

1 Samuel 22-23 – “On the Run But Not Alone”

David Becomes Captain to 400 Discouraged Men – 22:1-2

22:1 - *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.*

We left off with David on the run from Saul. This is a period of time where David is going to be tested greatly. He's been anointed king already, but it will be approximately 15 years between his anointing and his ascension to the throne. But they're not wasted years. They're years that God is preparing and teaching David many things that will be of value for David leading a nation as their King. We'll see in our study today that David still has some lessons to learn.

We last left David in Gath. And you have to ask, what are you doing in Gath? Not only is this Philistine country, this is Goliath's hometown!! David are you trying to see how close you can get to the fire without getting burned? This is not a wise move. It's a move that's been motivated by fear, and it took David to a place he should not have been.

- If we're living by fear and not faith in God, it's going to keep moving us further from God's ideal.

When people began to recognize David, he began to act like a madman, clawing at the gate and letting his saliva run down his beard. People left him alone which allowed him to depart with his life intact.

And this is where we pick things up. He leaves Gath and comes to the **cave of Adullam**. This is in an area just south of the Valley of Elah, where David killed Goliath. It's about 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem. David is trying to disappear as best he can and avoid any confrontations with Saul. And it seems it's in this context and time that David writes **Psalms 142**, "*A Contemplation Of David. A Prayer When He Was in the Cave.* ¹ *I cry out to the Lord with my voice; With my voice to the Lord I make my supplication.* ² *I pour out my complaint before Him; I declare before Him my trouble.* ³ *When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, Then You knew my path. In the way in which I walk They have secretly set a snare for me.* ⁴ *Look on my right hand and see, For there is no one who acknowledges me; Refuge has failed me; No one cares for my soul.* ⁵ *I cried out to You, O Lord: I said, "You are my refuge, My portion in the land of the living.* ⁶ *Attend to my cry, For I am brought very low; Deliver me from my persecutors, For*

they are stronger than I. ⁷ Bring my soul out of prison, That I may praise Your name; The righteous shall surround me, For You shall deal bountifully with me.”

Notice David is saying, ‘*there is no one who acknowledges me... no one cares for my soul*’ (vs. 4).

David is feeling alone. He’s certainly needing to learn to rely on the Lord and he eventually gets there in this Psalm when he says *You are my refuge* and *My portion...* (vs. 5).

But notice what the Lord is doing when David is in this pit of discouragement, God is leading people to come alongside David. God is taking care of things in a way that David didn’t see or even imagine. It begins with moving David’s brothers and family to him.

- David’s family no doubt would have felt their lives in jeopardy from the irrational Saul. They were looking to flee for their own safety.
- But it was some of his brothers that disdained David for coming to the battle when Goliath was taunting Israel.
- But now they’ve seen in David a man that can take care of business, a man that they’re willing to get behind and support. God is raising up people to be a comfort and support to David. Exactly what he’s needing.

Not only did his family join him, God had another group ready to join in...

22:2 - *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.*

What a motley crew of ragtag, floundering men we’ve got here. In the world’s eyes this was definitely not the A team, it wasn’t even close to the B team, it was the D team – **D**istressed, in **D**ebt, and **D**iscontented. David’s D-Team. It sounds like it could have some significance. Maybe people thought, David, what’s the D stand for? Dangerous, Destruction, Demolition? David, probably with a sigh says, nope, just distressed, in debt, and discontented.

What a crazy crew. But God brought them to David in a time where he felt distressed. But it was just what David needed to show him that God was at work. There were people ready to show their allegiance to him. He had opportunity now to learn some leadership skills that went beyond the sheep in the pasture.

So David becomes their captain!

This is awesome, because it's a great picture of what Jesus did for us.

- We were a bunch of ragtag misfits who were down and out, but Jesus came for this kind of people, He came for you and me. He could have said, *'I'm the Lord, you better clean yourself up and get your act together before you come and attach yourself to Me.'* But He saved us when we were not really worth saving. We were in debt to sin, distressed by sin, discontented because of sin, but He became our Captain and delivered us from this demise.
- This is what David did, and may it remind us of what the Son of David, Jesus Christ has done for us.

Jesus didn't come for the best of the best, he came for the weak and ordinary.

1 Corinthians 1:26–29, *"For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. ²⁷ But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; ²⁸ and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, ²⁹ that no flesh should glory in His presence."*

These 400 men also became David's mighty men. They became a super strong secret service men for David.

