

**Contrast: The Difference of a Life In Christ**  
**How To Combat Faithless Fear and Panic**  
**1 Samuel 21**

**Introduction:** Chapter 20 ended with David's opinion about Saul being confirmed. Jonathan, who was still giving his father Saul the benefit of the doubt, agreed to test his father to see what his true motives and intentions were concerning David. Sadly, it concluded with Saul trying to kill Jonathan for doing nothing more than asking an objective question designed to rescue Saul from his own self-destruction! In that moment, it became agonizingly clear that Saul had no intention of ever relenting from his efforts to execute David, and it meant David and Jonathan could never live in the reality of any sort of functional relationship. Their friendship was practically over, and David was going to be on the run from Saul as long as Saul was alive.

It's a painful story to watch unfold. Saul knew his rebellion against God had caused God to not only remove the anointing of the Holy Spirit from him but also to replace him as King. God's judgment was final on the matter of Saul's future as King. However, instead of repenting so he could restore his relationship with God and, for the Glory of God and the benefit of Israel, humbly embrace whoever God had set forth to be the next King of Israel, Saul decided to double down on his rebellion against God and try to kill the one he knew God had anointed to be the next King—David! Instead of turning from his rebellious heart, Saul justified and fueled his insecure, arrogant narcissism, and it caused him to become a miserable human wrecking ball to everyone who loved him.

So, chapter 20 ended this way,

**42 Then Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, because we have sworn both of us in the name of the LORD, saying, 'The LORD shall be between me and you, and between my offspring and your offspring, forever.'" And he rose and departed, and Jonathan went into the city. (1 Samuel 20:42)**

So, now what? David couldn't go back to Bethlehem and live with his family because, as you will see next week, they all realized Saul was likely going to try to kill them as well! The last thing David wanted to do was run back to Bethlehem and have Saul follow him there!

So, where's David going to go? What is David going to do? He's literally on the run with NOTHING and NOBODY! This is where chapter 21 picks up, and for many, it's shocking to see what happened. So far, David has been nothing but a hero, so you would naturally expect to see his retreat from Gibeah narrated by a series of heroic events that demonstrated his complete and unwavering confidence in God to protect him and establish him as King. However, that's not at all how this got started. Following the new moon festival events in 1 Samuel 20, David found himself in a state of faithless fear and panic!

**Proposition: In 1 Samuel 21, we find two testimonies of the faithless fear and panic that temporarily consumed David's life.**

**The first testimony of the faithless fear and panic that temporarily consumed David is in 1 Samuel 21:1-9.**

**(1) Out of faithless fear, David selfishly manipulated the High Priest of Israel with complete lies. (21:1-9)**

A. It's one thing to manipulate people, but it's a whole 'nother thing to do it with lies!

B. **1 Then David came to Nob to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech came to meet David trembling and said to him, "Why are you alone, and no one with you?"**

1. He had already been found when he hid with Samuel, the Prophet of God, so he couldn't go there. So, this time, he went to the "city of priests," where we presume the Tabernacle was located.
  - a. "David proceeded immediately to Nob, a couple of miles away on the northern outskirts of Jerusalem. The tabernacle was now located there. Ahimelech the high priest came trembling to meet David. He must have known of Saul's hatred of David."<sup>1</sup>
  - b. "It is difficult to trace the history of the tabernacle after the capture of the ark in 1104 b.c. The ark itself rested at Kiriath Jearim since then (7:2; 2 Sam. 6:3-4), but the tabernacle is not mentioned or even hinted at till 1 Samuel 21, when it was presumed to be at Nob, the "city of priests," where **David** fled after he made his final break with Saul. Just as David had earlier sought sanctuary with Samuel at Ramah (19:18), so now he went to find sanctuary with **Ahimelech** (also known as Ahijah), **the priest at Nob** (21:1), halfway between Jerusalem and Gibeah."<sup>2</sup>
2. Interestingly, as we talk about David's fear, Ahimelech is also afraid. Ironically, as we will see in 1 Samuel 22, if he had trusted his instincts, things would have turned out much better for him. However, Ahimelech overcame his fear and acted with reason and compassion, sadly in response to the complete and total lies David, whom he trusted, told him.
  - a. "Ahimelech "trembled" at the approach of David as his great-grandfather had "trembled" on the day the ark of God was lost, as the people of Israel had "trembled" before the Philistines, as the Philistines had in their turn "trembled" before the Israelites, and as the elders of Bethlehem had "trembled" when Samuel came on his secret mission (1 Samuel 4:13;

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, J. E. (1995). *The Books of History* (pp. 304-305). College Press.

