

We began our consideration of David's life with his anointing (1Sam.16). We then saw that David was brought into Saul's court by the king himself. After David defeated Goliath and proved himself a faithful and brave leader, Saul grew jealous of David and sought his life. This necessitated that David flee from Saul and become a fugitive.

In chapter 21, we find David fleeing from Saul to two places—Nob (vv1-9) and Gath (vv10-15). The first was a city near Jerusalem, the other was a chief city of the Philistines. Thus, David seeks refuge both with his own people and his enemies. This underscores how fearful David was of Saul. He would go anywhere to be free of him. This brings us to our subject – David at Nob and Gath.

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I. David at Nob—vv1-9

1. V1—"Now David came to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech was afraid when he met David, and said to him, 'Why are you alone, and no one is with you?'"
2. Nob was a city located a few miles NE of Jerusalem—it was one of several places where the tabernacle was located.
3. It's describes as "the city of priests" because many (if not most) of the priest lived there to tend the tabernacle.
4. The name Nob literally means "high place" and likely is the same city referred to as "the Hill of God" in 1Sam.10:5.
5. V1—"Now David came to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest"—that is, the High Priest, likely the brother of Ahijah (1Sam.14:3).
6. We read that Ahimelech was "afraid when he met David"—he likely heard about Saul's displeasure of David.
7. And thus, he wasn't afraid of David but Saul—he knew that if he aided David he too would fall under Saul's wrath.
8. In fact, as we will see in the next chapter, Saul would later have Ahimelech and his entire house put to death (for the very events of chapter 21).
9. And so, we learn, that the fear of Ahimelech was justified, for he surely knew the potential wickedness of Saul.
10. Thus, let us consider three things about David's stay in Nob—David's lie, David's hunger, and David's weapon.
11. (1) David's lie—here I am thinking about David's answer to the priest's question, v1—"Why are you alone, and no one is with you?"
12. Ahimelech wondered why David, a high-ranking commander in the army of Israel, was traveling all by himself.
13. V2—"So David said to Ahimelech the priest, 'The king has ordered me on some business, and said to me, 'Do not let anyone know anything about the business on which I send you, or what I have commanded you.' And I have directed my young men to such and such a place.'"
14. Now, these words have been understood in various ways—some have refused to detect any lie within them at all.
15. Others have seen two lies: (1) that Saul sent him on a special mission, and (2) that he had other men with him.
16. We know for certain that the second of these was not a lie, for the NT teaches us that David had others with him.
17. Matt.12:3-4—"Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him; how he entered the house of God and ate the showbread which was not lawful for him to eat, nor for those who were with him, but only for the priests?"

18. You may know, that the context of this quotation in Matthew 12, was the perversion of the Sabbath by the Pharisees.
19. They were attempted to trap our Savior in that He allowed His disciples to pluck the heads of grain to eat them.
20. Matt.12:2—"And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, 'Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath.'"
21. In response to this, our Savior appeals to 1Sam.21, and the way in which the priest shared the showbread with David.
22. In other words, there are lawful and necessary works on the Sabbath—it's proper to prepare food and satisfy hunger.
23. And yet, for our present purposes, notice our Savior said—"Have you not read what David did when he was hungry, he and those who were with him."
24. Thus, we learn that David was not alone—other men, faithful men, had joined David as a show of allegiance.
25. Who these men are, we are not told, but apparently, David had told them to wait for him in some undisclosed place.
26. But there is simply no way around the fact that his claim the king had ordered him on secret business was a lie.
27. While we cannot be certain of David's motivation behind the lie, we can rather dogmatically condemn the lie.
28. (2) David's hunger, v3—"Now therefore, what have you on hand? Give me five loaves of bread in my hand, or whatever can be found."
29. David was looking for bread to feed himself and his men—he asked the High Priest for five loaves of bread (five cakes of bread).
30. V4—"And the priest answered David and said, 'There is no common bread on hand; but there is holy bread, if the young men have at least kept themselves from women.'"
31. Though there wasn't any regular bread, there were the 12 loaves of bread on the Table of Showbread in the tabernacle.
32. These loaves were baked fresh every Sabbath, and placed on gold plates and put on the Table before the LORD (thus the term Showbread is literally The Bread of His Presence or The Bread in His Presence).
33. They symbolized the 12 tribes of Israel and their total dependence upon God for their physical and spiritual needs.
34. After the fresh bread was placed on the table, the priests were allowed to eat the older bread in the tabernacle.
35. This again was symbolic of God's provision for His people—physical bread for the body and spiritual bread for the soul.
36. V6—"So the priest gave him holy bread; for there was no bread there but the showbread which had been taken from before the LORD, in order to put hot bread in its place on the day when it was taken away."
37. Thus, David took showbread and, assumedly, fed himself and his men—who were hiding somewhere nearby.
38. (3) David's weapon, v8—"And David said to Ahimelech, 'Is there not here on hand a spear or a sword? For I have brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste.'"
39. Here David lied again—he says the reason he was without a weapon, was "because the king's business required haste."
40. V9—"So the priest said, 'The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the Valley of Elah, there it is, wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod.'"
41. If you remember, the ephod was a part of the High Priest's garments, which were stored somewhere in the tabernacle.
42. Apparently, the sword was placed near the ephod as a trophy or reminder of Israel's defeat of Goliath and the Philistines.
43. David no doubt needed the sword for protection—he needed to protect himself from Saul and those loyal to Saul.

