



# ADULLAM: GOING UNDERGROUND

SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS

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1 Samuel 22:1-5  
Twelfth Message  
Brian Morgan  
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When I visited Israel earlier this year, I felt heavy of heart. During the past year, I have had to say good-bye to many good friends who were leaving this area. Five members of our staff here at PBC have left within the past twelve months. I had grown weary of seeing so many good friends depart, and my loneliness over their leaving led me to write these lines by the Sea of Galilee:

For I came across to this holy place,  
Tired, weary and forlorn,  
Of always having to send away those I love  
To the wilderness to be born.  
Why must Jonathan serve David  
In another court?  
Why should David play his harp alone?  
My harp is broken.

One of the purposes behind my trip to the Holy Land was to find the cave of Adullam, the place where David wrote his first psalms during the loneliness of his wilderness years. I wondered what was the secret that David discovered in that cave. Upon my return, I ran into my old friend, Ari Cartun, a rabbi at Stanford University. He said to me, "You know what David found in Adullam, don't you? He found eternity" (*ad olam* — eternity). So today I'm going to take you to Adullam, where David discovered the secret to eternal life.

There are four movements to the story, found in First Samuel 22:

1. Entering into the cave: What is it that drives us there?
2. Inside the cave: What do we find once we are all alone?
3. From inside looking out: What is God creating?
4. Leaving the cave: How does the cave affect our future walk?

We will begin by reading the text. 1 Samuel 22:1-5:

So David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam; and when his brothers and all his father's household heard of it, they went down there to him. And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented, gathered to him; and he became captain over them. Now there were about four hundred men with him.

And David went from there to Mizpah of Moab; and he said to the king of Moab, "Please let my father and my mother come and stay with you until I know what God will do for me." Then he left them with the king of Moab; and they stayed with him all the time that David was in the stronghold. And the prophet Gad said to David, "Do not stay in the stronghold; depart, and go into the land of Judah." So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth. (NASB)

## I. Entering into the Cave: A Tomb (22:1a)

In the first movement, David enters the cave:

So David departed from there and escaped to the cave of Adullam;

During our trip, we found the cave on the side of a forested hill. From the crest of the hill we could see the valley of Elah, where David killed Goliath, about four miles to the west. Fixing our gaze to the north-east, we could see Bethlehem. We could even see the tops of the buildings in Jerusalem, about twelve miles distant. This was familiar territory to David. As a shepherd boy, it was here that he cared for his father's flocks. On reaching the cave, we found a small opening, through which we made our way inside. As our eyes adjusted to the light, we discovered that the cave has several chambers, separated by narrow passageways. It could indeed accommodate and conceal 400 men, as the text says.

Entering the cave, descending into the depths of the earth, we felt as though we were descending into a grave. (The place was even littered with bat droppings.) Adullam was a symbol of rejection for David. He fled there because he could find no other safe place. Saul's royal court was fraught with danger for him; he found no resting place in the walled cities of Judah; he could not get help from the foreign powers in Gath. The only safe place was a cave, and that was what he found in Adullam. It was, for all intents and purposes, a tomb.

David describes his loneliness in Psalm 142, which he wrote while he languished there in Adullam. Verse 4:

Look to the right and see;  
For there is no one who regards me;  
Escape has perished from me;  
No one cares for my soul.

Jesus also was born in a cave. His kingdom likewise was a threat to the powers that be, so the only safe place for him was a cave. It is the same for all who wish to follow him. Eternal life is birthed through the gateway of rejection. Being abandoned by others is a blessing, however, if that is what it takes to drive us to God.

In the next movement of the story, David learns something that will change his life forever.

## II. Alone Inside the Cave: A Womb (Ps 142:1-5)

Inside the cave, disconnected from all others, David learns to pray and to connect with God. He renders his musings into music, melodies that become worship in the hands of the shepherd-poet.

Before we set out to find Adullam, we made a visit to the House of Harrari in Jerusalem, whose craftsmen have recreated the Davidic harp. The instrument, which is made

from a single piece of hollowed-out wood, makes a beautiful sound. It struck me that the soul is a lot like David's harp. It is suffering and rejection that hollows out the soul, deepening and widening the heart so that it resonates. The strings of the soul are like the poetic words in the psalms that we say, and then the wind of God's Spirit blows across the strings and our soul resonates with life as we worship and connect with God.

Psalm 142 describes how David connected with the Lord in the loneliness of this cave.

#### (a) His Plea

With my voice I cry aloud to the LORD ;  
With my voice I make supplication to the LORD;  
I pour out my complaint before Him;  
I declare my trouble before Him. (1-2)

His affliction pressed so heavily on his soul that it created a great outcry in his heart before God. Holding nothing back, he poured forth everything that was troubling his spirit.

