

1 Samuel 23 — Hide And Seek

October 9, 2022

If you are new, my name is Kurt. I am one of the pastors. It is great to have you. As a church, we are working our way through the book of 1 Samuel. To get the visitors up to speed, let me give a little background of what has happened so far in this book.

Background

At this point in the story, it is clear that Saul is committed to killing David. When David realized he was public enemy number one, he ran for his life and tried relying on himself to save his own life. He lied to the priests of Nob, and for security, he tried relying on the worldly strength of Goliath's sword. He even made plans to find safety among the Philistines. The problem was that all of his attempts to save himself massively backfired. David's lies to Ahimelech contributed to the death of the high priest and his family. Goliath's sword didn't help him one bit. The Philistines didn't protect David. They arrested David, chained him to the city gate, and almost killed him. This turned into one of the lowest points in David's life. At that point, he called back out to God. He stopped relying on himself and turned to God for rescue. In the Psalms, we read about David saying in that time, "God, you will have to fulfill your purpose for me." He was done relying on himself to protect his life. Only God to save his life.

It was at that time, when David finally got to the end of himself, that God began to intervene. First, God brought his family to him for companionship and support. Then God brought 400 men to him. They were military misfits, the rejects and the unwanted in society, but at least they were there to help. David

then moved to the land of Moab where he and his men held up in a fort and had safety from Saul since they were in a foreign land. It was after David was rested and restored from the near-death experience in Gath that God sent the prophet Gad to him. Gad told David to return to Israel and face his destiny. David knew that if he returned to Israel, he would be hunted by Saul like a fox pursued by hounds. In courage, he obeyed God's word and returned to Israel. He hid in the forest of Hereth.

That brings us to 1 Samuel 22, where we found ourselves last week. In that chapter, the camera of the text panned north from Hereth in the south to Mt. Gilboa and King Saul in the north. There we saw him kill Ahimelech, the high priest, and all his family because he suspected the high priests were involved in a coup to overthrow the government and take his life. Nothing like that was happening, but King Saul was filled with paranoia.

In God's grace, one high priest escaped. His name was Abiathar. He ran to David for safety.

When we pick up the story in 1 Samuel 23, the camera returns to David. As expected, David will be on the run with Saul hot on his tail, trying to kill him. At this point, it is a game of hide-and-seek, with the outcome being life or death. David was in an extremely stressful season, with his everyday life in question. If David was anointed king, why was God letting him go through this hard time? Why is God letting David face exhaustion and sleepless nights? This morning, we will find the answer. We will not just find the answer for why God allows David

to go through stressful times in his life, but we will also find the answer to why God allows us to go through stressful times in our life as well.

Along the way, we will see how God sustained David in his times of high stress and desperation and how God also sustains us when our world is falling apart.

If you are someone whose life is falling apart, whose job is in question, or if you are someone who has been through those kinds of tough seasons before, this message is for you.

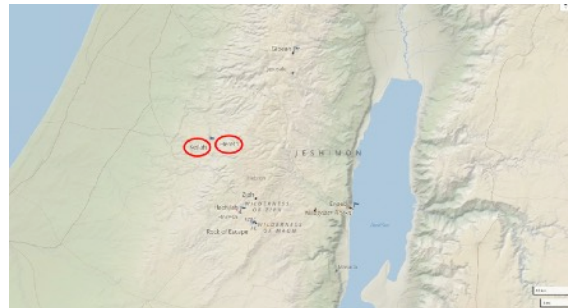
Let's begin

God cares for his people in difficult times by hearing and answering their prayers.

What we see taking place with David seems to have taken place immediately after Saul slaughtered the priests at Gibeah. While Saul was busy killing God's people, let's see what David was doing.

Now they told David, "Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are robbing the threshing floors." Therefore David inquired of the LORD, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" And the LORD said to David, "Go and attack the Philistines and save Keilah." 1 Samuel 23:1-2 (ESV)

Keilah was a town near the western border of Judah. It was 2 miles south of Adullam, where David hid in the cave after escaping from the Philistines. Keilah was next to the Forest of Hereth, where David was hiding. The Philistines robbing the threshing floors means it was harvest season. Farmers, how many seasons would you last if someone came and stole all your harvested corn and



soybeans? The answer is obvious, you wouldn't last long. In this case, not only would the city be impoverished, but the people of the city would starve to death.

