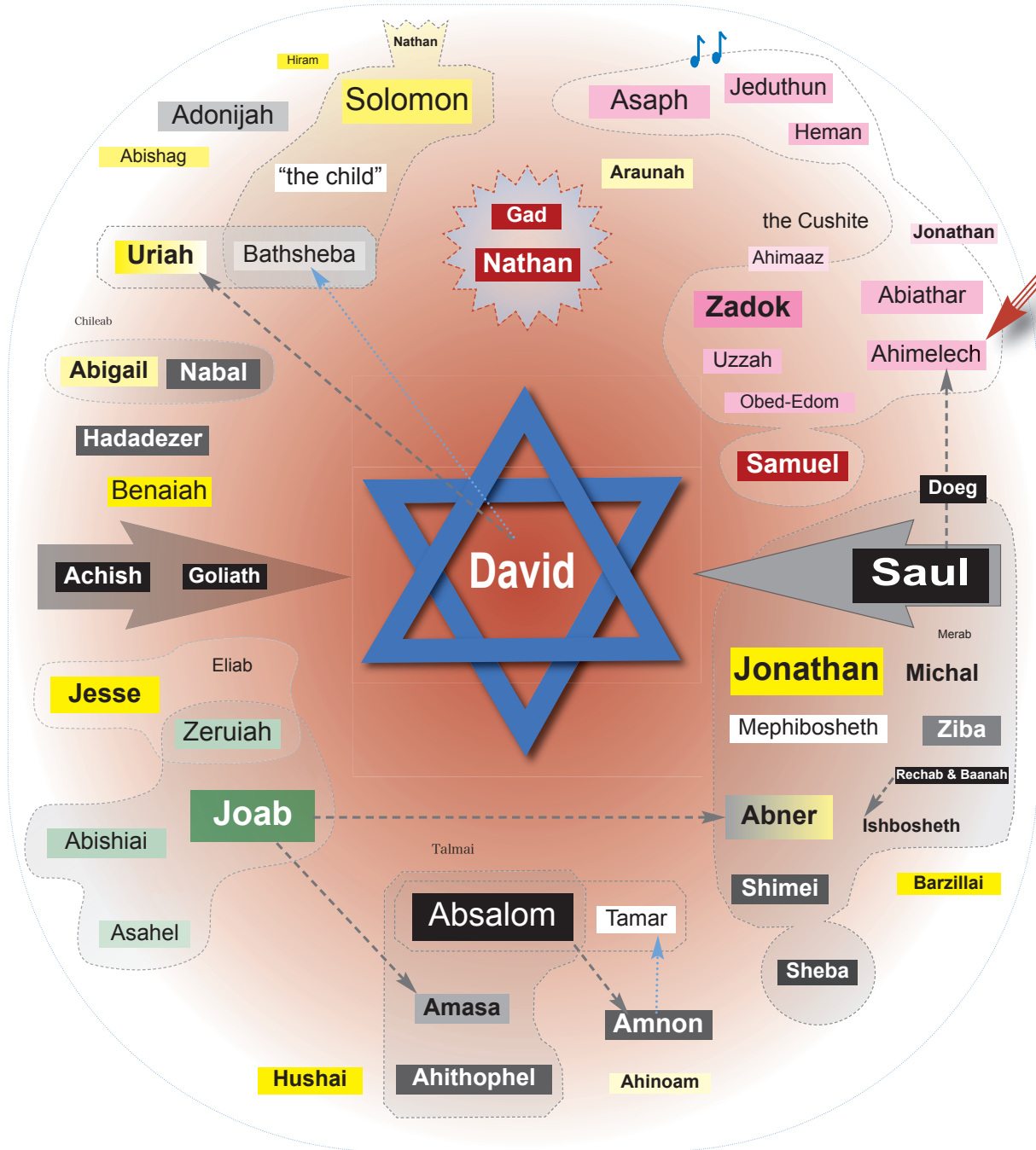


surrounded



people in the life of David

about Ahimelech

1. Ahimelech was a leading priest and a descendent of Eli. Like Jonathan and Michal, he was in a dangerous position, caught between Saul and David. In First Samuel ch. 21 he gave bread to David as he fled from Saul. Then in ch. 22 Saul killed him for doing so, even though he claimed that he had not knowingly sided with David.

