

Lecture #8 – Exposition of I Samuel 21-26

Chapter 21 – David at Nob – 1065 B.C.

vs. 1-9 – David and Ahimelech

The first place David runs is to the Tabernacle to inquire of the Lord for direction.

Ahimelech (“brother of the king”)¹ is the current high priest, a descendant of Eli. Nob (“high place”)² is the now the residing place of the Temple (minus the Ark which is still at Kirjath-Jearim). The Tabernacle likely moved here after the fall of Shiloh.

Note that David lies about the reason he is there in vs. 2. While he has run to God in his time of trouble, he still fears man. Reese notes that this lie will cost Ahimelech his life.³

David receives three things from Ahimelech: (1) shewbread for food, (2) answer from an inquiry to the Lord (see II Samuel 22:9-15), and (3) the sword of Goliath.

Edersheim writes concerning the giving of the shewbread to David:

“It affords sad evidence of the decay into which the sanctuary and the priesthood had fallen, that Ahimelech and Abiathar could offer David no other provisions for his journey than this shewbread; which, according to the letter of the law, only the priests might eat, and that within the sanctuary (Leviticus 24:9). But there was the higher law of charity (Leviticus 19:18), which was rightly regarded as overruling every merely Levitical ordinance, however solemn (comp. Matthew 12:5; Mark 2:25). If it was as David pretended, and the royal commission was so important and so urgent, it could not be right to refuse the necessary means of sustenance to those who were engaged on it, provided that they had not contracted any such Levitical defilement as would have barred them from access to the Divine Presence (Leviticus 15:18). For, viewed in its higher bearing, what were the priests but the representatives of Israel, who were all to be a kingdom of priests? This idea seems indeed implied in the remark of David (21:5): ‘And though the manner’ (the use to which it is put) ‘be not sacred, yet still it will be made’ (become) ‘sacred by the instrument,’ - either referring to himself as the Divine instrument about to be employed, or to the ‘wallet’ in which the bread was to be carried, as it were, on God's errand.”⁴

All this is witness by Doeg (“fearful”)⁵, the Edomite shepherd employed by Saul.

vs. 10-15– David and Achish

¹ Smith's Bible Dictionary

² Smith's Bible Dictionary

³ Reese's Chronological Study Bible, p. 403.

⁴ *Bible History: Old Testament* by Alfred Edersheim. Book 4, ch.12. This event is referenced by Christ when challenged about His actions on the Sabbath in Matthew 12:3-4, Mark 2:25-28, Luke 6:2-3.

⁵ Smith's Bible Dictionary

David in desperate fear of Saul leaves the land of Israel to seek asylum among the Philistines in Gath.

Achish (“angry”)⁶ is lord there. He is referred to as *Abimelech* (“father of the king”)⁷ in the title to Psalm 34. *Abimelech* appears to be a title, similar in usages as *Pharoah* in Egypt or *Caesar* in Rome.

Achish is reminded the celebratory song of I Samuel 18:7. David fears that the king will either kill him or return him to Saul. In an act of desperation, David acts like a mad man. Carroll notes: “A North American Indian would have done the same thing. They never shoot or strike the insane, believing them under the hand of a spirit.”⁸

Chapter 22 – The Crime of Doeg

vs. 1-2 – David at Adullam

David now hides in the cave of Adullam (“justice of the people”)⁹. There his family and those discontent with Saul’s reign gather. All these were likely targets of Saul’s wrath like David.

♪ Psalms 34, 56, 57, 142

vs. 3-5 – David Protects his Family

David’s next move is to protect his parents. He takes them to Moab, where no doubt as a descendant of Ruth they must have enjoyed some notoriety.

David is warned by the prophet Gad to not remain himself in Moab, so David goes to the forest of Hareth (“thicket”).

vs. 6-19 – Doeg’s Crime

The narrative now takes a sinister turn as we move our view from David back to Saul and his lackeys. Saul berates his followers and accuses them of treason until Doeg speaks up. Doeg tells that he witnessed Ahimelech give aid to David. Saul calls the priest to stand before him in trial.

