

## **Week 8:** *The Contrast Continues: David Receives Provision; Saul Takes Life*

### **Hook**



**Main Point: When you are afraid, put your trust in the Lord.**

In today's story, David's plight had him running from home into the unknown. But before his journey began, David made a supply run. Ready.gov suggests that you have a disaster supply kit with at least 14 items stored in a duffel bag, ready to go in case of emergency.<sup>1</sup> Break into small groups and see how many of the 14 recommended items you guess correctly.

#### **Recommended items:**

- water
- food
- battery-powered or hand-crank radio and an NOAA Weather Radio, flashlight
- first aid kit
- extra batteries
- whistle
- dust mask
- plastic sheeting and duct tape
- moist towelettes (for personal sanitation)
- wrench or pliers
- manual can opener
- local maps

cell phone with chargers

**RECAP:** In the last section of our study (weeks 5–7), David was living in Saul’s palace as part of his family. He had married Saul’s daughter, Michal, and made a friendship covenant with Saul’s son and heir, Jonathan. He also led Saul’s army and played music to soothe Saul when he was being attacked by a harmful spirit. But throughout that time, Saul grew more and more jealous of David and tried to kill him on more than one occasion. Both Jonathan and Michal defended David to their father and helped him escape. The text emphasized many times that David was innocent; he had done nothing wrong. Saul’s anger was pure jealousy.

For the next 10 weeks (weeks 8–17) we’ll see David on the run from Saul. It’s a long period in our study and in the text because it was a long period in David’s life—eight years. The text will continue to contrast Saul and David, showing David’s integrity and trust in the Lord and respect for Saul as the Lord’s anointed, even though Saul was trying to kill him.

It is during this time that David wrote most of the psalms that are labeled in relation to particular events in his life (Psalm 56, 34, 57, 142, 52, 63, 54). Other psalms may have been written during this time as well, but they are not specifically labeled as such. This season of David’s life, particularly, taught him to lean on God as his refuge and fortress.

## **Week 8: *The Contrast Continues: David Receives Provision; Saul Takes Life***

### **Book**

**Main Point: When you are afraid, put your trust in the Lord.**

**1 Samuel 21:1–9 and Mark 2:23–28 [Read]**

**Talking Point 1:** God values life over ceremonial law.

**Q: What was special about the bread that Ahimelech gave to David? Was it wrong for David to eat it?**

**Q: What did Jesus say about what David did?**

As we start this chapter, David had just left Jonathan, where they hugged and wept, knowing their lives would never be the same but promising to remain faithful to their covenant, even to their future generations. The first place David went was to a town just three miles away called Nob, which was a bit north of Jerusalem but south of Gibeah. We think of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, but it did not become the capital until David's reign. Saul was of the tribe of Benjamin, so Gibeah was the capital city of Israel during Saul's reign, and his palace was there. Nob was between these two cities, on the way to Jerusalem from Gibeah.<sup>2</sup>

Nob had become the priestly city after the destruction of Shiloh. The priest Ahimelech ("brother of the king") was the great-grandson of the priest Eli, whose line was cursed by God earlier in the story.<sup>3</sup> Eli was a faithful priest and raised Samuel to be a faithful priest, prophet and judge. But "the sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know the Lord" (1 Samuel 2:12). They abused the offerings of the people, taking whatever portion of the meat they wanted instead of using God's instructions to determine how much belonged to the priests. They were supposed to stick a fork in the boiling pot and whatever came up belonged to them, determined by God. But they took a portion *before* it was offered so they could get as much as they wanted (2:13–17). God said this "treated the offering of the Lord with contempt" and that their "sin was very great in the eyes of the Lord" (2:17). They also slept with the women who served at the entrance of the tabernacle (2:22). And even when Eli confronted them about it, they would not listen (2:25).

A prophet came to Eli and pronounced a curse on his descendants. First, his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, will die soon and on the same day, which happened less than two chapters later (4:11). But then, long term, the "days are coming" when his whole line

would be cut off and all his descendants would die by the sword (2:27–33). Only one would be left at the altar to “weep his eyes out to grieve his heart” (2:33).

David’s interaction with Ahimelech is curious. He seemingly lied to the priest to get what he wanted. Some scholars provide no defense for David, labeling it simply as deception. However, others interpret his language as crafty but honest; he was being sent on a mission from the “king” – Yahweh, not Saul.<sup>1</sup> In either case, David sought help with food and weapons.

