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Kings and Prophets 1 Samuel 20-24 By Kirk Gambrell

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Using This Study

❶ EXAMINE His Word

What does God SAY? Open your time with prayer. The words God uses to communicate matters, so go back and pay close attention to the details that are emphasized or repeated in the passage.

❷ EXPLORE His Word

What does God MEAN? Asking questions of the text helps surface how the details relate to the message God wants to communicate.

❸ EMBRACE His Word

Why does it MATTER to me? Embrace God by responding to what you discover in His word in faith and obedience.



In Chapters 20 – 24, David has gained a great deal of popularity and made Saul very jealous. Saul's jealousy drives him to lash out at David on multiple occasions. At the same time, David has formed a bond with Saul's son, Jonathan. Jonathan seeks to protect David after discovering the harsh truth that his father is trying to kill David. While David is on the run, he shows the condition of his heart, revealing more about why God chose him to be the next king. David is patient for the Lord to work, and confident in the Lord's sovereignty, but above all, he has a strong faith and a relentless desire to serve the Lord, even in the midst of overwhelming odds.



Read 1 Samuel 20-24 (NET)

20 ¹ David fled from Naioth in Ramah. He came to Jonathan and asked, "What have I done? What is my offense? How have I sinned before your father? For he is seeking my life!"

² Jonathan said to him, "By no means are you going to die! My father does nothing large or small without making me aware of it. Why would my father hide this matter from me? It just won't happen!"

³ Taking an oath, David again said, "Your father is very much aware of the fact that I have found favor with you, and he has thought, 'Don't let Jonathan know about this, or he will be upset.' But as surely as the Lord lives and you live, there is about one step between me and death!" ⁴ Jonathan replied to David, "Tell me what I can do for you."

⁵ David said to Jonathan, "Tomorrow is the new moon, and I am certainly expected to join the king for a meal. You must send me away so I can hide in the field until the third evening from now. ⁶ If your father happens to miss me, you should say, 'David urgently requested me to let him go to his city Bethlehem, for there is an annual sacrifice there for his entire family.' ⁷ If he should then say, 'That's fine,' then your servant is safe. But if he becomes very angry, be assured that he has decided to harm me. ⁸ You must be loyal to your servant, for you have made a covenant with your servant in the Lord's name. If I am guilty, you yourself kill me! Why bother taking me to your father?"

⁹ Jonathan said, "Far be it from you to suggest this! If I were at all aware that my father had decided to harm you, wouldn't I tell you about it?"

¹⁰ David said to Jonathan, "Who will tell me if your father answers you harshly?" ¹¹ Jonathan said to David, "Come on. Let's go out to the field."

When the two of them had gone out into the field, ¹² Jonathan said to David, "The Lord God of Israel is my witness. I will feel out my father about this time the day after tomorrow. If he is favorably inclined toward David, will I not then send word to you and let you know? ¹³ But if my father intends to do you harm, may the Lord do all this and more to Jonathan, if I don't let you know and send word to you so you can go safely on your way. May the Lord be with you, as he was with my father. ¹⁴ While I am still alive, extend to me the loyalty of the Lord, or else I will die! ¹⁵ Don't ever cut off your loyalty to my family, not even when the Lord has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth ¹⁶ and called David's enemies to account." So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David. ¹⁷ Jonathan once again took an oath with David,

because he loved him. In fact Jonathan loved him as much as he did his own life. ¹⁸ Jonathan said to him, "Tomorrow is the new moon, and you will be missed, for your seat will be empty. ¹⁹ On the third day you should go down quickly and come to the place where you hid yourself the day this all started. Stay near the stone Ezel. ²⁰ I will shoot three arrows near it, as though I were shooting at a target.

²¹ When I send a boy after them, I will say, "Go and find the arrows." If I say to the boy, 'Look, the arrows are on this side of you; get them,' then come back. For as surely as the Lord lives, you will be safe and there will be no problem. ²² But if I say to the boy, "Look, the arrows are on the other side of you,' get away. For in that case the Lord has sent you away. ²³ With regard to the matter that you and I discussed, the Lord is the witness between us forever!"