Ahimelech pleads innocence through ignorance. How was he to know that David was no longer a trust servant of Saul? David had enquired of the Lord many times before so there was nothing suspicious in his action.

In fury Saul sentences the high priest and his family to death, yet none of the Israelites would lift their hand against the priests. Doeg has no such scruples and murders the 85 priests that had come to

⁶ Smith’s Bible Dictionary

⁷ Smith’s Bible Dictionary

⁸ *An Interpretation of the English Bible: The Hebrew Monarchy*, by B.H. Carroll. E-sword module.

⁹ Smith’s Bible Dictionary

stand before Saul. Not satisfied with only this heinous act, Doeg then attacks Nob. What Saul was supposed to have done to the Amalekites in I Samuel 15, Doeg does to the priests at Nob. It is my belief that there are few crimes in the Bible or the history of mankind as terrible as the actions here of Saul and Doeg.

A quick, lighthearted sidenote on vs. 6 – Saul still has that spear! Someone please, please take it away from him before someone gets hurt!

It is possible that the murdered Gibeonites mentioned in II Samuel 21:1-2 were part of the casualties of the attack on Nob.

vs. 20-23 – David and Abiathar

Abiathar (“father of abundance”)¹⁰, the son of the murdered High Priest Ahimelech, must have been left behind at Nob to care for the Tabernacle when the rest of his family stood before Saul. He escapes from the rampage of Doeg and finds refuge with David. He brings with him the High Priest’s ephod with the Urim and Thummim (see I Samuel 23:6). He will serve as High Priest until deposed by Solomon.

♪ Psalms 52, 140

Chapter 23 – David Pursued

vs. 1-12 – David at Keilah

Note in this passage how David enquires of the Lord. This is almost certainly using Urim and Thummim. Though we know very little for certain about what these were and how they were used, it does appear that the answer could have been given was a simple “yes” or “no”.

The Philistines were harassing the inhabitants of Keilah (“fortress”)¹¹ After receiving direction from the Lord, David and his band intervene and defeat their enemy.

Saul hears that David has come out of hiding and prepares to bring his army down against David.¹² David is warned of Saul’s intention, and the Lord directs him to leave Keilah before he is betrayed by its inhabitants.

Note that David’s force has grown from 400 to 600.

vs. 13-29 – David at Ziph

¹⁰ Smith’s Bible Dictionary

¹¹ Smith’s Bible Dictionary

¹² Why couldn’t Saul have brought an army against the Philistines to aid Keilah in the first place?

David hides himself in the wilderness of Ziph (“battlement”)¹³ and Saul is unable to locate him. There must be many perilous tales of this time not recorded in Scripture.

Carroll comments on what this *wood* would be like:

“That does not mean any big trees. It means thick brush – scrubby brush – as may be seen on West Texas mountains – shin-oak thickets. I have seen them so thick it looked like one couldn’t stick a butcher knife in them, and woe to the man who tried to ride through them”¹⁴

While Saul cannot locate David, Jonaathan does. He and David meet for the last time in the woods of Ziph. A third and final covenant is made between them.

The Ziphites contact Saul to betray David. David is camped in the wilderness of Maon (“habitation”)¹⁵ near Jeshimon (“wilderness”)¹⁶ Saul is in the process of surrounding him there, with only one hill between the two men. But Saul is interrupted from his selfish mission by a national emergency. Word arrives that the Philistines are invading. Saul amazingly does the right thing and goes to battle the Philistines and David narrowly escapes. The site became known as Sela-Hammahlekoth (“cliff of divisions”)¹⁷.

David escapes toward the Dead Sea and hides at En-gedi (“fount of the kid”)¹⁸

♪ Psalms 13, 63, 54

Chapter 24 – David at En-gedi – 1062 B.C.

vs. 1-15 – David Spares Saul

En-gedi is an oasis in the hills overlooking the Dead Sea. It is rough terrain and not suited for a large army. Saul takes a force of 3,000 to find David and his 600 men.

