

1st Samuel

Lesson 44

(b) David to Hide in the Field (20:24-29)

Just as Jonathan planned, the writer states that David was to hide in the field and let the plan work its work. Verse 24.

"So David hid in the field; and when the new moon came, the king sat down to eat food.²³ The king sat on his seat as usual, the seat by the wall; then Jonathan rose up and Abner sat down by Saul's side, but David's place was empty.²⁶ Nevertheless Saul did not speak anything that day, for he thought, 'It is an accident, he is not clean, surely he is not clean.'²⁷ It came about the next day, the second day of the new moon, that David's place was empty; so Saul said to Jonathan his son, 'Why has the son of Jesse not come to the meal, either yesterday or today?'²⁸ Jonathan then answered Saul, 'David earnestly asked leave of me to go to Bethlehem,²⁹ for he said, Please let me go, since our family has a sacrifice in the city, and my brother has commanded me to attend. And now, if I have found favor in your sight, please let me get away that I may see my brothers. For this reason he has not come to the king's table.' (20:24-29)

Just as Jonathan planned, David was not there at the new moon feast. It is interesting that Saul was puzzled and thought that it was because David was not clean and could not attend the feast. This position is, of course, listed in the law given by Moses. Men who were not clean were not allowed to participate in religious feasts (Leviticus 7:20-21). The law says,

But the person who eats the flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings which belong to the LORD, in his uncleanness, that person shall be cut off from his people. When anyone touches anything unclean, whether human uncleanness, or an unclean animal, or any unclean detestable thing, and eats of the flesh of the sacrifice of peace offerings which belong to the LORD, that person shall be cut off from his people.¹⁰

Saul wondered about David's cleanliness and did not speak about David during the new moon religious feast. But, at the banquet on the third day, the cleanliness requirement was not required to eat with Saul. It was then that Saul asked about David. It was then that Jonathan entered the conversation with his father. It was then that Jonathan would learn the true heart of his father.

(5) The Plan Goes Against Jonathan (20:30-34)

The writer continues to tell us how the plan goes against Jonathan. Verse 30.

"Then Saul's anger burned against Jonathan and he said to him, 'You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you are choosing the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of your mother's nakedness?³¹ For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Therefore now, send and bring him to me, for he must surely die.'³² But Jonathan answered Saul his father and said to him, 'Why should he be put to death? What has he done?'³³ Then Saul hurled his spear at him to strike him down; so Jonathan knew that his father had decided to put David to death.³⁴ Then Jonathan arose from the table in fierce anger, and did not eat food on the second day of the new moon, for he was grieved over David because his father had dishonored him.' (20:30-34)

Jonathan found out what he did not want to believe. His father wanted David dead. His father spewed his anger at Jonathan for being in a covenant with David. His father accused him of choosing David over him as his father. But notice something else in this passage. Saul was trying to

¹⁰ New American Standard Bible, 1995 Edition: Paragraph Version (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995), Le 7:20-21.

preserve his kingdom through Jonathan's line. "*For as long as the son of Jesse lives on the earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Therefore now, send and bring him to me, for he must surely die.*" This entry by the writer is eye-opening. Saul knew that his kingdom would come to an end and another family would take over because Samuel told him so when Samuel killed Agag. But this statement must mean that Saul knows David is the one to be the next king. Saul, wanting to thwart the will of the LORD, thinks that if he kills David, Jonathan can be the next king of Israel, and Saul's kingdom will not be ripped from his line. Here we find the reason why Saul wants David dead. It is not because he killed Goliath. It is not because he is a great commander. It is not because he is loved by the people more than Saul. It is because he is the LORD's anointed next king of Israel, a Judite, not a Benjamite of Saul's line.

When Jonathan questioned Saul's reasoning for having David killed, Saul did what angry people do; he lashed out at the one who was trying to reason with him. He threw his spear and tried to kill Jonathan. It makes no sense, but angry people make no sense. Why would he want to kill Jonathan?

We also can derive something else from Saul's words. Saul wants Jonathan to be the next king of Israel. That point tells us something about Jonathan that we have not been told in the Scripture. It tells us that Jonathan was Saul's first-born male son. This point was not a hard and fast rule that developed in Israel, for David will not choose his first-born male son to be the next king after him, but we must remember, when selecting Saul, the people said they wanted a king like the surrounding nations had. That did not mean that that was the real reason. That was a lie. As we found out that the real reason was that they wanted a king for protection from Nahash, the Ammonite who was threatening the eastern Promise Land and trying to take control of it. Be that as it may, we know from how Saul reigned as king that he reigned like the surrounding kings. Jonathan was his choice to take his place one day, but Jonathan was not the LORD's choice. David was. Saul needed David dead so Jonathan could be king. But silly Saul tried to kill Jonathan that day, and it made Jonathan angry. The news of his father's heart grieved Jonathan greatly.