David saw this happening close to where he was hiding, and he couldn't help but ask God, "Do you want me to do something about this?"

God told him to go, attack the Philistines, and save the city. There is a bit of irony at this point. In 1 Samuel 9:6, when God put Saul in place as king, one of Saul's specific duties was to save God's people from the Philistines. Since Saul was consumed with killing David, he neglected his primary responsibility, which was protecting the nation from the Philistines. Isn't this what often happens to politicians when they go bad? Instead of protecting the nation and serving the people, they become consumed with their pet projects, which only hurt the nation instead of help it.

In saving Keilah, God was asking David to do what Saul had neglected to do.

This is also an important moment in our story. For the first time in the story, we see that David is receiving direct and immediate communication from God: "Go and attack the Philistines and save the city." What changed? How was David able to hear from God faster than we can check the weather on our cell phones? This was a game-changer. Let's keep reading and find out what happened.

But David's men said to him, "Behold, we are afraid here in Judah; how much more then if we go to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?" 1 Samuel 23:3 (ESV)

This was a reasonable response. Remember, David's military was a little militia of 400 men. The men were the outcasts, the rejects, and the social misfits

of society. The guys looked at each other and thought David was crazy. They were having a hard enough time hiding in the forest, playing keep-away from Saul. David had to be crazy to think this rag-tag bunch of military misfits could take on a well-trained Philistine army.

As we learned earlier in this book, the Philistines had metal working, and the Israelites didn't. The Philistines had iron chariots, iron body armor, swords, spears, javelins, and the modern military equipment of the day. The Israelites had sticks, stones, and leather straps to throw rocks. David's army was outgunned in the area of military equipment and the number of soldiers.

I love David's response. He didn't argue with the men. He said let me double-check attacking the Philistines with God. On paper, your thoughts make sense.

Then David inquired of the LORD again. And the LORD answered him, "Arise, go down to Keilah, for I will give the Philistines into your hand." 1 Samuel 23:4 (ESV)

It can't get any clearer than this. God told them for a second time to attack the Philistines, even though they were completely outmatched in the size of the army and the armament of the army.

Folks, does this sound like something we read about earlier in this book? Remember David and Goliath. David was completely outmatched by the size of Goliath and the armament of Goliath. Remember how Goliath was covered in iron plating, a spear, and a shield? David had a leather strap and five smooth stones. Who gave the victory? God! David had to go forward in faith that God would keep his promise and give victory over the Philistines, no matter how

impossible that looked. This is the same situation. David had to convince his men that God would come through for them once again, in spite of the odds.

In Hebrew, it is interesting. When God says, “Arise, go down to Keilah, for I will give the Philistines into your hands,” the “I” is in the emphatic tense. God tells them they are right. They couldn’t beat the Philistines, but He can!

What we need to see is that there is a close connection between the commands of God and the promises of God. This is not just true for David. It is true for us. God will command us to do things that often don’t make sense. We don’t see how God’s commands will work out on paper. In faith and obedience, we need to move forward by obeying God’s commands and trusting that God’s promises will prove true. Let me give you some practical examples from our life.

“Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), “that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.” Ephesians 6:2–3 (ESV)

When it comes to how we treat our parents, we are to go out of our way to honor them, not abandon them. That may be hard. Some of you come from a rough family. The thought of honoring the adult parents who hurt you turns your stomach. I don’t know what it looks like for you to honor your parents, but I do know that when we obey that command from God there is also a promise from God that it will go well with us.

Another area where God gives us commands and promises is our finances. God commands us to give to the spread of the gospel but he also gives us promises about what will happen when we give.

As a Christian, I believe giving to the Lord's work begins with our local church, it should not end with our local church. We should give to the spread of the gospel first in our local church family.

then give beyond our church family. I like to think of it this way. If you hear about hungry children in another family far from you, it is good to care about them and give to help them. As we do that, we should not neglect our own children that are in our house in order to feed children that are not part of our house.

