

Session 9 David: Overcoming Despair (1 Sam. 22; Ps. 52; 57; 142)

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. David faced the challenge of overcoming fear, shame, and depression in this season. Coming out of very negative experiences in Gibeah, Nob and Gath, he entered the “Adullam years” which lasted about 5–7 years (from about age 23 to 30). While in Gath, David wrote Psalm 34, declaring, “I will bless the Lord at all times,” as he sought to recover spiritually from his dark emotions.
- B. In God’s plan, the season associated with the cave of Adullam was David’s training. It would have been easy for the Lord to remove Saul and give David rest from all his adversaries. His strategic delays prepared David to succeed in his future calling. In this season of testing the Lord worked character, faith, and perseverance into his life, which would uphold him in time of future blessing.
- C. David had so many great promises, but they continued to be delayed. We see the end of David’s story, but not our own. When we see the whole story, it makes sense. When we are only halfway through our own story, it may seem like all is lost. But the Lord knows our path.
- D. David took refuge in a cave near Adullam (22:1-2). He had just escaped from Gath in the land of the Philistines, traveling ten miles east to take refuge in a large cave near the city of Adullam. While in Adullam (in the territory of Judah), David’s relatives and about 400 distressed men joined him.
- ¹David 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. ²And 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. (1 Sam. 22:1-2)*
- E. ***Cave of Adullam:*** Adullam was “David’s seminary.” In this time he wrote several psalms, in particular, two related to his time “*in the cave*” (Ps. 57 and 142) and one related to Doeg (Ps. 52).
- F. ***His father’s house:*** David’s family joined him, not out of loyalty to David, but because of their fear of reprisals from Saul and a recent invasion of Bethlehem by the Philistines (2 Sam. 23:13-16).
- G. ***400 men:*** The news of David’s return was spread around the country. Some 400 men in distress, debt, and discontent gathered to David and became his army. This group was transformed into the “mighty men of David” (2 Sam. 23:8-39). They were one of the most powerful “youth groups” in history. They stood with David in his wilderness years through persecution and later worked with him as he ruled as king of Israel. Among them were his nephews Joab, Abishai, and Asahel.
- H. ***Leadership lesson:*** Some choose the honor and comfort of Saul’s court over the risks, rigors, and persecution of being with David in the wilderness years of testing outside the camp (Heb. 13:13).
- I. ***Captain over them:*** David trained them in spiritual and military ways to become the nucleus of the greatest army Israel ever had. Picture David speaking to them gathered around the campfires: “*Come, you children, I will teach you the fear of the Lord*” (Ps. 34:11).
- J. ***Leadership lesson:*** David “rose up” to take leadership without drawing back in fear and depression.

II. DAVID AT MIZPAH IN MOAB (1 SAM. 22:3-4)

- A. David took his elderly parents from Adullam to Mizpah of Moab (22:3-4). There are several cities called Mizpah in Israel in addition to one in Moab somewhere east of the Dead Sea.
- ³Then 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.” ⁴So he brought them before the king of Moab, and they dwelt with him all the time that David was in the stronghold. (1 Sam. 22:3-4)*
- B. *My father and mother*: Saul was bitterly opposed to David and his family so there was no safety for his parents. David did not want his parents to share the hardships of his wanderings, so he sought asylum for them in Moab. Though the youngest of eight sons and only in his mid-twenties at this time, David took responsibility to care for his parents even while facing many difficult trials.
- C. *King of Moab*: Moab was Saul’s enemy (14:47), so the king was eager to support any rival of Saul. David’s father was Jesse, and his great-grandfather Boaz had married Ruth of Moab (Ruth 4:13-22). In marrying Boaz, Ruth became a rich and influential woman in Israel. Thus, the king of Moab is doing David a favor in memory of this famous Moabite woman who had moved to Israel.

