

THE MORNING OF THE MONARCHY
STUDIES IN FIRST SAMUEL
LESSON 10

"SAVED BY GOD'S PROVIDENCE"
I Samuel 23 and 24

While keeping away from Saul, David began to act in a way that would allow him to grasp more firmly the kingship. He became the protector of his kinsmen in Judah and tried to make sure that the events at Nob were not repeated.

After consulting the Lord, he delivered the town of Keilah near the border of the Philistines. However, those people repaid his kindness by betraying him to Saul. (Remember this when you read of whole towns being destroyed.) So with 600 men who were faithful to him, David went to the Desert of Ziph, a desolate hilly and wooded area between Hebron and the Dead Sea, where Jonathan joined him briefly, again confirming the legitimacy of David's kingship.

Geography: Adullam -- 8 miles southwest of Bethlehem
Keilah -- 3 miles south of Adullam
Hebron -- 5 miles southeast of Keilah (today an Arab village)
Ziph -- south of Hebron
Engedi -- directly east on the shores of the Dead Sea.

I. DAVID DELIVERS KEILAH 23:1-6

The Philistines sent a raiding party to Keilah which was fifteen miles southwest of Bethlehem in the hill country, about three miles south of Adullam. It occupied a defensible position, being perched on a steep hill overlooking the valley of Elah. The village was built on a hillside whose terraced slopes were covered with grain. This made its threshing-floors a tempting target for the Philistines. The season of threshing was a natural one for raids of this kind, as in the story of Gideon (Jud. 6:11). The threshing-floors would have been broad flat spaces on open ground, generally high, and situated where the most wind could be found. Because the grain was put into heaps waiting to be carried home, there was always a period when the threshing-floors had to be guarded from raids.

David knew that a victory over the Philistines would help him in the eyes of the people of Judah and put him in a stronger position. With such a small force at his disposal, he could not have opposed a Philistine invading army, but at Keilah the Philistines were not invading but simply mounting armed raids to plunder and harass the Judean people there.

We presume that David inquired of the Lord by means of the Urim and Thummim which would have come with the ephod brought by Abiathar (23:6). Though the reply was affirmative, David's men were so nervous that he inquired again. God confirmed the message and victory was promised. The word used for "deliver" (v.2) means "save" and was often used of the Judges (e.g., Jud. 2:16). David was a true deliverer.

Verse 5 says, "and he led away their livestock." The word signifies "small cattle," such as sheep and goats. Besides robbing the threshing-floors, the Philistines apparently had been driving off the flocks from the neighboring pastures.

II. DAVID ESCAPES FROM KEILAH 23:7-14

Saul, still obsessed with catching David, seemed unconcerned with the welfare of his own people. He had spies always on the watch to give him the earliest intelligence of David's movements. But in driving Abiathar to David, he had given him the means of "inquiring before the Lord," and thus David was saved on this and many other occasions.

The evil king had deluded himself with the idea that God was on his side and had deserted his rival. But he had misread Providence. Circumstances are an uncertain indicator of God's will because we can

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so easily read into them our own desires. In verse 7, "God has delivered him into my hand," the Hebrew word suggests that Saul thought David was rejected by God, but probably it should be read with the sense of "sell," like "he walked into a trap" -- literally, "he has delivered himself up."

The events at Keilah help us (as they helped David) to see that there were Israelites, even in David's native Judah, who were prepared to support Saul (and with good reason). If a sacred town like Nob had been sacked simply on suspicion of showing sympathy to David, what hope was there of Keilah's escaping Saul's anger and vengeance if it refused to surrender the outlaw to him?

The incident at Keilah was important in David's rise as king because in it David befriended and aided the town of his own free will and left again without exacting any payment or causing them any harm. He could not afford a second Nob. If the story of what happened at Keilah got around, it would have helped to counteract any ill reputation which the massacre at Nob had gained for David.

It may be legitimately asked, "If David was guided by God to go to Keilah, however, why was the move a failure?" The answer is that it was not really a failure. Under God's guidance, David got away again from Keilah just in time, and he continued to elude Saul (v.14) in spite of relentless pursuit. God had no intention of letting Saul capture him.

