



## 1 Samuel 21

### David flees to Nob and Gath

#### Outline

1. David flees from Gibeah to Nob (3mi) where he gets help (food, sword) from Ahimelech the priest.
2. David flees from Nob to Gath in Philistia (30mi) where he pretends to be insane after his plan to hide in king Achish's courts fail.
3. David writes psalm 34

#### I. A Low Point in David's Life

- a. Fear instead of faith is reigning in David's mind and emotions. The shock of the situation has overwhelmed his faith and his many emotions are ruling his actions. Sadness, rejection, anger, fear and confusion are calling the shots now. He is chaos-driven instead of purpose-driven. He is scrambling for help and grasping for a plan. He's relying on deceit and cunning instead of relying on God's help.
- b. You find out how human you are when you're in mortal fear.
- c. Contrast this with 1 Sam 17 where David's faith in his God led him to victory over Goliath.
  - i. Leading up to 17, David had no agenda of his own. He was a simple shepherd in his father's field. He ran errands for others and was about his father's/family's business.
  - ii. Leading up to 21, David is in full service to Saul. He is steeped in Saul's world – married to Saul's daughter, even. He maintains his faith and a good attitude, but after Saul tries to kill him and posts assassins at his door, fear begins to creep in. (Understandably!)
  - iii. In 17, David clearly relies on his secret history with God. He is clear headed, single-minded and faith-driven. But in 21, David's fear temporarily overtakes his faith.
  - iv. In 17, David said to Goliath, "You come to me with sword and spear but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel." But in 21, he says, "There is none like the sword of Goliath, give it to me." He puts his faith in the very sword God defeated through David!
  - v. That sword should have jogged his memory and faith. Perhaps the Lord was whispering, "Remember when you were not afraid? Remember the exploits of how I was true to you and used you? Why go another way now?" (Bickle p. 6) Even still, God gave David the grace of multiple chances and David would eventually come back around to faith.
- d. What could David have done differently? David was sucker-punched and didn't have time to evaluate the best direction. Also, in his defense, he was wise to go to Nob where the priesthood centered. Still, it is worth asking, in hindsight, what could have improved David's path?
  - i. David had gone from shepherd to high officer in the king's court, even marrying the king's daughter. When God promotes you, it's paramount to remember where you came from. It was in the hills while shepherding that David developed his "secret history with God." He may have done well to keep the simple faith of a shepherd even after being elevated.
  - ii. On his short hike from Gibeah to Nob, he could have stopped to pray, sought God's counsel and comfort. "Where should I go, Lord?" Maybe he did this, but it's not recorded. Proverbs 3:5-6 comes to mind: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him and He will direct your paths."

- iii. In Nob, he could have consulted Ahimelech the priest using the Urim and Thummin in the ephod, a method of hearing God's direction and advice that was established in the priesthood. See appendix A.

## II. In Nob

- a. Commentators disagree on what Ahimelech knew or suspected when David arrived. It's clear he knew something was amiss. I believe he realized quickly that David was fleeing Saul. There was enough evidence and suspicion to make it obvious to a keen eye, but the subterfuge in their exchange hid well enough Ahimelech's suspicion so that he could later deny knowing anything. He went along with David's story about a special mission to protect himself and the town. Sadly, the protection didn't last thanks to Doeg the Edomite.
- b. Ahimelech is willing to give David and his few men the sacred Bread as long as they were ceremonially clean in the fashion of not being with a woman. We see the same practice of soldier abstinence during war time with Uriah in 2 Sam 11. Yeshua uses this passage when rebutting the Pharisees in Matthew 12. He makes the point that the Sabbath and the law were made to serve man in his need, not the other way around.
- c. David knew perfectly well that the sword of Goliath was stored in Nob. That David might have sensed his own desperation and need to return to faith has already been discussed.
- d. Doeg the Edomite acts as spy for Saul
  - i. Was probably captured by Saul when he fought the Edomites. (1 Sam 14:48). He became Saul's chief herdsman, although this can be rendered chariot runner as referenced earlier in 1 Samuel. (Baldwin p. 138) He was important in the upper courts of Saul.
  - ii. Alternatively, Doeg may have been more of a foreign mercenary than a captive loyal. (Alter)
  - iii. David panicked when he saw him because surely Doeg would report back to Saul what took place. Later we learn David's fears were realized when Saul orders Doeg to kill everyone in Nob. Only Ahimelech's son Abiathar escapes to tell David in 1 Sam 22.

