

**DAVID AT NOB**

**DAVID AT GATH**

**1 SAMUEL 21:1-15**

## **David at Nob**

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### **Text:**

### **1 Samuel 21:1-15,**

**1. David went to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech trembled when he met him, and asked, "Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?"**

**2. David answered Ahimelech the priest, "The king charged me with a certain matter and said to me, 'No one is to know anything about your mission and your instructions.' As for my men, I have told them to meet me at a certain place.**

**3. Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find."**

**4. 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."**

**5. David replied, "Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual whenever I set out. The men's things are holy even on missions that are not holy. How much more so today!"**

**6. 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.**

**7. Now one of Saul's servants was there that day, detained before the LORD; he was Doeg the Edomite, Saul's head shepherd.**

**8. David asked Ahimelech, "Don't you have a spear or a sword here? I haven't brought my sword or any other weapon, because the king's business was urgent."**

**9. 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."**

**10. That day David fled from Saul and went to Achish king of Gath.**

**11. 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'?"**

**12. David took these words to heart and was very much afraid of Achish king of Gath.**

**13. 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.**

**14. Achish said to his servants, "Look at the man! He is insane! Why bring him to me?"**

**15. 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?" (NIV)**

## **Commentary:**

### **David at Nob**

I. David went to the priest in Nob.

**A. 1 Samuel 21:1-9, David went to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech trembled when he met him, and asked, "Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?" David answered Ahimelech the priest, "The king charged me with a certain matter and said to me, 'No one is to know anything about your mission and your instructions.' As for my men, I have told them to meet me at a certain place. Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me**

**five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find." 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." David replied, "Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual whenever I set out. The men's things are holy even on missions that are not holy. How much more so today!" 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. Now one of Saul's servants was there that day, detained before the LORD; he was Doeg the Edomite, Saul's head shepherd. David asked Ahimelech, "Don't you have a spear or a sword here? I haven't brought my sword or any other weapon, because the king's business was urgent." 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." (NIV)**

1. David went to Nob to see Ahimelech.

a. **1 Samuel 21:1, David went to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech trembled when he met him, and asked, "Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?" (NIV)**

i. Nob, it is thought, was the place where the priests located after the destruction of Shiloh. **1 Samuel 4:1-22.**

ii. **1 Samuel 4:1-22, Now the Israelites went out to fight against the Philistines. The Israelites**

**camped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines at Aphek. The Philistines deployed their forces to meet Israel, and as the battle spread, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand of them on the battlefield. When the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked, "Why did the LORD bring defeat upon us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the LORD's covenant from Shiloh, so that it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies." So the people sent men to Shiloh, and they brought back the ark of the covenant of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim. And Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. When the ark of the LORD's covenant came into the camp, all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook. Hearing the uproar, the Philistines asked, "What's all this shouting in the Hebrew camp?" When they learned that the ark of the LORD had come into the camp, the Philistines were afraid. "A god has come into the camp," they said. "We're in trouble! Nothing like this has happened before. Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? They are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the desert. Be strong, Philistines! Be men, or you will be subject to the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Be men, and fight!" So the Philistines fought, and the Israelites were defeated and every man fled to his tent. The slaughter was very great; Israel**

**lost thirty thousand foot soldiers. The ark of God was captured, and Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died. That same day a Benjamite ran from the battle line and went to Shiloh, his clothes torn and dust on his head. When he arrived, there was Eli sitting on his chair by the side of the road, watching, because his heart feared for the ark of God. When the man entered the town and told what had happened, the whole town sent up a cry. Eli heard the outcry and asked, "What is the meaning of this uproar?" The man hurried over to Eli, who was ninety-eight years old and whose eyes were set so that he could not see. He told Eli, "I have just come from the battle line; I fled from it this very day." Eli asked, "What happened, my son?" The man who brought the news replied, "Israel fled before the Philistines, and the army has suffered heavy losses. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured." When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell backward off his chair by the side of the gate. His neck was broken and he died, for he was an old man and heavy. He had led Israel forty years. His daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant and near the time of delivery. When she heard the news that the ark of God had been captured and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she went into labor and gave birth, but was overcome by her labor pains. As she was dying, the women attending her said, "Don't despair; you have given birth to a son." But she did not**

