

Week 9: *The Contrast Continues: Inquiring of God*

Hook



Main Point: A godly leader seeks God’s will and follows it.

Google’s “Year in Search” reveals the most searched items in a variety of categories, including *people*, *actors*, and *news*. The top Google searches in the “how to be” category in the year 2021 included:

- How to be eligible for stimulus check
- How to be more attractive
- How to be happy alone
- How to be a good boyfriend
- How to be a flight attendant
- How to be happy with yourself
- How to be mindful¹

Q: In what ways have search engines like Google changed the way you seek information?

Q: Some questions like “how to be eligible for stimulus check” seem perfect for the internet. Are there any questions on this list that you would not suggest folks turn to the internet for answers to?

RECAP: In this section of our study (weeks 8–17), David was 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 even respect for Saul as the Lord's anointed. Last week, we saw David treat the priests of the Lord with respect and honor while Saul slaughtered them and their entire city for what he saw as betraying him. This week, we'll see how David sought the Lord's will and followed it while Saul did not inquire of God.

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 9: *The Contrast Continues: Inquiring of God*

Book

Main Point: A godly leader seeks God's will and follows it.

1 Samuel 23:1–14 and Psalm 63 [Read]

Talking Point 1: David sought the Lord's will, trusted in it, and followed it.

Q: Why did David ask the Lord twice before he attacked the Philistines?

Q: Why was Saul unable to catch David in the wilderness?

At this point in the story, Saul was out of control. He has just slaughtered an entire city of priests of the Lord and their families. Though Ahimelech had done nothing wrong, Saul accused him of being a traitor by helping David, so he ordered the entire city of Nob, including women, children, infants and animals, to be utterly destroyed (22:12–17). This was such an atrocious act that Saul's own servants were unwilling to do it (22:17). It was not the act of a godly king who honored God but one so jealous and insecure and desperate to hold onto power that he would destroy anyone and anything in his path.

Chapter 23 opens with David's asking the Lord whether he should defend Keilah against the Philistines. Keilah was a town about three miles from the cave of Adullam where he had hidden, and David had gotten word that they were being attacked (23:1). Because of its location (isolated from other Israelites cities) and the time of year (harvest), it was particularly vulnerable to plundering by the Philistines.² King Saul should have been the one asking the Lord if he should defend one of his cities, but he was too busy chasing David. Saul did end up going down to Keilah, not to defend them from the Philistines but to attack David and his men (23:7–8). Even while David was running for his life, he was more concerned about helping God's people than Saul was.

In the religious ritual system of the Old Testament, a king could inquire of the Lord and the Lord might answer by a dream, by a prophet or through the high priest by the Urim and Thummim (28:6). The Urim and Thummim was a specific method the high priest used to "inquire of the Lord" for a king or the nation as a whole, using the ephod of the high priest. The text tells us that Abiathar had brought the ephod of the high priest from the tabernacle in Nob when he fled to David in 1 Samuel 22:20 (23:6).³ Abiathar functioned as David's high priest because all the other priests had been slaughtered (22:23).⁴

In their religious system, the high priest wore a special ephod, an apron that went over his robe (Exodus 28). It was made of gold, blue, purple, and scarlet yarns of fine twisted linen (Exodus 28:6). It had two onyx stones on the shoulders, engraved with the names of the tribes of Israel, so the high priest would "bear their names before the Lord"

(Exodus 28:9–12). On the breastplate were 12 different stones, each engraved with the name of a single tribe, so the high priest would “bear the names of the sons of Israel in the breastpiece of judgment on his heart when he goes into the Holy Place” (vv. 15–21, 29). Therefore, the high priest represented all 12 tribes of Israel before the Lord.

The Urim and Thummim were inside the breastplate (28:30).⁵ *Urim* means “lights” and *Thummim* means “perfections”; St. Jerome and other ancient theologians translated that figuratively to mean “revelation and truth.”⁶ We don’t know the details of how it worked, but these stones were used by the high priest to “inquire of the Lord” by casting lots, which would tell them God’s answer to a question, kind of like the “heads or tails” of a coin toss. They are used in 1 Samuel 14:41, when Saul asked God to tell them who was responsible for the judgment that had come to the nation – *Thummim* meant the people, *Urim* meant Saul or Jonathan. When it was *Urim*, they cast again, this time between Saul and Jonathan (14:37–42).

