

## DAVID INQUIRES OF THE LORD

1 Samuel 23:1-29

Key Verse: 23:4

*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.”*

David was running for his life moving from place to place in the Judean deserts. Many people betrayed him, even the ones whom he saved from their enemy. He felt alone. But David did not feel sorry for himself. What did he do? He prayed to God. Before making a decision, he would first inquire of the Lord. He followed God’s directions. He was growing to be a man after God’s own heart. May God help us to learn from David and become men and women of prayer and faith!

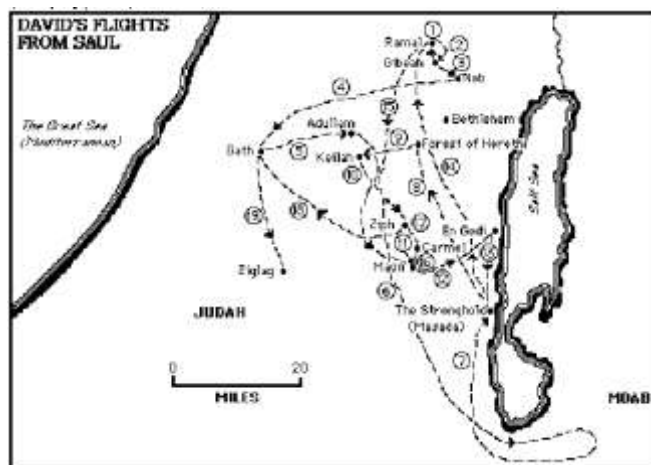
**First, David inquires of the Lord** (1-6). In chapter 22, God told David not to stay in the stronghold of Moab. He challenged him to return to Judah and continue his desert training to become a shepherd king (22:5). So David returned to the forest of Hereth, located southwest of Bethlehem. What happened when he was in the forest? News came to him that the Philistines were fighting against Keilah and looting the threshing floors (1).

Keilah (meaning “fortress”) was a city in the lowlands of Judah (Jos 15:44). It was located to the east of the Philistine city of Gath. What was David’s reaction to the news? He was a fugitive, running for his life. He had enough troubles of his own. And it was King Saul’s responsibility to protect the city. But David did not ignore the plight of the people in Keilah. They had worked hard all year and were about to harvest their crop. But the Philistine soldiers came with weapons and carts to take away their grain. How would they survive without the food? They would have nothing to feed their children. David could not just sit around knowing their problem. He did not remain selfish. He had compassion towards the people of Keilah.



So what did David do? Look at verse 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.”* David’s heart was in the right place. He wanted to help the people in Keilah. But he still wanted to ask God about his plan. He wanted to follow God’s ways, not his own. God was pleased with David’s shepherd’s heart for the people of Keilah. God told him, “Go ahead, David, save Keilah.”

However, David was not alone at that time. A group of 400 people had joined him when he was in Adullam and he became their leader. Now the number had grown to be six hundred (13). God told David to go ahead with his plan to attack the Philistines who were looting Keilah when he inquired of the Lord about it. But now his men wanted to give him a second opinion. They said, “Here in Judah we are afraid. How much more then, if we go to Keilah against the Philistine forces!” (3) David and his men were in the safety of the forest of Hereth. Keilah was close to the Philistine territory. David’s ragtag army consisted of misfits with all kinds of problems in life. They didn’t think it was wise to pick a fight with the mighty Philistines when it was the job of King Saul to protect his people. They saw another potential danger. Attacking the Philistines would expose David to King Saul and jeopardize his safety. They were also concerned that the people of Keilah might betray David and hand him over to Saul (and they were right).



David could have followed to his advisors’ suggestion. What they said made a lot of sense strategically. He would be more popular among his men if he listened to them. After all, it was their consensus. But David didn’t follow their advice, even though it was reasonable. He did not rebuke them either for thinking selfishly. He did not argue with them. They were his companions and coworkers. He did not agree with what they were telling him. But he knew they loved him and were concerned about his safety as well as theirs.

So what did David do? He went to God once again to inquire of him. He wanted to do what’s right before God, not what was popular among his men. David showed spiritual leadership in doing this. Look at verse 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.”* David inquired of the Lord—this phrase is repeated in this chapter. And this was not a one-time, temporary thing he did. I found that David often inquired of the Lord throughout his life (e.g., 1Sa 30:8; 2Sa 5:23; 2Sa 21:1).

Again and again, David inquired of the Lord. What does this really mean? David wanted to follow God’s directions, not his own desires or people’s popular opinions. From our prayer study last year, we learned that the real purpose of our prayer is to make our desires align with God’s will. Jesus set a perfect example of this in his prayer in Gethsemane. Jesus did not want to die as a young man. Who would want to be tortured, beaten and hung on a cross, naked before family and friends, until he bleeds to death, when he is totally innocent of any wrongdoing? But Jesus prayed to God asking for the strength to obey his will. “Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will” (Mk 14:36). Msn. Isaac and Mary have been praying that they may follow God’s guidance for their future

mission life. I pray that God may show them his way by opening and closing doors for them.

