

STUDIES IN SAMUEL
A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 23

- Vv. 1- 6 *Abiathar, the priest, with David.* Escaping from the slaughter at Nob, Abiathar joined David in his hideout in Keilah. Abiathar had a linen ephod, a distinctive garment of the priests and evidently served as the priest for David and his men while they fled from Saul.
- Vv. 7-18 *David's and Jonathan's meeting.* Saul learned that David was hiding in Keilah and went out to get him. Jonathan, Saul's son arose and went to David into the forest around Keilah. The two met again and confirmed a covenant which they had made earlier. Jonathan returned to his home but David remained in hiding in Keilah.
- Vv. 19-29 *Saul's pursuit of David.* The Ziphites came to Saul in Gibeah and told him where David was hiding. With this information Saul made a bold attempt to capture David. He very nearly accomplished this. On one occasion Saul went on one side of the mountain and David and his men were on the other side. David got away and continued his flight out of Saul's presence. He then moved his hiding place to the caves on the west shore of the Dead Sea near En-gedi.

LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1. *God's abundant provision for our needs.* God not only sent a prophet to be with David but he also made it possible for a priest to join David's company. God always does more than we would expect.
2. *The blessing of steadfast friends.* David must have longed to see Jonathan. Jonathan must have known this. He came to David and the two were able to

renew their covenant and David received strength to go on in his life as a fugitive.

3. *God's good providences.* Things happen in life that cannot be explained except that they are directed by the hand of almighty God. When Saul went around one side of the mountain David was on the other. God must have been with David.

Saul's Pursuit of David to Keilah, 23:1-29.

Abiathar, the Priest, With David. 23:1-6

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.

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.

1. *Why did David save Keilah? 23:1*

Keilah is a city in the Plains of Judah now identified with *Khirbet Kila*. The location is some nine miles northwest of Hebron. The city was on the Philistine border, but the inhabitants were evidently Israelites of the tribe of Judah. David himself was of that tribe; and although

the people of the community later betrayed David, his deliverance of them would have endeared him to the upright men of the place. Such activity on the part of David demonstrates that he was still behaving himself wisely, even while fleeing for his life from the king. He had the best interests of the people at heart.

2. *How did David enquire of the Lord? 23:2*

As Moses appointed Joshua to be his successor, the Lord told Moses that Joshua would stand before Eleazar who was to ask counsel for him after the judgment of Urim before the Lord (Numbers 27:21). It was at the word of the priest as given to him by the Lord that Joshua was to lead the people out to battle and to bring them back in again when it was over. Of Moses himself it was said that "And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses whom the Lord knew face to face" (Deuteronomy 34:10). Both Gad and Abiathar, the prophet and the priest, were with David. More than likely David used the Urim and the Thummim, God's appointed means for revealing His will. The inspired prophet could also receive the Lord's message and deliver it. In either way David moved only at the Lord's directive. He did this regardless of the fear which gripped men. Naturally they were afraid to take the offensive against the Philistines by themselves since they were on the defensive against any attack Saul might make. Such activity seemed foolhardy to them. They were in enough trouble on their own without stirring up the opposition of the Philistines.

3. *Why did Abiathar bring an ephod with him? 23:6*

The ephod was the distinctive garment of the high priest's clothing. Such wearing apparel would identify Abiathar as the priest with David's men. It would signify that he was an heir of the priests who were slain at Nob and would indicate orderly procedure on the part of David in appointing him as his priest. There is no indication that the ephod mentioned here was in any way a fetish

such as was made of the spoils of war taken by Gideon after he defeated the Midianites. The idolatry practiced with regard to the ephod in Gideon's day is soundly condemned (Judges 8:27), and if there had been anything wrong with Abiathar's having an ephod, it would more than likely be mentioned.

David's and Jonathan's Meeting. 23:7-18

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.

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 practised 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 forbare to go forth.

14 And David abode in the wilderness in strongholds, 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.

4. *Why did Saul think he could catch David in Keilah?*
23:7

A man is hard to catch in the open fields. Those who are skilled in guerrilla tactics can slip off into the woods, hide in caves, or literally blend into the landscape. A group of men in a city are easier to catch. Saul evidently thought David had made a tactical mistake in going into a city which had gates and bars. If Saul could only besiege the city, set watchmen at the walls, and block the gates, then it would be impossible for David to escape. Even if Saul could not fight his way into the city, he could lay a siege and starve David and his men until they were forced to surrender.

