

1 Samuel 21 marks a crucial point in David's life. It presents him as a cunning and devout fugitive, balancing political and spiritual survival. This chapter highlights the transition of David from a hero to an outcast, illustrating a character filled with tension, faith, and moral ambiguity.

This chapter also invites us to ponder David's actions and decisions and their deeper implications. It challenges us to reflect on faith's complexities when faced with difficult situations. How does David balance religious observance and survival? What do these events say about God's provision and protection in times of crisis?

Exploring 1 Samuel 21 helps us understand David's life—a life marked by divine favor, human frailty, and a relentless pursuit of God's will amidst uncertainties. It offers insights into his journey from an anointed shepherd boy to the king of Israel.

#### DAVID'S ARRIVAL AND INQUIRY AT NOB (VERSES 1-3):

On the run, David came to Nob, an unknown location speculated to be near modern day Jerusalem. We are introduced to Ahimelech the priest. There is some confusion with the name, likely due to double names. Ahimelech, we believe, is the same person as Ahiah in 1 Samuel 14:3 and Abiathar in Mark 2:26. The priest expresses fear upon David's arrival, which turns out to be well-founded in the next chapter. Ahimelech asks what seems a natural question, "Why ART thou alone, and no man with thee?" (v. 1). A man of such important position as David would rarely travel alone.

David's response is simple: **he lied**. He made up a story about being on a secret mission for the King, and therefore leaving his men at "such and such a place" (v. 2). The text uses the word אַלְמוֹנִי [almoni]. The word "is derived from 'almon' (a widower), bereft of a name, (as a widower is bereft of his spouse), for I do not wish to mention it, since it is a secret matter."<sup>1</sup>

David proceeds to ask Ahimelech for whatever he has available. In this case, it happens to be the five loaves of shewbread from the Tabernacle. The text does not specify if David knows the type of bread, but it is likely that he does.

In this portion of the narrative, David appears desperate. His actions, including his lack of honesty and outright deception, can be interpreted in two ways. On one hand, we may judge him harshly for his actions. On the other hand, we can empathize with his situation, understanding that the pressure of hunger and fear can drive a person to extreme measures. This serves as a reminder of the human element in these biblical narratives, as even figures like David, anointed by God, struggle with their circumstances and make morally ambiguous decisions.

#### AHIMELECH'S RESPONSE AND THE HOLY BREAD (VERSES 4-6):

Ahimelech debates giving David the holy bread, questioning their ceremonial cleanliness. This struggle reveals the moral dilemmas of those in the religious and political conflicts of the time. David responds with a lie about the purity of his men and argues the bread is common. He suggests it should be given to the priests, implying its status as holy bread has ended. However, he contends that even if it were still holy, their desperation should warrant compassion from the priests.

This scene highlights how desire can distort perception of reality. Despite violating religious law, Ahimelech gives David the bread, possibly due to the urgency of the situation.

Jesus references this account in Mark 2:25-26 to challenge the Pharisees' inconsistency. They revered David but sought to destroy Jesus, holding Him to a different standard.

#### THE PRESENCE OF DOEG THE EDMITE (VERSE 7):

In verse 7, we encounter an "uh-oh" moment. It appears there is a witness, and an important one at that. God introduces us to Doeg the Edomite, Saul's chief shepherd. He was "detained before the LORD," possibly for some kind of ceremonial duty, but the circumstances are unclear. One rabbinical interpretation suggests that he was standing there, giving the impression of being religious by studying the Torah, but was actually strategically eavesdropping.

While no further information is provided, the reader senses the foreshadowing of a plot twist.

It's important to note that Doeg is identified as "an Edomite". This refers to his ethnic group rather than his location. The land of Edom, located to the east of Jerusalem and across the Jordan, is home to the descendants of Esau. As such, they are considered "cousins" to the Jewish people.

#### DAVID'S REQUEST FOR A WEAPON (VERSES 8-9):

In verse 8, David requests a sword, lying that he urgently needed one for the king's business. Ahimelech mentions the only available sword is Goliath's, hidden "behind the ephod."

Most interpret this as the sword being physically hidden, but ancient sages of Judaism suggest "behind the ephod" means "following the ephod's" divine guidance. This interpretation aligns with Ahimelech's role as the high priest, unlikely to hide a weapon behind his ceremonial garment.

Moreover, the sword, having been used to kill Goliath, was likely not ritually clean. It's more plausible that Ahimelech, needing divine guidance due to Doeg's presence, was instructed by God to give David Goliath's sword.

If this interpretation is accurate, it indicates God's protection of David, despite his deceitful ways, to ensure the fulfillment of His plan for Israel.

<sup>1</sup> The Complete Jewish Bible with Rashi Commentary." [Chabad.org](https://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/15850/showrashi/true), [https://www.chabad.org/library/bible\\_cdo/aid/15850/showrashi/true](https://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/15850/showrashi/true). Accessed January 6, 2024.