

Samuel to King David David at Adullam 1st Samuel 22

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English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

Introduction

Hello and today, we recommence our studies of 1st Samuel by considering chapter 22. Although the title of this talk is 'David at Adullam', I intend to talk about the whole chapter under the headings:

1. David at Adullam, vv.1-5.
2. Saul's rant and Doeg's brutality, vv.6-19.
3. Abiathar's escape to David, vv.20-23.

I'll start each section by reading the corresponding verses from the ESV.

David at Adullam, vv.1-5

"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. 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. 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." And he left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with him all the time that David was in the stronghold. 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."

As these verses are the most edifying part of ch.22, I'll spend the majority of my time on them. Ch.22 starts in v.2 with a description of the four hundred or so Israelites who defected to David and over whom he became their captain (v.2, KJV). Those of us who were brought up to use the KJV readily see David as a picture of Christ, who is the Captain of our salvation (Hebrews 2:10). Salvation is a most comprehensive truth of the Gospel. David's men are described as those in distress, every one that was in debt, and everyone who was discontented. They depict life for the ordinary Israelite under the despotic rule of king Saul. In ch.8:10-18, Samuel had warned Israel that he would become such a king. These men show that that had become the reality of his kingdom! By contrast, David was a man after God's own heart, whose rule was entirely different. Ps.78:72 says,

"With upright heart [David] shepherded them and guided them with his skilful hand."

For Christians, the Captain of our salvation has paid all of our debts for He gave His life as a ransom for all (1 Tim. 2:6). The many difficulties and distresses of life cannot separate us from His love (Romans 8:35). And Paul, who experienced these things more than any of us said:

“Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content” (Phil.4:11).

1st Samuel 21 closed with David pretending to be a madman at Gath in order to escape the clutches of the Philistines. 22:1 reports that he then returned to Judah to live in the cave of Adullam, which evidently was near the border with the Philistines, some six miles southwest from Bethlehem. As such, it was well-known to David and, to him, an ideal place for hiding from Saul and his army. However, that move put his family at risk as they realised that Saul would soon come knocking on their door at Bethlehem to demand that they disclose David’s exact location or else they would suffer serious consequences for shielding David. Therefore, they joined David and his men in the cave for security and protection. The cave of Adullam was one of many pits or underground vaults, which were ideal hiding places from Saul. But Gad brought the LORD’S message to David that it was too dangerous for them all to remain in that stronghold:

“Then the prophet Gad said to David, “Do not remain in the stronghold; depart, and go into the land of Judah”” (v.5).

David realised that his elderly parents were the most at risk and he decided that he had no other option than to take them out of such a dangerous situation. So he took them to Mizpeh of Moab, where its king dwelt. The king of Moab was an enemy of Saul (14:47) and David must have reckoned that the Moabites would not be vindictive towards himself. In fact, they probably would feel that to shelter the parents of such a notable warrior, who had defected from their enemy, Saul, would increase the hostility between the two countries. David’s request of the king of Moab was that he let David’s father and mother stay with him until David knew what God would do for him (v.3). An interesting sideline is that Scripture does not record the return of David’s parents from Mizpeh to Judah. Be that as it may, to me I detect the first indications of David’s mindset changing from anxiety to reliance upon God. God was now intervening in David’s flights from the hand of Saul, for the prophet Gad seems to have been sent by God at that specific time to join David at the cave of Adullam. When Gad told David to leave the stronghold of Adullam and go into the land of Judah, v.5 states,

“So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth.”

For the first time in a good while, David immediately obeyed God’s word rather than the schemings of his anxious heart!

1 Samuel is mainly a narrative of the historical events detailing the advent of kingship in Israel. In ch.16, David was anointed and superseded Saul, who was displaced by God because of his blatant disobedience. Ch.17 records David’s victory over Goliath verifying that he was qualified for this high office. Chs.18-21 have detailed how Saul, by trying to kill David, made every attempt to reverse God’s decision. It all started when Saul became jealous of David’s military achievements:

“The women sang to one another as they celebrated, “Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands.” ...Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him. He said, “They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands, and what more can he have but the kingdom?” And Saul eyed David from that day on” (18:7-9).

These chapters also reveal David's natural fear that one day Saul would succeed in his relentless quest. This anxiety continued until Saul's death. For example:

"Then David said in his heart, "Now I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I should escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will despair of seeking me any longer within the borders of Israel, and I shall escape out of his hand"" (27:1).

However, it was David's trust in God that sustained him throughout these harrowing ordeals. This is revealed in the psalms he wrote, especially those he wrote when he was in the cave of Adullam and thereafter in the wilderness of Judah. Pss.34, 56, 57 & 142 were written by David as he reflected upon his experiences recorded in 1 Samuel chs.21-22.

Psalm 34

The title of Ps.34 shows what David had learnt about God' support:

"Of David, when he changed his behaviour before Abimelech, so that he drove him out, and he went away."

Abimelech was the official title of king Achish. Ps.34 is the outflow of praise for God's keeping and delivering grace.

"I sought the LORD, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. ...This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them. Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! Oh, fear the LORD, you his saints, for those who fear him have no lack! [...] Those who seek the LORD lack no good thing. Come, O children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the LORD" (Ps.34:4-11).

Psalm 56

Let's read Ps.56.