It may seem strange that God would command this kind of lot casting while He had outlawed them from practicing divination or soothsaying in His law (Leviticus 19:26, 31). But the *Urim* and *Thummim* were only used by the high priest and only with questions that affected the whole nation, like whether they should go to war or who should be king. It wasn’t like an individual person going to a tarot card reader or fortune teller to learn his future. The *Urim* and *Thummim* weren’t about trying to control your own destiny or manipulate God; they were about seeking His will.⁷

In verses 1–5, David asked if he should attack the Philistines and God answered yes, but the people were afraid (23:3). This is a familiar theme in Scripture. The people were afraid of the Canaanites in the promised land, but Caleb and Joshua trusted in God (Numbers 13–14). The people were afraid to fight Goliath, but David trusted in God (1 Samuel 17). David asked again and God promised he would be successful, so David went (23:4–5). David sought the will of the Lord and followed it, even though others were scared.

Then Saul set out to attack David at Keilah, the Israelite city David had just rescued from the Philistines (23:6–8)! David had saved one of Saul’s cities without even being asked, and this is how he would be repaid. David asked if Saul would really come attack him *and* if the men of Keilah would give him up to Saul. It may seem ungrateful on the part of the men of Keilah, but remember, Saul had just slaughtered the whole city of Nob because he thought they were conspiring with David against him. The contrast here, again, is stark between David, who saved a city, and Saul, who had just destroyed one.⁸

David fled Keilah and “remained in the strongholds in the wilderness” (23:14). He left a walled city (23:7) for strongholds in the wilderness. These were not military fortresses, but small outposts used as contact points for herdsmen and villagers in the area.⁹ But remember, David’s true stronghold was the Lord (Psalm 18:2). He has no reason to be afraid of any man, even the king (Psalm 27:1).

David wrote Psalm 63 while he was in the desert of Judah, hiding in these outposts in the wilderness. He began the psalm by describing his earnest seeking of the Lord. Using the imagery of the desert, he wrote that his whole being longed for God, thirsted for Him like our bodies thirst for water in a dry and parched land (63:1). He claimed that those seeking to kill him would be destroyed (63:9); he did not fear them. Yes, he was on the run, but “because You are my help, I sing in the shadow of your wings” (63:7). God was His refuge. He could hide under His wings for protection. When he did, he wasn’t cowering in fear, worry or anxiety. He was singing. David didn’t know what would happen to him, even from day to day. But because he sought the Lord’s will and followed it, he trusted that he would be safe in God’s will. And he was. Saul looked every day, but even with all his resources, Saul never found him because God did not give David into his hand (23:14).

Q: Describe a time when you had to trust in the Lord’s will for your life even though it seemed uncertain or scary. How did you know it was His will?

Q: How can we help one another discern God’s will for our lives?

1 Samuel 23:15–18 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Jonathan chose God’s will over what seemed best for himself.

Q: Why might it be dangerous for Jonathan to continue to support David?

Q: How do we know that David and Jonathan’s relationship was focused on the Lord?

Jonathan and David still loved each other with that deep friendship covenant love. When Jonathan heard Saul had gone to seek David’s life, Jonathan went to meet him and encourage him in the Lord (23:15–16). Saul was unable to find David, but Jonathan was not. They kept in contact, and David trusted Jonathan to keep his whereabouts secret from his father, unlike the men of Keilah.

Jonathan went to reassure David that Saul would not find him, and he made a prediction – that David would be the next king, and Jonathan would be “next to [him]” (23:17), not as an equal, as if they would share the kingship, but as his right-hand man, advisor, maybe general. This is an act of incredible humility for Jonathan. Under Saul, he would have become the next king. Instead, he chose to step down and support David because he believed David was God’s chosen one. Jonathan said that Saul also knew David would be the next king, though he was doing everything in his power to stop it from happening. Saul knew the will of God, yet he fought against it because it didn’t fit what he wanted for himself, a strong contrast to Jonathan’s humility and submission to God’s will.

Q: Why is it so important for Christian friends to encourage each other in the Lord?

Q: Describe a time when you had to sacrifice something in order to follow God's will. How did things turn out?

Q: In what ways is God calling you to submit to His will, even if something else may look better in the eyes of the world?

1 Samuel 23:19–29 and Psalm 54 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Saul did not inquire of the Lord; he did what he wanted.

Q: Why would the Ziphites volunteer information about David to Saul?

Q: How did David describe his foes in Psalm 54?

Without even being asked, the Ziphites went to Saul to give up David's location (23:20). Even though Saul hadn't followed the Lord for quite some time, he blessed them "by the Lord" for having compassion on him. Saul again made it all about himself.¹⁰ Saul might still claim to speak for the Lord, but he hadn't interacted with God's Spirit since chapter 19, when the Spirit fell upon him without his asking, while he was chasing after David to kill him (19:18–24). He hadn't inquired of God since chapter 14. He hadn't been following God for a long time. He had been acting out of fear and a desperate desire to keep his power and the throne.

