



Community Group Discussion Guide

February 16, 2025

1 Samuel 23: 1-14 | Divine Direction

MOTIVATE

Starter Question

- **Starter Question: Can you describe a time when you asked God for specific direction? How did you go about doing this? What was the result?**

DISCUSS

In 1 Samuel 23:1-14, the story continues with David as a wanted fugitive by King Saul. David's future had been bright: anointed by Samuel as the next king over Israel, married to a daughter of the king, best friend to Jonathan, the king's oldest son, and numerous battle victories credited to his name. Instead of all of this, adversity and hardship became David's constant companions.

God did intend for David to have a glorious future. He would be king, and God would make a covenant especially with him so that the Savior would come from his family line. But before this happened, David had to learn to trust God in the afflictions of life as well as the blessings. David's faithful response to difficulty developed in him the type of godly character he needed to rule over Israel and to be a man after God's own heart.¹ (See [1 Samuel Overview](#) for more information.)

- ⇒ ***What does David's experience reveal about God and how He uses suffering in our lives?***

These events of 1 Samuel 23 provide the narrator with background information to highlight a contrast of greater significance between Saul and David, namely, the way the two men made important decisions. David consistently inquired of God before making any important moves, whereas Saul was dependent on rumors and espionage. David seemed keenly aware of God's guidance and leadership in his life, while Saul seemed out of touch and indifferent to divine guidance.

- ⇒ ***Discuss this quote: This narrative serves as a case study in contrasting approaches between someone who is seeking to perform God's will and someone who is seeking to avoid God's will.***²

1 Samuel 23:1-6 Now they told David, "Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are robbing the threshing floors." **2** Therefore David inquired of the LORD, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" And the LORD said to David, "Go and attack the Philistines and save Keilah." **3** But David's men said to him, "Behold, we are afraid here in Judah; how much more then if we go to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?" **4** Then David inquired of the LORD again. And the LORD answered him, "Arise, go down to Keilah, for I will give the Philistines into your hand." **5** And David and his men went to Keilah and fought with the Philistines and brought away their livestock and struck them with a great blow. So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah. **6** When

¹ Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). [1, 2 Samuel](#) (Vol. 6, p. 177). Holman Reference.

² Arnold, B. T. (2003). [1 & 2 Samuel](#) (p. 319). Zondervan.

Abiathar the son of Ahimelech had fled to David to Keilah, he had come down with an ephod in his hand.

The Philistine threat, which played a role in the rise of the monarchy itself, had receded into the background of the narrative tracing David's rise to power. Here they once again threatened the borders of central Judah.

While in the desert regions of Judah, David learned that the Philistines were looting the threshing floors of the nearby Judahite city of Keilah.

Keilah was in the low-lying hills of the west. Its location between Judah and Philistia made it particularly vulnerable to various raids, such as the one described here on the threshing floors. Such agricultural locations would not have been heavily defended, but the loss of grain would have created a burden for the inhabitants of the city.

David desired to deliver his people from the hands of the enemy, but he did not make a move until he sought God's leadership in the matter. David's reliance on God is accented here. He used Abiathar, the priest, to discern God's will concerning whether he should go to Keilah or not.

⇒ ***What can we learn from David first inquiring of God before going to battle?***

God's answer was positive. He told David to attack the Philistines and save Keilah. When David's men balked because of the Philistine's superior strength, David checked again to confirm God's message. God assured David that He would give the Philistines into his hand. The phrase used here for discerning God's will--"inquired of the Lord"--becomes an important theme in this chapter and elsewhere in the David narratives. This phrase is a technical expression for inquiring of God when anticipating a simple affirmative or negative response.

The reference to Abiathar and the priestly ephod ties these events together with the previous episode in 1 Samuel 22:20–23 and presumably means David's inquiries were answered by means of the sacred lots, the Urim and Thummim stored in Abiathar's priestly ephod (Exodus 28:30; Numbers 27:21). The specifics of how these worked is not clear, but they served as a form of divinely sanctioned lot-casting, which may have functioned something like our "heads" or "tails." A simple, linen garment, from its earliest form and uses, it appears that the ephod was associated with the presence of God or those who had a special relationship with God.

Abiathar was the 11th high priest in succession from Aaron through the line of Eli. Abiathar survived the slaughter of the priests of Nob and fled to David who was hiding in the cave of Adullam from Saul (1 Samuel 22). Having escaped with the ephod, Abiathar became the high priest and chief counselor for David. Since Abiathar was with David permanently, he could easily inquire of the Lord before taking any serious action.

⇒ ***How do we go about "inquiring of God" today? Can we easily inquire of Him?***

⇒ ***What are the primary methods by which God communicates today?***

As a result, David and his men attacked and inflicted heavy losses on the Philistines and saved the people of Keilah. God gave David the victory over a larger and better-equipped army.

⇒ ***How would this victory contribute to David's growing confidence in God?***

1 Samuel 23:7-8 Now it was told Saul that David had come to Keilah. And Saul said, "God has given him into my hand, for he has shut himself in by entering a town that has gates and bars." **8** And Saul summoned all the people to war, to go down to Keilah, to besiege David and his men.

Saul should have rejoiced in the deliverance of Keilah from the Philistines. Ironically, Saul thought that this was God's doing in handing David over to him. But Saul did not inquire of God, nor after destroying the priests at Nob did he have a means to do so. Saul believed that when David entered a walled city with gates and bars, he became a prisoner waiting to be caught.

