

### I Samuel

#### Lesson 38 - Chapter 23 and 24

>We ended last time as David and his growing group of political dissenters and socially disenfranchised rescued the food supply of the Judean city of Ke'ilah from the Philistines. The Philistines did not attack the city or residents of Ke'ilah; they merely showed up in force to confiscate the harvested and threshed grain for their own economic benefit.

An honest reading of the methods of the Philistines and other nations like them in that era reveals that many of them weren't interested in acquiring land or building empires; they just wanted food and wealth and sometimes people to build up their own nation. Most of them weren't blood-thirsty barbarians that enjoyed a good slaughter (although certainly some were of that ilk). Even the great Nebuchadnezzar (who would lead Babylon against Judah some 400 years after David's time) came to take the Jews' wealth and their most educated and able back to Babylon to use to elevate his nation; he didn't come to destroy, but to confiscate and build a modern empire. Destruction usually occurred as some type of reprisal for a breach of promise.

Let's re-read a portion of 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 23.

#### RE-READ 1<sup>ST</sup> SAMUEL 23: 13 - end

No doubt David and his men stayed in Ke'ilah to guard against some type of Philistine reprisal against the people for thwarting their taking of the grain; also probably to enjoy the comforts of city life for a few days after spending so long in caves and camps. But when David got word that Saul learned of what had occurred at Ke'ilah and that David and his men were staying at the walled city, he knew Sha'ul would come after him. So his first thought was: would the leadership of Ke'ilah stand with David or simply turn him over to the Israelite King to avoid confrontation? The Lord, through the Urim and Thummim stones now administered by Avyatar, unequivocally said, "Yes, the people of Ke'ilah would turn David over to Saul".

With no remaining option David led his men out of Ke'ilah before Saul's expeditionary force could arrive. He apparently moved from "stronghold to stronghold" out in the inhospitable desert terrain of Zif to try and stay one step ahead of Saul. Stronghold is **metsad** in Hebrew; it is not usually indicating a fortress (but under rare circumstances it can). Rather a **metsad** or **metsadah** is usually the high ground in the area that affords a vantage point to observe the enemy, or it offers a hiding place, or perhaps even some kind of natural defensive barrier that makes attacking it more difficult. Often these **metsadah** had water supplies. By the way, notice that the name for the famous Dead Sea plateau that scores of thousands of visitors ascend every year is Masada; Masada is merely a Roman way to pronounce the Hebrew word **metsadah**, fortress.

We'll run across the term wilderness, **midbar**, often in the Bible. It generally means desert.

Particularly as pertains to Canaan and especially to Judah, “the wilderness” means the vast Judean Desert that is the Negev. Zif was not another desert; rather it gives us a more specific location within the Negev. Zif was a town around 12 miles southeast of Ke’ilah (around 5 miles south-southeast of Hebron); therefore the Zif desert was the area surrounding the town of Zif.

The end of verse 14 makes it very clear that Saul kept pursuing David; but it was the Lord who prevented him from finding David. The anti-king was not going to be allowed to harm God’s anointed king. Even so, Saul was not an inept man or without resources and soon found out David’s whereabouts. Verse 15 says that David was at Horesh in the area of Zif. What it actually says is that David was at **hahores**, which means “the woods”, and therefore this merely means he was currently camped in a wooded area. King Saul’s son Jonathan, upon hearing the news, hurried to find David and warn him; but also to encourage David. Another way to look at it is that Jonathan came to reaffirm his commitment to David and to the covenant they had made between them. Jonathan counseled David not to be afraid.

David was after all, human. He had been on the run for months. He had no interest in becoming a martyr. Nowhere in Canaan was truly safe but David had been told by his prophet Gad that Yehoveh set the limits of David’s escape path to the territorial boundaries of the 12 tribes; or even more specifically to the southern areas controlled by the tribe of Judah. David would have to go forward in faith, and trust in God completely. David’s Psalms show us that while he hoped for deliverance from Saul he also realized that God could (in His divine sovereignty) decide on an outcome that David would not welcome (his own demise).

David was undoubtedly grateful for Y’honatan’s arrival and words of encouragement; but these were not idle words of human sunshine spoken by David’s dearest friend. Rather what Jonathan said he truly believed to his core. Jonathan told David not to fear, that Saul’s military would not find David (meaning to capture him); and that David was destined to be the King of Israel and nothing on earth could stop it. He told David that despite his father’s actions that Sha’ul too, knew that David was God’s anointed and that the time of his reign was nearing an end. It is at this point that David started to become self aware that he was destined to be King of Israel. He didn’t deny it or deflect it when Jonathan spoke it.

