



# Community Group Discussion Guide

February 23, 2025

1 Samuel 23: 15-29 | The Rock of Escape

## MOTIVATE

⇒ **Starter Question: Can you describe a time when you narrowly escaped a tricky situation? What was your means of escape?**

## DISCUSS

1 Samuel 23 records David's interaction with two different groups living in the territory of Judah. 1 Samuel 23:1–13 explains how David rescued the city of Keilah from the Philistines. 1 Samuel 23:15–29 describes the attempt of the Ziphites to turn David over to Saul. Between these two experiences, David received a last visit from his friend Jonathan, the eldest son of Saul. Jonathan encouraged David and renewed the covenant the two made earlier in 1 Samuel 20. (See [1 Samuel Overview](#) for more information.)

⇒ **Why should we remember that we will continue to see the contrast between David and Saul? How does this help us with context?**

Before David could become God's chosen king, it was beneficial for him to encounter adversity in his life. God used David's experiences as a fugitive to teach him how to face suffering and hardship head-on. God did not leave David alone. God brought Jonathan to encourage him, Abiathar the priest to guide him, and a group of mighty men to fight alongside of him. God's purpose was to build in David a godly character so he would trust Him and honor His will.<sup>1</sup>

⇒ **While adversity is painful, how can God use it to develop our character?**

**1 Samuel 23:15-18** David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life. David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh. **16** And Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God. **17** And he said to him, "Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Saul my father also knows this." **18** And the two of them made a covenant before the LORD. David remained at Horesh, and Jonathan went home.

While David managed to elude Saul by staying in strongholds in the wilderness of Ziph, Jonathan secretly visited him at Horesh, an otherwise unknown place. Jonathan came, bringing encouragement and a renewed pledge of loyalty. Jonathan's purpose was to help David find strength in God by confirming the larger picture of God's plan for David's life.

⇒ **How can godly friends be an important source of encouragement during times of hardship and adversity? Can you share an example of a friend doing this for you?**

<sup>1</sup> Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). [1, 2 Samuel](#) (Vol. 6, p. 173). Holman Reference.

Jonathan knew that David would be king over Israel and that Saul would not be able to lay a hand on him. As in other texts where the two appear together, Jonathan acknowledged the future greatness of David, though this statement is the most definitive of all (see also 1 Samuel 18:1–4; 20:11–17). After renewing their covenant before God, Jonathan returned home. This marked the last time David ever saw Jonathan alive.

- ⇒ **Discuss this quote: David is no doubt encouraged by their long-standing friendship, but perhaps more by Jonathan’s certainty and optimism about the future.** <sup>2</sup>
- ⇒ **Why was Jonathan’s final visit so timely in David’s life?**

**1 Samuel 23:19-24** Then the Ziphites went up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, “Is not David hiding among us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hachilah, which is south of Jeshimon? **20** Now come down, O king, according to all your heart's desire to come down, and our part shall be to surrender him into the king's hand.” **21** And Saul said, “May you be blessed by the LORD, for you have had compassion on me. **22** Go, make yet more sure. Know and see the place where his foot is, and who has seen him there, for it is told me that he is very cunning. **23** See therefore and take note of all the lurking places where he hides, and come back to me with sure information. Then I will go with you. And if he is in the land, I will search him out among all the thousands of Judah.” **24** And they arose and went to Ziph ahead of Saul.

Apparently, the Ziphites had been watching David in the strongholds at Horesh. Horesh is said to have been located on the hill of Hachilah south of Jeshimon. Jeshimon is the name given to the barren eastern part of the mountains of Judah stretching toward the Dead Sea. This area was full of caves and was an ideal hideout for fugitives and outlaws. The Ziphites were connected with the family of Caleb (1 Chronicles 2:42) and therefore associated with the tribe of Judah.<sup>3</sup>

The Ziphites took it upon themselves to go to Saul at Gibeah to encourage him to come into their territory to seize David and his men who were staying near their city. They went so far as to promise that they would be responsible for surrendering David to Saul. It is uncertain as to why they were so eager to hand David over.