<sup>2</sup> Merrill, E. H. (1985). [1 Samuel](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 450-451). Victor Books.

13:7; 14:15; 16:4; cf. 28:5). In other words, the term indicates a profound fear. Terror would not be too strong a word for what Ahimelech felt as he saw David approach.”<sup>3</sup>

- b. “David arrived, however, he was unnerved by the demeanor of the priest: “Ahimelech came to meet David trembling” (1 Sam. 21:1). Evidently, news of Saul’s hatred for David had spread so as to make people nervous about the fugitive. The priest not only met David with shaking hands and a sweaty face, but also immediately quizzed David: “Why are you alone, and no one with you?” (21:1).”<sup>4</sup>

- C. **2 And David said to Ahimelech the priest, "The king has charged me with a matter and said to me, 'Let no one know anything of the matter about which I send you, and with which I have charged you.' I have made an appointment with the young men for such and such a place. 3 Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever is here."**

Note: There is NOTHING true in anything David just said! Saul hadn’t charged him with any matter, he hadn’t sworn David to any secrecy, and David didn’t have any appointments! He was running for his life with nowhere to go and no idea what to do.

- D. **4 And the priest answered David, "I have no common bread on hand, but there is holy bread--if the young men have kept themselves from women."**

1. “This bread was eaten by priests each sabbath day (Lev 24:9). The priest determined that he could release that bread if David and his men were consecrated as soldiers normally were when they fought in a holy war. Abstinence from sexual relations was apparently a minimal requirement of consecration”<sup>5</sup>
2. “This prohibition does not represent a biblical notion that sexual intimacy is inherently wicked, for the Bible sees God-given sex within marriage as a great blessing. Nonetheless, the Levitical holiness code considered the loss of bodily fluids a sign of uncleanness (see Lev. 15:18; cf. Ex. 19:15).”<sup>6</sup>
3. “He had no ordinary bread “under his hand,” only the bread that had been consecrated, set aside for use in the tabernacle. These were the twelve loaves baked according to the regulations in Leviticus 24:5–9. These loaves

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<sup>3</sup> Woodhouse, J. (2008). *1 Samuel: Looking for a leader* (pp. 407–414). Crossway Books.

<sup>4</sup> Phillips, R. D. (2012). *1 Samuel* (P. G. Ryken & R. D. Phillips, Duguid Iain M., Eds.; 1st ed., pp. 362–366). P&R Publishing.

<sup>5</sup> Smith, J. E. (1995). *The Books of History* (pp. 304–305). College Press.

<sup>6</sup> Phillips, R. D. (2012). *1 Samuel* (P. G. Ryken & R. D. Phillips, Duguid Iain M., Eds.; 1st ed., pp. 362–366). P&R Publishing.

were, according to the Law, to be arranged on the table in the tabernacle every Sabbath day (Leviticus 24:8). It could be implied, therefore, that the day David came to Nob may have been a Sabbath day (like the day Jesus' disciples plucked the ears of grain). More directly to the point, according to the Law this bread was to be eaten by priests ("Aaron and his sons") "in a holy place" (Leviticus 24:9)."<sup>7</sup>

4. "There was no **ordinary bread**, the **priest** replied (v. 4), but only the holy showbread (Ex. 25:30, kjv) which had been desacralized by being replaced with fresh bread (1 Sam. 21:6; cf. Lev. 24:5-9). This could be eaten, as Jesus suggested later on (Matt. 12:3-4), but ordinarily only by the priests and certainly only by those who were ceremonially pure (1 Sam. 21:4-5; Lev. 15:18). David's eating illustrated a concession that the Law permitted—life is more holy than bread (Matt. 12:7-8). 21:7-15."<sup>8</sup>
5. The simplest explanation is that the priests, as they were supposed to do, had studied the Law and already established what was permissible; that is, as long as a person in need was ceremonially clean, the priests could share the bread with them. The Law to love one another and care for those in need (Deuteronomy 15:11) took precedence over the laws governing who could eat the bread.

**E. 5 And David answered the priest, "Truly women have been kept from us as always when I go on an expedition. The vessels of the young men are holy even when it is an ordinary journey. How much more today will their vessels be holy?" 6 So the priest gave him the holy bread, for there was no bread there but the bread of the Presence, which is removed from before the LORD, to be replaced by hot bread on the day it is taken away.**

1. Interestingly, Phillips notes that "Jesus' commentary on this passage in Matthew 12:3-4 suggests that David did have at least some companions, and they may indeed have been hidden nearby, but he was absolutely not on a mission from King Saul."<sup>9</sup>
2. However, I tend to disagree with Phillips. I believe Jesus could have very well been telling the story from the perspective of David's lie to further highlight the significance of it being permissible for the priests to give David the bread even though David wasn't even telling the truth!