**respond or pay any attention. She named the boy Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed from Israel"-because of the capture of the ark of God and the deaths of her father-in-law and her husband. She said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured." (NIV)**

iii. Everything would have gone there except the Ark of the Covenant (which was captured).

iv. Ahimelech was a descendent of Eli. **14:3; 22:9, 11, 20.**

v. **1 Samuel 14:3, among whom was Ahijah, who was wearing an ephod. He was a son of Ichabod's brother Ahitub son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the LORD's priest in Shiloh. No one was aware that Jonathan had left. (NIV)**

vi. **1 Samuel 22:9, 11, 20, But Doeg the Edomite, who was standing with Saul's officials, said, "I saw the son of Jesse come to Ahimelech son of Ahitub at Nob. Then the king sent for the priest Ahimelech son of Ahitub and his father's whole family, who were the priests at Nob, and they all came to the king. But Abiathar, a son of Ahimelech son of Ahitub, escaped and fled to join David. (NIV)**

vii. It is interesting to note that Ahimelech feared David's presence.

viii. Youngblood thought it might have been due to David's reputation (as a warrior) and one who operated on the king's authority. (p. 727)

ix. If that is the case, it might explain the following words of the narrative.

2. David lied to Ahimelech and asked for sustenance. **21:2-7.**

a. **1 Samuel 21:2-7, David answered Ahimelech the priest, "The king charged me with a certain matter and said to me, 'No one is to know anything about your mission and your instructions.' As for my men, I have told them to meet me at a certain place. Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find." 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." David replied, "Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual whenever I set out. The men's things are holy even on missions that are not holy. How much more so today!" 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. Now one of Saul's servants was there that day, detained before the LORD; he was Doeg the Edomite, Saul's head shepherd. (NIV)**

b. The priest's question to David was an inquiry into the reason for his "loneness."

i. David, perhaps, not knowing whom he could trust offered an answer that is not remotely close to the truth.

ii. The priest, having no reason to think David lied to him, accepted his answer.

iii. David's lies were two: (1) He lied about a mission the king sent him on – the king sent him on no mission; he was fleeing from the king. (2) He lied about his men being stationed at a different location – there were no men with him (as per the written text) when he fled from Saul; however, it is to be noted that there was a gathering of a number of people later.

c. David was in need of food, as well as weapons.

i. The only food available was the sacred bread provided for the priests. **Leviticus 24:5-9.**

ii. **Leviticus 24:5-9, "Take fine flour and bake twelve loaves of bread, using two-tenths of an ephah for each loaf. Set them in two rows, six in each row, on the table of pure gold before the LORD. Along each row put some pure incense as a memorial portion to represent the bread and to be an offering made to the LORD by fire. This bread is to be set out before the LORD regularly, Sabbath after Sabbath, on behalf of the Israelites, as a lasting covenant. It belongs to Aaron and his sons, who are to eat it in a holy place, because it is**

**a most holy part of their regular share of the offerings made to the LORD by fire." (NIV)**

iii. Ahimelech thought it was permissible for David to have the bread if his body was pure, that is, if he had had no sexual relations with women (**21:4-5**) within the stipulated time.

**iv. 1 Samuel 21:4, 5, 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." David replied, "Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual whenever I set out. The men's things are holy even on missions that are not holy. How much more so today!" (NIV)**

v. The text of 1 Samuel 21 allows one to think that Ahimelech thought nothing of an impropriety in giving the sacred bread to David when this food was for the priests only (**Exodus 29:32-33; Leviticus 22:10-16**), but was it?

