

# *Truth for Today*

## **The Bible Explained**

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## **Samuel to King David**

### **God works through David 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 23**

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.  
English Standard Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

#### **Introduction**

By way of background, chapter 22 is a sad episode in the life of David. David realised that his actions inadvertently had caused the death of the Lord's priests. Doeg the Edomite at the command of Saul killed all the priests of the LORD. Being an Edomite Doeg had no fear of the LORD and was extremely willing to gain favour with Saul. Wonderfully one priest, Abiathar, had escaped to inform David what had happened. We will look at chapter 23 under the following headings. Scriptures will be from the English Standard Version unless otherwise stated.

David saves the town of Keilah.  
The inhabitants of Keilah are afraid of Saul.  
Saul continues to seek David's destruction.  
Ziphites seek to betray David.  
Saul closes in on David.  
The LORD intervenes.

#### **David saves the town of Keilah**

We will read the first five verses of the chapter.

"Now they told David, "Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are robbing the threshing floors." Therefore David inquired of the LORD, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" And the LORD said to David, "Go and attack the Philistines and save Keilah." 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 armies of the Philistines?" Then David inquired of the LORD again. And the LORD answered him, "Arise, go down to Keilah, for I will give the Philistines into your hand." And David and his men went to Keilah and fought with the Philistines and brought away their livestock and struck them with a great blow. So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah." (1Samuel 23:1-5)

As we open this chapter, David had been informed of a Philistines' attack on the town of Keilah in the south of Judah. David's first action was to enquire of the LORD before making any independent move. This is a good lesson for all believers to learn, not to leave the LORD out of any decision making, especially important decisions. In the above verses, although the LORD clearly speaks to David to go and save Keilah his men were not too happy. They were afraid of Saul and the people of Judah. So, David once again enquired of the LORD and the answer came again to go and gain the victory over the Philistines. This second positive reply from the LORD was enough for David's men. They arise and defeat the Philistines and take possession of the spoils of victory. In this way the town of Keilah was saved.

As in Old Testament times so it should be true of believers today that we need to be dependant upon the Lord for the decisions of life. Where such decisions impact others then like David we need to be doubly sure. Paul was a believer who was very conscious of the Spirit of God leading his life. This can be clearly seen in Acts 16 vv.6-10.

“And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them” (Acts 16:6-10).

This was in relation to preaching the Gospel, Paul was led to conclude that he and those with him should go into Europe, the country of Macedonia. Whether it is in our field of service or in matters of our home or work life it is just the same. We need to be guided aright.

[John Newton \(1725-1807\) has a lovely poem which captures the thought of being guided in difficult situations.](#)

Though troubles assail, and dangers affright,  
Though friends should all fail, and foes all unite,  
Yet one thing secures us whatever betide;  
The scripture assures us the Lord will provide.

His call we obey, like Abram of old,  
Not knowing our way, but faith makes us bold;  
For though we are strangers, we have a sure guide,  
And trust in all dangers the Lord will provide.

### **The inhabitants of Keilah are afraid of Saul**

We will read verses 6 to 14 of the chapter.

“When Abiathar the son of Ahimelech had fled to David to Keilah, he had come down with an ephod in his hand. Now it was told Saul that David had come to Keilah. And Saul said, “God has given him into my hand, for he has shut himself in by entering a town that has gates and bars.” And Saul summoned all the people to war, to go down to Keilah, to besiege David and his men. David knew that Saul was plotting harm against him. And he said to Abiathar the priest, “Bring the ephod here.” Then said David, “O LORD, the God of Israel, your servant has surely heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah, to destroy the city on my account. Will the men of Keilah surrender me into his hand? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard? O LORD, the God of Israel, please tell your servant.” And the LORD said, “He will come down.” 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.” Then David and his men, who were about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah, and they went wherever they could go. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he gave up the expedition. And David remained in the strongholds in the wilderness, in the hill country of the Wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God did not give him into his hand.” (1Samuel 23:6-14)

At the end of chapter 22 Abiathar the priest had come to David. He had fled from the slaughter of the priests, which was ordered by Saul. Doeg the Edomite was the only one to obey Saul's order, because Saul's servants would not raise their hands against the priests of the LORD. This resulted in Abiathar now being the high priest since his father was dead. As Abiathar seeks to escape from Saul he brings with him the ephod that enables the LORD to answer with the Urim and Thummim. There might have been things that Abiathar could have collected in his haste to flee the slaughter, but the ephod was necessary as He was now the high priest. So when David asks for the ephod, he is seeking to know answers to his questions. It is possible that David seeks a fuller answer not just yes or no through the Urim and Thummim. We know from Scripture that David, both during his years as a fugitive and as king, conversed with the LORD.

