

DAVID, A LEADER AND A SHEPHERD

1 Samuel 21:1-22:23

Key Verse: 22:2

All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him, and he became their leader. About four hundred men were with him.

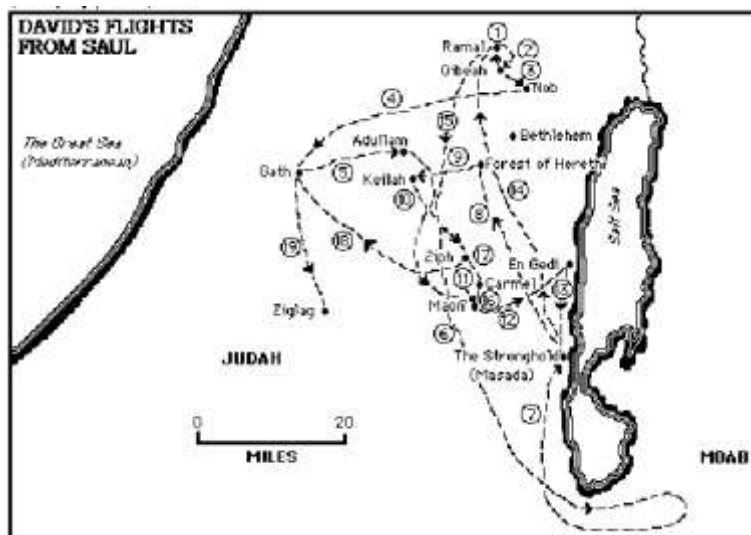
In this passage, we learn how David had to run away from King Saul who was determined to kill him. David became a fugitive. It was a tragic thing that happened to a young man. But in hindsight, this was God's training for David, just as God trained Moses in the wilderness. David had to be constantly on the move, venturing even onto enemy territory and pretending to be an insane man. But in the midst of his trials and troubles, David decided to become a leader for those who were in need. He became a shepherd for them. May God help us to learn from David!

First, David and Ahimelech the priest (21:1-9). Look at verse 1. *David went to Nob, to Ahimelech the priest. Ahimelech trembled when he met him, and asked, "Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?"* After saying goodbye to Jonathan in Gibeah, David went to Nob (located east of Gibeah and northeast of Jerusalem). Ahimelech the priest trembled when he met David and asked, "Why are you alone?" David told the priest that he was on a secret mission for the king. And he asked for bread for his men. The priest had no food other than the consecrated bread which was only for the priests. He broke the law by giving the bread to David (Lev 24:5-9).

David lied here. He was not on a secret mission for the king. In fact, he was running away from the king. The question is why did he decide to lie to the priest? One possible reason was that he did not want the servant of God to get in trouble because of him. He tried to protect him. He reasoned that if the priest didn't know he was helping a fugitive, he could not be accused of any wrongdoing. So the priest was not aware of David's situation (22:15), other than the fact that he was in need of help. Unfortunately, King Saul would find out about this, and he would massacre 85 priests including Ahimelech and his family. Another reason why David was compelled to lie in this situation was that his life was on the line. He knew lying was sin, but felt justified because his life and those of his companions were in danger. In Mark 2:25-26 (see also Luke 6:1-5), Jesus defended David's action to teach the legalistic Pharisees that to save life and to do good is a higher law of love than any ceremonial law. Both Ahimelech and David upheld this law of love. However, there was someone there who did not quite understand their act of love. It was one of Saul's servants, his head shepherd named Doeg (he had been detained in the house of God, meaning probably that he was fulfilling some ceremonial requirements). He would report this incident to King Saul later. He also witnessed that David asked for a weapon and got from Ahimelech the sword of Goliath that he had kept, wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod (8-9).



Second, David in the Philistine territory (10-15). Where did David go next? David fled from Saul and went to Achish king of Gath (10). Gath was one of the five major Philistine cities and the hometown of Goliath. David thought that he would be safer in Gath than in Judah. It was a brilliant idea. It was the last place King Saul would look to find him. However, Achish's intelligence agents recognized him and briefed him on David's identity. Actually their intelligence was very good. They called David "the king of the land," even though most people in Judah were not aware the anointing of David by Samuel. They reminded their king of David's victory against their champion fighter Goliath. They also reported how the Jewish women had danced in joy and sung a song to praise David for his victory, with the lyrics, "*Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.*" David probably did not like this song. After all, because of it, Saul began to hate David. Anyway, the point of Achish's servants was that David was a security risk, given that he was a Hebrew and one with the record of hostile actions towards their people. David felt very uneasy. He took their words to heart. He became afraid of the king of Gath. He was afraid what the king might do to the man who killed their national hero.



