

# OpenTheo

## August 7th: 1 Samuel 26 & Romans 8:1-17

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David spares Saul a second time. The Law of the Spirit of life has set me free from the Law of Sin and Death.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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## Transcript

1 Samuel 26 Then the Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah, saying, Is not David hiding himself on the hill of Hekila, which is on the east of Deshimun? So Saul arose and went down to the wilderness of Ziph, with three thousand chosen men of Israel, to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul encamped on the hill of Hekila, which is beside the road on the east of Deshimun. But David remained in the wilderness.

When he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness, David sent out spies and learned that Saul had indeed come. Then David rose and came to the place where Saul had encamped. And David saw the place where Saul lay, with Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army.

Saul was lying within the encampment, while the army was encamped around him. Then David said to Ahimelech the Hittite, and to Joab's brother Abishai the son of Zeruiah, will

go down with me into the camp to Saul? And Abishai said, I will go down with you. So David and Abishai went to the army by night.

And there lay Saul sleeping within the encampment, with his spear stuck in the ground at his head. And Abner and the army lay around him. Then Abishai said to David, God has given your enemy into your hand this day.

Now please let me pin him to the earth with one stroke of the spear, and I will not strike him twice. But David said to Abishai, Do not destroy him, for who can put out his hand against the Lord's anointed and be guiltless? And David said, As the Lord lives, the Lord will strike him, or his day will come to die, or he will go down into battle and perish. The Lord forbid that I should put out my hand against the Lord's anointed.

But take now the spear that is at his head, and the jar of water, and let us go. So David took the spear and the jar of water from Saul's head, and they went away. No man saw it or knew it, nor did any awake, for they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the Lord had fallen upon them.

Then David went over to the other side, and stood far off on the top of the hill, with a great space between them. And David called to the army, and to Abner the son of Ner, saying, Will you not answer Abner? Then Abner answered, Who are you who calls to the king? And David said to Abner, Are you not a man? Who is like you in Israel? Why then have you not kept watch over your lord the king? For one of the people came in to destroy the king your lord. This thing that you have done is not good.

As the Lord lives, you deserve to die, because you have not kept watch over your lord, the Lord's anointed. And now see where the king's spear is, and the jar of water that was at his head. Saul recognized David's voice, and said, Is this your voice, my son David? And David said, It is my voice, my lord, O king.

And he said, Why does my lord pursue after his servant? For what have I done? What evil is on my hands? Now therefore let my lord the king hear the words of his servant. If it is the lord who has stirred you up against me, may he accept an offering. But if it is men, may they be cursed before the lord, for they have driven me out this day that I should have no share in the heritage of the lord, saying, Go, serve other gods.

Now therefore let not my blood fall to the earth away from the presence of the lord, for the king of Israel has come out to seek a single flea like one who hunts a partridge in the mountains. Then Saul said, I have sinned. Return, my son David, for I will no more do you harm, because my life was precious in your eyes this day.

Behold, I have acted foolishly, and have made a great mistake. And David answered and said, Here is the spear, O king. Let one of the young men come over and take it.

The lord rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness, for the lord gave

you into my hand today, and I would not put out my hand against the lord's anointed. Behold, as your life was precious this day in my sight, so may my life be precious in the sight of the lord, and may he deliver me out of all tribulation. Then Saul said to David, Blessed be you, my son David.

You will do many things and will succeed in them. So David went his way, and Saul returned to his place. First Samuel chapter 26 very closely parallels the content of chapter 24.

There is a feeling of *deja vu*. Indeed the first verse almost repeats word for word what was given to us back in chapter 23 verse 19. The Ziphites go to Gibeah and inform Saul about David's being in pretty much exactly the same location.

The parallels with chapter 24 are quite striking. First Saul is informed about David's location. Then he takes 3,000 chosen men.

