

1 Samuel 24 and 26

Aim of Lesson

To show David's respect for Saul as God's chosen king, and how he returned good for evil.

Background study

1 Samuel 21-23. Map as used in previous lesson. Try to find photographs of caves similar to those of En Gedi.

Suggested outline of lesson

Remind the children that David was an outlaw, fleeing from Saul's murderous intent. He had fled alone from Gibeah, but as he moved around the country he gathered support, so that now he had six hundred men at his command. David's loyalty to his people was such that he continued to fight against their enemies, the Philistines. Saul, too, was actively engaged in battle with the Philistines, while relentlessly pursuing David whenever he learned of his whereabouts. Saul commanded a force of three thousand trained soldiers.

It was while Saul was in hot pursuit of David that he happened to enter the very cave in which David and his men were hiding, in the innermost part where they were safe from detection. Emphasize the way in which David was egged on to make use of the apparently God-given opportunity to be rid of his persecutor, and the tension David must have felt as he crept stealthily through the dark cave. Could he really manage to cut off a piece of Saul's robe without his knowledge, or would Saul sense his presence and raise the alarm?

His objective accomplished, David was immediately overcome by remorse for having presumed to raise a hand against his king. However, he could not resist demonstrating to Saul that he had actually spared his life. The reaction of Saul to this fact was dramatic. Were his feelings those of relief after having come so close to death, or remorse at having misjudged David, or of shame at his own bitter hatred which contrasted so keenly with David's kindness? Whatever his feelings were, they moved him to tears. He confessed that he had been in the wrong, acknowledged David's position as heir to the throne and elicited a promise from David (verses 21 and 22) which was, in effect, what David had already promised Jonathan.

The pattern of events was soon to be repeated. The details of the incident in chapter 26 are different and interesting; but the sequence is similar - Saul's evil intent, Abishai's incitement to revenge, David's mercy and Saul's remorse.

In this account, consider the risks David and Abishai took in venturing right into the enemy camp. Describe the scene as the two daring men, under cover of darkness, crept past the armed guards, and approached the centre of the camp where the king lay, with Abner, his commander-in-chief close by. Imagine the whispered conversation as Abishai tried to persuade David to let him kill Saul at a stroke. Did they gradually become aware that the men were more deeply asleep than usual, and that God was actively assisting them? Although David knew he was to be king, he never for a moment considered taking the law into his own hands. He was content for God to work out his promises in his own good time. Use David's actual words in reply to Abishai's evil suggestion, from 1 Samuel 26:10-11, in the course of the narrative. (Note that David chose to take the very things upon which Saul's life depended - his weapon and vital water supply. In allowing these items to be returned later, David demonstrated that he had not only refrained from attacking Saul, but also wished to preserve his life.)

Consider the possibility of dramatizing this story by getting the children to act the parts. By so doing they will more readily appreciate the contrasts between the characters. Throughout this time David was faithful to God, loyal to his king and consistent in his behaviour; Saul, however, was unstable, swinging from extreme jealousy and aggression to pitiful remorse. David's men, in the first incident, and Abishai, in the second, were completely loyal to David, while failing to understand their master's goodness.

Relevance to the children's lives

When Saul was violent and angry, David reacted in a remarkable way. How do most people react when they are attacked or shouted at? Usually people respond by becoming angry themselves. What often happens then? The Bible teaches that it is better to keep calm and show kindness to everyone, even when people are being cruel to you. This sounds impossible, but we see from this story that it really does work. When David remained calm and showed kindness, Saul was immediately sorry and, as a result, no one was hurt. Doesn't this show that kindness is more powerful than anger?

Worksheets

Saul said, "Come back, David my son. I will not try to harm you again."

David said "The Lord gave you into my hands today but I would not lay a hand on the Lord's anointed".

The remaining letters in the grid are 'love your enemies'.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, help us to see the power of kindness, and to be brave enough to use it when others are being unkind to us. Amen.

Memory verse

"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21).