

The Books of 1 and 2 Samuel

Lesson 13: David in the Cave; Saul's Life Spared -- 1 Samuel 22:1-24:22

Picture a damp cave in the wilderness, a hole in the rocks near a town called Adullam. The anointed king of Israel is hiding inside it. David, the giant-slayer, the harpist who soothed a tormented king, the young man over whom the women once sang, is now a fugitive crouched in the dark. He has no palace, no army, no settled future. He has a cave. And one by one, the broken people of Israel begin to find him there.

Read who came: "every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented." Four hundred ragged souls. It reads almost like a rejected pile, the people nobody wanted. Yet this is the company God gathers around His chosen king. There is something deeply gospel-shaped about that. The Lord still gathers the distressed, the indebted, and the discouraged, and He makes a kingdom out of them.

But this lesson carries a shadow too. While David hides, a jealous king burns. Saul, convinced everyone is conspiring against him, orders the slaughter of the priests at Nob, eighty-five men in their linen ephods, cut down because they helped a fleeing David. It is one of the darkest scenes in all of Samuel, and it shows us what unchecked suspicion and rage will finally do to a heart that has stopped listening to God.

Then the cave turns again. Saul, hunting David, steps into the very cave where David is hiding, and David's men whisper that this is God's gift, the enemy delivered into his hand. In that breathless moment David must decide who he will be. Will he seize the throne by his own knife, or will he wait on the God who anointed him? As we walk through these chapters, we are really walking through our own temptations, every time life hands us a chance to grab what God has not yet given.

Group Discussion: When have you been tempted to take a shortcut to something good, grabbing by your own hand what you believed God had promised but had not yet given?

Personal Reflection: Where in your life right now are you waiting on God's timing, and what is that waiting exposing about what you truly trust?

Read 1 Samuel 22:1-24:22

Study Questions

1. What does David's gathering of the distressed, the indebted, and the discontented (22:1-2) reveal about the kind of people God draws to His anointed king, and how does that prepare us for the gospel?

2. Who are the “distressed, indebted, and discontented” people God has placed in your life, and how might He be calling you to welcome rather than overlook them?
3. How does the massacre of the priests at Nob (22:6–19) expose what jealousy and unchecked suspicion finally do to a heart that has turned from God?
4. Where do you sense suspicion, resentment, or jealousy quietly taking root in you, and what will you do before it grows into something destructive?
5. What does it mean that David “enquired of the LORD” before acting at Keilah (23:1–5, 9–12), and how does that habit contrast with Saul’s reckless self-direction?
6. How consistently do you bring real decisions to God before you act, and what would change if you genuinely sought His will first?
7. When David spared Saul and refused to “stretch forth mine hand against the LORD’s anointed” (24:6), what conviction about God was governing his restraint?
8. Who is the “Lord’s anointed” you find hardest to honor, a leader, an authority, a difficult person, and how does David’s restraint challenge your attitude toward them?

9. Saul wept and confessed, "Thou art more righteous than I" (24:17), yet did not truly change; what does the contrast between Saul's heart and David's heart teach us about God's ways and the danger of an unrepentant heart?

10. Name one specific way Jesus, who refused to seize by force what the Father would give Him in His time, is forming that same patient, vengeance-renouncing trust in you through this passage.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Romans 12:19, on leaving vengeance to God rather than avenging ourselves; Psalm 57, David's own prayer from the cave when he fled from Saul; 1 Peter 2:21–23, on Christ who when reviled did not revile again but committed Himself to God; Hebrews 5:8–9, on the Son learning obedience and becoming the author of eternal salvation; Galatians 6:9–10, on doing good and not growing weary while we wait.

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