

I Samuel Chapter 23 Commentary

1Sa 23:1 ¶ "Then they told David, saying, Behold, the Philistines fight against Keilah, and they rob the threshingfloors. 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. 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 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 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."

Why would the Philistines invade Israel? No doubt they know that Saul is busy trying to kill David, and since both David and Saul are preoccupied, they see an opportunity to get food without the work to produce it. If Saul was doing his job as king of Israel, instead of trying to kill David, the Philistines may not have attempted to make war on Keilah. From this scenario we learn a lesson, of how the enemy gets a foothold, in our lives as Christians. When we are fighting among ourselves, we are not about our Father's business; our full attention to duty has been diverted, and the devil, having already gotten a foothold in our lives, has a chance to lead us further and further away from God and godliness.

Word comes to David that the Philistines besiege Keilah. Why would they bring word to David of the Philistine invasion, instead of sending for Saul? David has fought more successfully against the Philistines than Saul. By now, Israel knows that David is chosen of God to be king over Israel. They have confidence in David, but they no longer have confidence in Saul.

David asks God what he should do. Why would David ask God if he should do what Saul should be doing? David demonstrates to us a lesson of how we are to love our brethren and not usurp our position. David holds no animosity toward his fellow brethren. David has true love for them and is willing to come to their aid, however, rightfully, the job is Saul's, for he is the reigning king.

God tells David: go and deliver Keilah, by smiting the Philistines. David's men were afraid to go to Keilah to fight against the Philistines, because they are afraid for their lives where they are now. David asks God again what to do. God tells him to go. God tells David that I will deliver the Philistines to you. David and his men go down and God does what he said he would do. David and his men take the spoil of the Philistines.

Remember, David is anointed to be king over Israel. His action of love and deliverance, through the power of God, will win him the future loyalty of the inhabitants of Keilah and many others. They will remember David came to their aid, not Saul. David, through the works of righteousness, is teaching souls to trust in God.

Hereby, David sets an example for us all to follow. First: ask of God what to do. Then do what God says to do. We will have more to say on this further down in this chapter when we get to the ephod. We can trust God, and his word, because God is ever faithful, and his word of truth fails not. We point out, sometimes God does not give us a clear answer, which probably means we should just be still until he does give clear direction.

God, through David and his men, saves the city of Keilah. David and his men, by obedience to God are rewarded, and now have sustenance of life from the spoils of war.

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."

We would speak here of the ephod. If you remember when God gave instruction for the garments of the High Priest part of that was an ephod, seen in chapter 28 of Exodus. We presume that Abiathar was left at the tabernacle, when Ahimelech and the rest of the priest were summoned to appear before Saul, as it would not have been appropriate to leave the tabernacle completely abandoned. Abiathar hearing of, or seeing, Doeg slaying the priest, took the ephod and fled to David.

This action is mentioned by several commentators, to which I agree, it was appropriate that the true King of Israel have Abiathar, who is now the High Priest since his father Ahimelech is slain, and the ephod with him. *Easton's Bible Dictionary dictates that Abiathar was descended from Eli and was the thirteenth High Priest of Israel.* Why would he only carry the ephod? He could not carry the ark of the covenant nor the tabernacle, and

his father, the current High Priest had been slain, which made the vestment of the high priest his responsibility, as the High Priest office had passed to him.

The ephod had upon it the two stones with the names of the twelve tribes of Israel inscribed in them, and it also had as an attachment the breastplate of judgment, which had the Urim and Thummim. This was a most vital piece of the vestment to have for by it was inquiry made unto God, seen in: ***Nu 27:21 "And he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim before the LORD: at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him, even all the congregation."*** This was the commandment given to Joshua when he was anointed to take Moses's place as leader of Israel. God commanded Joshua to come to the High Priest, who was to be wearing the vestments, and the High Priest was to inquire of God for him. Thus, we see the evidence of the providence of God getting the ephod and its attachments to the true king of Israel, whereby King David may inquire of God as God had commanded.

We point out that there were other ephods mentioned in scripture, but we believe this is the ephod of the High Priest, which was needed to carry out properly the commandments of God, because in verse nine below David ask for "***the ephod***" and this was the only ephod by which inquiry was made of God.

