



Community Group Discussion Guide

March 23, 2025

1 Samuel 27:1-12; 28 1-2; 29:1-11; 30 1-31 | David Among Enemies

MOTIVATE

- ⇒ **Starter Question: Describe someone you go to when you need advice and direction about a challenging situation. Why do you trust him or her?**

DISCUSS

Today's guide covers multiple chapters of 1 Samuel that deal with David's time among his enemies: 1 Samuel 27:1-12; 28:1-2; 29:1-11; 30:1-31. Because of the combined length of these narrative chapters, the actual biblical passages are not included in this guide. These chapters relate how David came to live peaceably among the Philistines, how he settled in Ziklag, how he again outwitted King Achish of the Philistines (1 Samuel 21:10-15), and how he recovered what the Amalekites took from him and his men. Besides important historical background for the rest of 1 Samuel, we also come to understand just how politically daring and shrewd David was. (See [1 Samuel Overview](#) for more information.)

- ⇒ **What is the benefit to us today in studying David's time among his enemies?**

Read or summarize 1 Samuel 27:1-4: This appears to be one of David's most desperate hours. He seemed to believe that his only lasting means of escaping Saul was to go into exile in the land of the Philistines. David had expressed this sentiment in 1 Samuel 26:19, when he spoke of being driven from God's presence, forced to live where pagan gods were served. David also knew that Saul could not afford to send Israelite troops deep into Philistine territory to pursue him.¹

David, his 600 men, and their families left Israelite territory and moved to the Philistine city of Gath under the protection of King Achish, who now recognized David as an enemy of Saul and therefore a potentially valuable ally for the Philistines. David's actions proved effective, for Saul permanently suspended his search for David.

Gath, hometown of the Goliath, was one of the five major cities of the Philistines. David had been to Gath once before in 1 Samuel 21:10-15. At that time, he pretended to be crazy in front of Achish the king of Gath in order to protect himself.

- ⇒ **How might living in Goliath's hometown pose a serious threat to David's safety?**
 ⇒ **What are your insights into David setting himself up to serve this pagan king who worshipped idols and did not recognize the name of the Lord?**

¹ Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (p. 359). Zondervan.

Read or summarize 1 Samuel 27:5-7: After living with Achish in Gath for more than a year, David appealed to the king to give him one of the country towns controlled by the Philistines. Achish gave David Ziklag, an unimportant rural village south of Gath on the edge of the Negev. Though Ziklag was allocated to the tribe of Judah by Joshua (Joshua 15:31), it was never successfully conquered. Later, the Philistines captured it. After David arrived there, the city remained in the control of the kings of Judah from that time on.

- ⇒ **How does David's attainment of Ziklag relate to God's instruction to the Israelites to conquer all of the Promised Land of Canaan?**
- ⇒ **How does this indicate that God's hand was still on David, helping him to fulfill His will?**

Read or summarize 1 Samuel 27:8-12: David's custom during his time among the Philistines was to conduct raids against Judah's desert-dwelling, enemy neighbors that had failed to be driven out from the Promised Land of Canaan (see Judges 2:20-23). The Geshurites were inhabitants of the southern territory, north of the Egyptian border and south of the Philistine coastal plain. The Girzites are mentioned only here. Their identity is disputed, though they appear also to have occupied territory between Philistia and Egypt.² The Amalekites had been a problem for Israel since the days of the Exodus from Egypt. These military successes on the geographical fringes of Judah would certainly have endeared David to the citizens of Judah while also providing a measure of security for his homeland. David was continuing the task of conquering the Promised Land for Israel.

However, David was expected to make some sort of contribution to the Philistines' welfare. In periodic reports to King Achish, David claimed he was attacking Israelite settlements. David provided the Philistines with a share of the plunder acquired in those raids. In truth, David was attacking traditional enemies of Israel living not far from Philistine territory, killing all the inhabitants to cover his tracks, and then seizing their flocks and goods.

Achish, who was no doubt impressed with the gifts David brought him from these attacks, believed David's claims. Achish concluded that because of these raids, David had alienated himself from the Israelites and would, therefore, have no choice but to remain loyal to the Philistines forever.