The Ziphites gave Saul extremely detailed information on David's location (23:19), but he asked for them to go spy David out and come back with even more "sure information" (23:23). The rest of this chapter reads like a game of cat and mouse. David went to the Arabah, Saul looked for him. David went to the wilderness of Moan, Saul pursued him. Saul was on one side of the mountain; David was on the other. But just as Saul was closing in on David, a messenger arrived with an immediate need for Saul to attack the Philistines (v. 27). It reads like an act of God, stopping Saul from catching David.¹¹

David described the scene in Psalm 54: "Ruthless men seek my life; they do not set before God themselves" (54:3). This describes the Ziphites as well as Saul. Saul had no regard for God, his people, or even his own family; he was only out for himself. But David called on the Lord both to save him and vindicate him. David was innocent; he had done nothing to Saul, and he was hunted like an animal. Yet David didn't take matters into his own hands; he didn't retaliate. He continued to run, flee, and hide, and he waited on the Lord and His plan, His timing. This is the key difference between David

and Saul in this section. David trusted in the Lord, sought His will, and followed it. Saul sought what he thought was best and followed his emotions.

Q: In what ways have you taken matters into your own hands instead of trusting God's will? How did that turn out for you?

Q: Why is it dangerous to follow our emotions, our desires or our own logic?

Q: What tools can you use to inquire of God's will today?

Week 9: *The Contrast Continues: Inquiring of God*

Took

Main Point: A godly leader seeks God's will and follows it.

Greg Laurie, Pastor of Harvest Christian Fellowship, wrote that while he does not have a foolproof system to discover God's will in his life, there are a few principles to understand and steps to take to prepare our hearts to know His will better.

1. Understand that God wants to tell you His will. God wants you to know His will (John 15:15; Psalm 25:14) and do His will (John 10:27).
2. God has revealed His will to us in the pages of Scripture – so spend time in God's Word.
3. Before knowing the will of God, you must be willing to submit your life to Him to offer Him a surrendered heart. This means dedicating your life to the Lord and refusing to conform to the world.¹²

Q: Why is the posture of your heart important when discerning God's will?

Q: Describe a time in your life when you had a specific decision to make and sought the Lord's wisdom. What did you do? (Answers might include prayer and fasting, seeking wise counsel from other believers, evaluating the situation with reason, etc.)

CHALLENGES

THINK: How do you discern God's will? What tools do you have at your disposal? How can you know what God is calling you to do, where He is leading you? How can your Christian community help you with the discernment process?

PRAY for God to show you His will; ask for guidance, wisdom and discernment.

ACT: Inquire of God. David went to the high priest to inquire of God. We have a different system in the new covenant. We don't need a priest to mediate between us and the Lord. However, it can be helpful to pray for discernment with another believer when it comes to God's will. Ask a Christian friend or mentor to pray with you specifically to inquire about God's will for your life. You may have a specific question or just need general leading.

NEXT TIME in *The Life of David*: Next week, we'll see Saul's pursuit of David come to a shocking climax when David has the opportunity to kill Saul but doesn't.

¹ <https://trends.google.com/trends/yis/2021/US/>

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

³ *The ESV Study Bible* has a footnote that says they think that Abiathar didn't bring the ephod until verse 6, but the text says he "had" brought it when he "had" fled to David, which happened in 22:20. Even if it is talking about him "fleeing" again a different time to Keliath, there is no reason to think he didn't already have the ephod with him the first time. Nor is there any reason to not think that he was not with David in vv. 1-5, because in 22:23, David tells him to "stay with me." He was with David the whole time and had the ephod the whole time, so it would make sense that David would use it. This was the traditional method for "inquiring of the Lord" for the king by the high priest, which Abiathar was at this point since all of the other priests had been slaughtered.

⁴ Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1999).

⁵ Some scholars believe it was only one stone, the *Urim* on one side and the *Thummim* on the other

⁶ Emil G. Hirsch, William Muss-Arnolt, Wilhelm Bacher, Ludwig Blau, "Urim and Thummim," *The Jewish Encyclopedia, Vol 12* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1906).

⁷ John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000).

⁸ Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1999).

⁹ John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000).

¹⁰ *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

¹¹ *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

¹² <https://harvest.org/resources/gregs-blog/post/how-to-know-the-will-of-god/>