



# Community Group Discussion Guide

March 2, 2025

## 1 Samuel 24: 1-22 | How To Behave In A Cave

### MOTIVATE

- ⇒ **Brainstorm a of list movies that have a revenge theme. As it pertains to revenge, what do these movies have in common?**
- ⇒ **Discuss a popular phrase, "I don't get mad; I get even." How have you seen this come about in your own life?**

### DISCUSS

1 Samuel 24:1-22 records the first of two separate times when God delivered Saul into the hands of David (see also 1 Samuel 26). It is a powerful narrative because it represents David's rejection of the very action that could have freed him. Theologically, it confirms David's desire to see things God's way and to be submissive to His will. David dared to let God guide him, even if it appeared to be giving up a golden opportunity. Through it all, David recognized a higher principle than revenge.<sup>1</sup> (See [1 Samuel Overview](#) for more information.)

- ⇒ **What does our culture teach about vengeance or getting even?**
- ⇒ **In what ways did vengeance change between the Old and New Testaments?**

**1 Samuel 24:1-2** When Saul returned from following the Philistines, he was told, "Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi." **2** Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel and went to seek David and his men in front of the Wildgoats' Rocks.

After Saul had responded to the latest outbreak of Philistine aggression (1 Samuel 23), he returned to Gibeah to focus on David. When he was informed of David's whereabouts, he immediately assembled an elite fighting force from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men.

Having made a journey of more than thirty miles, the troops centered their efforts in the vicinity of the "Wildgoats' Rocks" in the wilderness of Engedi. Engedi was an area in the wilderness of Judah on the west coast of the Dead Sea. This area was and is a nature preserve known for its waterfalls and botanical gardens. Engedi was considered an oasis during biblical times. Because of the topography, water and nearby caves, this was where Saul's army made camp.

- ⇒ **Why do you think there were consistently sources willing to tell Saul about David's whereabouts?**
- ⇒ **What does it demonstrate about Saul's state-of-mind that he enlisted 3,000 men to hunt down David?**

<sup>1</sup> Andrews & Bergen, *Holman Old Testament Commentary, 1 & 2 Samuel*, Vol. 6, 2009, p. 165.

**1 Samuel 24:3-4** And he came to the sheepfolds by the way, where there was a cave, and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave. **4** And the men of David said to him, "Here is the day of which the LORD said to you, 'Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you.'" Then David arose and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul's robe.

Saul chose to use one of the nearby caves to relieve himself. This was the same cave in which David and his men were hiding. Saul's vulnerability during this private moment was extreme, and David's soldiers knew it. In fact, the situation was so extraordinary that David's men concluded God made it happen to fulfill the prophetic words, "Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you." In other words, "Kill Saul and your worries will be over." It appears David's men may have hidden their advice in a prophecy supposedly given from God to David. The trouble is that this prophecy is not mentioned elsewhere in any biblical text associated with David. R.D. Bergen states: It is either a false prophecy or it is genuine and refers to some pagan enemy of Israel but is misapplied here to Saul (Holman Reference, 1 and 2 Samuel, Volume 6, pages 165-167).

- ⇒ **Was this an opportunity or temptation for David? Explain your answer.**
- ⇒ **Describe a time when a temptation felt like an opportunity for you.**

David moved stealthily to Saul's location and used his weapon to secretly cut off a corner of Saul's robe as means of proving to Saul that he could have been killed. This act was far from meaningless because David's confiscation of a portion of the royal robe signified the transfer of power from the house of Saul to the house of David.

- ⇒ **How is this reminiscent of the tearing of Samuel's robe by Saul in 1 Samuel 15:24-29?**

Furthermore, David made Saul's robe to be in a state of noncompliance with Torah requirements that Israelites were required to have tassels on the corners of their robes to serve as reminders of the Law and their obligation to obey it (see Numbers 15:38-39 and Deuteronomy 22:12). Saul's most obvious symbol of kingship was made unwearable. In essence, David had symbolically invalidated Saul's claim to kingship and had interfered with an anointed king's ability to fulfill God's Law.

