

The Life of David

David Saves the City

1 Samuel 23:1-14

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Scripture

King Saul wanted to kill David. So David became a fugitive on the run from Saul. Initially, David's faith in the Lord was superseded by his fear of Saul. However, David came to realize that God was still sovereignly watching over him and protecting him. Therefore, David's trust in the Lord grew. One sign of David's trust in the Lord is seen in how he sought the Lord's guidance in different circumstances.

Let's read 1 Samuel 23:1-14:

¹Now they told David, "Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are robbing the threshing floors." ²Therefore 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." ³But 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?" ⁴Then 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." ⁵And 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.

⁶When Abiathar the son of Ahimelech had fled to David to Keilah, he had come down with an ephod in his hand. ⁷Now 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." ⁸And Saul summoned all the people to war, to go down to Keilah, to besiege David and his men. ⁹David knew that Saul was plotting harm against him. And he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here." ¹⁰Then 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. (1 Samuel 23:1-14)

Introduction

Two old friends met one day after many years. One attended college and now was very successful. The other had not attended college and never had much ambition, yet he also seemed to be doing extremely well.

Curious as to why, the college graduate asked his friend, “How has everything been going with you?”

The less-educated, less-ambitious man replied, “Well, one day, I opened my Bible at random, and dropped my finger on a page. The word under my finger was *oil*. So, I invested in oil, and boy, did the oil wells gush. Later, I tried the same method again, and my finger stopped on the word *gold*. So, I invested in gold, and those mines really produced. Now, I’m as rich as Rockefeller.”

The successful friend was so impressed that he rushed to his hotel, grabbed a Gideon Bible, flipped it open, and dropped his finger on a page. When he opened his eyes, he saw that his finger rested on the words, “Chapter Eleven.”¹

I hope that is not the way you seek guidance from the Lord.

¹ See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2006/september/15634.html>.

Nevertheless, if you are a Christian, you want to do that which is pleasing to the Lord, don't you? You want to follow the Lord, and so you want to know God's guidance in your life.

The question is: *How may I know God's guidance in my life?*

When David was a fugitive on the run from Saul, he was initially very fearful. But, then he began to realize that God was sovereignly protecting him. And so David started trusting God more and more. One sign of David's growing trust in the Lord is seen in how he sought the Lord's guidance in different circumstances.

The key verse in today's text is 1 Samuel 23:6, which states, **“When Abiathar the son of Ahimelech had fled to David to Keilah, he had come down with an ephod in his hand.”** In the previous chapter we learned that **Abiathar the son of Ahimelech had fled to David** because Saul had killed Abiathar's entire family. **Ahimelech** had been the high priest, but he was now dead. The only priest left was **Abiathar**, and he was now with David.

The **ephod** was a linen cloth that the priest wore “during religious services associated with the tabernacle or temple....Prior to the Babylonian exile the ephod served as a means of revelation from God, especially concerning military operations.”² When David sought guidance from the Lord, the Lord directed him (through the ephod) to go to **Keilah** and also to get out of **Keilah**.

Lesson

First Samuel 23:1-14 shows us what seeking God's guidance looks like.

Let's use the following outline:

1. God Guided David Regarding an Attack (23:1-5)
2. God Guided David Regarding an Escape (23:7-14)

² Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, “Ephod,” *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 710.

I. God Guided David Regarding an Attack (23:1-5)

First, notice how God guided David regarding an attack. There are several points in the story to notice.

A. *The Report (23:1)*

First, there was the report of an attack.

When David fled from Achish the king of Gath, he went to the cave of Adullam (22:1). While he was there, his family and about four hundred men (presumably with their families too) joined him (22:2). After settling his parents in Mizpeh of Moab, David returned to the cave of Adullam, which was also known as “the stronghold” (22:3-4). It was at this time that the prophet Gad told David to go into the land of Judah (22:5a). So, David left the cave of Adullam and went into the forest of Hereth (22:5b). It was while David was hiding in the forest of Hereth in the land of Judah that Abiathar the priest came and joined David.

At about this time, a report was brought to **David, “Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are robbing the threshing floors”** (23:1). The town of **Keilah** was in western Judah, just a few miles from the Philistine border. It was harvesting season, and **the Philistines** had come to Keilah and were **robbing the threshing floors**.