## III. In Gath

- a. David has the nerve to take the sword of Goliath to Goliath's hometown in the land of the enemy Philistines!! He surely hid the sword. Such was his extremity in dire straights that he hoped to be unrecognized. He hoped he could be taken in as a servant to Achish, the Philistine king. This was overly optimistic
- b. The people remembered him from that fateful day and from the song. Remember that song? "Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands." David must have hated that song. (Bickle) Saul sure did.
- c. David was clever enough to feign insanity in Achish' court. It was a hail-Mary attempt at getting thrown out instead of killed. It worked.
- d. The word rendered "insane" is used 3 times by Achish and is the root from "Meshuga." As in the Yiddish "Mishuga" or the noun, "Mishugana." (Alter p. 368).
- e. Alter notes the irony that David feigned insanity to survive and therefore to gain the kingdom, Saul truly became mad as he lost the kingdom.
- f. David succeeded in making himself so revolting with his drooling and scratching that he was kicked out of the king's court. A lowly disguise, but not the last one David willingly plunges into during his life to survive. (Alter p. 368)
- g. David would come this way again when he was in a better frame (more stable with more friends, but still running from Saul.) That time, he would be accepted, erroneously, as a co-enemy of Israel. But here is a fugitive with only a few friends and is at his lowest and loneliest.

#### IV. Psalm 34

- a. This psalm is an acrostic poem: each verse begins with a successive letter in the Hebrew alphabet.
- b. During or right after David pretending to be insane before the Philistine King, David writes Psalm 34. He is filled with the desire to pass on what he's learned.
- c. Often, ancient kings would go by more than one name. The description is so close, Abimelek is surely one and the same as Achish, most scholars agree.
- d. David could have omitted the note before the psalm, leaving out that embarrassing episode. But he was humbly willing to be reminded of this low point in his life because of the teaching value and to give God all the glory for the redemption.
- e. Within the first few verses (4-7) we see that David had nothing left. He had spent his last clever resource on this madness trick to escape Gath and was wondering, waiting to see if it would really work in the long term. Even while he was drooling and scratching and acting insane, he must have had a moment of clarity like the prodigal son did when he was in the pig pen. "Wait a minute: My Father can help me...."
- f. "Those who look to God are never covered with shame. David was, by every meaning of the phrase, covered in shame presently before Achish. He was realizing, "I got myself into this shameful and embarrassing mess because I did things my own way. But the ones who looks to God for help is not covered in shame. In fact, they reflect the radiance of the God who helped them!"
- g. Fortunately, that is not the end of the story. Verse 6: "This poor man called out and God saved him." David is the poor man. He didn't stay in his shameful state but finally called out to God. He feared God and God delivered him from his troubles. David tasted and saw that the Lord is Good. He took refuge in God. (v. 8) David turned from evil and did good. He sought peace and pursued it. (v. 14)
- h. The rest of the psalm shows how God loves to come rescue us when we humble ourselves and look to Him for help. He is waiting and watching for the invitation to come help us when we relinquish control and depend on Him.
- i. There are Psalms for every occasion. Psalms for rejoicing, psalms for war. Psalms for the good times and praise songs. But this psalm is for the lowly. These are mentioned in Ps 34:
  - i. poor
  - ii. servants
  - iii. those with troubles (3x)
  - iv. those needing refuge (2x)
  - v. children
  - vi. Those who cry out
  - vii. The broken hearted
  - viii. The crushed in spirit.

## Appendix A: Urim & Thummim

These were 2 or more stones placed in a pocket inside the ephod. They were used to cast lots for a decision. God regularly used this to communicate a ruling or counsel for leaders. It was always administered by a priest who wore the Ephod. God first gave the command to include the urim and thummim in the ephod to Moses, recorded in Exodus 28. There are numerous references elsewhere in scripture including both Saul and David using them to inquire of the Lord through the priest.



Exodus 28:30 “You shall put in the breastpiece of the judgment the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be over Aaron’s heart when he goes in before the Lord; and Aaron shall carry the judgment of the sons of Israel over his heart before the Lord continually.

Numbers 27:21 “He shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the Lord. At his command they shall go out and come in.”

1 Samuel 23:9 “David knew that Saul was plotting evil against him; so he said to Abiathar the priest, “Bring the ephod here.”

1 Samuel 28:6 “When Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by prophets.”

Other references:

Leviticus 8:8

Deuteronomy 33:8

1 Samuel 30:7

Ezra 2:63

Nehemiah 7:65

## Appendix B: Bibliography

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