David has the opportunity to kill Saul. Saul is in a state of blindness, the blindness of darkness on the first occasion in the cave and then the blindness of sleep on this occasion. David's men encourage him to take Saul's life and he resists.

Unbeknownst to Saul, David takes something of Saul's that symbolises his royal authority. From a distance David declares that he has saved Saul, not taking his life into his hands and gives proof. Saul uses the expression, Is that your voice David my son? David compares Saul's pursuit of him to pursuing a flea.

Saul confesses his sin and declares that David will be blessed and then they both go their own way. Things are playing out almost exactly the same way as they did previously. However when stories largely repeat in scripture they never exactly repeat.

We need to be alert to the differences that we can observe. David now goes out to Saul's camp rather than Saul unwittingly coming into his camp in the cave. Perhaps the greatest difference here involves the role played by Abner, the son of Ner.

This time Saul is not alone. He's surrounded by Abner and his army. He's not just covering his feet in the cave.

Abner is, in many respects, David's replacement. He's Saul's right hand man, the commander of his army. That's the position that David should have occupied and so David's challenge to Abner is a challenge to someone who is some sort of counterpart.

All of the people are asleep and David and Abishai go over to the camp. This might remind us of Gideon and his servant going to the camp of the Midianites at night or Jonathan and his armour bearer going over to the camp of the Philistines. We are here introduced to Abishai as well, one of the famous sons of Zeruiah.

He is a brother of Asahel and even more famously of Joab. James Jordan has remarked upon the way that the camp of Saul is described and he suggests that there might be an allusion to the Garden of Eden. The spear stuck in the ground at the head of Saul is like a tree.

As we've seen, it is the stick that represents Saul, like Aaron or Moses' rods represented them. There's also a jar of water connected with the spring or the well that you would find in the garden. Saul is with the tree in the very centre of the garden.

Abishai wants to pin Saul to the ground as Saul had tried to pin David to the wall but David prevents him. David recognises the appropriateness of judgement against Saul but it isn't something to take into his own hand. It's to be left to God.

God will judge in Saul's case. The Garden of Eden themes are important here. Saul is like the forbidden fruit and the temptation to David is to stretch forth his hand and to take the office of Saul.

Parallels to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil might be worth exploring here. The tree was a tree associated with judgement and rule. The promise was that you would be like gods, knowing good and evil, having authority within the world, the authority of judgement, being like one of the powers in the divine council.

However, that is forbidden fruit. It belongs to God to give in the appropriate time. This wouldn't be the first time that we've seen themes of Adam in this story and it won't be the last.

Saul was a sort of Adam when he fought against Nahash, the serpent. David was a sort of Adam when he fought against Goliath, another serpent figure. Saul is like Esau but also like Adam.

He rebels against his heavenly father and he takes the forbidden fruit. David, however, is faithful where Adam and Saul were not. The reference to deep sleep here might also recall the story of Eden.

There are only three occasions in the narrative parts of scripture where deep sleep is mentioned. It's mentioned in the story of Abraham as he's placed in a deep sleep and the Lord appears to him in a vision. And then it's mentioned, of course, back in chapter 2 of Genesis where the woman is created from the side of the man.

When David reveals his identity to Saul and his men, he speaks particularly to Abner. Abner is judged for his failure to guard his master. The judgement is given concerning him.

You deserve to die. This is similar to the judgement upon Adam. Adam failed to guard the garden.

Abner failed to guard his master. Of course, who should be guarding Saul? David. We learnt back in chapter 22 that Saul had set David as the captain over his bodyguard and now without David, his life was put in danger.

While, as we have noticed, there are a lot of similarities between this story and that of chapter 24, David's address to Abner suggests that the focus has slightly shifted. Saul once again acknowledges his fault. However, as we've seen from Saul, there is lots of remorse for what he has done and certainly for the consequences, but very little repentance and true change of life.

David has shown his power to take the spear, but he returns it to Saul. And Saul invites David to return, to become his servant once again, but David does not do so. David has learnt by now that Saul is fickle.

