

Why Have You Conspired Against Me?

1 Samuel 21-22

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## Introduction

Twelve miles outside of Prague in the Czech Republic there used to be a small town called Lidice. In 1942, a man named Reinhard Heydrich was a top Nazi leader who had helped develop the “Final Solution” - the mass murder of German Jews. He was targeted by Allied forces as a top target to take out, so British Special Operations forces trained two Czech men to carry out an assassination of Heydrich. When Hitler was told of the attack, he flew into a rage and ordered his men to kill 10,000 Czech citizens as revenge. His advisors talked him out of that number, but he decided instead to destroy the town of Lidice, despite any evidence connecting the assassins to it. Nazi soldiers drove into the town of 500 people and shot all the men and boys. The women were sent to Ravensbruck concentration camp, most of the children were eventually sent to gas chambers, and the town itself was burned to the ground, which the Nazis filmed. The annihilation of Lidice became international news that came to symbolize Nazi brutality.<sup>1</sup>

In today’s Scripture passage, we have a similar brutal overreaction where an entire village was destroyed, and its inhabitants put to death as revenge for cooperating with the enemy. This was almost 3,000 years before World War II, but it also involved an insane, murderous head of the country who needed to send a message to anyone who would dare to oppose him. If you haven’t been with us for the last few sermons on David’s life, the main thing that you need to know coming into these two chapters is that Saul has been intensely jealous of David and seeking to kill him any chance he gets. He’s been obstructed by his own children, by circumstances, and by the Lord’s direct intervention. But Saul’s no quitter, he’s going to keep on trying. And today, there will be great collateral damage in the hunt for his rival.

David has had to abandon his home, his wife, his station in the palace, and his position in Saul’s army. He was homeless and a fugitive from the crown, with no supplies or provisions. But he had a will to live that would carry him far. Leaving the reach of Saul meant going to cities where he might get help, but he had to be careful who he revealed himself to. The first fifteen verses tell how

### **I. David Deceived the Distant (21:1-15)**

*<sup>1</sup> Then David came to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. And Ahimelech came to meet David, trembling, and said to him, “Why are you alone, and no one with you?” <sup>2</sup> And David said to Ahimelech the priest, “The king has charged me with a matter and said to me, ‘Let no one know anything of the matter about which I send you, and with which I have charged you.’ I have made an appointment with the young men for such and such a place. <sup>3</sup> Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever is here.” <sup>4</sup> And the priest answered David, “I have no common bread on hand, but there is holy bread—if the young men have kept themselves from women.” <sup>5</sup> And David answered the priest, “Truly women have been kept from us as always when I go on an expedition. The vessels of the young men are holy even when it is an ordinary journey. How much more today will their vessels be holy?” <sup>6</sup> So the priest gave him the holy bread, for there was no bread there but the bread of the Presence, which is removed from before the Lord, to be replaced by hot bread on the day it is taken away. <sup>7</sup> Now a certain*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/lidice>

man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the Lord. His name was Doeg the Edomite, the chief of Saul's herdsmen. <sup>8</sup> Then David said to Ahimelech, "Then have you not here a spear or a sword at hand? For I have brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste." <sup>9</sup> And the priest said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you struck down in the Valley of Elah, behold, it is here wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you will take that, take it, for there is none but that here." And David said, "There is none like that; give it to me." <sup>10</sup> And David rose and fled that day from Saul and went to Achish the king of Gath. <sup>11</sup> And the servants of Achish said to him, "Is not this David the king of the land? Did they not sing to one another of him in dances, 'Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands?'" <sup>12</sup> And David took these words to heart and was much afraid of Achish the king of Gath. <sup>13</sup> So he changed his behavior before them and pretended to be insane in their hands and made marks on the doors of the gate and let his spittle run down his beard. <sup>14</sup> Then Achish said to his servants, "Behold, you see the man is mad. Why then have you brought him to me? <sup>15</sup> Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this fellow to behave as a madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?"