#### (b) His Plight

When my spirit faints within me,  
But You know my way.  
In the way where I walk,  
They have hidden a trap for me.  
Look to the right and see;  
For there is no one who regards me;  
Escape has perished from me;  
No one cares for my soul (3-4).

The Sovereign God knew all about David's spirit fainting within him, yet he allowed these terrible things to befall him. This is what drives David to say at last, in verse 5:

#### (c) His Portion

I cried out to You, O LORD:  
I said, 'You are my refuge,  
My portion in the land of the living.' (5)

The cave was a shelter from the world and a sanctuary with God. In that tomb David died to others; and in that womb he was tied to God alone. In Adullam he wrote the psalms, the deepest expressions of spirituality that have ever been penned.

From the cave we traveled to another cave named Eremos (the Greek word for "desert"), beyond the Sea of Galilee. This is the cave where Jesus often withdrew to find safety and solitude. Yet we often protest that living in our fast-paced world we haven't much time for deep reflection, let alone poetic expression. Do you think David had time? His life was in danger, yet he would not go on until he worshipped God in song.

On our trip, one of the brothers felt the necessity to spend some time alone with God, and so he took a whole day to worship in solitude. At the end of the day I found him sitting by the pool at the hotel where we were staying. He face was aglow with joy; he was refreshed and renewed. He shared with me everything the Lord had taught him that day. I suggested he write a poem about it. At first he refused, but upon our return I learned that he had indeed written a poem describing his emotions. I will read three stanzas from it:

I fled to the Adullam cave, not to hide,

but to reflect and revive.  
A Sabbath's rest to repair.

Adullam's shepherd sunk my roots into the Above.  
I emerged with reawakened resolve  
not to feed without Christ's love.

Love surrounded me, "rushing into every crack";  
and habits formed to others' harm  
gave way to Eremos cave by prayer charmed.

The cave is a shelter from the world and a sanctuary with the Lord, a safe haven where we disconnect from others in order to connect with God. There we can reflect on the eternal significance of what God is doing amidst the mundane things of life.

In the third movement of our text, God surprises David with something that he was doing outside the cave.

### III. Looking Out From The Cave: A Gathering Place (22:1b-2)

#### (a) Gathering Place for a New Spiritual Family

In Psalm 142 we read David's final petition from the cave:

"Bring my soul out of prison,  
So that I may give thanks to Your name;  
The righteous will surround me,  
For You will deal bountifully with me." (7)

David senses that although he is, in a manner of speaking, entombed in a cave, God will resurrect him. He also has the sense that the spiritual life resulting from his connecting to God will draw others to the messianic king. As he looks out into the light, here is what he sees. 1 Samuel 22:2:

And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented, gathered to him; and he became captain over them. Now there were about four hundred men with him.

In one of the most beautiful scenes in Scripture, David looks out from the cave and sees that hundreds of men have been drawn to Adullam. The cave had become the gathering place. (By the way, the word "gather" is the Hebrew word from which the word "kibbutz" derives.)

And who were those who made up this new family? "Those who are in distress" (constrained, in deep straits that caused them to wither up); "everyone who was in debt" (due to the heavy tax structure of Saul's kingdom); and the "discontented" (literally, the bitter of soul, those for whom all the simple pleasures of life had disappeared). The people who were drawn to the cave were the outcasts, those who felt heavy-laden by the old kingdom. "In English literature the term Adullam is occasionally used as a kind of shorthand for a sanctuary outcasts. Thus Thomas Hardy in *The Mayor of Casterbridge* refers to Mixen Lane in the lowest section of town as 'the Adullam of all the surrounding villages. It was the hiding place of those who were in distress, and in debt, and trouble of every kind.'"<sup>1</sup>

The spiritual life that emanated from the cave of Adullam drew others into the new family. Everyone who came was drawn; no one was coerced. Saul was seeking David, but he could not find him, but those who were internally drawn found him without any problem. In the same way,

the men and women who came to Christ were drawn to do so willingly because of their unhappiness with the old order. They gladly responded when Jesus said, "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls" (Matt 11:28-29).

I think this has profound implications for evangelism and church growth. Much effort is spent in trying to get people to attend church, but often they find that there is nothing about the life of the church that attracts them. Believers in the early church, however, had their priorities right. They focused on worship, fellowship, communion and the apostolic teaching, and the result of these things is recorded in the book of Acts: "and the Lord kept adding to their numbers those who were being saved." Evangelism in the early church was a natural outgrowth of the spiritual life of the church. The lesson for us is this: hurting people are drawn to believers who are connected to God.

This text also identifies whom we should target in our evangelistic efforts. Oftentimes we target the wrong groups, failing to recognize that God is already at work, drawing people to himself. The church needs to reach out to the discontented, the distressed, and the debt-ridden. In our own area, this means the foreign refugees, the poor, unwed mothers, the divorced, single parents, teenagers from unhappy homes, AIDS patients and the unborn. Such are fertile fields for the message of the gospel.