What was the result of the battle in Keilah? Look at verse 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.*

**Second, David inquires of the Lord again (7-18).** Look at verse 7. *Saul was told that David had gone to Keilah, and he said, “God has handed him over to me, for David has imprisoned himself by entering a town with gates and bars.”* When King Saul heard about how David was fighting the Philistines in Keilah, what was his reaction? He didn’t appreciate David who was doing the job that was entrusted to him. He did not thank God for using David to defend one of his cities from the enemy. Instead, Saul said, *“God has handed him over to me, for David has imprisoned himself by entering a town with gates and bars”* (7). He was happy to know that David boxed himself in in the town of Keilah which had gates and bars. He called up all his forces for battle to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men (8). David had saved the town with God’s help. But King Saul tried to kill David there, thinking he trapped himself in the town. What is most appalling is that Saul thought God was handing David over to him. What a self-serving way of thinking! He was pursuing his own selfish and evil desires and presumed that God was helping him. This was the mind of King Saul.



Sadly some people make the same mistake. They have something they really want to do out of their selfish motive. They would say, “It seems God’s will for me to do this.” They are so obsessed to do what they want, they fall into an illusion that God is backing them up. This is very different from what David did. In his case, he wanted to help the people of Keilah. It was an unselfish thing he decided to do. His heart was right before God. Still, he didn’t become presumptuous. He went to God to inquire of the Lord. And he followed God’s directions. We shouldn’t be like Saul. We should not make a selfish or self-centered decision and use God’s name to rationalize it.

An intelligence report came to David that the king was plotting against him. King Saul called up all his forces to come to Keilah to capture and kill him. What was David’s reaction? Look at verse 9. *When David learned that Saul was plotting against him, he said to Abiathar the priest, “Bring the ephod.”* Now Abiathar son of Ahimelech was the lone survivor of the massacre of the priests in Nob. He had brought the ephod down with him when he fled to David at Keilah (6). With the priest at his side, David once again inquired of the Lord. *David said, “O LORD, God of Israel, your servant has heard definitely that Saul plans to come to Keilah and destroy the town on account of me. Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me to him? Will Saul come down, as your servant*

*has heard? O LORD, God of Israel, tell your servant*” (10-11). He also asked God the question, *“Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me and my men to Saul?”* David prayed to God asking the Lord two specific questions: (1) Will Saul come down for sure? (2) If so, will the citizens of Keilah surrender him and his men to Saul? God’s answer to him was “Yes” for both questions. It was time for him and his men to move on. And that is what they did. They left Keilah and kept on moving from place to place (13).

David depended on God in times of distress and uncertainty. He did not calculate this and that, based on his own logic or people’s opinions. He had rescued the people of Keilah from the looting forces of the Philistines. But he did not assume that the citizens of the town would automatically support him. He did not depend on people. He depended on God. How did God protect his servant David? Look at verse 14. *David stayed in the desert 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.*



It must have been extremely difficult for David to wander in the desert. Day after day, the king was searching for him to kill him. He knew that God was with him, but he needed a friend to be there with him and comfort him. And that is exactly what his best friend did. Jonathan came to encourage him. While he was at Horesh in the Desert of Ziph, David learned that King Saul had come out to take his life (15). Saul was relentless in pursuing David. It was at this time of an extreme distress for David, his friend Jonathan visited him at Horesh. Verse 16 says that Jonathan helped David find strength in God. He said to David, *“Don’t be afraid. My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this”* (17). Jonathan did not offer mere words of sympathy to his friend. He helped David find strength in God. He told David that God would surely make him king over Israel, despite the present circumstances. By this time, David might have wondered when he would be king. It had been a while since he was anointed by Samuel. But he was living the life of a fugitive. He might have begun to doubt God’s will for his life. Jonathan assured him that God would make it happen. He just had to hold on to God’s promise. We learn from Jonathan that we should help our friends find strength in God. It is easy for us to say something to make them feel good, but not really help them find strength in God. But a true friend should make his friend stronger in God.

Once again, David and Jonathan made a covenant before the Lord before saying goodbye. Their friendship was based on their faith in God. They made a covenant before the Lord once more for the last time. They would not see each other again.

**Third, God protects David (19-29).** King Saul's secret agents and informants were everywhere. This time it was the people of Ziph. They went to Saul at Gibeah and informed the king that David was hiding in their town. They said to Saul, *"Now, O king, come down whenever it pleases you to do so, and we will be responsible for handing him over to the king"* (20). They were obviously expecting big rewards from the king. Saul was pleased. He told them to go back and watch David and provide more specific information that would lead to his capture (23). Then Saul and his men came to the area in hot pursuit of David. David was told about it and he went to hide in the Desert of Maon. When Saul heard this, he went there in pursuit of David (24-25). His pursuit of David was relentless.



This time, Saul and his men were very close to capturing David. *Saul was going along one side of the mountain, and David and his men were on the other side, hurrying to get away from Saul. As Saul and his forces were closing in on David and his men to capture them, a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Come quickly! The Philistines are raiding the land."* Then Saul broke off his pursuit of David and went to meet the Philistines (26-28). Whew, it was so close! But God protected his servant David, though the game wasn't over yet. The next stop would be a place called En Gedi.

We learned today that David followed God's ways by inquiring of the Lord. We know David as a brave warrior, a musician and a poet. We should remember also that he was a man of prayer. He inquired of the Lord again and again. When life throws a curve ball at us, we may feel very alone. There seems to be no one to turn to for help. But we learn from David we can always come to God in prayer. As he helped David, he will surely help us!