**vi. 1 Samuel 21:3-6, Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find." 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." David replied, "Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual whenever I set out. The men's things are holy even on missions that**

**are not holy. How much more so today!" 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. (NIV)**

**vii. Exodus 29:32,33, At the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, Aaron and his sons are to eat the meat of the ram and the bread that is in the basket. They are to eat these offerings by which atonement was made for their ordination and consecration. But no one else may eat them, because they are sacred. (NIV)**

**viii. Leviticus 22:10-16, " 'No one outside a priest's family may eat the sacred offering, nor may the guest of a priest or his hired worker eat it. But if a priest buys a slave with money, or if a slave is born in his household, that slave may eat his food. If a priest's daughter marries anyone other than a priest, she may not eat any of the sacred contributions. But if a priest's daughter becomes a widow or is divorced, yet has no children, and she returns to live in her father's house as in her youth, she may eat of her father's food. No unauthorized person, however, may eat any of it. " 'If anyone eats a sacred offering by mistake, he must make restitution to the priest for the offering and add a fifth of the value to it. The priests must not desecrate the sacred offerings the Israelites present to the LORD by allowing them to eat the sacred offerings and so bring upon them**

**guilt requiring payment. I am the LORD, who makes them holy.' " (NIV)**

ix. Not according to **Leviticus 22:10-16.**

x. Did Ahimelech, then, compromise the Lord's will? It appeared so.

xi. However, before one extends to Ahimelech any criticism, consider the words of the Lord in **Matthew 12:1-8, At that time Jesus went on the sabbath day through the corn; and his disciples were an hungred, and began to pluck the ears of corn and to eat. But when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto him, Behold, thy disciples do that which is not lawful to do upon the sabbath day. But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him; How he entered into the house of God, and did eat the shewbread, which was not lawful for him to eat, neither for them which were with him, but only for the priests? Or have ye not read in the law, how that on the sabbath days the priests in the temple profane the sabbath, and are blameless? But I say unto you, That in this place is one greater than the temple. But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of man is Lord even of the sabbath day. (KJV)**

xii. It might be worth noting that in **Mark 2:26**, the Lord used the name Abiathar, not Ahimelech. Contradiction? No. It is best understood, as the NKJV reads, "in the days of..." Thus, our Lord was very much correct when he used the name of Abiathar.

xiii. **Mark 2:26, How he went into the house of God in the days of Abiathar the high priest, and did eat the shewbread, which is not lawful to eat but for the priests, and gave also to them which were with him? (KJV)**

3. David retrieved the sword used to kill Goliath.

a. **1 Samuel 21:8, 9, David asked Ahimelech, "Don't you have a spear or a sword here? I haven't brought my sword or any other weapon, because the king's business was urgent." 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." (NIV)**

b. After answering the priest's question, David, having inquired of food, now inquired about weapons, saying the king's order demanded that he move with haste. Thus, he was without weapons in order to expedite the king's order. **21:8.**

c. The only one available was the sword that belonged to Goliath.

i. There may be something symbolic in this event.

ii. Goliath wielded the sword to defeat David and Israel but the Lord took the sword away from Goliath and it became confined to a sacred area belonging to the Lord.

iii. Now David took the sword and, symbolically, wielded it to hold Saul at bay.

4. Doeg, the Edomite.

**a. 1 Samuel 21:7, Now one of Saul's servants was there that day, detained before the LORD; he was Doeg the Edomite, Saul's head shepherd. (NIV)**

i. There are some names that live in infamy, and Doeg is one of them.

ii. No right thinking parent would consider naming a daughter Jezebel nor a son Doeg!

iii. Doeg was an Edomite (descendent of Esau).

iv. Rabbinic legend has it that this man was the greatest scholar of his time. (N-ISBE, vol. 1, p. 980)

v. If this is true it doesn't say much for the scholarship of his day.

vi. Reflect on **Psalm 52:1-9**, **Why do you boast of evil, you mighty man? Why do you boast all day long, you who are a disgrace in the eyes of God? Your tongue plots destruction; it is like a sharpened razor, you who practice deceit. You love evil rather than good, falsehood rather than speaking the truth. You love every harmful word, O you deceitful tongue! Surely God will bring you down to everlasting ruin: He will snatch you up and tear you from your tent; he will uproot you from the land of the living. The righteous will see and fear; they will laugh at him, saying, "Here now is the man who did not make God his stronghold but trusted in his great wealth and grew strong by destroying others!" But I am like an olive tree flourishing in the house of God; I trust in God's unfailing love for ever and ever. I will praise you forever for what you have done; in your name I will hope, for your name is good. I will praise you in the presence of your saints. (NIV)**

vii. Tradition has it that this Psalm was written because of the murderous activity of Doeg.

