

David and his Ragtag Army Hide in the Wilderness

1 Samuel 22

1 Samuel 22 - "David therefore departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam. So when his brothers and all his father's house heard it, they went down there to him. ² And everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him. So he became captain over them. And there were about four hundred men with him. ³ Then David went from there to Mizpah of Moab; and he said to the king of Moab, "Please let my father and mother come here with you, till I know what God will do for me." ⁴ So he brought them before the king of Moab, and they dwelt with him all the time that David was in the stronghold. ⁵ Now the prophet Gad said to David, "Do not stay in the stronghold; depart, and go to the land of Judah." So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth.

⁶ When Saul heard that David and the men who were with him had been discovered—now Saul was staying in Gibeah under a tamarisk tree in Ramah, with his spear in his hand, and all his servants standing about him— ⁷ then Saul said to his servants who stood about him, "Hear now, you Benjamites! Will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, and make you all captains of thousands and captains of hundreds? ⁸ All of you have conspired against me, and there is no one who reveals to me that my son has made a covenant with the son of Jesse; and there is not one of you who is sorry for me or reveals to me that my son has stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as it is this day." ⁹ Then answered Doeg the Edomite, who was set over the servants of Saul, and said, "I saw the son of Jesse going to Nob, to Ahimelech the son of Ahitub. ¹⁰ And he inquired of the LORD for him, gave him provisions, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine." ¹¹ So the king sent to call Ahimelech the priest, the son of Ahitub, and all his father's house, the priests who were in Nob. And they all came to the king.

¹² And Saul said, "Hear now, son of Ahitub!" He answered, "Here I am, my lord." ¹³ Then 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, that he should rise against me, to lie in wait, as it is this day?" ¹⁴ So Ahimelech answered the king and said, "And who among all your servants is as faithful as David, who is the king's son-in-law, who goes at your bidding, and is honorable in your house? ¹⁵ Did I then begin to inquire of God for him? Far be it from me! Let not the king impute anything to his servant, or to any in the house of my father. For your servant knew nothing of all this, little or much."

¹⁶ And the king said, "You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all your father's house!" ¹⁷ Then the king said to the guards who stood about him, "Turn and kill the priests of the LORD, because their hand also is with David, and because they knew when he fled and did not tell it to me." But the servants of the king would not lift their hands to strike the priests of the LORD. ¹⁸ And the king said to Doeg, "You turn and kill the priests!" So Doeg the Edomite turned and struck the priests, and killed on that day eighty-five men who wore a linen ephod. ¹⁹ Also Nob, the city of the priests, he struck with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and nursing infants, oxen and donkeys and sheep—with the edge of the sword. ²⁰ Now one of the sons of Ahimelech the son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled after David. ²¹ And Abiathar told David that Saul had killed the LORD's priests. ²² So David said to Abiathar, "I knew that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I have caused the death of all the persons of your father's house. ²³ Stay with me; do not fear. For he who seeks my life seeks your life, but with me you shall be safe."

Background Notes

The Cave of Adullam was in the territory of Judah, about 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem, not far from Philistine territory. If you travel in that area today, you can explore a lot of large caves – they're still there. We don't know exactly which one is the Cave of Adullam, but there are a number of possibilities. It was here that David attracted a ragtag army of men. At first about 400 men joined David in the wilderness, but by the next chapter the number had grown to 600 men.

David took his parents over to the land of Moab for safety (v3-4). Saul had fought the Moabites (1 Samuel 14), so the Moabites were open to David's request since Saul was now against David. Furthermore, David had distant relatives in Moab, because Ruth, David's great-grandmother, was from Moab. Was David right in taking his parents to Moab for safety? Commentaries differ. Some Bible scholars say that this was common sense, and others think that David should have depended more on the Lord and kept them in the land of Israel. We can't be dogmatic here. In any case, Hebrew tradition says that David's parents were eventually killed by the Moabites, but this is not documented history.

In verse 5, the prophet Gad exhorted David to move more into the heartland of Judah into the forest of Hereth. The Lord provided the prophet Gad to exhort, advise, and counsel David during these times of trouble. Gad continued to be in David's circle of confidence when David became king, and even wrote up many of these events. 1 Chronicles 29:29-30 says, *"Now the acts of King David, first and last, indeed they are written in the book of Samuel the seer, in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the book of Gad the seer, ³⁰ with all his reign and his might, and the events that happened to him, to Israel, and to all the kingdoms of the lands."*

Doctrinal Points

1. Following the right Leader leads to eternal rewards.

Verse 2: *"And everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him. So he became captain over them. And there were about four hundred men with him."* When you read this description of the men who came to David in the wilderness, it's obvious that they had made some bad decisions in life. Many of them had serious problems as a result: distress, debt, discouragement, and discontent. This is hardly a description of a group of folks who "have it all together"! But for all their problems, they made one right major decision, and that was to follow David. They chose to follow the right leader, and as a result, they were on the winning team when David became king.