The bread of the presence was set on the gold table before the Lord every Sabbath day, 12 loaves in two piles of six, with pure frankincense on each pile. It was to be eaten only by the priests in the holy place as their portion (Leviticus 24:5–9). But Ahimelech said David’s men could have it if they had kept themselves clean. As the priest, he had the authority to interpret and apply Torah guidelines to individual situations. Historically, Torah laws could be set aside if a higher consideration warranted it, especially the preservation of life.<sup>4</sup> Though it officially broke a *rule* of the Torah, it was consistent with the *principles* of the Torah to give David the means to sustain life.<sup>5</sup> Jesus used this story to defend His own disciples picking grain to eat on the Sabbath (Mark 2:27). He said God’s law was created for our good, not for the sake of following rules. The *ESV Study Bible* says, “Jesus endorsed Ahimelech’s judgment in putting mercy before ceremonial law.”<sup>6</sup>

While he was in Nob, David was able to gather food for the journey and Goliath’s sword for protection (21:8–9). In this, the Lord miraculously provided what David needed. The sons of Eli had been condemned for taking whatever portion they wanted of the people’s sacrifices, yet David was *given* the portion of the bread that belonged to the priests. He didn’t demand it or take it; he asked, and it was given to him. Not only was this a practical way to provide food for David’s journey, it also made a theological statement about David as God’s anointed one.

**Q: What does it say about David that he didn’t just go into Nob and take the bread and the sword, but asked the priest and honored his conditions?**

**Q: Describe a time when God used a surprising situation and surprising source to provide just what you needed.**

**Q: What special meaning might Goliath’s sword hold for David in this time of uncertainty?**

**1 Samuel 21:10–22:5 and Psalm 34 and 56 [Read]**

**Talking Point 2:** David first acted in fear, then ran to God for refuge.

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**Q: Psalms: What did David do when he was afraid? How did God respond?**

**Q: In 1 Samuel 22:1–2, how did God provide for David yet again?**

In the beginning of this section, David reacted out of fear, as we have seen Saul doing thus far (21:10–15). Gath was the hometown of Goliath. He had shown no fear of Goliath, but now he was so afraid of the king of Gath that he feigned madness to get away from him, desecrating his honor in the process by letting saliva run down his beard. The beard was a symbol of manhood and spit was a sign of dishonor. This is yet another contrast with Saul. David feigned madness to survive while Saul's actual madness became his ruin.<sup>7</sup>

This wasn't one of David's bravest moments, but the psalms he wrote in response to this situation speak beautifully of coming to God in your fears. Though 1 Samuel only tells us of David's acting, in the psalms, David said he sought the Lord, and God delivered him from all his fears (Psalm 34:4). Significantly, he wrote, "Those who look to him are radiant and their *faces* shall never be *ashamed*" (Psalm 34:5). What David did with his face, letting saliva run down his beard, *was* shaming. David was encouraging us to turn to the Lord in our fears, not react out of fear as he did. Not everything David did was right or good; he was human, just like you and me. But he learned from his sins, and he wrote about it in his prayers and psalms.

David didn't pretend that he never experienced fear, but instead committed: "Whenever I am afraid, I will put my trust in you" (Psalm 56:3). These psalms all speak to crying out to God when we are afraid or in trouble, going to Him for refuge. This is what David did *after* he feigned madness. He fled to a cave for refuge and God met him there. God provided him an entire army of 400 men he didn't even have to ask for (22:2). "The Lord redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in Him will be condemned" (Psalm 34:22). Then David went to Mizpeh (which means "watchtower") in Moab (22:3). But he did not stay there long before the Lord called him to leave "the stronghold," a play on words on Mizpeh, and go into the forest of Judah (22:4-5). God called him to leave a stronghold made by human hands to go to the forest where the Lord would be his stronghold.<sup>8</sup>

David wrote, "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit" (34:18). When we cry out to Him, the Lord hears us. He cares deeply about our pain. "You have kept count of my tossings, put my tears in your bottle" (56:8). You may feel fear and doubt, even feel absolutely crushed and broken. But turn to God. He is near. He is waiting to be your refuge and strength. To wipe all your tears, redeem your life, and heal your brokenness. From his own experience, David implored us, "Taste and see that the lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in Him!" (Psalm 34:8).

**Q: Describe situations that make you feel fear. How do you typically respond?**

**Q: What would it look like for you to "take refuge" in God instead?**

**Q: How do these psalms make you feel? What do they help you understand better?**

**Q: Describe times you have felt comforted by God. How did you feel His love?**

**1 Samuel 22:6–23 and Psalm 52 [Read]**

**Talking Point 3:** Saul valued power more than human life.

**Q: Why did Saul blame the priests at Nob for David's escape?**

**Q: How did Saul's killing them fulfill God's word to Eli about his descendants?**

Now the story goes back to the priests at Nob and what finally became of them. Saul heard that David had a whole army with him (22:6) and he became even more paranoid, thinking everyone was conspiring against him. He didn't trust in the Lord, nor did he trust anyone else, including his own children and his closest advisors (22:7–8). All of which led up to the way he treated Ahimelech.

