

# The Life of David—a Daily Bible Guide, week 2

## Monday, March 21st: 1 Samuel 21

<sup>1</sup> David went to Nob, to Ahimelek the priest. Ahimelek trembled when he met him, and asked, “Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?”

<sup>2</sup> David answered Ahimelek the priest, “The king sent me on a mission and said to me, ‘No one is to know anything about the mission I am sending you on.’ As for my men, I have told them to meet me at a certain place. <sup>3</sup>Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find.”

<sup>4</sup> But the priest answered David, “I don’t have any ordinary bread on hand; however, there is some consecrated bread here—provided the men have kept themselves from women.”

<sup>5</sup> David replied, “Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual whenever I set out. The men’s bodies are holy even on missions that are not holy. How much more so today!” <sup>6</sup> So the priest gave him the consecrated bread, since there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence that had been removed from before the LORD and replaced by hot bread on the day it was taken away.

<sup>7</sup> Now one of Saul’s servants was there that day, detained before the LORD; he was Doeg the Edomite, Saul’s chief shepherd.

<sup>8</sup> David asked Ahimelek, “Don’t you have a spear or a sword here? I haven’t brought my sword or any other weapon, because the king’s mission was urgent.”

<sup>9</sup> The priest replied, “The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the Valley of Elah, is here; it is wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you want it, take it; there is no sword here but that one.”

David said, “There is none like it; give it to me.”

<sup>10</sup> That day David fled from Saul and went to Achish king of Gath. <sup>11</sup> But the servants of Achish said to him, “Isn’t this David, the king of the land? Isn’t he the one they sing about in their dances:

“Saul has slain his thousands,  
and David his tens of thousands?”

<sup>12</sup> David took these words to heart and was very much afraid of Achish king of Gath. <sup>13</sup> So he pretended to be insane in their presence; and while he was in their hands he acted like a madman, making marks on the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard.

<sup>14</sup> Achish said to his servants, “Look at the man! He is insane! Why bring him to me? <sup>15</sup> Am I so short of madmen that you have to bring this fellow here to carry on like this in front of me? Must this man come into my house?”

### Points of Interest

- ‘David went to Nob’--at this point, the Israelites don’t really have what you would call an organized religion. Instead, the land is dotted with shrines built around the site of a visitation from God or the possession of an honored relic. Nob is apparently one of these shrines.
- ‘Ahimelek trembled when he met him’--David is a famous and important general. He would usually travel with a big entourage, if not an entire army. So, when he arrives alone, unarmed, and perhaps a bit bedraggled, Ahimelek immediately knows that something is wrong.
- ‘The king sent me on a mission’--this is, of course, a lie. I don’t know if David is truly trying to hide his plans from Ahimelek, or if he’s trying to give Ahimelek plausible deniability. In other

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words, if Ahimelek ever got into hot water for helping David, Ahimelek could honestly say, 'David told me he was on a royal mission.'

- 'I have told them to meet me'--while the part about being sent by the king is a lie, this part might be true. David is trying to collect more food than might be necessary just for him. And he and his men do indeed meet up shortly after this.
- 'there is some consecrated bread here'--twelve loaves of bread were continually set out in the sanctuary as a memorial to the way God fed the twelve tribes of the Israelites miracle bread as they wandered in the desert. Once a week, the priests would bake new loaves and eat the old ones. Ahimelek is offering David his own food, food that only priests were supposed to eat. That's why Ahimelek shows some hesitation and asks the strange question about whether or not they've had sex recently. If he's going to give the priestly food to non-priests, he wants to at least make sure that they are what's called 'ritually clean,' that is, adequately prepared for religious service. For whatever reason, refraining from intimate contact with women is one element of that ritual preparation. Serendipitously, at least as far as getting the bread is concerned, being away at war has kept the men away from women; so they're good on that front.
- 'Now one of Saul's servants was there that day'--perhaps Doeg is the audience for David's line about being on assignment from the king.
- 'The sword of Goliath the Philistine'--David drops into a random shrine looking for food and a weapon. Amazingly, not only is there, in fact, a sword he can borrow, but it's his own sword, the one he won by killing Goliath. I imagine that this must have been pretty encouraging to David. Right now, things aren't how he might have expected them to be. But every time he looks down at his sword, he can remember that God did indeed come through for him in an amazing way in the past; maybe that's enough to bolster his belief that God will come through again in the future.
- 'behind the ephod'--the 'ephod' is the special garment worn by the priest while performing his official duties. It's hard to tell from this passage whether the ephod is being displayed when it isn't in use, or is being stowed in a closet, with the sword stuffed in a corner behind it.
- 'There is none like it'--the Philistines had a local monopoly on the best metalwork (ch. 13:19-22).
- 'went to Achish king of Gath'--Gath is one of the Philistine cities; it's Goliath's hometown. David is trying to put himself well outside of Saul's reach. It seems like David is trying to enter the town incognito and get some work as a mercenary. This is perhaps not the best thought-out plan ever. Very quickly people start to ask, 'Hey, don't we know you from somewhere?' And they figure out that he's the subject of that irritating, omnipresent hit song, 'David Slew his Ten Thousands'--surely a song that was a lot less liked in Philistia than in Israel.
- 'he acted like a madman'--I get the impression David is improvising here; the best chance he has of staying alive is to pretend to have gone insane. It's just possible that in that case he'd be pitied or mocked or feared instead of hated and killed. It's quite a steep decline for David. Not so long ago, he had defeated Goliath, chased the Philistine army off, and become his country's biggest hero and most respected general. Now, he's an exile, hiding out in Goliath's own town, and letting the spittle collect in his beard so that people will leave him alone.

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## Taking it home

- For you: Goliath's sword serves as a reminder of a time when God worked miraculously on David's behalf. When did God last do something truly miraculous in your life? Take some time to remember, and to thank God for that time. If it seems like a long time ago, tell God that you want to experience God's power more regularly. Ask God to give you all the encouragement and reminder signs you need today to continue to trust him.
- For your six: When David went to the priest, it wasn't for spiritual guidance; David just needed some food, his lunch for the day. Sometimes, it's the simple things that matter most. When is the last time you shared a meal with your six? Take one of your six out for dinner or a drink, or invite them over. Pray that this time together would hit the spot, just like the bread did for David.
- For our church: A big part of David's job during this phase of his life is to keep persevering. Earlier, he experienced glory and stardom. Now, he's basically just trying to survive. As a church, we too have had our high times and our more difficult times, and I'm sure we'll have them both again. Pray that God would make us a church that perseveres well through seasons of difficulty.
- For families: We can do practical things for our friends as well as pray for them. Think of one of your friends. Ask God to tell you if there is anything this person needs that you might be the right person to help them with.

## Tuesday, March 22nd: 1 Samuel 22

<sup>1</sup> David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam. When his brothers and his father's household heard about it, they went down to him there. <sup>2</sup> All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him, and he became their commander. About four hundred men were with him.