In 2 Corinthians 9, Paul talks about how we should give.

Each one must give as he has decided in his heart, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver. 2 Corinthians 9:7 (ESV)

We are to give a regular amount of our paycheck to the Lord. Should we give a tithe, which is ten percent of our income? That is not wrong. A tithe is a good place to start but that may not be a good place to start for all of us. We are to pray about it and ask God what he wants us to give. What we give should not be given reluctantly because we don't want to or under compulsion because we feel we have to. What we give should be given joyfully and cheerfully. It is an expression of our appreciation to God for saving us. Worshipping God with our wealth is part of the way we worship God with our hearts. While God commands us to give to his work, the next verse also gives us a promise of what God will do when we give.

And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work. 2 Corinthians 9:8 (ESV)

When we give, God promises to make sure we will have all sufficiency at all times. God promises to provide for our needs when we worship him with our

wealth. The first thing people say when it comes to giving to the work of the Lord and their local church is they say, I can't afford it. My paycheck is already too small. Folks, the truth is that it doesn't matter. Giving to the Lord is always a matter of faith, not finances. Paul said to the Corinthians and us that when you give and you think you won't have enough, you forget that God is the one in charge of your paycheck. When we give, God promises to make all grace abound to us. That means he promises to order our lives so that he will provide for our needs. He promises to always provide us with enough so we will be able to overflow with good works.

So God commands us to worship him with our wealth, and when we do, he promises to provide us with more than enough for our needs. Maybe not all our wants, but all our needs. I would rather give to the Lord and know God will keep his promise to provide for my needs than refuse to worship God with my wealth and be in a position where God doesn't promise to provide for all my needs in a way that will allow me to overflow with good works.

If you doubt this is true, show me one person who gave an offering, and because they gave, they are now too impoverished and can't survive. They had to sell their home. They couldn't make a car payment. You don't find those people because God promises to provide even above and beyond for those who give to the Lord's work.

So God commands David and his men to fight against a much greater army with size and technology, but God also promises to provide them with victory.

And David and his men went to Keilah and fought with the Philistines and brought away their livestock and struck them with a great blow. So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah. 1 Samuel 23:5 (ESV)

Don't miss this. It wasn't a close battle. The army of misfits completely annihilated a far superior armored force and saved the city. They obeyed God's command, and God kept his promise even when it seemed impossible on paper. While Saul was busy being the destroyer of the nation, David has now become the nation's savior.

In stress, David has learned not to lie, trust in worldly strength and his own plans, but turn to God and obey God's word, no matter how hard it seems. Every time David obeys God's word, God will come through with his promises.

Isn't this a good reminder for us today? We are called to obey God's word and trust the results in God's hands. God will always bless our obedience, especially when it is hard.

Today, we live in a sexually permissive culture. Everybody is sleeping together in the younger generation. This is what God's word says about sexual purity.

But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints. Ephesians 5:3 (ESV)

Sexual immorality is the Greek word *porneia*. That is a junk drawer term that refers to any sexual activity outside the bounds of marriage. It is premarital sex, pornography, and extra-marital sex. None of that kind of sexuality should be named among God's people.

Flee from sexual immorality. Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. 1 Corinthians 6:18 (ESV)

Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled, for God will judge the sexually immoral and adulterous. Hebrews 13:4 (ESV)

Folks, if you are a young adult, I beg you to save yourself for marriage. That is not because God is trying to ruin your life but because God loves you and wants what is best for your life. I don't know anybody who says on their wedding night, boy am I thankful I slept with other people. It made my wedding night so much better. Sex is relational superglue. It is meant to be saved for marriage because it helps you stick together in marriage.

If you are hearing this today and you are sleeping with your boyfriend or girlfriend, how should you respond? God wants you to repent of your extramarital sex and get married. Don't repent two years from now, do all you can to repent right now.

If you are sleeping with someone you know will never be your spouse, care about them enough to break up with them. God can never bring mister or misses right into their life, or your life, if you are busy sleeping with mister or misses wrong.