How did David get out of the tight spot? A light bulb went off in his head. He quickly decided to bring out his acting skills. Look at verse 13. *So he pretended to be insane in their presence; and while he was in their hands he acted like a madman, making marks on the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard.* David began to write graffiti on the doors of the gate, like a little kid. He also let saliva run down his beard. It was not a pretty sight. No one could believe this man was the same handsome boy who had KO'd Goliath in the first round of their title match. His acting must have been convincing. Achish said to his servants, "*Look at the man! He is insane! Why bring him to me? Am I so short of madmen that you have to bring this fellow here to carry on like this in front of me? Must this man come into my house?*" (14-15). This way, David could escape the potentially dangerous situation. He was aware of the custom to not harm a mentally unstable person and used it wisely.

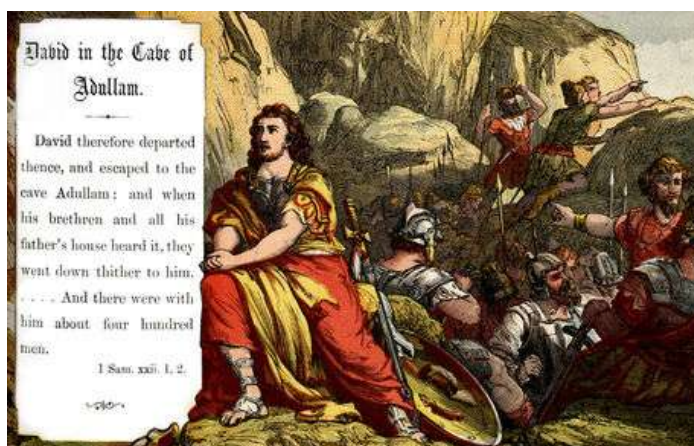
We can laugh about it, but for David it was not a comedy. It was a life and death experience. Later, he wrote about this experience in Psalm 34. (This psalm was written after he acted insane before Abimelech (aka Achish) for his safety and was driven out by him). David sang: "I sought the LORD, and he answered me; he delivered me from all my fears" (Ps 34:4). He praised God for rescuing him from the terrifying situation.

Third, David becomes a shepherd (22:1-2). Where did David go next? He left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam which was located in Judah in the east of Gath. When his brothers and his father's household heard about it, they went down to him there. Then something very unusual happened. Look at verse 2. *All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him, and he became their leader. About four hundred men were with him.*

David was a fugitive, running from King Saul. His life was in constant danger. But all kinds of people gathered around him. Some were in distress. Some were in debt. Others were just discontented. In other words, they were losers. About 400 of them were with him. David could have shooed away these social misfits, telling them that he was only a fugitive. But he didn't. Verse 2 says he became their leader.

This was God's training for David. God wanted David to grow as a man of God's own heart—a true shepherd for his people. Each of the 400 people who gathered around him had a life problem. Some were in deep distress, spiritually and emotionally. Others were financially in trouble. Some had children who were very ill. They ran enormous medical bills, but no one was there to help them. Others were plain discontented. They were unhappy. Life was hard for them. It was difficult for David to even listen to all their stories of life. But David became their leader. He heard their stories patiently. He prayed with them. He encouraged them with the word of God. David did not say things like, "Hey, I have my own share of problems. Leave me alone!" In the process, David himself grew to be a shepherd with God's heart.

We have been saved from our sin and death by the blood of Jesus so that we may overcome our selfish nature and be a blessing for others. St. Peter says to us, "Be shepherds of God's flock, ... not because you must but because you are willing as God wants you to be" (1Pe 5:2). Jesus also told us to take care of his sheep (Jn 21:16). But this isn't easy when we think about many challenges we face in our lives. Some of us work full-time and go to school. Some of us are trying to establish new career. Some of us are busy with raising children. How can we find time and energy to take care of God's sheep? But that's what God wants us to do. Neither Isaiah nor Jeremiah felt they were ready to be shepherds of God's flock. Still God called them to be shepherds. The disciples were far from being ready to be shepherds. But Jesus told them to feed his sheep. What we need is our willing and humble heart to be obedient to the Lord. We have to look at young people of our time with the eyes of God. Many of them are in distress emotionally and spiritually. Many of them are discontented. Many of them have no spiritual understanding of important issues in life. Have you read the articles that students wrote in the campus newspaper, following the nationwide media coverage of the Plan-B vending machine at SU? Their general views of



sex and abortion reflect the popular trend of our society that is far from the teachings of God. These young people need our help. They are like “sheep without a shepherd” (Mk 6:34). We must share the truth of God with them. We cannot wait until we are in an ideal situation to be shepherds of God’s flock. David became a shepherd while he was a fugitive, running for his life.