44. And so, David leaves Nob with bread and a sword—bread to nourish and a sword to protect him from his enemies.
45. Before I leave this first heading, let me simply point out that our author provides us with an important detail in v7.
46. V7—"Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the LORD. And his name was Doeg, an Edomite, the chief of the herdsmen who belonged to Saul."
47. Why Saul had an Edomite in charge of his herds, we do not know—it's very likely he was a Jewish proselyte.
48. That he was "detained before the LORD" likely means it was a Sabbath, and thus he was forbidden to travel.
49. We learn from chapter 22, that he would eventually tell Saul all that happened at Nob, which would result in the destruction of the city and death of 85 priests.
50. There's little doubt that David was aware of his presence in the tabernacle at Nob, and this was one reason he fled from there.
51. 1Sam.22:22—"So David said to Abiathar, I knew that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I have caused the death of all the persons of your father's house."
52. And so, not only was David's life at risk, but even those who attempted to assist him—this is how much Saul hated him.

II. David at Gath—vv10-15

1. V10—"Then David arose and fled that day from before Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath"—here we are reminded that David was fleeing from Saul.
2. David knew that Saul was pursuing him—he knew that Saul would not rest, until he had found and killed David.
3. But why would David go to Gath—Gath, was a Philistine city north of Nob—it was the hometown of Goliath (Goliath of Gath).
4. Well seemingly, David didn't think he was safe anywhere in Israel, and so he fled outside of Israel to enemy territory.
5. This really underscores the danger David felt he was in—he felt safer in enemy territory than he did among his people.
6. And so, here's David, the Israelite general who killed Goliath, taking refuge in Gath, armed with Goliath's sword.
7. V11—"And the servants of Achish said to him, 'Is this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing of him to one another in dances, saying, 'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?'"
8. V12—"Now David took these words to heart, and was very much afraid of Achish the king of Gath"—just as Ahimelech was afraid so David is afraid.
9. Thus, we find that David pretended madness before king Achish and his servants, and "scratched on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva fall down on his beard" (v13).
10. V14—"Then Achish said to his servants, 'Look, you see the man is insane. Why have you brought him to me?'"
11. V15—"Have I need of madmen, that you have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?"
12. Apparently Achish believed David was mad, and thus eventually let him leave, 22:1—"David therefore departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam."
13. Thus, before I come our third heading (and suggest a few lessons), let me first address a rather difficult question.
14. Was it sinful for David to deceive king Achish in the manner he did—was it sinful for David to pretend madness?
15. Well, let me suggest no, there was nothing wrong in David attempting to deceive his enemies—this is common in warfare.
16. But I will say, while it wasn't sinful it was very humiliating—the king of Israel reduced to pretend madness to his enemies.

