

Session 8 David's Trouble in Nob and Gath (1 Sam. 21 and Ps. 34)

I. DAVID WAS HELPED BY THE PRIESTS AT THE CITY OF NOB (1 SAM. 21:1-9)

- A. David asked the priests to give him supplies (21:1-4). David lied to the high priest Ahimelech, telling him that he was on a secret mission for the king.
- ¹Now David came to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech was afraid when he met David, and said to him, “Why are you alone, and no one is with you?”²So David said to Ahimelech the priest, “The king has ordered me on some business, and said to me, ‘Do not let anyone know anything about the business on which I send you, or what I have commanded you.’ And I have directed my young men to such and such a place. (1 Sam. 21:1-2)*
- B. ***Why David went to Nob:*** David asked the high priest for food and weapons as well as to inquire of the Lord that he might receive prophetic direction from the Lord (22:10). The high priest had a garment called the *ephod* (14:3) with pockets carrying two stones called the *Urim* and the *Thummim* (Ex. 28:30). It seems they could ask a “Yes” or a “No” question and receive insight on the spot.
- ³Ahijah...the LORD's priest in Shiloh, was wearing an ephod. (1 Sam. 14:3)*
- ³⁰And you shall put in the breastplate...the Urim and the Thummim... (Ex 28:30)*
- C. ***The city of Nob:*** This was a national religious center about three miles south of Gibeah. Saul thought David was in Bethlehem with his family celebrating the New Moon festival (20:18).
- D. ***Why are you alone:*** Ahimelech was unsettled seeing David alone. The king's son-in-law arriving without an escort seemed unusual when there were so many raiding bands of the Philistines. Saul's anger was well known. Perhaps Ahimelech was aware of the recent events at Ramah when Saul sent soldiers in pursuit of David (19:19-24). Ahimelech was not comfortable with David being there.
- E. ***The king ordered me on business:*** David told a lie about Saul sending him on a private mission.
- F. David asked the priests for food (21:3-4). He had been in a field for three days and was hungry.
- ³Now therefore, what have you on hand? Give me five loaves of bread in my hand, or whatever can be found.”⁴And the priest answered David and said, “There is no common bread on hand; but there is holy bread, if the young men have at least kept themselves from women.” (1 Sam. 21:3-4)*
- G. David assured Ahimelech that he and his men were ceremonially clean (21:5-6).
- ⁵Then David answered the priest, and said to him, “Truly, women have been kept from us about three days since I came out. And the vessels of the young men are holy, and the bread is in effect common, even though it was consecrated in the vessel this day.”⁶So the priest gave him holy bread; for there was no bread there but the showbread which had been taken from before the LORD, in order to put hot bread in its place on the day when it was taken away. (1 Sam. 21:5-6)*
- H. Jesus validated David eating this. When healing on the Sabbath, Jesus used this as an example of keeping the spirit of of the law when not keeping its exact letter in a literal way (Mt. 12:3-4).

II. DAVID ACQUIRED GOLIATH'S SWORD (21:7-9)

- A. David acquired Goliath's sword (21:7-9). It was in the sanctuary at Nob as a memorial of defeating a powerful enemy. David put his trust in a sword that could not protect Goliath. Goliath said that day, "I come to you with my sword!" and David replied "...but I come in the name of the Lord!"
- ⁷Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the LORD. And his name was Doeg, an Edomite, the chief of the herdsmen who belonged to Saul. ⁸And David said to Ahimelech, "Is there not here on hand a spear or a sword? For I have brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste." ⁹So the priest said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the Valley of Elah, there it is, wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you will take that, take it. For there is no other except that one here." And David said, "There is none like it; give it to me." (1 Sam. 21:7-9)*
- B. **Doeg, an Edomite:** Doeg was Saul's chief herdsman, over his livestock, mules, sheep, and the many herds that comprised Saul's great wealth. A chief herdsman would be a person of importance, as one of Saul's top officials over much of his personal wealth.
- C. In Bible symbolism, an Edomite or Amalekites or Agagite spoke of the principle of flesh that was at enmity against God's purpose. The Edomites were hostile to Israel throughout the biblical history.
- D. David surely felt panic when he saw Doeg, knowing that he would go back and tell Saul (22:22). They both knew each other from working in the royal court in Saul's government.
- E. David's lie resulted in the tragic massacre of the priests and their families in Nob (22:18-19). After Saul heard that David's location had been discovered in the city of Nob, Doeg told him the story of how the high priest gave David supplies.
- ⁶When Saul heard that David and the men who were with him had been discovered...⁷Saul said to his servants...⁸All of you have conspired against me, and there is no one who reveals to me that my son has made a covenant with the son of Jesse...⁹Then answered Doeg the Edomite... said, "I saw the son of Jesse going to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub. (1 Sam. 22:6-9)*
- F. Saul commissioned Doeg to kill 85 priests in the city of Nob for helping David (22:18-19). Abiathar, the only surviving son of Ahimelech, joined David and became the new high priest.
- ¹⁸And the king said to Doeg, "You turn and kill the priests!" So Doeg the Edomite...struck the priests, and killed on that day eighty-five men who wore a linen ephod...²⁰Now one of the sons of Ahimelech...named Abiathar, escaped and fled after David...²²David said to Abiathar, "I knew that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I have caused the death of all the persons of your father's house. (1 Sam. 22:18-22)*
- G. Being led by fear was a new experience for David. To trust God while overcoming pressures is one thing, but to trust Him when the pressures do not go away quickly is another matter.
- H. David was learning to trust in God in really tough times, not just the good times. The Lord asks us if we can trust Him in the challenging times. God wants us to be reliable, or stable, and strong in our faith through all the seasons. The Lord was building stability and confidence into David's life.

