

## DAVID: A MAN OF PASSION AND DESTINY

## STUDY EIGHT

## Life's Most Subtle Temptation

*1 Samuel 24*

*Let's learn a lesson from David: When life's most subtle temptation attempts to draw you in, refuse to yield. Trust me on this one . . . you'll never regret forgiving someone who doesn't deserve it.*

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

ACCORDING to James 1:14, the source of temptation is “our own desires, which entice us and drag us away” (James 1:14). Yet one temptation is *particularly* enticing . . . so alluring that it draws many in, yet so subtle that few ever recognize its magnetic pull. Is it lust? Anger? Greed?

No, life's most subtle temptation is *revenge*.

Revenge tends to disguise itself behind acceptable terms. Instead of saying, “I'm getting even!” people will say, “I'm just standing up for my rights.” This thinking naturally leads to another label for revenge: “justified retaliation.” For some, settling the score becomes a moral obligation. They take the law into their own hands and mete out their own justice as they see fit.

Likely, David felt he had the right to this “justified retaliation” against Saul. All David had done was love God, defend Israel, and serve King Saul. But Saul was jealous of David, and the king spent years in hot pursuit, trying to kill the shepherd by any means possible.

One day, however, David heard sweet revenge whispering in his ear. Saul was vulnerable, and David had a chance to get even. Would David yield to revenge's invitation?



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1

## Life's Most Subtle Temptation

*1 Samuel 24*



### PREPARE YOUR HEART

As you prepare to study David's temptation, offer in prayer [Psalm 54:4–7](#). David expressed these words of trust in God right before encountering the bloodthirsty king.

*But God is my helper.  
The Lord keeps me alive!  
May the evil plans of my enemies be turned against them.  
Do as you promised and put an end to them.  
I will sacrifice a voluntary offering to you;  
I will praise your name, O LORD,  
for it is good.  
For you have rescued me from my troubles  
and helped me to triumph over my enemies.*



### TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The backdrop of David's temptation to take revenge was the ruthless paranoia Saul displayed in [1 Samuel 22–23](#). In these chapters, Saul ordered the execution of Ahimelech for aiding David and the massacre of all the priests at Nob, their wives, and their children. David also narrowly escaped when the citizens of Keilah and the Ziphites betrayed him.

After some time passed, David finally settled down in the oasis of En-gedi. This hilly region was dotted with caves which David used as hideouts. It offered the refreshment of a flowing spring and teemed with wildlife. It was a perfect "stronghold" where David could set up camp and wait until Saul gave up his chase.

Saul, however, would eventually hear of David's newest hiding spot, and he would go to trap David. But Saul wouldn't find David. David would find him. First Samuel 24 records what happened.



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1 Samuel 24



### Observation: A Case Study on Revenge

Observe *1 Samuel 24* by noting the flow of the narrative. Who are the main characters? What do they say and do? In what ways do you feel the tension intensifying as the conflict comes to a peak? How is it resolved? Use these questions to guide you in the observation phase of our *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study method.<sup>1</sup>

#### The Situation—1 Samuel 24:1–2

What news did Saul receive in *1 Samuel 24:1*? According to *24:2*, how did he respond to this news?

#### The Temptation—1 Samuel 24:3–7

In *1 Samuel 24:3*, Saul went to “relieve himself” in the very cave where David was hiding. Unknowingly, Saul put himself into a very vulnerable position! According to *24:4*, what did David’s friends suggest he do with this opportune moment? What did David do instead?

Put yourself in the sandals of one of David’s soldiers. You’ve been on the run, living out of caves for too long. Finally, only by an act of God, your pursuer strolls into your cave, but he doesn’t see you. *Now’s our chance!* You hand your knife to David. The kill should be his, after all. That’s revenge. David draws the knife, tiptoes to Saul’s back, and . . . *trims Saul’s robe?*



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*1 Samuel 24*

David's retinue likely would have scratched their heads at this point wondering, *Did he really just let Saul go?* David, however, had quite a different reaction. Summarize David's response in *1 Samuel 24:5–7*. Why did David let Saul live?

### The Conversation—1 Samuel 24:8–22

According to David's words in *1 Samuel 24:8–9*, what lie did Saul believe about David? How did David clarify the truth in *24:10–11*?

According to David's words to Saul in *24:12–15*, who would ultimately judge Saul's actions?