If we see this is a pattern, then it is not surprising that a full millennia into the future David’s descendant Yeshua was a young man before He began to be self-aware of His destiny and who He was. And as we read the Gospel accounts, it seems to portray that He only came to internalize and truly accept His own divinity and mission bit by bit over time. Y’honatan reminded David that he considered himself, “second to you”, meaning that while he expected to be second in command once David was king that it would be David’s dynasty ruling over Israel and not Saul’s so Jonathan would be serving strictly at David’s pleasure. The Hebrew word for “2<sup>nd</sup> in command” is **misneh**; it’s the same word that we’ll find in the book of Esther in chapter 10:3, referring to Mordecai as the **misneh** to King Xerxes so it definitely carries the sense of an official position (not unlike Joseph when he was 2<sup>nd</sup> in command to Pharaoh in Egypt).

We should note that Y’honatan was not downcast or passively upset at the concept of losing out on becoming King of Israel or at giving up his personal authority to David; rather he

seemed to be excited and optimistic at what lay ahead with his dearest friend at the helm. It was a more mature and realistic Jonathan that we see now; the Lord was about to bring in a new era and Jonathan was less concerned about being in charge than being in harmony with all that God was going to do.

Sadly, Jonathan was correct only in spirit but not in letter. While David indeed would go on to become Israel's first true king, Jonathan would be second to him only in the abstract because in the near future Jonathan would die in battle at Gilboa alongside his father; and David would be heartbroken. This exchange in 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 23 is the last time the two would ever again see one another.

I'm certain that many of you see the several wonderful lessons and principles on display here. But the one that I'd like to comment on is this: the New Testament makes it clear that those who trust in Yeshua for salvation are His friends, and that we carry within us His great commission and the power to carry it out. But always He is first, and we are second to Him. Our future is tied to His, but His is more important than ours. Too much the Church has made an effort to make Yehoveh a kindly super-tolerant grandfather in order that He is more appealing to us and especially to the unwashed. Too much we are told that our personal desires and welfare are His overriding concerns; this is not true. Nowhere does the Bible establish that God puts us above all else. Rather the Lord's own holiness comes first; His Messiah Yeshua immediately thereafter, the establishment of the Kingdom of God next (if those 3 are actually separable), and then we as individual Believers. Just as Jonathan realized and wholeheartedly accepted his position in God's hierarchy as subservient to His Anointed One, so must we if we are to fulfill our roles in redemptive history.

Verse 19 explains that the people of Zif (who were members of the tribe of Judah) were even more antagonistic against David than the city dwellers of Ke'ilah. It seems that they informed Saul that David and his men were hiding in their area. Perhaps they just didn't want trouble between them and Saul (certainly they, along with everyone else, had heard that Saul murdered every one of God's Priests at Nob from the mere suspicion that they had helped David). Or perhaps they just didn't want this gang-of-sorts to exist in their neighborhood. Either way Saul was most grateful and genuinely touched for their display of loyalty to him.

In fact the spiritually irrational, self delusional King actually calls on the God of Israel to bless the Zifites for what they have just done! And Saul sees it as showing compassion to him! These are the warmest words of praise that he speaks to the men of Zif, ones that a king would usually not bestow on his subjects. He actually thanks them for their compassion towards him. The Hebrew word is **chamal**, and it means compassion in the sense of showing pity; this is very humble speech. But Saul has sent his military on wild goose chases so often trying to find David (not realizing that Yehoveh was the one who was orchestrating Saul's inability to find David), that he doesn't want to do it yet again so he asks would these Zifites please go back and double check as to exactly David's whereabouts because David is quite the master of stealth.

Sure enough, in God's providence, David and his men felt the need to move on from Zif and had already left the area for the Ma'on desert in the Arabah. Ma'on is the modern day Tel

Ma'on located about 8 miles south of Hebron; it sits atop a tall hill that gave David a commanding view of the area all around it. The Arabah is a barren stretch that basically follows the Jordan River rift valley all the way to the Red Sea. David's men were not inside the village of Ma'on, they were in the desert area on its outskirts. When David heard that Saul and his men were approaching he again moved, this time to a rocky area that he figured would make it difficult for Saul's men to find him. The area is strewn with caves, large and small, and as Saul's men inspected one cave David's men would move into another, only to move back into the ones that had already been inspected once Saul's men left. It was kind of an ancient game of Whack-a-Mole, only a deadly serious one.

The King had received some good intelligence on the exact location of David and his militia, and so began to surround the area he thought David was in, employing a kind of pincers movement. Saul's army divided and began circling around from two sides the rock crag where David was hiding. David is trapped; Saul's move was brilliant. The King was as spiritually irrational as ever, but evil doesn't mean stupid. Just as Hitler overwhelmed Europe with brilliant battle tactics and superior weaponry that stunned the world, so Saul inherently knew just how to box David in.

