

GOD WITH US
Part 3: A King in place of THE KING.
1st and 2nd Samuel

Message 8 – Saul Pursues David
1 Samuel 23-26

Introduction

David continued to flee from Saul. What sets these chapters apart is the way that David *listened* to the right voices and made right choices to walk in God's ways. If we were to isolate a main idea here, it would be this: *How to find joy in God while living in dark caves and dry deserts.* Once again, the superscriptions to a number of David's psalms tie them to this particular part of his journey (Psalms 54,57,63,142). The opening lines of Psalm 63 serve as a fitting introduction to this period of David's life: "*O God, you are my God; I earnestly search for you. My soul thirsts for you; my whole body longs for you in this parched and weary land where there is no water*" (63:1). Only God could satisfy David's soul during this difficult period of wandering, wondering and waiting.

David rescues Keilah: 23:1-6

David was on the run from Saul, yet, he still acted as a protector of his people, Israel. The Philistines had attacked the southern city of Keilah, and David desired to rescue them. He did not move, however, before he sought the Lord's direction . . . twice.

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." 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?" 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" (23:2-4).

Abiathar the priest had brought "*the ephod*" with him when he had escaped from the slaughter of the priests at Nob (22:19-23). The ephod was a special vest that the high priest wore (Exodus 28). On it were 12 stones representing the 12 tribes of Israel. It also

contained two special objects – the Urim and Thummim – that were used by God to give Yes/No answers to questions (Exodus 28:30). While we do not know specifically the procedure for how the priest used the ephod to determine God’s will, it is clear that *David had access to God’s voice and he was listening.*

We also see David modeling a good leadership principle. *“Rather than shame his men for questioning the word he had received from God, David went back to God and reconfirmed His direction”* (Moore, *A Heart Like His*, p.92). David showed more concern for leading his men in the direction of God’s will, than in defending his own spirituality in response to their doubts.

Sometimes people will try to steer us in directions other than the one God has called us to walk in. We can learn from David. First, go back to God and listen again for HIS instructions. Second, determine to obey God’s voice above all others. Is anyone trying to lead you in a direction other than the one God has called you to? Once you have received God’s marching orders, move forward and do not let other voices deter you.

David leaves Keilah: 17:7-13

While David was tuning his heart to hear God’s directions, Saul was misreading God’s will through circumstances.

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” (23:7).

“Not every opportunity is sent from God. We may want something so much that we assume any opportunity to obtain it is of divine origin. As we see from Saul’s case, however, this may not be true... When opportunities come your way, double-check your motives. Make sure you are following God’s desires, and not just your own.” Life Application Study Bible, p.477.

Again, David called for the priest, with the ephod, and twice inquired of the Lord. Note the contrast between Saul (above) and David in their attempts to discern the will of God.

Then David said, “O Lord God of Israel, Your 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 Your servant has heard? O Lord God of Israel, I pray, 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” (23:10-12).

David did not rely on what he had “heard” (v.10). Nor did he rely on the fact that he had just rescued Keilah from the Philistines, (thus, logically they should have been on his side). He earnestly sought the Lord for *His voice and direction*.

So many voices call out to us: peers (v.3), logic (v.5), circumstances (v.7), sources (v.10). All of these voices provide us with information; but this information must be taken before the Lord in times of concerted prayer as we ask Him to help us ‘interpret’ the data correctly, and to give us the necessary guidance to move in step with His Spirit. Don’t just try to figure things out on your own. Instead: “If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and He will give it to you” (James 1:5).

Having been warned by God that the inhabitants of Keilah *would* betray him and hand him over to Saul, David departed with his troops into the southern wilderness areas of Israel.

Imagine how David felt, after he had risked his life to rescue Keilah from the Philistines, only to have them turn right around and betray him to Saul! Nonetheless, David did not take revenge against the people of Keilah. He committed his betrayers to God’s hand of justice (eg. Psalm 54:5) and went his way. Has someone betrayed you? Can you take your pain to the Lord, rather than taking it out on the one who has betrayed you? It is a major step of spiritual maturity to let God deal with those who have hurt you.

