

Lesson 79

Saul Hunts David

Saul sought to kill David, but David trusted God for protection.

Overview

Lesson Focus

Saul's jealousy led him to hunt David and attempt to destroy him, but God protected David and his men. David had several opportunities to kill Saul, but he chose to trust God and wait for his timing to become king.

Key Passages

1 Samuel 21:12–13, 24:4, chapter 26

Memory Verse

1 John 1:8–9 If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Prepare to Share

Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

After Jonathan warned David to flee from Saul and the city of Gibeah, David began a journey

that would have him crisscrossing the country, even venturing into Moab and Philistia to escape Saul's mad hunt. David's first stop at the priests' city of Nob enabled him to get bread and Goliath's sword from the priest, Ahimelech, who was unaware that David was no longer a trusted commander and son-in-law to King Saul.

Ahimelech, a great grandson of Eli, gave David and his men the consecrated bread that was for the priests. Unfortunately, Saul's chief herdsman, Doeg the Edomite, saw David receiving supplies and would later report this to Saul. Saul reacted with anger and violence when he thought the priests were loyal to David and had them killed (1 Samuel 22:11–19). Saul's own servants refused to strike the priests, but Doeg obeyed Saul's command to destroy the city, which fulfilled the curse God pronounced on the descendants of Eli (see 1 Samuel 2:31). Only one priest, Abiathar, escaped and told David what happened. Abiathar served the house of David until Solomon had him removed from the priesthood (1 Kings 2:26–27).

After leaving Nob, David fled to the Philistine city of Gath, Goliath's hometown. The servants of King Achish recognized David as an Israelite commander, so David feared for his life and feigned insanity to be sent away (1 Samuel 21:10–15). After escaping from Gath, David went to a cave in Adullam where his family and a band of disgruntled men gathered to him. David then took his parents to Moab for their safety. David and his men saved the city of Keilah from

the Philistines, but God warned him not to stay there. David hid in strongholds in the wilderness while Saul continued to hunt for him (1 Samuel 23:14).

Jonathan visited and encouraged David in the Lord, but then the Ziphites told Saul of David's location. While David and his men were fleeing from Saul on a mountain, Saul was closing in on them, probably with his men divided into two groups to surround him. Again, we see God's providential protection of David when a messenger arrived to tell Saul that the Philistines had made a raid, forcing Saul to give up his pursuit of David and leave (1 Samuel 23:26–28).

David's first opportunity to get revenge occurred in a cave at the oasis of Engedi. When Saul entered the cave to relieve himself, he was unaware that David and his men were hidden farther back inside the cave. Ignoring the advice of his men to kill Saul, David cut off a piece of Saul's robe and then later showed it to Saul to prove he could have taken his life but chose not to (1 Samuel 24:8–15). Saul showed remorse for his actions and returned home.

Before Saul's next attempt to capture David, the faithful prophet Samuel died and was mourned by all of Israel (1 Samuel 25:1). David also met Abigail, the wise wife of foolish Nabal, who refused to give supplies to David's men. Abigail appealed to David and talked him out of taking vengeance on Nabal's household. David listened

to her and left with the supplies she gave, and God punished Nabal with death (1 Samuel 25:37–38). David asked Abigail to be his wife, and she agreed. David's other wife, Ahinoam of Jezreel, is also mentioned at the end of 1 Samuel 25.

Reneging on his word, Saul again pursued David when the Ziphites came and gave his location. Saul, Abner (the commander of the army), and 3,000 men of Israel went into the wilderness and camped on a hill. David's spies reported their location, and David went with his nephew Abishai into the camp of Saul. Because God caused all of Saul's camp to sleep deeply, David and Abishai made it to the king undetected. When Abishai wanted to kill Saul with his spear, David refused. He understood that Saul's death was in God's hands, not his, and it would be a sin to kill God's anointed ruler. Instead, they took Saul's spear and jar of water (1 Samuel 26:7–12). After climbing a safe distance from Saul's camp, David called to Abner and reprimanded him for failing to protect the king. He showed the spear and jar to prove that he had once again been given the opportunity to kill Saul but hadn't (1 Samuel 26:13–16). Saul said he'd sinned and wanted David to return, but David knew better than to trust Saul's word. He returned Saul's spear and went on his way, knowing he'd done what was right by sparing Saul's life.

Historical/Apologetics Background

Engedi is an oasis in the midst of the wilderness that surrounds the Dead Sea. It has fresh water, plants, and limestone caves. It was an area that David used to supply his group and to hide from Saul. Today, Engedi is a nature preserve where visitors can see waterfalls, wildlife, vegetation, and caves like the ones where David and his men hid.

David made some sinful choices during this difficult period of fleeing from Saul. He lied to Ahimelech about his standing with Saul and reason for needing supplies, but he recognized his responsibility in what happened to the priests because of his lie. He also failed to trust God for protection when he fled to Gath and instead relied on his performance as a madman. However, David showed great faith in God and mercy to Saul on two occasions when he could have taken vengeance. David trusted that God would deal with Saul in his timing and that he should not sin by killing the man anointed to rule Israel. The pressure from his men would have been tough, but David restrained them and showed himself to be more righteous than Saul, who continued to hunt him.

We can see David's faith and reliance on the Lord by reading the psalms he wrote during this difficult time of his life. Psalm 34, which may have been written when David acted insane in Gath, says, "This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles" (v. 6). Psalm 52 was written when Doeg the

Edomite reported that David had been to see Ahimelech at Nob. David wrote, "I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever" (Psalm 52:8). Shortly after that, he wrote Psalm 54 when the Ziphites gave his location to Saul. His plea to God for help and deliverance is a blessing to us today. Many psalms refer to God as a fortress and rock just like the strongholds David sought for protection from Saul (see Psalm 18:1–2 and 31:3–5). By choosing to focus on the Lord in times of trouble, David stands as an example to all believers to cry out to the Lord, wait patiently for him, trust him, and praise him for deliverance.

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