As some of you hear this, I know you will be mad at me. Pastor Kurt is such a meanie. Pastor Kurt always makes me feel depressed. He preaches messages that don't leave me feeling good. I leave feeling convicted of my sin. Folks, I am sorry. I am not writing the mail. I am only reading the mail. Take up your frustration about this with God, not me. I am only telling you what God says. He says what he says because he loves you and wants what is best for you, not because he hates you.

Let's get back to the story. Earlier, we saw a decisive shift in David's life where he was able to ask God questions and get back almost immediate guidance. Let's find out what happened to make that possible.

When Abiathar the son of Ahimelech had fled to David to Keilah, he had come down with an ephod in his hand. 1 Samuel 23:6 (ESV)

Last week we saw Saul kill Ahimelech — the high priest, and he attempted to kill all the other priests. He killed 85 priests, but one priest escaped. That was Abiathar, one of Ahimelech's sons. He ran to David for safety. Here we find Abiathar came to David with an ephod in his hand. What is an ephod?

An ephod is a priestly garment. When Abiathar escaped, he didn't just grab any old ephod, but it appears he grabbed his father's priestly garment. The front of the priestly garments had a



chest plate with stones on it

representing the twelve tribes of Israel. The high priest's garment had something else special in the breastplate. It had a pouch where two stones were kept. They were called the Urim and Thummim. God used those stones in a special way.



Also put the Urim and the Thummim in the breastpiece, so they may be over Aaron's heart whenever he enters the presence of the Lord. Thus Aaron will always bear the means of making decisions for the Israelites over his heart before the Lord. Exodus 28:30 (NIV)

The stones kept in the breastplate of this garment over the high priest's heart were a means for making a decision before the Lord. God revealed his will

through these stones. You could ask God a question, and these stones were used to reveal God's will in the answer.

How did they work? There is no definitive answer in the Bible. In my years of studying of the Bible, the best description I ran across about them is that they were believed to be stones with a black side and white side to them. When the high priest rolled them on the ground, two whites was a yes from God. Two blacks was a no from God. A black and white was undecided. We don't know for sure if that was the way they worked but that is the best article I read about how they probably worked.

God sometimes talked to people through his prophets. We have already seen God do that with the prophet Gad directing David to return to Israel and Samuel the prophet when he anointed David as king. Now David has another means of discerning God's will at his disposal. This is how David is asking questions of God in this chapter and getting quick and immediate answers.

So when Saul killed the high priest and his family, he cut off the one remaining way he could hear from God. He also inadvertently sent the one priest remaining in the high priest's family to David, who is now giving David updates on God's will for his life faster than we can check the weather on our cell phones.

God took Saul's dreadful act of sin toward the priests of Nob and turned it into a blessing for David. Isn't it amazing how God can take people's sins and have the unintended consequences of someone's sin become a blessing for someone else?

Now we switch back to Saul. He was presumably still sitting on Mt. Giboa, relaxing under his tamarisk tree.

Now it was told Saul that David had come to Keilah... 1 Samuel 23:7 (ESV)

This was the only kind of news Saul wanted to hear these days. News about where he could find David, to kill David, was the only kind of news that cheered him up.

...And Saul said, "God has given him into my hand, for he has shut himself in by entering a town that has gates and bars." 1 Samuel 23:7 (ESV)

Notice what we don't see. We don't see Saul celebrating that the city of Keilah was saved from the Philistines. Saul doesn't care about them. Saul can only think about himself, and he hopes this is God putting David into his hand.

And Saul summoned all the people to war, to go down to Keilah, to besiege David and his men. 1 Samuel 23:8 (ESV)

Notice what happened. David just saved Keilah from the Philistines. Saul rallies the troops to go to war against Keilah and destroy the city. Saul is now acting like a Philistine. He is going to war against his own people. Saul is willing to kill as many of his citizens as he needs to kill as long as he can get David.

I think we should also notice whom Saul summons to go to war. It says "all the people" Saul didn't just want to go to Keilah with his existing army. He called up the reserves and had a general mobilization of all the men in the nation to attack and destroy this city. Think about this. This is thousands upon thousands of men all called to war to get David and his little group of 400 rag-tag misfits. This was complete overkill. It is like using a ballistic missile to swat a fly.