- ⇒ **Does this narrative indicate that in spite of his presence among enemies, David remained focused on doing God's work?**
- ⇒ **Discuss this quote: There are many occasions when the Bible actually honors those leading characters who are able to outwit their pagan foes. Here too the text simply reports that David's decisions work. Achish "trusts" David and believes they have formed a lasting political and military relationship that will benefit them both.³**

Read or summarize 1 Samuel 28:1-2: Once again, the Philistines gathered their forces to fight Israel. Since David was under the protection of the Philistines, King Achish informed David that he and his men would have to participate in the battle against Israel. In response to David's boast, Achish made him his bodyguard for life. David and his men would now have to go wherever Achish commanded.

² Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (p. 361). Zondervan.

³ Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (p. 364). Zondervan.

David's plan to escape Saul by fleeing to the land of the Philistines created an unthinkable problem. David was now required to fight against his own people. This was a lose-lose situation. David could fight with the Philistines against Israel. If he did so, he would become the enemy of God's people, the very people He had anointed David to rule. David could turn on Achish and fight for the Israelites. But attempting this would almost mean suicide. There would be no escape to the Israelite side because Saul would surely capture David or cut him down.⁴

- ⇒ **What are your insights into David's dilemma?**
- ⇒ **Though probably not as dramatic as David's, can you describe a "lose-lose situation" from your own life? In what ways did God guide you through this?**

At 1 Samuel 28:3, David's impossible situation is suspended until 1 Samuel 29, where it reaches resolution. For the rest of 1 Samuel 28, the narrator switches to the *other* anointed one, Saul, in order to relate the Israelite king's continued downward spiral.

Read or summarize 1 Samuel 29:1-5: In preparation for battle with Israel, Philistine forces assembled at Aphek, a military staging site that had plenty of water, grain fields, and places to camp. In accordance with Achish's request, David and his men joined the Philistines, marching at the rear as the king's bodyguards. David's worst-case scenario had developed, and he appeared to have no means of avoiding the battle.

This was a dangerous situation. The single development David could ill afford was renewed hostilities between the Philistines and Saul's armies. In such a conflict, David would be trapped. If he joined his Israelite brothers by turning against his Philistine allies, he would forfeit the protection he had in Gath and would once again be at the mercy of Saul. But if he fought against the Israelites, he would certainly jeopardize the God-given promise of becoming their king.⁵

As the Philistine army headed for the Jezreel Valley, the commanders of the Philistines noticed David and asked Achish about "these Hebrews." In response to their challenge, Achish defended David's presence by pointing out David's strained relationship with Saul. David had been an officer of Saul king of Israel, but now he had served Achish for over a year. Achish had found no fault in him.⁶

Achish's word was not good enough for the other Philistine commanders. They were extremely angry with him. Fortunately for David, the Philistine commanders refused to let him and his men join them in a battle against the Israelite army, even mentioning the now famous words that memorialized David's great military victories, "Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands." As a result, Achish was forced to dismiss David and his men from the Philistine army.

- ⇒ **What might be their reasoning for excluding David?**
- ⇒ **How did Achish become God's instrument for delivering David from an impossible situation?**

⁴ Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). [1, 2 Samuel](#) (Vol. 6, pp. 184–185). Holman Reference.

⁵ Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (p. 385). Zondervan.

⁶ Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). [1, 2 Samuel](#) (Vol. 6, p. 188). Holman Reference.

Read or summarize 1 Samuel 29:6-11: Achish seemed to think that David would be disappointed by the news. It is interesting that Achish, a pagan king, swore to David by the life of the Lord to confirm his sincerity. But the Philistine rulers did not approve of David, so Achish had no choice but to order David to turn back and go in peace.