<sup>3</sup> From there David went to Mizpah in Moab and said to the king of Moab, "Would you let my father and mother come and stay with you until I learn what God will do for me?" <sup>4</sup> So he left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with him as long as David was in the stronghold.

<sup>5</sup> But the prophet Gad said to David, "Do not stay in the stronghold. Go into the land of Judah." So David left and went to the forest of Hereth.

<sup>6</sup> Now Saul heard that David and his men had been discovered. And Saul was seated, spear in hand, under the tamarisk tree on the hill at Gibeah, with all his officials standing at his side. <sup>7</sup> He said to them, "Listen, men of Benjamin! Will the son of Jesse give all of you fields and vineyards? Will he make all of you commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds?" <sup>8</sup> Is that why you have all conspired against me? No one tells me when my son makes a covenant with the son of Jesse. None of you is concerned about me or tells me that my son has incited my servant to lie in wait for me, as he does today."

<sup>9</sup> But Doeg the Edomite, who was standing with Saul's officials, said, "I saw the son of Jesse come to Ahimelek son of Ahitub at Nob. <sup>10</sup> Ahimelek inquired of the LORD for him; he also gave him provisions and the sword of Goliath the Philistine."

<sup>11</sup> Then the king sent for the priest Ahimelek son of Ahitub and all the men of his family, who were the priests at Nob, and they all came to the king. <sup>12</sup> Saul said, "Listen now, son of Ahitub."

"Yes, my lord," he answered.

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<sup>13</sup> Saul said to him, “Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, giving him bread and a sword and inquiring of God for him, so that he has rebelled against me and lies in wait for me, as he does today?”

<sup>14</sup> Ahimelek answered the king, “Who of all your servants is as loyal as David, the king’s son-in-law, captain of your bodyguard and highly respected in your household? <sup>15</sup> Was that day the first time I inquired of God for him? Of course not! Let not the king accuse your servant or any of his father’s family, for your servant knows nothing at all about this whole affair.”

<sup>16</sup> But the king said, “You will surely die, Ahimelek, you and your whole family.”

<sup>17</sup> Then the king ordered the guards at his side: “Turn and kill the priests of the LORD, because they too have sided with David. They knew he was fleeing, yet they did not tell me.”

But the king’s officials were unwilling to raise a hand to strike the priests of the LORD.

<sup>18</sup> The king then ordered Doeg, “You turn and strike down the priests.” So Doeg the Edomite turned and struck them down. That day he killed eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod. <sup>19</sup> He also put to the sword Nob, the town of the priests, with its men and women, its children and infants, and its cattle, donkeys and sheep.

<sup>20</sup> But one son of Ahimelek son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled to join David. <sup>21</sup> He told David that Saul had killed the priests of the LORD. <sup>22</sup> Then David said to Abiathar, “That day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, I knew he would be sure to tell Saul. I am responsible for the death of your whole family. <sup>23</sup> Stay with me; don’t be afraid. The man who wants to take your life is trying to kill me too. You will be safe with me.”

### Points of Interest

- ‘his brothers and his father’s household heard about it’--David and his brothers have done nothing but bicker throughout this story. But now, as so often happens, this outside threat draws them together. It’s probably not just brotherly solidarity that brings his family to David; being the brother of a traitor, as David is now considered, could be dangerous for them as well.
- ‘those who were in distress or in debt or discontented’--David becomes the leader of an outlaw band, rather like Robin Hood and his merry men. Some of the people who come to him are relatives. Many others join him because they, like him, are outcasts from normal society, through legal or financial difficulties, bad fortune, the wrong enemies, or just plain disaffection. While a large number of them are from David’s own tribe, Judah, there are representatives from all over Israel, and even from foreign countries. This ragtag group of outlaws, known as David’s Mighty Men, remains with him his entire life, serving as the core of his military forces even after he becomes king. They’re quite renowned, especially the members of two elite units, known as the Three and the Thirty. You can find their names and read about some of their exploits in 2 Samuel 23:8-39 and 1 Chronicles 11:10-12:22.
- ‘he left them with the king of Moab’--David is sending his parents to neutral territory for safekeeping. It’s possible he chooses Moab because of family connections; Jesse’s grandmother was a Moabite.
- ‘men of Benjamin’--Benjamin is Saul’s own tribe. These would be the troops most closely bound to Saul personally.

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- ‘Will he make all of you commanders’--Saul, ever more unhinged, chooses to interpret their inability to catch David as disloyalty. ‘Has he promised to give you all promotions in the new administration? Is that it?’
- ‘Who of all your servants is as loyal as David’--Ahimelek’s words are both completely true and something of a deception. David is, in fact, the most loyal of Saul’s servants; and Saul has indeed often sent David to Ahimelek himself. But Ahimelek did have an inkling that something had gone wrong between Saul and David and chose to support David anyway.
- ‘your servant knows nothing at all about this whole affair’--despite the fact that Ahimelek had sniffed out that something was amiss, this is a reasonable defense of his actions; he had never been officially notified of David’s change in status. ‘How was I supposed to know without you telling me?’ he asks. Saul is not, however, in a reasonable mood.
- ‘unwilling to raise a hand to strike the priests’--even hardened warriors might hesitate to massacre unarmed priests, mistreatment of priests pretty much universally being thought to bring bad luck. Ancient Israelites might be especially reluctant to wipe out all of the priests. In Israel, the priesthood is hereditary; so they would essentially be cutting themselves and their entire nation off from God forever if they killed off the entire family.
- ‘Doeg the Edomite turned and struck them down’--Doeg is a foreign mercenary, from the neighboring kingdom of Edom. Perhaps, as a foreigner and probably a worshipper of different gods, he is less bothered by the stigma attached to killing these priests. Or perhaps he’s just desperate enough for advancement that he’s willing to do anything.
- ‘Abiathar, escaped and fled to join David’--Saul’s efforts to destroy David are actually accelerating David’s advancement. First, David ends up collecting his own army. Now, the remaining priest has switched over to David’s side. David practically has an entire shadow government in operation.
- ‘I am responsible for the death of your whole family’--David knew that stopping at Nob could put Ahimelek in danger; that’s why he lied about being on a mission from Saul. Ahimelek could have denied David the help, and Saul didn’t have to kill Ahimelek; so, David isn’t solely responsible for the situation. Nonetheless, because he put Ahimelek at risk, he feels the responsibility at least to protect and care for Ahimelek’s remaining family.

