



# Finer Grounds Bible Study

## 1 Samuel

### Lesson 11: 1 Samuel 21-23

In the last lesson, we read about Saul’s attempts to kill David which forced David to flee for his life. Remember that at this point, most of the nation still loved and respected David and was not aware of Saul’s vendetta against him (1 Samuel 18:30). Only Saul’s family, close servants, and advisors knew of his desire to kill David.

While few knew of David’s loss of favor, David was unsure of where to go to escape Saul’s detection. David allowed his fear to get the better of him, causing him to make some costly decisions.

#### Read 1 Samuel 21:1-7

The city of Nob became the new location of the tabernacle sometime after Shiloh was presumably destroyed in the war with the Philistines (see 1 Samuel 4). David asked Ahimelech the priest, a grandson of Eli, for help, but deceived him in the process.

**What reason did David give for coming to the tabernacle?**

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**Read Leviticus 24:5-9. What is the bread of the Presence?**

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David claimed that he was on his way to meet some men on a secret mission from Saul. Thinking that David and his followers needed food, Ahimelech willingly provided them with the Holy Bread on the condition that David and his men were ceremonially

clean. David said that he was ceremonially clean as if prepared for battle.

**Was David authorized to eat the bread?**

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**Read Mark 2:23-28. How did Jesus justify David and Ahimelech’s actions?**

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The bread of the presence was reserved for the priests. However, Ahimelech gave the bread to David to keep him from starving on his journey. Jesus would say years later that this was not a violation of the law. The law was meant to preserve life, not to deny it.

**Read Deuteronomy 23:9-14. How and why were the warriors of Israel to keep their camp and themselves clean?**

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Israelite warriors kept themselves ceremonially clean before going to war, a condition which included abstinence, pure and lawful behavior, and keeping the camp literally clean. David followed this law as he knew that God promised to be with His warriors if the camp was kept holy.

**Who witnessed the interaction between Ahimelech and David and how is he described?**

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While eating of the bread of the presence was not a sin, David's lie to the priest certainly was. He may have been trying to provide "plausible deniability" for Ahimelech if Saul questioned him. Another likely reason for the lie was that David, seeing Doeg at the tabernacle, did not want to reveal his true reason for needing help. Whatever his reasons for lying, David sinned by deceiving Ahimelech (see Proverbs 12:22).

**What are some ways that we attempt to justify lying?**

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**Read 1 Samuel 21:8-9**

**What did Ahimelech give to David?**

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David acquired food and a form of defense at the expense of his honest reputation. While going to the tabernacle for help may imply that he was seeking the Lord, his sinful actions reveal his fear and lack of trust in God's provision. Knowing God's plan for his life, David should have trusted that God would have protected him even if others knew the truth about David's situation.

**Read 1 Samuel 21:10-15**

**Why would David choose to flee to the Philistines?**

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**What did David do when he realized that the Philistines did not welcome him?**

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David tinks like a man without an ally. He went to King Achish (also known as Abimelech) to convince him to take him on as a mercenary. He may have been using the logic of the saying "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." He probably thought that the Philistines would welcome him since he could help fight Saul. David seemed to have forgotten the defeats that he had inflicted on the Philistines.

**List David's interactions with the Philistines prior to the events in 1 Samuel 21.**

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Not only had David humiliated the Philistines, he approached the city of Gath with the sword of Goliath, the city's now deceased champion! When the Philistines did not welcome him with open arms, he quickly changed tactics and acted like he was insane or possessed. Thinking him harmless in this state, the Philistines allowed him to depart.

During David's fugitive years, he wrote many Psalms as a result of his experiences. Psalm 34 was written after David's visit to Gath.

**Read Psalm 34. Summarize this Psalm in your own words.**

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**Who did David credit with his escape from Gath (v. 4-7)**

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**What did David learn from his experience there (v. 11-22)**

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David must have sought God’s help when he realized the danger of seeking help from the Philistines. He relied on God to deliver him once he recognized his mistake. David’s words in 11-14 are very telling about his heart. He realized that he was not pursuing peace in coming to the Philistines. With a warrior like David with them, God’s enemy would have been emboldened to attack Saul’s army, killing an untold number of Israelites in the process. In doing so, David would have become a traitor to his people. God prevented David from making a disastrous decision, and David, recognizing this, was thankful for and humbled by God’s correction.

