

## Pay Attention! (1 Samuel 22:6-23)

### 1. Conspiracy (v.7-14)

- Saul is mentioned for the first time since his New Moon Feast fiasco (20:26-34). He is described as conducting business outdoors under a tamarisk tree (Judg. 4:4-5) with a spear in his hand.
- This spear represents not only his authority but is a narrative cue; whenever the narrator mentions Saul's "spear," he is prepping the reader for an immoral violent action (18:10-11; 19:9-10; 20:33).
- Saul's inner circle are all men from his own tribe of Benjamin. Tensions between Israel and Judah have been a theme throughout Saul's kingship (11:8; 15:4; 17:52). David, on the other hand, has favor in the eyes of Israel and Judah (18:16).
- Somehow, Saul is informed that David was at Nob (v.6). At the mention of David's name, Saul becomes hysterical by assuming and accusing everyone of conspiracy:
  - He assumes that David has promised to reward Saul's own men with land once the "coup" is carried out (v.7).
  - He berates his own bodyguards for neglecting to tell him of Jonathan's covenant with David. However, he already knew of it (20:30-31; 22:8).
  - He accuses his servants of knowing yet failing to inform him of David's supposed encroaching assassination (v.8).
  - He accuses his son (Jonathan) of conspiring with David ("my son" and "son of Jesse"). In Saul's eyes, Jonathan is the mastermind, not David. David is simply the vehicle (v.8).
  - No one feels sorry or is empathetic for him (v.8).
- At the mention of David's presence at Nob, he accuses all his servants, Jonathan, and David of a great conspiracy to remove him as king. All his servants are silent. He takes their silence as affirming his suspicion.
- Doeg departs from Nob and arrives at the tamarisk tree within a few days after David's parting from Ahimelech (21:7) and informs Saul of Ahimelech's actions. He accuses Ahimelech of "inquiring of the LORD" for David, providing provisions for him, including giving him the sword of Goliath (v.10).
- Saul then summons Ahimelech to him at Gibeah, along with 84 priests who were stationed at Nob (about two miles away).
- Saul calls Ahimelech "the son of Ahitub," which is to be taken as a term of derision, comparable to David's reference as "the son of Jesse" (v.7, 8, 13).
- In respect and integrity, Ahimelech answers Saul as "my lord," which is a reaffirmation that he has not undermined Saul in any way.
- His response was noble, gracious, and tactful. He asks Saul two rhetorical questions:
  - Fivefold Defense of David (v.14): David is Saul's servant, he is loyal, Saul's son-in-law, the captain of his bodyguard, and highly respected by all.
  - Ambiguous Denial (v.15): see point #2.

### 4. Ambiguity (v.15)

The Hebrew is ambiguous. It can read one of two ways:

*"This is nothing new. It was not the first day I have inquired of the LORD for him."*

- "Inquiring" of the LORD for the priest includes consulting the Urim and Thummim or the ark of the covenant. When Saul was pursuing the Philistines (14), Ahijah (son of Ahitub and brother of Ahimelech) brought with him the ark and ephod with the Urim and Thummim (14:18-19, 36-42).



- We do not know what happened to Ahijah, but Ahimelech becomes the High Priest at Nob. With him, as with his brother, was the ephod (with the Urim and Thummim).
- Just as Saul consulted the Urim and Thummim (14:41), so David consulted the Urim and Thummim. He may have done it when he went out to fight against the Philistines (18:5, 13-16, 25, 30). As a result, it would make sense that Ahimelech asked David "why he was alone" (21:1); when David had come to inquire of the LORD in the past, he always had men with him, for he was going out to battle against the Philistines.
- Ahimelech tells Saul "Yes, I did inquire of the LORD for David, but it was not the first time. I have done it many times, especially when he went out to fight the Philistines. As your servant (v.15), I had no clue about David's change in status before you."
- If David did inquire of the LORD through Ahimelech, this would partly explain his visit.

Questions: Why is Ahimelech trembling (21:1)? Was the inquiry successful? Why did David flee to Gath? Why wasn't the inquiry mentioned by the narrator (21:1-9)? Can Doeg be trusted (Psalm 52:1-3)?

*"I have never inquired of the LORD for David. Why would I begin now?"*

- The Hebrew is expletive, which refers not to the beginning of the action, but the action itself. Ahimelech is not admitting his inquiry, but instead denying it.
- The only defense that Ahimelech gives is the inquiry; he mentions nothing about the bread or the sword, but only the inquiry. Saul violates the commandment of God regarding accusations; two or three witnesses are required (Deut. 19:15).
- Ahimelech is correcting the false narrative: "It was not the first time I inquired of the LORD for David. I never did!"

### 3. Prophecy (v.17-29)

- Saul, acting as judge and king, pronounces the death sentence on Ahimelech and the 84 other priests who were with him, despite Ahimelech's entreaty that he knew nothing about the matter (v.15-16). He assumes all of them, like all his servants, are co-conspirators.
- Saul orders his bodyguards to kill the priests (v.17). Saul views Ahimelech's actions as seditious: He has fed, armed, and consulted the LORD for a fugitive. He must die.
- Saul's men will not follow through (Acts 5:29). This is the second time where his men would not follow his orders (14:45).
- After his men refuse, Saul orders Doeg to slaughter the priests. All of them (85) were killed. The carnage did not stop in Gibeah. Doeg then traveled two miles Nob and slaughtered all the women, children, infants, oxen, donkeys, and sheep (v.19).
- Fifty years earlier, a "man of God" confronted Eli with prophetic utterances (2:27-36):
  - Eli himself would be the last priest who would live to be old (2:22, 31; 4:18) and all others would die young. The initial prophecy occurred when Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas died on the same day (2:25, 34; 3:12; 4:11). Nob is the third fulfillment of the prophecy: Abiathar escapes but is weeping his eyes out because of the slaughter at Nob (2:35).
  - The last prophetic fulfillment will occur when Abiathar is removed from service in David's house, and replaced by Zadok once David becomes king (1 Kgs. 2:26-27, 35).
- Even though the prophecy was also given half a century ago, Saul and Doeg are still morally accountable for their great wickedness. David, in the same manner, acknowledges his partial role in the death of the priests; he knew Doeg would tell Saul (v.22). God's providence does not negate man's responsibility, but instead includes it, even amid great evil and sin (Gen. 50:20; Acts 2:23).