## **David at Gath**

**1 Samuel 21:10-15, That day David fled from Saul and went to Achish king of Gath. 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'?" David took these words to heart and was very much afraid of Achish**

**king of Gath. 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. Achish said to his servants, "Look at the man! He is insane! Why bring him to me? 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?" (NIV)**

I. David went to Gath.

A. Gath feared David.

**1. 1 Samuel 21:10-12, That day David fled from Saul and went to Achish king of Gath. 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'?" David took these words to heart and was very much afraid of Achish king of Gath. (NIV)**

a. Even though David was a man on the run, he was well known to be a warrior, a fighting man.

i. Thus, while he had to be on his guard with respect to Saul, now he had to watch out for enemies in Gath.

**2. The Philistines would have considered David a tremendous threat to them, something on the order (perhaps) of Samson.**

a. David's reputation would be all the greater because it was from Gath that Goliath came. **17:4.**

**i. 1 Samuel 17:4, A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. He was over nine feet tall. (NIV)**

3. With all this before David, he knew that he had to take the words of the Philistines seriously for he was threatened with a “two-front” war (so to speak).

B. David became a “madman.”

**1. 1 Samuel 21:13-15, 13. 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. Achish said to his servants, "Look at the man! He is insane! Why bring him to me? 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?" (NIV)**

2. David was in a tough spot.

a. The options that might have been available to David may not be known, but the option he chose, as Gordon said, was not regal (royal).

i. In any case, David’s choice was effective.

3. The Philistine king saw the “madness” of David and knew well that he did not need another insane person in his community.

4. It is interesting that Adam Clarke actually considered the *ethics* of David’s actions.

i. Clarke gave no summary conclusion, but merely referred to the writings of another.

ii. John Gill, on the other hand, thought nothing was improper about the actions of David on account of the circumstances.

5. God-fearing people understand that lying is wrong, but in this case involving self-preservation (as David was experiencing it), how would you have handled the situation differently?

6. One should consider that perhaps God was watching over and directing David's behavior, because the Philistine king could have easily ordered David to be apprehended and executed.

## Questions

### On

### 1 Samuel 21:1-15

#### (Questions based on NIV text.)

1. What circumstances led to David's going to Nob and later to Gath? \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Who was Ahimelech? What questions did he ask David? Why was Ahimelech afraid? \_\_\_\_\_

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3. What answers did David give to Ahimelech's questions? \_\_\_\_\_

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4. Were David's answers truthful? If not, was he justified in lying? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. For what two things did David ask Ahimelech? \_\_\_\_\_

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6. What did Ahimelech offer David to eat? Was there anything wrong with David's eating this food? \_\_\_\_\_

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7. What did women have to do with David's eating? Explain the meaning of, "The men's things are holy even on missions that are not holy." \_\_\_\_\_

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8. Who was Abiathar? \_\_\_\_\_

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9. Geographically locate Nob, Gath and the Valley of Elah. \_\_\_\_\_

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10. What weapon was given David? What is the significance of this weapon? \_\_\_\_\_

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11. Who was Doeg? Give as much information as you can about Doeg. Was he a nice fellow? \_\_\_\_\_

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12. Why would David have chosen to go to Achish, the king of Gath, a Philistine enemy? \_\_\_\_\_

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13. What did Achish's servants report about David to their king? \_\_\_\_\_

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14. Why was David afraid of Achish? \_\_\_\_\_

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15. What technique did David use to avoid execution? Did David conduct himself ethically in this matter? Explain, justify your answer. \_\_\_\_\_

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16. What was Achish's response to his servant's concern about David's being a threat to them? \_\_\_\_\_

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17. What did Jesus say about David, Ahimelech and David's eating the bread of the Presence? \_\_\_\_\_

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18. What is the historical background of **Psalm 52**? \_\_\_\_\_

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19. What behaviors evidenced by David in **1 Samuel 21** support the fact that he was “a man after God’s own heart?” \_\_\_\_\_

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20. What behaviors, if any, mentioned in **1 Samuel 21** depict another view of David? \_\_\_\_\_