A growing body of supporters gave David both strength and problems. Six hundred men were hard to hide; they needed a lot of food and they could not live off the land for long. They had to keep on the move, both for safety and for provisions. To help solve his problem, David had the services of both Gad the prophet and now Abiathar the priest to advise him. He could consult God himself, and he did not fail to do so. Saul had power but was bereft of guidance; in the long run he was bound to lose.

III. JONATHAN ENCOURAGES DAVID 23:15-18

Here we have the last recorded meeting between Jonathan and David. It is a touching and royally important scene. Jonathan came to encourage his friend, assuring him that Saul would not find him and that David would become king. Once again they renewed their covenant. It is interesting and humorously ironic that Saul and his troops could not locate David, but Jonathan seems to have had no difficulty in finding his friend. Saul was bent on destruction; Jonathan came to encourage.

The expression of Jonathan's strong conviction that Jehovah was with David must have had a powerful effect upon David's mind. Under such trying circumstances David must often have been tempted to despair. The assurance of Jonathan's unbroken love for him and the knowledge that he and many more regarded him as chosen by God to be Israel's king undoubtedly revived his courage.

There is now given the most explicit statement yet of David's coming kingship, with Jonathan seeing himself as occupying the second place in the new kingdom. Even Saul is said to be aware of the realities, though it is also very clear from the narrative that Saul was still very powerful and able to exert considerable control over Judah. David however was no usurper; Jonathan, had he lived, would have willingly acknowledged David as king. Such an emphasis was important to counteract a certain amount of propaganda against David, which seems to have circulated after David gained the throne.

IV. DAVID BETRAYED BY THE ZIPHITES 23:19-29

A. David's Narrow Escape

David was now in wild and rather barren and lightly populated country. His position was precarious if ever the local population turned against him -- as did the people of Ziph. No credit attaches to them for this betrayal; on the other hand we should probably not condemn them either. They could hardly appreciate that David was destined to be king, and they were doing no more than help the lawful authority to capture an outlaw. At least they could not be accused of putting tribal loyalties before national ones. At any rate the Ziphites, probably hoping to gain some favor from Saul, traveled to Gibeah (some 25-30 miles) to betray David's whereabouts to Saul.

The precise location of Hachilah in verse 19 is unknown. A suggestion has been described by Conder (Tent Work), who writes,

Between the ridge of El Kolah (Hachilah) and the neighborhood of Maon there is a great gorge called "the Valley of the Rocks," a narrow but deep chasm, impassable except by a detour of many miles, so that Saul might have stood within sight of David, yet quite unable to overtake his enemy; and to this "cliff of division" (sela-hammahlekoth)

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the name Malaky now applies, a word closely approaching the Hebrew Mahlekoth. The neighborhood is seamed with many torrent beds, but there is no other place near Maon where cliffs such as are to be inferred from the word sela are to be found.

-- Deane & Kirk, Studies in the First Book of Samuel

Some believe that 1 Samuel 26:1-3 is a duplicate of this narrative, but there are enough differences to make one realize that the Ziphites simply betrayed David twice. In both chapters, this story is placed just prior to incidents in which David has Saul in his power and chooses to spare Saul's life (24: and 26:4-25). Jeshimon is probably not a proper name, but a word used for barren desert (e.g., Dt. 32:10). In verse 24 "Arabah" is the name given to the rift-like valley of which the Dead Sea forms a part.

Still paranoid, Saul did not want another wild goose chase, so he asked for more details, but when he arrived David had moved south to the wilderness of Maon. Seeing David before him, Saul divided his forces so as to cut off all hope of escape. Thus, although Saul would have had to make a detour of some miles in order to get round the gorge at either end, David's final escape was seemingly impossible. The pursuit became more and more tense, and David was surely to be caught when, providentially, a Philistine raid necessitated Saul's presence in another place. The rock mentioned in verse 28 no doubt was a landmark whose name became linked with this story. David continued on to Engedi, an oasis ten miles north of Masada by the Dead Sea. These chapters with David in constant flight are reminiscent of Matthew 8:20 -- "...the foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head."

