

The story of Nabal and Abigail in chapter 25 is at the very center of “The Adventures of David.”

It is surrounded by the two episodes of Saul being given into David’s hand.

It is preceded by the story of David in the Judean wilderness;

it is followed by David in the land of the Philistines.

The Adventures of David begin with the death of Goliath.

They end with the death of Saul.

In these central episodes we hear of what will happen to all of David’s enemies.

David’s enemies will be destroyed—

not because of David’s might and power,

but because the LORD was with David.

It is not David’s military might,

but his faith and trust in Yahweh

that gave him the victory!

Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the LORD!

And as that was true for David,

so was it most powerfully true for our Lord Jesus Christ,

and therefore it is true for us as well!

Wait upon the LORD and he will accomplish his purposes for you.

It is equally important to point out that “waiting on the LORD”

does not mean that you never do anything!

Rather, it means that you wait for the LORD to do what *he* has promised –

and then, when God says “Go!”

You go.

But sometimes it is the tempter who says “now is the time!”

David in the wilderness reflects the three temptations of Deuteronomy 6-11,

Do not say in your heart, these nations are too great for me. (Dt 7:17)

Do not say in your heart, my power has gotten me this wealth (Dt 8:17)

Do not say in your heart, it is because of my righteousness (Dt 9:4)

These three temptations come back in the temptation of Christ in the wilderness.

And we will see tonight how Satan’s temptation of Jesus is prefigured when David’s men say,

strike down Saul, and you can have the kingdom now!!

But David refuses.

Why?

Because David knows what God has said.

You don’t strike down the LORD’s Anointed!

When you know what God has said – and what God calls you to do and to be –

the temptations of the wilderness do not have nearly so much power over you!
And you can have simple confidence in God that he will do what *he* has promised.

We see this in our opening scene at Keilah in verses 1-5.

1. David against the Philistines (23:1-14)

a. David Saves Keilah (v1-5)

23 Now they told David, “Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are robbing the threshing floors.”² 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.”³ 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?”⁴ 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.”⁵ 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.

So while Saul is busy pursuing David and slaughtering the priests of Yahweh,
David is defending Judah from the Philistines,
and protecting the last priest of Yahweh!

Of course, having the priest around is helpful,
because then you can inquire of the LORD!

Verse 6 is the key to the whole passage.

We had heard at the end of chapter 22

that Abiathar had fled from the slaughter of the priests at Nob –
and now we hear in verse 6 that he brought an ephod in his hand.

The ephod contained the Urim and the Thummim.

When inquiring of the LORD, it appears that you ask a yes or no question,
(or, at least, a question with only two answers)
and the priest reaches into the ephod, and pulls out the answer –
Urim or Thummim.

It's like casting lots – but God had appointed this method of inquiring after him,
so David trusts that the answer will be from God.

You might think –

wouldn't it be awesome to have something like this available for knowing the will of God?!

Just remember –

Saul had access to it as well.

In order for this to work – you have to fear God more than you fear man!

Oh – and you have to be the LORD's anointed.

You and I are not the Messiah!
You and I – quite frankly – are not the center of God’s purposes for history!

Ordinary Israelites did not have access to the Urim and Thummim every day.
They were not intended for making everyday decisions.

But we have something better than Urim and Thummim!
We have not just Abiathar with the ephod.
We have Jesus – the great high priest – who has entered the heavenly Holy of Holies –
and who has brought us with himself to the right hand of the Father!
There we are seated with him in the heavenlies.
We have a high priest who welcomes us and sympathizes with us in our time of need.

So when David hears that the Philistines were attacking Keilah and robbing the threshing floors,
he inquires of the LORD, “Shall I go and attack these Philistines?”
And the LORD answered, “Go and save Keilah.”

But David’s men were afraid.
They were hiding in the hills and caves!
If they are afraid to face Saul,
how can they face the Philistines?

So David inquired again of the LORD.
The LORD’s anointed was concerned for his men.
And the LORD honors that by answering again,
Arise, go down to Keilah, for I will give the Philistines into your hand.

It appears that the first time David inquired, the question was “shall I go and attack these Philistines?”
And the answer was yes.

But “go attack” is not the same thing as “will we win?”!
And so the second time the question seems to be will you give the Philistines into my hand?
And the answer is Yes!

b. Saul Pursues David (v6-14)

⁶ When Abiathar the son of Ahimelech had fled to David to Keilah, he had come down with an ephod in his hand. ⁷ Now it was told Saul that David had come to Keilah. 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.” ⁸ And Saul summoned all the people to war, to go down to Keilah, to besiege David and his men. ⁹ David knew that Saul was plotting harm against him. And he said to Abiathar the priest, “Bring the ephod here.” ¹⁰ 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. ¹¹ 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.” And

the LORD said, “He will come down.” ¹² 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.” ¹³ Then David and his men, who were about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah, and they went wherever they could go. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he gave up the expedition. ¹⁴ 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.