17. To such an extent that even the king of Gath felt only pity for David—the fearful warrior was no longer to be feared.
18. Roger Ellsworth—"The man who stood calmly before Goliath because he was possessed with faith now acts like a maniac because he is possessed with fear."
19. Brethren, let me simply say in passing—things can change rather quickly—victory can turn into defeat overnight.
20. Richard Phillips—"Achish probably held the common ancient superstition that harming lunatics brought bad luck. Mainly, however, he had enough cray people already and did not need one more around in David! This was hardly a compliment to a man anointed by God as Israel's future king—and it shows the shame into which sin will bring anyone—but it did allow David to escape."

III. Lessons

1. I want to suggest, in the broad sense we learn two important lessons—from David's stay in Nob we learn about God's provision, and from his stay in Gath we learn about God's protection.
2. Perhaps we could say—God provided for David in Nob and He protected David in Gath—these are two broad lessons.
3. But what I want to do at this point, is to be a bit more specific, and suggest we learn five important lessons from this chapter.
4. (1) God's people must look beyond David for a perfect King—this I trust is an obvious lesson learned from this chapter.
5. Simply put, David was far from perfect, and was never intended to be the final king who would redeem his people.
6. While as we've seen, David serves as a wonderful type of Christ, we must never forget—David was not Christ!
7. And I think this is in part why Scripture records his failures as well as his victories—another king would be needed.
8. And brethren, frankly put, this provides a reminder for us all—man, in some way or another, will always fail you.
9. It's been rightly said—The best men are but men at best—and so we are reminded—like us all, David needed salvation.
10. (2) God's people are loved even though we are weak and needy—this is another reason Scripture records David's weakness.
11. Even though David lied to the High Priest and pretended to be crazy to the king, the Lord provided for him and protected him.
12. Brethren, let me ask you this question—Why does this chapter portray David—Isn't he portrayed as weak and needy?
13. And yet, how does God deal with David? We really learn two things—Christians are weak and God is patient!
14. Now, to be fair—David is in a very difficult situation—he's become a fugitive with no place to really call home.
15. I mean—put yourself in David's shoes for a second—the king of Israel is trying to kill him, and he has to provide for his little band of followers.
16. While we in no way want to justify his behavior, I think most of us are willing to judge David with a measure of mercy.
17. Brethren, I want to suggest, David in many ways is a picture of us, who are in a similar predicament in this world.
18. Think of every season of life—you are a teenager trying to sort things out—you are single trying to sort things out.
19. You are newly married trying to sort things out—you are a new parent trying to sort things out—you are raising teenagers trying to sort things out.
20. No sooner do we begin to understand one of these, do we then move into the next one, only to again have to sort it out.

21. And guess what—in everyone of these seasons we make mistakes, and, if truth be told, we make decisions we regret.
22. Because David was a man after God's own heart, I assure you, as he reflected on this season in his life, he regretted some of his actions.
23. Now, as we are going to see, this is far from the only time or season, wherein David acted in a way he would regret.
24. But here's my point—even though David often made a mess of things, God never abandoned David and left him.
25. How does God deal with David at Nob and Gath? He graciously provides for his needs and protects him from his enemies.
26. God provides for David and protects him, even though David did nothing to deserve it and much to deserve the opposite.
27. You know as I look at the various seasons in my own life, I see the same two things I see in David's—my own weakness and God's patience.
28. I got married and made a lot of mistakes, but God provided and protected; had children and made a lot of mistakes, but God provided and protected.
29. Became a pastor and made a lot of mistakes, but God provided and protected; became a grandfather, and I am sure I will make a lot of mistakes (but God will provide and protect).
30. Brethren, do not overlook the obvious—God provided for David bread even though he did nothing to deserve it.
31. Dale Ralph Davis—"In the confusion and danger and fear David received daily bread. The LORD sustained him. And the bread he received was nothing less than the bread of the presence."
32. Dale Ralph Davis—"Some reader may object and complain that David in all his deception does not deserve this provision. So what else is new? Who would have daily bread if it rested on our deserts? We'd all be skeletons. When everything is scraped down to the bone, I receive my daily bread not because I am godly but because Yahweh is gracious."
33. (3) God's people must never put confidence in past victories—past victories may give way to present failures.
34. Brethren surely, we agree, the David we behold in Gath is rather different than the one we've seen in previous chapters.
35. The last time David faced the Philistines he defeated the giant, and now, he's reduced to a deceiving madman!
36. In chapter 17, he cut off the head of the Philistine, and now in chapter 21, he falls in fear at the Philistines feet.
37. What made the difference? Well, obviously, in chapter 17 he trusted in the Lord, and now, he trusted in himself.
38. David had to learn the difficult lesson, that left to ourselves, we will fail in every situation that comes our way.
39. This is why the Lord allowed David to fall into the hands of the Philistines, that he would cry to God for deliverance.
40. It's a humbling reality, that Christians have the tendency to rely upon themselves, as long as things are going well.
41. But when they fall into the hands of their enemies—when they face trouble—they are forced to cry out to Him.
42. Perhaps I can put it like this—after we have some spiritual victory, we are prone to trust ourselves and not God.
43. This is how subtle our enemy is—he tempts us to trust ourselves when things are going well, or we've had a measure of success in a particular area of our life.
44. 1Cor.10:11-12—"Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come. Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall."
45. (4) God's people have need of both spiritual bread and weaponry—this is learned from David in the tabernacle at Nob.