A summary of David’s flight from Saul: 23:14

What was daily life like for David and his men during this extended period of running from Saul? A helpful summary verse paints the picture for us:

“David stayed in the wilderness in the strongholds, and remained in the hill country in the wilderness of Ziph. Saul sought him every day, but God did not deliver him into his hand” (23:14).

David was in the desolate southern wilderness areas of Israel, moving from cave to cave. He had to remain constantly vigilant against Saul’s constant attempts to capture him. Yet, GOD was faithfully watching over David every single day.

Psalm 63 is associated with these ‘desert years’ of David’s life.

Notice how David contrasts the dryness of the desert with the richness of his relationship with God.

“O God, you are my God; I earnestly search for you. My soul thirsts for you; my whole body longs for you in this parched and weary land where there is no water. I have seen you in your sanctuary and gazed upon your power and glory. Your unfailing love is better than life itself; how I praise you! I will praise you as long as I live, lifting up my hands to you in prayer. You satisfy me more than the richest feast. I will praise you with songs of joy. I lie awake thinking of you, meditating on you through the night. Because you are my helper, I sing for joy in the shadow of your wings. I cling to you; your strong right hand holds me securely. But those plotting to destroy me will come to ruin. They will go down into the depths of the earth. They will die by the sword and become the food of jackals. But the king will rejoice in God. All who swear to tell the truth will praise him, while liars will be silenced” (Psalm 63 - NLT).

Joy, satisfaction and security are recurring themes here. It was only “in the shadow of God’s wings” that David could sing for joy.

God is always at work to mercifully detach our “joy” from exclusive dependence upon our circumstances, teaching us instead to draw on our relationship with Him for our deepest satisfaction. This is what the apostle Paul meant when he wrote these words from a Roman prison cell: “I have learned how to be content with whatever I have. I know how to live on almost nothing or with everything. I have learned the secret of living in every situation, whether it is with a full stomach or empty, with plenty or little. For I can do everything through Christ, who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:11-13). Ask God to help you “learn the secret” of finding your deepest contentment and joy in Him alone.

Jonathan encourages David: 23:15-18

In the midst of his wearisome struggle to stay alive, who should come and encourage David but his dearly beloved friend, Jonathan.

“Do not be afraid, because the hand of Saul my father will 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; and David stayed at Horesh while Jonathan went to his house (23:17,18).

Notice the specific words Jonathan spoke to David. *Do not be afraid. My father will not find you. You will be king over Israel. I will be next to you. My father knows it.* Of all the words that Jonathan spoke, only one line would go unfulfilled: *I will be next to you.* It was Jonathan's sincere hope that he would someday serve next to David in his kingship over Israel; but that would not be God's will. Instead, Jonathan would die next to his father and brothers in battle. At this time, Jonathan and David renewed their *covenant of brotherhood* with one another for the 3rd time (see also 18:3; 20:8; 20:16,17).

The word, "encourage" means to "breath courage into." Jonathan made the effort to: 1) sense his friend's need, 2) find him, and 3) breath specific words of courage into his heart. Who needs your words of encouragement, today? When you choose your words for that person, be specific. "Therefore, encourage one another, and build up one another" (1Thessalonians 5:11). Your words might just give your friend the courage to face another difficult day.

David narrowly escapes Saul's grasp: 23:19-29

The men of Ziph went to Saul and told him that David was hiding in their area. Saul set out with his army to capture David; but God protected him just as he was being surrounded.

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. But a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Hurry and come, for the Philistines have made a raid on the land." So Saul returned from pursuing David and went to meet the Philistines; therefore they called that place the Rock of Escape (23:26-28).

Psalm 54 is connected to the occasion of the Ziphites betraying David's whereabouts to Saul. Here David pours out his heart to his only *true* "ROCK of escape" . . . GOD.