We said earlier that we would speak more about prayer when we got here. The ephod upon the High Priest, through which the leaders of Israel were to inquire, can today be viewed as the King James bible for us. We should read the word of God to know what God has commanded and then inquire of God as God has commanded. We are commanded to ask of God in accordance with God's will if we expect our prayers to be answered. God's word of truth should be upon our hearts as the Urim was upon the breastplate of the High Priest. The Urim is representative of Jesus Christ for us today, as Jesus commands us to ask of God the Father in the name of Jesus Christ.

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."

Notice the arrogance of Saul, which is the same for all men who are devoid of the Spirit of God. Saul says that God has delivered David into my hand, because he is in a city from which he cannot escape if Saul gets there in time to surround it. Saul, in his demented state of mind, does not even recognize that God is not doing anything to help him, because Saul continually disobeyed God and God has departed from Saul. Saul has forgotten that David is being protected by God, because David has already been anointed to be the next king over Israel. If we are not in the will of God, we should not expect that God is going to be with us in any way.

8 "And Saul called all the people together to war, to go down to Keilah, to besiege David and his men. 9 And David knew that Saul secretly practiced mischief against him; and he said to Abiathar the priest, Bring hither the ephod. 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 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. 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. 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."

We can discern that Saul is not a true prophet of God, for his prophesy does not come true: "***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.***" Saul hears that David is in Keilah and prepares to go to war against him there. You would think, and we believe, that Saul knows why David went to Keilah, which was to deliver them from the Philistines. This should have given David favor in the eyes of Saul. However, it is obvious that God is not with Saul, and he is so consumed by his lust to kill David, that he has become deluded in his mind.

Think upon the scene: David has about six hundred men who are his followers, and Saul calls all Israel to war against these six hundred. We understand that by calling all Israel to war against David, Saul is sending a message to all Israel: do not give any kind of aid to David, or you will be guilty of treason. However, when you think of the hundreds of thousands of men of war in Israel, being called out to kill six hundred men, it makes you

want to laugh at Saul. Saul is not only showing his hatred for David, but this action shows his great fear of David. Why does Saul so fear David? Because Saul knows that God is with David. Saul could have called the entire world to war against David, and it would have been a futile action. God is protecting David, and none can overthrow God.

David hears that Saul is planning to come and destroy him and Keilah. David asks God what to do. God tells David that Saul will come, and the men of Keilah will deliver David up to Saul. Wherefore, David and his men leave Keilah. They go wherever they can find a place of rest. Saul hears that David has escaped from Keilah and does not come to Keilah.

David inquires of God, through Abiathar the High Priest with the ephod. God has given us the King James bible, (our ephod in a figure) coupled with prayer to God through our High Priest, Jesus Christ, to consult and draw from its treasure's directions from God, through the guiding of the Holy Spirit.

Again, David sets an example for us to follow. David asks God what to do and takes action according to God's response. Scripture does not say that God told him where to go. However, we recognize that David uses the good, military, mind God has given him, to flee to safety from Saul. This reminds us of Jesus, who also fled from the presence of his enemies several times in scripture, because his time to die had not come. This is an example to us: we should exercise good soundness of mind of when to stand still, and see the deliverance of God, and when to flee away from our enemy and save ourselves from destruction, just as Jesus directed his disciples in: ***Mt 10:16 "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."***

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. 15 And David saw that Saul was come out to seek his life: and David was in the wilderness of Ziph in a wood. 16 And Jonathan Saul's son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God. 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 And they two made a covenant before the LORD: and David abode in the wood, and Jonathan went to his house."

Saul continues to chase after David and his men. God protects David and keeps him away from Saul. This reminds me of a scripture in: ***2Ki 6:10-12; 10 "And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of, and saved himself there, not once nor twice. 11 Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not shew me which of us is for the king of Israel? 12 And one of his servants said, None, my lord, O king: but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber."*** From this picture we see: God is using Abiathar the High Priest to protect David, just as God used Elisha the prophet to protect the king of Israel from the king of Asyria. We should apply this same analogy to our own lives, if we are living the life of a true Christian, knowing, and believing that God is our protector, and the one on whom we must depend for preservation each day of our lives. It is that matter of listening to that "***still small voice***," which is the Holy Spirit leading in our lives.