David's first stop after fleeing the palace was to go the city of the priests, Nob, to see the high priest, Ahimelech, hoping to get food and supplies from him. He wasn't ready to advertise that he was fleeing Saul, so he had to come up with a cover story of going on an errand for the king. It was a flimsy story for someone who had not packed food or weapons, but he had a quick lie for that as well – "the king's business required haste." Ahimelech's main concern was whether David's men had made themselves ritually unclean through sexual relations, which David assured them they had not. Which wasn't hard to deny since there weren't any actual men with him yet.

So Ahimelech gave him the only food around, the bread of the Presence, which is explained in Leviticus 24:9 – "And it shall be for Aaron and his sons, and they shall eat it in a holy place, since it is for him a most holy portion out of the Lord's food offerings, a perpetual due." David was not a priest, so he shouldn't have been given this bread, but there was a higher principle at work. Ahimelech made the right choice in giving it to him, since none other than Jesus commended it in Luke 6:1-5:

*"On a Sabbath, while He (Jesus) was going through the grainfields, His disciples plucked and ate some heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands. But some of the Pharisees said, 'Why are you doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath?' And Jesus answered, '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 took and ate the bread of the Presence, which is not lawful for any but the priests to eat, and also gave it to those with him?' And he said to them, 'The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.'"*

If the Lord's anointed in ancient Israel could eat the holy bread in the tabernacle meant for only priests, then the Lord's anointed a thousand years after that could eat grain on the Sabbath day. Ahimelech letting David eat the bread broke the letter of the law but kept the spirit of the law. This was feeding the hungry and loving your neighbor. Jesus was saying that "if David could override the law without blame, how much more could the much greater Son of David do so?"<sup>2</sup>

Put a mental asterisk next to verse 7 where it says that Doeg the Edomite was there that day. This will be significant in the next chapter. In verses 8-9, David got Goliath's sword from Ahimelech, who had somehow gotten possession of it. This was the sword that David cut off Goliath's head with. And then where did David go from there, hoping to elude Saul and his men for as long as he could? To Gath, one of the five main Philistine cities. Do you remember where Goliath was from? Gath. David marched into that town with its former champion's sword in tow. And they immediately recognized him, which he apparently was hoping would not happen. So in fear, he decided that if he

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<sup>2</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Grand Rapids: Tyndale, 1975), p. 123.

acted insane that they'd be disgusted by him and leave him alone. And it worked! Think about this, though: what else better symbolized the Lord's ability to keep David safe than Goliath's sword? God delivered David from the giant champion and had guided him to victory that day, but now that David was on the run, he was acting in fear. Robert Chisholm comments that:

"David attempts at self-preservation – which involve lying to a priest, trusting in a defeated enemy's weapon, and seeking a position in the army of a Philistine ruler – have backfired. He cannot escape his past or his destiny; ironically, the Philistines remind him of both when they call him 'the king of the land' and recall his fame as a warrior."<sup>3</sup>

How far David has fallen at this point? He had once been the great champion over the Philistines, now he was drooling and clawing and getting kicked out of town by the disgusted Philistine ruler. He was not even worth killing, just removed from their presence. He went from being among the enemy to hiding in a cave where

## **II. David Gathered the Disenchanted (22:1-5)**

*<sup>1</sup> David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. And when his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him. <sup>2</sup> And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul, gathered to him. And he became commander over them. And there were with him about four hundred men. <sup>3</sup> And David went from there to Mizpeh of Moab. And he said to the king of Moab, "Please let my father and my mother stay with you, till I know what God will do for me." <sup>4</sup> And he left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with him all the time that David was in the stronghold. <sup>5</sup> Then the prophet Gad said to David, "Do not remain in the stronghold; depart, and go into the land of Judah." So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth.*

You know that you're a true outlaw when you're hiding in a cave. Saul didn't know where to find David but apparently his family and everyone who was in debt or bitter and disillusioned towards the king knew where he was. His family must have felt in danger simply because they were related to him. David had been the commander of Saul's armies, but now he was the commander of a small group of castoff/malcontents. He's like Robin Hood in the forest, gathering his band of merry men. Better than being alone, I suppose, but it's a reminder of how far he's fallen. And it's a foreshadowing of something that will happen in the future with his son, Absalom.