5. *Why did David call for the ephod? 23:9*

If Abiathar brought an ephod to David, he more than likely brought the rest of a high priest's wearing apparel. God commanded Moses that he should make a breastplate for the high priest and here were placed the "urim and thummim" (Exodus 28:30). These items formed the media through which the high priest learned the will of the Lord in regard to any important matters. Josephus identifies the Urim and the Thummim with the sardonyxes on the shoulders of the ephod (*Antiquities* III, iii, 5). The rabbins indicated that these stones would glow with an unnatural iridescence to indicate the Lord's will. If the Lord's answer was negative, they would remain dull and dark. Other suggestions are made indicating that

there was a golden plate within the folds of the ephod. On this plate were engraved the letters of the sacred name of God. It is suggested that by fixing his gaze on these letters, the priest became capable of prophesying, hearing the divine voice within or listening to it as it proceeded from God. The former suggestion seems more likely, and it was on this account that David called for the ephod. God would give him guidance through the services of the priest.

6. *Did the oracle come true?* 23:12

David asked the Lord if the men of Keilah would deliver him up to Saul's hand. God said that they would. He also asked if Saul would come down to fight with him, and the Lord responded that Saul would come down to fight with him. David and his men left Keilah after he made this inquiry of the Lord. There is no record of the men of Keilah delivering David into the hands of Saul for this reason. Some would feel, therefore, that the oracle of the Lord was thwarted by David's actions. If we understand David's question to be a conditional question, we would not deny that the oracle came true. David's question should be understood more as an enquiry as to whether the men of Keilah would deliver him if he stayed there. Of course, if he left then they would not have this opportunity. David was trying to find out if they were grateful for the way in which he had saved them out of the hands of the Philistines. He was making inquiry about their loyalty to him. When he found that their loyalty could not be trusted, he left their area. Furthermore, if the men of Keilah are considered to be a part of the people known as the Ziphites, we learn from the Scripture that these men twice revealed to Saul the hiding place of David in their vicinity. The land of Ziph extended between Carmel and Juttah and included the inhabitants of the highland of Judah. The men of Keilah might well be described as Ziphites. These men did deliver up David.

7. *Why did David's band increase? 23:13*

More and more people were placing their confidence in David. Gad, the prophet, had been sent of God to be with David. Abiathar, the priest, had fled to David after the priests were slaughtered by Saul. In the beginning every one that was distressed, every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented gathered themselves to David. The fact that his band was increasing would indicate that more people were plunging into debt on account of the taxation levied upon them to support the monarchy. More and more people were growing discontented with Saul and his policies. An increasing number of people were distressed over the way in which Saul was pursuing David. All of these joined themselves to David.

8. *Where was Ziph? 23:14*

There is a town in the desert or wilderness of Ziph to which David fled. It was a place fortified by Rehoboam at a later date. The location has been preserved in the ruins of *Tell Zif*, four miles southeast of Hebron. The wilderness of Ziph was that portion of the desert of Judah which was near to and surrounded the town. Generally speaking, it was the highland district of Judah, and would be extending from Carmel on the east to Juttah on the west.

9. *How did Jonathan strengthen David's band? 23:16*

Jonathan's coming to David would in itself encourage him greatly. To see an old friend was a real privilege for a fugitive. Jonathan's strengthening of David was primarily "in God." One might expect such encouragement to be the function of the prophet or the priest, but the covenant between Jonathan and David had been a sacred vow. The flight of David was even worse than he had anticipated, and Jonathan's coming to him gave him a great deal of reassurance. He was strengthened to know that Jonathan had not forgotten. This knowledge would be an immense boost to David's morale.

10. *How did Jonathan know that David had been anointed king? 23:17*

David delivered the men of Keilah (eight and one-half miles northwest of Hebron, *Kbirbet Kila*) from the hands of the Philistines. Saul had proposed to come against the city while David was enclosed therein; but David, led of the Lord, departed and hid in the wilderness of Ziph. To his wilderness retreat came Jonathan. Here he told David that he knew that he was to be king, and he asked only that he himself might have the second place. It by no means follows from the words "my father knoweth" that Saul knew of David's being anointed; nor does it follow that Jonathan knew of David's calling to be king. Jonathan could learn from David's course this far, and from his father's own conduct, that David would not be overcome, but would possess the throne after the death of Saul.