### Taking it home

- For you: Even if David is slowly gaining a band of people who support him, he is still fleeing, in fear for his life, and mostly alone. What are the ways in which you feel alone and under-resourced? Pray some of David’s prayers during this time in his life from Psalm 31:

#### **Psalm 31**

**1** *In you, LORD, I have taken refuge;*

*let me never be put to shame;*

*deliver me in your righteousness.*

**2** *Turn your ear to me,*

*come quickly to my rescue;*

*be my rock of refuge,*

*a strong fortress to save me.*

**3** *Since you are my rock and my fortress,*

*for the sake of your name lead and guide me.*

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**4** *Keep me free from the trap that is set for me,  
for you are my refuge.*

**5** *Into your hands I commit my spirit;  
deliver me, LORD, my faithful God.*

**6** *I hate those who cling to worthless idols;  
as for me, I trust in the LORD.*

**7** *I will be glad and rejoice in your love,  
for you saw my affliction  
and knew the anguish of my soul.*

**8** *You have not given me into the hands of the enemy  
but have set my feet in a spacious place.*

**9** *Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am in distress;  
my eyes grow weak with sorrow,  
my soul and body with grief.*

**10** *My life is consumed by anguish  
and my years by groaning;  
my strength fails because of my affliction,  
and my bones grow weak.*

**11** *Because of all my enemies,  
I am the utter contempt of my neighbors  
and an object of dread to my closest friends—  
those who see me on the street flee from me.*

**12** *I am forgotten as though I were dead;  
I have become like broken pottery.*

**13** *For I hear many whispering,  
“Terror on every side!”  
They conspire against me  
and plot to take my life.*

**14** *But I trust in you, LORD;  
I say, “You are my God.” ...*

**17** *Let me not be put to shame, LORD,  
for I have cried out to you;  
but let the wicked be put to shame  
and be silent in the realm of the dead. ...*

**22** *In my alarm I said,  
“I am cut off from your sight!”  
Yet you heard my cry for mercy  
when I called to you for help...*

**24** *Be strong and take heart,  
all you who hope in the LORD.*

- For your six: Pray for the families of your six. Ask God to bring reconciliation to broken family relationships. Pray for unlikely circumstances to bring their families closer together.
- For our church: From Gath, to Adullam, to Moab to Hereth to Gibeah—God both knows and tracks the physical places where his people are. Ask God to use our church in meaningful ways here in our city. Pray for the specific North Cambridge neighborhood where our church is located, that God would bless all the incredibly unique people and social dynamics here. Ask

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God to also bless the specific neighborhoods and cities represented by people attending our church.

- For families: Parents, spend some time sharing with your children things you feel like God has called you to. Talk about people who have been partners to you along the way in this mission. Ask your family: do you think God is calling us to do anything special with God as a family? Are there others we know of who are also interested in this and might be our partners? If you come up with something specific, see if you can plan a date over the Leap of Faith to take action on this in some way. Invite those you think might be partners to do it with you.

### Wednesday, March 23rd: 1 Samuel 23

<sup>1</sup> When David was told, “Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are looting the threshing floors,” <sup>2</sup> he inquired of the LORD, saying, “Shall I go and attack these Philistines?”

The LORD answered him, “Go, attack the Philistines and save Keilah.”

<sup>3</sup> But David’s men said to him, “Here in Judah we are afraid. How much more, then, if we go to Keilah against the Philistine forces!”

<sup>4</sup> Once again David inquired of the LORD, and the LORD answered him, “Go down to Keilah, for I am going to give the Philistines into your hand.” <sup>5</sup> So David and his men went to Keilah, fought the Philistines and carried off their livestock. He inflicted heavy losses on the Philistines and saved the people of Keilah. <sup>6</sup> (Now Abiathar son of Ahimelek had brought the ephod down with him when he fled to David at Keilah.)

<sup>7</sup> Saul was told that David had gone to Keilah, and he said, “God has delivered him into my hands, for David has imprisoned himself by entering a town with gates and bars.” <sup>8</sup> And Saul called up all his forces for battle, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men.

<sup>9</sup> When David learned that Saul was plotting against him, he said to Abiathar the priest, “Bring the ephod.” <sup>10</sup> David said, “LORD, God of Israel, your servant has heard definitely that Saul plans to come to Keilah and destroy the town on account of me. <sup>11</sup> Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me to him? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard? LORD, God of Israel, tell your servant.”

And the LORD said, “He will.”

<sup>12</sup> Again David asked, “Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me and my men to Saul?”

And the LORD said, “They will.”

<sup>13</sup> So David and his men, about six hundred in number, left Keilah and kept moving from place to place. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he did not go there.

<sup>14</sup> David stayed in the wilderness strongholds and in the hills of the Desert of Ziph. Day after day Saul searched for him, but God did not give David into his hands.

<sup>15</sup> While David was at Horesh in the Desert of Ziph, he learned that Saul had come out to take his life. <sup>16</sup> And Saul’s son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God. <sup>17</sup> “Don’t be afraid,” he said. “My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this.” <sup>18</sup> The two of them made a covenant before the LORD. Then Jonathan went home, but David remained at Horesh.

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<sup>19</sup> The Ziphites went up to Saul at Gibeah and said, “Is not David hiding among us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hakilah, south of Jeshimon?” <sup>20</sup> Now, Your Majesty, come down whenever it pleases you to do so, and we will be responsible for giving him into your hands.”

<sup>21</sup> Saul replied, “The LORD bless you for your concern for me. <sup>22</sup> Go and get more information. Find out where David usually goes and who has seen him there. They tell me he is very crafty. <sup>23</sup> Find out about all the hiding places he uses and come back to me with definite information. Then I will go with you; if he is in the area, I will track him down among all the clans of Judah.”

<sup>24</sup> So they set out and went to Ziph ahead of Saul. Now David and his men were in the Desert of Maon, in the Arabah south of Jeshimon. <sup>25</sup> Saul and his men began the search, and when David was told about it, he went down to the rock and stayed in the Desert of Maon. When Saul heard this, he went into the Desert of Maon in pursuit of David.

<sup>26</sup> Saul was going along one side of the mountain, and David and his men were on the other side, hurrying to get away from Saul. As Saul and his forces were closing in on David and his men to capture them, <sup>27</sup> a messenger came to Saul, saying, “Come quickly! The Philistines are raiding the land.” <sup>28</sup> Then Saul broke off his pursuit of David and went to meet the Philistines. That is why they call this place Sela Hammahlekoth. <sup>29</sup> And David went up from there and lived in the strongholds of En Gedi.

### Points of Interest

- ‘the Philistines are fighting against Keilah’--Keilah is a border town between Israelite and Philistine territory; so it may have been in frequent contention (Walton et. al). The Philistines are taking advantage of Saul’s distraction to gain some ground in their constant back-and-forth war with the Israelites. As king, Saul should be protecting his people against the Philistines; instead, he’s putting all of his efforts into destroying the person who has historically most helped him do so.
- ‘How much more, then, if we go to Keilah’--David’s outlaw band has had to be careful and lay low to avoid being discovered by Saul’s forces. They’ve been successful in Judah, David’s homeland, where they are among sympathetic people and in the places most familiar to most of them. They’re the typical guerrilla force, able to melt into the population or the landscape at the first sign of trouble. David is now wondering whether or not they should engage in a pitched battle to rescue Keilah. This idea makes his men nervous, not so much because they’re afraid of fighting the Philistines as because now Saul will know exactly where to find them.
- ‘Abiathar son of Ahimelek had brought the ephod down with him’--all priests wore ephods; thus, in yesterday’s passage, the author uses ‘men who wore the linen ephod’ as a synonym for ‘priest.’ But this isn’t just any old ephod but the ephod, apparently a particularly important and holy relic, probably even the original ephod of the first high priest Aaron, from the time of Moses, 400 years before. I think the author mentions it here because it is in some way instrumental in making inquiries of the Lord. At this time, speaking to and hearing from God is mostly considered a special skill, the realm of prophets and priests. Even with the priests, having the right equipment matters. In our story so far, we’ve occasionally seen things break out of these strict bounds, with Saul and his men inspired to prophesy; but apparently that’s a rare occurrence, so rare that it provokes the surprised comment, ‘What? Is Saul a prophet now?’ So, in his conversation with God, David uses the ephod-wearing Abiathar as a middleman. Abiathar would use these mysterious objects called ‘the Urim and the Thummim,’ which were some sort of accessory to the high priestly uniform, to receive guidance from God. We don’t know exactly how the Urim and the Thummim worked, but it’s worth noting that