It is worth noting that the report did not go to Saul, who was still the king and who should have been the one to protect his people. Saul, it seemed, was intent on finding David and rooting out imagined conspiracies against him. The report, however, came to David, the God-anointed king-elect. The people of Israel recognized that David was more likely to act as a king should act by defending the people against enemy aggressors. And so the report came to David about the Philistines **fighting against Keilah**.

B. *The Requests (23:2-4)*

Second, there were two requests regarding the attack.

David was immediately concerned about the welfare of the people of Keilah. He wanted to do something about it. But, it is important to note that he did not simply dash off to go and fight against the Philistines. No. Here is where we see his growing spiritual maturity. David wanted to know God's will regarding what he should do. This is where Abiathar and his ephod come in. The high priest's ephod contained the Urim and Thummim, which were provided by God for discerning his will (cf. Exodus 28:30). These lots were designed by God to answer "yes" or "no" to specific questions. **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"** (22:2).

That was a rather clear answer to David's question. Apparently, however, when David told his men about it, they **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?"** (22:3). David's men knew that Saul had killed all the priests and their families in Nob. Moreover, they knew that Saul's army wanted to find and kill David too. So, they did not want to go and fight the Philistines in Keilah only to have Saul and his army come up against their rear too.

Here is where we see the shepherd's heart of David. He knew that his men were afraid; indeed, they had just told him that they were **"afraid here in Judah."** He did not say, "Listen, I am your God-anointed king-elect, and you should obey me just because I am telling you that God has given me divine guidance." No, **David inquired of the Lord again** (22:4a). One commentator believes that David did so now in the presence of his men so that they could all see and be sure of the Lord's answer to David's request. **And the Lord answered him, "Arise, go down to Keilah, for I**

will give the Philistines into your hand” (22:4b).

David wanted God’s guidance regarding an attack at Keilah. He sought that guidance through the God-appointed means of the priest’s ephod. And when his men were afraid to follow him, David repeated his request to the Lord so that his men could be assured of God’s guidance regarding an attack on the Philistines.

Let us seek God’s guidance as we encounter various circumstances. We, of course, do not have ephods. But, we have something far more sure—the written, inspired, inerrant, infallible word of God. I will say more about how we discern God’s will shortly.

C. The Result (23:5)

And third, notice the result concerning the attack.

Having been given guidance by God as to what they should do, **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 (22:5).** Here David was acting as a king should. He saved the people of Keilah, which was something that Saul should have done.

II. God Guided David Regarding an Escape (23:7-14)

And second, notice how God guided David regarding an escape.

Having saved the people of Keilah from the Philistines, David and his men were now in the town of Keilah. For the time being, David was safe there. But not for long.

A. The Report (23:7-8)

First, there was the report that was given to King Saul.

Saul’s network of spies told him **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 (23:7-8).

B. The Requests (23:9-12)

Second, there were two requests regarding the escape.

But David also had a network of spies because **David knew that Saul was plotting harm against him (23:9a)**. In fact, it seems that David’s network of spies were better than Saul’s because David was always a step ahead of Saul.

In any event, David **said to Abiathar the priest, “Bring the ephod here” (23:9b)**. This is where we see David clearly seeking the guidance of God through the ephod.

David asked the Lord two questions. First, **“Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard?” (23:11b)**. And second, **“Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?” (23:12a)**. The Lord’s clear answer to both of David’s questions was “yes”: **“Yes, Saul will come down” (23:11c)**, and **“Yes, the men of Keilah will surrender you” (23:12b)**.

It may seem like ingratitude for the men of Keilah to surrender David and his men to Saul. But, they were likely terrified of what Saul might do to them and their town, having heard that Saul had wiped out the entire town of Nob. So, they would have felt that they had no choice but to surrender David to Saul.

C. The Result (23:13-14)

And third, notice the result concerning the escape.

David had received clear guidance from the Lord. **Then David and his men, who were about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah, and they went wherever they could go**

(23:13a). David's men had grown from four hundred men to six hundred men. They continued to move about so as to evade capture by Saul and his army. Understandably, **when Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he gave up the expedition** (23:13b). Saul must have been exasperated. Try as he might, he simply could not get his hands on David. **And David remained in the strongholds in the wilderness, in the hill country of the wilderness of Ziph** (23:14a), which was about 10 miles southeast of Keilah. David moved around by hiding in the mountainous caves, frustrating Saul's efforts to capture and kill David.

