

May 22, 2016
Sunday Morning Service
Series: The Life of David
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
© 2016 David J. Whitcomb

To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as we prepare to hear from 1 Samuel 23.

1. Why is it important for leaders to flesh out the truth of a matter before trying to decide how to respond?
2. Why does this text highlight the fact that Abiathar brought the ephod with him?
3. Contrast the reasons why 400 men joined with David, but the citizens of Keilah planned to turn David over to Saul even though he delivered them from destruction.
4. In light of the above contrast, why did David feel compelled to deliver the people of Keilah?

ASK GOD FOR DIRECTIONS
1 Samuel 23:1-13

Christians say they believe in God. They claim that God is omniscient, that is He knows everything all the time. They agree that He is omnipresent, meaning He is present everywhere all the time. And we say that He is omnipotent, which means He can do whatever He chooses to do whenever He chooses to do it. Christians also claim that they desire to do God's will. And Christians generally act like God's will is a secret that He defies His people to figure out. Do we simply try to get off the hook of doing what we know to be God's will?

Is it obvious from this observation that there is a conflict? If our God has a will for us, and if He is able to direct us in that will, we should think that it is not only possible, but likely, that we will discover it.

Just the other day, I read again the story of Peter who went to preach to the Gentile Cornelius. That was a radical departure from the norm. Jesus was born a Jew, taught and worked among the Jews, and left the responsibility for continuing His ministry to Jewish men. The common Jewish opinion, taught by some significant Rabbis, was that God had created Gentiles to fuel the fires of hell. Therefore, when Peter entered the house of Cornelius, preached the gospel, and witnessed many Gentiles coming to faith in Christ, the rest of the Church, being all Jews, were flabbergasted. How could that be God's will?

Peter assured the doubters that he was in the center of God's will. He explained how God Himself had given Peter the vision of the sheet with all kinds of unclean food on it. God told Peter to eat it, and Peter refused arguing that he was a ceremonially clean Jew. At that point God made His point. He told Peter to stop making distinctions among people groups that God did not intend to be made. That was the revelation of God's will.

We should not expect visions of sheets and God's audible voice as we seek to know God's will for our lives. It is highly unlikely that such miracles will occur in a day when God has given us His completed revelation, the Bible, and has given us believers the person of the Holy Spirit to live within us. The Holy Spirit's ministry is to teach us God's will as we read and study the Bible.

David didn't have that privilege. And seldom in his day did God do the vision of sheets kind of thing. But, sincere people like David had ways of searching out God's will. The priests and the prophets figured significantly in this process. God had given these gifted people to the Israelites to help them discern God's desires. It might seem strange to us that God would actually work through these odd methods. But we must remember that those people had only a relatively small part of the Bible available.

We have the full revelation of God at our disposal. Therefore, God leads us along His paths of righteousness through the study of His truths and sincere prayer. If we prayerfully seek God's will

through the understanding and application of the principles of His word, we will in time have confidence about what God would have us to do. In this part of the David story, there are a couple of examples of how God did this for David and his friends.

Consult God Again and Again (vv.1-5).

In this part of the David story, God's servant illustrates how leaders need to know God's leading for themselves first (vv.1-2). The text brings up an important question. How should leaders respond to hearsay? *Now they told David, "Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are robbing the threshing floors" (v.1).*

First, we will be wise to try to determine who the leaders are. They are not just presidents and kings and stuff like that. Almost everyone is a leader of some sort. God intends for all parents to be leaders of their children. Husbands should be leaders of their homes. Many of you are leaders in your work place, at school, in neighborhood committees, or clubs. Several of you hold leadership positions here at this local church.

These are not insignificant matters because leaders are responsible to know how to lead, where to lead, when to lead, and why to lead. Especially in the church setting this responsibility takes on the special requirement of being in fellowship with God so that God directs our paths. Church leaders above all people must do as Solomon wrote, *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths (Proverbs 3:5-6).*

In very practical ways, those leaders need to verify the news they hear. In the example before us, David heard that the Philistines had attacked Keilah. The city of Keilah was about five miles south of David's location in the forest of Hereth. We do not know a lot about this city. We know that Joshua gave it as an inheritance to the tribe of Judah (Josh. 15:44). We also know later that people resettled in the city after the exile in Babylon, and they helped rebuild the wall of Jerusalem (Neh. 3:17-18). But at this point in David's life, Keilah was a city occupied by fellow Israelites. The precarious thing about the city is that it sat right at the border with Philistia, the perennial enemies of Israel.

