

1 Samuel Chapter 21 Commentary

1Sa 21:1 ¶ "Then came David to Nob to Ahimelech the priest: and Ahimelech was afraid at the meeting of David, and said unto him, Why art thou alone, and no man with thee?"

In this chapter, we see David, even though he is the Lord's anointed, and a man after God's own heart, running to save his natural life. He is in what we would call "survival mode." We notice; the first place David goes is where the priest of God and the tabernacle are. Our first resort in times of trouble should always be to God, through Jesus Christ.

Ahimelech, astutely, asks why David is alone. Why would Ahimelech be afraid of seeing David alone? Ahimelech knows David's status, in the kingdom of Saul, and knows that David should be accompanied by several people. David being alone tells Ahimelech that something is not right. Abimelech knows that if David has done something that is worthy of death and is trying to escape, any assistance given to David by Abimelech would be treason and punishable by death.

However, David has no where to go and resorting to the priest was the best place to start. David cannot go to his own family without bringing a death sentence upon them. David cannot return to Samuel because he knows there are informants to Saul in Naioth. David, having nowhere else to go, goes to the place where the tabernacle of the Lord is. Here he can inquire of God what he should do. Here he can worship God in the short window of time he has available. He does not know when he may again be able to resort to the place where God is worshipped. David's worship of the Lord was a dear thing in his heart and life. It is supposed that the ark of the covenant is currently here in Nob, which is a city of the priest, seen in: **1Sa 22:19 "And Nob, the city of the priests, smote he with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and asses, and sheep, with the edge of the sword."** We know that near the end of his life, because of his love for God, David will prepare a place for the tabernacle, the ark of God, to be near him in Jerusalem.

2 "And David said unto Ahimelech the priest, The king hath commanded me a business, and hath said unto me, Let no man know anything of the business whereabout I send thee, and what I have commanded thee: and I have appointed my servants to such and such a place."

David begins to spin his web of lies, which will only lead to more sin being committed. Later, as Doeg the Edomite falsely accuses Ahimelech and many priest are slain by Saul. David explains to Ahimelech: the king has sent me on a secret mission, and I have appointed my men to meet me in another place, after I have completed the secret mission of the king.

It is commonly accepted among mankind that it is okay to lie if it is about saving your life. However, that is not the Christian way. None was ever so pursued, hated, and his life sought after, than Jesus. Have you ever found, in scripture, where Jesus told a lie to save his life? Never did he tell a lie, and likewise, if we are going to profess to be a Christian, which means to be like Christ, or to follow the example of Christ, we should follow the example set by Jesus Christ, which means to be ready to give an answer from the bible.

Saul, at this time, was the man to be most afraid of in Israel. At this time, it would be easy to accuse David of being disobedient to God, or of being out of the will of God. As we have already pointed out, we cannot justify David lying, for that is sin in the sight of God. However, God does not hide any man's sins in scripture. God just tells it like it is. A reminder to us would be the scene of the woman accused of adultery that they brought to Jesus to tempt him. Do you remember what Jesus did? **Joh 8:7 "So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself, and said unto them, He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."** This is where we leave this matter. I am a sinner and cannot cast a stone at David for his actions, and neither can you.

There is one other thought that we would impress upon the reader: It may seem wrong, in our eyes, for David to flee from Saul, however, we are also told in scripture to not tempt God, seen in: **Mt 4:7 "Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God."** Here, Jesus is replying to the temptation of Satan to do himself harm, which had Jesus done what the devil wanted, it would have been tempting God. Had David remained where he was within Saul's reach, David would have been tempting God, which was not the right thing to do. God gave David the sense to know, that to survive he must flee for his life to some place of safety.

3 "Now therefore what is under thine hand? give me five loaves of bread in mine hand, or what there is present. 4 And the priest answered David, and said, There is no common bread under mine hand, but there is hallowed bread; if the young men have kept themselves at least from women. 5 And David answered the priest, and said unto him, Of a truth women have been kept from us about these three days, since I came out, and the vessels of the young men are holy, and the bread is in a manner common, yea, though it were sanctified this day in the vessel. 6 So the priest gave him hallowed bread: for there was no bread there but the shewbread, that was taken from before the LORD, to put hot bread in the day when it was taken away."