Saul's Pursuit of David. 23:19-29

19 Then came up the Ziphites to Saul to Gibeah, saying, Doth not David hide himself with us in strongholds 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.

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.

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 Sela-hammahlekoth.

29 And David went up from thence, and dwelt in strongholds at En-gedi.

11. *Why did the Ziphites aid Saul? 23:19*

Saul had repeatedly scolded his courtiers and every other member of his kingdom. He charged them with being in league with David and aiding and abetting him in an attempt to usurp the throne. He charged them with failing to understand his position and to sympathize with him in his plight. He had slain the priests under the false charge of their being on David's side. Such activities on the part of the king would strike terror in the hearts of the weak and vacillating members of the kingdom of Israel. Some of these may have been rewarded for information which they brought to Saul. Others, who had knowledge of David's whereabouts, may have been afraid to conceal it lest they be charged with failing to support Saul. These people are especially despicable because of their repeated spying on David and reporting to Saul.

Tell Zif itself is a conical hill. It stands above rich and beautiful valleys which surround it on every side. The base is terraced, and its light, rich soil produces a full harvest of grain. The summit is leveled and circular, being about one hundred yards in diameter. Nothing is left of the town, however, except a few cisterns, sepulchres, and pieces of pottery that are thickly intermixed with the soil. The view to the southeast is extensive and reaches out over a rich and beautiful country. Barren hills of the desert span the horizon (J. W. McGarvey, *Lands of the Bible*, p. 255).

12. *Where was Hachilah?* 23:19b

Hachilah appears to be the long ridge now known as *El Koleb*. On this high hill is a ruin called *Yukin*. David's hiding here is apparently the only significant event which transpired at this place throughout the Bible history. The Ziphites betrayed him again when he was here later (26:1).

13. *What was the meaning of Saul's benediction?* 23:21

Saul was very appreciative of the fact that the Ziphites had brought him information about David's hiding place. In his nearly ecstatic condition he pronounced a benediction upon these people. He was grateful that they had compassion on him and helped him. He prayed that they might be blessed of the Lord for what they had done. The benediction would be a lot of empty words to anybody who knew Saul's real character. Since Saul had turned his back on God and was forsaken of God, one could hardly expect that God would hear his prayer for a blessing to be upon anybody. Here is an instance of a pitiable reference to God by one who had essentially abandoned God and thereby had been left desolate by God.

14. *What is the meaning of the "thousands of Judah"?*
23:23

Judah had always been the most numerous of all the Israelite tribes. At the first numbering, while they were still at Sinai, Judah numbered 74,600 (Numbers 1:27).

At the second numbering, just before the Israelites entered Canaan, Judah was still the largest and at that time she numbered 76,500 (Numbers 26:22). Those who were numbered were men twenty years of age and older. No doubt there were as many women of this same age as men. In addition there would be an equal number of boys as well as an equal number of girls under these ages. Judah may have had as many as 300,000 inhabitants. Saul faced an enormous task as he boasted that he would search David out throughout all the thousands of Judah.

15. *Where was Maon?* 23:24

Maon was a town on a high hill in the tribe of Judah, and located some seven miles to the south of Hebron. David hid himself here and later found many of Nabal's possessions nearby (25:2). *Tell Main*, a rather small mound of ruins, has been taken to be the modern-day remnants of the location. The Scripture located Maon south of Jeshimon. Jeshimon is a word signifying a waste or desolation. This is a title given to the area north of the Dead Sea (Numbers 21:20; 23:28). At times this title is given to the desert area of Judea. The American Standard Version gives it the title of Arabah. This title is usually applied to the deep valley running between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Akabah. David's wandering must have taken him into an area that was sparsely inhabited and where little vegetation marked the landscape. It is little wonder that he referred to himself as a flea (24:13).

