

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic.,
3166]

**DHW BIBLE CLASS
LESSON 15A
FIRST SAMUEL
CHAPTER 21**

INTRODUCTION

David became a fugitive fleeing for his life from king Saul. He went to the city of the priests in Nob hoping to find refuge. But because of the presence of Doeg, the Edomite, he had to flee from the city. He then went to the uncircumcised Philistines. He thought that they would not recognize him and that he would be safer in enemy territory but he was mistaken. He had to feign madness in order to escape capture and death.

Trials and adversities are common to every believer. These adversities will reveal our faith in God. In the case of David the fugitive, we find a man struggling within himself between the road of faith and the road of self-survival. The road of faith would be to trust in the Lord, obey Him and know that He will save us until our task is done. The road of self-survival is a road of schemes and counter schemes employing the ingenuity

of man's sinful mind coupled with deception to save our skin.

Valuable lessons are available from the detailed account of the incidents. The chapter can be divided into two main parts: 1) David in Nob; and 2) David in Gath.

COMMENTARY

David Sought Help in Nob

—21:1-9

After David and Jonathan bid farewell to each other, David fled and guarded himself vigilantly. He was now a wanted man and a fugitive. He went to Nob, a small village north of Jerusalem, which was home to the priests. The Tabernacle had been relocated from Shiloh to Nob. The scripture did not tell us exactly when that happened. David had hoped that he could get some help from the priests who were keeping The Tabernacle. He was hungry because he had stayed hidden for three to four days while Jonathan sought to verify his father's intentions.

On arrival at Nob he went to Ahimelech (my brother is king), the priest. Ahimelech was the great grandson of Eli (14:3; 22:9). When Samuel had withdrawn as Saul's priest and prophet, Ahimelech had taken over the role of spiritual advisor.

Ahimelech was afraid to meet David. He was actually trembling as he approached David. It was customary for a person who was on the king's business (let alone the king's son-in-law) to be accompanied by an escort. When Ahimelech inquired as to why he was alone, David lied. He lied that the king had given him something to do which required secrecy. Ahimelech accepted David's explanation without further questions.

David asked Ahimelech for five loaves of bread. Ahimelech replied that there was no common bread only "hallowed bread," or sanctified bread which were set apart and placed on the shewbread table in the Holy Place in the Tabernacle. This consecrated bread could only be eaten by the priests. Ahimelech was willing to give the loaves of bread to David provided he was ceremonially clean and had, at least, kept away from women. David assured him that that was true for the last three days. David said that the bread was now common as they had been removed from the Table of Shewbread. The week old bread was meant for the consumption of the priests and their families.

Leviticus 24:1-9 says, "*And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Command the children of Israel, that they bring unto thee pure oil olive beaten for the light, to*

cause the lamps to burn continually. Without the veil of the testimony, in the tabernacle of the congregation, shall Aaron order it from the evening unto the morning before the LORD continually: it shall be a statute for ever in your generations. He shall order the lamps upon the pure candlestick before the LORD continually. And thou shalt take fine flour, and bake twelve cakes thereof: two tenth deals shall be in one cake. And thou shalt set them in two rows, six on a row, upon the pure table before the LORD. And thou shalt put pure frankincense upon each row, that it may be on the bread for a memorial, even an offering made by fire unto the LORD. Every sabbath he shall set it in order before the LORD continually, being taken from the children of Israel by an everlasting covenant. And it shall be Aaron's and his sons'; and they shall eat it in the holy place: for it is most holy unto him of the offerings of the LORD made by fire by a perpetual statute."

So Ahimelech gave the hallowed bread to David. What Ahimelech did was against the levitical law. A commoner, that is a non-Levite, was not allowed to eat this bread reserved only for the priests. Furthermore, this being the Sabbath Day, the day when the priests replaced the Table of Shewbread with fresh bread, David was not supposed to work and yet

he did “work” when he came to the home of the priests and asked for bread. This was a double sin that David committed against God’s law on top of his lying to Ahimelech that he was on the king’s business.

This incident between David and Ahimelech was used by the Lord Jesus Christ in Matthew 12:1-13 to counter the arguments of the Pharisees who charged Christ for breaking the Sabbath law. Can the breaking of the Sabbath law be justified?