⇒ **How does Achish’s relationship with David provide a significant contrast to Saul’s treatment of David?**

While most likely secretly relieved, David publicly protested the decision with several questions and expressed indignation that he would not be permitted to fight against “the enemies of my lord the king.” David did not specify which king. Achish would assume that David meant him, but it is possible that David meant his real king, Saul, and the army of Israel. Whether David actually meant Achish, Saul, or God, he would have no opportunity to fight in this battle for any king. David and his men go up early the next morning and began the three-day trip back to Ziklag while the Philistine army moved toward Saul. Hopefully, David recognized that God had helped him get out of his predicament. But God was still building his character, and David had more difficult circumstances to face.⁷

⇒ **How did God miraculously deliver David? Why is it important to remember this?**
 ⇒ **What does this reveal about God? How can He use this story in your life?**

Read or summarize 1 Samuel 30:1-6: When David and his men arrived back at Ziklag, they were horrified to discover the city abandoned and destroyed. The command of Achish to return to Ziklag was providential for two reasons. First, David found out that the Amalekites had attacked his home, burned it down, and carried away his own family, the families of his men, and all their possessions. Had David gone into battle, all this would have been lost. Secondly, God spared David from a difficult situation. Through God’s grace, David was able to avoid conflict with both Saul and the Philistines.⁸

Not knowing if their families were dead or alive, David and his men “wept until they had no more strength to weep.” The grief of David’s men turned to rage and bitterness against him. They spoke of rising up and killing him. This was the first time David’s leadership was questioned by his own men.

⇒ **How would the attack of the Amalekites prove to be a major wake-up call for David in his relationship with God?**
 ⇒ **What is the significance of the last sentence of verse 6? How does this demonstrate the relationship between God and David?**
 ⇒ **Can you describe a time when you “strengthened yourself in the Lord your God?”**

Read or summarize 1 Samuel 30:7-10: Before his men could act, David called for Abiathar the priest to bring the ephod to inquire of God. David asked God whether he should pursue the Amalekites to get the missing people back and, if so, would he overtake them. God responded positively to both, promising David success. David and his 600 men set out, following the trail of the Amalekite raiding party. Two hundred of David’s men were too exhausted to keep up the pace and were allowed to drop out of the pursuit.

⁷ Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). [1, 2 Samuel](#) (Vol. 6, p. 190). Holman Reference.

⁸ Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). [1, 2 Samuel](#) (Vol. 6, p. 189). Holman Reference.

- ⇒ **How does this show the contrast between Saul and David's leadership and their relationships with God?**
- ⇒ **When was the last time you deeply inquired of God? What was the result? How did this affect your relationship with Him?**

Read or summarize 1 Samuel 30:11-15: While tracking the enemy, David's men found a slave abandoned by the Amalekites when he became ill. The man, an Egyptian, hadn't had food or water for three days. David treated the man kindly, giving him food and water. When questioned, the man revealed that he had been with the Amalekites when they raided Ziklag. In exchange for his safety, the man agreed to lead David's forces to the Amalekite raiding party.

- ⇒ **In what ways did David display restraint with this man?**
- ⇒ **What does it indicate about him that this slave trusted David's word?**

Read or summarize 1 Samuel 30:16-20: Apparently, David obliged the slave because he did lead David and his men to the raiding party. The Amalekites were eating, drinking, and partying because of the great amount of plunder they had taken in battles against the Philistines and the Israelites.

David and his 400 men fought the Amalekites for more than 24 hours, destroying all but 400 of the Amalekites who escaped on camels. Afterward, David recovered everything that had been taken by the Amalekites. Amazingly, nothing was missing. The wives and families of his men were restored, including David's two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel. The Amalekite flocks and herds were driven back toward Ziklag. His men called it "David's spoil."

- ⇒ **Discuss this insight: David had sought the Lord's will on the matter, and God had given him the victory.**

David's defeat of the Amalekites was more than a victory in battle.

a. It was historical and prophetic in nature: During their Exodus from Egypt under Moses' leadership, the Israelites were attacked in the desert by the Amalekites. Under Joshua's leadership, the Israelites successfully defended themselves. After the battle, Moses prophesied that God would one day wipe out the Amalekites (Exodus 17:8-16). David's attack on the Amalekites was being used by God to act on that prophecy.

