

When others malign or falsely accuse us, a common reaction is one of retaliation.

- From what we learn from the Psalms, how did David handle this kind of abuse? (e.g. see Psalms 63; 43:55; 18:62).
- Discuss the relevance of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 6:25-34, Paul in Philippians 4:6-7, and Peter in 1 Peter 5:7 and how these ideas could help.

What spiritual principles can you list that might help people overcome the temptation that leads to “payback” or lashing out in retaliation.

Jesus says there is no greater love than laying down one's own life for one's “friends” (John 15:13). He also states that in regard to the Kingdom of God those who are last will be first (Mark 10:31).

- What impact do these statements have on our response to those who oppose or abuse us, behaving like our enemies? Others may choose to retaliate or take justice into their own hands, what is the right stance for a Christian. Read 1 Samuel 2:1-10, Romans 5:6-10; 12:17-21

<sup>1</sup> Miscall, Peter D. 1 Samuel: A literary reading. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986

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# 1 Samuel 26 Small Group Study Material

## Revenge and Murder

### Context

After repulsing the Philistines, King Saul follows David to Engedi with murder in mind. His forces outnumber David's 5 to 1. However, David is given opportunity to kill him and be saved from Saul's deranged campaign of revenge and jealousy (1 Sam. 24:3). Though Saul is unaware and easy picking, David is not motivated by his own safety— he has a different principle in mind (1 Sam. 24:6,7).

In chapter 26 David has another strategic opportunity to save his own hide by killing Saul. Although David's right-hand man insists on doing Saul in while he sleeps, David reiterates his better way (1 Sam. 26:10,11). David believes that Saul's judgment is in the hands of the Lord.

### Getting Inside the Passage

There are striking similarities between chs. 24 & 26. But the differences are equally striking. Miscall comments<sup>1</sup>: “*Chapter 24 was a study in David's restraint... Chapter 26 is a demonstration of David's ability to put himself in a position to kill Saul*”. Chapter 26 gives us the final confrontation and mutual irreconcilability between Saul and David.

**Vss. 1-2** The Ziphites caused trouble before (23:19). Psalm 54 is a commentary on their character. This desert place of many “strongholds” offered good hiding places. Psalms 57 and 59 are traditionally seen as set in these days.

**Vss. 5-7** Note the lack of fear in David (as in other episodes) when entering a situation against such great odds. Note too the Lord's assistance (vs. 12, perhaps like Genesis 2:21; 15:12). The spear is like a scepter, signifying royalty.

**Vss. 8-11** "Today" often signifies more than urgency, pointing to God-given opportunity and judgment (17:46; Psalm 95:7). While God *has* given the opportunity (vs. 12), note the contrast between Abishai and David. The former is guided by his own strength and talent; the latter guided by knowledge of the Lord's ways. The Lord's "anointed" is the King (see 9:16; 10:1; 12:3,5), God's appointed judge.

**Vss. 12-13** Previously, David took "a corner of Saul's robe" (1 Sam. 24:4), a symbol of royalty. Saul gets another opportunity to "listen" and change. This time the royal symbol stolen signifies a pending death and judgment to make the message clearer (see David's prediction in vs. 10).

**Vss. 19-24** David has valued Saul's life. He does not place his own safety in a plea to Saul for the same favour. Rather, David puts his future and worth in God's hands. Salvation, he believes, will come from the Lord, not Saul.

### **Going Further**

God's providence is seen explicitly in bringing his promises to fruition, in this case by his protection of David. In the Bible, providence stands against the view that things are merely governed by chance and fate. As an exercise, set up a debate between two panels: one defending chance and fate, and another arguing for God's providence. The following passages may help: Ps. 103:19; Matt. 5:45; Ps. 66:7; Gal. 1:15,16; 1 Sam. 2:9; Acts 17:28; Gen. 28:15; 1 Cor. 10:13; 1 Pet. 3:12; Acts 2:36; Prov. 16:33; Acts 14:16,17; Rom. 9:22.

Discuss the common ground between 1 Samuel 2:1-10; Luke 1:46-55 and Philippians 2:3-13.

### **Personal Application**

Although David had fought Saul's battles, served Saul in his household and honoured him as King, Saul shows no gratitude. From David's example, what can we learn about handling ingratitude from those we have sought to serve and honour? What value does this have?

Note the many challenges and dangers David passes through in 1 Samuel. If these illustrate the sovereign protection God offers to the faithful bearers of his promises and purposes, what encouragement does this give to you? ....to the church? How does the doctrine of providence challenge the way you view your future?

David's attitude in this chapter is in complete contrast to the spirit of our world today. Human beings too often seize the opportunity for "payback" upon those who have wronged them. Too often this is given with interest, and injustice is compounded.

- Discuss how vengeance should be related to justice and not just to emotion and whim.
- Share examples of vengeance known to you, and other responses you have observed when people have been attacked or abused (the names and dates of your stories may need to change!).