

1 Samuel 21
February 12, 2023

Open with Prayer

REFRESHER: The book of 1 Samuels traces the transition of leadership in Israel from judges to kings, which would lead them to a monarchy. The monarchy gave them more stability because it was easier to follow an earthly king. As you will recall, the transition to a monarchy has not been a smooth one! Samuel was the kingmaker who anointed the first two kings for Israel. Saul was the first one anointed, and he quickly disobeyed God and became a tyrant. Consequently, God rejected Saul as the king and had Samuel anoint David as the new king.

David becomes God's-elect, and he serves in Saul's court. During this time, David defeats Goliath. Jonathan has a growing devotion to David and sees that he has been divinely appointed as the next king and works hard to protect David from Saul. Saul is insanely jealous at this point and has a goal to murder David, but God's hand of protection stays upon him with the help of Jonathan. From chapters 18-20, we see (7) different attempts by Saul to kill David, but all of them were foiled.

Today, we pick up with Chapter 21 where we still see David on the run. Let's see who God uses to protect David this time. Let's begin.

BOOK:

David at Nob

21 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 (or bodies) 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."

David at Gath

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?”

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn’t understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

It is amazing how men and women of faith can gradually become men and women of fear and unbelief. If we get in a hurry, trust people, and trust our own plans, before long everything falls to pieces, and we find ourselves out of the place of God’s blessing and protection. Let’s keep our trust in the Lord.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). *Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (1 Sam 20-21)*. Victor Books.

B. He lied to Ahimelech (21:1–9).

David fled again, this time to Nob, where the tabernacle was established. David always had a great love for the house of God, so perhaps he wanted to visit the tabernacle again before going into hiding. But he lied to the priest by claiming to be on business for Saul (v. 2). The priest gave David and his men the holy bread to eat and also the sword of Goliath for David's protection. The whole plan seemed to be successful, except that one of Saul's spies, Doeg, was there to witness the events; and this ultimately led to treachery and bloodshed (22:9ff; see Ps. 52 and note the title).

C. He lied to Achish (21:10–15).

Matters were going from bad to worse, just as they always do when we trust ourselves instead of the wisdom of God. David now fled into the hands of the enemy! "The fear of man brings a snare," and David almost snared himself right in enemy territory! Certainly the king would not tolerate a Jewish hero in his land, and David had to pretend to be out of his mind before he could escape. "O what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive." This might have been the end of David's life, but the Lord intervened and turned the heart of the king toward getting rid of David. He then fled to the cave of Adullam and organized his "outlaw band." See Ps. 34 and Ps. 56.

It is amazing how men and women of faith can gradually become men and women of fear and unbelief. If we get in a hurry, trust people, and trust our own plans, before long everything falls to pieces, and we find ourselves out of the place of God's blessing and protection. We shall see in later chapters that David learned to wait on the Lord and seek His will.

The friendship between David and Jonathan was something rare, for actually neither of them had anything to gain. Jonathan had lost the crown, and David could lose his life. Their unselfishness and constancy in spite of trials is a beautiful example of Christian love.

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) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

(1) David at Nob and Gath (chap. 21).

21:1–6. 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. Hungry from his flight, David asked the priest for **bread** (v. 3). 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. While **David** was at Nob, he was spotted by a spy of Saul, **Doeg the Edomite**, who informed Saul of David's whereabouts (v. 7; 22:9). Taking Goliath's **sword** which had been kept by the priests at Nob (21:8–9), **David** immediately **fled** for his life and, throwing all caution to the winds, fled to **Gath**, hometown of the dead Philistine hero Goliath (v. 10). Recognized by **Achish**, the lord of **Gath**, David pretended to be insane and so escaped Philistine reprisal (vv. 11–13). 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.

Mathews, K. A. (1998). *The Historical Books*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (p. 117). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

David's Deceptions (21:1–22:5). For fear of his life, David took matters into his own hands. At Nob he lied to the priest Ahimelech to save himself by receiving food and Goliath's sword. His deception would cost many innocent lives (see 22:18–19).

David mistakenly thought he could find refuge as a mercenary soldier in the Philistine city Gath, but Achish the king discovered his identity. David pretended to be a madman to save himself.

Philbeck, B. F. (1972). *1 Samuel*. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), *The Teacher's Bible Commentary* (p. 175). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

David, the Solitary Fugitive (1 Sam. 21:1–15)

The passage—David's break with Saul was finally complete. There follows an extended passage (through 28:2) dealing with David's fortunes as a fugitive. The story is told in such a way that God's guidance and protecting hand is seen underlying the entire narrative.

This chapter preserves two incidents which depict David's dire straits as a solitary fugitive from Saul's court. In the first of these he appeared before the priests of Nob asking for food and arms. In an effort to allay the suspicions of the fearful leader of the priestly band, David invented a secret mission supposedly undertaken at the king's command. Finally convinced by David's fanciful tale, the priest provided bread for him and his imaginary soldiers.

The second incident depicting David's helplessness during this period takes place in the Philistine town of Gath. Since Israel offered him no safe hiding places, David sought refuge among her enemies. Apparently, he hoped to live inconspicuously among the Philistines, but suspicious soldiers seized him and brought him before Achish. When it appeared that his identity had been guessed, but before it could be proven, David feigned madness and escaped detection.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (1 Samuel 21). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.