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whenever David asks for direction from God, he presents two binary options ('Should we stay or go?' 'Will Saul come or not?' 'Will they betray us or not?'); so probably there was some way in which it would 'come up' Urim or Thummim, like flipping a coin. Urim, for example, might mean help Keilah, but Thummim would mean stay hidden.

- 'to go down to Keilah to besiege David'--again, we see that Saul is neglecting his kingly duties. When Keilah was being besieged by the Philistines, he couldn't be bothered to go to help. Now that the town is safe, he suddenly springs to action, to besiege the town himself and capture David. Saul is actually attacking one of his own loyal towns. This puts David into a very difficult position. He is doing Saul's job for him, while at the same time making sure that he himself doesn't get captured by Saul.
- 'Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me and my men to Saul?'--this is harsh. David has just rescued them, and the ungrateful citizenry turn right around and plan to hand him over to Saul. This is certainly a cowardly act, and yet you can understand why they do it. When Nob showed friendliness to David, Saul wiped the whole place out.
- 'about six hundred in number'--the size of David's forces continues to grow. After this major battle and the risky move of coming out of cover, rather than losing men to wounds or desertion, he actually has a 50% larger army.
- 'Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh'-- Saul is running all around the desert following every false lead, trying in vain to track David down, with Jonathan quietly at his side. It turns out that Jonathan knows all along exactly how to find David. But he only uses his information when he thinks David might need him, not when his father wants it. Jonathan is the opposite of the people of Keilah.
- 'You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you'--I bet being king of Israel seems pretty far away for David right now. Not so long ago, he was pretending to be a madman among the Philistines, and even now he and his band are constantly on the run. Jonathan, the one person in the world who stands to lose the most--in one way of looking at things--if David does become king, goes out of his way to encourage David. Jonathan believes God's promises to David and looks forward to them coming true. He reminds David that the same God who rescued him from the lion and the bear and the Philistine giant will also rescue him from Saul.
- 'Even my father Saul knows this'--Jonathan knows that while Saul looks unstoppable powerful he's actually desperately afraid.
- 'The Ziphites went up to Saul at Gibeah'--Gibeah is Saul's capital. The people of Keilah may succumb to Saul's threats, but the Ziphites go out of their way to inform on David. They're making the most of the situation to curry favor with the king.
- 'Saul broke off his pursuit of David'--apparently this is such a big attack that even Saul, obsessed as he is by pursuing David, can't ignore it.
- 'That is why they call this place Sela Hammahlekoth'--that is, 'Rock of Escape' or 'Rock of Parting.'

### Taking it home

- For you: Having first listened to God's instruction to save Keilah, David later follows up with God, at which point he gets the useful information that the citizens of Keilah will nonetheless hand him over. Multiple check-ins with God seem to be the key to God's guidance being truly helpful

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to David. What's the last thing you felt like you heard from God? Spend some time today checking back in with God about that. Ask what his next set of instructions would be for you.

- For your six: Pray that your six would develop a vibrant relationship with God where they are regularly checking in with him. Ask your six if they ever pray and if they ever feel like they have heard anything from God.
- For our church: Saul's squanders so much of his talent, potential, and influence because he is distracted by chasing David. Ask God to protect our church from being distracted and chasing things that will only lead us off course. Ask God to help us focus our time and energy on the things God has for us.
- For families: Spend more time talking about what God has called you to as a family. Pray together and ask God for more details: what does it look like? what is our role? what is really important? where do you start? It is okay to ask God to repeat what he said so you can make sure you heard right. Make a picture, poster, or list of the things God confirms so everyone in the family can see them.

### Thursday, March 24th: 1 Samuel 24

<sup>1</sup> After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, "David is in the Desert of En Gedi." <sup>2</sup> So Saul took three thousand able young men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Crags of the Wild Goats.

<sup>3</sup> He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave. <sup>4</sup> The men said, "This is the day the LORD spoke of when he said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.'" Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe.

<sup>5</sup> Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. <sup>6</sup> He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the LORD." <sup>7</sup> With these words David sharply rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way.

<sup>8</sup> Then David went out of the cave and called out to Saul, "My lord the king!" When Saul looked behind him, David bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. <sup>9</sup> He said to Saul, "Why do you listen when men say, 'David is bent on harming you'?" <sup>10</sup> This day you have seen with your own eyes how the LORD delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, 'I will not lay my hand on my lord, because he is the LORD's anointed.' <sup>11</sup> See, my father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you. See that there is nothing in my hand to indicate that I am guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life. <sup>12</sup> May the LORD judge between you and me. And may the LORD avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you. <sup>13</sup> As the old saying goes, 'From evildoers come evil deeds,' so my hand will not touch you.

<sup>14</sup> "Against whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog? A flea?" <sup>15</sup> May the LORD be our judge and decide between us. May he consider my cause and uphold it; may he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand."

<sup>16</sup> When David finished saying this, Saul asked, "Is that your voice, David my son?" And he wept aloud. <sup>17</sup> "You are more righteous than I," he said. "You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly. <sup>18</sup> You have just now told me about the good you did to me; the LORD delivered me into your

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hands, but you did not kill me. <sup>19</sup> When a man finds his enemy, does he let him get away unharmed? May the LORD reward you well for the way you treated me today. <sup>20</sup> I know that you will surely be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands. <sup>21</sup> Now swear to me by the LORD that you will not kill off my descendants or wipe out my name from my father's family."

<sup>22</sup> So David gave his oath to Saul. Then Saul returned home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

### Points of Interest

- 'This is the day the LORD spoke of'--it's unclear to what exactly his men are referring. Maybe it's a previously unrecorded prophecy; there do also seem to be promises of this sort sprinkled throughout David's psalms, for example, Psalm 110:1:

The LORD says to my lord:  
"Sit at my right hand  
until I make your enemies  
a footstool for your feet."

The closest thing we have in our story is David's words to Goliath: 'This day the LORD will deliver you into my hands, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head' (17:46) It's startling to note that David's men are speaking of the Israelite king in exactly the same language as David spoke of their Philistine oppressor.