III. DAVID IN THE FOREST OF HERETH (1 SAM. 22:5)

- A. The prophet Gad exhorted David to leave Moab and return to Judah (22:5). David was quick to respond to this prophetic word and return to Judah, which was far more dangerous than Moab.
- ⁵Now 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. (1 Sam. 22:5)*
- B. *Hereth*: David went to the forest of Hereth, which was probably on the edge of a mountain chain surrounded by thickets; it was in the territory of Judah, probably about three miles from Adullam. The forest provided some protection against Saul’s large military force of 3,000 men (24:2; 26:2).
- C. *Go to Judah*: Gad instructed David to go to Judah where Saul was seeking to kill him. This was an important prophecy. David had to trust God every day in Judah as 3,000 of Saul’s men sought him. David’s men were afraid (23:3), but the Lord would not let them leave Judah to seek refuge in Moab, Gath, or another city. God would not let them live in the “comfort zone,” outside of His will.
- The Lord wanted to give David a greater testimony of His intervention and deliverance so that David would have greater spiritual depth when he became king of Israel.
- By being in Judah and protecting the people from the Philistine invasions, David gained credibility throughout Judah and all Israel as more and more men joined him (1 Chr. 12:1-22).
- D. *Gad*: He was faithful in the wilderness years and later served as a court prophet after David became king (2 Sam. 24:11-19; 1 Chr. 21:9-19; 2 Chr. 29:25). Gad was a young man when he joined David and may have been sent by Samuel from the prophetic school at Naioth in Ramah to help David.

IV. THE MASSACRE OF THE PRIESTS AT NOB (1 SAM. 22:6-23)

- A. Saul received news about David's actions in Nob (22:6-8). Saul gathered his top government officials to an official state meeting. In Gibeah, previously Saul gave orders to kill David (19:1).
- ⁶When Saul heard that David and the men who were with him had been discovered—now Saul was staying in Gibeah...and all his servants standing about him—⁷then 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? ⁸All 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.” (1 Sam. 22:6-8)*
- B. **Benjaminites:** Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin. He appealed to tribal loyalty by addressing his officials as “Benjaminites” (22:7), also indicating his favoritism in giving the best positions in his government and military, plus farm properties, to his kinsmen from the tribe of Benjamin. This redistribution of fields and vineyards by the king was an abuse of which Samuel had warned (8:14). Saul assured them that David, from the tribe of Judah, would not make them as powerful and rich.
- C. **Leadership lesson:** Insecure leaders only put “their own people” in positions of leadership, without regard for qualifications. David put people from different tribes into leadership positions, including some who had been hostile to him (e.g., Abner).
- D. **Conspired:** Saul accused the priests of knowing about David's conspiracy (22:13, 17), which was the same charge he brought against his own officials (22:8). Saul also accused the priests of giving David food and a sword and of inquiring of God for him (22:13).
- E. **Lie in wait:** Saul thought his son Jonathan had incited David to ambush and assassinate him (22:8). Saul was paranoid, thinking David was secretly plotting his downfall, and that his loyal son was the ringleader of a new anti-Saul conspiracy. With a negative mindset, he saw conspiracy everywhere.
- F. **Son of Jesse:** Saul often referred to David as “the son of Jesse,” expressing his contempt for him (22:7, 8, 9, 13, 17), rather than using his name, David, which means *beloved of the Lord*.
- G. **Sorry for me:** Saul, filled with self-pity, complained that no one would help him.
- H. **Leadership lesson:** Saul wanted people to feel sorry for him. This is bad leadership, because people are much more in touch with their own pressures than the pressures of their leaders. People want to follow leaders who are focused on helping others, not on securing their own positions.
- I. Doeg suggested to Saul that the priests were assisting David in a conspiracy (22:9-10). He accused Ahimelech of using the unique powers of his office as high priest to give aid to an enemy of the king, providing David with food, weapons, and prophetic ministry (inquiring of the Lord).
- ⁹Then 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...¹⁰And he inquired of the LORD [prophetic ministry] for him, gave him provisions, and gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine.” (1 Sam. 22:9-10)*

