

1 Samuel 23 - Victory at Keilah & David's Escape; Jonathan's Visit; Victory Over the Ziphites

IV. Transition from the house of Saul to the house of David (1 Samuel 16:1—31:13)

(3) David in exile from the pursuing Saul (21:1—29:11)

(G) God protects David from betrayal by Keliath into Saul's hands after he delivered Keliath from the Philistines (23:1-13)

(H) Jonathan visits David in the wilderness of Ziph as the Ziphites divulge David's location to Saul (23:14-23)

(I) David's narrow escape from Saul near Maon (23:24-28)

1 Samuel 23

(G) God protects David from betrayal by Keliath into Saul's hands after he delivered Keliath from the Philistines (23:1-13)

1 Then they informed David, saying, "Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are plundering the threshing floors."

1 Then they told David, saying, "Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are plundering the threshing floors."

1 Someone told David, "Look, the Philistines are fighting at Keilah and are plundering the threshing floors."

1 Then they told David, saying, Behold, the Philistines fight against Keilah, and they rob the threshingfloors.

- The narrative now shifts back to David and his activities...

— Throughout the narrative of 1 Sam 21-31, Saul's disregard for God's law increased, while David's submission to the Lord increased

- Keilah was a city in the Shephelah, a place of importance in the time of Nehemiah (Neh 3:17-18). It is mentioned in the Tell el Amarna letters as Kila.

— Today it is a city of ruins, but the terraced hillsides bear testimony to its grain-growing capacity, which the Philistines envied

- The threshing floors were where the Israelites stored their threshed grain (Cf. 2 Kings 6:27; Joel 2:24)

— The Philistines robbed the threshing floors to reduce Israel to submission by starvation

- David rushed to defend his countrymen and fellow Judahites from hostile invasion, while also watching out for Saul
- Saul should have come to the rescue of his countrymen, but there is no mention of him doing so

2 So **David inquired of the LORD**, saying, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" And the LORD said to David, "Go and attack the Philistines and save Keilah."

2 So David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" And the LORD said to David, "Go and attack the Philistines and deliver Keilah."

2 David inquired of the LORD: "Shall I go and strike down these Philistines?" The LORD told David, "Go strike down the Philistines and deliver Keilah."

2 Therefore David enquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go and smite these Philistines? And the LORD said unto David, Go, and smite the Philistines, and save Keilah.

- As Saul's commander, David would not have hesitated to attack the Philistines; however, now he was Saul's enemy and had different soldiers. This led him to inquire of the Lord on his next move.

- "...David inquired of the LORD" - 4x in this passage (v2,4,10,11); he placed himself under God's authority, Saul did not

— This is why God worked through David as His vice-regent, but rejected Saul

— David likely consulted the Urim and Thummin to decipher God's will; Abiathar brought the ephod with him when he fled the massacre at Nob (v6)

- The Philistines were David's enemy and the enemy of Israel, so it was right for him to fight them. As long as David sought the mind of the Lord, God gave him protection and victory.

Urim and Thummin

God manifested His will through the Urim and Thummim in the priestly ephod (v6,9; Cf. Ex 28:30). The Urim (lit. lights) and Thummim (lit. perfections) were evidently two stones or similar objects, one light and the other dark in color. The high priest carried them in the pocket on the front of his ephod (apron). He ascertained God's will by drawing one out after mentally assigning a meaning to each.

3 But David's men said to him, "Behold, we are fearful here in Judah. How much more then if we go to Keilah against the ranks of the Philistines?"

3 But David's men said to him, "Behold, we are afraid here in Judah. How much more then if we go to Keilah against the ranks of the Philistines?"

3 David's men told him, "Look, we're afraid here in Judah. How much then, if we go to Keilah against the Philistine army?"

3 And David's men said unto him, Behold, we be afraid here in Judah: how much more then if we come to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?

4 So David inquired of the LORD once more. And the LORD answered him and said, "Arise, go down to Keilah, for I am going to hand the Philistines over to you."

4 Then David inquired of the LORD once more. And the LORD answered him and said, "Arise, go down to Keilah, for I will give the Philistines into your hand."

4 David inquired of the LORD again, and the LORD answered him: "Get up, go down to Keilah. I'll give the Philistines into your control."

4 Then David enquired of the LORD yet again. And the LORD answered him and said, Arise, go down to Keilah; for I will deliver the Philistines into thine hand.

