

CHAPTER 23

INTRODUCTION TO FIRST SAMUEL 23

This chapter gives an account of David's relieving Keilah, when it had like to have fallen into the hands of the Philistines, (^{<0231>}1 Samuel 23:1-6); and of Saul's design to surprise him there, which David having notice of, and inquiring of the Lord, departed from thence; which when Saul heard of, he forbore to come forth, (^{<0237>}1 Samuel 23:7-13); and of David's being in the wilderness of Ziph, where, in a wood there, he had an interview with Jonathan, (^{<0234>}1 Samuel 23:14-18); and of the Ziphites offering to deliver him up to Saul, for which he commends them, and gives them instructions how they should behave to him in that affair, (^{<0239>}1 Samuel 23:19-23); and of his seeking him in the wilderness of Maon, where David and his men were in great danger of being taken; which was prevented by the news of the Philistines invading the land coming to Saul just at the nick of time, (^{<0234>}1 Samuel 23:24-29).

Ver. 1. *Then they told David*, etc.] Either the men of Keilah sent to him, being near them, or some well wishers of theirs, and of their country, acquainted him with their case:

saying, behold, the Philistines fight against Keilah; had laid siege to it, being a fortified place, (^{<0237>}1 Samuel 23:7); it was a city in the tribe of Judah, on the borders of the Philistines; of which (see Gill on "^{<0654>}Joshua 15:44");

and they rob the threshing floors; took away the corn upon them, which they were threshing and winnowing, which were usually done without the city for the sake of wind, (see ^{<0761>}Judges 6:11 ^{<0810>}Ruth 3:2,15); it was harvest time when the three mighty men came to David in the cave of Adullam, and so now it might be the time of threshing, harvest being over, (see ^{<0221>}1 Samuel 22:1); compared with (^{<0233>}2 Samuel 23:13).

Ver. 2. *Therefore David inquired of the Lord, saying, shall I go and smite these Philistines?* etc.] For though David was well disposed to serve his country, and was desirous of freeing them from their enemies the Philistines, he might have some doubts in his mind whether it would be

right for him to engage with them now; partly because he could not act under a commission from his prince, Saul the king; and partly because he had such a small number of forces with him, that it might be hazardous for him to attack the armies of the Philistines with them, and attempt to raise the siege of Keilah; and therefore he thought it advisable, as doubtless it was, to inquire of the Lord what was his mind and will in this matter: how and by what means he inquired it is not said, very probably it was by the prophet Gad, who was with him, (^{<09275>}1 Samuel 22:5); for as for Abiathar, he was not yet come with the ephod, the Urim and Thummim, to inquire by them, (^{<09276>}1 Samuel 23:6); though some think that is observed there to show in what way David did inquire, namely, by Urim and Thummim; and so Kimchi and Abarbinel understand it; and it is supposed that he came to David when he was about Keilah, and near unto it, and so before he came thither, and time enough for him to inquire by him whether he should go thither or not:

and the Lord said unto David, go, and smite the Philistines, and save Keilah; which was not only giving him leave to go, and signifying it was his mind and will he should; but that he should be successful, and rout the Philistines, and raise the siege of Keilah, and save the city from falling into their hands.

Ver. 3. *And David's men said unto him, behold, we be afraid here in Judah,* etc.] Of Saul and his army falling upon them, and crushing them, though they were in the tribe of Judah, where they had many friends, and in the heart of that tribe:

how much more then if we come to Keilah; which, though in the same tribe, yet in the further parts of it, and on the borders of the Philistines: and there engage

against the armies of the Philistines? too numerous and powerful for them, and so by this means be driven out of their place of safety, the forest of Hareth, where they could hide themselves upon occasion; to be exposed not only to the Philistines, before them, on the edge of their country, from whence they could have re-enforcements easily, but to Saul and his army behind them; and so, being between two fires, would be in danger of being cut off.

Ver. 4. *Then David inquired of the Lord yet again,* etc.] Not for his own sake, who firmly believed it was the will of God he should go and succeed,

but for the sake of his men, and to remove the doubts and fears that hung on their minds:

and the Lord answered him, and said, arise, go down to Keilah; immediately, make no stay, nor hesitate about it, but go with all haste to the relief of the place:

for I will deliver the Philistines into thine hands; which is still more explicit, and is a promise not only of delivering Keilah out of the hands of the Philistines, but of delivering them into David's hands, and so of an entire victory; and therefore none of David's men had anything to fear after such a declaration of the will of God.

