

PASSPORT TO ISRAEL

Ein Gedi

Ein Gedi is a desert oasis on the western shore of the Dead Sea in the Judean Mountains. It is near Masada, King Herod's desert fortress, and Qumran, where the Dead Sea Scrolls were found. The name Ein Gedi (also spelled En Gedi in some Bible translations) means "Spring of the Young Goat." Even though it is surrounded by desert, Ein Gedi has freshwater springs, plants, and trees, showing how God provides life in the wilderness.

After David was anointed by the prophet Samuel to be Israel's future king, King Saul became jealous and tried to kill him. In 1 Samuel 23–24, David fled from Saul and eventually took refuge in the strongholds of En Gedi, where Saul pursued him with 3,000 men. David hid among the rocks and caves. When Saul entered a cave, David had the chance to kill him — but he didn't. Instead, David cut off a piece of Saul's robe and spared his life. David showed integrity and trust in God, refusing to harm the man God had chosen as king. When Saul realized what David had done, he admitted that David was more righteous than he was.

Ein Gedi is also mentioned in the Song of Solomon: "My beloved is to me a cluster of henna blossoms in the vineyards of En Gedi" (1:14). This verse shows that Ein Gedi was known as a place of beauty and refreshment. Travelers could rest there, drink fresh water, bathe in the springs, water their animals, and enjoy the shade. Ein Gedi is home to waterfalls, palm trees, and wild goats.

Today, people can hike and explore ruins at Ein Gedi. The oasis was destroyed during the Jewish revolt against Rome, about 30 years after Jesus' resurrection. Archaeologists have discovered homes, fortresses, synagogues, and farms from ancient times. Long ago, Ein Gedi was famous for its balsam plants, which were used to make perfumes, medicine, and anointing oils.

THE WILDERNESS ROAD PUZZLE

FOR THE TEACHER

Description:

In this activity, students will study an illustrated map of ancient Israel and carefully read a story describing David's journey. Multiple roads appear on the map, but only one route matches the details of the story. Students will use observation, logic, and close reading to determine which path David most likely traveled.

This is not a race. It is a thinking puzzle. Every clue matters.

Resources Needed:

- A worksheet with a map of ancient Israel and a story prompt.

Instructions:

Read the story on the worksheet and pay attention to clues about direction, land, and details about the journey. You may underline or highlight clues in the story. Examine the map and possible routes starting from En Gedi. Based on the story, identify which route David took. Use the clues to eliminate routes that don't fit. Only one path matches all the clues in the story.

Consider:

- Is David moving toward cities or away from them?
- Is the land becoming safer or more dangerous?
- Is he staying near water, or going deeper into the wilderness?
- Which direction does the story describe?

Answer Key:

David is taking his men to the Wilderness of Paran. This journey follows David's confrontation with King Saul at En Gedi in 1 Samuel 24 and his departure for the Wilderness of Paran in 1 Samuel 25:1. If students are unable to solve the puzzle, encourage them to look for the answer in 1 Samuel 25:1.

EIN GEDI

STORY PROMPT FOR STUDENTS

***The following is an imagined retelling based on the events of 1 Samuel 24–25.
Some details have been added to help you picture David’s journey.***

David stirred awake as the camp around him began to move. The night chill still clung to the air, and the faint light of dawn revealed jagged rocks and dry hills stretching endlessly before him. For a moment, he lay still, trying to gather his thoughts. Where was he going now? Only yesterday, he had been hidden in the caves of En Gedi, listening as King Saul passed by—close enough to touch.

The memory made David’s heart pound. He had spared Saul’s life. He had trusted the Lord instead of taking the kingdom by force. Saul’s words still echoed in his mind: “You are more righteous than I.” And yet David knew better than to believe the danger had passed.

Around this time, word reached David that Samuel had died. The prophet who had anointed him king was gone. David mourned deeply, feeling the weight of waiting grow heavier. God’s promise still stood—but the path toward it felt longer and lonelier.

Around him, his men quietly gathered their belongings. None of them spoke of a destination. They had followed David through valleys and wilderness before, trusting that the Lord who had delivered them so many times would do so again. David watched them move and wondered, Lord, where now?

David gathered his men and left the place of springs and cliffs behind.

The land he entered grew quieter and wider. The roads faded. Cities disappeared. He traveled farther south, away from the hills of Judah and the places where Saul’s power was strongest. The wilderness stretched before him—dry, open, and unforgiving.

David had lived among caves, rocks, and strongholds, learning to depend on God day by day. He had seen the Lord provide water in dry places and protection in hidden ones. But now the land offered fewer trees, fewer streams, and fewer places to hide. This was a wilderness remembered from ancient days, a place where God had once taught His people to trust Him completely.

Here, shepherds watched their flocks at the edge of the desert. Wealthy landowners grazed sheep far from towns, relying on the land and the Lord for survival. David and his men lived quietly among them, guarding flocks, sharing the dangers of the wilderness, and depending on kindness rather than command.

In this dry and desolate land, David would face another test. Not the spear of Saul, but the struggle within his own heart. Here, far from the palace and far from applause, David would be shaped by restraint, humility, and obedience.

He did not yet know how God would lead him next.

But in the wilderness, David waited—trusting that the same God who called him would not abandon him, even in the most barren place.

EN GEDI ACTIVITY

The Wilderness Road Puzzle