This dialogue and mutual arrangement between David and Ahimelech was observed by Doeg, the Edomite, who was one of Saul’s servants and had served Saul as the chiefest of his herdsmen. Saul had fought Edom (14:47) and perhaps he had taken Doeg, the Edomite into his service after his victory. The word “chief” (Hebrew, *abbiyr*) means ‘mighty’ and can also mean ‘violent’ and ‘obstinate.’ Doeg was “detained before the LORD.” No explanation was given as to why he was confined in the Tabernacle grounds. Some suggested that it was because he had made some vow, or that he was there for purification. Others suggested that he was held against his will or for some kind of punishment. His presence at Nob did not go well for David even though it was within the sovereign will of God in fulfilling what He had earlier prophesied

concerning the premature deaths of the descendants of Eli in 1 Samuel 2.

David asked Ahimelech (21:8): “Is there not here under thine hand spear or sword?” The question was framed to imply that David knew that the sword of Goliath was in Nob for safe keeping. David explained that he was unarmed because, in his hurry to do the king’s business, he had not taken any weapon. Ahimelech told David that he had the sword of Goliath and was willing to let him have it. David remarked: “There is none like that; give it me” (21:9b).

In Dangerous Gath—21:10-15

After getting the food and the sword, David did not linger. He sensed danger because of Doeg, the Edomite (22:22). He fled immediately to Achish, the king of Gath. Achish was a Philistine king. David wanted to be as far away from Saul as possible. For the first time in his life, David left his native land. He reasoned that the best place to seek refuge was in enemy territory. Gath was about 50 kilometres southwest of Nob. He thought that the Philistines there would not recognize him but he was mistaken. His reputation had gone before him. The court advisors of Achish immediately recognized him. They had heard of the adulation given to him —‘Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands’. They

called David “the king of the land.” He was not the king, but they saw his potential after he had decimated Goliath and became the people’s hero. Perhaps the news of David’s anointing as the next king of Israel was by then public knowledge. Even in enemy territory, David’s kingship was well known. But Achish’s courtiers opposed accepting David into their ranks.

From Psalm 56, we may deduce that David was temporarily imprisoned. David sensed danger to his life because he had been recognized. When he was brought before Achish again, he changed his behaviour and pretended to be insane (21:14). He scribbled on the doors of the gate and let his saliva drip down to his beard. The beard of a man in the culture of the people at that time was held in high regard. It was considered the dignity of a man and any pollution to the beard was a great humiliation. Achish was convinced that David was mad. He did not want a mad man in his family so David was released and he left.

PRACTICAL VALUE

David went to the city of the priests for help. He was hungry and weak. Ahimelech gave him consecrated bread which only the priests were allowed to eat. To Ahimelech, meeting David’s hunger

was more important than a ritualistic obligation. Acts of mercy and needs appeared to take precedence over strict observance of religious rituals. The Lord seemed to have endorsed Ahimelech’s actions (12:3-7). In our daily life, whether as a student or a working adult, this guiding principle should free us from unnecessary agony and guilt in our observance of the Sabbath Day.

David lived to regret the lies that he told Ahimelech. Lies may benefit a person for a time but ultimately they will result in terrible consequences. When David looked to the LORD, he did not fear Goliath. Now, he seemed to have temporarily lost sight of the LORD and Saul seemed formidable. He leaned on his own understanding and lied to Ahimelech who believed that he was on the king’s business. This incident was witnessed by Doeg, the Edomite, who later reported to Saul.

In his desperation, David escaped to enemy’s territory. He was caught by the Philistine king, Achish. He was imprisoned for a while. Then he feigned madness and was released.

AMEN.

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: 1 Samuel 21:1-9; Matthew 12:3-8.

Tuesday: 1 Samuel 21:10-15; Psalm 56; Proverbs 29:25.

Wednesday: 1 Samuel 21:1-15.

Thursday: 1 Samuel 21:1-15.

Friday: 1 Samuel 21:1-15.

2. Can the lie of David be justified?

Analysis:

Text	Practical Value
1 Samuel 21:1-9	
1 Samuel 21:10-15	

3. What exactly is the biblical understanding and application of the law of the Sabbath in Old Testament times? Can the same Sabbath law principles be applied to our time? Can the breaking of the Sabbath law be justified?

Discussion Questions

1. When there is a conflict between human need and ceremonial observance as in 21:6, what should be the guiding principle?

4. When we are desperate, we tend to sin against God by telling lies. Can you suggest some ways to prevent this from happening?

5. Name one truth in this lesson that strikes you and is personally applicable to you.