This story ends with a beautiful statement that I do not want us to miss. Verse 14b says, **“And Saul sought him [that is, David] every day, but God did not give him into his hand.”** Saul was consumed by his desire to find, capture, and kill David. He was jealous and angry and saw everyone conspiring against him. However, the real reason Saul could not find David is because **God did not give him into his hand**. Here we see that God was in sovereign control of all things. He was frustrating Saul's search for David. He was protecting David and his escapes from Saul. To be sure, David had one narrow escape after another while on the run from Saul. But, God was sovereignly protecting him.

Friends, as David was now doing, let us always surrender ourselves completely to the Lord. Let us trust God in every circumstance. Let us believe God to take care of us for his glory and our ultimate good in whatever situation we find ourselves.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the incident of God's divine guidance as set forth in 1 Samuel 23:1-14, let us believe that God promises to bless those who turn to him for guidance.

Now, someone may say that we do not have prophets or high priests to whom we may turn for guidance, as David did. That is

true. But David had a unique place and lived in a particular time in redemptive history. He was God's anointed king whose kingdom would never end. Moreover, in that day, God's people were to seek his guidance through the Urim and Thummim, which are no longer in effect today. However, that does not mean that God no longer guides those who turn to him for guidance.

Bob Mumford, in *Take Another Look at Guidance*, compares discovering God's will with a sea captain's docking procedure:

A certain harbor in Italy can be reached only by sailing up a narrow channel between dangerous rocks and shoals. Over the years, many ships have been wrecked, and navigation is hazardous. To guide the ships safely into port, three lights have been mounted on three huge poles in the harbor. When the three lights are perfectly lined up and seen as one, the ship can safely proceed up the narrow channel. If the pilot sees two or three lights, he knows he's off course and in danger.

God has also provided three beacons to guide us. The same rules of navigation apply—the three lights must be lined up before it is safe for us to proceed. The three harbor lights of guidance are:

1. The Word of God (objective standard).
2. The Holy Spirit (subjective witness).
3. Circumstances (divine providence).

Together they assure us that the directions we've received are from God and will lead us safely along his way.³

Let me briefly elaborate.

First, the Word of God is our objective standard regarding guidance from God. That means that we may not do what the Bible prohibits. We may not do anything that is clearly sinful. Furthermore, we must do what the Bible commands.

This presupposes that we know our Bibles! A little over ten years ago, an article that ran in Reuters asked, "How many of The

³ See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/1996/july/200.html>.

Ten Commandments can you name?” Here is the answer, “Put to the test, Americans recalled the seven ingredients of a McDonald’s Big Mac hamburger and members of TV’s ‘The Brady Bunch’ more easily than the Bible’s Ten Commandments.”⁴ That will not do. People wonder why they have a hard time knowing God’s will, and the number one reason is that they don’t know their Bibles.

Second, the Holy Spirit is a subjective witness when we seek to know God’s will. There are actually many things for which there is no clear biblical direction, such as where to live or what job to take or whom to marry. There are, of course, biblical principles that can help frame the question for us, but in the end we are free to live, work, or marry based on preference or taste, provided we are not making choices contrary to God’s Word. However, as we seek the Lord in prayer about a decision, the Holy Spirit will give a sense of peace—or a lack of it—to help us know his will. That is why it is so important to keep in step with the Holy Spirit.

And third, circumstances are God’s divine providence, either opening opportunities or closing them. As we seek to discern God’s will, he will providentially open or close doors, and that will help us know God’s will for us.

David showed us that we should seek God’s guidance in all circumstances. He was growing in his faith, and he demonstrated that by seeking the Lord’s guidance in all that he did.

In this regard, he was like his greater Son, Jesus Christ, who always sought to do what his Father in heaven wanted him to do, even when it cost him his life. And yet, what a glorious inheritance was given to the Jesus because of his obedience to his Father.

So, dear friends, let us believe that God promises to bless those who turn to him for guidance. Amen.

⁴ See <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-bible-commandments/americans-know-big-macs-better-than-ten-commandments-idUSN1223894020071012>.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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1. www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/sermons.
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