David here reminds us of our Lord Jesus, the Chief Shepherd. Jesus had his own share of problems. The religious leaders were out to get him, following him and watching him like he was a most wanted criminal. They often laid a sting operation to catch him. They even used a woman as bait to catch him with his words. Often he had to run from them to avoid direct confrontation. But through all these troubles, Jesus took care of all kinds of people who came to him. He touched their wounded bodies and hearts and healed them. He planted a hope of the kingdom of God in them. Finally, he gave his own life on the cross as a ransom for them. Jesus is our true Shepherd! May we be little shepherds who follow the footsteps of our Lord Jesus!

Fourth, God told David, “Do not stay in the stronghold” (3-5). Next David went to Mizpah in Moab (in the east of the Dead Sea). He asked the king of Moab to allow his parents to stay there until he learned what God would do for him (3). David felt that his parents would be safe there, far away from Judah and King Saul. David was running for his life, but he was mindful of his parents. Then he went to a stronghold to stay. We don’t know the location of this stronghold (Perhaps it was Masada, the natural fortress located beside the Dead Sea). Anyway, he probably wanted to stay in the stronghold. He was tired of running. He wanted to stay in the safe place for a change. *But the prophet Gad said to David, “Do not stay in the stronghold. Go into the land of Judah.” So David left and went to the forest of Hereth* (5). His fugitive life continued. God didn’t want him to be complacent. He didn’t want him to take it easy. He challenged David to move on to the heartland of Judah and live the life of a shepherd for his people.



Fifth, David said, “I am responsible” (6-22). Meanwhile, King Saul was still preoccupied with finding David to kill him. He was angry with everyone around him. He was angry with his son Jonathan who had made a covenant with David. He was angrier with his officials for not telling him about their covenant. He accused them of conspiring against him (8). He complained to them, saying, *“None of you is concerned about me or tells me that my son has incited my servant to lie in wait for me, as he does today.”*

As the king was speaking, there was a man there who was an opportunist. He thought he had valuable information for the king. His name was Doeg the Edomite. He had been in the house of God when David visited Ahimelech the priest in Nob. He

witnessed how the priest gave the consecrated bread and Goliath's sword to David. Doeg told this account to the king. What did the king do with the information? He had the priest brought to him to accuse him of rebellion. He said to Ahimelech, *"Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, giving him bread and a sword and inquiring of God for him, so that he has rebelled against me and lies in wait for me, as he does today?"* (13).

What was Ahimelech's answer? Look at verses 14-15. *Ahimelech answered the king, "Who of all your servants is as loyal as David, the king's son-in-law, captain of your bodyguard and highly respected in your household? Was that day the first time I inquired of God for him? Of course not! Let not the king accuse your servant or any of his father's family, for your servant knows nothing at all about this whole affair."* What Ahimelech said was true. But Saul would not listen to him. He ordered his guards to kill, not only Ahimelech, but also all the priests in Nob for siding with David (17). However, the king's officials refused to kill God's priests. Finally, he told Doeg the Edomite to kill the priests, which he happily complied. *That day he killed eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod. He also put to the sword Nob, the town of the priests, with its men and women, its children and infants, and its cattle, donkeys and sheep* (18-19). Doeg did not just kill the priests as the king ordered. He massacred the whole town of Nob including women, children, infants and animals. He really wanted to score big for King Saul.

Later, David composed a song about this. In Psalm 52, David said, "Why do you boast of evil, you mighty man? Why do you boast all day long, you who are a disgrace in the eyes of God? Your tongue plots destruction; it is like a sharpened razor, you who practice deceit. You love evil rather than good, falsehood rather than speaking the truth. Selah. You love every harmful word, O you deceitful tongue!" (Ps 52:1-4)

There was a lone survivor in the massacre. It was Abiathar, a son of Ahimelech. He fled to join David and told him about the killing. David was heart-broken. He said, *"I am responsible for the death of your father's whole family. Stay with me; don't be afraid; the man who is seeking your life is seeking mine also. You will be safe with me"* (22-23). David said, "I am responsible..." He didn't blame Doeg the snitch and a priest killer. He didn't blame Saul the insane king and a mass murderer. He owned up to his action. He didn't pass the buck to someone else. The buck stopped with him. It was mark of a good leader.

In today's passage, we learned why David was called "a man after God's own heart." He was running for his life from a mad king who would not give up finding David to kill him. Saul did not hesitate killing the servants of God—85 priests along with their families. The situation was grave for David. But he did not become selfish. He took care of all kinds of people who came to him. He became their leader. He became their shepherd, because they were like "sheep without a shepherd." May God help us to be shepherds for many wandering young people of our time!