"Save me, O God, by Your name, and vindicate me by Your power. Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth. For strangers have risen against me and violent men have sought my life; they have not set God before them. Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is the sustainer of my soul. He will recompense the evil to my foes; destroy them in Your faithfulness. Willingly I will sacrifice to You; I will give thanks to

Your name, O Lord, for it is good. For He has delivered me from all trouble, and my eye has looked with satisfaction upon my enemies” (Psalm 54).

David used many words to describe the people that were against him: strangers, violent men, foes, trouble, enemies. He also used many words to describe God: helper, sustainer, faithful, good, deliverer. David was able to elevate God’s character above his troubling circumstances.

This is one of the great lessons that God wants us all to learn. No matter who or what the source of our troubles might be, God is greater still. This does not mean that we will experience life as ‘easy’ or ‘safe.’ Remember, David was surrounded by Saul’s army, and only escaped because Saul was suddenly called away to repel a Philistine invasion (23:27). Yet, it does mean that we can experience the faithfulness and provision of God in the midst of our “narrow escapes.”

David spares Saul’s life: 24:1-22

Some of the caves where David hid were large enough to hold over 3,000 people. While hiding with his 600 men in the dark recesses of one such cave, Saul strolled in to take a rest. David’s men tried to persuade him to seize the moment and eliminate his enemy.

“Behold, this is the day of which the Lord said to you, ‘Behold; I am about to give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it seems good to you’” (24:4).

He refused, however, to lift up his hand against “God’s anointed” king. Nor would he allow his men to harm Saul.

So he said to his men, “Far be it from me because of the Lord that I should do this thing to my lord, the Lord’s anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the Lord’s anointed.” David persuaded his men with these words and did not allow them to rise up against Saul. And Saul arose, left the cave, and went on his way (24:6,7).

David cut off a corner of Saul’s robe and then waited for him to leave the cave. After Saul had gone some distance, David shouted out after him and held up the corner of his robe to prove that he could have killed him. Saul admitted that David was more righteous than he was. He also acknowledged that David would someday be the king of Israel.

Now, behold, I know that you will surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hand. So now swear to me by the Lord that you will not cut off my descendants after me and that you will not destroy my name from my father's household." David swore to Saul. And Saul went to his home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold" (24:20-22).

Psalm 142 is connected to one of David's times hiding in a cave.

"I cry out to the Lord; I plead for the Lord's mercy. I pour out my complaints before him and tell him all my troubles. When I am overwhelmed, you alone know the way I should turn. Wherever I go, my enemies have set traps for me. I look for someone to come and help me, but no one gives me a passing thought! No one will help me; no one cares a bit what happens to me. Then I pray to you, O Lord. I say, "You are my place of refuge. You are all I really want in life. Hear my cry, for I am very low. Rescue me from my persecutors, for they are too strong for me. Bring me out of prison so I can thank you. The godly will crowd around me, for you are good to me" (Psalm 142 - NLT).

"Hear my cry, for I am very low." Where do you turn when you are "very low?" So often, we seek relief . . . with some kind of diversion, or something to help numb the pain. Or, we vent on other people, hoping to find comfort and sympathy. We need to learn the discipline of crying out to God, Who understands our pain and can provide the comfort and assurance we need. The apostle Paul wrote: "God is our merciful Father and the source of all comfort. He comforts us in all our troubles so that we can comfort others" (2Cor.1:3,4). When no one else will give you a passing thought, remember that God's thoughts toward you are beyond measure (Psalm 139:17,18). He can comfort you like no other.

The Death of Samuel: 25:1

There is just one short verse noting the death of Samuel. The passing of Samuel may have had an emotional impact on David, since Samuel was the link to David's promise of kingship.

David and Abigail: 25:2-44

In the midst of David's long and difficult struggle to escape from Saul, we find the story of David's encounter with the noble woman Abigail, who would become his wife. Nabal, Abigail's husband, was an extremely wealthy man; but he was also very foolish.