This then is the vision that David sees as he looks outside the cave of Adullam. God was bringing together a new spiritual community.

But there were others who came to the cave.

#### **(b) Reconciliation of the Physical Family**

And when his brothers and all his father's household heard of it, they went down there to him. (22:1b)

God was restructuring David's family. The outcast youth, once the subject of the disdain of his brothers, is now sought after as the messianic king who will overthrow the old order. At last his family recognizes him as their new leader, and they come to him on his turf and on his terms.

Jesus was a source of dissonance in his family. His brothers refused to believe in him; his mother tried to coerce him at the wedding in Cana. At one point, they thought he was a madman, so Jesus was forced to say, "Who are my mother, brothers, and sisters, but he who does the will of God?" Jesus was creating a new family, made up of those who were drawn to him. After his death and resurrection, his family too were reconciled to the new order. They were to be found in the Upper Room, with the others, worshipping Christ.

Though at times we grow spiritually because we suffer rejection initially by our physical family, true spirituality will keep them in our hearts as a right and proper concern, and we will long for their reconciliation with God. As many of you can attest, one of the most joyful occasions in life is when a member of one's physical family is reconciled to Christ.

The goal of spirituality therefore is community. The monks sought to withdraw from the world, and in this

they were half-right. But once we have met with God, true spirituality is experienced in community. Having met with God in the cave of Adullam, David has a vision of the new community. He leaves the cave, a different man, to walk twin paths.

How did his experience in the cave affect his walk with God?

### **IV. Leaving the Cave (22:3)**

#### **(a) A Path of Responsibility**

And David went from there to Mizpah of Moab; and he said to the king of Moab, "Please let my father and my mother come and stay with you until I know what God will do for me." (22:3)

In David's great hour of testing, having no home to call his own, he made it a top priority to honor his parents by providing a home for them. What a tribute to his heart, especially when we remember that in former times he felt abandoned by his own. As he wrote in Psalm 27:9,10: "Do not abandon me nor forsake me, O God of my Salvation! For my father and my mother have forsaken me..." David takes his family to Moab, right into the presence of the king (perhaps because Moab was the birthplace of his great-grandmother, Ruth). Note how he expresses his faith in God to the foreign king, in contrast to his behavior when he disguised his identity in front of Achish, in Gath.

Jesus had the same heart for his family. In his hour of trial and testing, he cared for his mother and provided for her future. The gospel records: "When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing nearby, He said to His mother, 'Woman, behold, your son!' Then He said to the disciple, 'Behold, your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own household" (John 19:26). While Jesus was being "cut off" from the earth, he made sure his mother was not cut off and abandoned.

It might not be convenient to care for your parents, but it is the biblical thing to do. My wife Emily cared for her dying father for the last year of his life. She moved him to an apartment across the street from our home and took care of him until cancer took him. Then her sister was diagnosed with AIDS, and she cared for her until she died. The new family transcends the old, but it still honors and cares for the old. Never forget those who bore you. Honor them to the grave. This protects us from the phenomenon of the cults, which are extremely destructive of families.

Spirituality is a path of responsibility.

There is a second path.

#### **(b) A Path of Mobility**

And the prophet Gad said to David, "Do not stay in the stronghold; depart, and go into the land of Judah." So David departed and went into the forest of Hereth. (22:5)

By means of the direct voice of the prophet Gad, David was told to not attempt to create security for himself by turning the cave of Adullam into a permanent fortress. (The word for "fortress" is the same as the word for "Masada.") He would find security in his constant obedience to go wherever the Lord sent him ("they went wherever they could go", 1 Sam 23:13). David would find no perma-

nent place to settle as long Saul remained in power. That is why he continued to depend upon God.

Our Lord likewise could find no safe place to settle down during his ministry on earth. To those who naively wanted to follow him, he said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Matt. 8:20). If this was the fate of David and Jesus, how can Christians expect to find a permanent, safe abode in this evil world? Let us not try to find safety in fortresses built by men, but rather in our constant abiding in the will of God.

The history of the Jews should serve as a warning to Christians today. In the first century, the sects who fled to fortresses like Masada or tried to put their security in the temple were destroyed. When the church adopts a fortress mentality and hides in structures of worldly security, whether buildings or political structures, we not only lose our effectiveness, we also forfeit our true security, making us an easy target for the enemy.

So I found the secret to spirituality in the cave of Adullam. I went to Israel suffering from the pain of losing close friends, but Adullam taught me that by letting people go, I am allowing them to enter into the most important aspect of spirituality: that they may "know Him, the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings."

O what Joy is this, what pleasure,  
To find you all again,  
And sing life's sweet Davidic song,  
For those who trek to Adullam's den.

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1. David Lyle Jeffrey, *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 22.