The reason Saul did this was because he was so obsessed with killing David that he was willing to throw every last military asset he possessed into killing David.

There is another interesting piece of irony. The word summoned in Hebrew is in the *Piel* verb form. The only other time we have that same word in the same verb form in this entire book was when Saul was summoning the nation to destroy the Amalekites. Saul is now doing the same thing, but he has summoned the national army to destroy fellow Israelites.

David knew that Saul was plotting harm against him... 1 Samuel 23:9 (ESV)

For Saul, knowledge about David's location was hard to discover. But, as soon as Saul made plans to attack the city, somehow David found out about it.

Whose side does God happen to be on?

...And he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here." 1 Samuel 23:9 (ESV)

It was handy to have Abiathar and the ephod to ask God questions.

Then David said, "O LORD, the God of Israel, your servant has surely heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah, to destroy the city on my account. Will the men of Keilah surrender me into his hand? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard? O LORD, the God of Israel, please tell your servant."... 1 Samuel 23:10–11 (ESV)

David had two questions. One was the threat Saul posed to Keilah. Would Saul come against the city to destroy it? The second question was, "I just saved this city, will the people of this city turn their back on me and give me up to Saul?"

...And the LORD said, "He will come down." 1 Samuel 23:11b (ESV)

So David asked the second question.

Then David said, "Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul?" And the LORD said, "They will surrender you." 1 Samuel 23:12 (ESV)

I am sure that broke David's heart. The city he just saved would turn their back on him and give him to Saul. Before we lay too much blame on the citizens of Keilah, we should realize how terrible the power of Saul had become. He just slaughtered the high priest and his family. He mobilized all the men in the nation to destroy the city of Keilah. The impression we are left with is that Saul has become a terrible thug. People were terrified of him. He was brutal and heartless. He was unpredictable. The extent of his brutality is legendary.

If David cared for the people of Keilah, and he did, there was only one option.

Then David and his men, who were about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah, and they went wherever they could go... 1 Samuel 23:13 (ESV)

David and his men ran from the city. Notice that David's militia has grown from 400 to 600 men. This will keep happening. The militia around David was swelling. Notice they didn't have a place to go to. They wandered in the wilderness, constantly changing their position in hopes that Saul would not find them. I also suspect that no city wanted to take them in. If Saul butchered the priests because he suspected they helped David, what would Saul do their city if he suspected they helped David?

...When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he gave up the expedition. 1 Samuel 23:13 (ESV)

Saul's attempt on David's life was thwarted again. David always escapes. He escaped the tip of Saul's spear three times. With the help of his wife, he escaped out a window when Saul had his house surrounded. He escaped 4 times when Saul sent soldiers to kill him at Ramah. Now David and his men escape from Keilah before Saul arrives because the high priest using the Urim

and Thummin in the ephod revealed to David that he would be captured if he stayed.

And David remained in the strongholds in the wilderness, in the hill country of the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God did not give him into his hand. 1 Samuel 23:14 (ESV)

In case we are a little slow, the writer points out that what Saul claimed, that “God had given David into his hands” was completely wrong. The truth is that God would not give David into Saul’s hands. But that didn’t mean Saul stopped trying to get him. Every day was a new adventure with David and his militia constantly on the run and Saul with his overgrown army constantly on their heels.

In these verses, we see one way God takes care of David in times of suffering and stress. Through Abiathar the high priest and the Urim and Thummin in the high priestly garment, David had immediate answers to his prayers.

Wouldn’t it be nice if we had a high priest and a priestly garment that could give us immediate answers to our prayers today? We don’t have that... but we have something better. We have Jesus. Look what the writer of Hebrews says about Jesus being our high priest in heaven today.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. Hebrews 4:15–16 (ESV)

My friends, we so often forget in our life when things are stressed, when our children are wandering, when our job is in question, when those who want to do us harm surround us, that we can call out to Jesus in prayer, asking for his grace to help us in our time of need, and God promises to provide it. He may not

speak to us in an audible voice. He may reorder or circumstances or close doors in our life, but one thing we know, he will respond with grace to help us in our time of need because he loves us. The access we have to God the Father today through Jesus is better than the access that David had through Abiathar.

