

# Explore the Bible: Blinded

July 20, 2016

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for August 7 focuses on 1 Samuel 22.*

## **Man on the Run (1 Samuel 22:1-6)**

After David conclusively learns from Jonathan that Saul intends to take his life, David becomes a fugitive. Anyone in Israel who harbors him puts his or her life at risk. He first approaches the priest Ahimelech at Nob, just outside of Jerusalem. David claims to be on a secret mission from Saul, and he asserts the men under his command would meet him at a specified place. Ahimelech provides him with the consecrated bread and with Goliath's sword, which had—at some unspecified time—passed into his keeping (1 Samuel 21:1-9).

From there, David takes the extreme risk of traveling to places where Saul would not be willing to go. He goes southwest to Gath, the city of the Philistines, where he feigns madness to stay alive. Fascinatingly, the Philistines assume he is the king of Israel, based on the Top 40 hit about Saul killing thousands and David tens of thousands (1 Samuel 21:10-15).

From there, David relocates to a cave south of Jerusalem, where his family meets him, as well as a group that resembles an ancient Israelite version of Robin Hood's band of outlaws. Those "in distress or debt or discontented" gather to him as leader. Saul's persecution has backfired, and instead of resulting in David's death, it has given David a guerilla army of 400 highly motivated anti-establishment men ready to follow him to the death. David shelters his parents in Moab for a time, but he is then warned by a prophet to relocate, this time to a forest in the tribal land of Judah (1 Samuel 22:1-6).

David has moved between one danger and another since the moment of

emergence as a famed fighter. He has been preserved through every trial, in some cases by his wits, but in most cases by those who devoted themselves to give him help and support in defiance of Saul.

### **The King of Paranoia (1 Samuel 22:7-17)**

Saul's response to the people of Israel turning against him is incredibly revealing. He appeals to his men and his officials' greed and pride. "Will the son of Jesse give all of you fields and vineyards? Will make all of you commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds?" This is pure pandering and quickly becomes pure petulance. Saul accuses them of conspiring against him and not revealing Jonathan's covenant with David. In Saul's twisted perception, Jonathan has incited David to ambush him.

Into this contentious atmosphere, Doeg the Edomite announces he was a witness to David's meeting with the priest Ahimelech. Saul consequently summons Ahimelech and his family and accuses them of conspiracy against him. Saul notes something the narrative did not reveal in 1 Samuel 21, that Ahimelech inquired of God on David's behalf (1 Samuel 22:13). This is Saul's only mention of God in the chapter. Saul does not directly accuse God of conspiring against him, but his challenge to Ahimelech clearly shows an appeal to God on behalf of his enemy is traitorous behavior.

In spite of Ahimelech's protests first of David's innocence and then of his own, Saul orders him and his family killed. Saul's men refuse to strike down the priests of Yahweh. Saul has reached the limit of his authority. His baseless jealousy of David has brought him to see enemies everywhere, and he has no regard for anyone's rank, status or position before God. The only thing that matters to him is unswerving allegiance to himself.

### **Dark Mirror (1 Samuel 22:18-23)**

In order to break the standoff with his army, Saul orders Doeg the Edomite to murder the priests. Doeg has served as spy and now will serve as

assassin. His true job was shepherd. He was the head shepherd of Saul's flocks. Whatever livestock Saul had personally and all the livestock taken from Israel as tax for feeding the household of the king was his responsibility. Doeg is a fascinating reverse image of David. They both served as shepherds. David rose to prominence by taking on an enemy none of Saul's army, nor Saul himself, would battle. He claimed the name of Yahweh and was successful, and he continued to be successful. Doeg also takes down the enemies that Saul's men, and Saul himself, are unwilling to face. This time, instead of a fearsome giant, they are unarmed priests. The name of Yahweh means nothing to Doeg. His success is in going far above Saul's command and slaughtering the entire family of Ahimelech and the entire town of Nob. This is the last mention of Doeg in scripture. His "battle" ends his story.

Once again, Saul's rage adds to the number of David's band. Abiathar, Ahimelech's son escapes and joins David. He later will serve as high priest when David becomes king. All of Saul's efforts to control or eliminate David and his supporters are futile and only add to his list of blameless victims.

Saul's single-minded conviction of the rightness of his cause brought destruction to the innocent. His determination to judge others based solely on their allegiance to him is a vivid picture of idolatry, and idolatry always destroys. By contrast, David's continued dedication to follow God's leading and not take others' lives into his own hands (as we will see next week), testify to the redemptive power of seeking God and his will. Only the bloodthirsty and the easily bribed attend to Saul. Prophets, priests and total strangers seek David out, and only one of the two groups will be part of the hopeful future.