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1SAMUEL 21: 1 Then came David to Nob to Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech came to meet David trembling, and said to him, "Why are you alone, and no man with you?"

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David comes to Ahimelech at Nob, receives provisions from him, and the sword of Goliath; and is noticed by Doeg, one of the servants of Saul, 1Sam 21:1-9. He leaves Nob, and goes to Achish, king of Gath, 1Sam 21:10. But on being recognised as the vanquisher of Goliath by the servants of Achish, he feigns himself deranged, and Achish sends him away, 1Sam 21:11-15.

#### Verse 1

Then came David to Nob - There were two places of this name, one on this side, the second on the other side of Jordan; but it is generally supposed that Nob, near Gibeah of Benjamin, is the place here intended; it was about twelve miles from Jerusalem.

Why art thou alone - Ahimelech probably knew nothing of the difference between Saul and David; and as he knew him to be the king's son-in-law, he wondered to see him come without any attendants.

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1SAMUEL 21: 2 David said to Ahimelech the priest, "The king has commanded me a business, and has said to me, 'Let no man know anything of the business about which I send you, and what I have commanded you; and I have appointed the young men to such and such a place.'

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#### Verse 2

The king hath commanded me a business - All said here is an untruth, and could not be dictated by the Spirit of the Lord; but there is no reason to believe that David was under the influence of Divine inspiration at this time. It is well known that from all antiquity it was held no crime to tell a lie, in order to save life. Thus Diphilus: - Ὑπολαμβάνω το ψευδος επι σωτηρια λεγομενον, ουδεν περιποιεσθαι δυσχερες. "I hold it right to tell a lie, in order to procure my personal safety; nothing should be avoided in order to save life."

A heathen may say or sing thus; but no Christian can act thus, and save his soul, though he by doing so may save his life.

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1SAMUEL 21: 3 Now therefore what is under your hand? Give me five loaves of bread in my hand, or whatever there is present."

1SAMUEL 21: 4 The priest answered David, and said, "There is no common bread under my hand, but there is holy bread; if only the young men have kept themselves from women."

1SAMUEL 21: 5 David answered the priest, and said to him, "Truly, women have been kept from us about these three days. When I came out, the vessels of the young men were holy, though it was but a common journey. How much more then today shall their vessels be holy?"

1SAMUEL 21: 6 So the priest gave him holy bread; for there was no bread there but the show bread, that was taken from before the LORD, to put hot bread in the day when it was taken away.

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Verse 6

So the priest gave him hallowed bread - To this history our Lord alludes, Mar 2:25, in order to show that in cases of absolute necessity a breach of the ritual law was no sin. It was lawful for the priests only to eat the shew-bread; but David and his companions were starving, no other bread could be had at the time, and therefore he and his companions ate of it without sin.

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1SAMUEL 21: 7 Now a certain man of the servants of Saul was there that day, detained before the LORD; and his name was Doeg the Edomite, the best of the herdsmen who belonged to Saul.

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Verse 7

Detained before the Lord - Probably fulfilling some vow to the Lord, and therefore for a time resident at the tabernacle.

And his name was Doeg - From 1Sam 22:9 we learn that this man betrayed David's secret to Saul, which caused him to destroy the city, and slay eighty-five priests. We learn from its title that the fifty-second Psalm was made on this occasion; but titles are not to be implicitly trusted.

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1SAMUEL 21: 8 David said to Ahimelech, "Isn't there here under your hand spear or sword? For I have neither brought my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste."

1SAMUEL 21: 9 The priest said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed 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 no other except that here." David said, "There is none like that. Give it to me."

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Verse 9

The sword of Goliath - It has already been conjectured (see 1 Samuel 17:1-58) that the sword of Goliath was laid up as a trophy in the tabernacle.

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1SAMUEL 21: 10 David arose, and fled that day for fear of Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath.

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Verse 10

Went to Achish the king of Gath - This was the worst place to which he could have gone: it was the very city of Goliath, whom he had slain, and whose sword he now wore; and he soon found, from the conversation of the servants of Achish, that his life was in the most imminent danger in this place.

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1SAMUEL 21: 11 The servants of Achish said to him, "Isn't this David the king of the land? Didn't they sing one to another about him in dances, saying, 'Saul has slain his thousands, David his ten thousands?'"

1SAMUEL 21: 12 David laid up these words in his heart, and was very afraid of Achish the king of Gath.

1SAMUEL 21: 13 He changed his behaviour before them, and pretended to be mad in their hands, and scabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down on his beard.

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#### Verse 13

And he changed his behavior - Some imagine David was so terrified at the danger to which he was now exposed, that he was thrown into a kind of frenzy, accompanied with epileptic fits. This opinion is countenanced by the Septuagint, who render the passage thus: Ἴδου ἴδετε ἀνδρᾶ ἐπιληπτον; "Behold, ye see an epileptic man. Why have ye introduced him to me?" Μη ἐλαττουμαι ἐπιληπτων ἐγω; "Have I any need of epileptics, that ye have brought him to have his fits before me, (ἐπιληπτευσθαι πρὸς με;)" It is worthy of remark, that the spittle falling upon the beard, i.e., slavering or frothing at the mouth, is a genuine concomitant of an epileptic fit.

If this translation be allowed, it will set the conduct of David in a clearer point of view than the present translation does. But others think the whole was a feigned conduct, and that he acted the part of a lunatic or madman in order to get out of the hands of Achish and his courtiers. Many vindicate this conduct of David; but if mocking be catching, according to the proverb, he who feigns himself to be mad may, through the just judgment of God, become so. I dare not be the apologist of insincerity or lying. Those who wish to look farther into this subject may consult Dr. Chandler, Mr. Saurin, and Ortlob, in the first volume of Dissertations, at the end of the Dutch edition of the Critici Sacri.

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1SAMUEL 21: 14 Then Achish said to his servants, "Look, you see the man is mad. Why then have you brought him to me?"

1SAMUEL 21: 15 Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence? Shall this fellow come into my house?"

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#### Verse 15

Shall this fellow come into my house? - I will not take into my service a man who is liable to so grievous a disease. Chandler, who vindicates David's feigning himself, mad, concludes thus: "To deceive the deceiver is in many instances meritorious, in none criminal. And what so likely to deceive as the very reverse of that character which they had so misconstrued? He was undone as a wise man, he had a chance to escape as a madman; he tried, and the experiment succeeded." I confess I can neither feel the force nor the morality of this. Deceit and hypocrisy can never be pleasing in the sight of God.