



Community Group Discussion Guide

February 2, 2025

1 Samuel 21: 1-15; 22: 1-5 | Fear and Faith

MOTIVATE

Starter Question

- *Has anyone ever been called for jury duty? If so, share a bit about your experience.*
- *Discuss the complexity of justifying actions that may seem wrong but are done with a perceived right intention.*

DISCUSS

In 1 Samuel 21:1-15 and 22:1-5, David began living as a refugee with enemies in every direction. This continues throughout the rest of 1 Samuel. David, alone and on the run, watched his privileged life in the court of Saul fall apart. The king who had first promoted him and made him a son-in-law now sought to kill him. God's hand was still upon David, but he needed to learn how to seek after the Lord's own heart in the bad times as well as the good. David's faithful response stands in stark contrast to Saul's evil designs.

One commentator observes: "These chapters depict David's 'wilderness experience.' As Israel's wilderness experience followed an exodus from a foreign king, so David's followed an exodus from a king. And as the wilderness for Israel preceded possession of the Promised Land, so for David it preceded possession of a promised kingdom. Furthermore, during this wilderness period, David experienced events that in crucial ways paralleled those of the Israelites following their expulsion from Egypt – pursuit by the armed forces of the king they were fleeing, a hostile encounter with the Midianites, an attempted foray into Moab, and yet the Lord's protection against all human foes. Like the Jews, God took David into the wilderness to test him, to mold him, and to prepare him. Also, like the Jews, David stumbled when God brought him into the wilderness. But David repented and learned from his errors. Many of the mistakes that David makes in these chapters form his inspiration for future psalms to God.¹

- ⇒ *Why might God's future king benefit from a lengthy wilderness experience?*
- ⇒ *Can you share about a "wilderness experience" and a specific spiritual truth you learned?*

1 Samuel 21:1-6 Then David came to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech came to meet David, trembling, and said to him, "Why are you alone, and no one with you?" **2** And David said to Ahimelech the priest, "The king has charged me with a matter and said to me, 'Let no one know anything of the matter about which I send you, and with which I have charged you.' I have made an appointment with the young men for such and such a place. **3** Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever is here." **4** And the priest answered David, "I have no common bread on hand, but there is holy bread—if the young men have kept themselves from women." **5** And David answered the priest, "Truly women have been kept from us as always when I go on an expedition. The vessels of the young men are holy even when it is an ordinary journey. How much more today will their vessels be holy?" **6** So the priest gave him the holy bread, for there was no bread there but the bread of the Presence, which is removed from before the Lord, to be replaced by hot bread on the day it is taken away.

Realizing that Saul's intent was to kill him, David had no choice but to flee. Saul's action against his own son, Jonathan, had confirmed Saul's murderous schemes. David left Saul's court and headed to the priestly city of Nob. Nob was located within the tribe of Benjamin about two miles away from Jerusalem. Some of the furnishings of the tabernacle appear to have been relocated at Nob.

¹ Robert Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel, The New American Commentary, Vol. 7, B&H Publishing Group (1996) p. 220.*

The fact that David came unexpectedly and alone, made Ahimelech nervous. David was vague in his requests and in his response to Ahimelech's questions. The priest may have thought this soldier's solitary visit meant there was trouble in Saul's kingdom. David tried to put Ahimelech at ease by telling him that Saul had ordered David to lead a hastily arranged secret mission.

Supposedly, David had left his men at a special place and arrived alone because the king had said no one was to know anything about the assignment or his instructions to David. Ahimelech was a descendant of Eli and was the brother of Ahijah, who had joined Saul as his spiritual adviser after Samuel withdrew his services (1 Samuel 14:3). For that reason, David may have been unsure whether to trust Ahimelech.