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*1 Samuel 24*

What kinds of emotion did Saul show in response to David in *1 Samuel 24:16–21*? What realization did he come to in *24:20*? According to *24:22*, how did the encounter end?

*This is very, very important. Wrong is being done against David, and when you have been wronged, it is necessary for you to declare the truth. You are responsible for declaring the truth to your enemy, whoever the enemy might be. You cannot change your enemy, but you can be sure he or she understands the right facts. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll*



### Interpretation: Hard Facts to Face about Revenge

From his observation of this interaction between David and Saul, Pastor Chuck Swindoll wisely observed three steps that lead to revenge:

1. *Injury*: One person harms another.
2. *Vulnerability*: The victim later finds the perpetrator open to harm.
3. *Depravity*: The sinful nature of the victim leads him or her to seek revenge.

How do you see these three features represented in this account of David's encounter with Saul? Which feature is absent in this narrative? What does this absence reveal about David? How is David's example instructive for followers of Jesus Christ today?



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*1 Samuel 24*

*There's no such thing as a small step on the road to temptation or on the pathway to revenge and retaliation. Even a small step in that direction is a wrong step.*  
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Reread the exchange between David and Saul in *1 Samuel 24:12–21*. What timeless truths do their words reveal about revenge?

Even though Saul had committed innumerable evils, David did not yield to the subtle temptation of revenge. Instead of thrusting the knife into Saul's back, David opened his hands and trusted that God would judge Saul. In doing so, David demonstrated a truth that the apostle Paul would later teach: "Vengeance belongs to the Lord."



### Correlation: Vengeance Belongs to the Lord

The narratives of the Old Testament powerfully shape readers because they actively demonstrate the truth about God. Some truths, however, are so important that the biblical authors articulate and expand them again . . . and again. *Romans 12:17–21* contains a succinct yet profound discussion about revenge.

What is the apostle Paul's fundamental command concerning revenge in *12:17*?



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*1 Samuel 24*

According to *Romans 12:19*, to whom does vengeance ultimately belong? (Note: this is a quotation of *Deuteronomy 32:35*.) How does this principle relate to Paul's command that opened this passage?

According to *Romans 12:20–21*, how should followers of Jesus treat their enemies?

*What a radical paradigm shift!* Paul called Christians to do more than just resist seeking revenge against those who harm them. Instead, he took it a step further and urged followers of Jesus to love and serve their enemies. This is easy to read but hard to practice in the struggles of day-to-day life. Thankfully, Pastor Chuck shares some wisdom on how to apply these truths today.

### **Application: Tough Principles to Practice against Revenge**

Drawing from the well of David's example, Pastor Chuck offers the water of biblical application about revenge that truly is life-giving.

- *Because man is depraved, expect to be mistreated.*
- *Because mistreatment is inevitable, anticipate feelings of revenge.*
- *Because the desire for revenge is predictable, refuse to fight in the flesh.*

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In what ways does your current cultural climate encourage people to give in to the subtle temptation of revenge?

Is there someone in your life who has hurt you so deeply that you still carry the wounds? How have you dealt with the pain? Have you ever collapsed due to the pain and given in to the temptation of revenge?

What would it look like for you to confront your offender with the truth—not to harm him or her but to take the first step of forgiveness?

Many people who have been deeply hurt by others can hear revenge singing its sweet song in the background of their lives. Revenge simply waits for its melody to strike a chord in a sinful heart—leading a hurt person to hurt another. You may feel the tones of this song growing louder, but David's example shouts a reminder of a comforting truth . . . *vengeance belongs to the Lord.*





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### A FINAL PRAYER

As you close this study, think of one person against whom you feel the subtle temptation to take revenge. Then sincerely offer this prayer to God as you walk toward renewal.

*Father, I confess to You that I am resentful toward:*

\_\_\_\_\_

*for:*

\_\_\_\_\_

*Just as Jesus died for me and released me from the guilt of my sins, I want You to heal me of this poisonous grudge so I can live in the freedom of Christ's love. Help me. Free me of this bondage and keep me from it for the rest of my life. I claim God's power through Jesus Christ my Lord. In His gracious name, amen.*

#### ENDNOTE

1. To learn about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, go to the web page, "[How to Study the Bible for Yourself](#)."

