



A Refuge for the Guilty

1 Samuel 21:1–22:23

MAIN IDEA

The hunted king is a refuge for the guilty.

THE QUESTION THIS CHAPTER ANSWERS

Where do you run when you are hunted and you are guilty?

THE ONE WORD

Safekeeping: Hebrew *mishmeret*, a keeping, a guard (22:23). Watch the anointed receive a refuge, become a refuge, and keep the last survivor safe.

1. At Nob: A Refuge Received 1 Sam 21:1–9

David comes to the priests' town of Nob stripped of everything: no bread, no sword, no men. And the first thing he does with his freedom is lie, telling Ahimelech the priest he is on the king's secret business (21:2). Yet God provides anyway. The priest hands him the holy *bread of the Presence* and, wrapped behind the ephod, Goliath's own sword (21:6, 9).

So the priest gave him the holy bread, for there was no bread there but the bread of the Presence.

1 SAMUEL 21:6

The mercy is real, and so is the shadow. A servant of Saul named Doeg the Edomite is there that day, *detained before the LORD* (21:7), watching. And Ahimelech is being kind to a man he believes serves the king, with no idea what David's lie will cost him.

- God provides in the middle of our fear and our failure; His keeping does not wait for us to get it together.
- The "small" lie we tell to protect ourselves puts the people beside us in danger we never counted on.
- **GOSPEL GLIMPSE** • Jesus pointed back to this very day (Mark 2:25–26) to show that God delights to give what is holy to the hungry and the undeserving. The true Son of David gives Himself to sinners.

2. In the Cave: A Refuge Embodied 1 Sam 21:10–22:5

David's own plans collapse. He runs to Gath, the enemy's city and Goliath's hometown, and has to scratch at the gate and feign madness just to escape with his life (21:13). At rock bottom, in a cave called Adullam, God begins to build something out of nothing.

And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul, gathered to him. And he became commander over them.

1 SAMUEL 22:2

The distressed, the indebted, and the bitter of soul gather to the hunted king, and he shelters them. God surrounds him with a people, a safe place for his parents, and the prophet Gad (22:3–5). The man who could not find a refuge becomes one.

- You did not come to the King because you had it together; the broken are exactly who He gathers and keeps.
- God sustains us through ordinary provision: a cave, a company of the desperate, a prophet's word.
- **GOSPEL GLIMPSE** · "This man receives sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2). The Son of David is still gathering the distressed and the bitter of soul.

3. Back at Nob: A Refuge Destroyed and Proven 1 Sam 22:6–23

The camera cuts back to Saul. Enraged, he orders the priests of Nob killed. His own guards refuse to lift a hand against the priests of the LORD, so Doeg the Edomite carries it out, and the sanctuary town becomes a graveyard (22:17–19). The refuge is turned into a grave.

Stay with me; do not be afraid, for he who seeks my life seeks your life. With me you shall be in safekeeping.

1 SAMUEL 22:23

One priest, Abiathar, escapes and runs to David. David owns his part in the tragedy, *I have occasioned the death of all the persons of your father's house* (22:22), and then opens his arms to the survivor. Two anointed kings stand over one town: one destroys, the other keeps.

- Two kings, two refuges: run to the King who takes in the hunted and the guilty at the cost of Himself.
- Grace tells the truth about the damage, and still opens the door.

The Refuge Who Was Hunted for You

Gather the three scenes: holy bread put into the hands of sinners, a cave full of the broken gathered to the king, and a survivor told he will be kept safe. They all come true in one Person. The true David gives Himself as bread to the undeserving, receives the distressed and the bitter, and shelters the guilty. He was hunted all the way to a cross, and on the third day He walked out of the grave, and the door of that refuge has never once been shut.

I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

JOHN 10:28

You are Abiathar: running with something, guilt you caused or grief you did not, sure that when God finally deals with you it will be a reckoning. Hear the true King: **do not be afraid.**

Turn from what you have been running with. Trust the Son who was hunted in your place. Receive Him, and come inside, where the King Himself is your safekeeping.

Table Talk

READ TOGETHER: 1 SAMUEL 21:1-9 AND 22:20-23

- 1 How does Ahimelech treat David when he shows up at Nob, and what does the holy bread given to hungry men show us about God's heart?
- 2 When David is afraid, his first move is to protect himself with a lie (21:2). When you are afraid, what do you tend to reach for first?
- 3 David's lie helped set in motion a tragedy he never intended (22:22). Where has protecting yourself cost the people around you more than you meant it to?
- 4 The people who gathered to David were "in distress... in debt... bitter in soul" (22:2). Why is that an encouraging picture of who comes to Jesus? Do you ever feel too much of a mess to belong?
- 5 Saul and David were both anointed, and both stood over Nob. Why did one destroy it and the other shelter the survivor? What does Saul show us about fear that is left unchecked?
- 6 Jesus pointed back to this story to defend mercy (Mark 2:25-26). Where are we tempted to put rules ahead of mercy today?
- 7 David told Abiathar, "do not be afraid... with me you shall be in safekeeping" (22:23). Are you keeping your distance from God, assuming He is coming to judge? What would trusting His safekeeping look like this week?
- 8 Who around you is hunted, desperate, or carrying guilt and needs a refuge? How can you, and our church, be that kind of shelter this week?