David asks for bread, for him and his men, to eat and to carry him on his way. He is told; there is no bread present, but that which is taken from before the Lord, as the holy bread is exchanged and replaced with new bread. David is told that for him and his men to eat this bread they must have been kept from women. David says that he, and his men, have been kept from women for at least three days, since he has been hiding out for three days. David declares that this holy bread is common, in a manner. We do find in the New Testament that Jesus sustained David in eating the bread, not in lying, as seen in: *Mt 12:3; 1 ¶ 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. 2 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. 3 But he said unto them, Have ye not read what David did, when he was an hungred, and they that were with him; 4 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?"* We learn some additional information from this text. Jesus said "**David and those that were with him:**" which indicates that though we are only reading of David in this chapter, it is obvious that he was accompanied by some men, which as he told the priest he had told them to wait for him in another place.

Ahimelech tells David that they could eat the bread "*if the young men have kept themselves at least from women.*" We reference this phrase to the scripture seen in: *Ex 19:15; Ex 19:1 ¶ In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai. 2 For they were departed from Rephidim, and were come to the desert of Sinai, and had pitched in the wilderness; and there Israel camped before the mount. 3 And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; 4 Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. 5 Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: 6 And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel. 7 And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LORD commanded him. 8 And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD. 9 ¶ And the LORD said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee forever. And Moses told the words of the people unto the LORD. 10 And the LORD said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes, 11 And be ready against the third day: for the third day the LORD will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai. 12 And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, that ye go not up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount shall be surely put to death: 13 There shall not an hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether it be beast or man, it shall not live: when the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount. 14 And Moses went down from the mount unto the people, and sanctified the people; and they washed their clothes. 15 And he said unto the people, Be ready against the third day: come not at your wives."* In this text: God is giving instruction for the three-day cleansing that he might appear before Israel and speak to them. We point out that God told them, "*if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant,*" you shall be to me "**a kingdom of priests.**" A portion of the cleansing process was that the men "**come not at your wives.**" Wherefore, we reason out that God's people, under the law ordinances, are all priest, if they are following the commandments of God and are clean. Wherefore, it would be acceptable for David and his men to eat the hallowed bread which was to be eaten by the priest of God only, because in God's eyes, all his people are priests unto him.

We point out that Jesus also said: ***Mt 12:4 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?*** It was against the law commandments, but it was not actual a sin against God, or Jesus would have condemned David for his actions.

7 "Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the LORD; and his name was Doeg, an Edomite, the chiefest of the herdmen that belonged to Saul. 8 And David said unto Ahimelech, And is there not here under thine hand spear or sword? for I have neither brought my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste. 9 And the priest said, The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom thou slewest in the valley of Elah, behold, it is here wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod: if thou wilt take that, take it: for there is no other save that here. And David said, There is none like that; give it me."

"detained before the LORD" We are not told the nature of the business that detained Doeg. We presume that he was there to fulfill some vow or other religious purpose, or it was on the sabbath, and he could not travel under the law ordinances. Doeg will falsely accuse David and Ahimelech of conspiracy against Saul when the occasion rises. We should expect no less from Doeg because he is an Edomite. The Edomites were not of the tribes of Israel and were most often at odds with Israel.

David asks for any weapon that Ahimelech might have on hand, saying that the secret mission of the king required such haste that he did not have time to get his weapons. To me, it is surprising that David does not have his sword and other weapons. However, several commentators point out that in that time, those who were in the presence of the king's court did not always wear their weapons continually. They were not needed because the king had his own men on watch and armed to always defend him. Wherefore, we can reason out that when David fled from Saul's presence, when Saul tried to smite him with his javelin the second time, he must have left without his weapons, and has not yet gotten any new weapons.

He is told that the only weapon there is the sword of Goliath, whom David had slain. We were told in: ***1Sa 17:54 "And David took the head of the Philistine, and brought it to Jerusalem; but he put his armour in his tent."*** Now we find that the sword of Goliath is with tabernacle, kept as a memorial before the Lord. We believe, as Jonathan gave David his royal robes and weapons at the end of the battle where David killed Goliath, David gave the sword of Goliath to the priest to be laid up in the tabernacle as a memorial, as he would have no need of the sword. David takes the sword, which is rightfully his as a spoil of war, and goes his way.

