

Bible Study February 28, 2024

1 SAMUEL 21 (AMPLIFIED VERSION)

David Takes Consecrated Bread

¹ Then David went to Nob to Ahimelech the priest; and Ahimelech came trembling [in fear] to meet David and said to him, “Why are you alone, and no one with you?” ² David said to Ahimelech the priest, “The king has commissioned me with a matter and has told me, ‘Let no one know anything about the matter for which I am sending you and with which I have commissioned you. I have directed the young men to a certain place.’

David lied to protect himself from Saul (21:10). Some excuse this lie because a war was going on, and it is the duty of a good soldier to deceive the enemy. But nowhere is David's lie condoned. In fact, the opposite is true, because his lie led to the death of 85 priests (22:9-19). David's small lie seemed harmless enough, but it led to tragedy. The Bible makes it very clear that lying is wrong (Leviticus 19:11). Lying, like every other sin, is serious in God's sight and may lead to all sorts of harmful consequences. Don't minimize or categorize sins. All sins must be avoided, whether or not we can foresee their potential consequences.

³ Now what [food] do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever can be found.” ⁴ The priest answered David, “There is no ordinary (unconsecrated) bread on hand, but there is consecrated bread; [you may have it] if only the young men have kept themselves from women.” ⁵ David answered the priest, “Be assured that women have been kept from us in these three days since I set out, and the bodies of the young men were consecrated (ceremonially clean), although it was an ordinary (unconsecrated) journey; so how much more will their vessels be holy today?” ⁶ So the priest gave him the consecrated bread; for there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence which was removed from before the LORD in order to put hot bread in its place when it was taken away.

This is the first time Ahimelech is mentioned. Either he was the Ahijah mentioned in 14:3, 18, or, more likely, he was Ahijah's successor. In either case, Ahimelech had to go against the law to give the holy bread to David because the bread was supposed to be given only to the priests (Leviticus 24:5-9). But Ahimelech put David's need and life ahead of religious ceremony and fed him the holy food. This upheld a higher law of love (Leviticus 19:18). Centuries later, Jesus would refer to this incident to show that God's laws should be applied with compassion. To do good and to save life is God's greater law (Matthew 12:1-8; Luke 6:1-5).

Once a week on the Sabbath, a priest would enter the Holy Place in the Tabernacle and place 12 freshly baked loaves of bread on a small table. This bread, called the Bread of the Presence, symbolized God's presence among his people as well as his loving care that met their physical needs. The bread that was replaced was to be eaten only by the priests on duty. Jesus would one day refer to himself as the Bread of Life (John 6:35) in reference to his ability to meet both our physical and spiritual needs.

⁷ Now one of Saul's servants was there that day, detained before the LORD; his name was Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul's shepherds.

We don't know why Doeg was detained at the Tabernacle. Perhaps he had made some sort of vow, was waiting for a word from the Lord, or was kept there by some kind of impurity.

⁸ David said to Ahimelech, "Do you not have a sword or spear here on hand? For I brought neither my sword nor my [other] weapons with me, because the king's business was urgent."⁹ Then the priest said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the Valley of Elah, is here wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod; if you would take it for yourself, do so. For there is no other here except for it." And David said, "There is none like that; give it to me."

An ephod was a vest worn by a priest. David didn't know Goliath's sword was there, probably because David was a young man when he killed the giant and had spent much of his time at home.

¹⁰ Then David arose and fled from Saul that day, and went to Achish king of Gath. ¹¹ The servants of Achish said to him, "Is this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing in praise of this one as they danced, saying,

***'Saul has slain his thousands,
And David his ten thousands?'"***

¹² David took these words to heart and was greatly afraid of Achish king of Gath. ¹³ So [fearing for his life] he changed his behavior in their sight, and acted insanely in their hands, and he scribbled on the doors of the gate, and drooled on his beard. ¹⁴ Then Achish said to his servants, "Look, you see that the man is insane. Why have you brought him to me? ¹⁵ Do I lack madmen, that you bring this one to behave like a madman in my presence? Shall this one come into my house?"

Gath was one of the five major Philistine cities. Why did the Philistines allow their archenemy, David, into their camp? They may have been initially happy to accept a defector who was a high military leader. Any enemy of Saul would have been a friend of theirs. They could not have known that David had been anointed Israel's next king (16:13). Soon, however, the Philistines became nervous about David's presence. After all, he had slain thousands of their people (18:7). David then protected himself by acting insane because it was the custom not to harm mentally unstable people.