

# 1 SAMUEL—WEEK 16

## LIFE ON THE RUN



F. Michael Slay

*A DEEP Study*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

*The Cover Picture is David and Goliath by Titian (1487–1576)  
On display in the church of Santa Maria della Salute in Venice, Italy*

David is now “on the lam” as an outlaw fleeing from Saul. First, he protects his family by parking them with the king of Moab. Meanwhile, Saul’s pursuit gains steam. He finds out about Ahimelech helping David and he has all the priests killed.

Yet, when David learns of the attacks on Keilah, he ignores his own troubles and jumps to their aid.

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! Samuel, Week 16 — Life on the Run  
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1 1 Samuel 22:1–5

*David therefore departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. So when his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him. And everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him. So he became captain over them. And there were about four hundred men with him.*

*Then David went from there to Mizpah of Moab; and he said to the king of Moab, "Please let my father and mother come here with you, till I know what God will do for me." So he brought them before the king of Moab, and they dwelt with him all the time that David was in the stronghold.*

*Now the prophet Gad said to David, "Do not stay in the stronghold; depart, and go to the land of Judah." So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth.*

It makes sense for David to ask the king of Moab to let his parents stay there. Ruth, who was from Moab, is his father's grandmother.

*So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife; and he went in to her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son. ... And they called his name Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David. — Ruth 4:13, 17b (ESV)*

Jesse should have a whole bunch of second cousins around there. They might even get to connect and catch up.

But David gives a stronger reason when he says, "*till I know what God will do for me.*" God has big plans for David, but that says nothing about his parents. So he acts wisely to protect them.

David has his share of faults, but overconfidence isn't one of them.

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Oh, that we could be like David. Christians struggle with overconfidence. It's only natural; being saved means a lot of good things. It's easy to think that everything will go our way. In a sense, everything does.

*And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose. — Romans 8:28*

This is a glorious truth, but we tend to think that *for good* means no trials or suffering. That can't be it—great saints have had great trials—but then what does it mean?

The answer come from fully understanding the phrase, "*for those who love God.*" The Greek word translated as "love" there is *agapé*. It means sacrificial love, or "to prioritize another."

So, those who love God are those who have made God's priorities their own. For them, "*for good,*" means, "for His glory." They have moved beyond a purely selfish perspective.

They won't be disappointed.

2 1 Samuel 22:6–8

*When Saul heard that David and the men who were with him had been discovered—now Saul was staying in Gibeah under a tamarisk tree in Ramah, with his spear in his hand, and all his servants standing about him— then Saul said to his servants who stood about him, “Hear now, you Benjamites! Will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, and make you all captains of thousands and captains of hundreds? All of you have conspired against me, and there is no one who reveals to me that my son has made a covenant with the son of Jesse; and there is not one of you who is sorry for me or reveals to me that my son has stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as it is this day.”*

David has fled from Saul, but word of where he is gets around. So David and his men are discovered.

But Saul faces a great dilemma. David is super popular. Saul needs to somehow whip his followers into a murderous frenzy. They must be willing to do his bidding, no matter what that might be.

Not surprisingly, Saul makes some monstrously false allegations. He claims that Jonathan, “*has stirred up David against me, to lie in wait.*” That’s nonsense. David is simply running away. He’s confident in God’s promises, but he’s not stupid.

Saul even says, to the people he’s speaking to, “*All of you have conspired against me.*” Does he really think that’s a convincing argument?

But worst of all, Saul implies that “us Benjamites need to stick together.” David is from the tribe of Judah. Saul is claiming that he can’t be trusted to give Benjamites the time of day.

That’s projection. Tribal prejudice hasn’t even crossed David’s mind. When he slew Goliath, no one knew or cared which tribe he was from. It was a victory for Israel, not Judah.

And all the people celebrated as one.

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Saul has no idea what he’s messing with. In sowing tribal rivalries, he’s unleashing forces that have the power to tear Israel to pieces. The tribes are currently distinct, but they’re not at odds with each other. That unity is now in jeopardy.

Of course, Saul doesn’t care about jeopardizing Israel’s future; he doesn’t care about anything except his own legacy.

The irony is that this *is* his legacy. His legacy will not be his descendants on the throne; Samuel already told him that. So, his legacy will be the other kind of legacy—the mark he leaves on history.

Israel’s experiment with monarchy will not go well, and the nation will be torn to pieces. The divided kingdom will be conquered and enslaved.

That’s not all Saul’s fault, but his legacy is still mostly a lesson in what not to do.

3 1 Samuel 22:9–15

*Then answered Doeg the Edomite, who was set over the servants of Saul, and said, “I saw the son of Jesse going to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub. And he inquired of the LORD for him, gave him provisions, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine.”*

*So the king sent to call Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father’s house, the priests who were in Nob. And they all came to the king. And Saul said, “Hear now, son of Ahitub!”*

*He answered, “Here I am, my lord.”*

*Then Saul said to him, “Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, in that you have given him bread and a sword, and have inquired of God for him, that he should rise against me, to lie in wait, as it is this day?”*

*So Ahimelech answered the king and said, “And who among all your servants is as faithful as David, who is the king’s son-in-law, who goes at your bidding, and is honorable in your house? Did I then begin to inquire of God for him? Far be it from me! Let not the king impute anything to his servant, or to any in the house of my father. For your servant knew nothing of all this, little or much.”*

Welcome to kangaroo court. Doeg somehow manages to not recall anything that David said. David’s lies about being there on the king’s business are the foundation of everything that happened. Doeg heard and saw all that. Ahimelech has an airtight defense.

