

David Lets Saul Live



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1 Samuel 24:1-11, 16

Saul, who was king of Israel, had become very jealous of David, because by killing Goliath, David had become a very popular hero and everyone praised him more than they praised Saul. The king had decided to 'get rid of' David so David ran away.

When Saul got back from fighting off the Philistines, he heard that David was in the desert around En-Gedi. Saul led three thousand of Israel's best soldiers out to look for David and his men near Wild Goat Rocks at En-Gedi. There were some sheep pens along the side of the road, and one of them was built around the entrance to a cave. Saul went into the cave to relieve himself.

David and his men were hiding at the back of the cave. They whispered to David, "The Lord told you he was going to let you defeat your enemies and do whatever you want with them. This must be the day the Lord was talking about."

David sneaked over and cut off a small piece of Saul's robe, but Saul didn't notice a thing. Afterwards, David was sorry that he had even done that, and he told his men, "Stop talking foolishly. We're not going to attack Saul. He's my king, and I pray that the Lord will keep me from doing anything to harm his chosen king."

Saul left the cave and started down the road. Soon, David also got up and left the cave. "Your Majesty!" he shouted from a distance. Saul turned around to look. David bowed down very low and said: "Your Majesty, why do you listen to people who say that I'm trying to harm you? You can see for yourself that the Lord gave me the chance to catch you in the cave today. Some of my men wanted to kill you, but I wouldn't let them do it. I told them, I will not harm the Lord's chosen king! Your Majesty, look at what I'm holding. You can see that it's a piece of your robe. If I could cut off a piece of your robe, I could have killed you. But I let you live, and that should prove I'm not trying to harm you or to rebel. I haven't done anything to you, and yet you keep trying to ambush and kill me." "David, my son—is that you?" Saul asked. Then he started crying.

Commentary

When David killed Goliath he became a national hero, but this enraged King Saul. David had tried to live peaceably within the king's court, but was finally forced to run away in fear for his life. He is living as an outlaw with others among the rocks and wild places of Israel when the events of this story take place. To everyone else it seems that Saul's arrival in the cave is David's God-given opportunity to get rid of the king and seize the throne, which David knows from Samuel will be his one day. But David is nobler than that. He knows that it would be wrong to murder Saul while he is defenceless. His generosity and self-restraint are a shining example to all of us who feel the need to take revenge on those who have hurt us.

No wonder the discovery leaves Saul almost speechless and in tears. David is truly a man after God's own heart.

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Questions

- ▶ Can you imagine how surprised David and his men were when Saul entered the cave where they were hiding? What do you think they whispered to each other in the shadows?
- ▶ David's decision not to kill Saul also took everyone by surprise. Can you think of a situation in your life where not fighting back, not raising your voice in anger, and not taking revenge might be a surprising thing to do?
- ▶ Do you think it's possible to respect someone even if they hurt you?
- ▶ Why do you think David acted so generously towards Saul?
- ▶ Why do you think Saul decided not to continue chasing David?



Visual aid

This story is as comical as it is powerful. A unused toilet roll could symbolize Saul's reason for entering the cave. You could tear off some tissue, just as David cut away part of Saul's tunic, and you could also use a piece later to wipe away the tears that filled Saul's eyes.



Activity idea

This incident in the wilderness at Wild Goat Rocks is very dramatic. Play a game of hide and seek, adding the 'sardines' factor—namely, if someone finds the one who is hiding, they should join him or her there. How many of you will manage to hide away like David and his men, before being found by the last person?



Prayer idea

Find Psalm 57 (believed to be written by David when he hid from Saul) in a Bible and read it together. Draw the entrance to a cave on a large piece of paper. Around the cave write some of the things that may be worrying you all at the moment and then each put one hand over the cave entrance and say, each time you mention a particular worry, "Father God, please keep us safe from all danger."

Key verse

I pray that the Lord will keep me from doing anything to harm his chosen king. (1 Samuel 24:7).

New Testament story link

1 Peter 2:11-17: Peter writes to Christians about respecting those in authority and not giving in to the temptation to get our own back.



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