²⁴ So David hid in the field. When the new moon came, the king sat down to eat his meal. ²⁵ The king sat down in his usual place by the wall, with Jonathan opposite him and Abner at his side. But David's place was vacant. ²⁶ However, Saul said nothing about it that day, for he thought, "Something has happened to make him ceremonially unclean. Yes, he must be unclean." ²⁷ But the next morning, the second day of the new moon, David's place was still vacant. So Saul said to his son Jonathan, "Why has Jesse's son not come to the meal yesterday or today?"

²⁸ Jonathan replied to Saul, "David urgently requested that he be allowed to go to Bethlehem.

²⁹ He said, 'Permit me to go, for we are having a family sacrifice in the city, and my brother urged me to be there. So now, if I have found favor with you, let me go to see my brothers.' For that reason he has not come to the king's table."

³⁰ Saul became angry with Jonathan and said to him, "You stupid traitor! Don't I realize that to your own disgrace and to the disgrace of your mother's nakedness you have chosen this son of Jesse?"

³¹ For as long as this son of Jesse is alive on the earth, you and your kingdom will not be established. Now, send some men and bring him to me. For he is as good as dead!"

³² Jonathan responded to his father Saul, "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?"

³³ Then Saul threw his spear at Jonathan in order to strike him down. So Jonathan was convinced that his father had decided to kill David. ³⁴ Jonathan got up from the table enraged. He did not eat any food on that second day of the new moon, for he was upset that his father had humiliated David.

³⁵ The next morning Jonathan, along with a young servant, went out to the field to meet David. ³⁶ He said to his servant, "Run, find the arrows that I am about to shoot." As the servant ran, Jonathan shot the arrow beyond him. ³⁷ When the servant came to the place where Jonathan had shot the arrow, Jonathan called out to the servant, "Isn't the arrow further beyond you?" ³⁸ Jonathan called out to the servant, "Hurry! Go faster! Don't delay!" Jonathan's servant retrieved the arrow and came back to his master. ³⁹ (Now the servant did not understand any of this. Only Jonathan and David knew what was going on.) ⁴⁰ Then Jonathan gave his equipment to the servant who was with him. He said to him, "Go, take these things back to the city." ⁴¹ When the servant had left, David got up from beside the mound, knelt with his face to the ground, and bowed three times. Then they kissed each other and they both wept, especially David. ⁴² Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, for the two of us have sworn together in the name of the Lord saying, 'The Lord will be between me and you and between my descendants and your descendants forever.'"

Then David got up and left, while Jonathan went back to the city. **21** ¹ David went to Ahimelech the priest in Nob. Ahimelech was shaking with fear when he met David, and said to him, "Why are you by yourself with no one accompanying you?" ² David replied to Ahimelech the priest, "The king instructed me to do something, but he said to me, 'Don't let anyone know the reason I am sending you or the instructions I have given you.' I have told my soldiers to wait at a certain place. ³ Now what do you have at your disposal? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever can be found."

⁴ The priest replied to David, "I don't have any ordinary bread at my disposal. Only holy bread is available, and then only if your soldiers have abstained from sexual relations with women." ⁵ David said to the priest, "Certainly women have been kept away from us, just as on previous occasions when I have set out. The soldiers' equipment is holy, even on an ordinary journey. How much more so will they be holy today, along with their equipment!"

⁶ So the priest gave him holy bread, for there was no bread there other than the bread of the Presence. It had been removed from before the Lord in order to replace it with hot bread on the day it had been taken away. ⁷ (One of Saul's servants was there that day, detained before the Lord. His name was Doeg the Edomite, who was in charge of Saul's shepherds.) ⁸ David said to Ahimelech, "Is

there no sword or spear here at your disposal? I don't have my own sword or equipment in hand due to the urgency of the king's instructions."