- ⇒ **Why did David lie? What was his motivation in your view?**
- ⇒ **Do you think his lie was justifiable or unjustifiable?**
- ⇒ **Did God need David to lie?**

David asked Ahimelech for whatever the priest had on hand--perhaps five loaves of bread. The only bread Ahimelech had available was the consecrated Bread of the Presence. Normally, this bread was reserved only for the priests. It was set out on a table in the holy place of the tabernacle (Leviticus 24:5-9). The twelve large loaves symbolized the twelve tribes with whom the Lord had entered into a covenant. When the fresh loaves replaced the discarded loaves, they were not for ordinary use but were to be eaten by the priests.

In keeping with the Law of Moses' principle of acting to sustain life, Ahimelech made an exception and gave David the five loaves he requested. David assured Ahimelech that he and his men were ritually clean, having kept themselves from intimacy with women. David also stated that he and his men treated every mission as holy.

In all three synoptic Gospels, Jesus used this specific story as evidence in a controversy with the Pharisees concerning the relationship between human need and ritual requirements (Matthew 12:1-8; Mark 2:23-28; Luke 6:1-5). The religious leaders were concerned that Jesus' disciples were plucking grain and eating it on the Sabbath which was forbidden. Jesus responded that just as David needed food in 1 Samuel 21:1-9, so the disciples were hungry and that in both instances human needs took precedence over cultic regulations.

- ⇒ **Since we are no longer under the Law of Moses, how do we apply this occurrence from David's life as well as Jesus' teaching to the Christian life today?**

1 Samuel 21:7-9: *Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the Lord. His name was Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul's herdsmen. 8 Then David said to Ahimelech, "Then have you not here a spear or a sword at hand? For I have brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste." 9 And the priest said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you struck down in the Valley of Elah, behold, it is here wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you will take that, take it, for there is none but that here." And David said, "There is none like that; give it to me."*

The information slipped in at verse seven is significant for later developments in the story (1 Samuel 22:9). Saul had fought against Edom (1 Samuel 14:47) and possibly had taken Doeg the Edomite into his service at that time. The word translated "chief" (from the Hebrew word *'abbîr*) means "mighty" but is also used to mean "violent" and "obstinate." David later revealed that he had been uneasy at the presence of the Edomite at Nob (1 Samuel 22:22). The Edomites were descendants of Esau, Jacob's twin brother, and were often at war with the Israelites.

Ironically, David came to Nob lacking a weapon of any kind. David's excuse was that the king's business was urgent. The only weapon Ahimelech had was the sword of Goliath. David had used this very sword to cut off the head of giant. The priest had wrapped the sword in a cloth and was apparently keeping it in a holy place. Items that were especially valuable or sacred were kept hidden away and wrapped in this fashion. Ahimelech offered the sword and David took it. Scripture does not

give information as to how the sword ended up in Nob. It was last seen in the hand of David after he slew the giant and he had placed it in his tent. Years later, in this episode, it resurfaced in the city of Nob.

- ⇒ **Discuss any significance in David regaining possession of Goliath's sword.**
- ⇒ **What might have been David's state of mind at this time?**

1 Samuel 21:10-15 *And David rose and fled that day from Saul and went to Achish the king of Gath. 11 And the servants of Achish said to him, "Is not this David the king of the land? Did they not sing to one another of him in dances, 'Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands'?" 12 And David took these words to heart and was much afraid of Achish the king of Gath. 13 So he changed his behavior before them and pretended to be insane in their hands and made marks on the doors of the gate and let his spittle run down his beard. 14 Then Achish said to his servants, "Behold, you see the man is mad. Why then have you brought him to me? 15 Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this fellow to behave as a madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?"*

David ran all the way to enemy territory to the Philistine city of Gath which was about 23 miles west of Nob. Within the walled city, David was beyond Saul's grasp. Perhaps David did this to protect his family and friends. David must have felt that Saul was not above attacking his loved ones.

At first, David may have hoped that he would not be recognized in Gath. However, the servants of Achish, king of Gath, did recognize him. In fact, they knew the song the Israelites had sung about Saul and David: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands" (1 Samuel 18:7). Not knowing of Saul's fear of David, the citizens of Gath also feared David greatly and believed he had come to destroy them.

Technically, the servants of Achish had mistakenly identified David as the king of the land. Saul still ruled in Israel. But ironically, David had been anointed king, would become king, and would be the king who would defeat the Philistines.

