

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
Church, 10 Downing St. Oakleigh, Vic.,
3166]

DHW BIBLE CLASS

LESSON 16A

FIRST SAMUEL

CHAPTER 23

INTRODUCTION

In chapter 22, David was told by the prophet Gad to return and settle in Judah instead of Moab. Accordingly, David chose the forest of Hareth for his hiding place. We saw in horror that Saul killed Ahimelech and 85 priests in Nob just because Ahimelech innocently offered bread and Goliath's sword to David. But by the providence of God, Saul did not manage to kill all the descendants of Ahimelech. Abiathar, a grandson of Ahimelech, escaped and sought refuge with David. David told him to stay with him for safety. Abiathar brought the ephod which contained the Urim and Thummim. These two stones were the means by which the priest received the judgment of the Lord when one wished to seek direction and guidance from the LORD.

In chapter 23, the character and conduct of David and Saul were contrasted. David was still a fugitive running away from Saul. In one incident, Saul almost trapped David when suddenly Saul was summoned away to attend to more important businesses. Incidents like these were recorded to show the unseen providential hand of God working to protect His anointed. It showed that

God is sovereign and man cannot thwart His purpose and plan. The chapter can be divided into the following sections: (1) David saved the inhabitants of the little town of Keilah; (2) David was providentially saved by God when Saul was in hot pursuit of him and his men.

COMMENTARY

**David and the Keilah
Deliverance—23:1-6**

It was reported to David that the Philistines had been raiding and robbing the inhabitants of Keilah of their farm produce. Under ordinary circumstances, such incidents should have been reported to king Saul who was responsible for the safety of his subjects. Instead, the people complained to David. Keilah was about 14 kilometres northwest of Hebron and near Hareth. David responded to their call for protection although he could have told them to go to king Saul. He cared for the people. In any case, it showed that the people had confidence in David although he was a fugitive.

David did not go to the rescue of the people in Keilah in haste. He sought first the direction and guidance of God through Abiathar, the priest who had the ephod. The coming of Abiathar to David was indeed a privilege and an advantage for him. He could seek the judgment of the LORD concerning the decision to go to war against the Philistines and to save Keilah. The LORD answered in the affirmative – “Go and smite the Philistines and save Keilah” (23:2). But David's men saw the greater danger they would be in if they fought against the Philistines. David sought a confirmation from the LORD. The answer from the LORD

was not only in the affirmative but reassuring for he and his men would be successful and the defeat of the Philistines was certain. So, David led his men against the Philistines and defeated them. As an added bonus, they took away the livestock of the Philistines. And so, the inhabitants of the town of Keilah were saved by David. It was a great day of victory and deliverance for the people and David's men. They must have celebrated their resounding victory. Keilah was a fortified town and David might have thought of making it his headquarters because the town offered security and safety. But it was not to be so.

David betrayed in Keilah— 23:7-18

News came to Saul that David was in Keilah. He must have heard that David had saved the town from the Philistines. Instead of sending a congratulatory letter to David and thanking him for his bravery, Saul announced a general call-up of the people to go down to Keilah, to besiege the town and capture David. Moreover, when Saul was told that David was in Keilah, he remarked: "God hath delivered him into mine hand; for he is shut in, by entering into the town that hath gates and bars" (23:7b). Saul was being presumptuous. He had deluded himself. In his obsession, he interpreted the circumstance as God's will.

Interestingly, David knew that Saul had "secretly practised mischief against him" (23:9). Saul had often praised David and said good things about him while secretly planning to hurt and destroy him. Such men are dangerous. David felt that it might not be safe to stay in Keilah. So he sought the counsel of the LORD through Abiathar, the priest. He

called Abiathar to bring the ephod. David told the LORD that he heard that Saul was making his way to Keilah to destroy the city because of him. The massacre at Nob was still fresh in his mind and he did not want the same fate to happen to the inhabitants of Keilah. Observe that David did not speak to the LORD about his own safety but that of the people of Keilah. David further asked God whether the inhabitants of Keilah would hand him over to Saul. The LORD answered David that Saul would besiege Keilah and the people would hand him over to Saul. What can we say about the inhabitants of Keilah? Some might criticize them for being ungrateful. Others might think that it was better for one person to die than for the whole town to be destroyed.

However, on hearing the answer of the LORD, David made the right decision to leave Keilah so that the town with all her people would be spared. David left with 600 of his men. They had no particular destination and they wandered around for awhile. In the meantime, news reached Saul that David had escaped from Keilah. Saul called off the march to Keilah. The town and the people were thus saved.

David and his men came to some caves in the wilderness of Ziph, a less frequented, hilly and wooded area which was located between Hebron and the Dead Sea. Saul, being outwitted by David in Keilah, relentlessly sought David "but God delivered him not into his hand" (23:14). David knew this and he feared that Saul would one day find him in Ziph. Once again, we learn of the sovereignty of God. If God disapproved of Saul's intention, even though Saul thought of every

devious scheme, no evil could happen to David!

During this period of hot pursuit by Saul, David had a very hard time. God did not remove Saul or his attempts to kill David but He protected David and led him through the trials and tribulations. Although David had the advantage of being directed and guided by the LORD, it did not mean that he did not need sincere and genuine human encouragement.

Jonathan decided to look for David. He did this at great risk not only to his personal life but also to the safety of David. He found where David was and went to him. It was very brave of him.