- 'cut off a corner of Saul's robe'--I may be wrong, but I don't get the impression that David's original intention was to take a corner of Saul's robe. I imagine David swinging for Saul's head, and changing the arc of his sword stroke mid-swing. Saul is right there in front of him, and he can't get himself to take advantage of the situation.
- 'David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe'--David doesn't seem to have much to feel guilty about. Damaging Saul's clothing is a fairly minor offense, in light of the fact that Saul has thrown several spears at him and chased him around the country with an army. I think David could fairly claim self-defense if he were to go so far as killing Saul. I can perhaps see where David is coming from, though. He defeated Goliath in a formal duel, in the ring. If he were to kill Saul here, it would be from behind, in hiding, catching Saul literally with his pants down. That's not exactly a victory to be proud of. In fact, given Saul's vulnerable position, as it were, David is embarrassed even to have taken that bit of cloth.
- 'he is the anointed of the LORD'--killing a king is no small thing. And becoming a king by killing the previous one sets a dangerous precedent. David doesn't want to steal the kingship for himself, and he doesn't want to invite people to take matters into their own hands when he's king. Thus, he decides that since God made Saul king, it's God's job, not his, to unmake him.
- 'See, my father'--David holds off from killing Saul out of a concern for his own honor, and out of respect for God and for the kingship. Beyond that, he simply doesn't want to kill Saul. He loves Saul. Saul may consider David an enemy, but David does not consider Saul one.
- 'look at this piece of your robe'--David may feel a little guilty about cutting the corner of robe, but it proves to be a useful bit of theater. David convincingly demonstrates in front of both armies that Saul's accusations are unfounded: David is not a traitor. At the same time, David shows his power: if he wanted to do Saul harm, he could. Saul comes out of this exchange looking smaller in two ways.

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- ‘A dead dog? A flea?’--while he is swearing to his loyalty and promising not to do Saul any damage, David is also tired of being pushed around. He wants Saul to know that he’s not running away because he’s afraid. He’s not as easy to kick as a dead dog. He can’t be swatted like a fly. He’s running away because he’s trying very hard not to hurt Saul.
- ‘he wept aloud’--whether he’s weeping from fear, sorrow, shock, or regret is hard to tell.
- ‘May the LORD reward you well’--Saul seems to genuinely recognize what a close brush with death he’s had. He’s grateful to be alive, and not just generally so; he’s grateful to David for not taking his life.
- ‘David and his men went up to the stronghold’--despite Saul’s effusive gratitude and striking confession of David’s innocence, nobody is under the illusion that everything will be alright now. Saul withdraws for the time being. But it’s not as if he welcomes David back to court; nor does David seem to want or expect it. He goes right back to his hideout.

### Taking it home

- For you: David seems like he very well could have been justified in killing Saul at the first chance he got. David more than anyone has legitimate reasons to be angry at and bitter toward Saul. Yet the picture we see is one of humility and respect instead. It doesn't seem like David has been stewing in bitterness while he has been fleeing from Saul. Instead he has given God the job of getting even and being the judge. Where have you been tempted toward bitterness lately? Are there situations in which you feel particularly cynical or jaded? Take some time today to talk to God about those things. Ask him to give you a spirit like David’s which was quick to show forgiveness and love.
- For your six: One thing that is so sad about the story of David and Saul is that they used to be such great partners, now only to be the worst of enemies. Ask God to intervene in any relationships in which your six are experiencing distance or hostility. Pray that your six would see God’s power and love through his ability to reconcile their relationships.
- For our church: Ask God to make our church a place where we treat people well, even if they treat us badly. Ask God to fill us with enough love, patience and understanding to do this.
- For families: Talk about a time when someone treated you badly. We might want to treat the person the same way they treated us; we might dislike them, or even feel hatred toward them. However, God seems to ask us to respond differently. He asks us to forgive people when they do us harm. Forgiveness acknowledges the pain that was caused, but gives the power back to God to make things right again. God seems to promise that if--with God’s help--we can respond in forgiveness, our lives will actually go better. Is there a situation right now in which any of your family members could ask God to help them respond in forgiveness? Pray that God would help them do this.

### Friday, March 25th: 1 Samuel 25

<sup>1</sup> Now Samuel died, and all Israel assembled and mourned for him; and they buried him at his home in Ramah. Then David moved down into the Desert of Paran.

<sup>2</sup> A certain man in Maon, who had property there at Carmel, was very wealthy. He had a thousand goats and three thousand sheep, which he was shearing in Carmel. <sup>3</sup> His name was Nabal and his wife’s name

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was Abigail. She was an intelligent and beautiful woman, but her husband was surly and mean in his dealings—he was a Calebite.

<sup>4</sup> While David was in the wilderness, he heard that Nabal was shearing sheep. <sup>5</sup> So he sent ten young men and said to them, “Go up to Nabal at Carmel and greet him in my name. <sup>6</sup> Say to him: ‘Long life to you! Good health to you and your household! And good health to all that is yours!’

<sup>7</sup> “Now I hear that it is sheep-shearing time. When your shepherds were with us, we did not mistreat them, and the whole time they were at Carmel nothing of theirs was missing. <sup>8</sup> Ask your own servants and they will tell you. Therefore be favorable toward my men, since we come at a festive time. Please give your servants and your son David whatever you can find for them.”

<sup>9</sup> When David’s men arrived, they gave Nabal this message in David’s name. Then they waited.

<sup>10</sup> Nabal answered David’s servants, “Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days. <sup>11</sup> Why should I take my bread and water, and the meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows where?”

<sup>12</sup> David’s men turned around and went back. When they arrived, they reported every word. <sup>13</sup> David said to his men, “Each of you strap on your sword!” So they did, and David strapped his on as well. About four hundred men went up with David, while two hundred stayed with the supplies.

<sup>14</sup> One of the servants told Abigail, Nabal’s wife, “David sent messengers from the wilderness to give our master his greetings, but he hurled insults at them. <sup>15</sup> Yet these men were very good to us. They did not mistreat us, and the whole time we were out in the fields near them nothing was missing. <sup>16</sup> Night and day they were a wall around us the whole time we were herding our sheep near them. <sup>17</sup> Now think it over and see what you can do, because disaster is hanging over our master and his whole household. He is such a wicked man that no one can talk to him.”

<sup>18</sup> Abigail acted quickly. She took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, five seahs of roasted grain, a hundred cakes of raisins and two hundred cakes of pressed figs, and loaded them on donkeys. <sup>19</sup> Then she told her servants, “Go on ahead; I’ll follow you.” But she did not tell her husband Nabal.

<sup>20</sup> As she came riding her donkey into a mountain ravine, there were David and his men descending toward her, and she met them. <sup>21</sup> David had just said, “It’s been useless—all my watching over this fellow’s property in the wilderness so that nothing of his was missing. He has paid me back evil for good. <sup>22</sup> May God deal with David, be it ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive one male of all who belong to him!”