5 Then David and his men went to Keilah and fought the Philistines; and he drove away their livestock and struck them with a great slaughter. So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah.

5 So David and his men went to Keilah and fought with the Philistines; and he led away their livestock and struck them with a great slaughter. Thus David delivered the inhabitants of Keilah.

5 David and his men went to Keilah and fought the Philistines. He carried off their livestock and defeated them decisively, and so David delivered the inhabitants of Keilah.

5 So David and his men went to Keilah, and fought with the Philistines, and brought away their cattle, and smote them with a great slaughter. So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah.

- David was not just defending himself against Saul, on the run, during this period of his life...he was also aggressively carrying out the will of God by defending Israel's enemies as the Lord's anointed servant

- David was given credit for the victory, but it was clearly the Lord who enabled him to win against such a tough opponent

6 Now it came about, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David at Keilah, *that* he came down *with* an ephod in his hand.

6 Now it came about, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David at Keilah, *that* he came down *with* an ephod in his hand.

6 Now when Ahimelech's son Abiathar had fled to David in Keilah, the ephod had come down with him.

6 And it came to pass, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David to Keilah, that he came down with an ephod in his hand.

- Abiathar remained in the forest of Hereth as David conquered the Philistines in Keilah. After the battle, the priest joined David in Keilah with the ephod.

— The presence of the ephod made it possible for David to continue to receive guidance from the Lord

7 When it was reported to Saul that David had come to Keilah, Saul said, "God has handed him over to me, for he shut himself in by entering a city with double gates and bars."

7 When it was told Saul that David had come to Keilah, Saul said, "God has delivered him into my hand, for he shut himself in by entering a city with double gates and bars."

7 It was reported to Saul that David had come to Keilah, and Saul said, "The LORD has delivered him into my hand because he has shut himself in by going into a town with double gates and bars."

7 And it was told Saul that David was come to Keilah. And Saul said, God hath delivered him into mine hand; for he is shut in, by entering into a town that hath gates and bars.

- So intense was Saul's hatred that he did not thank God for David's victory, but instead came to fight the victor himself

- Saul believed he had David cornered in a city with one gate, and he believed he could control that gate in order to trap David

8 So Saul summoned all the people for war, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men.

8 So Saul summoned all the people for war, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men.

8 Saul summoned for battle all his forces to go down to Keilah, to besiege David and his men.

8 And Saul called all the people together to war, to go down to Keilah, to besiege David and his men.

- Saul summoned soldiers to go to Keilah, but there is no mention that he prayed for divine guidance, as David had done (Cf. v2)

9 But David knew that Saul was plotting evil against him; so he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here."

9 Now David knew that Saul was plotting evil against him; so he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here."

9 David knew that Saul was devising evil plans against him, and so he told Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod."

9 And David knew that Saul secretly practised mischief against him; and he said to Abiathar the priest, Bring hither the ephod.

10 Then David said, "LORD God of Israel, Your servant has heard for certain that Saul is seeking to come to Keilah to destroy the city on my account.

10 Then David said, "O LORD God of Israel, Your servant has heard for certain that Saul is seeking to come to Keilah to destroy the city on my account.

10 David said, "LORD God of Israel. Your servant has definitely heard that Saul intends to come to Keilah to destroy the town because of me.

10 Then said David, O LORD God of Israel, thy servant hath certainly heard that Saul seeketh to come to Keilah, to destroy the city for my sake.

11 Will the citizens of Keilah hand me over to him? Will Saul come down just as Your servant has heard? LORD God of Israel, please, tell Your servant." And the LORD said, "He will come down."

11 Will the men of Keilah surrender me into his hand? Will Saul come down just as Your servant has heard? O LORD God of Israel, I pray, tell Your servant." And the LORD said, "He will come down."

11 Will the people of Keilah hand me over to him? Will Saul come down just as your servant has heard? LORD God of Israel, please inform your servant."

The LORD said, "He will come down."

11 Will the men of Keilah deliver me up into his hand? will Saul come down, as thy servant hath heard? O LORD God of Israel, I beseech thee, tell thy servant. And the LORD said, He will come down.

- God answered David's second question first, then answered the first question...

12 Then David said, "Will the citizens of Keilah hand me and my men over to Saul?" And the LORD said, "They will hand you over."

12 Then David said, "Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?" And the LORD said, "They will surrender you."

12 Then David said, "Will the people of Keilah hand me over to Saul?"

The LORD said, "They'll hand you over."