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<sup>7</sup> Woodhouse, J. (2008). [1 Samuel: Looking for a leader](#) (pp. 407-414). Crossway Books.

<sup>8</sup> Merrill, E. H. (1985). [1 Samuel](#). In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 450-451). Victor Books.

<sup>9</sup> Phillips, R. D. (2012). [1 Samuel](#) (P. G. Ryken & R. D. Phillips, Duguid Iain M., Eds.; 1st ed., pp. 362-366). P&R Publishing.

3. The point is, ironically, the only thing that came out of David's mouth that could be written off as "true" was that he nor any of his men, if he even had any men with him, had not engaged in sexual activity. The reason we can trust that statement to be true is because not only was there likely nobody else with him in the first place, but also the fact that he was desperately running for his life and hiding from everybody!
4. In the middle of this story, the author introduces something that we will not fully understand the significance of until next week.

**F. 7 Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the LORD. His name was Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul's herdsmen.**

1. Like any great storyteller, the author of 1 Samuel ramps up the drama of the story when he drops this little tidbit into the narrative. The author doesn't give us any indication of what's going to happen as a result of Doeg's presence, but the fact that he's telling us a servant of Saul was present clearly wasn't put there to point us to something positive.
2. "Doeg the Edomite, the overseer of Saul's herdsmen, *"was detained before Yahweh,"* probably on some ceremonial impurity (21:6-7)."<sup>10</sup>
3. "He was one of "the servants of Saul"! *All* of the servants of Saul had earlier been informed of Saul's intention to kill David (1 Samuel 19:1). ... Doeg was "the Edomite." Saul fought the Edomites (1 Samuel 14:47). Perhaps he had taken Doeg into his service after defeating them. The Edomites were historic enemies of Israel. Descended from Esau (Genesis 25:30; 36:9), they had refused the Israelites safe passage in the days of Moses (Numbers 20:14-21). This unkind act against their brother people was not forgotten and was the pattern for Edom's later dealings with Israel (see Numbers 24:18; Judges 11:17; 2 Samuel 8:13, 14; 1 Kings 11:14-22; 2 Chronicles 28:17; Psalm 137:7; Isaiah 34:5-9; Jeremiah 49:7-22; Lamentations 4:21, 22; Ezekiel 25:12-14; 35; Amos 1:11; Obadiah). They had acted as the Amalekites had done, and we can vividly remember what happened to them (see 1 Samuel 15:2, 3). It is disturbing to see an Edomite servant of Saul, a strongman, lurking in the shadows at Nob. We are told that he was there because he was "detained before the Lord," which sounds like some kind of punishment. Be that as it may, the clear point is that Doeg was under Saul's control, and in due course we will see him do Saul's terrible will."<sup>11</sup>
4. This could also be why Ahimelech was so scared when he saw David. If he knew David was in hot water with Saul and that one of Saul's men was there

<sup>10</sup> Smith, J. E. (1995). *The Books of History* (pp. 304-305). College Press.

<sup>11</sup> Woodhouse, J. (2008). *1 Samuel: Looking for a leader* (pp. 407-414). Crossway Books.

watching, he would know right out the gate that he was in a terrible predicament. Ahimelech, as did the rest of the country at this point, would have tremendous respect for David but, as the High Priest, and as such, one who would be informed of important matters, he also likely already knew that Saul was seeking to kill David. In addition, by this time, he likely also knew Saul was justifying his desire to execute him because his daughter Michal claimed David threatened to kill her (1 Samuel 19:17)! When we find out that one of Saul's men is at the Tabernacle it only adds validity to the terrible predicament the High Priest is in.

**G. 8 Then David said to Ahimelech, "Then have you not here a spear or a sword at hand? For I have brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste."**

1. Again, the only truth in this statement is the obvious fact that he doesn't have any weapons or armor, but David's explanation is a total manipulative lie! David is trying to cover his tracks; that is, he's trying to explain away the things that would cause people to question his story, like why in the world would you be on a mission from Saul and have no armor or weapons?
2. In addition, he knows he needs a weapon. So, this lie helps explain an inconsistency in his story and helps him get something he needs. And it works.