B. The Lesson of God's Providential Miracles

Saul's near-capture of David teaches that however close Saul came to capturing David, he could not in the last resort thwart God's plans for him. On this occasion he would have succeeded but God used the Philistines to rescue David! Both David and the Philistines were viewed as Saul's enemies, and no doubt the Philistines viewed both David and Saul as their enemies. David, for his part, treated the Philistines as enemies, but did his best to evade Saul, not to fight him. David wanted to do nothing that would alienate his own fellow countrymen. It requires an act of faith to believe that God is overruling in human affairs. Often His purpose can only be seen as we look backward. Not till David had become king would the Israelites as a whole have been able to interpret this Philistine raid as the act of God.

The event is also a good example of a typical biblical miracle. Many miracles were not supernatural events as such -- a Philistine raid was, unhappily, an everyday affair -- but the miracle lay in the timing of them. If the Philistines had attacked one day afterwards, David would have been captured and no doubt summarily executed by Saul. The raid happened just at the right time for David. Such an escape will have caused him deep gratitude to God and also strengthened his faith in God. To Saul, however, the same event was a sign, if he had the insight to recognize it, that God was not on his side in his relentless hostility to David. It is more likely, however, that he put all the blame on the Philistines for David's escape and made no attempt to see God's purpose in the sequence of events.

- Payne, 1 and 2 Samuel

Verse 29 speaks again of the "strongholds". Aharoni, in *The Land of the Bible*, identifies this place with the mountainous fortress made famous later by Herod, called Masada, which was on the most direct route David would have taken to Moab, having crossed the Dead Sea in the shallow area opposite the Lisan. Masada is situated opposite this ford (1 Sam. 22:4-5; 23:14; 24:1). Iron Age sherds found at Masada indicate that even in the Israelite period this natural fortress had been in use.

V. DAVID SPARES SAUL AT ENGEDI 24:1-22

A. He Cuts Saul's Robe 24:1-7

1. The Geography

The hot and dry wilderness of Judea, the Jeshimon (1 Sam. 23:24; 26:1) is an area of arid soil and naked rocks which has been a refuge for fugitives from society throughout history. The Judean wilderness is never more than twelve and one-half miles wide, and the cities of Jerusalem

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and Hebron are within easy reach of any spot in the wilderness. On its borders are such well-known oases as Jericho and Engedi (1 Sam.23:29). Engedi itself is the largest oasis on the western shore of the Dead Sea. It is watered by a spring which causes narrow green belts of vegetation to spring up, yet the region around it is anything but fruitful. Engedi means "Fountain of the Goat" and is a place where wild goats have always been plentiful. Situated in about the center of the western shore of the Dead Sea, this spring bursts forth in an abundant stream from a narrow platform of bare limestone. The cliffs surrounding the spring rise to the height of two thousand feet above the sea. They are scarred with ravines which are full of caves.

2. The Event

Saul took 3,000 men -- the story-teller emphasizes the odds in favor of Saul -- and moved in on David at Engedi. Stopping at a cave used for a sheepfold Saul turned in and laid aside his outer robe. David and his men were already in the cave, hiding. The cavern was as dark as midnight, and the best eye could not have seen five steps inward; but one who had been inside for a time and was looking outward toward the entrance could have observed with perfect distinctness all that took place in that direction. David's men urged him to kill Saul but David merely cut part of the robe.

David's men believed that God had arranged matters so that Saul was at their mercy and he deserved to be killed. Verse 4 may mean the anointing of David, or their interpretation of the providence of the situation. David must have been very tempted to listen to such an argument. David's reproof of his men was based on his view that Saul was the Lord's anointed, the chosen king, whose life was sacrosanct. Later in 2 Samuel 1:1-16 David executed the Amalekite because he had killed the Lord's anointed. It was not so much familial love or generosity that checked David but respect for the divine will expressed in Saul's position.

Why David cut off a piece of Saul's robe may be explained by his later remorse. The loss of a piece of his robe would have made the king look ridiculous (see the insult of 2 Sam. 10:4). Another explanation may be that David suddenly saw it as a symbolic action since he no doubt knew of the rending of Samuel's robe by Saul (15:27-28). To take a piece of the royal robe could have been interpreted as a desire to steal from Saul the royal position.