"This man's name was Nabal, and his wife, Abigail, was a

sensible and beautiful woman. But Nabal, a descendant of Caleb, was crude and mean in all his dealings” (25:3).

God does not condemn having wealth. In fact, He encourages hard work and productivity (“My Father and I are always working,” said Jesus – John 5:17). However, God does command the wealthy to be generous and willing to share (Matt.5:42; 1Timothy 6:17-19). He also commanded “masters” to do what is right and fair because we all answer to our MASTER in heaven (Colossians 4:1). Nabal did not respect those who were under him, those whom he did business with, or the fugitives in his region. He was a successful, yet greedy and self-centered man. How do you treat the people who work under you? Those you do life/business with you? Do you use your wealth to glorify God and bless others?

While David and his men were in the area of Nabal’s shepherds, they provided protection to them (a “*wall by day and night*” v.16). David sent word of his goodwill to Nabal, asking in return for provisions for his men on some special day (25:8). Nabal, however, treated David’s messengers with contempt and even mocked David as an insubordinate man of insignificant origin. David, in turn, was outraged and commanded 400 of his warriors to put on their swords and get ready to exact revenge (25:13).

“Surely in vain I have guarded all that this man has in the wilderness, so that nothing was missed of all that belonged to him; and he has returned me evil for good. May God do so to the enemies of David, and more also, if by morning I leave as much as one male of any who belong to him” (25:21,22).

David was deeply triggered by Nabal’s disrespect of him. This may go back to David’s history of being disrespected and put down by others (recall Eliab, his oldest brother). Interestingly, he would not take revenge on Saul when he had many opportunities to do so; but he was instantly ready to exact his own vengeance on Nabal. God tells us not to take our own revenge (see Romans 12:17-19 and 1Peter3:9). How about you? Are you seeking to “even the score” with someone? Can you give this situation to God and let Him have His way with that person?

It was only Abigail’s swift intervention that kept David from actions that he would later regret. She moved quickly to bring David the food gifts that he had requested, and to appeal to his better sense of judgment. Her entire appeal is quite amazing for its wisdom and wording.

“Should anyone rise up to pursue you and to seek your life, then the life of my lord shall be bound in the bundle of the living with the Lord your God; but the lives of your enemies He will sling out as from the hollow of a sling” (25:29).

Note how she used a slingshot analogy with a man who was really good with that particular weapon. (Read her entire speech to see how wise she was with words.) David not only thanked Abigail for her prudent intervention; he sent her a marriage proposal after her husband, Nabal, died 10 days later!

Then David said to Abigail, “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me, and blessed be your discernment, and blessed be you, who have kept me this day from bloodshed and from avenging myself by my own hand” (25:32,33).

Abigail was an incredibly wise and resourceful woman that we can learn much from:

- She knew her God. She was devout and yet humble.
- She respected her servants.
- She knew the character of her husband and how to handle him.
- She knew how to approach David with respect and confidence.
- She reminded David of God’s past faithfulness and His promises.
- She knew how to encourage godly behavior in others.
- She made him think through the consequences of his actions.
- She provided the food that David had requested.
- She took the blame for Nabal’s offense against David.
- She inspired David to protect his own reputation in Israel.
- She affirmed that he would have a lasting dynasty.
- She assured David that his life was secure in God’s hands.

Abigail’s story is in Scripture to inspire all women young and old. (This IS the longest and most detailed chapter in the Bible devoted to one woman’s exemplary behavior in a crisis situation.) Although she was a very wise, faithful, God-honoring woman, she did not shame David in the way she sought to ward off his revengeful spirit. She was clear, direct, honest and respectful, making her heart and beliefs known. Yet, she was not demanding of David to do it “her way.” She inspired correct thinking, leading to a change in his behavior. Her hope was in God to convict David, to give him ears to hear her wisdom and a repentant heart. Take time to meditate on this woman’s approach to her husband, her servants, and David. Maybe there is something in Abigail’s example that can guide you as you handle a crisis situation of your own, today.