12 Then said David, Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul? And the LORD said, They will deliver thee up.

- The men of Keilah, although grateful to David, would not risk Saul's wrath

— It reveals how fearful the town was of Saul, who had recently destroyed Nob for harboring David (22:19)

13 Then David and his men, about six hundred, rose up and departed from Keilah, and they went wherever they could go. When it was reported to Saul that David had escaped from Keilah, he gave up the pursuit.

13 Then David and his men, about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah, and they went wherever they could go. When it was told Saul that David had escaped from Keilah, he gave up the pursuit.

13 David and his men, about 600 strong, got up and left Keilah. They moved around wherever they could go. Saul was advised that David had escaped from Keilah, so he stopped the campaign.

13 Then David and his men, which were about six hundred, arose and departed out of Keilah, and went whithersoever they could go. And it was told Saul that David was escaped from Keilah; and he forbore to go forth.

- The number of David's supporters had grown from 400 (22:2) now to 600

- David left Keilah after learning that his life was in danger by staying there

— He did not take revenge on the citizens of Keilah for telling Saul where he was, as Saul had taken revenge on the people of Nob for not telling him where David was

David in the Wilderness of Ziph

What patience David had, to be able to endure daily danger and persecution! He was a master strategist and could have tricked Saul into defeat, but he preferred to wait for God to give the victory.

David sought and received divine guidance and succeeded at Keilah (v1-14); now Saul sought and received human guidance and failed near Ziph (v15-23).

(H) Jonathan visits David in the wilderness of Ziph as the Ziphites divulge David's location to Saul (23:14-23)

14 David stayed in the wilderness in the strongholds, and remained in the hill country in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul searched for him every day, but God did not hand him over to him.

14 David stayed in the wilderness in the strongholds, and remained in the hill country in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God did not deliver him into his hand.

14 David stayed in the wilderness in the strongholds, and he lived in the hill country in the wilderness of Ziph. Saul sought him every day, but God did not let David slip into Saul's control.

14 And David abode in the wilderness in strong holds, and remained in a mountain in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God delivered him not into his hand.

- The wilderness was a wild uncultivated tract lying between the mountains of Judah and the Dead Sea. It begins at about the longitude of Maon and Carmel and becomes wilder

and more desolate as it descends toward the Dead Sea. In Joshua 15:61-62 six cities are mentioned as existing in this desolate region.

- David's chief abode was Ziph, which lay about halfway between Hebron and Carmel, in one of the many caves of this limestone rock region

15 Now David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life while David was in the wilderness of Ziph, at Horesh.

15 Now David became aware that Saul had come out to seek his life while David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh.

15 David was afraid because Saul had come out to seek his life while David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh.

15 And David saw that Saul was come out to seek his life: and David was in the wilderness of **Ziph in a wood**.

- "...Ziph in a wood" [KJV] - a conspicuous mound, 2,882ft above sea level, four miles southeast of Hebron, on a plateau of red, rolling ground

— The plateau is mostly bare, though partly covered with wheat and barley. It is broken, here and there, by limestone scraps partly covered by scrub, and it is honeycombed by caves, which commence near Hebron.

16 And Jonathan, Saul's son, set out and went to David at Horesh, and encouraged him in God.

16 And Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David at Horesh, and encouraged him in God.

16 Saul's son Jonathan got up and went to David at Horesh, and he encouraged him to trust in God.

16 And Jonathan Saul's son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God.

- Just as David got word that Saul had come to take his life, Jonathan arrived to help and encourage David. Jonathan was used by God to bring David strength.

— Encouragement is often easy, but its effect on others is immeasurable

— God knew another betrayal for David loomed ahead, so Jonathan's visit came at just the right time

- It is interesting that Jonathan could easily find David, but Saul and his intelligence officers could not locate him. God was protecting his servant.

17 He said to him, "Do not be afraid, because the hand of Saul my father will not find you, and you will be king over Israel, and I will be second in command to you; and Saul my father knows that as well."

17 Thus he said to him, "Do not be afraid, because the hand of Saul my father will not find you, and you will be king over Israel and I will be next to you; and Saul my father knows that also."

17 Jonathan told him, "Don't be afraid. My father Saul won't find you, and you will be king over Israel. I'll be your second-in-command. My father Saul also knows this."

17 And he said unto him, Fear not: for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee; and that also Saul my father knoweth.