Ver. 5. *So David and his men went to Keilah,* etc.] Animated by a commission from God, and a promise of success by him:

and fought with the Philistines; encamped before Keilah:

and brought away their cattle; which they had brought with them for the support of their army; or having routed them, they pursued them into their own country, and brought off their cattle from thence:

and smote them with a great slaughter; killed great numbers of them, and put the rest to flight:

so David saved the inhabitants of Keilah; from falling into the hands of the Philistines, by timely raising the siege of the city.

Ver. 6. *And it came to pass, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David to Keilah,* etc.] Either when he was there, or near the place:

[that] he came down with an ephod in his hand; not with a linen ephod on his back, which the priests in common wore, but the ephod with the Urim and Thummim in his hand, which was peculiar to the high priest; and his father the high priest being dead, it belonged to him, and therefore he took care to bring it with him; though the words may be literally rendered, "the ephod came down in his hand",^{f461} as it were by chance, and not with design; and so some Jewish interpreters^{f462} understand it, that in his fright and flight, among his garments and other things he took hold of to carry with him, and not minding well what he took, this happened to be, being so ordered by the providence of God; though the Targum renders it,

"the ephod he made to descend in his hand,"

or brought it in his hand; and so Kimchi and Abarbinel observe it may be interpreted, though they seem to incline to the other sense.

Ver. 7. *And it was told Saul that David was come to Keilah*, etc.] No doubt it was told him what he came thither for, to relieve it, and deliver it out of the hands of the Philistines, and what success he had; which one would have thought would have reconciled his mind to him, and made him think well of them; but instead of that, it only led him to contrive mischief against him:

and Saul said, God hath delivered him into mine hand; as if the success he had given to David was against, him, and in favour of Saul:

for he is shut in, by entering into a town that hath gates and bars; while he betook himself to caves, and fields, and woods, he had no great hopes of finding him out, and coming up with him, and seizing him; but now he had got into a fortified place, enclosed with walls, and that had gates to it, kept bolted and barred; when he brought his army against it, and surrounded it, he imagined he would not be able to get out, and escape his hands.

Ver. 8. *And Saul called all the people together to war*, etc.] Or “caused [them] to hear”, ^{f463} summoned them by an herald, whom he sent into all parts of the kingdom to proclaim war, and require them in his name to attend him; which was the prerogative of a king to do:

to go down to Keilah, to besiege David and his men; that was what he privately intended, but the pretence was to make war against the Philistines.

Ver. 9. *And David knew that Saul secretly practised mischief against him*, etc.] That is, plotted and contrived it, formed schemes in order to do him mischief, giving out one thing, and designing another; so he pretended war against the Philistines, but his intention was to come against Keilah, and take David there:

and he said to Abiathar the priest, bring hither the ephod; not for David to put on, but for the priest himself, that being clothed with it, and the Urim and Thummim in it, he might inquire for him of the Lord.

Ver. 10. *Then said David*, etc.] By the priest, for it was he that put the questions for and in the name of the inquirer:

O Lord God of Israel; the great Jehovah, the covenant God of his people, who always has a merciful regard unto them:

thy servant hath certainly heard; had good information of it, on which he could depend:

that Saul seeketh to come to Keilah; that was his intention and resolution:

to destroy the city for my sake; to besiege it, and demolish it, if that was necessary, in order to take him.

Ver. 11. *Will the men of Keilah deliver me up into his hands? will Saul come down, as thy servant hath heard?* etc.] That is, if David continued there, which is the supposition all proceeds upon. The questions are not orderly put, as may easily be observed, the last should have been first; which shows some perturbation of mind David was in upon hearing the design of Saul against him:

O Lord God of Israel, I beseech thee, tell thy servant; give an answer by Urim and Thummim, as he did:

and the Lord said, he will come down; if David abode there; that was in his thoughts, in his purpose and design, which the Lord, being omniscient, full well knew, who knows all future contingencies: hence the Jews^{f464} gather, that two things are not to be asked together; and if they are asked, only answer is made to one, and the answer is only made to that which it was proper to ask first; and that which is asked out of order should be asked again, which was the case here, as follows.