David spares Saul's life again: 26:1-25

David had returned to one of his hideouts near Ziph. These people had betrayed David's location to Saul previously, and now they repeated their betrayal. Saul gathered his army and pursued David.

One night, while Saul's army was in a "deep sleep," David had a renewed opportunity to kill Saul. Again, he refused to do so, even against the advice of his leading warrior, Abishai.

Abishai said to David, "Today God has delivered your enemy into your hand; now therefore, please let me strike him with the spear to the ground with one stroke, and I will not strike him the second time." But David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him, for who can stretch out his hand against the Lord's anointed and be without guilt?" David also said, "As the Lord lives, surely the Lord will strike him, or his day will come that he dies, or he will go down into battle and perish. The Lord forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the Lord's anointed; but now please take the spear that is at his head and the jug of water, and let us go" (26:8-11).

Notice the other ways that David reasoned God could remove Saul: *the Lord will strike him, he will die of natural causes, or he will die in battle.* David knew that God had plenty of tools at His disposal to accomplish His will. God did not need David's help to get Saul out of the way!

So often we subtly take matters into our own hands and help 'move along' God's agenda for our lives. Yet, God does not need our help. He is in complete control of the timing and the details of what He wants to accomplish with you. Are you trying to move God's agenda along via your own means . . . or are you leaving it in God's all-powerful, sovereign hands?

As before, David took physical evidence that he had the chance to kill Saul; this time, his spear and water jug. After Saul departed, David called out to Abner, Saul's general, indicting him for failing to protect his master from those who could have killed him.

"Why then have you not guarded your lord the king? For one of the people came to destroy the king your lord. This thing that you have done is not good. As the Lord lives, all of you must surely die, because you did not guard your lord, the Lord's anointed. And now, see where the king's spear is and the jug of water that was at his head" (26:15,16).

Saul admitted his sin against David, and promised not to pursue him anymore. This would, in fact, be the last time Saul and David would speak to one another before Saul's death.

Then Saul said, "I have sinned. Return, my son David, for I will not harm you again because my life was precious in your sight this day. Behold, I have played the fool and have committed a serious error . . . Blessed are you, my son David; you will both accomplish much and surely prevail" (26:21,25).

How ironic (and sad) that it was not until the end of their relationship that Saul began to refer to David as "my son" (24:16; 26:17,21,25). He always saw David as an enemy and threat to his own position and significance. He missed the opportunity to enjoy life with a strong ally who would, no doubt, have served him with utmost loyalty and faithfulness – a true 'son.'

Psalm 57 is linked to one of David's narrow escapes from Saul.

"Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy! I look to you for protection. I will hide beneath the shadow of your wings until the danger passes by. I cry out to God Most High, to God who will fulfill his purpose for me. He will send help from heaven to rescue me, disgracing those who hound me. My God will send forth his unfailing love and faithfulness. I am surrounded by fierce lions who greedily devour human prey - whose teeth pierce like spears and arrows, and whose tongues cut like swords. Be exalted, O God, above the highest heavens! May your glory shine over all the earth. My enemies have set a trap for me. I am weary from distress. They have dug a deep pit in my path, but they themselves have fallen into it. My heart is confident in you, O God; my heart is confident. No wonder I can sing your praises! Wake up, my heart! Wake up, O lyre and harp! I will wake the dawn with my song. I will thank you, Lord, among all the people. I will sing your praises among the nations. For your unfailing love is as high as the heavens. Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds. Be exalted, O God, above the highest heavens. May your glory shine over all the earth" (Psalm 57).

The best of David's character was revealed in the worst of his circumstances. Surrounded by fierce lions ready for a kill, David steadfastly cried out to God, whose purposes would stand against all enemies. David was "a man after God's heart" because, above all else, he wanted God to be exalted in his life . . . from the remote recesses of the deepest cave . . . to the highest of the heavens.