**Has God ever corrected or convicted you? How did it feel and how did you react?**

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## Read 1 Samuel 22:1-4

David returned to the land of Israel after his failed excursion into enemy territory. Adullam is half way between Gath and Bethlehem, David’s hometown (Tsumura 538). This made it the perfect location to meet his family. Word of his presence there spread. He eventually accumulated 400 followers who all had been mistreated in some way; they found common cause with the wronged son-in-law of the king.

Seeing the danger of his situation, David wisely made provisions to protect his parents.

**Why would David ask the king of Moab to take care of his parents? (Read Ruth 4:10, 13-17)**

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## Read 1 Samuel 22:5

In 22:4, David told the king of Moab that he would wait to see what the Lord would do for him.

Remember that David’s initial instinct was to flee as far from Saul as possible by going to the Philistines. After asking God for direction, he was told by the prophet Gad to go to the land of Judah, which bordered the land of Benjamin; God was telling David to go towards Saul, not away from him. David, consciously trusting that God knew better, faithfully followed God’s direction and went.

**Read Isaiah 55:6-9. Why should we trust God’s direction, even when it seems foolish to us?**

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## Read 1 Samuel 22:6-20

**Of what crimes does Saul accuse his men (v.7-8) and Ahimelech (v.13)?**

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**Why did Ahimelech consider David trustworthy?**

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**What did Saul do to Ahimelech and to the priestly city of Nob?**

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Saul’s paranoia caused him to view his fellow Benjamites, his servants, and his own son Jonathan as enemies. He even found the priests at Nob guilty for helping David escape. When Ahimelech was questioned, he listed several good reasons why he had helped David: David had proven himself trustworthy; he was the king’s son-in-law; he was the captain of the bodyguard; and Ahimelech had inquired of the Lord for David several times before.



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Saul could not answer Ahimelech's reasonable defense directly, and out of anger pronounced an unlawful judgment of death for the priest. Saul's servants and warriors realized the injustice of Saul's command as they were unwilling to execute Ahimelech. Only Doeg was willing to take the life of God's priest. Doeg, being an Edomite, would not have esteemed the priesthood as much as the Israelites. He also may have been trying to earn Saul's favor by carrying out the command.

Not only did Saul have Ahimelech killed, he ordered the complete destruction of the city of Nob. Every man, woman, child and animal were destroyed with nothing remaining. This type of total destruction should sound familiar.

## Reread 1 Samuel 15:3

Whereas Saul willingly restrained himself against the Amalekites, at least preserving the animals and King Agag, he willingly destroyed almost the entire priesthood out of rage. While the Amalekites were killed for their own crimes against Israel, everyone killed at Nob was an "innocent bystander." How ironic that Saul, who was not willing to carry out God's complete judgment on his enemies, now commanded the very same judgement for the city of God's priests. While terrible, the massacre at Nob did fulfill a prophetic message.

## Reread the prophecy in 1 Samuel 2:30-36

**How did the events in 22:6-20 fulfill part of this prophecy?**

Little did Saul know that he was fulfilling a prophecy that God had ordained many years earlier. Eli's descendants were the priests living in Nob. With their destruction, not an old man was left among Eli's descendants except for one. Abiathar was the lone survivor and escaped to David's camp. In no way does this justify Saul's actions. Instead, God, being all-

knowing, allowed the actions of Saul to serve his own purpose. (See Romans 9:14-24).

## Read 1 Samuel 22:20-23

**How did David react to the news from Abiathar?**

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David recognized that his lies to Ahimelech caused the deaths of almost the entire priesthood. He even admitted to knowing that his deception would cause problems. By lying, David did not give Ahimelech the chance to discern for himself whether he should help David or not. Instead of trying to defend his sin, David confessed his part in the deaths of the priests. Making amends in the only way he could, David took in the lonely priest Abiathar and became his protector.

