

STUDIES IN THE LIFE OF DAVID

Taught in Ambassador's Class of Peninsula Bible Church, Palo Alto, California

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by

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1 Samuel 23 Lesson #12 July 1, 1979

[Teaching on the first 12 verses of I Samuel 23 is missing. They are quoted here for continuity.]

I Samuel 23, verses 1-2:

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

Verse 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?"

Verses 4-5:

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." 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.

Verses 6-8:

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

Verses 9-11:

Now David knew that Saul was plotting evil against him; so he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here." Then David said, "O Lord God of Israel, Thy servant has heard for certain that Saul is seeking 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 just as Thy servant has heard?" And the Lord said, "He will come down."

Verse 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."

[The teaching continues.]

I Samuel 23, verse 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.

Suppose you are a people with very little loyalty to anyone but yourself and your own little tribal situation, and suppose you, too, dream of fields and vineyards and power and delightfully attractive things which Saul has been doling out to his own people, the Benjamites, the least of the Judahites and not to the Judahites. How can you [the men of Keilah] get your share of the spoils of Israel? Deliver David into Saul's hands and then you will get fields and vineyards and power over thousands and hundreds.

Besides, David isn't even a real Jew. His great-grandmother was a Moabitess and his great-great-grandmother was a Canaanitess.

You can see the thoughts going through the minds of the Judahites. David would be Social Security for whoever gave him up, an annuity plan, stock options with a capital S. And David; he has nowhere to go except to God. Look what God does to him.

I Samuel 23, verse 14:

And David stayed in the wilderness in the strongholds, and remained in the hill country in the wilderness of Ziph [which is to the west of the middle of the Dead Sea in an exceedingly barren area]. And Saul sought him every day, but God did not deliver him into his hand.

Day after day after day Saul tried to trap David. Day after day after day YHWH protected him. David has six hundred men now, armed with weapons of iron and well provisioned. He has very skillfully avoided Saul day after day. It is almost inevitable that he would think, "I am a pretty good general. We are living off the land, not a very friendly land either, and we are making it. We are beating Saul at his own game." And, of course, the longer David keeps his men safe, the more their loyalty to him grows. So David is going to get a second little testing to teach him about his own resources.

But God is a very faithful God. Before he ever puts you through a test, he adheres to his promise in I Corinthians 10: 13 where he says he will never test you beyond that which you are able to bear but will, with every testing, provide a way of escape that you might be able to go through it. He will in some way strengthen you before the testing, so, when it comes, you will be walking in righteousness with him and will be able to handle the test and not collapse. In this case he does a beautiful thing.

I Samuel 23, verse 15:

Now David became aware that Saul had come out to seek his life while David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh. And Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David at Horesh, [Remember Jonathan was at home. He would not take part in hunting David, and when he finds out his father is going to go down to Horesh, he goes down first] and encouraged him in God. Thus he said to him, "Do not be afraid, because the hand of Saul my father shall not find you, and you will be king over Israel and I will be next to you; and Saul my father knows that also." So the two of them made a covenant before the Lord [before YHWH, the God of the Covenant] and David stayed at Horesh while Jonathan went to his house. [He went back home. He would not participate.]

To strengthen David before the next test, which is really going to be tough, God sends him Jonathan, the one man who has the most to lose if David lives. He would not only lose his vineyards, his fields, and his

command of thousands but also the kingship. With David dead, Jonathan would be king of Israel and Saul's dynasty would continue. But God deliberately sends Jonathan, who makes a covenant with David, [before the Lord, YHWH, the God of the covenant who anointed David and covenanted to make him king of Israel] that he will be second to David and that David will be king. So of all the people who stood to gain by David's death, the one with the most to gain is the one sent by God to make a covenant with David regarding the kingdom. Jonathan gives up everything when, with just a single knife thrust to the stomach, he could have had it all. Jonathan is committed to David becoming king.