46. David was fed with bread and armed with a sword both from the tabernacle—these both came directly from God.
47. Put another way, David had need of physical nourishment and he had need of weapons to protect him from his enemies.
48. Let me apply this lesson with a question—"Why would David look for bread and weapons in the tabernacle?"
49. Nob was a small city that housed the tabernacle and priests—the only reason you went to Nob was to visit the tabernacle.
50. As a result, I want to suggest, that while David lied in Nob, he very likely had noble reasons for visiting Nob.
51. At the end of chapter 20, David left Jonathan with the knowledge that Saul had published his desire to see him dead.
52. This now meant that David would be a fugitive—he would no longer have a place to call home until Saul dies and he becomes king.
53. Thus, from this point until he becomes king, David would dwell in the wilderness running from his enemies—he would be a homeless pilgrim,
54. And so, David paid one last visit to the tabernacle to receive necessary supplies to preserve him in the wilderness.
55. Brethren, this is similar to us all, as we to are being hunting by our enemy Satan, throughout the wilderness of this world.
56. One day we will sit on a throne with our Savior, but that day is in the distant future—perhaps I can say—there's a wilderness between us and our throne.
57. And we too are in need of provisions, and we too can basically boil them down to two—spiritual bread and a spiritual sword.
58. Ps.34:8-10—"Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good; blessed is the man who trusts in Him! Oh, fear the LORD, you His saints! There is no want to those who fear Him. The young lions lack and suffer hunger; but those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing."
59. (5) God's people must praise God for His gracious deliverances—I suggest this is an important lesson of chapter 21.
60. Let me ask you a final question—Do you think David learned this lesson? Do you think the events of chapter 21 drove David to God?
61. Well, brethren, we don't have to speculate in answering these questions, as we have the inspired answers in Psalm 34 and 56.
62. Both of these Psalms were written after David "pretended madness before Abimelech" and "the Philistines captured him in Gath."
63. And both Psalms testify to the fact, that while in Gath David learned how to rely on God for His gracious deliverance.
64. For the sake of time, I want to turn you to Psalm 56, where we find the primary lessons David learned from Gath.
65. Ps.56:8-13—"You number my wanderings; put my tears into Your bottle; are they not in Your book? When I cry out to You, then my enemies will turn back; this I know, because God is for me. In God (I will praise His word), in the Lord (I will praise His word), In God I have put my trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? Vows made to You are binding upon me, O God; I will render praises to You, for You have delivered my soul from death. Have You not kept my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living?"
66. Here we learn several things about David and His God: (a) David knew that God watched over him in his journey and cared for his sorrows (v8).
67. (b) David knew if God was for him, what could man do (vv9-11); (c) David knew God would deliver him, and when He did, he would fulfill his vow of offering a thanksgiving sacrifice (vv12-13).
68. Remember, David wrote this Psalm after the events of Gath (as he reflected upon them), and so the Psalm not only reveals what he thought while at Gath but what he learned from Gath.
69. Every Christian will spend time in Nob and Gath, this is certain, and by God's grace, every Christian will learn from it, just as David did. Amen.