David was the instrument of God's vengeance against the Amalekites. Saul's early victories over the Amalekites were taken as a sign of his legitimacy as king of Israel (1 Samuel 14:48). But it was ultimately Saul's failure to execute the holy war ban against the Amalekites that revealed his spiritual failure and resulted in Samuel's condemnation (1 Samuel 15). Thus, the contrast between David and Saul is highlighted again in the way they dealt with the Amalekites.⁹

b. It was theological in nature: David did not fight the Amalekites for secular reasons, for plunder, or for vengeance. David did so because God had commanded it. That is, this battle was "the fulfillment of ancient Torah mandates and fulfillment of timeless prophecies." The Messiah would fight the Lord's battles and obtain the victory.¹⁰

⁹ Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (p. 388). Zondervan.

¹⁰ Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). [1, 2 Samuel](#) (Vol. 6, p. 193). Holman Reference.

⇒ **How was Jesus' death, burial, and Resurrection historical, prophetic, and theological in nature?**

Read or summarize 1 Samuel 30:21-25: A dispute arose among David's men when the plunder was being divided up after the conflict. At first some of the 400 men, described as "wicked and worthless fellows," who actually battled the Amalekites refused to share with the 200 who remained behind. However, David used the occasion to establish a permanent rule to be followed by Israelite armies: All soldiers, regardless of their positions or activities in the army, would share equally in the rewards.

⇒ **On what did David base his ruling? How does this show once again that David was "a man after God's own heart?"**

Read or summarize 1 Samuel 30:26-31: From the Egyptian slave David had learned that part of the spoils had come from settlements and territories in Judah. So when he returned to Ziklag, David sent some of the plunder to the elders of Judah. The narrator specifically identified these elders as the friends of David. He then listed fourteen sites or clan territories that received a gift.

Verse 31 indicates that David sent gifts to all the other places where he and his men had roamed. This suggests that these towns and settlements had most likely sheltered David and supported him during his fugitive days in Judah.¹¹ These gifts would most likely also make it easier for David and his men to return to Israelite territory following their imminent departure from Philistine territory. Having not yet heard that Saul and Jonathan were dead, David believed he still needed a secure place to hide from Saul.

- ⇒ **Discuss this quote: The narrator of 1 and 2 Samuel was not concerned with brute facts or with history for history's sake. It seems likely that the intent was to heighten the contrast between Saul and David. Saul was helpless and frightened and turned to the medium at Endor. Saul had been irrevocably abandoned by God. By contrast, David was providentially delivered from a predicament that he could not avoid, and in his vengeance against the Amalekites appeared fully capable of leading his people.**¹²
- ⇒ **While Saul proved himself ill-equipped and inadequate for leading God's people, how did David demonstrate he was suited for the task?**

TRANSFORM

1. Make personal application: As David had learned to trust God, so also believers must learn to trust in Him today. Each of us must look beyond ourselves for direction and guidance, and these passages draw our attention to the all-important question: Where do we turn for help in our time of need? As modern believers, we seek the face of God through His written Word. Being convinced by the truth in His Word, we must seek to act boldly on it, with confidence and hope.¹³

⇒ **This is a long narrative to study about David's time with his enemies. How would you sum this up into one key spiritual application?**

¹¹ Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). *1, 2 Samuel* (Vol. 6, p. 192). Holman Reference.

¹² Arnold, B. T. (2003). *1 & 2 Samuel* (p. 386). Zondervan.

¹³ Arnold, B. T. (2003). *1 & 2 Samuel* (p. 394). Zondervan.

- ⇒ **Where do you turn for help in your time of need?**
- ⇒ **Can you describe a time when you sought God's direction through His Word? How did you respond to His direction?**
- ⇒ **How does God's Word bring you confidence and hope?**

2. Pray: Ask God to teach you trust Him even when life seems dark, and your enemies seem great. Praise Him that He is sovereign over your life. Pray about a specific area in your life in which you need His direction today.

STUDY

Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:

- *Holman New Testament Commentary, 1 and 2 Samuel*, pages 179-200.
- *The NIV Application Commentary, 1 and 2 Samuel* pages.
- *Shepherd's Notes, 1 and 2 Samuel*, pages 46-53.