Now, having strengthened David, God puts him to the second test. The Keilahites, you remember, were planning to betray David, but they were not going to initiate the betrayal. They would let Saul do that. He was going to surround their city and destroy it in order to be sure he got David and all his men. The Keilahites would just hand David over. But now we have the Ziphites. The Ziphites live to the west of the Dead Sea, right in the heart of Judah. They are members of the same tribe as David. You would think they would be on his side, but all the fields and vineyards and command of thousands and hundreds are going to the Benjamites. Like the Keilahites, the Ziphites want a share of the spoil, and God has delivered into their hands David, the very thing they need to gain all they want the most.

I Samuel 23, verse 19:

Then Ziphites came up to Saul at Gibeah, [They go all the way up to Benjamin territory, to Saul's headquarters. They initiate the betrayal] saying, "Is David not hiding with us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon? [the desert] 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." And Saul said, "May you be blessed of the Lord [YHWH]; for you have had compassion on me. [It is interesting how religious the flesh gets, and not just blessed of God, but blessed of the God of the covenant, their God, for a little betrayal. But Saul is no fool] Go now, make more sure, and investigate and see his place where his haunt is, and who has seen him there; [get your intelligence really down solid] for I am told that he is very cunning. [This is probably true. This is probably the thing that God is now going to deal with in David] 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 it shall come about if he is in the land that I will search him out among all the thousands of Judah."

I believe by now David is really convinced he is very cunning. He now has a reputation for being very cunning. He has a pretty good track record for being very cunning, and I think he believes he is actually becoming very cunning. Somewhere along the line YHWH is being displaced by David when in reality it is YHWH taking care of David.

This is very easy to do. I find it true here. I have had people come up and tell me how much this study has blessed them. Do you know my first thought? "What a great Bible teacher you are, Bob. Isn't the Lord lucky to have you on his side instead of some everyday run-of-the-mill kind of guy?" Do you know how I start studying every Monday morning? In sheer panic. Have you ever read I Samuel through? Take chapter 23, for instance. I read the passage and say to myself, "What on earth is in there? It is just nothing but a Travelogue, and I am not allowed to use slides." David goes from Adullam to Keilah and back to Adullam and runs around the country a little bit. That is it! Big deal! I say to the Lord, "Lord, down the road on Sunday, I have to teach this passage and there is nothing here!". Now cold clammy sweat begins to possess me, and all of a sudden I don't think I am the world's greatest Bible teacher or that God is all that lucky to have me on his side. I am extremely fortunate that God even consents to deal with me, and, if He doesn't start talking through his Scripture, I am one dead teacher come Sunday morning. It is a very healthy, but a very unpleasant experience, and it occurs every Monday morning.

So that is what God is teaching David here. David thinks he is very cunning, and he is going to be "out-cunned" by some people who are smarter than he is. These Ziphites are brilliant in their deceit.

I Samuel 23, verse 24:

Then they [the Ziphites] arose and went to Ziph before Saul. Now David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon [which is just south of Ziph] in the Arabah [the great Rift Valley that runs from the Sea of Galilee all the way down the Jordanian Valley to the Gulf of Akabah] to the south of Jeshimon [the wilderness. They are out in a desert area]. When Saul and his men went to seek him, they [the Ziphites] told David, [Saul comes looking after David, and the Ziphites go to David and say, "Hey, you know who is coming, Saul."] and he came down to the rock

There is a mountainous range in this wilderness of desert. "The rock" is probably a conelike mountain or mound sitting out in the desert all alone. It would be a beautiful hiding place as long as no one knew you were there, but the Ziphites have told Saul all of the hiding places of David. Everyone of them! Trying to capture a guerrilla band like David's is like hitting a body of mercury. It goes in all directions! Saul needs to get David holed up somewhere, like he had in Keilah, so he can surround him. The Ziphites tell David, "Saul is coming after you," so he heads for this cone where he can hide. No one is going to look for him in the middle of the desert on a barren mountain with very little water, in fact, there is very possibly no water there at all. No pasture either, and 600 men needing food and drink. Ordinarily no one would look there but the Ziphites tell Saul exactly where David is. So there is David holed up, and Saul's got him.