(6) The Plan Protects David (20:35-42)

Jonathan was a man of his word. He had a plan, and the plan protected David. Verse 35.

"Now it came about in the morning that Jonathan went out into the field for the appointment with David, and a little lad was with him.³⁶ He said to his lad, "Run, find now the arrows which I am about to shoot." As the lad was running, he shot an arrow past him.³⁷ When the lad reached the place of the arrow which Jonathan had shot, Jonathan called after the lad and said, "Is not the arrow beyond you?"³⁸ And Jonathan called after the lad, "Hurry, be quick, do not stay!" And Jonathan's lad picked up the arrow and came to his master.³⁹ But the lad was not aware of anything; only Jonathan and David knew about the matter.⁴⁰ Then Jonathan gave his weapons to his lad and said to him, "Go, bring them to the city."⁴¹ When the lad was gone, David rose from the south side and fell on his face to the ground, and bowed three times. And they kissed each other and wept together, but David wept the more.⁴² Jonathan said to David, "Go in safety, inasmuch as we have sworn to each other in the name of the LORD, saying, 'The LORD will be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants forever.' " Then he rose and departed, while Jonathan went into the city." (20:35-42)

Out of sight of everyone, Jonathan and David met at the "stone of Ezel" on the southside of the field and embraced in great grief. David was right about Saul. Jonathan was wrong about Saul. The end result brought no comfort, only grief, and sadness. Jonathan sent David on the run from Saul. As far as we know, Jonathan and David will only meet one more time, as found in chapters 23:16-18, but we will wait until we arrive there to look into the reason for that meeting.

Chapter 21

h) A Summary of David on the Run from Saul

(1) David Asks for Bread from the Priest (21:1-6)

Our writer turns in chapter 21 to give a summary of David on the run from Saul. He begins as David asks for bread from the priest. Chapter 21, verse 1.

"Then David came to Nob to Ahimelech the priest; and Ahimelech came trembling 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 said to me, 'Let no one know anything about the matter on which I am sending you and with which I have commissioned you; and I have directed the young men to a certain place.'³ Now therefore, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever can be found."⁴ The priest answered David and said, "There is no ordinary bread on hand, but there is consecrated bread; if only the young men have kept themselves from women."⁵ David answered the priest and said to him, "Surely women have been kept from us as previously when I set out and the vessels of the young men were holy, though it was an ordinary journey; how much more then today will their vessels be holy?"⁶ So the priest gave him consecrated bread; for there was no bread there but 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." (21:1-6)

Here we come to an interesting quandary. Nothing about David's reason for being at Nob nor where he has stationed his men is true. David has lied to the priest, Ahimelech. Yet, Ahimelech was wise enough to know that something was amiss, and that is why he trembled when he met David.

The whole story tells us the timing of David arriving in Nob when the writer tells us that the consecrated bread had just been replaced on the Table of Show Bread in the Tabernacle. Another name for it is the *bread of the Presence*. With that information as an introduction, we must review some data and draw conclusions. Before capturing the Ark of the Covenant and its return to Israel in chapter 7, the Tabernacle was stationed at Shiloh. After the Ark was removed from Shiloh and captured by the Philistines, it was stored at Kiriath-jearim in the home of Abinadab for twenty years. The twenty years had not expired at this time in David's story, so the Ark was still with Abinadab, and his son Eleazar was still in charge of the Ark. With the Ark gone from Shiloh, it seems that the Tabernacle complex and all of its furniture and fixtures may have been moved to Nob which sat in the tribal area of Benjamin, Saul's home territory. We do not know this point for sure, but it seems to be implied from Ahimelech's words concerning the changing of the bread.