That the Philistines might raid the city during barley or wheat harvest was not to be unexpected. But, how would David verify if the city had actually come under attack? He and his men did not have the luxury of watching reports about the attack on the evening news, or checking facebook, or being able to Google the latest headline about Keilah. However, because most towns were relatively close together in Judah, news certainly would have traveled quickly. There is little doubt that David could consult an eyewitness in this case.

Verifying the truth is critical for us before we start making decisions about how to respond. Unfortunately, Christians in general have a reputation for knee-jerk reactions. We hear that a governing official or the head of a leading corporation has made a statement or issued an edict that we disagree with. Right away some leader calls for a boycott. But wait! Did anyone verify what was really said, what the official meant, and how it is going to truly effect us . . . if it does at all?

Maybe a worse scenario is how rumors fly through any local church or work place. Do we verify the truth before we decide how to respond? Often the best way to verify truth in our local settings is to ask the person or people who are involved.

In 1897, rumors that Samuel Clemmons, Mark Twain, was on his deathbed quickly flew through the news, beginning with a major American newspaper. Maybe you remember his supposedly famous reply. Clemmons happened to be in London and Frank White of the *New York Journal* contacted him to see if indeed he was still alive. Clemmons responded by writing, among other things, that it was his cousin who was ill, and that some people had even concluded that Mark Twain was dead. To which Clemmons wrote, "The report of my death was an exaggeration." Which reply is generally misquoted because few people ever verify the truth of the situation.

Now the important part. Having discovered the truth, we must inquire of the Lord. *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" (v.2).* Maybe an expected reply to such news would have been, "Why bother?" David would be bothered by this attack because Keilah was part of the nation of Israel. The people who lived in that city were fellow citizens. More than that they were possibly relatives of some of David's followers.

Furthermore, a very important principle was at issue here. David already knew that he was to be the next king of these people. No doubt the 400-600 followers at this point were also aware of this promise which is why they were hanging out with David. How would the people feel about “King David” if he had the opportunity to deliver them from the enemy but didn’t do it? David already knew that it was God’s will for him to be king over these people in the future. Therefore, if he had opportunity to do what kings do (defend them from attack), would it not be a good idea to do it, if it was God’s will? Of course it would.

The lesson for us is that we need to determine clearly if our “ideas” or our “desires” honor God. To *inquire of the Lord* is the same idea as our practice of prayer. Often the priests or prophets would be involved in this process. This word shows up 172 times in the Old Testament and often refers to one human asking a favor or petition of another human. But here we find the idea of David going before God and asking what he should do in this matter. This brings up an interesting and very important contrast between Saul and David. They both had input from various human sources. We read, “It was told Saul” (v.7); “when Saul was told” (v.13); “when Saul heard” (v.25). At the same time we read, “They told David” (v.1); “when David learned” (v.9); “when David was told” (v.25). The great contrast is that David had the advantage because he got word from God also.

In some manner God gave a positive answer to David’s request. During the Old Testament period, it was possible for the people to determine God’s will by praying for God to direct and then casting lots. That is what Solomon referred to when he wrote, *The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD (Proverbs 16:33)*. It is possible that God spoke audibly, but not likely.

For us who have the Bible and the Holy Spirit to guide us, God answers in a couple of ways and often a combination of those ways. God often arranges circumstances that provide either an “open door” (move forward) or a “closed door” (can’t move forward). God will give confidence and peace of heart about the matter.

What a blessing that David, the leader, knew for certain what God’s will was for him and his band of “not merry” men. We can almost hear him say with confidence, “Come on men. Put on your

swords. Let’s go deliver Keilah.” And we can hear them all say in response, “Whoa! Not so fast there Lone Ranger. We better take a vote on this matter.”

In the matter of leading in the will of God, leaders need to convince others about God’s leading (vv.3-5). Not everyone is always in agreement. *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?” (v.3)*.