Of course, the one problem with defeating the Philistines is that everybody hears about it!

Saul now knows exactly where they are.

The irony between verses 4 and 7 is not accidental:

the LORD says to David, “I will give the Philistines into your hand,”

and Saul says to himself, “God has given David into my hand.”

Don’t count your providences before they’re hatched!

David hears that Saul will come after him,

and so David again inquires of the LORD:

will Saul come to Keilah?

and will the men of Keilah surrender me into the hand of Saul?

And God says Yes and Yes!

Do you see how sin works?

If Saul had not slaughtered the priests,

then David would not have had a priest with an ephod through whom to inquire of the LORD.

He might have remained in Keilah,

trusting in kinship to save him.

They are Judahites – they’ll protect me, right?!

But as it is, the murder of the priests comes back to haunt Saul.

(If you think of the end of Saul’s life, haunting might be just the right word!)

So David flees into the Wilderness of Ziph,

and though Saul sought him, *God did not give him into his hand.*

You may be noticing that “the hand” is rather important in this chapter.

These two chapters of 1 Samuel contain 20 references to the “hand” –

either Saul’s hand or David’s hand (or – in v6, the ephod in Abiathar’s hand!).

2. David in the Wilderness (23:15-29)

a. Jonathan Strengthens David (v15-18)

¹⁵ *David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life. David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh.*

¹⁶ *And Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God.*

¹⁷ *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.”¹⁸ And the two of them made a covenant before the LORD. David remained at Horesh, and Jonathan went home.

But then – out of the blue – Jonathan shows up.

Saul is seeking for David – but cannot seem to find him.

Jonathan “rose and went to David at Horesh.”

It’s not hard to see why.

David is running away from Saul.

But David *trusts* Jonathan – and so when David’s scout sees Jonathan, undoubtedly he would welcome him and bring him to David!

At this little-known meeting in 1 Samuel 23:16-18,

we see the final covenant-making between Jonathan and David.

It is worth noting that the first time, Jonathan made a covenant (or cut a covenant) with David.

Jonathan was the superior in the relationship –

so David says in chapter 20, verse 8,

“you have brought your servant into a covenant of the LORD with you.”

But here it says that “the two of them made a covenant before the LORD.” (v18)

This is the language of a treaty between equals.

Jonathan has previously surrendered any claim to the throne –

and so now he treats David as his equal.

Jonathan is still technically the crown prince –

and so in terms of their “legal status” they are both in the same position.

They each have a claim to the throne – but Jonathan has renounced his claim in favor of David.

But while Saul is pursuing David and trying to kill him,

Jonathan “strengthens his hand in God.”

Once again the hand plays an important role.

God gave the Philistines into David’s hand,

but he would not give David into Saul’s hand,

and so now Jonathan, rather than give David into Saul’s hand,

(betraying David like everyone else!)

strengthens David’s hand in God.

The word “hand” appears 9 times in chapter 23 –

and another 11 times in chapter 24.

(The hand will also play an important role in chapters 25-26 next time)

There are two hands in view –
David's hand – and Saul's hand.

Jonathan has clearly chosen which hand he will serve!
“Do not fear, 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.” (v17)

Why is this so important in our story?

Because everyone else is betraying David!
David saved the men of Keilah – but they were ready to betray him to Saul.
The men of Ziph literally betray David.
Saul – his king – is trying to kill him.

And so David – with his 600 men – is scrambling around the wilderness
trying to keep one step ahead of Saul...

and here comes Jonathan – here comes my best friend –
and he strengthens my hand in God!

Don't worry, David! God will not give you into the hand of my father.

When Jesus calls us to seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness –
he is calling us to be like Jonathan –
to renounce our own kingdoms – our own ideas of what is most important –
and submit ourselves to him!

Think about that in terms of the issues of our day.

Right now, things are not the way they should be.
Our culture is not walking in the way of Jesus.
We should not fret about that.
We should not be anxious.

Saul is on the throne.
For now.
So what?

He will not rule forever.

What does Jesus say?
What does Jesus call us to do?

b. The Ziphites Betray David (v19-29)

¹⁹ 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?” ²⁰ 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.” ²¹ And Saul said, “May you be blessed by the LORD, for you have had compassion on me. ²² 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. ²³ 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.” ²⁴ And they arose and went to Ziph ahead of Saul.

