

Exegetical Notes – 1 Samuel 21:1-10, 22:1-23

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(David has fled from King Saul. Saul is pursuing David with the intention of killing him. Over the next four weeks we will look at four sections of Scripture which deal with David's attempts to escape Saul. These are four troubling passages because they are based on deception and deceit. To protect himself from Saul, David, the man after God's heart, lies and deceives others. Saul pursues David to prevent God's judgment from falling on him, which is impossible. No one consults God and no one follows the law of God. Innocent people die. David relies upon his own understanding to protect himself from Saul. Saul relentlessly pursues David to alter the declared will of God. God protected David at every turn, and God's will cannot be altered by the action of Saul. However, there are valuable lessons for us in these passages.)

1 Samuel 21:1-10, 22:1-23

Verses 21:1-3

¹ *David went to Nob, to Ahimelek the priest. Ahimelek trembled when he met him, and asked, "Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?"*

² *David answered Ahimelek the priest, "The king sent me on a mission and said to me, 'No one is to know anything about the mission I am sending you on.' As for my men, I have told them to meet me at a certain place. ³ Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find."*

- When David fled from Saul (see 1 Samuel 20), he went to Nob to Ahimelek, the priest. Nob was a small town north of Jerusalem which was inhabited by priests. Ahimelek was, apparently, the leader of this community of priests. He may be the Ahijah mentioned in 1 Samuel 14:3. If so that would make him Israel's High Priest at that time.
- David was a great general in the army of King Saul. He was the king's son-in-law. When he arrived in Nob, Ahimelek was disturbed because David was alone. He had no entourage. Generals traveled with their troops. Members of the king's family did not travel alone. Ahimelek may have heard that Saul

was not entirely pleased with David. So when David arrives in Nob alone, Ahimelek is afraid. He asked David what it meant.

- David lied to the priest. He told Ahimelek that Saul had sent him on a secret mission. He told Ahimelek that his army was waiting for him at some place and that he needed provisions, five loaves of bread. David gives no details and five loaves of bread would never feed an army, and why would the army travel without provisions.
- It is important to understand that David lied to a priest, and it was not a very good lie. It is even reasonable to ask if the lie was necessary at all. Could God not have worked on David's behalf without the lie? But David felt it necessary to lie to protect himself. He was not trusting God. He did not believe that God alone could/would protect him.

Verses 4-6

⁴ But the priest answered David, "I don't have any ordinary bread on hand; however, there is some consecrated bread here—provided the men have kept themselves from women."

⁵ David replied, "Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual whenever I set out. The men's bodies are holy even on missions that are not holy. How much more so today!" ⁶ So the priest gave him the consecrated bread, since there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence that had been removed from before the LORD and replaced by hot bread on the day it was taken away.

- Ahimelek told David that he did not have any "ordinary bread" but only the "consecrated bread" in the Tabernacle. The "consecrated bread" was the bread mentioned in Exodus 25:23-30. This bread was presented to the Lord daily. It represented the twelve tribes of Israel. It was exchanged for twelve new loaves each day. This bread was given to be consecrated to the Lord. When it was exchanged each day, the old loaves could be eaten only by consecrated persons. Part of the consecration of the men who could eat the "consecrated bread" was sexual abstinence. If David's men were "consecrated" as they should have, if they were on a mission for the king, they could eat this bread.
- But remember, there was no waiting army. The bread was for David alone. This was all a lie. The bread was for David alone. But, David reassured the priest that his men were consecrated because they were on a "holy mission." So, Ahimelek gave David the "Bread of The Presence" that was removed from the tabernacle that day. But David felt it necessary to lie to

protect himself. He was not trusting God. He did not believe that God alone could/would protect him.

Verse 7

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

- There is a fly in the ointment. Saul's chief shepherd, Doeg, was in Nob that day. He saw and heard all that took place.

Verses 8-9

⁸ David asked Ahimelek, "Don't you have a spear or a sword here? I haven't brought my sword or any other weapon, because the king's mission was urgent."

⁹ The priest replied, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the Valley of Elah, is here; it is wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you want it, take it; there is no sword here but that one."

David said, "There is none like it; give it to me."

- David then asked Ahimelek if he had a spear or a sword that he could give to David because David had no weapons with him. The mission was urgent so the great general had left home without his weapons. It is at this point that David's story loses all credibility. Generals always have their weapons.
- Ahimelek gave David Goliath's sword.

Verse 10

¹⁰ That day David fled from Saul and went to Achish king of Gath.

- David left Nob and went to Achish the King of Gath for help. We will deal with David's visit to Gath next week.

Verses 22:1-2

David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam. When his brothers and his father's household heard about it, they went down to him there. ² All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him, and he became their commander. About four hundred men were with him.