18 So the two of them made a covenant before the LORD; and David stayed at Horesh, while Jonathan went to his house.

18 So the two of them made a covenant before the LORD; and David stayed at Horesh while Jonathan went to his house.

18 The two of them made a covenant in the LORD's presence. David remained at Horesh while Jonathan went home.

18 And they two made a covenant before the LORD: and David abode in the wood, and Jonathan went to his house.

- How moving it was when Jonathan met him in the wilderness (at the risk of his own life) to reassure him and encourage him

- Jonathan and David made another covenant (Cf. 18:3; 20:8,12-17)

- Sad to say, Jonathan was never allowed to reign with David, as he was killed in battle with his father. The righteous often suffer because of the sins of others.

— This was the last meeting recorded between the two friends

19 Then Ziphites came up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, "Is David not keeping himself hidden with us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hachilah, which is south of **Jeshimon**?"

19 Then Ziphites came up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, "Is David not hiding with us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon?"

19 People from Ziph came up to Saul at Gibeah and informed him, "David is hiding with us in the strongholds in Horesh and on the hill of Hachilah south of Jeshimon, isn't he?"

19 Then came up the Ziphites to Saul to Gibeah, saying, Doth not David hide himself with us in strong holds in the wood, in the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon?

- "...Jeshimon" - "the wilderness"

- Ziph was in Judah and its inhabitants should have been loyal to David; but instead they betrayed their rightful king to Saul

— Evidently they thought it better if they informed Saul of David's presence than if the king discovered David was there on his own

Psalm 54 is titled: "When the Ziphites had gone to Saul and said, 'Is not David hiding among us?'" This Psalm tells us what David was thinking and praying during this experience. He trusted in God for deliverance.

20 Now then, O king, come down, since you fully desire to do so; and our part *shall be* to hand him over to the king."

20 Now then, O king, come down according to all the desire of your soul to do so; and our part *shall be* to surrender him into the king's hand."

20 Now, your majesty, whenever you want to come down, come down, and our part will be to hand him over to the king."

20 Now therefore, O king, come down according to all the desire of thy soul to come down; and our part shall be to deliver him into the king's hand.

21 Saul said, "May you be blessed of the LORD, since you have had compassion on me.

21 Saul said, "May you be blessed of the LORD, for you have had compassion on me.

21 Saul said, "May you be blessed by the LORD, because you have been gracious to me.

21 And Saul said, Blessed be ye of the LORD; for ye have compassion on me.

- Saul praised the Ziphites for having compassion on him, but it really was David who was in need of compassion from these people, but found none

22 Go now, be more persistent, and investigate and see his place where he is hiding, *and* who has seen him there; for I am told that he is very cunning.

22 Go now, make more sure, and investigate and see his place where his haunt is, *and* who has seen him there; for I am told that he is very cunning.

22 Go and again make sure, find out and investigate where he is and who has seen him there, for people tell me that he's very clever.

22 Go, I pray you, prepare yet, and know and see his place where his haunt is, and who hath seen him there: for it is told me that he dealeth very subtilly.

- Saul sought human help in finding David, but there is no mention of him seeking divine help in prayer

- Saul attributed cunning behavior to David, but Saul was the cunning hunter in this episode

23 So look, and learn about all the hiding places where he keeps himself hidden, and return to me with certainty, and I will go with you; and if he is in the land, I will search him out among all the thousands of Judah."

23 So look, and learn about all the hiding places where he hides himself and return to me with certainty, and I will go with you; and if he is in the land, I will search him out among all

the thousands of Judah."

23 Investigate and find out all the hiding places there where he hides, and return to me with reliable information. Then I'll go down with you, and if he's in the land, I'll search him out among all the thousands of Judah."

23 See therefore, and take knowledge of all the lurking places where he hideth himself, and come ye again to me with the certainty, and I will go with you: and it shall come to pass, if he be in the land, that I will search him out throughout all the thousands of Judah.
- God promised to go with David and deliver the Philistines into his hands (v2,4); Saul promised to go with the Ziphites to destroy David

(I) David's narrow escape from Saul near Maon (23:24-28)

24 So they set out and went to Ziph ahead of Saul. Now David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the Arabah to the south of Jeshimon.

24 Then they arose and went to Ziph before Saul. Now David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the Arabah to the south of Jeshimon.

24 The people from Ziph got up and left Saul, while David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon in the Arabah south of Jeshimon.

24 And they arose, and went to Ziph before Saul: but David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the plain on the south of Jeshimon.