As a result, Saul called out his troops and headed for Keilah to capture David. The contrast between Saul and David continues, as David consistently and faithfully inquired of God while Saul received no answer. Saul may have appeared to have the upper hand politically, but David had God's guidance.³

⇒ ***How can Saul possibly be so off base in his assumptions about what God was doing? Could this possibly happen to us?***

1 Samuel 23:9-12 David knew that Saul was plotting harm against him. And he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here."**10** Then David said, "O LORD, the God of Israel, your servant has surely heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah, to destroy the city on my account. **11** Will the men of Keilah surrender me into his hand? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard? O LORD, the God of Israel, please tell your servant." And the LORD said, "He will come down."**12** Then David said, "Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?" And the LORD said, "They will surrender you."

It comes as no surprise that Saul mustered his troops to capture David rather than take advantage of the victory to pursue the Philistines further. The citizens of Keilah would be anxious to avoid the same fate as Nob. Regardless of how grateful they may have been to David; they would be compelled to surrender him to Saul.⁴

Before Saul got to Keilah, David learned of Saul's plot to trap him there. David was most likely still painfully aware of his role in the tragic deaths of the citizens of Nob (1 Samuel 22:6–23). He feared the same would happen at Keilah, as his prayer revealed.⁵

⇒ ***Why must David come to recognize that he cannot place his trust in walled cities and fortifications? Are you tempted to trust in someone or something besides God?***

⇒ ***How did David demonstrate that his compassion for the citizens of Keilah outweighed his desire for security? How will this serve him in the future as king? How is this like Jesus?***

What David did next became an important habit for him. He asked Abiathar to bring the ephod so he might inquire of God before he acted. This is important to note because it grounded David's future actions in the sure communication with God offered by an officially sanctioned priest according to the

³ Arnold, B. T. (2003). *1 & 2 Samuel* (p. 321). Zondervan.

⁴ Arnold, B. T. (2003). *1 & 2 Samuel* (p. 321). Zondervan.

⁵ Arnold, B. T. (2003). *1 & 2 Samuel* (p. 321). Zondervan.

Torah. From this point on David will have the proper means to seek God's will for him and His people.⁶

⇒ ***How did Jesus provide us the proper means to seek God's will?***

With Abiathar's help, David sought God's guidance in responding to the threat. David asked: Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me to Saul? Will Saul come down as David had heard? God confirmed that Saul would come down and that the citizens of Keilah would turn David and his men over. To lift the siege of the city, David must leave Keilah or face certain capture.

1 Samuel 23:13-14: Then David and his men, who were about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah, and they went wherever they could go. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he gave up the expedition.**14** And David remained in the strongholds in the wilderness, in the hill country of the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God did not give him into his hand.

In order to avoid more innocent bloodshed, David led his troops—now numbering about 600 men—away from Keilah to the desert strongholds near the Judahite city of Ziph. The Ziphites would reveal David's hideouts to Saul twice—in 1 Samuel 23:19-20 and again in 1 Samuel 26. David and his men moved from place to place to avoid Saul. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he did not bother to go there.

⇒ ***How does this story reveal that God is in charge and ultimately His plan will be accomplished?***

TRANSFORM

1. Make personal application: Narratives of David's rise to kingship emphasize the importance he attached to seeking direction from God. The need for divine guidance is an undeniable link between believers of Bible times and today. The contrast in this text between David and Saul offers timeless truths about reliance on God alone for the important decisions of life. Indeed, the Bible has much to say about receiving and acting on divine guidance.⁷ David sought divine direction, but Saul placed his trust in human intelligence. David's success reveals that in times of adversity we must seek the will of God; He will direct us in all our ways.⁸

- ⇒ ***How does the Bible's emphasis on divine revelation create in you an expectation that God will indeed provide direction and guidance for you?***
- ⇒ ***God speaks to us and desires to guide us in our faith journey. Are you sensitive to God's guidance, like David, or are you presumptuous about God and dependent on human wisdom, like Saul?***
- ⇒ ***Are you convinced that God has promised to guide you, but uncertain of your own receptiveness to the guidance of God?***

In seeking God's guidance, we should never separate the work of the Holy Spirit from the role of Scripture, because the Bible is "the sword of the Spirit" (Ephesians 6:17). The texts of the Old and

⁶ Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). *1, 2 Samuel* (Vol. 6, pp. 162–163). Holman Reference.

⁷ Arnold, B. T. (2003). *1 & 2 Samuel* (p. 323). Zondervan.

⁸ Andrews, S. J., & Bergen, R. D. (2009). *1, 2 Samuel* (Vol. 6, p. 162). Holman Reference.

New Testaments comprise the primary weapon the Holy Spirit uses to accomplish His purposes in our lives. Through these ancient texts, God speaks to our contemporary world. "He speaks through what He has spoken."⁹

2. Pray: Ask God to show you clearly what He wants you to learn through difficult times. Thank Him that you can seek His presence and guidance through prayer and His Word. Praise Him that you can rely completely on Him.

STUDY

Resources used, compiled from, and quoted:

- Holman New Testament Commentary, 1 and 2 Samuel, pages 162-165, 173-178.
- The NIV Application Commentary, 1 and 2 Samuel pages 316-327.
- Shepherd's Notes, 1 and 2 Samuel, pages 39-40.

⁹ Arnold, B. T. (2003). [*1 & 2 Samuel*](#) (p. 326). Zondervan.