how much we take his words to overdo or change the story of the Bible.

This isn't a discussion about the New Testament, but my point is that when we come upon David saying something like he's going to say in verse 19, I recommend that we listen to him and even take his words to be true. When we say that, I know it sounds a bit on the front side, but listen to what David says. Verse 19:

¹⁹ Now therefore, please, let my lord the king hear the words of his servant: If the Lord has stirred you up against me, let Him accept an offering. But if *it is* the children of men [RJ: *bene adam*—there's that word meaning a classification, "sons of mankind, meaning he's a human class of being], *may they be* cursed before the Lord, for they have driven me out this day from sharing in the inheritance of the Lord...

That's the idea again of much of what we talked about in Mike's work. Back in Deuteronomy 4, 19, and 32, God has allotted to the nations divine beings to rule over those nations on Yahweh's behalf. Listen to it again:

...for they have driven me out this day from sharing [abiding] in the inheritance of the Lord [Yahweh], saying [RJ: remember, they had driven him to Moab], ‘Go, serve other gods.’

Cosmic geography 101, right? He's complaining to Saul that he was kicked out of Israel or forced out of Israel and had to go live in Moab. In the ancient worldview that... Again, this consummate theologian is honestly talking the truth here—that

when you cross a border in the ancient world, you're expected to serve the elohim allotted to that territory. Yahweh controlled Israel and if he crosses the border into Moab, he had to serve Chemosh. That's just how David thought. If you don't serve Chemosh, a worse thing will happen to thee, right? In other words, you're taking your life in your hands by not just the people of Moab, but the god of Moab.

So if we say to that, "Well, nah, he's just kind of talking mythology" or "David is just expressing himself in the terms of the ancient world," my challenge back would be to name a time that David doesn't believe this. This is clearly his frustration with Saul—that he's been forced to go into a different land "to go serve other gods."

15:00 We've been through these texts before, but they are good ones to look at. 2 Kings 5:17-18, where Naaman wants to put two bags of dirt on his donkeys to go back and worship Yahweh in his own territory up in Syria... The reason he does that is because he believes what David says, "When you go across a border, you are destined to serve the god of that other nation."

Ezekiel 20... I'm going to read this one because it's right on topic here. In Ezekiel 20, verse 24:

²⁴ because they had not executed My judgments, but had despised My statutes, profaned My Sabbaths, and their eyes were fixed on their fathers' idols [RJ: Talking about the exiles now],

²⁵ "Therefore I also gave them up to statutes *that were* not good, and judgments by which they could not live;

When Israel was forced to go into Babylonia, God is admitting through Ezekiel that they were forced to live under statutes that, as it says, "were not good."

²⁶ and I pronounced them unclean because of their ritual gifts, in that they caused all their firstborn to pass through *the fire*...

Speaking of child sacrifice and such. And you can go all the way down to verse 32:

'We will be like the Gentiles, like the families in other countries, serving wood and stone.'

That's what the Israelites were thinking, and that's why God sent them into exile. We talked about it before, but Deuteronomy 32... This cosmic geography issue becomes prevalent when in verse 22 of Genesis 32, he crosses over the ford of the Jabbock. It's the first mention of the Jabbock river in the Bible. If you look it up in Yale Anchor Bible Dictionary, the Jabbock is the border of Sihon's kingdom. So just think common sense here in the ancient world... If I'm crossing a border, I am walking into the territory of not just another people group, but another god. And wouldn't you know, the next thing is he has this wrestling match with a divine being. This is a good case where you take the capital "G" off Genesis 32 verse 28.

28 And He said, "Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel; for you have struggled with God and with men, and have prevailed."

Take the capital "G" off. Use the Hebrew Bible (the Jewish Publication Society Bible) and it has, "you have struggled with a divine being and have prevailed." So they don't see Yahweh there, they see an evil god that has tried to kill Jacob.

Again, what we're seeing in just a quip of David in 26:19 is a very strong sense of a Divine Council Worldview—cosmic geography.

1 Samuel 26:21:

21 Then Saul said, "I have sinned..."

Now, would we expect a non-Yahwist to repent of his sins? I think they do it all the time. I think it's bound deep within the heart of humanity to be sorry for one's sins when you're caught. So I don't take this as any kind of hint that Saul has a kind heart toward Yahweh or David. I think if he had a chance, he'd kill him still. But, of course, he's a politician, so he says:

"I have sinned. Return, my son David. For I will harm you no more [RJ: yeah right], because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Indeed I have played the fool and erred exceedingly."

Again, words of a politician running for office.

