

Exegetical Notes – 1 Samuel 23:1-14

Prepared by Charles H. Jensen for Cornerstone Fellowship
101 Kylies Road, Coatesville, PA 19320
610-384-1375
charleshjensen@aol.com

(David has fled from King Saul. Saul is pursuing David with the intention of killing him. Over the next two weeks we will look at two more sections of Scripture that deal with David's attempts to escape Saul. These are two more troubling passages because they are based on deception and deceit. To protect himself from Saul, David, the man after God's heart, lies and deceives others. Saul pursues David to prevent God's judgment from falling on him, which is impossible. No one consulted God and no one followed the law of God. Innocent people died. David relied upon his own understanding to protect himself from Saul. Saul relentlessly pursued David to alter the declared will of God. God protected David at every turn, and God's will cannot be altered by the action of Saul. However, there are valuable lessons for us in these passages.)

1 Samuel 23:1-14

Verses 1-3

¹ When David was told, "Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are looting the threshing floors," ² he inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?"

The LORD answered him, "Go, attack the Philistines and save Keilah."

³ But David's men said to him, "Here in Judah we are afraid. How much more, then, if we go to Keilah against the Philistine forces!"

- David took refuge from Saul in the forest of Hereth. With him were 400 men who were also disgruntled by King Saul. There, he learned that the Philistines were attacking the city of Keilah and looting the threshing floors. Keilah was a Hebrew city in the territory of Judah. David was from the tribe of Judah. The city was not far from the place where David was held up. After the men of the area had separated the grain from the chaff on the threshing floors, the Philistines would raid the threshing floors and steal the grain.

- David “inquired of YHWH.” He asked God if he should defend Keilah against the Philistines. The text says that YHWH answered David by telling him to defend Keilah.
- When David announced his intention to defend Keilah, “his 400 men” refused to do so saying that they were safe at Hereth and saw no reason to risk their safety to defend the town.

Verses 4-6

⁴ Once again David inquired of the LORD, and the LORD answered him, “Go down to Keilah, for I am going to give the Philistines into your hand.” ⁵ So David and his men went to Keilah, fought the Philistines and carried off their livestock. He inflicted heavy losses on the Philistines and saved the people of Keilah. ⁶ (Now Abiathar son of Ahimelek had brought the ephod down with him when he fled to David at Keilah.)

- Again, David inquired of God asking what he should do given the reluctance of his men. God’s instructions did not change. So, David led his men against the Philistines in defense of Keilah. They drove the Philistines back, secured the area, and took the livestock of the Philistines. They inflicted heavy losses on the Philistines.
- The parenthetical remark about the ephod is important. Abiathar is the son of Ahimelek, Israel’s High Priest, whom Saul had killed along with all of Israel’s other priests. Abiathar is the only priest left and, by default, Israel’s High Priest. The ephod is the garment worn by the priest to symbolize his authority. This means that the center of religious authority has shifted from Saul’s presence to David’s. Saul has lost God’s favor and God’s favor now rests with David.

Verses 7-8

⁷ Saul was told that David had gone to Keilah, and he said, “God has delivered him into my hands, for David has imprisoned himself by entering a town with gates and bars.” ⁸ And Saul called up all his forces for battle, to go down to Keilah to besiege David with his men.

- When Saul heard that David had moved to protect Keilah, he rejoiced, believing that God had delivered David into his hands because David is now hold up in a walled city.
- Saul, therefore, besieges one of his own cities, Keilah, to capture David. Besiegement is a military strategy in which the city is surrounded and

deprived of food and water until it surrenders. The whole population of the city is forced to suffer. Saul inflicted punishment upon his own people in order to capture and kill David.

Verses 9-12

⁹ When David learned that Saul was plotting against him, he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod." ¹⁰ David said, "LORD, God of Israel, your servant has heard definitely that Saul plans to come to Keilah and destroy the town on account of me. ¹¹ Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me to him? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard? LORD, God of Israel, tell your servant."

And the LORD said, "He will."

¹² Again David asked, "Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me and my men to Saul?"

And the LORD said, "They will."

- When David learned that Saul was planning to besiege Keilah, he called the priest and again inquired of God. (This is probably how he inquired of God before. David is observing the proper respect for the office of priest.) Though Saul said that God had moved to entrap David, the comment is ingenuous. He just killed all of God's priests, including the High Priest. He believed that God wanted what he wanted. He did not seek to know what God wanted; he simply assumed that his will was God's will.
- David wanted to know if Saul would really besiege Keilah and what the people of the town would do if Saul did besiege the city. He was told that Saul would besiege the city and that the people of Keilah would turn him over to Saul if he stayed there.

Verses 13-14

¹³ So David and his men, about six hundred in number, left Keilah and kept moving from place to place. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he did not go there.

¹⁴ David stayed in the wilderness strongholds and in the hills of the Desert of Ziph. Day after day Saul searched for him, but God did not give David into his hands.

- David left Keilah. He did not stay in any one place for very long. When Saul heard that David was no longer at Keilah, he did not besiege the city.

- David moved from place to place in the desert of Ziph and though Saul searched for him, he could not find him.
- David's army increased from 400 to 600 men as a result of his action to defend Keilah.
- God showed David that David could trust God to move on his behalf and defend him. Perhaps, the presence of the High Priest reminded David to lean on God.

(These exegetical notes are the foundational study for the sermon based on 1 Samuel 23:1-14. They have been prepared by the Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. All rights are reserved by Cornerstone Fellowship & The Reverend Doctor Charles H. Jensen. They are used here by permission.)