God cares for his people in difficulty by providing Godly friends.

At this point, the pressure on David was immense. This was why he wanted to stay in the land of Moab and not return to Israel. Every day he was running from Saul and his massive army. Saul's determination to eliminate David turned into a nationwide manhunt that involved the full resources of the nation's military. At this point, it was a game of hide-and-seek with life or death results, not just for David and his men, but anyone who helped David in any way ran the risk of being brutally killed by Saul. If Saul was willing to butcher the priests because he suspected they helped David, imagine what Saul would do to ordinary people!

David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life. David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh. 1 Samuel 23:15 (ESV)

Ziph was on the southern border of Judah, about 12 miles south of Keilah.

Notice where David was hiding. It was in the wilderness. When we think wilderness, we think trees and a comfortable stream. That is not



the kind of wilderness we have in this area. It was a desert. It is a very dry and inhospitable place. It was a good place to hide because most people in their right mind wouldn't go there



because very few people could survive there. The text strongly suggests that David was once again facing another low point in his life, a time of great physical exhaustion, dehydration, and discouragement. The depressing nature of this place and constantly running for his life wore him thin. Would there ever be an end to Saul's irrational hatred? David was not just caring for himself in this desolate place, but he was caring for 600 men who were looking to him for survival in this place. Look what God did for him at this low time.

And Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David at Horesh,... 1 Samuel 23:16 (ESV)

Saul couldn't find David, but Jonathan wandered this desert region until he found David. Jonathan was David's best friend. Jonathan was the person who most clearly understood that God had anointed David to be the next king. Jonathan never undermined David, but instead, he repeatedly risked his life to help David. What a gift from God to send a friend to help him at this difficult time in his life.

This simple statement is loaded with practical implications for us to learn.

1. Notice that Jonathan took the initiative and went to David.

Jonathan was on the safe side with his father. He was living in the luxury of the palace. Jonathan left the comfort of the palace and exposed himself to the dangers of the desert so he could find David and experience what David was experiencing, and know the suffering David knew. Isn't this what friendship is about? A friend who is not willing to sacrifice their time to embrace another's hardship and join with them in experiencing their hardships is no friend at all.

2. Jonathan was sensitive to David's needs. Many of us say we would be willing to sacrifice to help a friend in need if we knew about the needs of our friend. How did Jonathan know David was so discouraged? David didn't text Jonathan. He took the time to use his imagination to think through what David was experiencing. He knew what the wilderness was like. He imagined the anguish David experienced being constantly on the run. With his imagination in gear, he understood the help David needed, and he knew he had to respond without David saying a word. This is what Paul tells us to do.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Philippians 2:3–4 (ESV)

Folks, it is incredibly lonely at the top for David. He was constantly encouraging his men but who was encouraging him? While the Bible makes it clear that God was not willing to give David up to Saul, don't you think there were times of discouragement when David wasn't sure of that promise? Don't you think one near-death encounter after another would wear you down? David needed the encouragement of a friend.

How did Jonathan encourage David?

...and strengthened his hand in God. 1 Samuel 23:16 (ESV)

What does it mean that Jonathan strengthened his hand in God?

Jonathan didn't promise he could solve David's problems. He didn't promise he could protect David's life. He reminded David of the promises God made to him and that God would keep for him. God had promised David he would be king. Jonathan reminded him that he was confident, since God keeps his word, that no

matter how discouraging life looked at this point, it would work out in the end.

God would make sure of it.

And he said to him, “Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Saul my father also knows this.” 1 Samuel 23:17 (ESV)

Jonathan knew they could trust in the promises of God. David will be king over Israel. That is what God spoke through Samuel when David was just a boy. It was the very word of God delivered to David. Jonathan knew Saul his father knew this. Jonathan envisioned that he would be second in command to David supporting and encouraging him as his friend. As it worked out, Jonathan died on Mt. Gilboah defending his father. He did not end up being second in command. God had promised David would be king, but he had not promised Jonathan would be second in command.