Saul enters a cave there to “cover his feet”. Used also in Judges 3:24, the precise meaning of this idiom is unknown. The two primary theories are that it means to either (A) to relieve oneself through a bowel movement or (B) to take a nap or sleep¹⁹. There are difficulties with either definition. Most commentaries I have consulted will gloss over this detail, either because the writers do not know themselves or do not wish to speak about bodily functions.

Saul does not realize he has placed himself at David’s mercy. David is encouraged by his men to slay Saul, but he refuses. Although he does not attack Saul, he does do give into the temptation to act by cutting off part of Saul’s robe. This goes unnoticed by Saul at first, but David’s conscience smites him

¹³ Smith’s Bible Dictionary

¹⁴ *An Interpretation of the English Bible: The Hebrew Monarchy*, by B.H. Carroll. E-sword module.

¹⁵ Smith’s Bible Dictionary

¹⁶ Smith’s Bible Dictionary

¹⁷ Smith’s Bible Dictionary

¹⁸ Smith’s Bible Dictionary

¹⁹ Compare to the language in Ruth 3:7

for taking even such a petty revenge against Saul. As Davis observes: “David recognized that this deed was of his own bidding and not that which was commanded by God.”²⁰

After Saul exits the cave, David calls out to him and tells of what he had done. He calls for his actions to stand witness against Saul and his accusations against him.

vs. 16-22 – Saul’s Oath

Gaebelein notes:

“And Saul? His reply, given in the voice of weeping, acknowledged the wrong he had done and the righteous cause of David as well as the future of David, that he would receive the Kingdom of Israel. He also made David swear not to cut off his seed. He is broken down and deeply moved. Yet his heart is unchanged.”²¹

In vs. 20 we have either a prophecy by Saul or an acknowledgement of what was to come.

In vs. 21, we have a covenant made that David swears he will not destroy the house of Saul. This would go against the common custom of the ancient world where a new ruler would hunt down and eradicate his predecessor’s family to ensure their own position.

The two forces part. Saul goes home and David back to his hiding place. The fact that David does not go with Saul illustrates how much he trusts in Saul’s promise.

♪ Psalms 86, 7, 35, 141, 143

Chapter 25 – David and Nabal – 1060 B.C.

vs. 1 – The Death of Samuel

The kingdom and its drama between Saul and David have overshadowed the final days of the last Judge of Israel. Samuel passes amid national mourning.

David removes himself further south to Paran (“bounding in caverns”)²², likely fearing that the loss of Saul removed one of the few checks against Saul.

vs. 2-13 – Nabal Angers David

²⁰ *Israel: From Conquest to Exile* by John J. Davis and John C. Whitcomb. p. 242.

²¹ *Annotated Bible by A.C. Gaebelein*. E-Sword module.

²² Easton’s Bible Dictionary

We here meet Nabal (“fool”)²³, inhabitant of Maon with possession in Carmel (“fruitful place or park”), and his wife Abigail (“father, that is, source, of joy”)²⁴ These two are about as opposite as can be. Nabal is “churlish²⁵ and evil”, while Abigail is wise and beautiful.

David makes a reasonable request of Nabal, counting on him being a good mood at the time of shearing his sheep. Nabal roughly rebuffs them.

David here gives into his pride. He is insulted by Nabal’s response and prepares to take revenge on him by arming 400 of his men to attack Nabal. He will learn from this mistake and be more patient to such insults, as we will see in a future lecture.

vs. 14-35 – Abigail’s Intervention

Abigail wisely responds by bringing supplies and intervening before David makes a terrible mistake. She softly rebukes David for what he was about to do (vs. 26) and places herself at David’s mercy in the place of her ignorant husband.