But David's fate was not in Saul's hands; nor was it in David's. In an impossible to orchestrate bit of timing, the Philistines decided to attack Israel just as Saul's men were ready to pounce. Undoubtedly the Philistines had observed King Saul, Israel's Commander-in-Chief, once again leaving his country vulnerable as he set off with his army to pursue this one man: David. Messengers rushed to tell the King of this development and frustrated yet again, Saul had no choice but to immediately halt this operation and rush back to defend his kingdom. But is this not how the Lord regularly works? In a never ending series of divinely ordained "coincidences" unsuspecting men, the righteous and the wicked, are accomplishing Yehoveh's invisible will. David was miraculously delivered from certain capture and death because God was using the Philistines.

As a result of this event the place came to be called ***Sela-Hamachlekot***: the crag (or rock) of divisions. It was in remembrance of the day that God put up a heavenly divide between David's men and Saul's there in the rocky hills of Ma'on.

Let's go to chapter 24.

### **READ 1<sup>ST</sup> SAMUEL CHAPTER 24 all**

David now moves his men to the area of En-Gedi, a very difficult area to operate in militarily. En-Gedi means, "the spring of the young goat", and is located on the west bank of the Dead Sea. En-Gedi was without doubt the most important and most permanent spring-fed oasis in Judah's vast desert wilderness. And for those who have ventured there with me, you know that in the midst of those sterile ancient rocky hills is this little bit of heaven today known as David's Falls. Almost any time of the day or night you'll see Oryx, Mountain Goats, Coney, small deer; practically a zoo of desert dwelling creatures who are attracted to the green foliage and abundant water.

What is not apparent to most that come today however is that the Dead Sea that is perhaps a mile away from the approach to En-Gedi was much closer in David's day. In fact En-Gedi would have been considered waterfront property. Three thousand years ago the Dead Sea (just as lifeless then as now) was around twice today's size. Many of the better known desert communities that we read about in the Bible (and we can visit today) were actually built on the shores of the Dead Sea (some Bibles will call it the Salt Sea). Jericho, Qumran, and En-Gedi were adjacent to that vast pool of mineral water that would also have lapped at the pathway up to that ancient fortress Masada.

The hills surrounding En-Gedi are peppered with caves; locating David was going to be like finding a needle in a haystack for Saul. Thus we read in verse 3 that Sha'ul assembled 3000 men to go after David's 600. This was a search and destroy mission with the emphasis on search. It was a huge area and small garrisons would need to be left in likely hiding places to assure that David's men didn't simply vacate them as they saw the troops coming, and then return to the same place when they left.

There is an underlying theme to this chapter that we need to recognize because it answers a very important question: did David actively try to wrest the throne away from Saul? For centuries after this tradition was created and retold (and later on written down), this was going to be a critical theological and practical point for the Jews because if David was simply another would-be-king who gathered an army of tribal loyalists and overthrew a sitting king of another tribe, then his status as being the anointed of God was questionable (I hope you can see that). Politics was as important then as it is to us in our time. If making David the king over all Israel was perceived by future Israelites as an issue of replacing a northern tribal king (Saul of Benjamin) with a southern tribal king (David of Judah), then this wasn't really an act of God as the tradition claims, it was the result of typical human politics and the desire for power.

As Saul led his men in the search for David, the call of nature caused him to duck inside a nearby cave to relieve himself. Of all the places he could have chosen, wouldn't you just know that this was the cave where David and many of his men were hiding! Stunned at their good fortune the men alert David, certain that God has handed Saul over to them to end this deadly cat and mouse game for good. Verse 5 has David's men saying, "Look! The day has come that Adonai told you about when He said to you, I will turn your enemy over to you....." First of all there is nothing recorded of any such prediction that God made to David; and second this may sound like a prophetic fulfillment but it was really just rather customary Middle Eastern conversation. It is expressing the surprise that such an unexpected and serendipitous opportunity would come along, and thus it can only be that God has caused it; and this proves that He must be on their side. Middle Eastern banter was often couched using religious overtones, but nothing particularly spiritual was intended.

So now we encounter one of the more famous stories in the entire Bible. David indeed saw this as an opportunity; but not as an opportunity to kill or to acquire the throne. While Saul was indisposed, David snuck up behind him and carefully cut off a piece of the hem of his skirt. What was cut is in Hebrew *kanaph*; it means the wings or extremities of a garment. It carries with it a deeper meaning depending on its context.