1 Chronicles 12:8, *"Some Gadites joined David at the stronghold in the wilderness, mighty men of valor, men trained for battle, who could handle shield and spear, whose faces were like the faces of lions, and were as swift as gazelles on the mountains:"*

- It's what the Lord is doing for us as well. He's building us into the people of God He knows we'll become – a victorious people for His name's sake.

David Makes Provision For His Family in Moab – 22:3-4

22:3-4 - *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.

David wanting to get his family to safety decides to take them to Moab. Perhaps David thought since his great grandmother Ruth was from Moab, perhaps they would show him some favour.

- It's never a good idea to put your trust in the enemies of God, which is what this nation was. Remember, God called them his washpot (Psalm 60:8).
- "Tradition says that the Moabites eventually killed David's parents."¹

After taking his family to Moab, it seems David went to a stronghold where he dwelt for a time. The word stronghold in Hebrew is *matsudah*. When we tour Israel we go to an incredible place called Masada, which is the English of this word. It's right down by the Dead Sea and wouldn't have been far from Moab. It could be that this is where David positioned himself strategically as a place of refuge.

David Returns to Judah / Saul Has a Pity Party – 22:5-10

22:5 - *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.*

Gad is a prophet of God who just sort of pops up out of nowhere. We don't know much about him at all. But the few times we see him in Scripture he appears as a true spokesman of the Lord.

So David listened to what he directed him to do.

22:6-8 - *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."*

Here's Saul's little pity party. He's gotten word that David has been spotted, but he's complaining that nobody is helping him out. And he's sitting with spear in hand like he just can't wait to take somebody out. I'm sure that's why nobody is saying anything to him. They don't know how he'll react to anything, good or bad.

¹ MacDonald, W. (1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments* (A. Farstad, Ed.; p. 314). Thomas Nelson.

22:9-10 - *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.”*

You'll recall Doeg was on the scene when David took refuge in Nob where he went to Ahimelech the priest to ask for some of the holy bread (Chapter 21). Now Doeg is thinking this information will set him up well with king Saul.

Saul Calls For Ahimelech and Questions His Allegiance – 22:11-16

22:11-16 - *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!”*

Saul saw everything and everyone as against him. This is a man being ruled by pride. If he was humble he could have taken Ahimelech's words to heart when he said David is a faithful servant. But pride causes things to get distorted where you see things through a tainted lens.

Saul is not even listening to reason. Ahimelech speaks rightly to him but all Saul can say is, you're going to die. That's the only remedy Saul has for making things right in his eyes. He's tried to kill David, he's tried to kill his own son, and now he's ready to kill a priest because he gave David some bread and a sword.

Doeg Kills All the Priests and Decimates Their City, Nob – 22:17-19

22:17-19 - *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.

What’s interesting is that when Saul gave the orders to kill the priests, Saul’s servants wanted nothing to do with it. They had too much reverence for the priesthood and their role before God. In fact, they saw the respect for the priests to be of greater importance than their respect for the king in that they were willing to disobey the king.

So, Saul turns to a Gentile – Doeg the Edomite to carry out this brutality. And Doeg was more than happy to accept this mission. He killed 85 of the priests but then he goes to Nob, the city of the priests, and kills a number more. The Septuagint says that there were 385 killed all together.

- This seemed to be overreach by Doeg in that Saul never told him to go to the city. But Saul certainly never held him accountable for this act either.

Sadly, Saul was unwilling to kill the Gentile Amalekites, and now he’s allowing a Gentile to take out the Jewish priesthood.

David Feels Responsible for the Death of the Priests – 22:20-23

22:20-23 - 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.”

One priest was able to escape the slaughter, the son of Ahimelech – Abiathar. And notice David’s response when he hears the news, ***‘I have caused the death...’*** He doesn’t blame Saul or others. He doesn’t seek immediate retribution. David takes responsibility and invites this man to come under his protection. Abiathar would indeed serve as a priest when David would become king.

The last verse here is a beautiful verse. The one who wants to take My life wants to take yours as well. This could be the words of Jesus to us.

Jesus knows that there is a real enemy out to devour our souls. But He calls us to come to Him where we find safety and security. It's in Him that we get to escape death and find life ultimately. Praise God for that.

"But no one can take Jesus' life. He has already given it up in death on the cross and gotten it back through the power of the resurrection. And He who has defeated death will protect you and me in life and in death. Jesus is the true Savior because blessing and salvation come through Him." ²

God Brings a Victory to David and His Men – 23:1-5

23:1-2 - *Then they told David, saying, "Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah, and they are robbing the threshing floors."* ² Therefore David inquired of the Lord, saying, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" And the Lord said to David, "Go and attack the Philistines, and save Keilah."