- ⇒ **How could David's simple act carry so much weight?**
- ⇒ **How does it help us with context to understand the importance of the Torah to Old Testament characters?**

**1 Samuel 24:5-7** And afterward David's heart struck him, because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe. **6** He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD's anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the LORD's anointed." **7** So David persuaded his men with these words and did not permit them to attack Saul. And Saul rose up and left the cave and went on his way."

David immediately recognized the powerful implications of his act and was conscience-stricken. By voiding Saul's claim to kingship, David was at some level lifting his hand against God's anointed. This was more than an act against the king; it was rebellion against the Lord, who had commanded Israelites not to curse their rulers (Exodus 22:28) and had previously punished Israelites who had

expressed a rebellious attitude against authority (Numbers 12:2-15;16:1-35). Having repented of his actions, David then worked to prevent his men from sinning in a similar manner. Meanwhile, Saul, who somehow remained oblivious to all of this, returned to his men.

- ⇒ **What was the motivation for David's men to kill Saul?**
- ⇒ **Describe the theological differences between David and his men.**

**1 Samuel 24:8-15** Afterward David also arose and went out of the cave, and called after Saul, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the earth and paid homage. **9** And David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men who say, 'Behold, David seeks your harm'? **10** Behold, this day your eyes have seen how the LORD gave you today into my hand in the cave. And some told me to kill you, but I spared you. I said, 'I will not put out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD's anointed.' **11** See, my father, see the corner of your robe in my hand. For by the fact that I cut off the corner of your robe and did not kill you, you may know and see that there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you hunt my life to take it. **12** May the LORD judge between me and you, may the LORD avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you. **13** As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes wickedness.' But my hand shall not be against you. **14** After whom has the king of Israel come out? After whom do you pursue? After a dead dog! After a flea! **15** May the LORD therefore be judge and give sentence between me and you and see to it and plead my cause and deliver me from your hand."

A most remarkable confrontation occurred in this moment of vulnerability for Saul and David. Verses 8-21 contain the longest recorded quotes by both David and Saul found in the book of 1 Samuel. Within these verses there are at least two major items: David's passionate affirmation of loyalty to the king and Saul's confession that David would be Israel's next king.

- ⇒ **Taken as a whole, what do David's words indicate about his trust in God?**

While Saul was still within earshot of the cave, David emerged from the dark recesses and called out to Saul. This action was dangerous since it betrayed the location of David and his men. First, David honored Saul by calling him "my lord the king" and "my father," and by falling on the ground in homage to him.

David avoided accusing Saul of being the one who initiated hurtful actions against him but remarked that unnamed men had concocted the idea that David sought to harm Saul. David had treated the king properly, not because of anything the king had done or might do, but because of what the Lord had done. If there was any doubt in Saul's mind about how close his brush with death really was, this evidence would remove it. Saul's own royal garment would remind him that David cut off the corner of the robe but did not kill him.

- ⇒ **David's respect for human authority was based on his respect for divine authority. What can we learn from this?**
- ⇒ **What are your insights into the drama of the moment when David called to Saul, held up the section of his robe, and Saul realized what had just happened in the cave?**

David led Saul to the desired verdict: he was not guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. David was no threat to Saul, and the king should stop treating David as if he were. Though Saul had been hunting David down, David would not seek to avenge the king for the wrongs done against him. In asking the Lord to judge between David and Saul and “give sentence between me and you,” David was actually pleading for Saul to save himself, not just to spare David.