"To the choirmaster: according to The Dove on Far-off Terebinths. A Miktam of David, when the Philistines seized him in Gath. Be gracious to me, O God, for man tramples on me; all day long an attacker oppresses me; my enemies trample on me all day long, for many attack me proudly. When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me? All day long they injure my cause; all their thoughts are against me for evil. They stir up strife, they lurk; they watch my steps, as they have waited for my life. For their crime will they escape? In wrath cast down the peoples, O God! You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book? Then my enemies will turn back in the day when I call. This I know, that God is for me. In God, whose word I praise, in the LORD, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me? I must perform my vows to you, O God; I will render thank offerings to you. For you have delivered my soul from death, yes, my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of life."

The words "The Dove on Far-off Terebinths" in Ps.56's title show that David regarded himself as an uncomplaining, meek dove, a fugitive beset by enemies at home and abroad. He confidently

appealed to God, by reciting his complaints, in assured anticipation of God's continued help. The previous talk highlighted some of the verses from this psalm, for example: "When I am afraid, I put my trust in you" (v.3). David's faith in God enabled him to ask three probing questions:

1. "What can flesh do to me?" (v.4).
2. "What can man do to me?" (v.11).
3. "Do You not keep my feet from falling, so that I may walk before God in the light of the living?" (v.13, LITV).
 - a. It seems that v.13 is the basis for Ps.34.

Psalm 57

Let's read Ps.57.

"To the choirmaster: according to Do Not Destroy. A Miktam of David, when he fled from Saul, in the cave. Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by. I cry out to God Most High, to God who fulfils his purpose for me. He will send from heaven and save me; he will put to shame him who tramples on me. Selah God will send out his steadfast love and his faithfulness! My soul is in the midst of lions; I lie down amid fiery beasts—the children of man, whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth! They set a net for my steps; my soul was bowed down. They dug a pit in my way, but they have fallen into it themselves. Selah My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast! I will sing and make melody! Awake, my glory! Awake, O harp and lyre! I will awake the dawn! I will give thanks to you, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing praises to you among the nations. For your steadfast love is great to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds. Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth!"

The words "Do Not Destroy" in Ps.57's title are perhaps an allusion to the critical circumstances David found himself in. David called Saul's persecution of him "the storms of destruction." He found refuge under God's wings; a thought expressed in five other psalms. Vv.2-3 show David's confidence in God. But v.11 states that David's deliverance ends with God being exalted and glorified.

Psalm 142

Let's read Ps.142.

"A Maskil of David, when he was in the cave. A Prayer. 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. Look to the right and see: there is none who takes notice of me; no refuge remains to me; no one cares for my soul. 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."

Ps.142 is a psalm written to instruct believers about how David prayed to God in vv.5-7, when he was in these precarious circumstances of vv.1-4. These two sets of verses contrast: 1 David's trust with his troubles; 2 his confidence with his dire condition; 3 his feeling of desertion with his sure hope of deliverance; 4 his lamentable complaint with his sure confidence in his God; 5 his plight with his sure prospect: "You are my refuge, [all I want] in the land of the living" (v.5b).

Saul's rant and Doeg's brutality, vv.6-19

"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. 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, 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 or discloses to me that my son has stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as at this day." 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, and he inquired of the LORD for him and gave him provisions and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine." Then the king sent to summon Ahimelech the priest...and all his father's house, the priests who were at Nob, and all of them came to the king. And Saul said, "Hear now, son of Ahitub." And he answered, "Here I am, my lord." 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?" 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 honoured in your house? 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." And the king said, "You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all your father's house." 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. 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. 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" (1Samuel 22:6-19).

As I said at the beginning of my talk, there is nothing much of practical help in these verses. Six times 1st Samuel states that God tormented Saul with a harmful spirit (16:14,15, 16, 23: 18:10; 19:9). It was punishment for his disobedience and his rebellion against God. It manifested itself in 22:6-19, when he commanded the profane Doeg to execute Ahimelech and the 85 priests with their families in Nob. Something that even Saul's bodyguard were not willing to do. David's verdict of Doeg is given in Ps.52.

Psalm 52

“To the choirmaster. A Maskil of David, when Doeg, the Edomite, came and told Saul, “David has come to the house of Ahimelech.” Why do you boast of evil, O mighty man? The steadfast love of God endures all the day. 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. Selah 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. Selah The righteous shall see and fear, and shall laugh at him, saying, “See the man who would not make God his refuge, but trusted in the abundance of his riches and sought refuge in his own destruction!” But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God. I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever. I will thank you forever, because you have done it. I will wait for your name, for it is good, in the presence of the godly” (Ps.52:1-9).

Abiathar’s escape to David, vv.20-23

“But one of the sons of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled after David. And Abiathar told David that Saul had killed the priests of the LORD. 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. Stay with me; do not be afraid, for he who seeks my life seeks your life. With me you shall be in safekeeping.””

It's a relief to finish my talk today on a positive note. God preserved the priesthood in Israel when Abiathar fled to David, who by that time was in Keilah (23:6). David guaranteed him the necessary military protection (22:23). It was a sad day for David, who had to confess that he had brought about the death of Abiathar’s entire priestly family by his presence and behaviour in the Tabernacle in Gibeon, which is where it seems to have been located after its move from Shiloh (see 1 Chronicles 21:29). This sober confession is another sign of David’s recovery to the LORD. And not only did he now have Gad the prophet to declare to him God’s directives, but he also had Abiathar the High Priest, who had brought the Ephod with him. From that time on, Abiathar was able to use the Ephod, which contained the Urim and Thummim, to enquire of God for David as to the way ahead in his struggles to become the rightful anointed king of Israel. In closing let’s be encouraged by David’s words in Ps.34:6-8,

“The LORD heard [me] and saved [me] out of all [my] troubles. The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them. Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good!”

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