On the Table of Show Bread (also called *Bread of Faces*, *Bread of Presence*, *Bread of the Presence*, *Shewbread*, *Shew-bread*, *Showbread*, and *Show Bread*), twelve loaves sat at all times. These twelve loaves were changed out every Sabbath day. Each loaf represented a tribe of Israel. Once removed, the bread was to be eaten only by the descendants of Aaron as they served in the holy places. *"It shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place; for it is most holy to him from the LORD'S offerings by fire, his portion forever."* (Leviticus 24:9) Ahimelech's words tell us that David arrived in Nob on the Sabbath. That point was probably the reason Ahimelech was trembling when he met David. Why was David not resting on the Sabbath but instead hot and hungry? Second, Ahimelech had loaves from the Table of Show Bread, but we do not know if they were brought to Ahimelech from Shiloh or that the Tabernacle had been moved to Nob and the bread was removed that day from the table. We must remember that, even though the Ark was in storage at Kiriath-jearim, the Brazen Altar and all the rest of the Tabernacle furniture and fixtures were still with the Tabernacle and the offering continued daily, monthly, seasonally, and as those who came wanting to present a thankyou offering to the LORD. Nothing had changed. Nevertheless, David was not of the line of Aaron, much less of the line of the priests, Levi. David was a Judite, not a Levite. It was illegal for David to take the loaves and eat them.

Ahimelech tried to find a reason to legally give the bread to David by asking if he and his men were clean. David had no men at the time, but, nevertheless, Ahimelech's question came from the

Leviticus 15 law. Several reasons for being unclean are listed in that chapter, but if any of the reasons were present, David and his men, if he had any, would be unclean for seven days. One of those reasons was if David or one of his non-existent friends had been with a woman any time in the last seven days. That would cause the men to be unclean. As such, that point brings up the need to plan such experiences between husbands and wives as religious days drew near on the calendar. Be that as it may, Ahimelech was still breaking the law by handing the bread to David unless he was, in some way, appealing to a higher command, *“but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD,”* found in Leviticus 19:18, but the context of that passage can hardly be used in this scene between David and Ahimelech.

One more thing about Ahimelech. He was serving as a priest in Nob. He was not the high priest, even though he was a descendant of Eli. Eli and his two sons were already dead, and the high priest line had switched to Ahimelech's cousin, Zadok. The descendants of Zadok will remain in the line of the high priest for the rest of time. As for Ahimelech, he was a priest, and could help with the priestly duties because he was of the line of Aaron. Still, he could never be a high priest, accept that he could act as a substitute high priest when he was on duty, but never could he hold the title because his line was cut off from that privilege by the LORD. We will address this matter further in chapter 22.

(2) David Spotted by Saul's Chief Shepherd (21:7)

During the exchange between David and Ahimelech, we learn of David being spotted by Saul's chief shepherd. Verse 7.

“Now one of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the LORD; and his name was Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul's shepherds.” (21:7)

Being at the Israelite holy site meant that Doeg was a proselyte to the Jewish faith. As for the reason Doeg was *“detained before the LORD”* that day is simple. It was the sabbath, and he could not walk far on the Sabbath; therefore, he might as well stay in the safety of the complex. It just so happened that David did not adhere to the Sabbath resting law that day. By chance, Doeg was there and saw the whole conversation. As we will see later in chapter 22, David also saw Doeg and had a premonition that Doeg would attempt to do David in with Saul.

(3) David Asks the Priest for a Weapon (21:8-9)

Our writer tells us how David asks the priest for a weapon. Verse 8.

*“David said to Ahimelech, ‘Now is there not a spear or a sword on hand? For I brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's matter was urgent.’”*⁹ Then the priest said, *“The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the valley of Elah, behold, it is wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod; if you would take it for yourself, take it. For there is no other except it here.”* And David said, *“There is none like it; give it to me.”* (21:8-9)

Let us not miss another important point. David asked for a weapon. The only weapon was the sword of Goliath that David had stored in his own tent, according to chapter 17:54. Somehow, and we do not know-how, the sword of Goliath was stored behind the ephod in the complex. We must identify this place. It was in the priest's changing room (tent). The ephod belonged to the priest. If this was the high priest's ephod, when the high priest was off duty, one of the other priests in the priestly line would be on duty as a substitute high priest. The ephods of the priests were never to leave the holy ground of the Tabernacle complex. However, when the priest on duty had nothing to do, he did not have to wear the ephod, he could hang it in the changing room that sat on the north side of the Brazen Altar out of the way. When it was time to serve in the role of the priest for a required offering, or someone came to the complex with a freewill offering, the priest on duty would put the ephod on and perform the duties at hand. At this point in the story, nothing was going on in

the complex, and the ephod was hanging in the changing room, covering the sword, which was wrapped in a cloth. It belonged to David because he was the victor against Goliath.