- ⇒ **This is the longest speech of David in 1 Samuel. What do we learn about David's character and theology through his words?**
- ⇒ **In verse 12 and 15, three times David uses the phrases, “May the LORD judge” and “May the LORD avenge.” What theological truth does this particular portion of the narrative teach us?**
- ⇒ **What application can you make to a specific situation in your life today?**

**1 Samuel 24:16-22** As soon as David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, “Is this your voice, my son David?” And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. **17** He said to David, “You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil. **18** And you have declared this day how you have dealt well with me, in that you did not kill me when the Lord put me into your hands. **19** For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safe? So may the Lord reward you with good for what you have done to me this day. **20** And now, behold, I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand. **21** Swear to me therefore by the Lord that you will not cut off my offspring after me, and that you will not destroy my name out of my father's house.” **22** And David swore this to Saul. Then Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.”

Saul, who was apparently far enough away from the cave that he could not see the face of the one addressing him, attempted to confirm David as the source of the words just spoken. The impact of David's words on the king was apparent. Formerly Saul had refused even to mention the name of his enemy; now he called him David. David was Saul's son-in-law; here the king calls him “my son.” Saul was humbled, emotionally broken, and wept aloud. Then, the king launched into the longest unbroken quote credited to him in Scripture. He began by praising David and noted that David was more righteous than himself.

David's actions toward Saul defied military and common-sense logic. Conventional wisdom advises killing one's enemy when found, but David let Saul get away unharmed. In gratitude for this, Saul pronounced a blessing on David asking the Lord to reward him richly. Then he affirmed God's royal intentions for David: “you shall surely be king.”

- ⇒ **What is the significance of Saul's comment “you shall surely be king?”**
- ⇒ **Does this seem like a prophecy, a ploy, or just placating David in this situation? Explain your answer.**

Saul then asked David to swear that he would not destroy his descendants or wipe out his name from his father's family. This is what typically happened in the ancient Near East. A new king would turn on the family of his predecessor and destroy any claimants to the throne. Also, the victor would systematically remove all references to the previous king. There would be no memorials or mourning. Saul asked David to not let these things happen to his family line.

⇒ **This is the longest speech of Saul in 1 Samuel. What do we learn about Saul's character and theology?**

Without hesitation David gave his promise to Saul. In so doing David was confirming the oath he had made previously with Jonathan. David would later fulfill this commitment by giving sanctuary, even a position of honor and a generous inheritance, to Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son (2 Samuel 9:1-13).

As this encounter between the present and future kings of Israel ended, Saul returned home to Gibeah. However, David chose not to return to his wife and home, probably not completely confident Saul's proclamations were sincere. Instead, he and his men went up to the stronghold.

## TRANSFORM

**1. Make personal application:** When Saul pursued David at Engedi, the king almost lost his life. However, David showed his respect for God and the king by sparing Saul's life. In refusing to kill Saul, David validated God's original intent in anointing Saul. David trusted that Saul's fate would be in God's hands.

This passage is a message of reverence and trust in God. While few Christians today are faced with hiding in caves because of the wrath of an insane monarch bent on destroying them, it is nonetheless true that many believers around the globe continue to suffer for their faith. The solution for them is, as it was for David while Saul pursued him, reverence for the Lord and His anointed one.<sup>2</sup>

- ⇒ **What are ways you are tempted to take justice into your own hands? (at work, at home, while driving, etc.)**
- ⇒ **Describe a hurtful relationship from your past that tempts you to take sinful actions.**
- ⇒ **Why are you tempted to punish or take vengeance on others that have hurt you?**

**2. Pray:** Ask God to help you to obey Him and for the clarity to realize right and wrong. Pray that God will help you to trust Him and to follow Him in those moments when you want to do the wrong thing. Confess any vengeance that you have taken on another. Praise God that justice is forever and always His.

## STUDY

Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:

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- Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). 1, 2 Samuel (Vol. 6, pp. 165-167). Holman Reference.
- Preceptaustin.com, Commentary available on 1 Samuel 24, 2-12-25.
- Shepherds' Notes: 1 and 2 Samuel, pages 41-42.

<sup>2</sup> Arnold, Bill, *The NIV Application Commentary*, 2003, p.335.