David's parents needed to be kept safe from Saul's reach but I'm assuming that life on the run was not going to work for them. So the king of Moab was tasked with keeping them until David returned. Here's another connection that's not mentioned in the text, but in all the commentaries: Who was David's great-grandmother? Ruth, the one whose book is right before 1 Samuel. And where was she from? Moab. She was an outsider from Israel, but she was David's ancestor, and so perhaps, that Moabite king knew of, and honored, David's family connection.

David is told to leave the cave stronghold and head into Judah. In the meantime,

## **III. Saul Executed the Disloyal (22:6-23)**

*<sup>6</sup> Now Saul heard that David was discovered, and the men who were with him. Saul was sitting at Gibeah under the tamarisk tree on the height with his spear in his hand, and all his servants were standing about him. <sup>7</sup> And Saul said to his servants who stood about him, "Hear now, people of Benjamin; will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, will he make you all commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, <sup>8</sup> that all of you have conspired against me? No one discloses to me when my son makes a covenant with the son of Jesse. None of you is sorry for me*

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<sup>3</sup> Robert B. Chisholm Jr, *1 & 2 Samuel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2013), p. 142.

or discloses to me that my son has stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as at this day.”  
9 Then answered Doeg the Edomite, who stood by the servants of Saul, “I saw the son of Jesse coming to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub,<sup>10</sup> and he inquired of the Lord for him and gave him provisions and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine.”<sup>11</sup> Then the king sent to summon Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father's house, the priests who were at Nob, and all of them came to the king.<sup>12</sup> And Saul said, “Hear now, son of Ahitub.” And he answered, “Here I am, my lord.”<sup>13</sup> And Saul said to him, “Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, in that you have given him bread and a sword and have inquired of God for him, so that he has risen against me, to lie in wait, as at this day?”<sup>14</sup> Then Ahimelech answered the king, “And who among all your servants is so faithful as David, who is the king's son-in-law, and captain over your bodyguard, and honored in your house?<sup>15</sup> Is today the first time that I have inquired of God for him? No! Let not the king impute anything to his servant or to all the house of my father, for your servant has known nothing of all this, much or little.”<sup>16</sup> And the king said, “You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all your father's house.”<sup>17</sup> And the king said to the guard who stood about him, “Turn and kill the priests of the Lord, because their hand also is with David, and they knew that he fled and did not disclose it to me.” But the servants of the king would not put out their hand to strike the priests of the Lord.<sup>18</sup> Then the king said to Doeg, “You turn and strike the priests.” And Doeg the Edomite turned and struck down the priests, and he killed on that day eighty-five persons who wore the linen ephod.<sup>19</sup> And Nob, the city of the priests, he put to the sword; both man and woman, child and infant, ox, donkey and sheep, he put to the sword.<sup>20</sup> But one of the sons of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled after David.<sup>21</sup> And Abiathar told David that Saul had killed the priests of the Lord.<sup>22</sup> And David said to Abiathar, “I knew on that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I have occasioned the death of all the persons of your father's house.<sup>23</sup> Stay with me; do not be afraid, for he who seeks my life seeks your life. With me you shall be in safekeeping.”