But David was now in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh,
and the Ziphites do not appear to have liked him very much (no reason is given).
Perhaps they were just loyal to their king!
So they play the Judas and came to Saul and revealed David's whereabouts.

Judas is exactly the right comparison.

The Ziphites come to the ruling power in Israel,
and offer to hand over the Lord's anointed,
whose very presence is a threat to the ruling powers.
Not only that, but the ruling power was itself appointed by God.
The chief priests in Jesus' day were the Lord's anointed.
And they eagerly accepted the offer of treason
by the one who could give the Messiah into their hand.

Because it is only through trial and temptation that the Messiah can be made perfect.
As Hebrews says, he was perfected through what he suffered (Hebrews 2:10).
Indeed, the problem with Saul is that he walked an easy road to glory.
He became king without any suffering.
(I'm not saying Saul never suffered—
I'm saying that 1 Samuel doesn't report it!
The point that 1 Samuel is making—and is making at great length--
is that the only sort of king that you want, is a king who has suffered —
a king who has endured affliction, and understands our misery.)

Now David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the Arabah to the south of Jeshimon. ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ 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. As Saul and his men were closing in on David and his men to capture them, ²⁷ a messenger came to Saul, saying, “Hurry and come, for the Philistines have made a raid against the land.” ²⁸ So Saul returned from pursuing after David and went against the Philistines. Therefore that place was called the Rock of Escape. ²⁹ And David went up from there and lived in the strongholds of Engedi.

And so Saul pursues David through the wilderness,
but just as Saul is catching up, he gets a message:
the Philistines are raiding!

Chapter 23 started with David saving Keilah from Philistines raiders.
Chapter 23 ends with the Philistines saving David from Saul.

In the same way that Egypt—the land of death and cursing—
becomes a refuge for the people of God in Joseph's day,
so also the Philistines become an ironic benefactor to David,
both now and later!

God will defeat both his and our enemies.
Until then he will use them to accomplish the salvation of his people.
He will use radical Islam as his instrument of judgment against the apostate west
(just as he used the Philistines against the apostate Saul),
and yet through their attacks, many (both Muslim and apostate Christian)
are yet being brought to repentance.

Brothers and sisters,
if we have paid attention even slightly to what God has revealed in David,
and then, far more clearly in Jesus (!)
we should be fearless.

What can separate us from the love of God in the Messiah?
If God brought Jesus through suffering to glory,
and has now made us partakers with Jesus,
then why should cross or trial grieve me?

3. David and Saul in the Cave (24:1-22)

a. The LORD's Anointed – David's Confession of Faith (v1-15)

24 When Saul returned from following the Philistines, he was told, "Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi." ² Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel and went to seek David and his men in front of the Wildgoats' Rocks. ³ And he came to the sheepfolds by the way, where there was a cave, and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave. ⁴ And the men of David said to him, "Here is the day of which the LORD said to you, 'Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you.'" Then David arose and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul's robe. ⁵ And afterward David's heart struck him, because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe. ⁶ He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD's anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the LORD's anointed."

Saul takes 3,000 men and chases David and his six hundred men in the wilderness of Engedi.
And as he is chasing him, he needed to relieve himself, so he goes into a nearby cave.

David's men see this and say
*Here is the day of which the LORD said to you,
Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand,
and you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you. (24:4).*
They see this as David's opportunity to kill Saul and take the kingdom.

Maybe they are well-intentioned,
but this is the same sort of request the disciples made,
"Shall we call down fire from heaven to destroy this Samaritan village?"

They do not understand how the kingdom comes.
They remember Ehud,
and how Ehud killed Eglon, King of Moab,
in order to deliver Israel from a tyrant.
And so they think of assassination as a legitimate political strategy.

But Saul is not a foreign king.
He is a brother.
And he is a messiah – the LORD's Anointed.

And so David arose *and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul's robe.*

Perhaps assassination would have worked politically.
(Though I suspect David won an awful lot of support from those who matter most–
the faithful–when they saw how he patiently waited for the LORD)
But David is content to wait upon the LORD and do what is *right*.
And you do not strike down the LORD's anointed.

For that matter:

*And afterward David's heart struck him,
because he had cut off a corner of Saul's robe.
He said to his men,
The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord,
the LORD's anointed, to put out my hand against him,
seeing he is the LORD's anointed. (24:5-6).*

Why is David so devastated about cutting off the corner of Saul's robe?
Perhaps he had heard about Samuel's comment
about his torn robe in 1 Samuel 15.
The tearing of the robe signals the tearing of the kingdom.

So for David to cut a corner off Saul's robe
suggests that David is indeed in full rebellion against Saul!