- ⇒ **How could it have benefitted the Ziphites to help Saul capture David?**

Saul basically told them to go back and make further preparation for his coming. Saul may not have believed that they could deliver David, so he directed the Ziphites to become his spies. Saul believed David to be very crafty. The word “cunning” implies skill in achieving one’s ends through deceit and evasion. Saul wanted a list of specific hiding places where David might take refuge. When the Ziphites produced such intelligence, Saul bragged that he would go with them and track David down among all the clans of Judah.<sup>4</sup>

- ⇒ **Based on verse 21 and his past experiences with God, how was Saul misreading the situation?**

<sup>2</sup> Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (pp. 321–322). Zondervan.

<sup>3</sup> Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). [1, 2 Samuel](#) (Vol. 6, pp. 163–164). Holman Reference.

<sup>4</sup> Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). [1, 2 Samuel](#) (Vol. 6, pp. 163–164). Holman Reference.

**1 Samuel 23:25-29:** Now David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the Arabah to the south of Jeshimon. **25** And Saul and his men went to seek him. And David was told, so he went down to the rock and lived in the wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard that, he pursued after David in the wilderness of Maon. **26** Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain. And David was hurrying to get away from Saul. As Saul and his men were closing in on David and his men to capture them, **27** a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Hurry and come, for the Philistines have made a raid against the land." **28** So Saul returned from pursuing after David and went against the Philistines. Therefore that place was called the Rock of Escape. **29** And David went up from there and lived in the strongholds of Engedi.

When David moved his men farther south into the Judahite desert, Saul led his troops to the region in pursuit of David. Saul finally caught up with David in the desert of Maon and sent his soldiers around the hill occupied by David and his men.

Maon is approximately eight miles south-southeast of Hebron and just over four miles south of Ziph. These geographical references are used somewhat imprecisely, not because the narrator is confused about their locations but because many of these events occurred in the open fields and hills between occupied cities. David was being forced to find refuge in the remote cracks and crevices of the southern deserts of Judah.<sup>5</sup> At the high point of the encounter, Saul was able to follow on one side of the mountain while David and his men were on the other side, trying to elude capture. It appears that Saul and his forces were closing in to take David.

Before Saul could engage David in battle, a messenger reached the king, informing him of some Philistine attacks on Israelites settlements. Saul was forced to break off his pursuit of David in order to confront the Philistine threat. Direct conflict with Saul was averted—although there is more to come.

⇒ **Discuss this quote: In his desperate obsession with killing David, Saul is completely dependent on his own wisdom and whatever information he can gather from informants. All of this while the king should have been concerned instead about the Philistines.** <sup>6</sup>

In commemoration of this deliverance, David and his men named the location of their close encounter with Saul "the Rock of Escape." They left for the caves and strongholds of Engedi, a site of a major oasis in the rugged hills west of the Dead Sea, about 35 miles southeast of Jerusalem. This was the best source of fresh water in this wilderness area.

⇒ **How does this episode demonstrate that God was in control?**

⇒ **Throughout his life, how did God continue to prove He was David's "rock of escape" both physically and spiritually?**

<sup>5</sup> Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (p. 322). Zondervan.

<sup>6</sup> Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (p. 322). Zondervan.

## TRANSFORM

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**1. Make personal application:** The same God who delivered the Philistines into David’s hands now protects David from the Saul. The irony here is again the role of the Philistines. Just as Saul is closing in on David and feels he has him trapped at long last, word comes of another Philistine raid, forcing Saul to abandon his pursuit of David.

- ⇒ **Discuss this quote: The hand of Yahweh is clearly behind these events, since He is free to use any means necessary to protect David, even the perennial threat of the Philistines.<sup>7</sup>**
- ⇒ **How do you relate the events of this chapter to your own life and your relationship with God?**

While the narrator does not give much insight into David’s response to these events, David spoke about his feelings in composing Psalm 54.

- ⇒ **Read this short psalm and discuss David’s words and heart. Take note of the confidence that David expresses in God. What do David’s words reveal about God?**
- ⇒ **How do David’s words encourage you?**

**2. Pray:** Using Psalm 54 as your guide, voice a prayer to God about a specific hardship in your life today. Praise Him that in all things He is your “Rock of Escape.”

## STUDY

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Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:

- *Holman New Testament Commentary, 1 and 2 Samuel*, pages 162-165, 173-178.
- *The NIV Application Commentary, 1 and 2 Samuel* pages 316-327.
- *Shepherd’s Notes, 1 and 2 Samuel*, pages 39-40.

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<sup>7</sup> Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (p. 322). Zondervan.