And when Saul heard it, he pursued David in the wilderness of Maon [Where did Saul hear of it? From David's dear friends the Ziphites. They had already counted the vineyards and fields, and they were putting on their armor and putting on their braid] And 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.

Saul knows exactly how to trap David on a conical mountain. He goes around one side and David goes around the other, just like a merry-go-round. Somewhere along the line one of them is going to have to break loose and head out into the desert where they will very easily be spotted. Once they are spotted, they are dead. Saul has David just where he wants him now. Saul knows it, and so does David. All of a sudden David is going to get that Monday morning panic feeling. He will be reading a travelogue with no slides, and he has to produce, or he is one dead pigeon. This is exactly where God wants him. He wants dead pigeons, for generals, for kings, for Bible teachers. All God wants from us is a hunk of dead meat, and the deader the better. That way he can take that hunk of dead meat and make it alive with his life. So whatever comes from it is Jesus Christ, the Lord God Almighty, and not the flesh doing its best to help God run his kingdom. He wants David as a hunk of dead meat, so he can take that dead meat and make it a king "after his own heart." If he has to, God will run David around that mountain until he is ragged. And God does, but remember, he will with "every temptation, provide a way of escape," and here is David's escape.

I Samuel 23, verse 27:

But a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Hurry and come, for the Philistines have made a raid on the land." [Philistines are not so dumb either. If Saul is going to be down in the south of Judah with all his armies, it leaves the northern part of Israel wide open, and it is threshing time. So the Philistines are having themselves a ball with all the wheat harvest while Saul is busy down south chasing one guy.] So Saul returned from pursuing David, and went to meet the Philistines; therefore they [David and his men] called that place the Rock of Escape

They commemorated it. That says something about David and his men's view of their own resources as adequate. They memorialized that place as a worship act to their God, as an altar like Abraham. As Abraham trekked through the land, wherever God appeared to him, he erected an altar. David and his men knew who got them out of that mess, YHWH, and they called it the Rock of Escape, literally "the Rock of Slipperies." They slipped away from Saul.

I Samuel 23, verse 29:

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

Engedi is way up, in the middle, on the western side of the Dead Sea. It is full of limestone cliffs and pock-marked with limestone caves, honeycombed with little valleys, the kind of place David ought to be. He is not going to be trapped again. He is no longer quite so smart, and now he realizes but for YHWH he would be dead. By the way, there is a tremendous water supply up there. It is called "The Fountain of the Young Goats" So everything David needs to supply him is there.

How did God provide a way of escape that David might be able to get through the desert? Who were the real agents? The Philistines, the enemy. One thing God likes to do in your life and my life is to take the very enemies that have you petrified and use them to provide a way of escape. Have you ever noticed that? That is what he does here. He takes the very people David feared to make his enemies, but which God made him make his enemies, and uses them to rescue David. With great reverence I say, God loves to throw his sovereignty around to show us what kind of a God he really is, totally adequate for any of our needs. He loves to deliberately take the thing you fear the most and use it to deliver you from that fear, just as he has done here with David.

Next time we will look at Chapter 24.

Prayer:

Father, we just thank you so much for your Word and what it says to our hearts. It brings up these wonderful principles of your faithfulness, Father, not our ability, and how you are committed to making us men and women of God, men and women after your own heart, men and women totally dependent upon you as our Lord as we walk this earth. Father, we just pray that we might remember that this is your purpose and that nothing happens apart from this purpose to make us totally your availability, totally your visibility, totally yours. Father, teach us to look upon everything that happens in our lives as having this purpose behind it, having the sovereignty of a God who can take our enemies, our fears, our greatest horrors and use them as instruments to allow us to go through the suffering, through the testings and make us glorious creatures in the end. Thank you, Father, in Jesus' name. Amen.

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