2. One of the most important but difficult things to judge about Ahimelech is how much he knew about the conflict between David and Saul. It seems probable that he knew something since Nob was centrally located and he held an important priestly position. Also, his question in 21:1 shows that he was suspicious because David was traveling alone. Yet, there was no way for Ahimelech to check David's story. Later he told Saul that he knew nothing (22:15). If so, he was totally innocent; if not, he was not as innocent before Saul as he claimed. Either way, it was good that Ahimelech helped David, since God had chosen David over Saul, a fact which he probably knew from Samuel and others.

3. The story of David receiving and eating the priestly bread was used as an example by the Lord in Mark 2:25-26 to support being flexible rather than legalistic about the Sabbath. (Abiathar, whom Jesus named, was Ahimelech's son and served as priest with his father and for many years after.)

4. The deaths of the priests in ch. 22 is undoubtedly relate to the prophecy in ch. two against Eli's house, but it's significant that such is not directly stated.

descriptive terms

The list below will help you describe Ahimelech as seen in 1 Sam. chs. 21 and 22. Some terms fit him well, while others do not; so mark them as correct, incorrect or partly correct. Then use the list below to help fill out the worksheet on the opposite page.

a good priest

a national leader

helpful to David

happy to help David

legalistic, inflexible

mentioned in Mark 2:25-26

fearful of David

suspicious of David

lied to by David

deceived by David

not cautious enough

totally innocent

truthful, uninformed

disloyal to Saul

not given a fair trial

treated too severely

killed by Saul

killed by a non-Jew

unarmed, not a soldier

to be protected as a priest

unable to protect himself

a martyr

to be pitied

indirectly killed by David

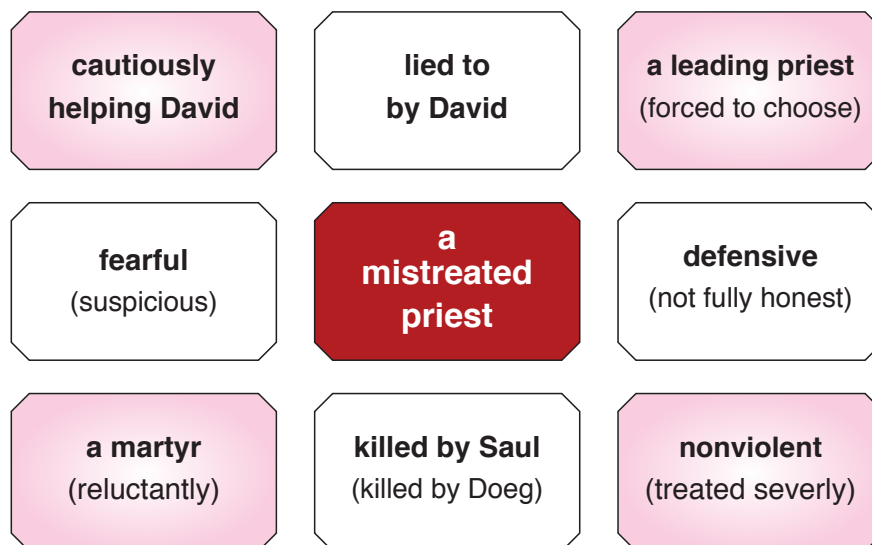
like Uzzah

Ahimelech

Humanly speaking, the key thing that should be said about Ahimelech is that he was a mistreated priest. Saul, of course, misjudged and killed him for helping David. Even Saul's men knew that this was too severe a punishment for a priest. A high priest who lost favor with the king could be replaced, but the Lord's priests were not to be slaughtered. Thus, the killing of the priest shows that Saul and Doeg, an Edomite, were fighting against God, himself. There is reason to believe that Ahimelech was not telling Saul the whole truth about why he helped David, but even so that was not an excuse to kill him and all the priest at Nob.

In addition to Saul, David also mistreated Ahimelech by lying to him about the reason he was traveling alone. Perhaps the fearful and suspicious priests would not have helped David otherwise, but that does not justify his dishonesty. David later admitted that he was indirectly responsible for their deaths (22:22). Still later he was indirectly responsible for Uzzah's death, as well (2 Sam. 6:6-8). Wrong decisions by leaders can lead to the death of innocent women and infants (22:19). Saul and David were both responsible (though not equally so) for the death of the priests. (Eli was responsible, as well, according to 1 Sam. 2:30-31.)

Ahimelech was...



What then should Ahimelech have done? Should he have been even more cautious and refused to help David? No! Helping David was the right thing to do. He was a martyr, though reluctantly so.

Though some things about this leading priest are uncertain, the selfish sinfulness of King Saul's actions toward him and his family are crystal clear. So more than anything else this study teaches us that we should not be like Saul.