**H. 9 And the priest said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you struck down in the Valley of Elah, behold, it is here wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you will take that, take it, for there is none but that here." And David said, "There is none like that; give it to me."**

1. So, the result of David's manipulative lies—that is, lies intentionally told with the complete purpose of getting people to serve him without regard for how it would impact the ones he was lying to—was that David indeed got what he needed. So, in David's eyes, it worked, and therefore, it must be all good! He now had two vital things—food and something to defend himself with.
2. But, because David is driven by his faithless fear and panic rather than faith in God, he justifies manipulating completely innocent people with lies that will later have horrifying results (more on that next week)! For now, I just want you to take note that David, who, as a young teenage boy, had powerfully challenged the entire nation to live by faith, was now clearly acting as a man controlled by faithless fear and panic!

**The second testimony of the faithless fear and panic that temporarily consumed David is in 1 Samuel 21:10-15.**

**(2) Out of panic, David irrationally ran to the Philistine King for help and ended up having to act like he was mentally insane to avoid being executed. (21:10-15)**

**A. 10 And David rose and fled that day from Saul and went to Achish the king of Gath.**

1. Ironically, David goes to Gath carrying the sword of the city's most famous person, a man whom David killed—Goliath!
2. "Gath was about twenty-five miles southwest of Nob, down out of the hills, toward the coastal plain. Gath was, therefore, outside Saul's territory."<sup>12</sup>
3. "Achish is styled here "king (מֶלֶךְ, *melekh*) of Gath." Other than in the patriarchal narratives, the Philistine rulers of the Pentapolis are called סְרָנִים (*seranim*) ("lords"). Stern suggests a reason for the use of the term "king" for Achish in these narratives: Among the Philistines, who originated in the Aegean, monarchical government apparently developed after contact with the inhabitants of Canaan. Perhaps one of the five Philistine governors (*sērānîm*) who ruled the cities of the Pentapolis at times took over command of the joint army and while he held office would be called "king" (1 Sam. 21:27–29; 1 Kings 2:39–40)."<sup>13</sup>
4. Why in the world would David run to Gath for help? He not only killed the Philistine champion Goliath but since then, he's been killing the Philistines by the tens of thousands and even mutilated two hundred of them as a bride price to marry Saul's daughter!
5. So, again, why would David think he could find safety among the Philistines? Well, have you ever heard the proverbial saying, "The enemy of my enemy is my friend." It's a scary proposition at best that almost always ends with the two parties being enemies again. Still, throughout history, people have found it a temporary solution for resolving something they consider a more threatening problem.
6. Therefore, given David is running for his life in complete panic mode and likely doing so with nobody helping him, it's not hard to imagine that David felt he only had one card to play—try to ally with his enemy under the auspice that they would want to align with David as a lesser enemy in hopes it would help them against the greater enemy Saul.
7. However, as successful as Saul had been as a military leader, the person everybody talked about in the context of defeating the Philistines was David. David had been a tenacious and utterly ruthless enemy of the Philistines.

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<sup>12</sup> Woodhouse, J. (2008). [1 Samuel: Looking for a leader](#) (pp. 415–423). Crossway Books.

<sup>13</sup> Hoffner, H. A., Jr. (2015). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (1 Sa 21:11–16). Lexham Press.

Therefore, the idea that he could find solace among those who lived in absolute fear of him was, in itself, insanity that turned out to truly be crazy. Watch what happens when the counselors and administrators under Achish realize he's truly entertaining the idea of allying with David.

**B. 11 And the servants of Achish said to him, "Is not this David the king of the land? Did they not sing to one another of him in dances, 'Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands'?"**

1. No wonder Saul was so paranoid about David! Even the Philistines knew Saul was toast and that David was likely going to be the next King of Israel! They hadn't been told that by God, but given David's success against them, it's no surprise they saw it coming!
2. You could read that from one perspective and assume Achish's counselors are advising him that this could be a grand alliance! After all, if you want to overthrow a government at the least cost to yourself, then what better way to do that than to support an indigenous revolutionary threat already present in that country? If we based our interpretation of the events on what was going on up to this point, we might think that's exactly what's happening.
3. However, David was present when this was being discussed. Where we can only read the words of the story, David can hear the emotion and emphasis being said. David could likely even see the facial expressions and body language of the men saying it. As such, right or wrong, David doesn't interpret what the counselors told Achish as advice to form an alliance with David but rather to kill him and potentially find favor with Saul by helping him protect his throne! The Bible states,

**C. 12 And David took these words to heart and was much afraid of Achish the king of Gath. 13 So he changed his behavior before them and pretended to be insane in their hands and made marks on the doors of the gate and let his spittle run down his beard. 14 Then Achish said to his servants, "Behold, you see the man is mad. Why then have you brought him to me? 15 Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this fellow to behave as a madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?"**

1. "In the books of Samuel, this is the only place in which we are told that David was afraid of the threats against him."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Woodhouse, J. (2008). [\*1 Samuel: Looking for a leader\*](#) (pp. 415–423). Crossway Books.