III. GATH: DAVID SOUGHT SAFETY BY GOING TO THE PHILISTINES (1 SAM. 21:10-15)

- A. In a panic, perhaps after seeing Doeg, David fled to Gath seeking to be safe from Saul (21:10-15). David's rationale was that Saul, a coward who was afraid of war, would never cross the national boundary line. The only thing greater than Saul's hatred of David was his fear of the Philistines. So in despair David went into the land of Israel's enemies, the Philistines, to escape Saul.

¹⁰Then David arose and fled that day from before Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath.

*¹¹The servants of Achish said to him, "Is this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing of him to one another...saying: 'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?'"
(1 Sam. 21:10-11)*

- B. **Gath:** There were five main Philistine cities to the west of Israel on the seacoast.
- C. Forsaking the land of Israel, he went armed with Goliath's sword hoping to establish an alliance with the Philistines, the long-time enemies of Israel. Nothing was more improbable than that David, the Lord's anointed who defeated Goliath, would be seeking refuge with the Philistines.
- D. **Is this not David?:** They recognized him by face (21:11). David hoped to slip into their city without being recognized. The fearful, timid Christian conceals his colors, hoping he will not be recognized as a follower of the Lord Jesus.

Achish's attendants were aware of David's status as a folk hero celebrated with song.

He was immediately spotted and reported to Achish. His reputation throughout the countryside as Israel's leader filtered down among the Philistines

David had been the chief nemesis of the Philistines for years after having killed Goliath (17:4) and having led various military excursions against the Philistines.

- E. Why didn't Achish kill David? Perhaps David relieved him of a powerful rival for his kingdom in cutting off the head of Goliath. He knew that David was not guilty of desertion from the military in Israel and so assumed that he had burned his bridge with Israel. Maybe he was a bigger trophy for them alive and acting insane than he was in being killed
- F. **David was very much afraid:** He feigned or faked madness before King Achish. David pretended insanity at Gath (21:14-15). They said, "Death is too good for him. Get rid of him! Don't let this madman come into my house. Get rid of him!"

¹²Now David took these words to heart, and was very much afraid of Achish the king of Gath.

¹³So he changed his behavior before them, pretended madness in their hands, scratched on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva fall down on his beard. ¹⁴Then Achish said to his servants, "Look, you see the man is insane. Why have you brought him to me? ¹⁵Have I need of madmen, that you have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?" (1 Sam. 21:12-15)

- G. Launching into a tirade against David, Achish questioned why they allowed him into the royal palace.

IV. PSALM 34: DAVID'S VICTORY OVER FEAR AFTER HIS TROUBLE IN NOB AND GATH

- A. The superscription to Psalm 34 says it was written when David pretended madness before Achish. Abimelech was probably his royal name and Achish his family name. Some kings had many names.
- B. In this Psalm we can see how David felt and acted in getting victory over his fears. Psalm 34 could be called "David facing his fears and finding the Lord." David had unusual confidence in the mercy of the Lord. That is what made David a worshipper. One of the defining qualities in David's life was his confidence in God's mercy, so he could come back time after time after failing.
- C. David's commitment to bless God continually instead of giving into fear, complaint, condemnation (34:1-3): He intentionally renewed his mind and confessed the truth of God's promises and power.

¹I will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth...³Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt His name together. (Ps. 34:1-3)

- D. David told *what he did* and *what God did*. David sought, cried out to, and feared the Lord (34:4-7)

⁴I sought the LORD, and He heard me, and delivered me from all my fears...⁶This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. ⁷The angel of the LORD encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them. (Ps 34:4-7)

- E. David told us what he taught the "children"—his curriculum in teaching the fear of God (34:11-14).

¹¹Come, you children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD ...¹³Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. ¹⁴Depart from evil and do good... (Ps. 34:11-14)

- F. David's key to getting free from fear and his life message (34:18): The mercy of God was one of David's life messages—that God enjoys His people, even when they are immature, if they will be honest about their sin and brokenness with a "yes to His leadership" in their spirit.

¹⁸The LORD is near to those who have a broken heart, and saves such as have a contrite spirit. (Ps 34:17-18)

The Lord saves any who admit their sin to Him and cry out against it with confidence that He will be near to them and save them from the negative emotions that trouble their hearts.

Many believers feel they are condemned and are failures (v. 22). They accept lies about what God is like. God differentiates between rebellion and spiritual immaturity.

David was one of the first to emphasize this truth that makes a distinction between the rebellious and the immature. This is one of the great doctrines in the grace of God.

- G. After David committed adultery with Bathsheba and killed her husband (2 Sam. 11), he responded in a way that he knew God wanted—with a broken and contrite heart (Ps. 51:17).

¹⁷The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise. (Ps. 51:17)