When Saul offered rewards for information, Doeg told Saul about David at Nob, adding that Ahimelech had inquired of the Lord for David, only pointing to David's commitment to following God (22:7–10). Saul accused Ahimelech of conspiring against him, but Ahimelech said he helped David because he thought David was still Saul's right hand man (22:11–15). The text makes Ahimelech's innocence clear, but Saul was too far gone. He simply said to his guard, "Kill the priests of the Lord" (22:17). If you've watched a lot of movies about powerful kings or dictators, this may seem like a normal thing for a king in his situation to do, but not in Israel. The priests were anointed as God's servants and set apart as holy. Saul's servants refused to touch them, no matter what their king said (22:17). So Saul turned to Doeg, who did it without hesitation. Not only the eighty-five priests, but the entire city, even women, children and infants, and animals.<sup>9</sup>

It's a significant contrast that Saul had no problem killing the Lord's anointed ones, because that's exactly the reason David gives for not killing Saul in the next chapters, even though many would believe Saul deserved it. Yet again we see that David honored the Lord while Saul did not. Psalm 52 also gives us a great contrast between David and Doeg, who boasted of evil, loved evil rather than good, and was a disgrace in the eyes of God (Psalm 52:1–4). David promised that God would bring him down to everlasting ruin (52:5), just as he did the house of Eli. Doeg trusted in the riches and power Saul promised him rather than making God his stronghold as David had (52:7).

David took responsibility for the deaths of Ahimelech's family, although it's unlikely he could have predicted such a horrendous outcome. He knew Doeg would tell Saul what happened at Nob, but it would have been unimaginable that Saul would slaughter the entire city (22:22). The murder of so many was the work of Saul's anger, jealousy and complete disregard for the holiness of God. Yet it was also the fulfillment of God's curse of the house of Eli from the very beginning of Samuel. The similar language and details point us back to that story, down to the detail that only one priest escaped alive (22:20). It's a difficult story in which we see the disastrous results of the selfishness and evil of both Saul and Eli's sons, the destruction of an entire city of innocent people. But one

priest remained, Abiathar, which means “my father remains.” He would stay with David as his priest, and David would keep him safe until David died and he was banished by Solomon, completing the curse against Eli’s house (1 Kings 2:27). Even in a story of such utter destruction, there is a glimmer of hope and salvation.

**Q: Give an example of how our selfish actions can affect people around us.**

**Q: We gain a new piece of knowledge from Doeg. David had Ahimelech inquire of the Lord on his behalf. What does this tell us about David’s character?**

**Q: How can we have hope in the midst of evil and destruction in the world? What can we do to protect/defend the victims of evil, as David did with Abiathar?**

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### **Took**

**Main Point: When you are afraid, put your trust in the Lord.**

Today's story is full of twists, loss and hope. Through it all, God continually provided for His anointed, sustaining David's life despite the tremendous odds stacked against him. The Lord became a food source, defense, shelter and even a military force. Today's story reminds us of Psalm 34:17: "When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles."

**Q: Describe the difference between David's and Saul's responses to fear in today's lesson.**

**Q: In what ways has the Lord provided for you in times of crisis?**

**Q: What are the dangers in looking outside of the Lord to provide ourselves?**

### **CHALLENGES**

**THINK:** How do you respond to fear? Do you find yourself looking to the Lord or attempting to solve problems on your own? In what ways would your life improve if your first action was to seek the Lord in times of fear and crisis?

**PRAY:** From the psalms David wrote during this period (Psalm 34, 52, 56, 57, 142), choose the one that speaks to your life most strongly right now and use it as your prayer today. Or you can pray a different psalm from the list to pray each day this week.

**ACT:** Memorize and meditate on Psalm 52:8–9. Do something to remind yourself of God's provision. Work thankfulness into your prayer life, a sure-fire way to remind yourself of the ways the Lord takes care of you. Share stories with your family, particularly your children, about times God provided a rescue for you.

**NEXT TIME in *The Life of David*:** Next week, we'll continue in this section of David's life – David on the run (weeks 8–17). As we watch David live in the wilderness, in caves and even with their Philistine enemies, we will see the ongoing contrast between Saul and David. We will see David continue to be the bigger person as Saul continues to operate

out of fear. Next week, we will see David inquiring of God and His will for David's life while Saul does not.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ready.gov/kit>

<sup>2</sup> Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1999).

<sup>3</sup> *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Robert D. Bergen, [1, 2 Samuel](#), vol. 7, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 221.

<sup>5</sup> Robert D. Bergen, 1–2 Samuel, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Robert D. Bergen, 1–2 Samuel, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 1996).

<sup>8</sup> Robert D. Bergen, 1–2 Samuel, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 1996).

<sup>9</sup> Robert D. Bergen, 1–2 Samuel, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 1996).