- Maon was located five miles south of Ziph, in the wilderness of Judah

25 When Saul and his men went to seek *him*, **they** informed David, and he came down to the rock and stayed in the wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard *about it*, he pursued David in the wilderness of Maon.

25 When Saul and his men went to seek *him*, they told David, and he came down to the rock and stayed in the wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard *it*, he pursued David in the wilderness of Maon.

25 When Saul and his men went to search for David, some people told David, and he went down to the Rock of Escape and remained in the wilderness of Maon. Saul heard this and he pursued David into the wilderness of Maon.

25 Saul also and his men went to seek him. And they told David: wherefore he came down into a rock, and abode in the wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard that, he pursued after David in the wilderness of Maon.

- "...they" - some of David's sympathizers

26 Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain; and David was hurrying to get away from Saul, while Saul and his men were surrounding David and his men to apprehend them.

26 Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain; and David was hurrying to get away from Saul, for Saul and his men were surrounding David and his men to seize them.

26 Saul went on one side of the mountain while David and his men went on the other side of the mountain. David was hurrying to get away from Saul while Saul and his men were closing in on David and his men to capture them.

26 And Saul went on this side of the mountain, and David and his men on that side of the mountain: and David made haste to get away for fear of Saul; for Saul and his men compassed David and his men round about to take them.

- As Saul and David strategically moved their forces through the wilderness, God was in control

— At one point, David and Saul stood on opposite sides of the same mountain

— The rock stood between David and Saul, just as the cloud stood between Israel and the Egyptians

27 But a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Hurry and come, for the Philistines have launched an attack against the land!"

27 But a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Hurry and come, for the Philistines have made a raid on the land."

27 Then a messenger came to Saul with this news: "Come quickly, because the Philistines have made a raid on the land!"

27 But there came a messenger unto Saul, saying, Haste thee, and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land.

- Just as Saul's men were closing in on David, news reached Saul that the Philistines were invading

28 So Saul returned from pursuing David and went to confront the Philistines; therefore they called that place the Rock of Division.

28 So Saul returned from pursuing David and went to meet the Philistines; therefore they called that place the Rock of Escape.

28 So Saul turned around from pursuing David and went to meet the Philistines. Therefore, they call that place the Rock of Escape.

28 Wherefore Saul returned from pursuing after David, and went against the Philistines: therefore they called that place Selahammahlekoth.

- With the news, Saul abandoned his godless pursuit of David and turned against Israel's true enemy

- Saul had to postpone his personal vendetta against David to respond to the danger posed by the Philistine invasion

— Certainly God is in control of circumstances and delivers His own at the right time

29 And David went up from there and stayed in the strongholds of **Engedi**.

29 David went up from there and stayed in the strongholds of Engedi.

29 David went up from there and stayed in the strongholds of En-gedi.

29 And David went up from thence, and dwelt in strong holds at En Gedi.

- "...Engedi" - an oasis 10 miles north of Masada (14 miles east of Ziph), on the eastern edge of the desert of Judah. It is 600 feet above the Dead Sea, and from the limestone rock a copious stream plunges toward the sea.

— David moved here to increase his safety

— There are five or six waterfalls en route, the stream skipping like a goat from one ledge to another; hence the name "The Fountain of the Kid"

— In the days of Abraham, the city of Hazezon-tamar stood on this site

— En Gedi is still an oasis in the limestone desert, and though palm trees and vineyards have vanished, the petrified leaves found there and the terraces cut in the hills attest its ancient fertility

David's life was not perfect, easy or comfortable. For long seasons, he lived as a shepherd, then soldier, and then fugitive facing the pressures of exposure, enemies, capture and death. Yet, through God's sovereignty, no challenge or trouble was wasted. God worked in David through these difficulties to create deep and constant dependence on Him.

How did God deliver David?

He saved him by bringing information to his ears that David needed to protect himself (v2,4,11-12,25). He also distracted David's enemy (v27-28).

What did David do while he trusted God?

He did not become anxious and just waited. He sought God in prayer (v2,4,11-12; Cf. Ps 54; Phil 4:6), and he proceeded to serve God (v2,5; Cf. Matt 28:19-20).

How did David receive strength during his trials?

God answered his prayers (v2,4,11-12; Cf. Saul). Moreover, other godly people encouraged David, namely, Abiathar the priest, who helped him in prayer (v6), and Jonathan, who reminded him of God's promises (v16-18).