Ver. 12. *Then said David, will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul?* etc.] That is, the lords and great men of the place, the governor of the city, and the heads of it, the chief magistrates in it:

and the Lord said, they will deliver [thee] up: that is, provided he stayed there; for the Lord knew the dispositions and affections of their minds, that they were inclined to do it, and would do it, if he continues among them till Saul came down; which showed the great ingratitude of this people to their deliverer.

Ver. 13. *Then David and his men, [which were] about six hundred*, etc.] Having had an increase of two hundred since he was at the cave of Adullam, (^{4021E}1 Samuel 22:1,2), and upon his relief of Keilah, (^{4021E}1 Samuel

23:5); so that he sustained no loss of men by fighting with the Philistines, but had an addition to his small forces:

arose and departed out of Keilah, and went whithersoever they could go; not knowing whither they should go, having no particular place in view; but went where they thought they could be safest, or that appeared the most proper place for them; so the Targum,

“they went to a place which was fit to go unto;”

which was fittest for their purpose, and most for their safety and security, be it where it would:

and it was told Saul that David was escaped from Keilah; very likely some of the inhabitants informed him of it, since they were disposed to deliver David to him, had he stayed among them, and Saul had come down:

and he forbore to go forth: from the place where he was, in order to come to Keilah,

Ver. 14. *And David abode in the wilderness in strong holds,* etc.] In the wilderness of Ziph, in high and strong rocks there, as it seems to be explained by what follows:

and remained in a mountain in the wilderness of Ziph; which had its name from a city in the tribe of Judah, of which (see Gill on “⁰⁶⁵⁵Joshua 15:55”);

and Saul sought him every day; for though he did not go forth from the place where he was to Keilah, yet hearing which way he went, and whereabouts he lurked, he sought after him continually, if haply he might find him:

but God delivered him not into his hand: which suggests, that it was only the providence of God that secured him, or, in all probability, such was the diligence of Saul, that he would have found him out, and he must have fallen into his hands, as he expected.

Ver. 15. *And David saw that Saul was come out to seek his life,* etc.] Either he saw him with his bodily eyes from the top of the mountain where he was, (⁰⁹²³⁴1 Samuel 23:14); or he perceived, he understood by information given him by his friends, it may be by Jonathan, or by spies he sent to observe his motions:

and David [was] in the wilderness of Ziph in a wood; where he and his men could hide themselves among the trees in it; sometimes he was in a mountain in this wilderness, and sometimes in a wood, where he thought himself the safest; thus was this great man obliged to shift about for his safety.

Ver. 16. *And Jonathan, Saul's son, arose*, etc.] And came from Gibeah, which, according to Bunting^{f465}, was twenty two miles from the place where David was:

and went to David into the wood: having had intelligence where he was, this being a proper place to have an interview with him privately:

and strengthened his hand in God; and his heart too, his hand of faith to lay hold on God, as his covenant God and lean and rely upon him; he strengthened him in his power and in his providence, and in his promises to him; the Targum is,

“he strengthened him in the Word of the Lord;”

not only in his word and promise, but in Christ the essential Word of God, who should spring from him according to the flesh.

Ver. 17. *And he said unto him, fear not*, etc.] Distrust not the power, providence, and promises of God, nor dread the wrath of Saul, or fear falling into his hands:

for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; to lay hold on him, seize him, and do him any hurt:

and thou shalt be king over Israel; meaning after the death of his father; which he knew either by some special revelation made to him; or rather by being informed he had been anointed by Samuel, and which he had either from Samuel or from David himself; and this he most firmly believed, though David was now in so low a condition:

and I shall be next unto thee; not succeed him in the kingdom; but if living when he came to the throne, he should be the second man in civil affairs, as he now was, and that he should be content with:

and that also Saul my father knoweth; having knowledge of the anointing of David by Samuel; or he might, and did conclude this from various

circumstances, that David was his neighbour Samuel had told him of, God had given his kingdom to, (~~4953~~ 1 Samuel 15:28).

Ver. 18. *And they two made a covenant before the Lord*, etc.] Renewed the covenant they had before made in the name and fear of God, and before him as a witness of it. Kimchi and Abarbinel interpret this phrase,

before the Lord, of the covenant being made before Abiathar, with the Urim and Thummim in his hand; and so Jerom ^{f466}, before Gad the prophet, and Abiathar who wore the ephod:

and David abode in the wood; being a proper place for him for secrecy and safety:

and Jonathan went to his house; in Gibeah; and these two dear and cordial friends never saw one another more, as is highly probable.