The people of Keilah were initially grateful for what David and his men had done. They invited them into the town and possibly there was feasting and celebrations. However, David realises that should Saul catch him and his men in the city it could very be dangerous for him. David wants to know how the people of Keilah would react. The LORD makes it clear that they would give up David and his men. No doubt the men of Keilah had weighed up the situation, David and 600 warriors, versus Saul and his whole army of thousands and concluded that Saul would destroy the city in order to capture David. So, before the situation became critical David heeds the LORD's warning and leaves the city retreating into the wilderness. Although the wilderness is no fortress it does afford space to move about and evade Saul and his army. Also, the wilderness provided caves for shelter not only for himself and his men but for their wives, children, and possessions. Saul gives up his expedition to destroy David letting his army return to other duties or to their homes.

Where there is no real relationship with God people take a realistic view of the situation. Where Christians are concerned realistic is not necessarily doing what is right. This is the lesson we can learn from the people of Keilah. This is seen around the world where authorities are afraid of believers and Christianity. As a result believers can suffer unduly by simply living for their Lord and Saviour and for bringing the message of Salvation to sinners. The Lord spoke to His disciples that in the world they would experience tribulation. [We will quote from John 16:33.](#)

["In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" \(John 16:33\).](#)

[There is a poem by S.C.G Kuster \(1762-1838\) which captures the security of belonging to Jesus in a world of tribulation.](#)

[O Jesus, Friend unfailing,  
How dear art Thou to me!  
Are cares or fears assailing?  
I find my strength in Thee!  
Why should my feet grow weary  
Of this my pilgrim way?  
Rough though the path and dreary,  
It ends in perfect day!](#)

[Nought, nought I count as pleasure,  
Compared, O Christ, with Thee!  
Thy sorrow without measure,  
Earned peace and joy for me.  
I love to own, Lord Jesus,  
Thy claims o'er me divine,  
Bought with Thy blood most precious  
Whose can I be but Thine?](#)

What fills my heart with gladness?  
'Tis Thine abounding grace!  
Where can I look in sadness,  
But, Jesus, on Thy face?  
My all is Thy providing -  
Thy love can ne'er grow cold;  
In Thee, my refuge, hiding -  
No good wilt Thou withhold.

Why should I droop in sorrow?  
Thou'rt ever by my side!  
Why, trembling, dread the morrow?  
What ill can e'er betide?  
If I my cross have taken,  
'Tis but to follow Thee;  
If scorned, despised, forsaken,  
Nought severs Thee from me.

O worldly pomp and glory,  
Your charms are spread in vain!  
I've heard a sweeter story!  
I've found a truer gain!  
Where Christ a place prepareth,  
There is my loved abode;  
There shall I gaze on Jesus:  
There shall I dwell with God.

For every tribulation,  
For every sore distress,  
In Christ I've full salvation,  
Sure help and quiet rest.  
No fear of foes prevailing,  
I triumph, Lord, in Thee!  
O Jesus, Friend unfailing,  
How dear art Thou to me!

### **Saul continues to seek David's destruction**

Let us read verses 15-18.

“David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life. David was in the Wilderness of Ziph at Horesh. And Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God. And he said to him, “Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Saul my father also knows this.” And the two of them made a covenant before the LORD. David remained at Horesh, and Jonathan went home” (1Samuel 23:15-18).

Saul always retained a small army and when he was not defending his kingdom from the Philistines, he deployed them in seeking David. As it happened both David and Saul were relatively nearby so that Jonathan was able to depart unseen from his father Saul and the army to go to meet with David. Once again Jonathan encourages David that he would be the next king and that Jonathan would be next to David in the kingdom. Again the two of them make a covenant. Much is said about Jonathan not leaving his father and going to be with David in his rejection. As we find in the last chapter of 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel Jonathan and his brothers were slain alongside their

father on mount Gilboa in a disastrous battle with the Philistines. Although Jonathan and David were the best of friends it was not in the purpose of the LORD that Jonathan would have the second place in David's kingdom. We can easily imagine future conflict arising between David's children and Jonathan's children. A situation that would be disastrous for the nation. So Jonathan returns to be with his father. Saul had been the people's choice, but David was the LORD's choice to rule over the nation.

We could view Jonathan as an example of someone who was not willing to endure persecution to be like David and his followers. However, as previously stated it was not in the mind of the LORD. The Lord in John 15 gave warning to the disciples about the attitude of the world.

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:18-20).

Also in John 16:

“I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

Christians today must make the choice, either to be part of the world or to be identified with Christ, the true Overcomer.

### **Ziphites seek to betray David**

Let us read verses 19-24a.