In this case *kanaph* is denoting the actual **hem** of the garment and not the **nature** of the garment (as it does in the act of Boaz spreading his *kanaph* over Ruth). In either case there is significance. It was customary that the hem of one's garment was symbolic of that person's station in life. The poorest had no hem whatsoever; the cloth was merely cut and left to fray. The next class up wore a garment made of similar cloth as the poorest, but it was folded over and sewn (forming a hem) so that it not only lasted longer but it looked nicer. The wealthier had fancy hems with colored thread and even some decorations. Kings and potentates had the most decorative wide and expensive hems. Since the more wealth one had the more authority that person carried, the hem was much more than mere decoration; it was not unlike the well-recognized stripes of rank sewn onto a soldier's uniform, or the various belt colors worn as signs of achievement by the adherents of the various martial arts. At times hems they took on a sacred overtone.

Thus after David had cut off a piece of Saul's hem he felt great pangs of remorse. He told his men that he had done a terrible thing; that he had raised his hand against God's anointed. David had shown no respect for the office of the King of Israel, and had committed a great insult against Saul. Killing a person as they were doing their business, stealing from them as they relieved themselves, even looking upon them during such a time was well beyond indelicate. So much more so for royalty; such a thing just wasn't done, not even to an enemy.

David ordered that Saul was not to be further disturbed, let alone attacked and killed. Another God-principle leaps off the pages; not every opportunity that comes our way is of God. Not everything that would give us great personal gain is to be accepted, nor is it necessarily God-sent. However tempting, an open path to success that comes as a result of our own handiwork or at the time of our own choosing doesn't mean that it is necessarily in harmony with God's will.

It is always necessary to examine God's principles and prayerfully seek God's purpose for whatever opportunities come along in our lives. They could as easily be a test of faith and discernment as an unmerited blessing. They could be a trap from the Evil One.

Have you ever found a wallet with a lot of money in it just at a time that you were in dire financial straits? You had just finished praying for God's provision when you look down and there lies some stitched and folded leather with the corners of green paper flapping in the breeze. The person's driver's license was in it; they lived far away. How would anyone ever know if you merely took the cash and dropped the wallet with its credit cards still in it into a Post Office drop box? Surely this is an answer to prayer; the person who lost it is probably quite well off judging from the amount of cash and the number of credit cards. But what a marvelous gift just at a time when you need it the most! While this example isn't very hard to judge, many others aren't quite this apparent. David encountered just such a situation. Saul's intent was to murder him. God's intent was for David to be Israel's king. What could possibly be wrong in killing Saul in this case? Saul, the anti-king, being handed over to David, the righteous king in such an unexpected circumstance; surely this was the moment.

But David inherently knew that murder on his part was not the answer. God hadn't told David he was to be the king; other men had said it to him. God certainly never told David to kill the

current king, even though in some ways it seemed justifiable. No, even though he and his men couldn't understand it at the time, it was not for Saul to die at the hand of David or any Israelite for that matter.

Thus the underlying and critical theological and practical question I asked at the outset of this chapter (did David actively try to wrest the throne away from Saul?) has been answered. An opportunity to kill Saul (obviously arranged by Yehoveh as a test) and immediately assume the throne was refused by David because he did not view himself as Saul's enemy nor as one who sought to rule over Israel. This story would stand now as proof that David's rise to the throne was neither by his own design, nor by his own hand. It was a divine act of the will of the God of Israel and David was simply an obedient servant.

In verse 9 Sha'ul is leaving the cave, oblivious to what has been playing out, and David follows him at safe distance. Outside David shouts at Saul and prostrates himself to show loyalty and humility. He asks Saul why he has listened to others telling him lies about David; supposedly Saul's council telling him David wants to kill him.

I don't know if David is contorting the reality simply to show deference to the King, or he honestly thinks that it was Saul's court that had convinced the naïve Saul of a great lie. Because what we read in Holy Scripture is the opposite; Saul's court, his military commanders, his own family, even the Priesthood, were all befuddled by Saul's insistence that David was an enemy of the state. Such a position had much to do with the extermination of the Priests of Nob.

David shows King Saul the piece of hem that he had cut from his royal garment, as a demonstration that he could easily have slain him but chose not to. In fact, just as King Saul's men had supposedly urged the king to kill David (this of course was a fantasy), so did David's men urge David to take advantage of the opportunity and kill Saul (this indeed was the case). The contrast is obvious: Saul decided to take his men's advice but David decided the opposite. Saul had no problem with the idea of murder, David detested the thought. Saul had no regard for the throne of Israel as anything but his personal right and treasure. David saw it as sacred and its occupant as God's anointed.

And so the stark differences between the natures of the anti-king and the righteous king pile up and create a pattern designed to help us discern when the man of lawlessness who claims to be the Messiah makes his appearance.

We'll continue next time.