Ver. 19. *Then came up the Ziphites to Saul to Gibeah*, etc.] Who though he had been out in quest of David, yet was now returned to Gibeah, the place of his residence, and where he kept his court; and hither came the Ziphites, the inhabitants of Ziph, in the wilderness of which David hid himself, with a proposal to deliver him to Saul; for though they were of the same tribe with David, yet being terrified with what Saul had done to Nob, they thought it best for their own security to inform Saul where he was, and make an offer to deliver him to him. Some interpreters, as Kimchi, think that this was done before Jonathan was with Saul, and should be rendered, “the Ziphites had come up to Saul”; and hence it is before said, and David saw, etc. for he had heard that the Ziphites should say to Saul, that David had hid himself there; and at this time it was that David wrote the fifty ninth psalm, (~~4954~~ Psalm 54:1-7):

saying, doth not David hide himself with us in the strong holds in the wood; which is in the wilderness of Ziph, in their neighbourhood; they were informed he had hid himself there, and they thought it their duty to let the king know of it: and particularly

in the hill of Hachilah, which [is] on the south of Jeshimon? Hachilah is by Jerom ^{f467} called Echela; and he speaks of a village of that name seven miles from Eletheropolis, and of Jeshimon as ten miles from Jericho to the south, near the dead sea; on the top of this hill, which was an ascent of thirty furlongs or about four miles, Jonathan the high priest built a castle, and called it Masada, often spoken of by Josephus; who says ^{f468}, that

Herod built a wall around it of seven furlongs or about a mile, twelve cubits high, and eight broad, and thirty seven towers of fifty cubits stood in it.

Ver. 20. *Now therefore, O king, come down*, etc.] From Gibeah to Ziph, and the wilderness of it, where David was:

according to all the desires of thy soul to come down; to seize such a prey which he was greatly desirous of, and of nothing more so than of that according to Abarbinel, the sense is, that the thing was ready in whatever way he should desire it; if he chose to come down himself, and lay hold on him, they invite him to come down; but if he did not choose to come down himself, they would seize him, and bring him to him, and deliver him up into his hand, and so he would be under no necessity of going down after him:

and our part [shall be] to deliver him into the king's hand; this we will take upon us to do, and save the king the trouble of coming down.

Ver. 21. *And Saul said, blessed [be] ye of the Lord*, etc.] He highly commends them for the offer they made to him, blesses God for them, and desires the blessing of God upon them for it:

for ye have compassion on me; pitied him on account of the troubles he met with from his son-in-law, were sorry for him, and sympathized with him, which others did not, of which he complained, (⁴⁹²¹⁸1 Samuel 22:8).

Ver. 22. *Go, I pray you, prepare yet*, etc.] That is, go home, return to their habitations, and get things in a greater readiness for him; inquire more diligently after David, get more intelligence of him, and inform themselves more exactly about him:

and know and see his place where his haunt is; or “foot” ^{f469} is, where that steps and walks most frequently, not only get knowledge of it by information, but if they could get sight of it with their own eyes, that they might describe it more exactly:

[and] who hath seen him there; not only seen the place, but him in the place, and that often, that it may be certain it is the place he usually resorts to:

for it is told me [that] he dealeth very subtilly; sometimes he is seen in one place, and sometimes in another; he is here today, and elsewhere

tomorrow; and by such crafty methods it is not easy to know where the place is, and where to be found; this Saul had information of from some, who knew the methods David took to keep it unknown where it was; or “it says to me”; my heart says so to me, as R. Isaiah interprets it; my mind suggests this to me, knowing the man, that he uses such wiles as these: or “he said to me”, so Kimchi; when he was with me, and we were intimate, when I used to ask him how he smote the Philistines, so and so, and preserved himself from them; his answer was, “that he dealt very subtilly”, he used a good deal of craftiness; and so I imagine he does now.

Ver. 23. *See therefore, and take knowledge of all the lurking places where he hideth himself*, etc.] Which he most frequents, that ye may be able to describe them, and the way to them, and easily find them when necessary:

and come ye again to me with the certainty; of time and place, when and where he may be certainly found:

and I will go with you; upon such certain intelligence: it is very much he did not seize this opportunity, and go directly with them; for by this delay, David being informed of the Ziphites coming to Saul to betray him, had time to depart elsewhere:

and it shall come to pass, if he be in the land; in the land of Israel, or rather in the land that is in the tribe of Judah:

that I will search him out throughout all the thousands of Judah; through all the divisions of that tribe, which, as others, were divided into thousands, (see ³¹⁸²Micah 5:2).