The most recognizable quote from Joseph Heller's novel *Catch-22* is: “Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they aren't after you!” Obsession with staying in power and keeping people in line can cause you to see enemies where they don't exist. Paranoia skews reality as the imagination assigns the worst motives to people. Saul was in full paranoid frenzy in this passage as he accused his servants of conspiring against him and of believing that they would be better treated by David. At the very least they had not helped him and had failed to inform him of Jonathan's alliance with David. His accusations hung in the air unanswered by his servants until the foreigner, Doeg the Edomite, spoke up with what he knew: Ahimelech the priest has aided and abetted the fugitive, I saw it with my own eyes.

So Ahimelech was hauled in front of Saul and accused of conspiracy. In response, we hear the priest's confusion – “Isn't David the most faithful servant you have? Isn't he married to your daughter, captain of your guard? I've always prayed for him. Don't accuse me of conspiring against you.” Saul had relented in the past when, for instance, his son Jonathan talked reason to him. But he was way past that here, and would not be bothered with the facts or trying to sort out whether Ahimelech was lying or not. He accused all of the other priests of knowing about David and keeping the secret as well. In his paranoid state, he pronounced a death sentence then and there.

Saul's servants would not kill these priests because they knew it was an abomination. But there's always someone who is willing to commit horrible crimes to score points with the king, and that man was Doeg, the tattletale. Eugene Peterson comments that Doeg is “described in our text as ‘chief of Saul's herdsmen,’ but recent textual studies have found evidence to redefine him as ‘chief of Saul's palace guard.’ In our society that label would translate into something like ‘head of Saul's

secret police.”<sup>4</sup> I mentioned last week that Jonathan has become one of my favorite people in all of Scripture, Doeg is one of my least favorite people. He didn't just put to death 85 priests, he destroyed every person and animal in the whole city. This was unprovoked murder, genocide ordered by the king of Israel purely motivated by his paranoid anger. If God had not already taken his blessing away from Saul, he surely would have now. And this incident certainly proved that God was justified in taking the kingship away from him. It also shows that if Saul has put God's priests to death, then no one is safe in his hunting down David; the message was sent to the rest of the land that anyone who helped David would suffer the same fate.

One of the priest's sons, Abiathar, escaped and informed David, who takes the blame for the massacre. Clearly David underestimated the severity of Saul's response to Ahimelech's helping him. Of course, the king was entirely to blame. The priests died as collateral damage in David's cause in the same way that the infant babies in Egypt died as Moses was saved and the infant babies in Bethlehem died in Jesus' day. The least David can do is offer Abiathar safe harbor, which he does.

It's interesting that we aren't given a lot of David's inner thoughts in this narrative, we only read his words and his actions. But we can gain great insight into his state of mind as we look at the parallel Psalms that he wrote as these events happened to him. There is a Psalm for each of the three sections of our text:

1) Psalm 34 has the inscription: *“Of David, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech (Abimelech is another name for Achish, the Philistine commander), so that he drove him out, and he went away.”* Verses 7-9, 17-18 show David's joy at God's delivering him:

*“7 The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them. 8 Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! 9 Oh, fear the Lord, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack!... 17 When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. 18 The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.”*

2) Psalm 142 has the inscription: *“A Maskil of David, when he was in the cave. A prayer.”* We hear the desperation and desire for deliverance in his words:

*“With my voice I cry out to the Lord; with my voice I plead for mercy to the Lord. I pour out my complaint before him; I tell my trouble before him. When my spirit faints within me, you know my way! In the path where I walk they have hidden a trap for me... I cry to you, O Lord; I say, “You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living.” Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low! Deliver me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me. Bring me out of prison, that I may give thanks to your name! The righteous will surround me, for you will deal bountifully with me.”*

3) Psalm 52 has this inscription: *“A Maskil of David, when Doeg, the Edomite, came and told Saul, ‘David has come to the house of Ahimelech.’”* We hear David's scorn for this evil man in vv. 1-5:

*“Why do you boast of evil, O mighty man?... Your tongue plots destruction, like a sharp razor, you worker of deceit. You love evil more than good, and lying more than speaking what is right. You love all words that devour, O deceitful tongue. But God will break you down forever; he will snatch and tear you from your tent; he will uproot you from the land of the living.”*

## Conclusion

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<sup>4</sup> Eugene Peterson, *Leap Over A Wall: Earthy Spirituality for Everyday Christians* (New York: HarperOne, 1997), p. 67.