**Compare David's actions after confessing his sin to Saul's actions (or inaction) after his confession in 1 Samuel 15:24-33.**

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## Read 1 Samuel 23:1-5

By helping Keilah, David exhibited his focus and reliance on God for guidance. He saw the people of Keilah in need and asked the Lord if he should go to help. After all, God had told David to go to Judah (22:5) and Keilah was outside the borders of Judah. After receiving permission to leave Judah, the men following David tried to convince him to refrain from leaving, as attacking the Philistines would give away their position to Saul; the men didn't want to face two enemies. Instead of catering to the will of his followers, David again inquired of the Lord for assurance. When the Lord gave the affirmative answer again, David went and delivered the people of Keilah.



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**What other leader of Israel decided to listen to the will of his people over the commandments of God?**

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## Read 1 Samuel 23:6-14

To clarify the chronology of the end of chapter 22 into chapter 23, David had already delivered Keilah when Abiathar came to him 22:20-23. Verse 6 isn't a contradiction to verse 22:20, but rather inserted to provide continuity in the two accounts. The presence of the ephod plays an important role in David's escape from Keilah while Abiathar's escape was a result of the events at Nob.

**Why do you think Keilah would have surrendered David to Saul?**

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Upon hearing of the massacre at Nob, the people of Keilah would have handed David over to Saul out of fear for their own lives. David, knowing this was possible, used the ephod to inquire of God. Remember that part of the ephod contained the Urim and Thummin which were used to discern God's will. David evaded capture because he took the time to inquire of God for direction. God continued to faithfully protect David as he traveled throughout the mountain strongholds in Ziph.

## Read 1 Samuel 23:15-18

This was the last time that Jonathan and David met. The meeting of the friends was very risky for both. Saul had already attempted to kill Jonathan once for his loyalty to David. If they were caught together, Saul may have killed them both. But Jonathan found the reward of encouraging his friend to be more important than his own life.

**Examine how Jonathan encouraged David. How can we use Jonathan as a model for our own practice of encouragement?**

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**What other scriptures can guide us in this practice?**

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## Read 1 Samuel 23:19-29

**What accolades did Saul give the Ziphites in 23:21?**

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Saul's words to the Ziphites reek of inauthenticity. Did Saul, who knew that God had selected David as his successor, really think that the Lord would bless the Ziphites' actions? Verse 21 shows Saul manipulating the Ziphites' view of current events by portraying himself as the victim, not as the aggressor.

**What strategy did Saul use to trap David?**

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**How was David rescued?**

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Saul knew that David and his men, who had grown from a group of 400 to a group of 600, were on the opposite side of the mountain. He divided his forces and sent them around both sides of the mountain to trap David. Just as he was closing-in, a messenger notified Saul that the Philistines had



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attacked. Saul had to give up his pursuit to protect his kingdom. God used the attack of the Philistines to save David from Saul. This may have been God's answer to David's prayer upon hearing of the Ziphites betrayal, as recorded in Psalm 54.

## Read Psalm 54

**What did David ask of God?**

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**Did David believe God would deliver him?**

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Throughout these chapters, Saul was unable to capture David despite having every advantage in his pursuit. As God continued to sabotage his plans, Saul continued to become more selfish and crueler, going so far as to unlawfully massacre an entire city without proof of wrong-doing.

While Saul's heart grew darker, David's became more strongly intertwined with the will of God. At first, fear overcame David's faith in God when he lied to the priests at Nob and then tried to get protection and employment from Israel's enemies, the Philistines. However, David, unlike Saul, quickly recognized and confessed his sins, and began to seek the Lord's advice and protection throughout his travels from Gath to Ziph. He gave himself over to God, even following His guidance when the logic of self-preservation seemed to dictate different decisions.

**Think of a decision you are currently facing. Are you seeking God's will through prayer? What fears are keeping you from following His guidance?**

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**Think of a decision you have already made. Did you seek God's will or help? What was the outcome?**

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**Character Study:** Write down what you have learned about David and Saul in this passage. Consider what their actions in 1 Samuel 21-23 reveal about their character. Also, write down what you learned about David's ancestry from Ruth 4.