Furthermore, 2 Samuel 23 says that out of this rag-tag group of problem people came some of David's "Mighty Men." As a result of following David, these men, who were at one time going nowhere, were molded into men who had purpose in life. They became part of David's kingdom and were rewarded for following him.

This same principle is true today. Following the right Leader leads to rewards. This principle has great practical application in all areas of life -- but notice that the doctrinal point says “eternal rewards.” That’s specifically stated because of the spiritual picture and lesson that we have here in this account.

David is a spiritual picture (or a “type”) of Christ in his time of rejection. Jesus Christ is rejected at the present time. He is the rightful King, but the world doesn’t recognize him yet as king. Right now, he is in the place of rejection, just as David was. As believers, however, we recognize Christ as King and we follow Him. He is our Savior and Leader and Lord.

We are like David’s men – people who choose to follow the right Leader. We’ve come to the Lord with our problems and discouragement and despair and the debt of sin that we could not pay, and the Lord has welcomed us and brought us into a fellowship of other believers. He has molded us into an army of soldiers and servants.

What a beautiful picture of our present situation! Hebrews 13:13 says, *“Therefore let us go forth to Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach.”* And for making this right choice there is eternal reward. Romans 8:17 says, *“and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.”* And 2 Timothy 2:12 says, *“If we endure, we shall also reign with Him....”* Following the right Leader leads to eternal rewards!

2. Following the wrong leader leads to tragic results.

Verses 6-19 describe a tragic event in the life of Saul. We know from 1 Samuel 2 and 3 that this tragedy was a partial fulfillment of the prophecy against the priestly line of Eli -- but it was still tragic. Saul’s insane and unchecked jealousy resulted in the slaughter of the whole community of priests. Doeg got caught up in all this evil because he chose to follow the wrong leader. Think about how different Doeg’s life would have been if he had chosen to side with David when he saw him at Nob. But Doeg rejected David, and he betrayed David. He chose to follow the wrong leader, and it led to tragic results.

From the title, we know that David wrote Psalm 52 on the occasion of Doeg’s betrayal. Listen to what it says about this man who chose to follow the wrong leader. Psalm 52:1-5 – *“Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man? The goodness of God endures continually. ² Your tongue devises destruction, like a sharp razor, working deceitfully. ³ You love evil more than good, lying rather than speaking righteousness. Selah. ⁴ You love all devouring words, you deceitful tongue. ⁵ God shall likewise destroy you forever; He shall take you away, and pluck you out of your dwelling place, and uproot you from the land of the living.” Selah.*

Doeg is certainly an illustration of a person who rejects Christ, and chooses to follow the wrong leader. During the “end times,” many people will reject Christ and choose to follow the anti-Christ. Doeg may be a spiritual picture or type of the anti-Christ here. Even today, people who choose not to follow Christ have chosen to follow Satan, whether they realize it or not. Ultimately, they will come to a tragic end with a sentence to eternal hell. Following the wrong leader leads to tragic results.

Practical Application

Let's be willing to admit our mistakes!

In verses 20-23 we learn that Abiathar, one of the sons of Ahimelech, managed to escape from the massacre of the priestly family. He eventually became the high priest in David's kingdom and continued into Solomon's kingdom.

In 1 Samuel 21 our practical application was "Let's learn from our mistakes." Here in 1 Samuel 22 our application is "Let's be willing to admit our mistakes." That's what David did in verse 22, when he said to Abiathar - *"I knew that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I have caused the death of all the persons of your father's house."* David did not exempt himself from his mistake by shifting all the blame to Saul or Doeg. No. David knew that he was part of the problem, and he admitted it.

Now let me ask you a question. Do we admit our mistakes and our share of the blame? Or when a problem arises, do we always try to shift all of the blame to others? It's an interesting fact that all of the great revivals in Scripture are associated with a willingness to acknowledge sin and mistakes - and not attempting to shift the blame to others.

Do we want revival in our souls in a personal way? Let's be willing to admit our mistakes!