The word *behold* means “pay attention” or stop to think about the facts. Just because a person is a leader it doesn’t mean he or she has stopped to consider all the facts. Yes, we have already discussed the importance of uncovering the truth about a matter before we decide how to respond. But David’s men were convinced that David had overlooked an important truth. They were already afraid of the possibility of having to fight with Saul and his army—in their home territory! The idea of going to the edge of Philistia to fight against the superior Philistine army seemed foolhardy.

Why was David so sure and the men were not? For one, they did not share David’s reason regarding his future kingship over those people. Furthermore, there is no evidence in this story that they inquired of the Lord. Therefore, they had not received an answer from the Lord. As a result, the men in general were rather myopic in their conclusion. Their first question was, “How is this going to effect me?” The answer was not good. They concluded, “We are small and afraid and the Philistines are big and not afraid.” So apparently their solution in this problem was to do nothing.

These men demonstrated an important principle based on experience. They failed to realize that their leader David had already fought this kind of battle in his heart in the past. Goliath was huge and fearsome—and a Philistine. David trusted God completely and stated publicly that God would win the battle for him for God’s own glory. Beyond that experience, it was also true that God had given David victory in several battles since then. Why would this one be any different?

But rather than argue with the doubters David went back to prayer. He taught us that when in doubt we do well to continue to inquire of the Lord (vv.4-5). David prayed and again God affirmed that it was His will for David to fight the Philistines. *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" (v.4). David didn't do anything different this time. He used the same kind of approach to the question which was to simply ask God for guidance. Essentially he received the same answer from God. But notice this time the significant difference in God's answer. Now God told David to go because "I will give the Philistines into your hand." Granted, David's men did not get this reply from God. Would they trust David who trusted God?

Reading the biographies of faithful missionaries and pastors over the years reveals that this kind of conflict is very common. The scenario is very much the same over and over. God chooses a particular person to be His spokesperson, evangelist, pastor, teacher, leader of some sort. That person walks in fellowship with God daily. Through prayer, the study of God's word, and the wisdom God grants, the leader recommends a certain action. Right away, people who God did not choose to lead, who do not walk in close fellowship with God, resist and boldly state that God's leader (like Moses) is wrong. Ascertaining and doing God's will can be challenging. Knowing God's will and getting others on board to help can be impossible for humans.

Difficulties notwithstanding, when we are sure of God's answer we must obey. *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 (v.5).* Finally, David convinced the men regarding God's will. They went down to Keilah and fought the powerful Philistines. And God, true to His word to David, gave the victory. And hopefully everyone involved concluded: "Isn't God great!" We can only hope.

God Foils Satanic Attacks (vv.6-13).

David faced another problem in this setting. The problem illustrates how Satanic powers work through people (vv.6-8). Having delivered Keilah by God's power, David soon faced a serious threat (vv.7-8). His enemy heard that David had trapped himself. *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" (v.7).

We need to remember that Saul was evil because he turned against God which leaves only one other option—be on Satan's side. There is no middle ground. Saul, looking for opportunity to kill the man God had chosen to replace him, learned his whereabouts. David was still in Keilah which was about twenty miles south of Saul's home in Gibeah (or a good day's journey). Evil Saul concluded, based on human wisdom, that he could easily capture David who was virtually in a trap.

David's enemy planned to devour him. *And Saul summoned all the people to war, to go down to Keilah, to besiege David and his men (v.8).* Saul's will was simply to lay a siege around the city of Keilah. The people would grow hungry and thirsty and turn David and his men over.

This is a good picture of Satan's work against the people of God. God warned us to *Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith, knowing that the same kinds of suffering are being experienced by your brotherhood throughout the world (1 Peter 5:8-9).* Satan loves to take down God's people through sin—it happens regularly. But Satan also knows he can knock out God's people by stirring up people against them.

Reading in "To the Golden Shore," a biography about Adoniram Judson, I have learned how he faced a continual cycle of opportunity to share the gospel of Christ, followed by fearful times of threats against anyone who taught Christ to the people of Burma. How sad it must have been for the Christians who were turned in to the authorities by their own family members to be tortured or killed. The same story has been repeated throughout the various periods of persecution against believers. In our lifetime, Satan has often stirred up individuals to be his attack dogs to expose Christians to persecution and death in Nazi Germany, Communist Russia and China, and now in the Islamic nations. How will we respond if the same happens in America? What hope do we have?