He will seem to repent, but it won't stick. Once again here, there are also elements that might remind us of the blessing of Jacob by Isaac. Saul once again is like Isaac.

He asks whether the voice is the voice of David. He is deceived in his blindness, in the darkness and then in sleep, and something is taken from him, and then he ends by giving a blessing. A question to consider, what might we learn from looking at the three stories of David's resistance of temptation that occur in succession from chapter 24 to 26? What are some key common themes? What are some contrasts between them? And what is their overall effect? Romans chapter 8 verses 1-17 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.

For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. For to set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot.

Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. You therefore are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

But if Christ is in you, although the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his

Spirit who dwells in you. So then, brothers, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh.

For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live. For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, Abba, Father.

The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him, in order that we may also be glorified with him. Romans chapter 8 is arguably the greatest summit in the mountain range of the epistle. It follows closely the case that Paul has been developing since chapter 5. Romans chapter 8 verses 1 to 11 completes the more immediate argument of Romans chapter 7, unpacking the contrast that was drawn in verses 5 and 6. For while we were living in the flesh our sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in our members to bear fruit for death, but now we are released from the law having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code.

Romans chapter 7 ended with an expression of the wretchedness of the self in the flesh, and with a bifurcated self and a bifurcated law. When the spiritual law of God comes on the scene, sin simply tightens its grip upon Adamic humanity, leaving it in an even bitterer bondage than it was before. While the law was given to Israel in particular, rather than to the nations more generally, under the law Israel responded as any other Adamic people would have done, had they been in the same position.

There was however a light at the end of the tunnel in the preceding chapter, a means of deliverance from the body of death. The second half of Romans chapter 7 unpacked verse 5 of the chapter, and now Romans chapter 8 verses 1-11 unpacks verse 6. But now we are released from the law having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code. The chapter begins by stating the truth that Paul is about to explain and then proceeds to unfold it.

The opening four verses of this chapter are arguably the most central claim of the entire book. Those in the Messiah Jesus have been released from the condition experienced by the eye of chapter 7. They no longer face the condemnation of the law. How can this be the case? Paul starts to develop an answer in the dense and cryptic statement of verse 2. Once again there are two laws, the law of sin and death and the law of the Spirit of life, just as there were at the end of the last chapter.

There is the law that tightened the grip of sin and death and which locked the Jews up and locked the Gentiles out. There is however another law, the law of the Spirit of life, a law operative in Jesus Christ. Paul has already defended the law against accusations that it is sinful in the previous chapter.

The problem was never with the law itself, it was with the human material that the law was working with. As Paul points out in verse 3, the problem was that the law was weakened by the flesh. Now however the law finally achieves its design.

The law failed when weakened by the flesh and hijacked by sin but now it succeeds when empowered by the Spirit for those in the Messiah Jesus. The law sought to give life, it declared do this and live, but the flesh rendered the performance of this impossible. God however has addressed the problem in sending his Son.

God's Son, Jesus the Messiah, entered into the fleshly Adamic condition. He took upon himself the full reality of human nature. As he entered into our condition, as the Christ, the representative ruler of the people, he could take the condition upon himself and deal with it within himself.

He died as a sin offering, what the words for sin means, so that the power of sin could be condemned in the flesh, the place where it had its greatest hold. This then made possible the fulfilment of the righteous requirement of the law in us, as we now walk according to the principle of the Spirit rather than that of the flesh. There have been questions hanging over Romans since chapter 2 where Paul spoke as though some people would be justified on the last day when judged according to their works.

We get something of an answer here. Those in Christ have been delivered from condemnation, as that condemnation has been borne by Christ himself, and the new life of the Spirit which is producing righteous behaviour in them is conforming them to the judgment that has been declared concerning them in their justification, a judgment that will be reiterated when they are judged according to works on the last day. Although God justifies the ungodly, delivering them into good standing with himself, those who are justified are not left in sin.