A quick note on the word *corn*, as in vs. 18. In British English the word *corn* refers to “the grain of a cereal grass that is the primary crop of a region (such as wheat in Britain and oats in Scotland and Ireland)”²⁶. In the English of the KJV, *corn* refers to the individual seeds or kernels of grain, like wheat or barley. What we are accustomed in America to call *corn* is more accurately *maize*. *Maize* was unknown in the Biblical world, only spreading to Europe and beyond after the voyages of Christopher Columbus²⁷. An “ear of corn” (such as in Genesis 41:5) refers to the top or head of a plant where its seeds are located.²⁸

vs. 36-38 – The Death of Nabal

Edersheim describes this scene:

“Meantime Nabal had been in ignorance alike of what had threatened him, and of what his wife had done to avert it. On her return, she found him rioting and in drunkenness. Not till next morning, when he was once more capable of understanding what had passed, did she inform him of all. A fit of impotent fury on the part of one who was scarcely sobered, resulted in what seems to have been a stroke of apoplexy. If this had been brought on by himself, the second and fatal stroke, which followed ten days later, is set before us as sent directly by God. It is not often that Divine vengeance so manifestly and so quickly overtakes evil-doing. David fully recognized this.”²⁹

²³ Smith’s Bible Dictionary. Perhaps this is a nickname, but it is fitting.

²⁴ Smith’s Bible Dictionary

²⁵ Webster’s 1828 – “Rude; surly; austere; sullen; rough in temper; unfeeling; uncivil.”

²⁶ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/corn> - accessed 9-3-22

²⁷ <https://www.britannica.com/plant/corn-plant#ref348078> – accessed 9-3-22

²⁸ <https://webstersdictionary1828.com/Dictionary/ear> – accessed 9-3-22 – “4. The top, or highest part” and “8. The spike of corn; that part of certain plants which contains the flowers and seeds; as an ear of wheat or maize”

²⁹ *Bible History: Old Testament* by Alfred Edersheim. Book 4, ch.12.

vs. 39-44 – David and Abigail

Now David takes Abigail to be his wife. David had first married Michal and that union, with its long separation and her marriage to another, brought no children. He next appears to have married Ahinoam (“*brother of grace*, that is, *gracious*”)³⁰. The timing of that marriage is unclear but since she bore David’s first son (II Samuel 3:2) it is assumed that he married her after Michal and before Abigail. Abigail becomes his third wife.

David’s sin in practicing polygamy will cause him great heartache in the future.

Chapter 26 – David Spares Saul – 1059 B.C.

vs. 1-4 – Saul’s Pursuit

Saul breaks his earlier word and goes after David again for what will be the final time. The disloyal Ziphites again tell Saul of David’s location at the hill of Hachilah (“darksome hill”)³¹. Saul brings his force of 3,000 men.

vs. 5-12 – David Spares Saul

David spies the camp and sees Saul camped in its center with his general Abner (“father of light”)³². Two men are with him: Ahimelech the Hittite³³ and his nephew Abishai (“father of a gift”)³⁴. Abishai agrees to sneak into the camp with David.

Note in vs. 7 that the spear is back. It is being used as a symbol of royalty to mark the king. Abishai offers to take the spear himself and kill Saul, probably because he knew David would not do it himself. David refuses the offer, instead letting vengeance belong to the Lord. Instead, David takes Saul’s spear (finally!) and cruse (a small cup or jar).

Note that they were able to accomplish task, not because of their great skill, but because of the Lord’s aid (vs. 12).

vs. 13-25 – The Final Meeting of David and Saul

Gaebelein:

“The sleeping company is aroused. He ridicules and chides Abner for his unwatchfulness. Saul recognized David’s voice and the last discourse between the two kings follows. We call attention

³⁰ Smith’s Bible Dictionary

³¹ Easton’s Bible Dictionary.

³² Smith’s Bible Dictionary

³³ Perhaps a foreign mercenary and/or a Jewish proselyte. The Hittite homeland was in Anatolia (modern Turkey).

³⁴ Smith’s Bible Dictionary

to two statements. David witnesses to his faith and trust in the Lord. He trusts Him that He will deliver him out of all tribulation. Saul's last words to David are prophetic. 'Thou shalt both do great things, and also shall prevail.' David did not hear Saul's voice again after this, nor did Saul see David again."³⁵

...and David gave the spear back to Saul...

³⁵ *Annotated Bible by A.C. Gaebel*. E-Sword module.