

Saul, Saul
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1 Sam 26:13

(BHS)

וַיַּעֲבֹר דָּוִד הָעֵבֶר
וַיַּעֲמֵד עַל־רֹאשׁ־הַהָר מְרֹחֵק
רַב הַמָּקוֹם בֵּינֵיהֶם:

(RSV)

Then David went over to the other side,
and stood afar off on the top of the mountain,
with a great space between them

“David” is readily discernable in line 1. Notice the similarity of the first and third word there; they share the same radicals. The “top” of the mountain in line 2 is technically “head.” What is emphasized is the long distance between David and Saul.

Stop right now and read 1 Samuel 26. Go ahead, I’ll wait.

* * * * *

Okay, now that you read it ...

Saul encamped by the road leading to where David fled. Late that night, David crept into the camp, which was helplessly asleep (v7). David believed that Saul was in God’s hands, whose time would come eventually (v10). He took items—from near Saul’s head—and departed. No one could see David (v12). David ascended to the “top of the mountain.” With a great space between them, he called down to Saul’s camp (v13). They replied, “Who are you?”

Saul recognized his voice. David cried from the high elevation, “Why are you pursuing me? What have I done?” (v18). Saul confessed, “Surely I have acted like a fool and have greatly erred” (v21). This story ends with Saul blessing David, “You will do great things and will surely triumph” (v25).

King Saul was a Benjaminite who pursued David, God's anointed. At first, Saul was a good Israelite. He never apostatized; he kept the law. He desired to sacrifice to Yahweh and fight for Israel. But once he got comfortable with political power, he became increasingly consumed with his own legacy, his glory, his dynasty. This ultimately moved him to pursue God's elect with murderous intent.

Much later in history, there was another Benjaminite named Saul, who also was a faithful Israelite, true to Moses, but who also used his political power to pursue God's elect. The only time the New Testament mentions King Saul is where the later Saul is called Paul (Acts 13:9, 21). NT Saul intended to destroy the church and to hound Christians to death with his armed forces (Acts 9).

As this Saul neared Damascus, a light blinded him. Then he heard a voice calling to him from a great space away at high elevation. The men with him could also hear the voice but could see no one. From across the void, the voice said, "Saul, Saul, why are you pursuing me?" Saul answered, "Who are you, Lord?" Jesus temporarily caused Saul to suffer the removal of eyesight from his head. But from this point on, Saul would be Jesus' servant.

Luke must have used 1 Samuel 26 to help describe Paul's conversion. "Paul" means "little." David was of small stature. "Paul" identifies more with David than with big King Saul. (See McDonaugh, 2006). Remember that Jesus renamed Simon, Peter. Jacob gained the moniker "Israel." Likewise, there is murderous Saul the Pharisee and the good apostle Paul.

Paul gave up what Saul valued. Saul was a Hebrew of Hebrews, before the law blameless. He persecuted the church for God (Phil 3:4 – 6). These things are analogous to King Saul's self-confidence. Paul had to put off Saul, and put on Paul. "Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil 3:8). He had to put off having to be in control, promoting his own glory, having to make it all about himself.

So ... what is your name? Do you need to put off Grouchy and put on Childlike Faith? Put off Vindictive; put on Has Learned Forgiveness. Put off Selfish, and put on Charity.

Like both Sauls, you need to be convinced of the futility of your ungodly ways, be it a grudge, a pleasure, an advantage, or the like. You need to see the danger of resisting the work of God. God will have you. God will change you. God will get your attention. But this can be painful. He may have to take things away.

King Saul heard the voice of God's Messiah calling to him. Saul the Pharisee also heard the voice of the Messiah calling. And some day you will hear his voice calling you by name—even if it means rousing you from the sleep of death. On that day, he will give you a new name (Rev 2:17). There will be a new you, and your current struggle with sin will be over. We look forward to that day. It is in that hope we willingly suffer loss today. Amen, Come Lord Jesus!