16. *What was the rock?* 23:25

The rock is undoubtedly the cone-shaped height of Maon. The top of the height is covered with ruins, and there are some indications that these may be the remains of a tower. No reason is given for David's descending from the height of the mound, and he chose to remain in the desert of Maon. Perhaps this mound was more visible to an approaching army and David decided that he would

be safer hiding behind it than staying on top of it. He did escape from Saul by going around one side of the hill while Saul was on the other.

17. *Was David's escape providential? 23:27*

The fact that a messenger came to Saul just at the time when he was about to take David and his men appears to be an act of providence. Certainly David could hardly have sent word to the Philistines and urged them to attack Saul while he was in the south part of his country. Probably the Philistines did keep an eye on Saul and knew where he was. They did, no doubt, take advantage of the opportunity to "spread themselves over the land" (marginal reading A.V.). Their attack must have been more than a skirmish or a small raid. Such a light attack would hardly have caused Saul to give up on his pursuit of David just at the time when he had him in his clutches.

18. *What is Sela-Hammablekoth? 23:28*

The spot cannot be identified definitely, but the word is a compound indicating "the rock of divisions." This was the scene of one of David's most remarkable escapes from Saul. David must have given the spot this name in commemoration of his providential deliverance from the armies of Saul, just as Jacob gave the name "House of God," to Luz when God revealed Himself there (Genesis 28:19) and Abraham gave the name Jehovah-jireh to Mount Moriah when God provided a ram to take the place of Isaac as a sacrifice (Genesis 22:14).

19. *Where was En-gedi? 23:29*

En-gedi is along the west shore of the Dead Sea. The Arabs call it "Ain Jiddy." Travelers in this area say that nothing can surpass the gloomy grandeur of the mountain walls of this vicinity. The mountain-sides have turned brown and, in places, almost black by their long exposure to the elements. They are rendered still more gloomy by contrast with the rich green and the sparkling water of the oasis in the wilderness. The spot is frequently men-

tioned in the Old Testament, but not enough is said to give a very definite concept of it as it then existed. At En-ge-di one is about halfway down the west side of the Dead Sea and at a point to look out over the Dead Sea to the eastern shore.

20. *What reference did David make to these events in the Psalms? Psalm 54:1-7*

Many of the Psalms seem to arise out of particular instances in the life of David. The Shepherd Psalm, the Twenty-third Psalm, for example, must have been written in recollection of David's early life as a shepherd. No doubt God's spirit guided him to leave this treasure of devotion as a testimony of the way in which David had known God through his experiences as a humble shepherd boy. Many of the other Psalms carry headings which indicate the particular event in David's life out of which the Holy Spirit through David gave to us lasting testimony of God's providence. The Fifty-fourth Psalm is attributed to David and was written when the Ziphim, or the Ziphites, came and said to Saul, "Doth not David hide himself with us?" Certainly the sentiments are appropriate as David says, "For he hath delivered me out of all trouble, and mine eyes have seen his desire upon my enemies" (Psalm 54:7).

CHAPTER 23 IN REVIEW

1. What city did David protect from the Philistines? _____
2. What did Abiathar have when he fled to David? _____
3. How many men were with David? _____
4. In what wilderness did David hide? _____
5. Who came down to see David in the wilderness? _____
6. In what hill did the Ziphites tell Saul that David was hiding? _____

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7. Where was Saul when the Ziphites went to him? _____
8. In what wilderness was David hiding when the Ziphites returned? _____
9. What name was given to the place where David escaped? _____
10. To what place did David finally flee? _____

A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 24

Vv. 1-7 *David spares Saul's life.* David was hiding in a cave in En-gedi when Saul came to rest in the open mouth of the cave. As Saul slept, David crept forward and cut off the bottom of his robe. When Saul left the cave, David ran after him to identify himself and to show him how he could have killed him if he had so desired.

Vv. 9-15 *David pleads for his life.* David rightfully judged that many men had spoken false words about him and his relationship to Saul. He therefore asked Saul to listen to him and not to the false reports. He also asked that the Lord judge between Saul and himself.

Vv. 16-22 *Saul accepts David's plea.* Saul knew that what David said was true. He admitted that David was more righteous than he and assured David that he would no longer pursue him. Saul then went home, but David and his men stayed in the stronghold of Judah.

LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1. *Let God lead.* David was not willing to take matters into his own hands to get rid of Saul. He knew, of