It is not the case that after justifying the ungodly out of sheer grace, God throws them back upon themselves to live in a way that merits their salvation. We never cease to stand in and live by grace. Rather it is a matter of God's own work within us, transforming us into the image of his Son.

It is also the fact that this is the shape that salvation and fellowship with God takes. Paul further draws out the contrast between those who live according to the flesh and those who live according to the Spirit. They set their minds on different things, being defined with ways of thinking, desiring, imagining and loving.

The way of the flesh produces death, while the way of the Spirit produces life and peace. Processes of thought lie at the very heart of the problem and are the primary site of the transformation. Paul isn't thinking so much about ideas as he is thinking about dispositions and orientations of the heart and mind, with two very different sets of consequences.

The central problem of the mind set on the things of the flesh is that it is fundamentally hostile to God. When the law comes along it will instinctively rebel against it. It cannot submit to the law and consequently it cannot please God.

It is as though the flesh has a severe allergy to the spiritual law and as soon as it is exposed to the law it starts to manifest itself in all sorts of unpleasant ways. It spews out sin, it swells up in rebellion. The law then, in a situation of the flesh, makes matters worse.

It does not actually produce that life that is pleasing to God. Rather it exacerbates the rebellion and the sin. Those in Christ, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit.

This strengthens the argument that the end of Romans 7 wasn't referring to redeemed humanity but fleshly Adamic humanity exposed to the allergen of the spiritual law, primarily in Israel but in a manner illustrative of the common human problem of the flesh. Flesh was the old realm and sin was its animating power. The new realm is Christ and the Spirit and the animating power is also the Spirit.

It is the presence of the Spirit of Christ within us that marks us out as Christ's own. The Spirit's empowering presence within us is also Christ's presence within us. Christ is present within us by his Spirit.

Although we are still subject to the power of death in our mortal bodies, if Christ is within us, his Spirit is life because of God's saving justice which is setting a broken world to rights. This Spirit is the very Spirit that raised Jesus himself from the dead and on the last day our bodies will also be raised by that Spirit. Until then however we already experience the new life of the age to come at work within us.

The direct upshot of all of this is that, as people graciously marked out by the Spirit of Christ, there is an onus upon us to live according to that Spirit in the newness of life that God has granted us. A life that isn't being lived isn't life, so we must live out the life of Christ if we want to possess that life. The alternative of course is living according to the flesh which has death as its natural outcome.

We are indebted to live according to the Spirit because the Spirit of God is the Spirit of our adoption. To receive the Spirit and to continue to live according to our old way of life would be to nullify the meaning of our adoption. It would be like an orphan adopted out of the sheer benevolence of his adoptive parents continuing to sleep out on the streets.

The fact of his adoption needs to be lived out in communion with his new family. Living lives of holiness is part of the shape of salvation because living in such a way is living out of the life of the Spirit and living in the reality of sonship of God and fellowship with Him. As those led by the Spirit we are also like the Israelites in the wilderness, led by the pillar of cloud and fire being brought toward the promised land of the new creation.



The danger for us as it was for the Israelites in the wilderness is that of returning to the old slavery that we left behind rather than trusting our loving Father and following Him into the freedom of sonship. The Spirit gives us a filial intimacy with God that leads us to cry out to Him, have a Father. The Spirit within us assures us that we are God's dearly loved children, not least in the fact that He spurs us to address God as Father in prayer.

If we are God's children though, we are also the heirs of God and fellow heirs with His Son, the Messiah, as we share in His standing. Sharing in the Messiah's sonship, however, requires commitment to the way of the Son, which is the way of suffering. Union with Christ, which entails life in Christ, the place where we enjoy all of these blessings, is a place of trial and testing.

However, just as it was the path that led to glory for Christ, so will it prove to be for us. A question to consider. Looking through Paul's argument here, what do you notice about the Trinitarian shape of our salvation?