

STUDIES IN SAMUEL

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 21

- Vv. 1- 9 *David at Nob.* The Ark of the covenant was not yet returned to the tabernacle. The high priest was at Shiloh in the days of Samuel but after the Ark was captured, the Tabernacle was evidently located at Nob. David wanted to worship God and so went to the Tabernacle. He found some help and friendship in the priests that were there.
- Vv. 10-15 *David at Gath.* David's flight to Philistia seems ill advised, but he must have thought that he would find help there. Since Saul was seeking to kill him he might find safety among Saul's Philistine enemies. He fled to the city which had been introduced earlier as the home of Goliath. It was a very important Philistine city and ruled over by Achish, the king.

LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1. "*Let us go into the house of the Lord*" (Psalm 122:1). David sang this song which he taught Israel, but this was evidently the tenor of his life long before he wrote the Psalm. Since he was in dire straits, he not only sought out the priest of God but also went to the house of the Lord where he could worship in an acceptable way. Here he would have opportunity to make a sacrifice unto God and to seek the will of the Lord for his life.
2. *Politics make strange bedfellows.* This old adage has been seen in many different instances. Once David had fought against the Philistines. He slew the champion of their army and caused them to flee from the armies of Israel. Now he sought refuge among them. His reasoning was wise according to the ways of this world, but it fills us with chagrin to see a man of God

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brought so low that he must affiliate himself with the enemies of God's people in order to save his own life.

3. *The enemies of God's people watch them closely.* When David got to Achish in Gath, he found that they already knew the song which was sung in Israel crediting David with slaying ten thousands of men whereas Saul had slain only thousands. They also recognized him as being the one who was to become king of Israel. He was thus not able to find safety among them. Christians would be surprised to find out how much non-Christians know about their everyday activities. We ought to realize that non-believers watch the believers very closely.

David's Flight to Gath, 21:1-15.

David At Nob. 21:1-9

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?*

2 And David said unto Ahimelech the priest, The king hath commanded me a business, and hath said unto me, Let no man know any thing 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.

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 shew-bread, that was taken from before the Lord, to put hot bread in the day when it was taken away.

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.

1. *To what place did David first flee? 21:1*

David fled first of all to Nob, to Abimelech the high priest, to inquire the will of God through him concerning his future course and induced him to give him bread and the sword of Goliath also, under the pretext of having to perform a secret commission from the king with greatest speed. The town of Nob, or Nobeh, was at that time a priests' city, in which, according to the following account, the Tabernacle was then standing and the legal worship carried on. According to Isaiah 10:30, 32, it was between Anathoth and Jerusalem: and in all probability it had been preserved in the village of *el-Isawiyeh*, an hour's distance from Jerusalem and the same distance to the southeast of Gibeah of Saul.

2. *Why did David say he was alone? 21:2*

The high priest was surprised to see David, the son-in-law of the king and a chieftain among the soldiers, without

a company of men with him. He asked David about this, and David replied that he had been sent on a certain business that was secret, therefore, he said he was traveling alone. He explained further that he had dispatched his soldiers to other places. He must have had some young men, but not his usual soldiers, with him.

3. *Was it right for him to eat the bread?* 21:3

For David and the young men to eat the shew bread was a departure from the Levitical Law. As is stated in the Law (Leviticus 24:9), the bread was for the priests. According to a higher law of love for a fellow man in need, the high priest may have justified himself in giving this bread to David. Jesus made reference to this incident when the Pharisees found fault with the disciples for being hungry and plucking ears of corn to eat on the Sabbath day. Jesus did not expressly justify David in his taking the shew bread, but He referred to the matter in order to give pause to the Pharisees. Jesus might have expected them to find fault with David rather than with his disciples (Matthew 12:1-4).

4. *Why did the high priest ask if the young men were clean?* 21:4, 5

The high priest was reluctant to give the holy bread to men who were ceremonially unclean. A part of the sanctification of a people for a holy occasion was their refraining from their normal relationships with their wives (Exodus 19:15). If the young men of David were ceremonially clean, the high priest would not feel as reluctant to give them the holy bread.

5. *Who was Doeg?* 21:7

Doeg was an Edomite. The Edomites were descendants of Esau (Genesis 36:1). These people lived in the country south of the Dead Sea. As the brother of Jacob, Esau was given a secondary blessing of Jacob. Esau had many descendants, and they grew into a prosperous nation. They

had kings ruling over them before the monarchy was established in Israel (Genesis 36:31). Doeg the Edomite was a chief herdsman among Saul's servants. He may have come to Israel as a mercenary and been given the responsibility of tending to the king's flocks and herds. If this were the case, he was no doubt grazing the royal herds near Nob and thus in a position to overhear the conversation of David.

6. *Why did the priest have Goliath's sword? 21:9*

After the battle in the valley of Elah David put Goliath's armor in his own tent. At that time he took the head of Goliath and brought it to Jerusalem. Nothing is said at that time about the ultimate destiny of Goliath's armor, but it was customary for a victorious people to bring some spoils of war to their temple as an offering of thanksgiving to the Lord, who had given victory. It was no doubt that spirit which prompted David to leave the disposition of Goliath's armor with Saul. Saul had evidently sent the sword, at least, to the Tabernacle at Nob.

David At Gath. 21:10-15

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 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 behavior before them, and feigned himself mad in their hands, and scrabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down 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?

7. *Why did David flee to Philistia? 21:10*

David fled to Gath, the home of Goliath, where Achish was king. Achish was Saul's enemy. Saul was David's enemy. Achish and David had a common enemy in Saul. David must have thought that Achish would give him political asylum.

8. *Why did they call David a king? 21:11*

This Achish, king of Gath, is evidently the same one who was overlord of David in his later career. The servants and officers of Achish asked, "Is not this David, king of the land?" They called him king, not because his anointing and divine election were known to them, but on account of his victorious deeds, which had thrown Saul entirely into the shade. Whether they intended by these words to celebrate David as a hero, or to point him out to their prince as a dangerous man is sometimes debated; but David's actions indicate that they were considering doing him harm.

9. *What effect did these questions have on David? 21:12, 13*

David pretended to be out of his mind. In their presence, he carried out all the acts of a maniac. When they tried to take him captive, he raved in their hands. In their houses, he scribbled on the doorposts. Wherever he was, he let the saliva run out of his mouth. By these acts, David caused Achish to wish to be rid of his company. From the assertion that the king made, some would imply that the members of the king's household were insane; but the obvious meaning is simply that the king did not relish the company of madmen, of whom plenty were to be had in his own land.

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CHAPTER 21 IN REVIEW

1. When David finally fled from Saul, to what place did he flee? _____
2. Who was priest there? _____
3. What did the priest give David to eat? _____
4. What piece of armor did he give to David? _____
5. What was the name of Saul's servant who was there? _____
6. Of what nationality was the servant? _____
7. To what foreign country did David flee? _____
8. In what city did he seek refuge? _____
9. What was the name of the king to whom David fled? _____
10. What title did these foreign people ascribe to David? _____