He came to David at the right time. David needed human comfort and encouragement. Jonathan “strengthened his hand in God” (23:16). What followed explained the meaning of this phrase. Jonathan told him not to fear. He assured David that Saul, his father, would not be able to lay his hands on him. He would be safe from his father. Jonathan was confident that David would be the next king of Israel. He told David that he would be next to him. Being the son of king Saul, Jonathan knew his position as the heir to the throne but he understood the will of the LORD for his best friend. He knew and accepted that David had been earmarked as the next king. He was contented to take second place in the kingdom. Jonathan exemplified great humility by his willingness to serve David. He was willing to submit to the will of God. Both of them renewed their covenant before the LORD once more. Jonathan then left and returned to his house. This was the last meeting between David and Jonathan. The

next news of Jonathan would be his death in battle against the Philistines.

The Ziphites Betrays David— 23:19-29

The Ziphites betrayed David. They went to Saul in Gibeah, his home town, to report that David was hiding in the caves in the hill of Hachilah, south of Jeshimon. They urged Saul to go down to the place and they would betray and hand David over to him. It was music to Saul’s ears. He was so delighted that he blessed the Ziphites in the name of the LORD saying that they had compassion on him (23:21). How ironical! The one who deserved compassion was David who had to flee from cave to cave and who was betrayed by the very people that he had helped. Having experienced failure before with the inhabitants of Keilah, Saul wanted to be very certain of David’s location. He instructed the Ziphites to find out exactly where David was hiding and then return to inform him.

The Ziphites went back and confirmed David’s location to Saul. So Saul and his men tracked David down. David was informed of Saul’s approach. He quickly moved down “into a rock” and stayed in the wilderness of Maon which was on the plain south of Jeshimon. Saul heard and pursued David in the wilderness of Maon. Saul was on one side of the mountain while David was on the other side. David tried to escape but Saul had him cornered by his men who surrounded him. David had nowhere to go. He was certain to be caught by Saul this time.

Suddenly, news came to Saul that the Philistines were invading the land. Saul withdrew his men and

went to confront the Philistines. This allowed David to escape hence the place was called "Sela-hammahlekoth" [the name means 'the cliff of escape'] (23:28). David escaped to the caves in En Gedi where there was an oasis. It was located about 16 kilometres north of Masada on the Dead Sea. This was a much better spot for David because water was readily available. David was saved by divine intervention.

PRACTICAL VALUE

David's character and conduct stood out in the events recorded in this lesson. He began to realize that he needed to ask God for direction and guidance in everything he do. In chapter 23, David enquired of the LORD three times. As a result, he was protected by God and found success. In going to the aid of the inhabitants of Keilah, David demonstrated that he was willing to help when he was asked in spite of his own danger. He also showed concern for others' well-being. He learned from his own mistakes at Nob and did not want the same thing to happen to the inhabitants of Keilah. He sacrificed his convenience for the safety of others. He loved the LORD and submitted to His will when he spared Saul's life.

Jonathan showed similar characteristics. He risked his life to see David just for the purpose of encouraging him. David was very much comforted and renewed in his spirit by Jonathan at a time when he needed it most! Jonathan was a true friend indeed. His love and loyalty to David was truly a contrast to the inhabitants of Keilah and the Ziphites. The people of Keilah were

ungrateful to David who had saved them from the Philistines. The Ziphites represented people who looked up to great men of power in order to gain favour and reward. There was no cause for them to inform Saul of David's whereabouts but they even offered to help find out exactly where David and his men were hiding.

God protects and saves the righteous but thwarts the works of the wicked. Abiathar's escape from Nob and his subsequent refuge with David was no accident. It was in accordance with God's plan. With the ephod, David had the privilege and advantage to enquire the LORD for direction and guidance. God could have destroyed David's enemy without David lifting a hand but that is not God's way. Instead, God let David experience the trials and tribulations so as to build his character and prepare him for his role as king of Israel. When the situation was really helpless, God intervened. At the critical moment when David was cornered and could not escape, Saul and his men were called away. David escaped to En Gedi which was a much better place. Saul's plans were thwarted because God did not allow David to be delivered into his hand (23:14b). God had a plan and purpose for David. No one can thwart His will. This is a great comfort and encouragement to all of God's people. If we live in His will, we can be rest assured that He will be with us, and when He is with us, we do not have to fear what men can do to us.

AMEN.

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: 1 Samuel 23:1-14; Proverbs 3:27.

Tuesday: 1 Samuel 23:15-18; Psalm 37:23, 24.

Wednesday: 1 Samuel 23:19-29; Psalm 54:1-7.

Thursday: 1 Samuel 23:1-29.

Friday: 1 Samuel 23:1-29.

Analysis

Text	Practical Value
1 Samuel 23:1-6	
1 Samuel 23:7-14	
1 Samuel 23:15-18	

1 Samuel 23:19-29	
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Discussion Questions

1. What do you think is the object of the account of David's deliverance of the inhabitants of Keilah?

2. Saul interpreted David's plight as the will of God to deliver him into his hands. Is such a misinterpretation of God's will common today? Do you think Christians often fall prey to such errors?

3. Self preservation or grateful thanks was the choice the people of Keilah had to make. And, they failed to make the right one. Do you have to make such decisions in relation to defending Christ's Name and God's Holy and perfect Word?

6. Do you agree that as long as God has anointed you for some work, you are invincible until the work is done? Are you God's anointed? What is God's work for you?

4. David was betrayed by the people he saved. Yet he cared for their safety instead of his own. How was David able to have such a caring and forgiving heart? Should all Christians possess such a heart?

5. Playing second fiddle is one of the hardest things to do in life. How was Jonathan able to do that? Can you be a second fiddle at work and in church?