- When David left Gath, he returned to Israel. He went to the cave of Adullam. His family joined him there because they did not feel safe from King Saul. Others who were worried about King Saul came to David at

Adullam. He became the leader of about 400 men who were discontented with Saul.

Verses 3-4

³ From there David went to Mizpah in Moab and said to the king of Moab, "Would you let my father and mother come and stay with you until I learn what God will do for me?" ⁴ So he left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with him as long as David was in the stronghold.

- David moved his family to Moab and put them under the protection of the King of Moab.

Verse 5

⁵ But the prophet Gad said to David, "Do not stay in the stronghold. Go into the land of Judah." So David left and went to the forest of Hereth.

- At the word of the prophet Gad, David moved from the cave of Adullam to the forest of Hereth.

Verses 6-8

⁶ Now Saul heard that David and his men had been discovered. And Saul was seated, spear in hand, under the tamarisk tree on the hill at Gibeah, with all his officials standing at his side. ⁷ He said to them, "Listen, men of Benjamin! Will the son of Jesse give all of you fields and vineyards? Will he make all of you commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds? ⁸ Is that why you have all conspired against me? No one tells me when my son makes a covenant with the son of Jesse. None of you is concerned about me or tells me that my son has incited my servant to lie in wait for me, as he does today."

- Meanwhile, Saul learned that David was hiding in the forest of Hereth. He accused the men of the tribe of Benjamin and his other officials of betraying him by not telling him of the covenant made between Jonathan, his son, and David (see 1 Samuel 20) and of David's whereabouts.

Verses 9-10

⁹ But Doeg the Edomite, who was standing with Saul's officials, said, "I saw the son of Jesse come to Ahimelek son of Ahitub at Nob. ¹⁰ Ahimelek inquired of the LORD for him; he also gave him provisions and the sword of Goliath the Philistine."

- Doeg (see 1 Samuel 21:7) saw his opportunity. He told the king what he had seen at Nob (see 1 Samuel 21).

Verses 11-16

¹¹ Then the king sent for the priest Ahimelek son of Ahitub and all the men of his family, who were the priests at Nob, and they all came to the king. ¹² Saul said, "Listen now, son of Ahitub."

"Yes, my lord," he answered.

¹³ Saul said to him, "Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, giving him bread and a sword and inquiring of God for him, so that he has rebelled against me and lies in wait for me, as he does today?"

¹⁴ Ahimelek answered the king, "Who of all your servants is as loyal as David, the king's son-in-law, captain of your bodyguard and highly respected in your household? ¹⁵ Was that day the first time I inquired of God for him? Of course not! Let not the king accuse your servant or any of his father's family, for your servant knows nothing at all about this whole affair."

¹⁶ But the king said, "You will surely die, Ahimelek, you and your whole family."

- Saul sent for Ahimelek and all the men in his family, all of whom were priests at Nob. He accused them of conspiring against him with David.
- Ahimelek did not deny that he had met with David. His defense was that David was regarded as Saul's loyal soldier, and that he had met with David on other occasions.
- But Saul insisted that Ahimelek and his entire family were guilty of conspiracy against him and should die.

Verses 17-19

¹⁷ Then the king ordered the guards at his side: "Turn and kill the priests of the LORD, because they too have sided with David. They knew he was fleeing, yet they did not tell me."

But the king's officials were unwilling to raise a hand to strike the priests of the LORD.

¹⁸ The king then ordered Doeg, "You turn and strike down the priests." So Doeg the Edomite turned and struck them down. That day he killed eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod. ¹⁹ He also put to the sword Nob, the town of the priests, with its men and women, its children and infants, and its cattle, donkeys and sheep.

- Saul ordered his guards to kill the priests. But they would not.

- So, Saul turned to Doeg and ordered him to kill the priests.
- Doeg killed 85 priests that day and then destroyed the town of Nob and everyone who lived there.
- This was a result of David's lie. But was it the will of God?

Verses 20-23

But one son of Ahimelek son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled to join David. ²¹ He told David that Saul had killed the priests of the LORD. ²² Then David said to Abiathar, "That day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, I knew he would be sure to tell Saul. I am responsible for the death of your whole family. ²³ Stay with me; don't be afraid. The man who wants to kill you is trying to kill me too. You will be safe with me."

- Only one son of Ahimelek escaped, Abiathar. He joined David.
- David confessed to Abiathar that he was aware of Doeg's presence at Nob and knew Doeg would tell Saul what had happened there. He told Abiathar that he was responsible for all that had happened and invited Abiathar to stay with him.
- David was correct. The deaths that occurred were the result of his lies. They were the consequence of his sin. David had attempted to protect himself and had stepped out from under the protection of God's word in doing so. Others suffered because David had sinned.

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