Keilah was a town southwest of Jerusalem (just below the Cave of Adullam). And David could have easily looked at this situation and thought, I'm not risking my life to take out the Philistines. This is Saul's job as the king. But David opened himself up to the leading of the Lord. These were still his people in Keilah and he's demonstrating a much better heart for his people than Saul was.

So David does what we should all do before moving out in action – inquire of the Lord. Everything should always be prayed through before we wade through it. So the Lord said yes. ***Go and attack the Philistines, and save Keilah.***

23:3 - *But David's men said to him, "Look, we are afraid here in Judah. How much more then if we go to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?"*

Remember, these guys are the distressed, indebted, and discontented. They're probably also disillusioned, dismayed, discouraged, and don't want to go. They're freaked out just hanging in Judah and being on the run from Saul. They're not ready to go up against a whole army of the Philistines.

23:4-5 - *Then David inquired of the Lord once again. And the Lord answered him and said, "Arise, go down to Keilah. For I will deliver the Philistines into your hand."* ⁵ And David and his men went to Keilah and fought with the Philistines, struck them with a mighty blow, and took away their livestock. So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah.

² Greear, J. D., & Thomas, H. A. (2016). *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Samuel* (pp. 148–149). Holman Reference.

So David inquired of the Lord again and the Lord said, *I already told you what to do. Are you expecting a different answer??*

- It's funny how we can do that sometimes. We get a sense of how the Lord is leading and yet we keep coming to Him with the response of, *Are you sure Lord?*

But David goes as he's told and he takes his men and they rout the Philistines. They took all their livestock and the city of Keilah was spared.

This is so awesome because I'm sure these 400 men didn't want anything to do with this. But they went as they followed their captain and they got to see an incredible display of God's power and provision.

- May we be those that are quick to follow our captain, Jesus. We may not be confident in ourselves, but our confidence is to be in Him.

Saul Thinks He has David Cornered – 23:6-8

23:6-8 - Now it happened, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David at Keilah, that he went down with an ephod in his hand. ⁷ And Saul was told that David had gone to Keilah. So Saul said, "God has delivered him into my hand, for he has shut himself in by entering a town that has gates and bars." ⁸ Then Saul called all the people together for war, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men.

At this point Saul is acting somewhat delusional as he is gripped with such pride and paranoia. He's thinking now that God has actually delivered David to him.

David Seeks Council From the Lord – 23:9-12

23:9-12 - When David knew that Saul plotted evil against him, he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here." ¹⁰ Then David said, "O Lord God of Israel, Your servant has certainly heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah to destroy the city for my sake. ¹¹ Will the men of Keilah deliver me into his hand? Will Saul come down, as Your servant has heard? O Lord God of Israel, I pray, tell Your servant." And the Lord said, "He will come down." ¹² Then David said, "Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul?" And the Lord said, "They will deliver you."

It says that Abiathar had come down to Keilah with an ephod in his hand. This was the garment of the priests which contained the breastplate. It's believed that this ephod held by Abiathar was the ephod of the high priest which would have contained the breastplate of judgment. And this had a pouch with two stones in it

known as the Urim and Thummim which was a way for the priest to ascertain the will of the Lord [show image].

- Urim and Thummim, though it remains a bit of a mystery today, means *Lights and Perfections*. Some believe it was two stones, one black and one white where the priest would ask a question and pull out a stone. One was for yes the other for no. This was how they would discover God's will. It's what many believe David was doing at this point, which is why we see him asking a yes or no question.
- Now, some like to live life this way where we use a kind of magic 8 ball to determine what we should do. But we live in a time where we have the Holy Spirit to guide us. And we need to develop that intimacy with the Lord where we are in tune to His Spirit and know what direction He is leading us in on a day-to-day basis.
- And the Spirit of God will work through the Word of God to be our guide as well.
- One old preacher was asked to explain the Urim and Thummim. He said, "Well, this is how I understand it. When I need to know God's will, I get out my Bible and I do a lot of usin' and thummin' through my Bible, and God always speaks to me." More Christians would know God's will if they did more usin' and thummin'!

God Keeps David Safe – 23:13-14

23:13-14 - So David and his men, about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah and went wherever they could go. Then it was told Saul that David had escaped from Keilah; so he halted the expedition. ¹⁴ And David stayed in strongholds in the wilderness, and remained in the mountains in the Wilderness of Ziph. Saul sought him every day, but God did not deliver him into his hand.

Look at this, we're told now that David's men has grown from 400 to 600. More people seem to be abandoning Saul and seeing something in David that they want to get behind. Saul is filled with rage and insecurity. He's not a man after God's own heart. David is humble and gracious and he's a man after God's heart. And people are drawn to that.