2. “Roger Ellsworth comments: “The man who stood calmly before Goliath because he was possessed with faith now acts like a maniac because he is possessed with fear.”<sup>15</sup>
3. When David realized the predicament his panicked, foolish decision to run to Gath created for him, he started acting like he had completely lost his mind! Why would he do that? David’s intention was not only to prove he wasn’t a threat to Achish but to induce the Philistine king to expel him rather than execute him. J.E. Smith noted,
  - a. **“The Philistines observed the code of the east which regarded the insane as possessed of the gods, and therefore sacrosanct. The fugitive was safe for the moment (21:12-15).”<sup>16</sup>**
  - b. Merrill noted, **“This is in line with the practice of the ancient world to regard the insane as being in some sense an evil portent and so exempt from harm lest the gods be provoked.”<sup>17</sup>**
4. In other words, this is actually the first wise decision he’s made since leaving Gibeah at the end of chapter 20. Fear and panic led David to go to Gath to find refuge instead of God, and in that fear and panic, David found himself in a pretty predictable mess! Therefore, he needed to do something to get himself out of it. There’s really nothing else he could have done, and he must have done it really well because it worked! This is the only wise and cunning decision in this chapter, and it brings the reader some hope that David will not end up going down the same irrational and erratic path that so characterized Saul.

The once fearless and steady David had just made two terrible, embarrassing decisions because he was consumed not with the fear of the Lord but with the faithless fear of man and panic about his circumstances. Also, to those who look at this chapter and say, “What’s the big deal? It all worked out, right?” Yes, David did get food and a sword from the priests at Nob, and he did avoid enslavement or execution in Gath, but when we get into chapter 22, we will find out real quick just how big of a disaster David’s faithless fear and panic created. But, for now, let’s switch gears and discuss how this applies to us.

R.D. Phillips noted, **“Nob is the place of David’s unholy flight of fear, and Gath is the city of David’s mad refuge. Few who have sought to follow Jesus Christ for any length of**

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<sup>15</sup> Phillips, R. D. (2012). *1 Samuel* (P. G. Ryken & R. D. Phillips, Duguid Iain M., Eds.; 1st ed., pp. 366–372). P&R Publishing.

<sup>16</sup> Smith, J. E. (1995). *The Books of History* (p. 305). College Press.

<sup>17</sup> Merrill, E. H. (1985). *1 Samuel*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, p. 451). Victor Books.

**time have avoided these travel stops; most of us can recognize from our own experience the bitterness of what they represent."<sup>18</sup>**

How, then, do we combat faithless fear and panic? How can we avoid what happened to David in Nob and Gath? How do we face the severe challenges of life with a healthy fear of the Lord and a respectful fear of the reality of the challenge that leads us to faith in God and a commitment to wisdom rather than faithless fear and panic that leads to a trainwreck of selfishness and foolishness? All kinds of things in life tempt us to give up living our lives in submission to the Lord and panic!

Let me begin by saying that this wasn't a one-and-done experience for David but something he would have to deal with repeatedly. When you read the Book of Psalms, you will see how he learned to run to the Lord instead of Gath; how he learned to first deal with his faithlessness so that he could attack his circumstances with wisdom instead of panic. However, instead of reading you a Psalm that illustrates what we are to do, let me take you to a passage that tells us what to do!

I know I reference this passage frequently, but perhaps it's because I not only often find myself needing to refer people to it in pastoral counseling situations, but, more importantly, I have to frequently reflect on it myself! It's crazy how fast we forget to apply something as powerful as the instructions in this passage to our lives. Paul wrote,

**4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5 Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; 6 do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. (Philippians 4:4-8)**

**Paul's instructions for combatting faithless fear and panic are:**

- (1) No matter what, worship the Lord for who He is and what He's done. (Philippians 4:4)**
- (2) Share all your feelings with God while reminding yourself that He has guaranteed an eternal future for us that is better than anything this world offers. (Philippians 4:5-6)**
- (3) Remember, when you take refuge in Him, He will combat your fear. (Philippians 4:7)**
- (4) Develop a habit of only mentally dwelling on things that lead to life and wisdom rather than fear and panic, especially the Gospel. (Philippians 4:8)**

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<sup>18</sup> Phillips, R. D. (2012). 1 Samuel. (P. G. Ryken & R. D. Phillips, Duguid Iain M., Eds.) (1st ed., pp. 361-362). Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing.