

CHAPTER 22

David, being driven from Achish, returns into the land of Israel to be hunted by Saul.

I. David sets up his standard in the cave of Adullam, entertains his relations (v. 1), enlists soldiers (v. 2), but removes his aged parents to a more quiet settlement (v. 3, 4), and has the prophet Gad for his counsellor (v. 5). Saul resolves to pursue him and find him out, complains of his servants and Jonathan (v. 6-8), and, finding by Doeg's information that Ahimelech had been kind to David, he ordered him and all the priests that were with him, eighty-five in all, to be put to death, and all that belonged to them destroyed (v. 9-19) from the barbarous execution of which sentence Abiathar escaped to David (v. 20-23).

<1020>1 SAMUEL 22:1-5

DAVID IN THE CAVE ADULLAM

Here,

I. David shelters himself in the cave of Adullam, v. 1. Whether it was a natural or artificial fastness does not appear; it is probable that the access to it was so difficult that David thought himself able, with Goliath's sword, to keep it against all the forces of Saul, and therefore buried himself alive in it, while he was waiting to see (and he says here, v. 3) what God would do with him. The promise of the kingdom implied a promise of preservation to it, and yet David used proper means for his own safety, otherwise he would have tempted God. He did not do any thing that aimed to destroy Saul, but only to secure himself. He that might have done great service to his country as a judge or general is here shut up in a cave, and thrown by as a vessel in which there was no pleasure. We must not think it strange if sometimes shining lights be thus eclipsed and hidden under a bushel. Perhaps the apostle refers to this instance of David, among others, when he speaks of some of the Old-Testament worthies that *wandered in deserts, in dens and caves of the earth*, ^{<8113>}Hebrews 11:38. It was at this time that David penned Psalm 142, which is entitled, *A prayer when David was in*

the cave; and there he complains that *no man would know him* and that refuge failed him, but hopes that shortly the *righteous would compass him about*.

II. Thither his relations flocked to him, *his brethren and all his father's house*, to be protected by him, to give assistance to him, and to take their lot with him. *A brother is born for adversity*. Now, Joab, and Abishai, and the rest of his relations, came to him, to suffer and venture with him, in hopes shortly to be advanced with him; and they were so. The first three of his worthies were those that first owed him when he was in the cave, ^{<1115>}1 Chronicles 11:15, etc.

III. Here he began to raise forces in his own defence, v. 2. He found by the late experiments he had made that he could not save himself by flight, and therefore was necessitated to do it by force, wherein he never acted offensively, never offered any violence to his prince nor gave any disturbance to the peace of the kingdom, but only used his forces as a guard to his own person. But, whatever defence his soldiers were to him, they did him no great credit, for the regiment he had was made up not of great men, nor rich men, nor stout men, no, nor good men, but men *in distress, in debt, and discontented*, men of broken fortunes and restless spirits, that were put to their shifts, and knew not well what to do with themselves. When David had fixed his headquarters in the cave of Adullam, they came and enlisted themselves under him to the number of about 400. See what weak instruments God sometimes makes use of, by which to bring about his own purposes. The Son of David is ready to receive distressed souls, that will appoint him their captain and be commanded by him.

IV. He took care to settle his parents in a place of safety. No such place could he find in all the land of Israel while Saul was so bitterly enraged against him and all that belonged to him for his sake; he therefore goes with them to the king of Moab, and puts them under his protection, v. 3, 4. Observe here,

1. With what a tender concern he provided for his aged parents. It was not fit they should be exposed either to the frights or to the fatigues which he must expect during his struggle with Saul (their age would by no means bear such exposure); therefore the first thing he does is to find them a quiet habitation, whatever became of himself. Let children learn from this to

show pity at home and requite their parents (~~5180~~1 Timothy 5:4), in every thing consulting their ease and satisfaction. Though ever so highly preferred, and ever so much employed, let them not forget their aged parents.

2. With what a humble faith he expects the issue of his present distresses: *Till I know what God will do for me*. He expresses his hopes very modestly, as one that had entirely cast himself upon God and committed his way to him, expecting a good issue, not from his own arts, or arms, or merits, but from what the wisdom, power, and goodness of God would do for him. Now David's father and mother forsook him, but God did not, ~~4970~~Psalm 27:10.

V. He had the advice and assistance of the prophet Gad, who probably was one of the sons of the prophets that were brought up under Samuel, and was by him recommended to David for his chaplain or spiritual guide. Being a prophet, he would pray for him and instruct him in the mind of God; and David, though he was himself a prophet, was glad of his assistance. He advised him to go into the land of Judah (v. 5), as one that was confident of his own innocence, and was well assured of the divine protection, and was desirous, even in his present hard circumstances, to do some service to his tribe and country. Let him not be ashamed to own his own cause nor decline the succours that would be offered him. Animated by this word, there he determined to appear publicly. Thus are *the steps of a good man ordered by the Lord*.

~~0216~~ 1 SAMUEL 22:6-19

SAUL DESTROYS THE LORD'S PRIESTS

We have seen the progress of David's troubles; now here we have the progress of Saul's wickedness. He seems to have laid aside the thoughts of all other business and to have devoted himself wholly to the pursuit of David. He heard at length, by the common fame of the country, that David *was discovered* (that is, that he appeared publicly and enlisted men into his service); and hereupon he called all his servants about him, and sat down under a tree, or grove, in the high place at Gibeah, with his spear in his hand for a sceptre, intimating the force by which he designed to rule, and

the present temper of his spirit, or its distemper rather, which was to kill all that stood in his way. In this bloody court of inquisition,

I. Saul seeks for information against David and Jonathan, v. 7, 8. Two things he was willing to suspect and desirous to see proved, that he might wreak his malice upon two of the best and most excellent men he had about him: —

1. That his servant David did *lie in wait* for him and seek his life, which was utterly false. He really sought David's life, and therefore pretended that David sought his life, though he could not charge him with any overt act that gave the least shadow of suspicion.

2. That his son Jonathan stirred him up to do so, and was confederate with him in compassing and imagining the death of the king. This also was notoriously false. A league of friendship there was between David and Jonathan, but no conspiracy in any evil thing; none of the articles of their covenant carried any mischief to Saul. If Jonathan had agreed, after the death of Saul, to resign to David, in compliance with the revealed will of God, what harm would that do to Saul? Yet thus the best friends to their prince and country have often been odiously represented as enemies to both; even Christ himself was so. Saul took it for granted that Jonathan and David were in a plot against him, his crown and dignity, and was displeased with his servants that they did not give him information of it, supposing that they could not but know it; whereas really there was no such thing. See the nature of a jealous malice, and its pitiful arts to extort discoveries of things that are not. He looked upon all about him as his enemies because they did not say just as he said; and told them,

(1.) That they were very unwise, and acted against the interest both of their tribe (for they were Benjamites, and David, if he were advanced, would bring the honour into Judah which was now in Benjamin) and of their families; for David would never be able to give them such rewards as he had for them, of *fields and vineyards*, and such preferments, to be colonels and captains.

(2.) That they were unfaithful: *You have conspired against me*. What a continual agitation and torment are those in that give way to a spirit of jealousy! *If a ruler hearken to lies, all his servants are wicked* (²⁹²Proverbs 29:12), that is, they seem to be so in his eyes.

(3.) That they were very unkind. He thought to work upon their good nature with that word: *There is none of you that is so much as sorry for me, or solicitous for me*, as some read it. By these reasonings he stirred them up to act vigorously, as the instruments of his malice, that they might take away his suspicions of them.

II. Though he could not learn any thing from his servants against David or Jonathan, yet he got information from Doeg against Ahimelech the priest.

1. An indictment is brought against Ahimelech by Doeg, and he himself is evidence against him, v. 9, 10. Perhaps Doeg, as bad as he was, would not have given this information if Saul had not extorted it, for had he been very forward to it he would have done it sooner: but now he thinks they must be all deemed traitors if none of them be accusers, and therefore tells Saul what kindness Ahimelech had shown to David, which he himself happened to be an eye-witness of. He had *enquired of God for him* (which the priest used not to do but for public persons and about public affairs) and he had furnished him with *bread and a sword*. All this was true; but it was not the whole truth. He ought to have told Saul further that David had made Ahimelech believe he was then going upon the king's business; so that what service he did to David, however it proved, was designed in honour to Saul, and this would have cleared Ahimelech, whom Saul had in his power, and would have thrown all the blame upon David, who was out of his reach.

2. Ahimelech is seized, or summoned rather to appear before the king, and upon this indictment he is arraigned. The king sent for him and all the priests who then attended the sanctuary, whom he supposed to be aiding and abetting; and they, not being conscious of any guilt, and therefore not apprehensive of any danger, *came all of them to the king* (v. 11), and none of them attempted to make an escape, or to flee to David for shelter, as they would have done now that he had set up his standard if they had been as much in his interests as Saul suspected they were. Saul arraigns Ahimelech himself with the utmost disdain and indignation (v. 12): *Hear now, thou son of Ahitub*; not so much as calling him by his name, much less giving him his title of distinction. By this it appears that he had cast off the fear of God, that he showed no respect at all to his priests, but took a pleasure in affronting them and insulting them. Ahimelech holds up his hand at the bar in those words: "*Here I am, my lord, ready to hear my charge, knowing I have done no wrong.*" He does not object to the

jurisdiction of Saul's court, nor insist upon an exemption as a priest, no, not though he is a high priest, to which office that of the judge, or chief magistrate, had not long since been annexed; but Saul having now the sovereignty vested in him, in things pertaining to the king, even the high priest sets himself on a level with common Israelites. *Let every soul be subject* (even clergymen) *to the higher powers.*

3. His indictment is read to him (v. 13), that he, as a false traitor, had joined himself with the son of Jesse in a plot to depose and murder the king. "His design" (says Saul) "was to *rise up against me*, and thou didst assist him with victuals and arms." See what bad constructions the most innocent actions are liable to, how unsafe those are that live under a tyrannical government, and what reason we have to be thankful for the happy constitution and administration of the government we are under.

4. To this indictment he pleads, Not guilty, v. 14, 15. He owns the fact, but denies that he did it traitorously or maliciously, or with any design against the king. He pleads that he was so far from knowing of any quarrel between Saul and David that he really took David to have been then as much in favour at court as ever he had been. Observe, He does not plead that David had told him an untruth, and with that had imposed upon him, though really it was so, because he would not proclaim the weakness of so good a man, no, not for his own vindication, especially to Saul, who sought all occasions against him; but he insists upon the settled reputation David had as the most faithful of all the servants of Saul, the honour the king had put upon him in marrying his daughter to him, the use the king had often made of him, and the trust he had reposed on him: "He *goes at thy bidding, and is honourable in thy house*, and therefore any one would think it a meritorious piece of service to the crown to show him respect, so far from apprehending it to be a crime." He pleads that he had been wont to *enquire of God for him* when he was sent by Saul upon any expedition, and did it now as innocently as ever he had done it. He protests his abhorrence of the thought of being in a plot against the king: "*Be it far from me*. I mind my own business, and meddle not with state matters." He begs the king's favour: "*Let him not impute any crime to us;*" and concludes with a declaration of his innocency: *Thy servant knew nothing of all this*. Could any man plead with more evidences of sincerity? Had he been tried by a jury of honest Israelites, he would certainly have been acquitted, for who can find any fault in him? But,

5. Saul himself gives judgment against him (v. 16): *Thou shalt surely die, Ahimelech, as a rebel, thou and all thy father's house.* What could be more unjust? *I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there,* ^{<1016>}Ecclesiastes 3:16.

(1.) It was unjust that Saul should himself, himself alone, give judgment in his own cause, without any appeal to judge or prophet, to his privy council, or to a council of war.

(2.) That so fair a plea should be overruled and rejected without any reason given, or any attempt to disprove the allegations of it, but purely with a high hand.

(3.) That sentence should be passed so hastily and with so much precipitation, the judge taking no time himself to consider of it, nor allowing the prisoner any time to move in arrest of judgment.

(4.) That the sentence should be passed not only on Ahimelech, himself, who was the only person accused by Doeg, but on *all his father's house*, against whom nothing was alleged: must the children be put to death for the fathers?

(5.) That the sentence should be pronounced in passion, not for the support of justice, but for the gratification of his brutish rage.

6. He issues out a warrant (a verbal warrant only) for the immediate execution of this bloody sentence.

(1.) He ordered his footmen to be the executioners of this sentence, but they refused, v. 17. Hereby he intended to put a further disgrace upon the priests; they may not die by the hands of the men of war (as ^{<1029>}1 Kings 2:29) or his usual ministers of justice, but his footmen must triumph over them, and wash their hands in their blood.

[1.] Never was the command of a prince more barbarously given: *Turn and slay the priests of the Lord.* This is spoken with such an air of impiety as can scarcely be paralleled. Had he seemed to forget their sacred office or relation to God, and taken no notice of that, he would thereby have intimated some regret that men of that character should fall under his displeasure; but to call them *the priests of the Lord*, when he ordered his footmen to cut their throats, looked as if, upon that very account, he hated them. God having rejected him, and ordered another to be anointed in his

room, he seems well pleased with this opportunity of being revenged on the priests of the Lord, since God himself was out of his reach. What wickedness will not the evil spirit hurry men to, when he gets the dominion! He alleged, in his order that which was utterly false and unproved to him, that they knew when David fled; whereas they knew nothing of the matter. But malice and murder are commonly supported with lies.

[2.] Never was the command of a prince more honourably disobeyed. The footmen had more sense and grace than their master. Though they might expect to be turned out of their places, if not punished and put to death for their refusal, yet, come on them what would, they would not offer to fall upon the priests of the Lord, such a reverence had they for their office, and such a conviction of their innocence.

(2.) He ordered Doeg (the accuser) to be the executioner, and he obeyed. One would have thought that the footmen's refusal would awaken Saul's conscience, and that he would not insist upon the doing of a thing so barbarous as that his footmen startled at the thought of it. But his mind was blinded and his heart hardened, and, if they will not do it, the hands of the witness shall be upon the victims, ⁽⁵⁷⁷⁾Deuteronomy 17:7. The most bloody tyrants have found out instruments of their cruelty as barbarous as themselves. Doeg is no sooner commanded to fall upon the priests than he does it willingly enough, and, meeting with no resistance, slays with his own hand (for aught that appears) on that same day eighty-five priests that were of the age of ministration, between twenty and fifty, for they *wore a linen ephod* (v. 18), and perhaps appeared at this time before Saul in their habits, and were slain in them. This (one would think) was enough to satiate the most blood-thirsty; but the horseleech of persecution still cries, "Give, give." Doeg, by Saul's order no doubt, having murdered the priests, went to their city Nob, and put all to the sword there (v. 19), *men, women, and children*, and the cattle too. Barbarous cruelty, and such as one cannot think of without horror! Strange that ever it should enter into the heart of man to be so impious, so inhuman! We may see in this,

[1.] The desperate wickedness of Saul when the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him. Nothing so vile but those may be hurried to it who have provoked God to give them up to their hearts' lusts. He that was so compassionate as to spare Agag and the cattle of the Amalekites, in disobedience to the command of God, could now, with unrelenting bowels,

see the priests of the Lord murdered, and nothing spared of all that belonged to them. For that sin God left him to this.

[2.] The accomplishment of the threatenings long since pronounced against the house of Eli; for Ahimelech and his family were descendants from him. Though Saul was unrighteous in doing this, yet God was righteous in permitting it. Now God performed against Eli that at which the ears of those that heard it must needs tingle, as he had told him that he would *judge his house for ever* ~~(122)~~ 1 Samuel 3:11-13. No word of God shall fall to the ground.

[3.] This may be considered as a great judgment upon Israel, and the just punishment of their desiring a king before the time God intended them one. How deplorable was the state of religion at this time in Israel! Though the ark had long been in obscurity, yet it was some comfort to them that they had the altar, and priests to serve at it; but now to see their priests weltering in their own blood, and the heirs of the priesthood too, and the city of the priests made a desolation, so that the altar of God must needs be neglected for want of attendants, and this by the unjust and cruel order of their own king to satisfy his brutish rage — this could not but go to the heart of all pious Israelites, and make them wish a thousand times they had been satisfied with the government of Samuel and his sons. The worst enemies of their nation could not have done them a greater mischief.

~~(122)~~ 1 SAMUEL 22:20-23

ABIATHAR'S ESCAPE

Here is,

1. The escape of Abiathar, the son of Ahimelech, out of the desolations of the priests' city. Probably when his father went to appear, upon Saul's summons, he was left at home to attend the altar, by which means he escaped the first execution, and, before Doeg and his bloodhounds came to Nob, he had intelligence of the danger, and had time to shift for his own safety. And whither should he go but to David? v. 20. Let those that suffer for the Son of David *commit the keeping of their souls to him*, ~~(122)~~ 1 Peter 4:19.

2. David's resentment of the melancholy tidings he brought. He gave David an account of the bloody work Saul had made among the priests of the Lord (v. 21), as the disciples of John, when their master was beheaded, *went and told Jesus*, ^{<1442>}Matthew 14:12. And David greatly lamented the calamity itself, but especially his being accessory to it: *I have occasioned the death of all the persons of thy father's house*, v. 22. Note, It is a great trouble to a good man to find himself in any way an occasion of the calamities of the church and ministry. David knew Doeg's character so well that he feared he would do some such mischief as this when he saw him at the sanctuary: *I knew he would tell Saul*. He calls him *Doeg the Edomite*, because he retained the heart of an Edomite, though, by embracing the profession of the Jewish religion, he had put on the mask of an Israelite.

3. The protection he granted to Abiathar. He perceived him to be terrified, as he had reason to be, and therefore bade him not to fear, he would be as careful for him as for himself: *With me thou shalt be in safeguard*, v. 23. David, having now time to recollect himself, speaks with assurance of his own safety, and promises that Abiathar shall have the full benefit of his protection. It is promised to the Son of David that God will *hide him in the shadow of his hand* (^{<3442>}Isaiah 49:2), and, with him, all that are his may be sure that they shall be in safeguard, ^{<19101>}Psalms 91:1. David had now not only a prophet, but a priest, a high-priest, with him, to whom he was a blessing and they to him, and both a happy omen of his success. Yet it appears (by ^{<10286>}1 Samuel 28:6) that Saul had a high priest too, for he had a urim to consult: it is supposed that he preferred Ahitub the father of Zadok, of the family of Eleazar (^{<1388>}1 Chronicles 6:8), for even those that hate the power of godliness yet will not be without the form. It must not be forgotten here that David at this time penned Psalm 52, as appears by the title of that psalm, wherein he represents Doeg not only as malicious and spiteful, but as false and deceitful, because though what he said was, for the substance of it, true, yet he put false colours upon it, with a design to do mischief. Yet even then, when the priesthood had become as a withered branch, he looks upon himself as a *green olive-tree in the house of God*, ^{<1818>}Psalms 52:8. In this great hurry and distraction that David was continually in, yet he found both time and a heart for communion with God, and found comfort in it.