

FIRST SAMUEL

Chapter 23

David Saves the City of Keilah

Now they told David, “Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are robbing the threshing floors.” 2 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.” 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 armies of the Philistines?” 4 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.” 5 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. 6 When Abiathar the son of Ahimelech had fled to David to Keilah, he had come down with an ephod in his hand. 7 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.” 8 And Saul summoned all the people to war, to go down to Keilah, to besiege David and his men. 9 David knew that Saul was plotting harm against him. And he said to Abiathar the priest, “Bring the ephod here.” 10 Then David said, “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. 11 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.” 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.” 13 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. 14 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.

23:1 *they*. No specific persons; likely Judeans. (TLSB)

Keilah. Judean town close to the Philistine border; a vulnerable target for raids. (TLSB)

23:2 *he inquired of the LORD*. By means of the Urim and Thummim through the high priest Abiathar. inquiry was made through Abiathar the priest. In v 10, David inquires directly in prayer, as Hannah prayed without mediation (ch 1). (TLSB)

save Keilah. Echoes the role of Israel’s judges, who saved Israel from their attackers (e.g., Jgs 2:16). (TLSB)

23:3 David’s men feared that involvement against the Philistines would set them against a yet more fearsome adversary than Saul. (TLSB)

23:4 Military inferiority was irrelevant. (TLSB)

23:5 *brought away their livestock*. Perhaps already plundered from the people of Keilah, or beasts brought along to carry back the spoil. (TLSB)

23:7 *God*. Unlike David, Saul does not use the distinctive name “the LORD,” by which the Almighty revealed Himself (Ex 3:14–15). Saul attributes his fortune to divine intervention, but he makes the same

mistake as David's comrades in v 3, merely looking at the outward circumstances and ignoring God's will. (TL SB)

23:8 Still following faulty reasoning (v 7), Saul musters all his troops to exploit his advantage. (TL SB)

besiege. Labor-intensive tactic. (TL SB)

23:10–13 Inquiry is made by way of yes-or-no questions, as with the other priestly device, the sacred Urim and Thummim. (TL SB)

23:11 *Will Saul come down.* David's first question is to confirm the report he has heard. (TL SB)

the LORD said. Mediated by Abiathar. (TL SB)

23:12 *Will the men of Keilah surrender me.* Urgent question, in light of the Lord's confirmation of Saul's attack. The Lord affirms their betrayal, even though David has saved them, and Saul seeks to destroy the city on account of David. (TL SB)

23:13 *about six hundred.* The number of David's men has grown significantly (cf. 22:2). (CSB)

In 22:2, his company amounted to 400 men. This has been supplemented, perhaps by a loyal element in Keilah. (TL SB)

wherever they could go. Dispersed, making pursuit impossible, and canceling strategic disadvantage of confinement in the city. (TL SB)

23:14 *desert strongholds.* Inaccessible places. (CSB)

Desert of Ziph. Barren desert area close to Hebron. (TL SB)

God. The real director of these events. (TL SB)

God did not give David into his hands. The reality of God's protection over David portrayed here contrasts sharply with the wishful thinking of Saul in v. 7. (CSB)

23:1–14 The Lord protects His servant and frustrates the plans of the wicked, revealing His will not only in the word of the prophet but also by hindsight in the unfolding of events. Trust the Lord to answer your prayers and to protect you against those who make themselves God's enemies. He is watching over you, though His presence may often be hidden by adverse circumstances. • Reveal to us Your will, dear Lord, and give us grace to follow it. Amen (TL SB)

Saul Pursues David

15 David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life. David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh. 16 And Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God. 17 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." 18 And the two of them made a covenant before the LORD. David remained at Horesh, and Jonathan went home. 19 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? 20 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." 21 And Saul said, "May you be blessed by the LORD, for you have had compassion on me. 22 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. 23 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.” 24 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. 25 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. 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. As Saul and his men were closing in on David and his men to capture them, 27 a messenger came to Saul, saying, “Hurry and come, for the Philistines have made a raid against the land.” 28 So Saul returned from pursuing after David and went against the Philistines. Therefore that place was called the Rock of Escape. 29 And David went up from there and lived in the strongholds of Engedi.

23:15 *Horesh*. C 5 mi S of Hebron. (TLSB)

23:16 The Holy Spirit offers encouragement through Jonathan, who strengthened David’s morale. (TLSB)

strengthened his hand in God. OT expression describes heartening esp of those who feel dispirited (cf Is 35:3). (TLSB)

23:17 *I will be second to you*. Jonathan’s love and respect for David enable him to accept a role subordinate to David without any sign of resentment or jealousy. This is the last recorded meeting between Jonathan and David. (CSB)

In favor of God’s anointed, Jonathan abdicates any claim to kingship. In 15:26, Samuel announces God’s rejection of Saul’s kingship and, therefore, of his son’s succession. (TLSB)

Saul my father also knows this. Saul heard the prophet’s word on this matter and surely realized his struggle to retain rule was hollow. (TLSB)

23:18 *covenant*. Renewal of oath of loyalty sworn in ch 20. It was sincerely undertaken, though Jonathan did not eventually have the opportunity of being next to King David. (TLSB)

before the LORD. Agreement is made with God present as a witness. (TLSB)

23:19 *strongholds*. Inaccessible places. (CSB)

Fairly precise directions are offered to Saul. (TLSB)

Horesh. Cf v 15. (TLSB)

Hachilah. In Judean hills southeast of Hebron. (TLSB)

23:20 *our part*. Might imply their duty, which falls short of actually delivering David themselves. (TLSB)

23:21 *blessed by the LORD*. Saul’s blessing sounds worthless from the lips of one who had ordered the slaughter of priests (cf Jas 3:10). (TLSB)

23:22 *make yet more sure*. Saul demands that they give the precise location to the very footprint. (TLSB)

cunning. Reports about David’s skills continue to reach Saul. (TLSB)

23:23 *See ... and take note.* Repetition betrays Saul's anxiety and insecurity. (TLSB)

23:24 *Maon.* Desert area south of Hebron. (TLSB)

Arabah. The Rift Valley through which the Jordan River runs. (TLSB)

23:25 *was told.* Passive voice sometimes alludes to God's actions. One of the Ziphites likely supplied the warning. (TLSB)

23:26 *the mountain.* "The rock" in v 25. (TLSB)

closing in. Implies a pincer movement, from which there is no realistic hope of escape. (TLSB)

23:27–28 Saul's hopes, so close to fruition, are suddenly dashed. God's intervention is implied. (TLSB)

23:29 *Engedi.* Oasis by the cliffs of the western shore of the Salt Sea. (TLSB)

23:15–29 Against the overwhelming opposition of Saul and his Ziphite informers, God spares David as Jonathan said He would. Remember that a word of encouragement from Scripture can be invaluable to someone in distress. The Lord is mighty to deliver His people. • We praise You, O God, for those You send to comfort us in our lowest times. Hear us for Jesus' sake. Amen. (TLSB)