Ver. 24. *And they arose, and went to Ziph, before Saul*, etc.] Not before his person, as if he went with them, and they before him leading the way; but they went thither before he went, to prepare things more exactly, and with more certainty, before he came, and in order to return to him again and go with him:

but David and his men [were] in the wilderness at Maon; for by the time the Ziphites returned home, David had intelligence of their design, and therefore removed from the wilderness of Ziph to the wilderness of Maon; which, though in the same tribe, was a distinct place; (see Gill on ⁴¹⁵⁵Joshua 15:55”);

in the plain on the south of Jeshimon; the same as in (~~0239~~-1 Samuel 23:19); only David was now farther to the south of it, and in a plain, whereas before he was on an hill.

Ver. 25. *And Saul also and his men went to seek [him]*, etc.] Whether the Ziphites returned to him with better intelligence, or sent him word where David was, is not said, however Saul with his army came out in search of him:

and they told David; or it was told him, that Saul was come in quest of him:

wherefore he came down into a rock; either into a cave in it, or he came down from the hill Hachilah to a plain or valley, in order to go up to a rock, the same with the mountain in (~~0236~~-1 Samuel 23:26):

and abode in the wilderness of Maon; in which was the rock or mountain he came to:

and when Saul heard [that], he pursued after David in the wilderness of Maon; for upon the intelligence of the Ziphites, he came out to seek for him in the wilderness of Ziph, but hearing that he was removed to the wilderness of Maon, he pursued him there.

Ver. 26. *And Saul went on this side of the mountain, and David and his men on that side of the mountain*, etc.] Saul with his army came to the very mountain where David and his men were, the one was on one side of it, and the other on the other side; there was only one mountain between them:

and David made haste to get away for fear of Saul; he fled on one side of the mountain, while Saul was pursuing him on the other, and hastening to get round unto him:

for Saul and his men compassed David and his men round about to take them; he took methods by dividing his troops, and sending them different ways, to surround David and his men, and had very near effected it.

Ver. 27. *But there came a messenger unto Saul*, etc.] From his court, by order of his council there; though the Jews ^{f470} say it was an angel from heaven; but be it which it will, it was certainly the providence of God that directed this affair, that a messenger should come to Saul just at that very time that David was like to fall into his hands:

saying, haste thee, and come, for the Philistines have invaded the land; were come into it, and spread themselves in it, as the word signifies, which expresses their numbers they had poured in, the force they came with, and the possessions they had already got; perhaps they had taken the advantage of Saul's departure in quest of David, to penetrate into the tribe of Benjamin, where his patrimony, residence, and court were, and which were liable to fall into their hands; and therefore his presence was immediately required, and haste was necessary.

Ver. 28. *Therefore Saul returned from pursuing after David,* etc.] Stopped short at once, as soon as ever he received the message:

and went against the Philistines; to stop them in their progress, and drive them out of his country:

therefore they called that place Selahammahlekoth, which signifies the rock of divisions. David and his men, very probably, gave it this name, not only because it divided between Saul and his men, and David and his men, when they were one on one side of it, and the other on the other side of it; but because Saul was, by the providence of God, divided and separated from David here, whereby he escaped falling into his hands. The Targum is,

“therefore they called that place the rock of division, the place where the heart of the king was divided to go here and there:”

he was divided in his own mind, and at a loss what to do; he was in two minds, as Jarchi says, and did not know which to follow, whether to return and deliver his country from the hands of the Philistines, or to pursue and take David; and others represent the soldiers of Saul as divided, some saying that since the son of Jesse was just falling into their hands, they should not leave him; others, that the war of Israel should be regarded before him, who might be found at any time ^{f471}.

Ver. 29. *And David went up from thence,* etc.] From the wilderness of Maon, having had a narrow escape for his life:

and dwelt in strong holds in Engedi; another place in the tribe of Judah, and which lay in the wilderness of Judah, and from whence that is called the wilderness of Engedi; and here Dr. Lightfoot ^{f472} thinks he penned the sixty third psalm, (~~Psalm~~ Psalm 63:1-11), the wilderness about Engedi being

the most desert of all other places, that being upon the borders of the dead sea; of this place, (see Gill on "~~0652~~Joshua 15:62").