<sup>23</sup> When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed down before David with her face to the ground. <sup>24</sup> She fell at his feet and said: “Pardon your servant, my lord, and let me speak to you; hear what your servant has to say. <sup>25</sup> Please pay no attention, my lord, to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name—his name means Fool, and folly goes with him. And as for me, your servant, I did not see the men my lord sent. <sup>26</sup> And now, my lord, as surely as the LORD your God lives and as you live, since the LORD has kept you from bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hands, may your enemies and all who are intent on harming my lord be like Nabal. <sup>27</sup> And let this gift, which your servant has brought to my lord, be given to the men who follow you.

<sup>28</sup> “Please forgive your servant’s presumption. The LORD your God will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my lord, because you fight the LORD’s battles, and no wrongdoing will be found in you as long as you live. <sup>29</sup> Even though someone is pursuing you to take your life, the life of my lord will be bound securely in the bundle of the living by the LORD your God, but the lives of your enemies he will hurl away as from

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the pocket of a sling. <sup>30</sup> When the LORD has fulfilled for my lord every good thing he promised concerning him and has appointed him ruler over Israel, <sup>31</sup> my lord will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself. And when the LORD your God has brought my lord success, remember your servant.”

<sup>32</sup> David said to Abigail, “Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. <sup>33</sup> May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands. <sup>34</sup> Otherwise, as surely as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, who has kept me from harming you, if you had not come quickly to meet me, not one male belonging to Nabal would have been left alive by daybreak.”

<sup>35</sup> Then David accepted from her hand what she had brought him and said, “Go home in peace. I have heard your words and granted your request.”

<sup>36</sup> When Abigail went to Nabal, he was in the house holding a banquet like that of a king. He was in high spirits and very drunk. So she told him nothing at all until daybreak. <sup>37</sup> Then in the morning, when Nabal was sober, his wife told him all these things, and his heart failed him and he became like a stone. <sup>38</sup> About ten days later, the LORD struck Nabal and he died.

<sup>39</sup> When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, “Praise be to the LORD, who has upheld my cause against Nabal for treating me with contempt. He has kept his servant from doing wrong and has brought Nabal’s wrongdoing down on his own head.”

Then David sent word to Abigail, asking her to become his wife. <sup>40</sup> His servants went to Carmel and said to Abigail, “David has sent us to you to take you to become his wife.”

<sup>41</sup> She bowed down with her face to the ground and said, “I am your servant and am ready to serve you and wash the feet of my lord’s servants.” <sup>42</sup> Abigail quickly got on a donkey and, attended by her five female servants, went with David’s messengers and became his wife. <sup>43</sup> David had also married Ahinoam of Jezreel, and they both were his wives. <sup>44</sup> But Saul had given his daughter Michal, David’s wife, to Paltiel son of Laish, who was from Gallim.

### Points of Interest

- ‘Then David moved down into the Desert of Paran’--the death of Samuel is a big deal. Over the course of his life, Samuel had been at various times the most respected priest in, the primary prophet for, and the supreme ruler of the country. From his boyhood through his old age, Samuel was arguably the most respected and influential person in the entire country; and his death is not just the end of a life but the end of an era. So, his funeral would be a large state affair. As we recall, both Saul and David were anointed as king by Samuel, and Samuel served as a mentor to both of them. So, Saul and David call a truce so that they can both safely attend the funeral. Once the funeral is over, David returns to one of his desert hideouts.
- ‘His name was Nabal’--as the story points out later, *Nabal* means, ‘fool.’ So, either his parents were an impressive combination of cruel and insightful, or this is a nickname; whether given to him by the author or by his neighbors is unclear.
- ‘he was a Calebite’--this doesn’t directly relate in any way to what comes before about his surliness and stinginess. The Calebites are a rather famous family from the tribe of Judah; Caleb was one of Moses’ most trusted and faithful assistants. It would be sort of like being related to Benjamin Franklin.
- ‘we did not mistreat them’--it’s probably not an easy thing for David’s men to find enough food, clothing, and other provisions. They are a large group of men, living in the desert, in hiding, and

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largely cut off from other people. They are also heavily-armed and battle-hardened; so it could be tempting for them to just take what they need, whether it belongs to them or not. They are outlaws, after all, and probably scary enough that no one is likely to put up much of a fight against them. They restrain themselves, and apparently even protect the local ranchers against other bandits.

- ‘be favorable toward my men’--rather than just taking what he wants, David asks politely for some consideration.
- ‘Why should I take my bread and water and give it to men coming from who knows where?’--Nabal decides to put them in their place: ‘Don’t you know who I am? Caleb was my great-great-great grandfather, and I run the most successful ranch around here. I built it with my own two hands. And who are you? Just a ragtag group of outlaws, with no name, no home, and no food. Get out of my face.’
- ‘Each of you strap on your sword!’--Nabal is stingy, ungrateful, and insulting; but it’s hard to see wiping out his entire family and business as an appropriate reaction to him. I get the feeling that this is a last-straw moment for David. He didn’t take any revenge on Keilah or Ziph when they betrayed him to Saul. He held back from killing Saul when he had the chance. But he just doesn’t have enough patience left to let some shepherd named Fool push him around. ‘Who’s David, huh? Well, I’ll give you a close-up view of the sword he used to cut off Goliath’s head.’
- ‘One of the servants told Abigail, Nabal’s wife’--it turns out that Abigail is actually the one in charge. Her own ranch hands have figured out over time how to flatter Nabal and keep him fat and happy, while they look to Abigail to run things from behind the scenes. David’s men have naively messed things up by going to Nabal--a culturally understandable but disastrous error. I imagine the dialogue going something like this:

Servant: Abigail, where were you? David’s men came by, and you won’t believe what happened; they talked directly to Nabal.

Abigail: You’re kidding! Not again. What a disaster! What happened this time?

- ‘Abigail acted quickly’--Abigail is dealing with two unreasonable men. Nabal is seemingly always a headstrong fool, and David has lost his head as well. In what may have been a familiar pattern for her, she decides to work around Nabal, guessing--probably rightly--that she has the better chance of talking David down.
- ‘since the LORD has kept you from bloodshed’--up until now, David has been admirably self-controlled. It would be a pity to waste his character and hard-won reputation for fairness and honor on such a miserable object as Nabal.
- ‘when the LORD your God has brought my lord success’--Abigail brings David back to himself. Just as he trusted God to protect him from Saul and give him the kingdom, he can trust God to give him the food he needs. He doesn’t need to grab hold of these few sheep any more than he needs to grab hold of the crown.
- ‘May you be blessed for your good judgment’--David snaps out of his bad mood, and he’s grateful that Abigail so deftly heads him off from doing something he’d regret later.
- ‘He was in high spirits and very drunk’--I wonder how often Abigail comes home from a hard day of work to find Nabal drunkenly partying.