I haven't really addressed this yet in our sermon series, but there has been a lot of lying happening to keep David alive. Whether it's his wife pretending that David was ill and then had forced her to help him escape or Jonathan's lying about why David wasn't attending the feast in chapter 20. Then in chapter 21 verse 2 David lied outright to the priest about why he had come to Nob, then in verse 13 deceives the people of Gath to think he's insane. Someone counted the number of times that deception is involved in the books of 1 & 2 Samuel and came up with 28 episodes in 55 chapters!<sup>5</sup> As Seinfeld might say, "What's the deal with all the lying?" What happened to Proverbs 12:22 – "*Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord, but those who act faithfully are His delight*" or Psalm 34:13 – "*Keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit*"? Is all of this lying just excused because it's for a good, godly cause, and the ends justify the means?

We first have to acknowledge that the Bible neither excuses nor condemns the lying in these stories, it is merely reporting what happened. Many of the lies seem to accomplish God's will that David stay alive, but that doesn't mean that that was the only way that it could have been accomplished. In fact, there's a strong case to be made that if David had told Ahimelech the truth, then the priest would have at least had a choice in whether he helped a fugitive or not. Since he thought he was helping one of the king's top men, he clearly thought that he was doing the right thing, and is blindsided by Saul's anger and accusations later. It is very likely that David was trying to give Ahimelech "plausible deniability" by not telling him why he was really in town. But in doing so, David unintentionally sealed his fate.<sup>6</sup> We are not being given positive examples in these stories. Satan is the father of lies, we should live as children of the light and strive to be truthful in all situations.

What do we learn from these stories? On Saul's side, we see that our idols, insecurities, and anger can make us lash out at other people, even people that we haven't been in conflict with. Innocent people get hurt and others get caught in our web of manipulation. The easiest thing for Saul to do at this point in his life is just surrender to the Lord's will that David would be given the throne when he dies. And the hardest thing for Saul to do is to surrender to the Lord's will.

On David's side, we're reminded that sometimes following the Lord involves us metaphorically sitting in a dark cave far from home. Sometimes we struggle with guilt, anger and fear because our worldly adversaries press in on us. Things get desperate, lonely, and dismal, with very little hope. But we don't give up, we look for those around us who will support us and help us in our time of need. And when we come to the sanctuary of God, we come with all kinds of things happening in our lives, all kinds of circumstances weighing on us. Like David, what we need two things: bread and a sword. In John 6:51 Jesus says, "*I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.*" Ephesians 6:17 tells us to "*take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*" So we need bread and a sword. We need Jesus to be our Lord and Savior, the One from whom we draw nourishment and sustenance, and we need the word of the Scriptures to be our weapon against evil. Our spiritual lives are empty without those two things. No amount of good deeds, positive thoughts, memorable speeches or platitudes can sustain us through the highs and lows of this life. God's Son, the living Word, and God's holy book, the Word of truth, are the great gifts that spiritually strengthen us.

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<sup>5</sup> Steven Nicoletti's sermon "Two Sons, Two Ways, Two Destinations" from 9/8/19, found at [faithtacoma.org](http://faithtacoma.org).

<sup>6</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart* (England: Christian Focus, 2000), p. 175.

The Gospel, the story of redemption, is simply this: Jesus is the great King who gave up His life for His people. He was not Saul, who looked to kill others to keep His throne. He was not like David, who had others die protecting him. Jesus surrendered His life willingly for sinful, desperate, lying, fearful, guilty people like you and me. Acts 4:12 – *“And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”* Amen.

Benediction - Ephesians 3:17b-19 - *“You, being rooted and grounded in love, may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.”*