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**Answers**  
**To**  
**Questions**  
**On**  
**1 Samuel 21:1-15**  
**(Questions based on NIV text.)**

1. What circumstances led to David's going to Nob and later to Gath?  
**David was fleeing the wrath of Saul.**
2. Who was Ahimelech? What questions did he ask David? Why was Ahimelech afraid? **Ahimelech was the priest at Nob. Ahimelech feared David because he was alone. Ahimelech asked, "Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?"**
3. What answers did David give to Ahimelech's questions? **David said he was on a secret (confidential) mission for the king.**
4. Were David's answers truthful? If not, was he justified in lying? **1) No 2) Yes, it saved his life. Ahimelech did not need to know what motivated David.**
5. For what two things did David ask Ahimelech? **Food and a weapon.**
6. What did Ahimelech offer David to eat? Was there anything wrong with David's eating this food? **Ahimelech offered him the day-old bread of**

**the Presence. According to the Mosaic code in the Old Testament, it was wrong. According to Jesus in the New Testament, it was not wrong. See Leviticus 24:5-9 and Mark 2:26. Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. Right or wrong depends upon who was eating the bread and how you interpret the scripture.**

7. What did women have to do with David's eating? Explain the meaning of, "The men's things are holy even on missions that are not holy." **If the men had had sexual relations with women within a certain timeframe, the men would have been unclean and could not eat the sacred bread. The men had to remain holy even if the mission itself was not classified as holy.**

8. Who was Abiathar? **Abiathar: Mark 2:26 records Abiathar as High Priest at Nob when David ate the day-old shewbread. He was later slain by Saul along with eighty-four (84) other priests at Nob. He was the son of Ahimelech.**

9. Geographically locate Nob, Gath and the Valley of Elah. **(1) Nob: Located in Benjamin between Anathoth and Jerusalem (Nehemiah 11:31-32). (2) Gath: Part of the Philistine city-state of Ekron, Ashdod, Ashkelon, and Gaza. (3) Valley of Elah: The valley where David slew Goliath. Runs east and west just north of Socoh.**

10. What weapon was given David? What is the significance of this weapon? **Goliath's sword. The captured sword signified Israel's victory over Goliath and the Philistines.**

11. Who was Doeg? Give as much information as you can about Doeg. Was he a nice fellow? **Doeg was an Edomite, chief of Saul's herdsmen. He was an evil man. He killed eighty-five (85) priests, women and children, along with cattle at the house of Ahimelech. He was a very evil, bloodthirsty man.**

12. Why would David have chosen to go to Achish, the king of Gath, a Philistine enemy? **This was strategically a perfect hiding place. Who would search for David in his enemies' camp?**

13. What did Achish's servants report about David to their king? **David had gone mad.**

14. Why was David afraid of Achish? **He feared him enough that he acted insane. He was the enemy. Achish was the king of Gath, part of the Philistine territory. David had every right to fear Achish, especially when he knew Achish recognized him.**

15. What technique did David use to avoid execution? Did David conduct himself ethically in this matter? Explain, justify your answer. **David acted as if he were insane. We can surmise God was directing him, using this charade to spare his life.**

16. What was Achish's response to his servant's concern about David's being a threat to them? **He was dismissive, claiming he had enough "mad-men" around him without adding another. At this point, he had no fear of David.**

17. What did Jesus say about David, Ahimelech and David's eating the bread of the Presence? **Jesus went against the Mosaic code, saying in effect that He was Lord of the Sabbath, and explained that in this circumstance David did no wrong.**

18. What is the historical background of Psalm 52? **David wrote Psalm 52 when Doeg the Edomite had gone to Saul and told him, "David has gone to the house of Ahimelech."**

19. What behaviors evidenced by David in 1 Samuel 21 support the fact that he was "a man after God's own heart?" **Upon arrival in Nob, David**

**went to the priest. He fought Israel's battles. He had great faith in God.**

20. What behaviors, if any, mentioned in **1 Samuel 21** depict another view of David? **David lied to Ahimelech. He ate consecrated bread which it was not for him to eat. He pretended falsely to be insane.**