- ⇒ **What is significant about the servants of Achish calling David the king of the land?**
- ⇒ **Where would they have heard the song of David's victories?**

David paid attention to their words and since he was very much afraid of Achish king of Gath, David pretended to be crazy. He made marks on the door and drooled on his beard. The ruse worked. Achish declared David to be insane and chastised his servants for bringing him into his palace. In the ancient Near East, this type of insanity was considered to be the result of divine possession or affliction. Consequently, Achish did not regard David as a threat, and David was allowed to leave Gath.

- ⇒ **Did David's actions show his faith or fear? Explain your answer.**
- ⇒ **Did God need David to act insane?**

1 Samuel 22:1-5 *David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. And when his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him. 2 And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul, gathered to him. And he became commander over them. And there were with him about four hundred men. 3 And David went from there to Mizpeh of Moab. And he said to the king of Moab, "Please let my father and my mother stay with you, till I know what God will do for me." 4 And he left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with him all the time that David was in the stronghold. 5 Then the prophet Gad said to David, "Do not remain in the stronghold; depart, and go into the land of Judah." So, David departed and went into the forest of Hereth.*

When David left Gath, he turned east for the hill country of Judah. There he waited in the cave of Adullam (meaning "refuge") halfway between Gath and Bethlehem. In this region, there was a hill which was both fortified and known for its caves, providing a natural shelter for the homeless. David's movements did not go unnoticed. When his family heard the news, they went down to him. They certainly came to comfort David, but they may also have done this in fear of Saul. Soon there gathered

around David all who were in distress or in debt or discontented. David's band of "outlaws" grew to four hundred men, and he became their leader. These men were the outcasts from society, yet they became the foundation of David's army.

- ⇒ ***Why is this an interesting military start for the future king of Israel?***
- ⇒ ***How does David's army compare to Jesus' initial small band of disciples?***

David soon left the cave and went to Mizpah in Moab. Here, he asked the king of Moab to grant asylum to his father and mother until he knew God's will for his life. The king of Moab may have granted his request because of Ruth, David's Moabite great-grandmother, who married Boaz.

David resided in a place identified only as the stronghold until the prophet Gad told him to go to Judah. The Torah severely restricted Israelite contacts with Moab (Deuteronomy 23:3-6). It was probably Gad's concern to help David avoid violating these restrictions that motivated him to leave Moab and return to Israel by way of the forest of Hereth.

- ⇒ ***What qualities of David stand out in this story?***
- ⇒ ***How did these situations prepare David for his kingship?***

TRANSFORM

1. Make personal application: This is a sobering passage when you think about it. Because, yes, David was in many ways a man after God's own heart. At the same time, we see sinfulness, deception, and lying in David that will lead to catastrophic consequences in others' lives. We cannot overestimate the effects of sin in our lives.²

- ⇒ ***What does this chapter teach us about God's presence and provision in times of fear or uncertainty?***
- ⇒ ***How can this chapter encourage you when facing difficult or uncertain circumstances in your own life?***

2. Pray: Psalm 142 was written while David was in the cave of Adullam. Using this psalm as a guideline, pray for God's mercy, portion, and protection for a specific wilderness experience you are currently undergoing.

STUDY

Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:

- Klein, R. W. (1983). *1 Samuel* (Vol. 10, pp. 212–221). Word, Incorporated.
- Baldwin, J. G. (1988). *1 and 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary* (Vol. 8, pp. 146–150). InterVarsity Press.
- Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). *1, 2 Samuel* (Vol. 6, pp. 149–159). Holman Reference.
- Exell, J. S. *The Biblical Illustrator: 1 Samuel* (pp. 530–534). Fleming H. Revell Company.
- Radical.net, David Platt, 1-16-25.
- *The Illustrated Guide to Bible Customs and Curiosities*, by George W. Knight, page 83.
- *Shepherd's Notes, 1 and 2 Samuel*, pages 36-37.

² *radical.net*, David Platt, 1-16-25.