Jonathan does what we are told to do in: ***Col 3:16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.*** Jonathan comes to David singing the song of the preserving grace of God. Jonathan, Saul's son, gives David factual and encouraging news: God will preserve you, and my father Saul shall not be able to kill you. Jonathan tells David: you shall surely be king, and I will be at your side. They make a third covenant and Jonathan goes home, because he is not willing to fight against God, which is what he would be doing if he fought against David. This is a principle we should always remember: if we fight against a child of God, we are fighting against God.

Jonathan's true, godly, love for David, is an example of how Jesus Christ has loved us. David's true, godly, love for Jonathan is an example of how we are to love our brethren and our Saviour. Remember, true, godly, love is reciprocating. It has total commitment in both directions.

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? 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."

The Ziphites are descendants from Caleb, who was a mighty man of valor in Israel. Caleb stood fast with Joshua in trusting in God. The Ziphites are Israelites, who are betraying a fellow Israelite. Paul tells us something to remember about our brethren in: **2Co 11:26 "in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils among false brethren,"** This is a warning to not put any faith or trust in man, but to be steadfast in service to God.

This also reminds me that the foe we need to watch for the closest is in us, as described in a song we sing in the Lloyd Hymnal, Verse 3 of: Hymn 397, Meter 7s, Title: *Mutual encouragement*.

1 BRETHREN, while we sojourn here, Fight we must, but should not fear; Foes we have, but we've a friend, One that loves us to the end. Forward, then, with courage go, Long we shall not dwell below; Soon the joyful news will come, 'Child, your Father calls, come home.'

2 In the way a thousand snares Lie to take us unawares; Satan, with malicious art, Watches each unguarded part; But, from Satan's malice free, Saints shall soon victorious be; Soon the joyful news will come, 'Child, your Father calls, come home.'

3 **But of all the foes we meet, None so oft mislead our feet, None betray us into sin, Like the foes that dwell within;** Yet let nothing spoil your peace, Christ will also conquer these; Then the joyful news will come, 'Child, your Father calls, come home.'

This song gives us a portrait of the life of King David. Truly, he had many foes to meet. He had perils of false brethren to deal with. However, the foe that got him in the most trouble was his own lust, which led him to commit adultery and murder. We must always remember to examine our own hearts for purity before we begin to examine those around us.

Never doubt, no matter where you are in life's circumstances, the devil will always have a spy to go and tell your enemies where you are. We know that God is everywhere present, and nowhere absent, and knows exactly all that is going on in time. This is an attribute of God alone. Though Satan does not possess this attribute of God: never doubt, Satan spies are always spying on God's people. Remember, God is omnipotent, not Satan.

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

Saul pronounces to the Ziphites: "**Blessed be ye of the LORD.**" Saul, who is living a life devoid of the Spirit of God, pronounces a hypocritical blessing of God upon the Ziphites. We must remember that the ungodly, with lying lips, can say "**Blessed be ye of the LORD,**" but there is no merit in their words. We must also remember that false brethren will do the same thing.

Saul tells the Ziphites: go find all his hiding places, and I will come down to you, and you can lead me to him. When Saul says to the Ziphites: I will search for him among all the thousands of Judah. Saul demonstrates his intense hatred for David. This is another reminder for us: the devil does not hunt for his own. He is at war with God's people. Wherefore, he must seek for God's people among the church bodies of God's people.

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. 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. 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. 27 But there came a messenger unto Saul, saying, Haste thee, and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land. 28 Wherefore Saul returned from pursuing after David, and went against the Philistines: therefore, they called that place Selahammahlekoth. 29 And David went up from thence, and dwelt in strong holds at Engedi."

The Ziphites go to seek David's whereabouts, and Saul and his people follow them. God warns David, and he flees with Saul in hot pursuit. When it looks hopeless for David and his men, God intervenes by sending the Philistines to invaded Israel. Wherefore, Saul must leave pursuing David to go and defend Israel.

This is a reminder to us: if we are steadfast in our faithfulness to God and Christ, God's protecting hand will always be with us. As we see that David has troubles on every side, so it shall be in our lives as Christians. However, just as Jonathan brought to David encouraging news, Jesus has brought to us encouraging news, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. David had the promise of being king over Israel, and we have the promise of Christ Jesus that we will be with him in the eternal heaven. This is a promise, which will help us to be steadfast in our faith, if we keep it near in our hearts and minds. When the troubles and trials of life are overwhelming, we should remember the finished work of Jesus Christ, and rest content in the will of God. Thank you, King Jesus, for the surety of our eternal salvation. Hallelujah! Amen!