- J. Saul charged Ahimelech and the priests of Nob with treason for conspiring against him (22:11-15).
*¹¹The king sent to call Ahimelech...and all his father's house, the priests who were in Nob...
¹³Saul said to him, "Why have you [Ahimelech] 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?" ¹⁴So 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? ¹⁵Did I then begin to inquire of God for him? Far be it from me!...For your servant knew nothing of all this, little or much." (1 Sam. 22:11-15)*
- K. Saul ordered the execution of the priests in Nob—a total of 85 priests and their families (22:16-19). This was the worst massacre of the priesthood at the hands of a Jewish king. What Doeg did to the priests is what Saul was supposed to have done to the Edomites and/or Amalekites (1 Sam. 15).
¹⁶The king said, "You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all your father's house!" ¹⁷Then the king said to the guards..., "Kill the priests of the LORD, because their hand also is with David..." But the servants of the king would not lift their hands to strike the priests of the LORD. ¹⁸And 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. ¹⁹Also 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. (1 Sam. 22:16-19)
- L. This massacre fulfilled the judgment spoken against the house of Eli (2:29-36). A generation earlier, Eli the high priest and his sons had sinned grievously against the Lord (3:12-14). An unnamed prophet had said, "In the future all the priests in your family line will be cut off in the flower of their life. When Israel hears it, their ears will tingle" (3:11).
¹¹"I will do something in Israel at which both ears of everyone who hears it will tingle." (1 Sam. 3:11)
- M. At least four factors contributed to this satanically-inspired national tragedy—the *sin of Eli* and his sons, *Saul's decree*, *David's lie*, and *Doeg's sin* in executing the priests. God used the evil actions of sinful men to fulfill His larger purpose as prophesied over the house of Eli (2:29-36, 3:11-14).
- N. Abiathar, the only priest who escaped the purge, now joined David (22:20-23). He brought the ephod that provided divine direction to David.
²⁰Now one of the sons of Ahimelech...named Abiathar, escaped and fled after David. ²¹Abiathar told David that Saul had killed the LORD's priests. ²²David 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." ²³Stay with me; do not fear. For he who seeks my life seeks your life, but with me you shall be safe." (1 Sam. 22:20-23)

David took the blame for the priests' deaths on himself, acknowledging that he had been responsible for the circumstances that led to their deaths at Saul's hand (22:22).

David promised Abiathar protection and friendship (22:23). Abiathar stayed with David throughout the wilderness years and for the rest of his life. He eventually shared the position of high priest with Zadok during David's reign (2 Sam. 20:25; 15:24-36).

V. PSALM 52: EXPERIENCING GOD’S GOODNESS AND MERCY IN FAILURE

- A. **The superscription for Psalm 52:** “A contemplation of David when Doeg the Edomite went and told Saul, and said to him, David has gone to the house of Ahimelech.”
- B. David wrote this psalm related to a great tragedy in his life and the life of the nation, related in 1 Samuel 21-22. He was filled with shame and guilt for causing the death of 85 priests and their families (1 Sam. 22:22). He also contrasted his trust in God with Doeg’s disregard for the Lord.
- C. Both David and Doeg lied, which led to the massacre of the priests of Nob. David lied to the high priest Ahimelech, saying that he was on a secret mission for Saul, while Doeg lied to Saul by coloring the story to get a reward and making it appear as if Ahimelech were involved in a conspiracy against the king. And, far worse, Doeg executed the priests at the command of Saul.
- D. David described Doeg as boasting in his sin instead of repenting (52:1-4). Doeg bragged about his sins, without expressing any remorse, thus spurning God’s goodness (52:2).

¹Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man? The goodness of God endures continually. ²Your tongue devises destruction...working deceitfully. ³You love evil more than good, lying rather than speaking righteousness. Selah. ⁴You love all devouring words, you deceitful tongue. (Ps. 52:1-4)

David’s point was, how could Doeg stand with such a callused heart before a God who offers such goodness to any who will repent and humble themselves before Him?