10 ¶ "And David arose, and fled that day for fear of Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath. 11 And the servants of Achish said unto him, Is not this David the king of the land? did they not sing one to another of him in dances, saying, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands? 12 And David laid up these words in his heart, and was sore afraid of Achish the king of Gath. 13 And he changed his behaviour before them, and feigned himself mad in their hands, and scrabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall upon his beard. 14 Then said Achish unto his servants, Lo, ye see the man is mad: wherefore then have ye brought him to me? 15 Have I need of mad men, that ye have brought this fellow to play the mad man in my presence? shall this fellow come into my house?"

I pause to interject here: if you look at a map of this time period, you will see that the land of the Philistines is actually just a small portion of land, in the southern portion of the land of Israel apportioned to Judah, on the Mediterranean Sea, that Israel had not conquered at this time.

Why would David flee from Israel and go to the place that is home to the Goliath whom he slew? We suspect David's reasoning was that if he left Israel, Saul would cease to chase after him. Also, it is apparent, from this, and other texts in the scripture, that there was some affinity, or friendship, between Achish, the king of Gath, and David. We understand this because later in scripture, David will serve under Achish king of Gath, who recognizes that there is enmity from Saul toward David. However, in the present setting, Achish does not know this.

David flees from Saul and goes to King Achish of Gath. When the servants of Achish recognize David, for who he really is, they present David to Achish as the one who slew Goliath, and of whom Israel sings "***Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.***" David, afraid that the Achish may have to respond to the people and have him killed, to save his life, begins to act the part of a madman. Achish tells his people: I do not have

time to watch a man act like he is maddened. Why should I receive him into my house? This tells me that Achish recognized that David was acting. Achish, who has no ill will toward David, simply dismisses David from his presence, wherefore David can escape from the people.

Here we had a reference to the scripture in: ***Ps 118:9 "It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in princes.*** To this verse, we can certainly say Amen! We are told in: ***Pr 3:5 "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.*** We declare that David is presently leaning to his own understanding, and it is getting him in more trouble than he was already in.

I believe we can get a better understanding, and a picture of what is transpiring, if we think about David attending the school of hard knocks, of which Saul is the current teacher. David, by going to Gath, is skipping school, and God is going to send him back to Israel to continue his education.

In summary of this chapter: we point out that God does not hide the sins of his people in scripture. God includes their failures to point out to us what not to do. This reminds us; there is not one person who is without sin and reminds us; we are sinners by our very inherited nature.

In all this activity, we see the preserving hand of God at work in keeping David alive. There is a lesson for us to learn here: as seen in the New Testament in: ***Mt 10:23; 22 And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved. 23 But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of man be come.*** This is a time of great tribulation in David's life, and it looks like God has left him to fend for himself. David, as indicated in the text above is fleeing from place to place to escape death at the hand of Saul.

In our Christian life walks, we may sometimes encounter such great tribulations that we must flee from one place to another to save our lives. We see in our own lives, and in David's life, what is expressed in scripture in: ***Ec 3:1-8; 1 ¶ "To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven: 2 A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted; 3 A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; 4 A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; 5 A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; 6 A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; 7 A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; 8 A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace."*** Even Jesus, on several occasions slipped away from those who would have killed him, because his time was not yet come to go to the cross. Sometimes, the best way for us to avoid trouble is to sidestep and let it pass on by.

It is easy for us to say: If David had not fled from Saul, God would have worked out his salvation from Saul. After all, God has already protected David, and his covenant brother Jonathan, from being slain by Saul on several occasions? Did not God anoint David to be king over Israel? Since God cannot lie, and since God has not fulfilled his promise to David, God could not let David be slain, for that would make God a liar. God is not a liar as he tells us in his word in: ***Tit 1:2 In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began.***

If we find ourselves trying to protect ourselves by spewing forth lies; we need to stop and get our focus back on God. We need to approach unto God in fervent humble prayer and ask God to preserve us according to his will and purpose. We should ask God; what would you have us to do? We should ask in the name of our Saviour and Lord, Jesus Christ, as prescribed by scripture, seen in:

- ***Joh 15:16 "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you."***
- ***Joh 16:23 ¶ And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you."***

Dear God, provide us with spiritual discernment, by the Holy Spirit power, that we may know your will and purpose in our lives, from day to day. Lord! We ask that you do not let the tribulations of life overcome us and cause us to fall into the grips of despair and doubt. Help us to be faithful servants unto you, we ask in the name of Jesus, Amen!