David need not fear. God knew all about his circumstances and provided the ephod for him (v.6). Great! *When Abiathar the son of Ahimelech had fled to David to Keilah, he had come down with an*

ephod in his hand (v.6). But what was the ephod and why does it deserve mention in this story? The ephod was a special garment associated with the high priest and his work of worship in the tabernacle. God gave the details of its design at the founding of the nation. His law required:

And they shall make the ephod of gold, of blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and of fine twined linen, skillfully worked. It shall have two shoulder pieces attached to its two edges, so that it may be joined together. And the skillfully woven band on it shall be made like it and be of one piece with it, of gold, blue and purple and scarlet yarns, and fine twined linen. You shall take two onyx stones, and engrave on them the names of the sons of Israel, six of their names on the one stone, and the names of the remaining six on the other stone, in the order of their birth. As a jeweler engraves signets, so shall you engrave the two stones with the names of the sons of Israel. You shall enclose them in settings of gold filigree. And you shall set the two stones on the shoulder pieces of the ephod, as stones of remembrance for the sons of Israel. And Aaron shall bear their names before the LORD on his two shoulders for remembrance. You shall make settings of gold filigree, and two chains of pure gold, twisted like cords; and you shall attach the corded chains to the settings. (Exodus 28:6-14).

As the instruction might indicate, this was a special garment to be worn only by the high priest. Also, associated with this ephod was the Urim and Thumim that was attached to it. *And in the breastpiece of judgment you shall put the Urim and the Thummim, and they shall be on Aaron's heart, when he goes in before the LORD. Thus Aaron shall bear the judgment of the people of Israel on his heart before the LORD regularly (Exodus 28:30).* In some way unknown and unpracticed by us, God revealed His will to His people as the priest or king would consult Him through this unique channel called the Urim and Thummim.

It was a really big deal for David and his people to have this special item with them in their camp. How interesting that the ephod would encourage God's people in that day, but the Bible does not have the same effect in our day. We have the Bible, God's self-revelation, a good general explanation of His will. The Bible reveals principles of God's righteousness that touch on every area of life.

Coupled with all the instruction and information of the Bible, we have the ministry of the Holy Spirit of whom Jesus taught: *But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you (John 14:26).* He also taught, *When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come (John 16:13).* We should be able to know at least something about God's will.

God's people need to know God's will in the battle (vv.9-13). It is wise to inquire of the Lord (vv.9-12). We do well to seek God's will when facing difficulty. *David knew that Saul was plotting harm against him. And he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here" (v.9).* Again we recall that the ephod served a special purpose for discerning God's will. Therefore the critical things for us to know when we face trials are, "Why does God desire for me to go through this trial?" "What does God desire for me to learn in this trial?" "How can God be glorified in this trial?"

Also, in the face of trial, pray specifics (vv.10-11). That means that we pray according to what is true like David did. *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" (v.10).* We need to remind ourselves like David did that we are simply God's servants. That means that we are not in control like the guy who rubs the magic lamp and then commands the genie who pops out to do our will. We must state the truth about our circumstances to God. He already knows, but it is good for us to remind ourselves about the truth.

We must pray expecting answers (v.11). Notice how David expected God to answer him. *"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" (v.11).* He posed two specific questions: "Will Saul really come after me?" and "Will the people of this town who I just delivered turn me over to Saul?" And then he pleaded, "Please tell your servant." God answered the question about Saul coming and David prayed some more.

While praying for God to reveal His will, it is good for us to pray for closed doors. *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" (v.12).* The question was: "Will we be safe in Keilah?" God gave a "closed door" to staying in Keilah by telling David he would be captured if he stayed.

That the people who David just saved from destruction would turn him over is a topic for another sermon. The point here is that staying in Keilah was a closed door. The lesson for us to learn is that we must pray for God to close the door He does not wish for us to go through because closed doors are generally easy to see.

Finally, the text teaches that for us to obey God's direction is wise and safe. *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 (v.13).* Once God gives a clear answer, obey. In this case, the men scattered *wherever they could go*. As we shall see in our next study, David went to the Wilderness of Ziph (v.14).

Our Creator and God has a desire for us to follow Him. Sometimes we are unaware of what He would have us do. We need to pray and seek His will in the principles of His word. We need to ask God to arrange circumstances so that we can know His will. We need to obey when we know.