

God's Search for a Mediator

The Book of Samuel

^{21:1} 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. 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. 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.'

¹⁰ Then David arose and fled that day from Saul, and went to Achish king of Gath. ¹¹ But the servants of Achish said to him, 'Is this not David the king of the land? Did they not sing of this one as they danced, saying, 'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?'' ¹² David took these words to heart and greatly feared Achish king of Gath. ¹³ So he disguised his sanity before them, and acted insanelly in their hands, and scribbled on the doors of the gate, and let his saliva run down into his beard. ¹⁴ Then Achish said to his servants, 'Behold, you see the man behaving as a madman. Why do you bring him to me? ¹⁵ Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this one to act the madman in my presence? Shall this one come into my house?' ^{22:1} So David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam; and when his brothers and all his father's household heard of it, they went down there to him. ² Everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him; and he became captain over them. Now there were about four hundred men with him. ³ And David went from there to Mizpah of Moab; and he said to the king of Moab, 'Please let my father and my mother come and stay with you until I know what God will do for me.' ⁴ Then he left them with the king of Moab; and they stayed with him all the time that David was in the stronghold. ⁵ The prophet Gad said to David, 'Do not stay in the stronghold; depart, and go into the land of Judah.' So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth.

⁶ Then Saul heard that David and the men who were with him had been discovered. Now Saul was sitting in Gibeah, under the tamarisk tree on the height with his spear in his hand, and all his servants were standing around him. ⁷ Saul said to his servants who stood around him, 'Hear now, O Benjamites! Will the son of Jesse also give to all of you fields and vineyards? Will he make you all commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds?' ⁸ For all of you have conspired against me so that there is no one who discloses to me when my son makes a covenant with the son of Jesse, and there is none of you who is sorry for me or discloses to me that my son has stirred up my servant against me to lie in ambush, as it is this day.' ⁹ Then Doeg the Edomite, who was standing by the servants of Saul, said, 'I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub. ¹⁰ He inquired of the LORD for him, gave him provisions, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine.' ¹¹ Then the king sent someone to summon Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father's household, the priests who were in Nob; and all of them came to the king. ¹² Saul said, 'Listen now, son of Ahitub.' And he answered, 'Here I am, my lord.' ¹³ Saul then said to him, 'Why have you and the son of Jesse conspired against me, in that you have given him bread and a sword and have inquired of God for him, so that he would rise up against me by lying in ambush as it is this day?' ¹⁴ Then Ahimelech answered the king and said, 'And who among all your servants is as faithful as David, even the king's son-in-law, who is captain over your guard, and is honored in your house? ¹⁵ Did I just begin to inquire of God for him today? Far be it from me! Do not let the king impute anything to his servant or to any of the household of my father, for your servant knows nothing at all of this whole affair.'

¹⁶ But the king said, 'You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all your father's household!' ¹⁷ And the king said to the guards who were attending him, 'Turn around and put the priests of the LORD to death, because their hand also is with David and because they knew that he was fleeing and did not reveal it to me.' But the servants of the king were not willing to put forth their hands to attack the priests of the LORD. ¹⁸ Then the king said to Doeg, 'You turn around and attack the priests.' And Doeg the Edomite turned around and attacked the priests, and he killed that day eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod. ¹⁹ And he struck Nob the city of the priests with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and infants; also oxen, donkeys, and sheep he struck with the edge of the sword.

²⁰ But one son of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled after David. ²¹ Abiathar told David that Saul had killed the priests of the LORD. ²² Then David said to Abiathar, 'I knew on that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I have brought about the death of every person in your father's household. ²³ Stay with me; do not be afraid, for he who seeks my life seeks your life, for you are safe with me.'