“Then the Ziphites went up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, “Is not David hiding among us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hachilah, which is south of Jeshimon? Now come down, O king, according to all your heart's desire to come down, and our part shall be to surrender him into the king's hand.” And Saul said, “May you be blessed by the LORD, for you have had compassion on me. Go, make yet more sure. Know and see the place where his foot is, and who has seen him there, for it is told me that he is very cunning. See therefore and take note of all the lurking places where he hides, and come back to me with sure information. Then I will go with you. And if he is in the land, I will search him out among all the thousands of Judah.” And they arose and went to Ziph ahead of Saul. Now David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon.” (1Samuel 23:19-24a)

Having just recently escaped from the ungrateful inhabitants of Keilah, David now finds himself among others in south Judah who want to betray him to Saul. David is in the wilderness living among the Ziphites who are willing to betray him to Saul. We know from previous chapters that Saul does not take kindly to people whom he believes were sheltering David and his followers. The sad account of Saul ordering the death of priests of the LORD as recorded in chapter 22 would frighten anyone to be associated with David and his followers. Although the Ziphites inform Saul about David, Saul is not willing to immediately mobilise his army. Saul wants more information such as David's hiding places. So Saul sends the Ziphites ahead to search out the hiding places of David while he follows with his army.

Once again David finds himself among people who are hostile to him. This hostility may simply be that they are more afraid of Saul. In many countries around the world today, believers live among people that are hostile to Christianity, so they need to be careful to whom they speak about the Saviour. Others find that when they are converted their family turn against them and may even persecute them to death. The world is Satan's domain, and he does not take kindly to those he had in bondage being set free from his control.

This experience caused David to write Psalm 54, which we will read.

"To the choirmaster: with stringed instruments. A maskil of David, when the Ziphites went and told Saul, "Is not David hiding among us?" O God, save me, by your name, and vindicate me by your might. O God, hear my prayer; give ear to the words of my mouth. For strangers have risen against me; ruthless men seek my life; they do not set God before themselves. Selah. Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life. He will return the evil to my enemies; in your faithfulness put an end to them. With a freewill offering I will sacrifice to you; I will give thanks to your name, O LORD, for it is good. For he has delivered me from every trouble, and my eye has looked in triumph on my enemies" (Psalm 54:1-7).

Such was David's experience with the Ziphites that it caused him to write this psalm so that their actions might not be forgotten.

### **Saul closes in on David**

Let us read vv.24b-26.

"And they arose 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. And Saul and his men went to seek him. And David was told, so he went down to the rock and lived in the wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard that, he pursued after David in the wilderness of Maon. 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. As Saul and his men were closing in on David and his men to capture them" (1Samuel 23:24b-26).

It would appear there were those who gave David up-to-date information on Saul's movements, unlike the Ziphites. However, in the above verses Saul was getting uncomfortably close to capturing David. David was always one step ahead of Saul. In this again we see the hand of the LORD preserving David.

### **The LORD intervenes**

Let us read the final verses of the chapter, vv.27-29.

"A messenger came to Saul, saying, "Hurry and come, for the Philistines have made a raid against the land." So Saul returned from pursuing after David and went against the Philistines. Therefore that place was called the Rock of Escape. And David went up from there and lived in the strongholds of Engedi" (1Samuel 23:27-29).

When everything was hopeless then the hand of the LORD once again intervenes for David. Just at that point in time the Philistines had invaded another part of the land. No doubt they were aware that Saul had gone to the south of the country, and they decided to take advantage of the situation. A messenger is dispatched to inform Saul of the danger and he leaves his pursuit of David to deal with a greater threat. This gives time for David to find a more secure place to hide

from Saul. This however was not secure as we shall see in chapter 24, but that is for the next radio talk.

At the beginning of the chapter God used David to help the people of Keilah when the Philistines attacked them. Now God has used the Philistines to distract Saul and save David from a dangerous situation. We learn that when the situation seems hopeless God can intervene. Paul the apostle is a good example of how God intervened in his life. In 2<sup>nd</sup> Corinthians 11 there is a catalogue of the dangers Paul, and his companions, went through in his life of service for Jesus Christ. Not all of these are explained in other parts of Paul's writings. Let us read from 2 Corinthians 11:24-27.

“Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure” (2 Corinthians 11:24-27).

While the Lord has work for His servants to undertake then no matter what the danger, they will be preserved. We know however that when our work of service is complete then we will make the last journey and depart this world to be with Christ which is far better.

#### **To conclude.**

If David faced very real and difficult challenges when pursued by Saul it is equally true for Christians today. It may or not be a physical army such as Saul was able to command but the threat may be just as real. Let us finish with another poem which looks forward to the moment when believers will see the Saviour, the Prince of Peace, face to face. It is by J Evans (1748-1809).

Let saints on earth their anthems raise,  
Who taste the Saviour's grace;  
Sing, till in heaven they tune His praise,  
And hail Him Prince of Peace.

Praise Him who laid His glory by,  
For man's rebellious race;  
Praise Him who stooped to bleed and die,  
And hail Him Prince of Peace.

We soon shall reach the blissful shore,  
And view His glorious face,  
His name for ever to adore,  
And hail Him Prince of Peace.

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk on 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel, Samuel to King David, “Chapter 23, God works through David”, talk number T1362.

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