⁹ The priest replied, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you struck down in the valley of Elah, is wrapped in a garment behind the ephod. If you wish, take it for yourself. Other than that, there's nothing here." David said, "There's nothing like it! Give it to me!" ¹⁰ So on that day David arose and fled from Saul. He went to King Achish of Gath. ¹¹ The servants of Achish said to him, "Isn't this David, the king of the land? Isn't he the one that they sing about when they dance, saying,

'Saul struck down his thousands,
But David his tens of thousands?'"

¹² David thought about what they said and was very afraid of King Achish of Gath. ¹³ He altered his behavior in their presence. Since he was in their power, he pretended to be insane, making marks on the doors of the gate and letting his saliva run down his beard.

¹⁴ Achish said to his servants, "Look at this madman! Why did you bring him to me? ¹⁵ Do I have a shortage of fools, that you have brought me this man to display his insanity in front of me? Should this man enter my house?"

22 ¹ So David left there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. When his brothers and the rest of his father's family learned about it, they went down there to him. ² All those who were in trouble or owed someone money or were discontented gathered around him, and he became their leader. He had about four hundred men with him.

³ Then David went from there to Mizpah in Moab, where he said to the king of Moab, "Please let my father and mother stay with you until I know what God is going to do for me." ⁴ So he had them stay with the king of Moab; they stayed with him the whole time that David was in the stronghold. ⁵ Then Gad the prophet said to David, "Don't stay in the stronghold. Go to the land of Judah." So David left and went to the forest of Hereth.

⁶ But Saul found out the whereabouts of David and the men who were with him. Now Saul was sitting at Gibeah under the tamarisk tree at an elevated location with his spear in hand and all his servants stationed around him. ⁷ Saul said to his servants who were stationed around him, "Listen up, you Benjaminites! Is Jesse's son giving fields and vineyards to all of you? Or is he making all of you commanders and officers? ⁸ For all of you have conspired against me! No one informs me when my own son makes an agreement with this son of Jesse! Not one of you feels sorry for me or informs

me that my own son has commissioned my own servant to hide in ambush against me, as is the case today!"

⁹ But Doeg the Edomite, who had stationed himself with the servants of Saul, replied, "I saw this son of Jesse come to Ahimelech son of Ahitub at Nob. ¹⁰ He inquired of the Lord for him and gave him provisions. He also gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine."

¹¹ Then the king arranged for a meeting with the priest Ahimelech son of Ahitub and all the priests of his father's house who were at Nob. They all came to the king. ¹² Then Saul said, "Listen, son of Ahitub." He replied, "Here I am, my lord." ¹³ Saul said to him, "Why have you conspired against me, you and this son of Jesse? You gave him bread and a sword and inquired of God on his behalf, so that he opposes me and waits in ambush, as is the case today!"

¹⁴ Ahimelech replied to the king, "Who among all your servants is faithful like David? He is the king's son-in-law, the leader of your bodyguard, and honored in your house! ¹⁵ Was it just today that I began to inquire of God on his behalf? Far be it from me! The king should not accuse his servant or any of my father's house. For your servant is not aware of all this—not in whole or in part!"

¹⁶ But the king said, "You will surely die, Ahimelech, you and all your father's house! ¹⁷ Then the king said to the messengers who were stationed beside him, "Turn and kill the priests of the Lord, for they too have sided with David! They knew he was fleeing, but they did not inform me." But the king's servants refused to harm the priests of the Lord.

¹⁸ Then the king said to Doeg, "You turn and strike down the priests!" So Doeg the Edomite turned and struck down the priests. He killed on that day eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod. ¹⁹ As for Nob, the city of the priests, he struck down with the sword men and women, children and infants, oxen, donkeys, and sheep—all with the sword.

²⁰ But one of the sons of Ahimelech son of Ahitub escaped and fled to David. His name was Abiathar. ²¹ Abiathar told David that Saul had killed the priests of the Lord. ²² Then David said to Abiathar, "I knew that day when Doeg the Edomite was there that he would certainly tell Saul! I am guilty of all the deaths in your father's house! ²³ Stay with me. Don't be afraid! Whoever seeks my life is seeking your life as well. You are secure with me."