22 And David answered and said [RJ: and I love his answer], "Here is the king's spear. Let one of the young men come over and get it."

"I'm leaving. I have no time for you. If you want to come over and get it, you're welcome to it."

20:00

Well, we come to verse 23. Probably as a Viking fan, I'd be willing to trade a Viking Superbowl for changing a moment of history that happened (if I may say so) back in the days of Calvin as he was writing his *Institutes*. In a candlelit room one night when Calvin was writing and basically summarizing the theological position of the Reformation one generation later... Put it this way: Calvin presumed that the Roman Catholic Church got salvation right on the first half of the question, that being, "What stands between heaven and hell?" or "What causes a person to go from hell to heaven?" And he came up with (and the Catholic Church had it as well), "The forgiveness of sins." "The thing keeping you out of heaven is the forgiveness of sins." Now, what Calvin disagreed with the Catholic Church about (and so did Luther) was the second half of that question, and that is the "how" question: "How are you forgiven?" And Calvin and others said, "Not indulgences, not the priesthood; it comes in the finished work of Christ." So I understand and I appreciate the Reformation for what it answered, but I'd recommend that we could have gone back farther, even to the days of... Well, here we have 1 Samuel 26:23. So like I say, I'd give up a lot more than the Superbowl [laughs], maybe my left arm, but the idea of if we could have traded out the Reformation idea that forgiveness of sins was the key to getting into heaven and instead take David's words of 1 Samuel 26:23, everything would have been different. So listen to it:

²³ May the Lord [Yahweh] repay every man *for* his righteousness and his faithfulness;

Here's the problem: we often tell people how to get saved by telling them to accept the privileges of being a Christian. So we'll talk about sins forgiven and asking God into your heart or those kinds of things—asking him to forgive your sins. But listen to how David would have described the gospel:

²³ May the Lord repay every man *for* his righteousness and his faithfulness;

Now righteousness is *tsedekah*. It's a very common word in the Old Testament. Not even a religious word; it just means "to be right," "to be proper." It's used in a non-legal sense almost all the time. I really get nervous when I hear people say that *tsedekah* or righteousness is a legal idea. I would almost challenge anyone, "Show me one time that it's in a legal context." It's almost never in a legal context in the Old Testament, nor is *dikiosune* in the New Testament (the word "righteousness" in the Greek). It's a simple, straightforward idea of being proper, whether it's fixing a wagon wheel or a person's standing with God, even. I guess you could say it that way. But listen to that second word:

²³ May the Lord repay every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness;

"Faithfulness" is *amuna*. *Aman* is the word for faith; *amuna* is the adjective "faithful." So faithfulness (*amuna*) is a word that occurs 49 times in the Old Testament. It is translated as "steady," once as a nurse who cares for a baby, a nursing mother. Let's, in fact read... I want to show you Psalm 36:5.

**⁵ Your mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens;
Your faithfulness [*amuna*] reaches to the clouds.**

It's translated as "faithfulness." Psalm 37:3:

**³ Trust in the Lord, and do good;
Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.**

Same word. What's interesting, then, when you think about it is David is saying the Lord will repay a man according to the very thing that Yahweh has, too, and that Yahweh demands of people. So what is *amuna*? It's simple. And Mike talked about this. I loved it when he talked about believing loyalty. Mike wasn't making up a concept there. He was simply taking the word for what it stands for. Habbakuk 2:4:

But the just shall live by his faith [*amuna*].

By his loyalty. So in the Old Testament, the gospel was, "Which *elohim* do you love?" Simple as that. And the Lord would repay or reward or give righteousness or consider a person righteous if they simply followed the wishes of Yahweh, as opposed to any other god. So that's why the Divine Council Worldview... I'm finding it just screaming out of our text here today. And David got it right. David noticed that God is rewarding a person, and he's saying that to a man (Saul) who, of course, is on the other side of the brick wall. He's saying, as it were, "Saul, here's how God works: unless you're loyal to him, you're in trouble." And so he was saying this, as it were, to an unrighteous man. And of course, he would have invited him across, but Saul would have none of it. Continuing:

...for the Lord delivered you into *my* hand today [RJ: "I was righteous"], but I would not stretch out my hand against the Lord's anointed.