So David and his men get out of Keilah before Saul gets there and they go and hide in the strongholds in the Wilderness of Ziph.

It's here that Saul sought him every day. Saul was driven by this rage to kill David. But God is not in that endeavour and you're going to weaken yourself by fighting a battle you won't win.

- How many times are we pursuing things that are not of God to where we just weaken ourselves and tire ourselves out.

But God did not deliver him into his hand. Hallelujah. God knows what is going on. It wasn't David's skill or strategy or agility that spared him, it was God.

- We have an enemy who is seeking our life every day, and don't think it's by your strength or ability that you get by, it's only by the help of God!
- Maybe there's something that is plaguing you in life that just feels like a daily relentless pressure or pain. God sees and is at work on your behalf.

Notice what God does for David next. He sends even more encouragement...

Jonathan Strengthens David – 23:15-18

23:15-18 - So David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life. And David was in the Wilderness of Ziph in a forest. ¹⁶ Then Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David in the woods and strengthened his hand in God. ¹⁷ And he said to him, "Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Even my father Saul knows that." ¹⁸ So the two of them made a covenant before the Lord. And David stayed in the woods, and Jonathan went to his own house.

Jonathan seeks out David and comes to him with an encouraging word. The Lord was in control and had a reason for all this to be happening to David, yet David could have easily become discouraged and dismayed. But the Lord is faithful, He brings someone that is close to David to be a support and strength. This is no doubt again the hand of the Lord directing all things. Saul couldn't track down David, but Jonathan seems to have no problem doing so.

Isn't it great to have people like this in your life, who just come with timely encouragement. Maybe you'd like more people like that in your life, maybe you're just asking for 1. Be that kind of person to others and you'll be blessed.

Saul Seeks to Kill David but God Provides a Way of Escape – 23:19-29

23:19-23 - Then the Ziphites came up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, "Is David not hiding with us in strongholds in the woods, in the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon?" ²⁰ Now therefore, O king, come down according to all the desire of your soul to come down; and our part shall be

to deliver him into the king's hand.”²¹ And Saul said, “Blessed are you of the Lord, for you have compassion on me.²² Please go and find out for sure, and see the place where his hideout is, and who has seen him there. For I am told he is very crafty.²³ See therefore, and take knowledge of all the lurking places where he hides; and come back to me with certainty, and I will go with you. And it shall be, if he is in the land, that I will search for him throughout all the clans of Judah.”

So now the Ziphites are ready to turn David in. The people of Keilah were ready to do it earlier and now the Ziphites are. It seems they're more ready to betray David simply to avoid the wrath of Saul.

Saul is such a hypocritical fool. Notice how he's buttering these guys up using such godly language: ***blessed are you of the Lord***. Saul would have been ready to kill them if they were to side with David.

23:24-26 - So they arose and went to Ziph before Saul. But David and his men were in the Wilderness of Maon, in the plain on the south of Jeshimon.²⁵ When Saul and his men went to seek him, they told David. Therefore he went down to the rock, and stayed in the Wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard that, he pursued David in the Wilderness of Maon.²⁶ Then Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain. So David made haste to get away from Saul, for Saul and his men were encircling David and his men to take them.

David had managed to slip over to the Wilderness of Maon where they were opposite Saul. Once Saul heard of it he pursued David at Maon and at one point got very close to David. They were racing on either side of a mountain where it seems Saul and his army were gaining on David and were ready to take them. **But God!**

23:27-29 - But a messenger came to Saul, saying, “Hurry and come, for the Philistines have invaded the land!”²⁸ Therefore Saul returned from pursuing David, and went against the Philistines; so they called that place the Rock of Escape.²⁹ Then David went up from there and dwelt in strongholds at En Gedi.”

I wonder who led the Philistines at this particular time to invade the land? God was at work and in very unconventional ways. He raised up an enemy of Israel to be an ally to Israel's rejected king. Pretty awesome!

This place was then called the Rock of Escape. What a great reminder for us. We have a Rock in our Saviour Jesus Christ who is with us and providing a way of escape. How we need to trust Him and thank Him for His faithfulness.

Points to Ponder:

1. Are you trusting God while in the cave, or only when the crown is in place?
God's delays are not denials but rather preparation for what is to come.
2. Do you inquire of the Lord before you act – or only after you panic?
Prayer isn't a last resort; it's meant to be our first response.
3. What might you be pursuing that isn't God's will to where it's wearing you out?
Sauls exhausted himself fighting God's will; David rested while trusting it.