23 ¹ They told David, "The Philistines are fighting in Keilah and are looting the threshing floors." ² So David asked the Lord, "Should I go and strike down these Philistines?" The Lord said to

David, "Go, strike down the Philistines and deliver Keilah."

³ But David's men said to him, "We are afraid while we are still here in Judah! What will it be like if we go to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?" ⁴ So David asked the Lord once again. But again the Lord replied, "Arise, go down to Keilah, for I will give the Philistines into your hand."

⁵ So David and his men went to Keilah and fought the Philistines. He took away their cattle and thoroughly defeated them. David delivered the inhabitants of Keilah.

⁶ Now when Abiathar son of Ahimelech had fled to David at Keilah, he had brought with him an ephod. ⁷ When Saul was told that David had come to Keilah, Saul said, "God has delivered him into my hand, for he has boxed himself into a corner by entering a city with two barred gates." ⁸ So Saul mustered all his army to go down to Keilah and besiege David and his men.

⁹ When David realized that Saul was planning to harm him, he told Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod!" ¹⁰ Then David said, "O Lord God of Israel, your servant has clearly heard that Saul is planning to come to Keilah to destroy the city because of me. ¹¹ Will the leaders of Keilah deliver me into his hand? Will Saul come down as your servant has heard? O Lord God of Israel, please inform your servant!"

Then the Lord said, "He will come down." ¹² David asked, "Will the leaders of Keilah deliver me and my men into Saul's hand?" The Lord said, "They will deliver you over."

¹³ So David and his men, who numbered about six hundred, set out and left Keilah; they moved around from one place to another. When told that David had escaped from Keilah, Saul called a halt to his expedition. ¹⁴ David stayed in the strongholds that were in the desert and in the hill country of the desert of Ziph. Saul looked for him all the time, but God did not deliver David into his hand. ¹⁵ David realized that Saul had come out to seek his life; at that time David was in Horesh in the desert of Ziph.

¹⁶ Then Jonathan son of Saul left and went to David at Horesh. He encouraged him through God. ¹⁷ He said to him, "Don't be afraid! For the hand of my father Saul cannot find you. You will rule over Israel, and I will be your second in command. Even my father Saul realizes this." ¹⁸ When the two of them had made a covenant before the Lord, David stayed on at Horesh, but Jonathan went to his house.

¹⁹ Then the Ziphites went up to Saul at Gibeah and said, "Isn't David hiding among us in the

strongholds at Horesh on the hill of Hakilah, south of Jeshimon? ²⁰ Now at your own discretion, O king, come down. Delivering him into the king's hand will be our responsibility."

²¹ Saul replied, "May you be blessed by the Lord, for you have had compassion on me. ²² Go and make further arrangements. Determine precisely where he is and who has seen him there, for I am told that he is extremely cunning. ²³ Locate precisely all the places where he hides and return to me with dependable information. Then I will go with you. If he is in the land, I will find him among all the thousands of Judah."

²⁴ So they left and went to Ziph ahead of Saul. Now David and his men were in the desert of Maon, in the Arabah to the south of Jeshimon. ²⁵ Saul and his men went to look for him. But David was informed and went down to the rock and stayed in the desert of Maon. When Saul heard about it, he pursued David in the desert of Maon. ²⁶ Saul went on one side of the mountain, while David and his men went on the other side of the mountain. David was hurrying to get away from Saul, but Saul and his men were surrounding David and his men so they could capture them. ²⁷ But a messenger came to Saul saying, "Come quickly, for the Philistines have raided the land!"

²⁸ So Saul stopped pursuing David and went to confront the Philistines. Therefore that place is called Sela Hammahlekoth. ²⁹ Then David went up from there and stayed in the strongholds of En Gedi.

24 ¹ When Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, they told him, "Look, David is in the desert of En Gedi." ² So Saul took three thousand select men from all Israel and went to find David and his men in the region of the rocks of the mountain goats. ³ He came to the sheepfolds by the road, where there was a cave. Saul went into it to relieve himself.