Doeg was a “mighty man” because of his high position over Saul’s herdsmen and servants (21:7; 22:9), which brought him great wealth (52:7)

- E. David described God’s judgment on Doeg (52:5-7).
- ⁵God shall 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...⁷“Here is the man who did not make God his strength, but trusted in the abundance of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness.” (Ps. 52:5-7)**

- F. **David’s experience of salvation (52:8-9):** One defining feature of David’s life was his ability to receive God’s mercy, repent in a deep way, and stand with confidence in the love of God.

⁸But I am like a green olive tree in the house of God; I trust in the mercy of God forever and ever. ⁹I will praise You forever, because You have done it. (Ps. 52:8-9)

The olive tree was the most important tree in ancient Israel because it was a source of food, light (oil), hygiene, and healing. Olive trees develop very slowly, but live for hundreds of years. They grow in almost any condition—very hot, dry, cold, wet, rocky, or sandy—and are virtually indestructible. It is said that you can never kill an olive tree. Even when cut down or burned, new shoots will emerge from its roots. They are known for their tenacity. Olive trees and the olive were regarded as a symbol of beauty, strength, divine blessing, and prosperity.

David praised God because “He has done it” (52:9)—He redeemed, forgave, and saved him.

VI. PSALM 142: DAVID OVERCAME DESPAIR

- A. **The superscription for Psalm 142:** “A prayer when he was in the cave.” Psalm 142 gives insight into how David responded when he felt **overwhelmed** by pressure and difficult circumstances (v. 3).

¹I cry out to the LORD...²I declare before Him my trouble...³my spirit was overwhelmed... (Ps. 142:1-3)

- B. He struggled with **despair** in facing continual persecution and the pressure of leading 600 distressed men. Thus, he described himself— I am overwhelmed by pressure (v. 3), nobody understands or cares about me (v. 4), I feel very low (v. 6), and my soul is in a prison (v. 7).
- C. David felt lonely and cried out that no one acknowledged or understood him (142:4). Even with 400 men at his side, he knew that they did not understand or care for him.

⁴...no one who acknowledges me...no one cares for my soul. ⁶Attend to my cry, for I am brought very low; deliver me from my persecutors, for they are stronger than I. ⁷Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Your name...for You shall deal bountifully with me.” (Ps. 142:4-7)

- D. **Summary:** David’s spirit was overwhelmed (v. 3), nobody understood or cared for him (v. 4), he was very low seeing his enemies as stronger than him (v. 6), and his soul was in prison (v. 7).

VII. PSALM 57: A STEADFAST HEART

- A. **The superscription for Psalm 57:** “A michtam of David when he fled from Saul into the cave.” Psalm 57 describes his resolve to respond to God with a steadfast heart in midst of overwhelming pressures (Ps. 142:3). David found victory over his despair by trusting and praising God (57:1, 7, 9).

¹ O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You... ²I will cry out to God Most High, to God who performs all things for me...⁷My heart is steadfast, O God, my heart is steadfast; I will sing and give praise. ⁸Awake, my glory! Awake, lute and harp! I will awaken the dawn. ⁹I will praise You, O Lord, among the peoples; I will sing to You among the nations. ¹⁰For Your mercy reaches unto the heavens, and Your truth unto the clouds. (Ps. 57:1-10)

- B. **Steadfast:** David set his heart to be steadfast in trusting, obeying, and serving God (v. 7).
- C. **Praise:** He sang praise to God rather than yielding to condemnation, complaining, and fear (57:9).
- D. **Awake my glory:** This refers to the deepest parts of his heart, the deepest recesses of his affections.
- E. **Summary:** David was attacked by men who are like devouring lions (v. 4), who prepared a net to trap him so that he would fail (v. 6), but his heart was steadfast to trust and obey God (v. 7).