This is the same way God works today. When life is hard for a Christian brother or sister, and they are overwhelmed, God will bring them a friend to encourage them. That is part of our job to support one another.

How do we support our friends in Christ? The best way to support them is not with promises that we will be there for them or we will help them. We all know that in the busyness of life, we fail one another. Our promises do not prove true. The best way to encourage someone is to remind them of the promises of God, which we know will always prove true.

Two weeks ago, I was with my friend Steve Andreasen in the hospital as his wife was passing away. This was incredibly hard. I can't imagine what he felt in those moments. The godly man he is, he faithfully sat by her side to the end.

The only hope I could provide him was to encourage him in the promises of the Lord. Steve kept reading the promises of God to encourage himself.

I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. Philippians 1:23 (ESV)

When Sharon closed her eyes, she would be with Jesus. That will be far better than even her best moments on earth.

For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 Corinthians 5:1 (ESV)

God has a home prepared for her in heaven. These are the promises of God we rest in. They will always prove true!

Jonathan's encouragement to David was a turning point in David's life. Imagine how depressed David felt when he saved the city of Keilah and then heard they would turn their back on him and turn him over to Saul. We will never know how close David was to giving up, abandoning his followers, and leaving Israel forever. The very fact that God sent Jonathan to encourage him tells us David was probably hanging on by a thread.

And the two of them made a covenant before the Lord. David remained at Horesh, and Jonathan went home. 1 Samuel 23:18 (ESV)

We are not told the specifics of this covenant. This is the third covenant we read about Jonathan and David making with each other. In each of these covenants, Jonathan and David pledged their loyalty and their friendship to one another and to take care of one another's family. We can safely assume this covenant was a reaffirmation of the promise of friendship and loyalty that they gave one another earlier.

God cares for his people in difficulty by providence.

Now the camera pans back to Gibeah where we see what was happening with Saul. He thought it was his lucky day.

Then the Ziphites went up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, “Is not David hiding among us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hachilah, which is south of Jeshimon? 1 Samuel 23:19 (ESV)

Some of the Ziphites decided they would give Saul exactly the information he wanted to find David. I guess they were hoping for a financial kickback from Saul. They told Saul the general location of David — the strongholds at Horesh, the actual hill where David was hiding — the hill of Hachilah, and its location — south of Jeshimon. Saul thought he hit the jackpot!

Now come down, O king, according to all your heart’s desire to come down, and our part shall be to surrender him into the king’s hand.” 1 Samuel 23:20 (ESV)

Think of how dastardly these men have become. They know David and his men are innocent. They know David and his men will be butchered like the priests of Nob when Saul finds them, yet for the sake of money and popularity they were willing to conspire to kill David and his men.

And Saul said, “May you be blessed by the LORD, for you have had compassion on me. 1 Samuel 23:21 (ESV)

Poor paranoid Saul. The Ziphites show pity on the unfortunate king. The fact that Saul viewed himself as a victim while he was living in a palace hunting an innocent man shows us how warped Saul’s perspective had become.

David slipped from Saul’s grasp the last time Saul tried to capture him at Keilah. Saul wanted to make extra sure David and his men were hiding in this place before he mobilized the army to go after him again.

Go, make yet more sure. Know and see the place where his foot is, and who has seen him there, for it is told me that he is very cunning. See therefore and take note of all the lurking places where he hides, and come back to me with sure information. Then I will go with you. And if he is in the land, I will search him out among all the thousands of Judah.” 1 Samuel 23:22–23 (ESV)

Yes, Saul knew how cunning David was, but it was really God who kept saving David. After Saul was sure he had detailed information, the chase was on.

And they arose and went to Ziph ahead of Saul... 1 Samuel 23:24 (ESV)

The scouts arrived ahead of the army.

...Now David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the Arabah to the south of Jeshimon. 1 Samuel 23:24 (ESV)



This is exactly where the Ziphites said

David could be found.

And Saul and his men went to seek him. And David was told, so he went down to the rock and lived in the wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard that, he pursued after David in the wilderness of Maon. 1 Samuel 23:25 (ESV)

As you can see on the map, the Wilderness of Moon is a rocky mountainous region.

Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain. And David was hurrying to get away from Saul... 1 Samuel 23:26 (ESV)

Saul and his large number of troops were trying to execute a pincer move. David and his men were higher up on the mountain. Saul and his men were attempting to encircle the middle of the mountain and cut David and his men off from escape.

...As Saul and his men were closing in on David and his men to capture them,... 1 Samuel 23:26 (ESV)

David and his men were scrambling before the pincher snapped shut below them and they were stranded on the top half of the mountain. We are holding our breath, then something nobody expected happened.

...a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Hurry and come, for the Philistines have made a raid against the land." 1 Samuel 23:27 (ESV)

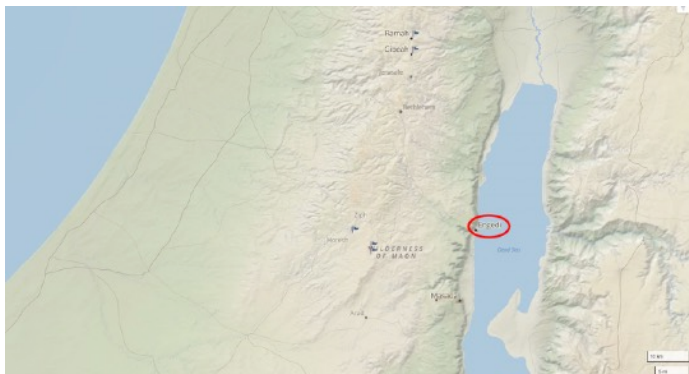
Would you believe it? When Saul mobilized his a massive army to chase David, he left the rest of the nation unprotected. The Philistines just happened to take advantage of that opportunity. Saul couldn't ignore this or he wouldn't have a kingdom to return to after pursuing David.

So Saul returned from pursuing after David and went against the Philistines. Therefore that place was called the Rock of Escape. 1 Samuel 23:28 (ESV)

Saul and his armies retreated when it looked like curtains for David and his men. This last-minute unexpected rescue became so famous they renamed the place the Rock of Escape. People couldn't believe the timing of what happened and how narrowly David and his men escaped.

Isn't God's timing wonderful? Who do you think sent the Philistine to attack the Israelites? It was God working circumstances to protect David so at the last minute, he would be saved again.

Folks, God doesn't just do this for David, but he also does this for us. He loves us. He is in full control over our lives, and even when we are in stressful times and wondering how we will survive in our job, wondering where the money will come from,



wondering how to make it another day, God protects us and carries us through by providentially ordering the circumstances of life to protect and save us so we can fulfill God's purposes for our lives.

And David went up from there and lived in the strongholds of Engedi. 1 Samuel 23:29 (ESV)

This is not the end of the story. It is only a momentary pause between chapters. This is a place by the Dead Sea. At least he was near water which was much better than the desert. Next week, Saul will continue chasing David and David will continue narrowly escaping with his life. The center verse in this chapter give us the theme for this chapter.

...And Saul sought him every day, but God did not give him into his hand. 1 Samuel 23:14 (ESV)

Application

In this chapter, we know God's faithfulness to David was never in doubt. David's faith was being tested by hard times as he ran for his life. Why did God allow these hard times in David's life? He was helping David develop perseverance in his faith. He was changing the character of David's faith so he would not end up like Saul when he came to the throne. David knew hard times. David learned to persevere and keep trusting in God in hard times. He learned to call out to God and depend on God and not himself. God was using the hard times to prove and improve David's faith.

Nothing has changed. God takes us as his beloved children and allows us to go through hard times where we get to the end of ourselves when we are desperate. God allows these hard times in our life because he loves us. He wants to prove and improve our faith, just like he did for David.

Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. James 1:2–4 (ESV)

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 1 Peter 1:6–7 (ESV)

The good news is that as we go through hard times in life, we are not alone.

First, we are promised divine help from Jesus when we call out to him in prayer.

Second, God will bring Christian friends into our lives to encourage us when we are down and remind us of the promises of God we need to hear.

Third, we can trust in God's providential care. God will protect us, and order our lives to save us until he decides to take us home.



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