Now David and his men were sitting in the recesses of the cave. ⁴ David's men said to him, "This is the day about which the Lord said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hand, and you can do to him whatever seems appropriate to you.'" So David got up and quietly cut off an edge of Saul's robe. ⁵ Afterward David's conscience bothered him because he had cut off an edge of Saul's robe. ⁶ He said to his men, "May the Lord keep me far away from doing such a thing to my lord, who is the

Lord's chosen one, by extending my hand against him. After all, he is the Lord's chosen one." ⁷ David restrained his men with these words and did not allow them to rise up against Saul. Then Saul left the cave and started down the road.

⁸ Afterward David got up and went out of the cave. He called out after Saul, "My lord, O king!" When Saul looked behind him, David kneeled down and bowed with his face to the ground. ⁹ David said to Saul, "Why do you pay attention when men say, 'David is seeking to do you harm'?" ¹⁰ Today your own eyes see how the Lord delivered you—this very day—into my hands in the cave. Some told me to kill you, but I had pity on you and said, 'I will not extend my hand against my lord, for he is the Lord's chosen one.' ¹¹ Look, my father, and see the edge of your robe in my hand! When I cut off the edge of your robe, I didn't kill you. So realize and understand that I am not planning evil or rebellion. Even though I have not sinned against you, you are waiting in ambush to take my life. ¹² May the Lord judge between the two of us, and may the Lord vindicate me over you, but my hand will not be against you. ¹³ It's like the old proverb says: 'From evil people evil proceeds.' But my hand will not be against you. ¹⁴ Who has the king of Israel come out after? Who is it that you are pursuing? A dead dog? A single flea? ¹⁵ May the Lord be our judge and arbiter. May he see and arbitrate my case and deliver me from your hands!"

¹⁶ When David finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, "Is that your voice, my son David?" Then Saul wept loudly. ¹⁷ He said to David, "You are more innocent than I, for you have treated me well, even though I have tried to harm you! ¹⁸ You have explained today how you have treated me well. The Lord delivered me into your hand, but you did not kill me. ¹⁹ Now if a man finds his enemy, does he send him on his way in good shape? May the Lord repay you with good this day for what you have done to me. ²⁰ Now look, I realize that you will in fact be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hand. ²¹ So now swear to me in the Lord's name that you will not kill my descendants after me or destroy my name from the house of my father."

²² David promised Saul this on oath. Then Saul went to his house, and David and his men went up to the stronghold.

EXAMINE His Word (Observation) (For personal preparation)

What does God SAY? Prayerfully note significant details and terms emphasized in the foregoing passages.

1. Who is involved in the text? Author, audience, main characters.
2. Where and when is this taking place? Geography and timeline.
3. What actions are carried out or commanded? Look for the verbs.
4. Is there anything repeated?
5. What is emphasized?
6. Is there anything in these passages that is related to other areas of scripture?

7. Are there things to be noted that are alike or unlike such as similes and metaphors?

② EXPLORE His Word (Interpretation) (For Community Group discussion)
What does God MEAN?

8. Why does Jonathan try to protect David?

9. Why does David take the holy bread from the priest? Was it acceptable for him to take the bread?

10. David had already been appointed as the next king of Israel by the prophet Samuel. Why does David spare Saul's life in chapter 24 when he has the chance to kill Saul and take the throne?

11. Why does David feel bad about cutting off a piece of Saul's robe?

③ EMBRACE His Word (Application) (For Community Group discussion)
Why does this MATTER to me?

12. David is content to wait for God's timing to assume the throne. What do you think helps him be patient and how can we show that same patience in our lives?

13. David clearly recognizes the sovereignty of God when he refuses to strike Saul. In what areas of your life do you need to recognize the sovereignty of God?
14. Saul feels threatened by David's popularity and lashes out trying to kill David. Are there areas in our lives where we feel threatened by someone taking away our control? How can we overcome the threat of losing control?

Summarize your thoughts on the passage

Write about what God wants you to **KNOW**, to **FEEL**, and to **DO**...

SERMON NOTES