David is concerned about showing respect for the LORD's anointed!
He is concerned to show honor to the office of Messiah—or anointed king.

Verse 7 is translated rather gently in English:

⁷ So David persuaded his men with these words and did not permit them to attack Saul. And Saul rose up and left the cave and went on his way.

“Persuaded” doesn’t get close!
The word means to “tear apart” – like what Samson did to the lion in Judges 14!
He persuaded the lion to die!!

No, he tore apart the lion with his bare hands!!
And David tore his men apart with these words...

You see an echo of this in Paul’s attitude toward the high priest in Acts 23:1-5.

The High Priest Ananias orders someone to strike Paul,
and Paul responds “God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall!
Are you sitting to judge me according to the law,
and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?”
And when he is asked “Would you revile God’s high priest?”
Paul replies, “I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest,
for it is written, *you shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.*”

Ananias may not personally deserve any respect or honor,
but the office that he holds deserve honor,
and so Paul acknowledges his error.

(Though it is hard to believe that Paul didn’t know who Ananias was!
I detect a fair amount of sarcasm in Paul’s reply!)

⁸ Afterward David also arose and went out of the cave, and called after Saul, “My lord the king!” And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the earth and paid homage. ⁹ And David said to Saul, “Why do you listen to the words of men who say, ‘Behold, David seeks your harm’? ¹⁰ Behold, this day your eyes have seen how the LORD gave you today into my hand in the cave. And some told me to kill you, but I spared you. I said, ‘I will not put out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD’s anointed.’ ¹¹ See, my father, see the corner of your robe in my hand. For by the fact that I cut off the corner of your robe and did not kill you, you may know and see that there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you hunt my life to take it. ¹² May the LORD judge between me and you, may the LORD avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you. ¹³ As the proverb of the ancients says, ‘Out of the wicked comes wickedness.’ But my hand shall not be against you. ¹⁴ After whom has the king of Israel come out? After whom do you pursue? After a dead dog! After a flea! ¹⁵ May the LORD therefore be judge and give sentence between me and you, and see to it and plead my cause and deliver me from your hand.”

But in David's case,
he recognizes Saul's authority over him, calling him "My lord the king" in verse 8.
And David asks him why he is listening to lies.
If I was trying to kill you, I could have.
"I will not put out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD's anointed." (24:10)

And David calls upon God as witness—
"May the LORD judge between us"
God gave you into my hand, and I spared your life.
If God were to give me into your hand, what would be my fate?

Indeed, David makes clear "may the LORD avenge me against you"!
But I will not avenge myself.
My hand shall not be against you. (v12 – which he repeats again in v13!)

David understands that vengeance belongs to God.
"Vengeance is mine, says the LORD, I will repay."
God *will* make all things right.

Even the King – and perhaps, *especially the King* – should not seek vengeance for himself.
David will bring justice for *others* – but not for himself.

David will wait for the LORD to render his verdict.
It can be tempting to try to justify ourselves.
But it doesn't work.

And notice Saul's response in verse 16:

b. You Are More Righteous Than I – Saul's Confession of Sin (v16-22)

¹⁶As soon as David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. ¹⁷He said to David, "You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil. ¹⁸And you have declared this day how you have dealt well with me, in that you did not kill me when the LORD put me into your hands. ¹⁹For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safe?"

In a remarkable moment of seeming repentance,
Saul responds by acknowledging that David is more righteous than he is.

Plainly, David does not view Saul as an enemy.
"for if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safe?"

And Saul recognizes this.
Saul sees that David is in the right.

And Saul is in the wrong.

But we've seen this before with Saul.

Saul recognizes the truth – but then “forgets.”
He does not fear God.

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom.

When we fear God, we do not fear man.
When we fear man, we do not fear God.

And when we fear God – we are able to love others (even our enemies).

When we fear man – we are *not* able to love others (especially our enemies –
or, better, those whom we *see* as enemies!

Momentarily, Saul sees clearly – and so speaks clearly:

So may the LORD reward you with good for what you have done to me this day. ²⁰ And now, behold, I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand. ²¹ Swear to me therefore by the LORD that you will not cut off my offspring after me, and that you will not destroy my name out of my father's house.” ²² And David swore this to Saul. Then Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

And he asks that Yahweh *reward you with good for what you have done to me this day.*

Acknowledging that David will indeed be king after him,

Saul then asks David to swear that he will not cut off the house of Saul
when he becomes king.

That was an easy oath for David, since he had already sworn that to Jonathan!

But notice that Saul says nothing about David returning.

And David has no interest in returning.

David will wait in the wilderness until the LORD makes a way.

Wait for the LORD – and he will hear your cry.