FIRST SAMUEL

Chapter 21

*David at Nob*

**David went to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech trembled when he met him, and asked, “Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?” 2 David answered Ahimelech the priest, “The king charged me with a certain matter and said to me, ‘No one is to know anything about your mission and your instructions.’ 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.” 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 things 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. 7 Now one of Saul’s servants was there that day, detained before the Lord; he was Doeg the Edomite, Saul’s head shepherd. 8 David asked Ahimelech, “Don’t you have a spear or a sword here? I haven’t brought my sword or any other weapon, because the king’s business 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.”**

**21:1** *Nob.* A town northeast of Jerusalem and south of Gibeah where the tabernacle was relocated after the destruction of Shiloh (4:2–3; Jer 7:12). Although it appears that no attempt was made to bring the ark to this sanctuary (see note on 7:1), Ahimelech the high priest, 85 other priests (22:17–18), the ephod (v. 9) and the table of consecrated bread (v. 6) are mentioned in connection with it. (CSB)

*Ahimelech the priest.* See note on 14:3. It appears from 22:10, 15 that David’s purpose in coming to Nob was to seek the Lord’s guidance by means of the Urim and Thummim (see notes on 2:28; Ex 28:30). (CSB)

**21:2** It is not clear why David resorts to deception in his response to Ahimelech. Perhaps it was an attempt to protect Ahimelech from the charge of involvement in David’s escape from Saul. If so, his strategy was not successful (see 22:13–18). (CSB)

**21:4** *consecrated bread.* The “bread of the Presence” (see v. 6; Ex 25:30), which was placed in the Holy Place in the tabernacle and later in the temple as a thank offering to the Lord, symbolizing his provision of daily bread. (CSB)

*provided the men have kept themselves from women.* Although the bread was to be eaten only by the priests (see Lev 24:9), Ahimelech agreed to give it to David and his men on the condition that they were ceremonially clean (see Ex 19:15; Lev 15:18). Jesus uses this incident to illustrate the principle that the ceremonial law was not to be viewed in a legalistic manner (see Mt 12:3–4). He also teaches that it is always lawful to do good and to save life (see Lk 6:9). Such compassionate acts are within the true spirit of the law. (CSB)

**21:9** *sword of Goliath.* See note on 17:54. (CSB)

*ephod.* See note on 2:28. (CSB)

*David at Gath*

**10 That day David fled from Saul and went to Achish king of Gath. 11 But the servants of Achish said to him, “Isn’t this David, the king of the land? Isn’t he the one they sing about in their dances: “ ‘Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands’?” 12 David took these words to heart and was very much afraid of Achish king of Gath. 13 So he pretended to be insane in their presence; and while he was in their hands he acted like a madman, making marks on the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard. 14 Achish said to his servants, “Look at the man! He is insane! Why bring him to me? 15 Am I so short of madmen that you have to bring this fellow here to carry on like this in front of me? Must this man come into my house?”**

**21:10** *Achish.* See note on Ps 34 title. *Gath.* One of the five major towns of the Philistines (Jos 13:3). (CSB)

**21:11** *king of the land.* The designation of David as “king” by the Philistines may be understood as a popular exaggeration expressing an awareness of the enormous success and popularity of David among the Israelite people. (CSB)