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- ‘his heart failed him and he became like a stone’--when Saul realizes how close to death he was, it at least temporarily snaps him out of his obsessive rage and into his better self. Perhaps Nabal has no better self. When he realizes how close he was to death, he has a heart attack and dies.
- ‘asking her to become his wife’--David is impressed by Abigail’s wisdom, intelligence, and resourcefulness. She’s just the kind of companion he could really use, a nice addition to his band of merry men.
- ‘Abigail quickly got on a donkey’--David is offering her a far less comfortable life in some ways. Instead of a big, well-appointed home, she’d be a wandering refugee in the desert. Instead of being a member of a well-established family, she’d be under constant threat as the wife of a traitor. And yet, all of that is worth it to her for the sake of having a husband who notices and appreciates her talents. When she gets the invitation, without hesitation she packs her bags, jumps in the car, and goes.
- ‘Saul had given his daughter Michal, David’s wife, to Paltiel son of Laish’--when David proposes to Abigail, you might have thought, ‘But isn’t he already married?’ And indeed he is, but not to the person we thought. Since we last heard about his love life, David has been divorced and remarried. The marriages of princesses were largely political in nature. Now that David is an enemy, Saul no longer wants his daughter connected to him; it might give David an easy way to make a claim on the throne. So, Saul takes her away and marries her to someone else. In the meanwhile, apparently, David has married someone else, about whom we basically only know a name. It seems rather common among men of David’s station and time to have multiple wives. I think it’s because marriages then were all the much more than now the joining of two families, not just two individuals. So, a man might have as many wives as he had families with which he wanted to form a strong bond. This marriage philosophy had the deeply unfortunate downside of frequently relegating women to being pieces in a chess game, as is illustrated by poor Michal being yanked out of one marriage (to someone she genuinely loved) and quickly inserted into another. David’s marriage to Abigail seems to spring more from true mutual affection, though there are probably some strategic advantages as well to being associated with the influential Calebites. As we will see, family life in these polygamous marriages isn’t easy. As you can well imagine, jealousy and rivalry among wives, jockeying for position among the children of different wives, and even confused feelings toward siblings are the outgrowths of multi-wife families; it’s the stuff of soap operas.

### Taking it home

- For you: If I were Abigail, I probably would have been panicked, overwhelmed, and paralyzed in the face of the servant’s news. Abigail, on the other hand, is a remarkable picture of courage and poise. She quickly figures out what she needs to do and then does it. What situations are you in where you think, ‘Someone else would do this better’? Consider that whatever situation you face today, you’re actually the person for the job. Ask God to give you courage to know that you have a meaningful role to play in whatever you face today, and pray that God would give you wisdom on the best course of action.
- For your six: Abigail wins David over with a generous gift of some of her very best possessions. Almost everyone appreciates a good gift. Maybe one of your six could really use a nice gift today; or maybe the right gift is just the thing to take one of your friendships to the next level. Ask God if he has any gift-giving suggestions for your six today.

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- For our church: Pray that our church would be one to act quickly and boldly, just like Abigail did, when the time calls for it.
- For families: Sometimes God asks us to be a peacemaker between two people who are fighting. As a third-person mediator, sometimes we are able to see things that the two fighting people might miss. Have you ever felt like God asked you to be a peacemaker? What was that like? Are there any situations where two people you know are fighting right now? Do you feel like God is asking you to do anything about that? Make sure to really listen to God here, as there are also many times when God might tell us not to jump into the middle of someone else's fight.

### **Saturday, March 26th: 1 Samuel 27:1-28:2**

<sup>1</sup> But David thought to himself, "One of these days I will be destroyed by the hand of Saul. The best thing I can do is to escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will give up searching for me anywhere in Israel, and I will slip out of his hand."

<sup>2</sup> So David and the six hundred men with him left and went over to Achish son of Maok king of Gath. <sup>3</sup> David and his men settled in Gath with Achish. Each man had his family with him, and David had his two wives: Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail of Carmel, the widow of Nabal. <sup>4</sup> When Saul was told that David had fled to Gath, he no longer searched for him.

<sup>5</sup> Then David said to Achish, "If I have found favor in your eyes, let a place be assigned to me in one of the country towns, that I may live there. Why should your servant live in the royal city with you?"

<sup>6</sup> So on that day Achish gave him Ziklag, and it has belonged to the kings of Judah ever since. <sup>7</sup> David lived in Philistine territory a year and four months.

<sup>8</sup> Now David and his men went up and raided the Geshurites, the Girzites and the Amalekites. (From ancient times these peoples had lived in the land extending to Shur and Egypt.) <sup>9</sup> Whenever David attacked an area, he did not leave a man or woman alive, but took sheep and cattle, donkeys and camels, and clothes. Then he returned to Achish.

<sup>10</sup> When Achish asked, "Where did you go raiding today?" David would say, "Against the Negev of Judah" or "Against the Negev of Jerahmeel" or "Against the Negev of the Kenites." <sup>11</sup> He did not leave a man or woman alive to be brought to Gath, for he thought, "They might inform on us and say, 'This is what David did.'" And such was his practice as long as he lived in Philistine territory. <sup>12</sup> Achish trusted David and said to himself, "He has become so obnoxious to his people, the Israelites, that he will be my servant for life."

28:1 In those days the Philistines gathered their forces to fight against Israel. Achish said to David, "You must understand that you and your men will accompany me in the army."

<sup>2</sup> David said, "Then you will see for yourself what your servant can do."

Achish replied, "Very well, I will make you my bodyguard for life."

### **Points of Interest**

- 'One of these days I will be destroyed by the hand of Saul'--in the intervening chapter, David has once again passed up the opportunity to kill an unwitting Saul. He knows that sooner or later Saul will have the opportunity to turn on him in one of those moments; and Saul is less likely to hold back his sword.

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- ‘David and the six hundred men with him left and went over to Achish’--tired of living in the desert, running from hideout to hideout, David decides to immigrate to Gath once again. It didn’t work out so well the last time; if you’ll remember, he had to act like a rabid animal so that people would leave him alone. This time it’s different though. Instead of alone and vulnerable, he comes as the captain of a large, well-armed, battle-hardened mercenary company.
- ‘Each man had his family with him’--they intend to stay a while. Plus, it’s safer for their families, who could get the Ahimelek treatment if it’s ever discovered that their husbands or father or brothers fight for David.
- ‘Achish gave him Ziklag’--I imagine it could have been awkward and tense at times for David’s men and Achish’s men to be in close quarters in Gath. They are supposedly allies now, but they’d just been at war with one another a short time ago. To defuse the situation, David suggests that Achish post him at a safer distance, and Achish indeed gives him his own town to run.
- ‘he did not leave a man or woman alive’--David is playing a dangerous game here. He’s working for Achish now, but his true, lifelong loyalty is to the Israelites. He hopes to be their king someday; so fighting against them now is unthinkable. So instead he fights against Israel’s enemies, but tells Achish that he’s been raiding the Israelites. In order to make sure that word of his ruse never makes it back to Achish, he takes no prisoners. It’s an effective military plan, though ruthless. War is a terrible thing.
- ‘your men will accompany me in the army’--it would have been interesting to see what David would do here. David would have been finally, definitively forced to choose between the Philistines and the Israelites. As it turns out, the other Philistine kings are less keen than Achish to have David’s troops in the middle of their army in a pitched battle; so they demand that Achish leave David at home in Ziklag.
- ‘I will make you my bodyguard for life’--it’s remarkably common throughout history for kings to use foreign troops as their bodyguards. The Byzantine emperors had a company of Vikings called the Varangian Guard. The Ottoman sultans were guarded by the Janissaries, an elite company composed of Christian slaves. The Swiss created an entire industry out of hiring themselves out as the bodyguards for various European kings and dukes, including to this very day the Pope. These bodyguards would not only stand post in the palace; they would also be the troops immediately surrounding the king in battle. Often, the king felt safer in the hands of these foreign companies than those of their native armies, who might be tempted to assassinate the king and effect a coup under cover of the king being ‘killed in battle.’