Questions

1. As David flees, what does he acquire? What does this mean to him? To others watching him?
 - a. (If this comes up) Was David lying? He was ambiguous, but it's not clear to him whose side Ahimelech is on. Ahimelech's name means 'my brother is king' after all. It's possible he is protecting Ahimelech from knowing too much. Later, Ahimelech is able to say truthfully, 'I didn't know about any plot.'
 - b. The bread is holy bread. Saul had asked in 20:27, 'Why has the son of Jesse not come to the feast (literally, *bread*)?' David also knew that he could not safely return to his home town, Bethlehem, which means 'house of bread.' So he goes to find the Tabernacle sanctuary at Nob. This means that David is inheriting a priestly role, a mediator's role.
 - i. Was the bread meant for the priests or for no one? (Priests would place the hot bread before God, and then eat the bread being replaced)
 - c. The sword of Goliath, which was rightly his. This reflected his mediator's role for Israel against the Philistines.
 - d. David is probably being intentional here, gathering these things.
2. Why would David go to the Philistines? Bringing Goliath's sword?
 - a. Possibly because it was part of a 'hate triangle.' If Saul was not likely to go there, because he hated Achish and vice versa, then maybe David should go there?
 - b. However, it is still a mistake on David's part to go there. Why?
 - c. Notice that the Philistines call David 'king of the land.' This is probably their mistake, but it is poetically appropriate, and increases the danger David is in. Why do the Philistines think that David is king? Because he's the best warrior, and songs are made about him. Possibly they assume that David would have bested Saul for the throne.
 - d. APPLICATION: How do we sometimes panic, not place our identity in God, and make alliances and compromises with some source of power?
3. What happens to David in the cave of Adullam?
 - a. The cave of Adullam is on the side of a forested hill. Looking west from the top of the hill to the valley of Elah, you could survey the place where David slew Goliath. Twelve miles to the northwest you could see Bethlehem. You could even see part of the skyline of Jerusalem.
 - b. David's confidence in God is restored, since God delivered him from Achish. He wrote Psalms 34, 52, 57, and 142 here.
 - c. Why are people drawn to David? How is this significant? The fearful, disenfranchised. David learns to shepherd them, to pray for them, to mediate for them. He is starting to learn to be the king. First he got holy bread and a sword. Now he gets people as well. This is the beginning of David's kingdom.
 - d. Notice that Jesus – as the new king beginning his kingdom – gathered his people around himself in the wilderness also.
4. What is the contrast being made between Saul and David in their appeals to their followers?
 - a. In his speech, Saul addresses those who are closest to him, from his own tribe of Benjamin, and lashes out at them for what he deems to be disloyal behavior. One commentator has this to say about his speech: "The factual content of the speech is minimal, the emotional content maximal. This is apparent from the fact that the order of the 'facts' in the speech is exactly opposite of the actual chronological order" (J.P. Fokkelman). He thinks:
 - i. they were all too susceptible to bribes from David, because
 - ii. they had entered into a conspiracy against him, because
 - iii. none of them warned him about Jonathan and David making a covenant, because
 - iv. no one had any sympathy for him, because
 - v. Jonathan himself had turned David against him
 - b. Brian Morgan, pastor at Peninsula Bible Church Cupertino, says: 'When the emotional content of a discussion becomes greater than the factual, reason and logic go out the window. Saul views everything in life through the lens of paranoia, thus he accuses those closest to him of conspiring against him. To the paranoid, everything looks like a conspiracy. Everyone is against him, Saul imagines. No one feels sorry for him. He has

limitless compassion for himself. But that can't comfort him, so he seeks comfort from others. None of his courtiers answer his tirade, however. There is dead silence, because everyone loved David, "even Saul's servants," as we read in 18:5, 22.'

- c. In a trial, there are many roles: defendant, prosecutor, judge, jury. How many roles is Saul playing? Saul plays defendant, prosecutor, judge, jury, and executioner with Ahimelech. Notice that the chiasm emphasizes Ahimelech's defense and innocence.

A. a) 3 lines of report (David spotted, Saul informed) **22:6** as an introduction to:

b) 7 lines of speech by Saul **22:7-8** Saul's paranoia causes him to disregard his best advisors.

B. Betrayal by Doeg (mainly in speech) **22:9-10**

C. Saul summons Ahimelech and calls him to account **22:11-12**

D. Saul's accusation **22:13**

X. Ahimelech's defense **22:14-15** He is innocent, and only behaved toward David with the respect Saul had already given David.

D'. Saul's judgment **22:16**

C'. Saul orders murder of Ahimelech and priests **22:17**

B'. Doeg acts, carries out the execution **22:18,19**

A'. a) 3 lines of report (Abiathar escapes, David informed) **22:20-21** as an introduction to:

b) 7 lines of speech by David: David takes responsibility for what happened, in sharp contrast to Saul.

- d. How many times does Saul commit an injustice? Even though Ahimelech was wrongly accused by Doeg (who left out David's speech with Ahimelech), and even though Ahimelech refuses to fall for the polarity between loyalty to David vs. loyalty to Saul, and even though Ahimelech points out Saul's hypocrisy in this matter, Saul disregards all this and kills them anyway.

- e. Throughout, Saul blames other people and takes no responsibility. How does he do this?
- He does not take responsibility for finding out the truth (instead of what Doeg said) and carrying out justice with the priests.
 - He does not take responsibility for what he did to David. Instead, he blames David for 'lying in wait' and being the aggressor. But David has never been the aggressor!
 - Then he blames his troops and even Jonathan for causing him all this pain. In reality, the pain is self-inflicted. His identity is tied up in his role as king, and not as a beloved child of God, despite all that God has done to wean him from it. But he does not take responsibility for that.
 - Most incredibly, Saul kills the priests! This is like shooting medics in war – international agreements in war prohibit the shooting of medics. He is killing off the voice of God in his life, since the priests represent that.
 - Saul is like Adam, shifting the blame to Eve (this woman) and God (you gave me).

5. David, on the other hand, takes responsibility.

- What does David learn when the death of the priests is told to him? David offers safety to Abiathar. How is he able to say that? He believes in God's promise, and that God will protect him. Therefore the safest place for Abiathar to be is with David. Despite all the threats! He places his identity and life in God's hands.
- David has now learned that it will cost people to mediate God's truth to people. Sometimes their lives. This is the first time this happens. Saul is increasingly vicious. He'll kill not just David, but those who support David.

6. APPLICATION: What do we learn about taking responsibility or blaming others here?