Or at least he *should have* an airtight defense. But Ahimelech gets thrown off track by Saul’s claim that David is out to get him. He doesn’t seem to realize the danger he’s in, so he reflexively defends David. This could have been the right thing to do—in a different court. But here, his defense of David hurts his case. At the end, he pleads ignorance of anything related to palace intrigue, but it’s too little too late.

None of that may have mattered anyway. Even if Doeg had told the whole truth about David’s interaction with Ahimelech, the fact that Ahimelech helped David is more than enough to set Saul off. The Queen of Hearts has nothing on this loony-tunes.

“Off with his head!”

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Kangaroo courts are all too familiar to Christians. The saints have, throughout history, been subject to persecution and injustice. Jesus warned us that this would happen.

*“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.” — Matthew 5:11*

*“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” — John 15:18–19*

4 1 Samuel 22:16–19

*And the king said, “You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all your father’s house!” Then the king said to the guards who stood about him, “Turn and kill the priests of the LORD, because their hand also is with David, and because they knew when he fled and did not tell it to me.” But the servants of the king would not lift their hands to strike the priests of the LORD. And the king said to Doeg, “You turn and kill the priests!” So Doeg the Edomite turned and struck the priests, and killed on that day eighty-five men who wore a linen ephod. Also Nob, the city of the priests, he struck with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and nursing infants, oxen and donkeys and sheep—with the edge of the sword.*

Saul’s servants show great character in refusing to *lift their hands to strike the priests of the LORD*. They are disobeying a direct order from the king. The punishment for that is presumably death, yet they refuse.

And here’s the kicker; they’re not the ones who know that Ahimelech is totally innocent. Only Doeg knows that.

They are standing their ground purely on principle.

Thus, this sequence of events sets up a faith test. Had Saul’s servants known all the facts, things would be different. We might conclude that they refused to kill the priests because they knew they were innocent.

But, no. Their refusal to break the sixth commandment, especially by killing a priest, is on religious grounds.

They risked their necks for righteousness.

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So, the only person willing to slaughter the priests is the only one who knows that they’re innocent. That seems uniquely evil.

But maybe not. Maybe this is just an example of a slippery slope in action. Back in 1 Samuel 21:7, when Doeg overheard the conversation between David and Ahimelech, he’s described as the chief of Saul’s herdsmen. It’s the top position in a low category. The Hebrew word translated as herdsmen (רֹעִים, ro-eem) is the same word as shepherds—the dregs of society. Doeg is at the top of the bottom, with no room for advancement.

But when he overhears David’s conversation with Ahimelech, he has an opportunity to carry important information to his king. A messenger (or a spy) is a much higher position. He delivers the news and the king quickly rallies his troops in pursuit. Doeg is suddenly much more than a shepherd.

Now he’s in the presence of the king’s servants refusing to obey an order. He has another chance to be significant, and he jumps on it. Doeg’s transformation is complete. He was just a nobody (albeit the chief nobody). Now he’s the king’s confidant and a mighty warrior, the slayer of many.

Never underestimate the power of sin to change people.

5 1 Samuel 22:20–23:5

*Now one of the sons of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled after David. And Abiathar told David that Saul had killed the LORD's priests. So David said to Abiathar, "I knew that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I have caused the death of all the persons of your father's house. Stay with me; do not fear. For he who seeks my life seeks your life, but with me you shall be safe."*

*Then they told David, saying, "Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah, and they are robbing the threshing floors."*

*Therefore David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?"*

*And the LORD said to David, "Go and attack the Philistines, and save Keilah."*

*But David's men said to him, "Look, we are afraid here in Judah. How much more then if we go to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?" Then David inquired of the LORD once again.*

*And the LORD answered him and said, "Arise, go down to Keilah. For I will deliver the Philistines into your hand." And David and his men went to Keilah and fought with the Philistines, struck them with a mighty blow, and took away their livestock. So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah.*

David finally realizes this is all his fault. *"I have caused the death of all the persons of your father's house."* His error is great, but so is his repentance. David is growing. That sets the stage for what's next.

And what's next is impressive. David is an outlaw on the run. Saul's pursuit of him is unjust, even insane. David's an outlaw even though he didn't break any laws. He's in the middle of an unjust nightmare.

So, David could be excused for not paying attention to the problems of others. But that's not what he does here. David's response to Keilah's unjust treatment is to ask the LORD whether he should intervene.

Then we hit a teaching moment. God says, "Yes," but David's men recoil in horror. They effectively ask, "Are you kidding?" David's men aren't thinking the way he thinks.

This is a perfect example of the difference that spiritual maturity makes.

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So David inquires again, just to be sure. That's good for two reasons.

First of all, David is listening to the advice of others. Others can be wrong—they are in this case—but the right thing to do is to hear and weigh what they have to say.

Second, double checking big decisions is always wise. In this case, David isn't double checking his calculations, he's double checking his understanding of the LORD's will.

We'd call his decision, "Bathed in prayer."

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. When have you been burned by overconfidence?
2. When have you seen shocking unintended consequences?
3. What's the greatest injustice you've seen?
4. Have you seen someone changed by sin?
5. When has double-checking saved you from error?

*Items for prayer:*