### Taking it home

- For you: Are you in a situation or an entire period of your life that feels less than ideal? We don’t know exactly how long David lives and fights on Philistine turf, but it has to have been a good while; they brought their families with them, and they had plenty of time for quite a few wars. I have to imagine that David would eventually be asking, ‘Is this over yet? When can I be done with this arrangement?’ Maybe he knew it wouldn’t last forever, but he just knew that for now this is what he had to do. Talk to God about how you feel where you are in life. If you are in a monotonous routine that you don’t really like, ask God for his comfort. If you’re in a situation where things don’t seem to be working out as planned, ask God to turn it around. If you get the sense this situation will last a while, ask God for patience and even for satisfaction in the midst of the un-ideal.

## The Life of David—a Daily Bible Guide, week 2

- For your six: Achish and David have an interesting relationship. David seems to have enough charisma and wisdom that he is able to build a really helpful relationship with this quirky, older authority figure. Pray that God would give your six the same type of favor with authority figures in their lives. Ask God to put them in situations that are helpful to them and give them what they need.
- For our church: Last week, David was leading battles against the Philistines, and now he thinks that their land would actually be a good place to which to flee. Pray that God would give our church the same entrepreneurial spirit as David, to see the possibilities in unlikely places.
- For families: Take time to share about unlikely friends that you have had in your life. Are there people who had very little in common with you or were not your normal type of friend but somehow became your friend? What is your friendship like? Ask God if there are any candidates for an unlikely friendship in your life right now.

### Sunday, March 27th: 1 Samuel 31

<sup>1</sup> Now the Philistines fought against Israel; the Israelites fled before them, and many fell dead on Mount Gilboa. <sup>2</sup>The Philistines were in hot pursuit of Saul and his sons, and they killed his sons Jonathan, Abinadab and Malki-Shua. <sup>3</sup> The fighting grew fierce around Saul, and when the archers overtook him, they wounded him critically.

<sup>4</sup> Saul said to his armor-bearer, “Draw your sword and run me through, or these uncircumcised fellows will come and run me through and abuse me.”

But his armor-bearer was terrified and would not do it; so Saul took his own sword and fell on it. <sup>5</sup> When the armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he too fell on his sword and died with him. <sup>6</sup> So Saul and his three sons and his armor-bearer and all his men died together that same day.

<sup>7</sup> When the Israelites along the valley and those across the Jordan saw that the Israelite army had fled and that Saul and his sons had died, they abandoned their towns and fled. And the Philistines came and occupied them.

<sup>8</sup> The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the dead, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. <sup>9</sup> They cut off his head and stripped off his armor, and they sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines to proclaim the news in the temple of their idols and among their people. <sup>10</sup> They put his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths and fastened his body to the wall of Beth Shan.

<sup>11</sup> When the people of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, <sup>12</sup> all their valiant men marched through the night to Beth Shan. They took down the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Beth Shan and went to Jabesh, where they burned them. <sup>13</sup> Then they took their bones and buried them under a tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and they fasted seven days.

### Points of Interest

- ‘killed his sons Jonathan, Abinadab and Malki-Shua’--if you feel that the death of such a major character as Jonathan deserves more attention than this, don’t worry, we’ll have the chance to properly mourn him in tomorrow’s passage. Today’s passage is the mess of battle; tomorrow we deal with the aftermath.
- ‘when the archers overtook him’--with the Israelite front lines collapsing, the Philistine archers can get within range of Saul, even in his protected position.

## The Life of David—a Daily Bible Guide, week 2

- ‘Draw your sword and run me through’--it seems that having already been mortally wounded by the archers, Saul wants to deny some random soldier who comes along the bragging rights for dealing him his death blow. He feels that someone should only be able to call himself ‘Saul-slayer’ if they’ve truly earned it in a fair fight. Another possibility is that, anticipating torture, he’s trying to avoid being captured while he’s still alive. The armor-bearer, on the other hand, doesn’t want his last living act to be killing the king he serves; so Saul has to do it himself.
- ‘and all his men died together’--‘all his men’ would be his bodyguard, the king’s company we mentioned yesterday (Saul’s bodyguard, by the way, were his close relatives rather than foreign troops. You may remember him ranting at these ‘men of Benjamin’ in chapter 22). Every one of them dies still standing beside their king. In other words, Saul and his bodyguard die bravely and honorably in battle, as good soldiers. The latter part of Saul’s reign may have been something of a mess, but he ends well.
- ‘they abandoned their towns and fled’--not only does the bulk of the army break and run, but the civilians abandon their towns in a panic. This is a major disaster.
- ‘proclaim the news in the temple of their idols’--they’re reporting back the news of their great success to their citizens and to their gods.
- ‘all their valiant men marched through the night to Beth Shan’--Saul and his sons deserve as honorable a burial as can be given to their mutilated and arrow-riddled bodies. So, a few brave men execute a night raid, to rescue their dead king from humiliation. The people of Jabesh Gilead probably feel particularly that they owe this final service to Saul; one of his first acts as king was to lift a siege of their city (ch.11).

### Taking it home

- For you: Despite being the ‘bad guy’ in most of our narrative, Saul still dies a war hero, fighting to protect his people. His nation still honors him and takes time to mourn. Who is someone in your life who you kind of view as the ‘bad guy’--someone who seems to be out to get you or who just plain makes your life more difficult? Pray for that person today, setting aside the list of things you don’t like and blessing whatever good they bring. How might you show this person honor today?
- For your six: It seems like the average ancient Near Eastern citizen of his day, looking at things from the outside, probably thought of Saul as a fine king. The story we’ve been reading paints a contrasting picture between his internal world and his external appearance. It’s striking that Saul’s inner world of jealousy and rage that consumes so much of his time and effort. Pray for your six today in whatever ways they might similarly be experiencing turmoil deep beneath the surface. Ask God to protect them from being derailed by this inner tension, and pray for a deep peace for them.
- For our church: Pray that God would bless our church as a place where people find answers, healing, and breakthrough with regard to things going on in their inner world. Pray that God would give us the resources to do this. Ask God to make us a unique place that equally values things going well in people’s lives on the outside and on the inside.
- For families: Talk about what it means to honor someone. Have you ever felt it important to honor a person even when you do not particularly like them? Is there anyone in your life whom you could show honor to today? How? What difference do you think it might make to them? What difference could make for you in your relationship?