When I say I would give up almost anything for the Reformation to have been different as to what it preached, it's easy to ask (and I think we should), "Does

the rest of the Bible defend this idea of the gospel—that God rewards a person according to their faithfulness?" Psalm 7:8 (David wrote it):

**⁸ The Lord shall judge the peoples;
Judge me, O Lord, according to my righteousness,
And according to my integrity within me.**

Psalm 18:20

**²⁰ The Lord rewarded me according to my righteousness;
According to the cleanness of my hands
He has recompensed me.**

Psalm 18:24

²⁴ Therefore the Lord has recompensed me according to my righteousness,

Psalm 125:4

25:00

**⁴ Do good, O Lord, to *those who are good*,
And to *those who are upright* in their hearts.**

Now the Reformation doctrine is built on the concept that no one is righteous. Well, that's misunderstanding what Paul meant, because in the Old Testament, you clearly have righteous people. David is even saying, "God you have rewarded me according to my righteousness." So if we undo David's theology by starting the conversation by saying, "No one is righteous," I think we have completely botched it. We've taken the greatest theologian of the Old Testament and thrown out his whole model. When you get to Paul in Romans 2, he'll say it this way:

...you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, ⁶ who...

And now he's going to quote Psalm 62:

⁶ who "will render to each one according to his deeds": ⁷ eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality;

Like I say, that's a quote from Psalm 62:12:

**¹² Also to You, O Lord, *belongs* mercy;
For You render to each one according to his work.**

Proverbs 24:12 says much the same. Now, I've been around long enough to know what people say and what theologians say: "What about Jeremiah 17:9?"

**⁹ "The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*,
And desperately wicked;
Who can know it?**

What I'd recommend is to look at the context. I'm going to back up and read that passage again, but notice the story of Jeremiah 17, beginning in verse 7.

**"Blessed *is* the man who trusts in the Lord,
And whose hope is the Lord.
⁸ For he shall be like a tree planted by the waters,
Which spreads out its roots by the river,
And will not fear when heat comes;
But its leaf will be green,
And will not be anxious in the year of drought,
Nor will cease from yielding fruit.**

**⁹"The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*,
And desperately wicked;
Who can know it?**

**¹⁰ I, the Lord, search the heart,
I test the mind,
Even to give every man according to his ways,
According to the fruit of his doings.**

You see how the text doesn't mean that every man is wicked. The text is saying that God knows who is wicked and who isn't by their heart. God can see inside of a person, whereas you and I can't. So the text isn't saying what the Reformation said it said, and I think it's just a matter of reading in context to figure that out.

So I love chapter 26 of 1 Samuel for, again, what David shows us—his unwillingness to take the life of a man because he knew that Yahweh was in charge. He's acting... Like I called it: "Yahwism in action." He's not going to take

the life of a person just because he wants to. Like I say, he will be a cruel warrior at other times. Secondly, that phrase, "You have forced me to go to Moab to worship another deity..." He's just fallen right into line with what we've learned throughout the Old Testament. And of course, David was not going to worship Chemosh, and that's why he hated being in Moab. And then this righteousness and faithfulness... The reason this is a Divine Council Worldview issue (how to define the gospel) is because it's the result of the question of "which *elohim* do you worship?" And if there's anything that the Divine Council Worldview screams for, it's to define our righteousness, not by the results of being a Christian (and I'll put forgiveness of sins in there), but by the doorway into Christianity, which is "which God do you worship?" And that's why salvation is always a faith issue in the New Testament... Well, the Old Testament as well.

So that'll do it! Thank you, Trey!

TS: Oh, thank you, Ronn! That was good. But we're going to have to get you some other references besides the Vikings because... [laughter]

RJ: Well, they're never going to end. We have a sportscasting duo up here in the Twin Cities, and that's their tag line. Like you say, "I'm the layman..." They always start their weekly broadcast with, "All we want before we die is a Viking Superbowl. Before we die. That's all we want, you know, one." So they're not asking for the world, but...

TS: Well, when you had Case Keenum for quarterback, did you like him?

RJ: He was a believer and he was a nice guy. He was very good in the locker room and everyone liked him. But it was a... you know...

TS: He's actually from my high school!

RJ: Get out!

TS: Yeah, he graduated from...

RJ: How old was he compared to you?

TS: He's probably 15 years younger than me.

RJ: What high school is this?

TS: Abilene Wylie.

RJ: Really? Okay. Any other famous people in your high school?

TS: Other than me? [laughs]

RJ: And Case Keenum.

TS: Yeah, I'm on par with Case Keenum, right? I mean, NFL quarterback and... [pause]... me. No comparison. [laughter]

30:00 Well, hey, I went back and looked up on the interviews with you, Carl, and Mike, and it's episode 188 and 245. So for those of you that want to go back and listen to Mike, Ronn, and Carl, please go back and do so. They're fantastic. And again, our prayers are with Carl's family and with you, Ronn. We appreciate you coming on and helping us complete 1 Samuel. And with that, I want to thank everybody else for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.