It was dramatic irony that David's narrow escape in the wilderness of Maon should be immediately followed by Saul's narrow escape near Engedi. There was this major difference: Saul had never had David in his hands, but now David was actually in a position to kill Saul. Saul would never have let such a chance slip by; David could and did. Basically we have a portrait of contrasting temperaments -- Saul suspicious and vindictive but yet impulsive; David more deliberate, more magnanimous, and free from personal malice. -- Payne, 1 and 2 Samuel

B. David Defends Himself and Rebukes Saul 24:8-15

For David to confront Saul was the height of courage. The fact that he had not killed Saul but only cut off part of his robe when he could easily have killed him, proved that he was not Saul's enemy.

Holding up the trophy of his restraint, with natural eloquence and warm persuasiveness David addressed Saul. Standing on the summit of some rock in the wilderness, David took the opportunity of touching the heart of his enemy

...with words hurried, but expressive of his innermost feelings, and showing himself full of humility, oppressed by unutterable sorrows, bowed down by the feeling of his powerlessness, yet inspirited by the consciousness of a noble deed.

-- The Pulpit Commentary

David used a six-fold argument:

- 1. You are listening to lies.**
- 2. I could have killed you, but did not.**
- 3. The cut robe is a symbol of my restraint and innocence.**
- 4. God will avenge but I will not harm you.**
- 5. Wicked people cannot change their nature. If I had really been a rebel I could not have resisted the chance to kill you, the king.**
- 6. I am really insignificant and unimportant.**

C. Saul Repents Again 24:16-22

Saul wept and admitted his sin and David's superior moral character. Surprisingly Saul admitted David would one day be king (v.20). Apparently Saul had his lucid moments and maybe in a sense he was giving his approval to David's succession to the throne. He must long have felt that God's blessing had departed from him, and brooding perpetually over Samuel's words, knew in his heart that his kingdom would be given to one so worthy of it and so manifestly protected and blessed by God. He therefore made David swear that he "will not cut off my descendants after me."

But Saul was not to be trusted for long and there was no suggestion that David return to the royal court. The two men went their separate ways. However, the position of David was improved for the present by Saul's "reconciliation" with him. Verse 22 tells us that David and his men "went up to the stronghold." The difficulty of obtaining food in Engedi for 600 men would be difficult except for a very short period. On the other side of the desert, however, they were in pastoral country and the large ranchers probably felt more free to send them supplies.

CONCLUSION:

A. David's Character Traits

1. Respect.

David had tremendous respect for the anointed of God; he could distinguish between the person and the position. David later demanded the same respect for the office when he held it. Today this is a problem in our country. Criticism and disrespect are not the same thing. Always "honor the king" (1 Peter 2:17).

2. Forgiveness.

David seemed to have a right for revenge, to hold a grudge, and to be bitter, but he forgave Saul and risked his life to appeal to Saul once more. For a believer, our fellowship with the Lord depends upon our forgiving one another (Mt. 6:14).

3. Independence.

He was responsible for the men who remained with him. He led them according to the Lord, not according to their opinions.

4. Tender Conscience.

He only cut the robe and then apologized.

5. Willingness to Confront.

6. Ability to State His Case -- Persuasive.

7. Humility.

B. Saul's Conduct

Still, Saul had only remorse. Repentance always brings a change in character and actions, but you don't see that in Saul. He did recognize that it was God's will for David to be king. Saul was still in rebellion against God.

A thousand years later Jesus also had reason for revenge but He gave His life for those who had crucified Him. "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

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QUESTIONS FOR LESSON 11

READ LESSON 10:

1. List the incidents in Lesson 10 that could have made David bitter.

2. What was new or interesting to you in the notes?

READ CHAPTER 25:

3. What indicates that Samuel was highly esteemed?

4. Describe in your own words the character, class, and family of Nabal.

5. Describe the character of Abigail and tell what you most admire about her.

6. What service did David and his men render to the farmers and shepherds in 14-17?

7. What did David request of Nabal and what was Nabal's response?

8. How does this story show David's natural inclinations and highlight his restraint with Saul?

9. Do you think Abigail betrayed or helped her husband? What would you have done?

10. (a) How did David reward Abigail later on? (b) What happened to Nabal?

READ CHAPTER 26:

11. Why did David spare Saul's life?

12. What did David take from Saul this time?

13. Read 26:6 and 1 Chronicles 2:16. What relation to David were Joab, Abashai, and Asahel?

14. Read 1 Peter 2:13-16. How does this passage relate to the story of 1 Samuel 26:?