1 Samuel 23

GOD IS MY HELPER

INTRODUCTION

The whole period when David was a fugitive from Saul is punctuated by a series of references to the information received by both Saul and David about the movements and plans of the other man. The series began back in chapter 19 with the words '*and it was told* Saul, saying, Behold, David is at Naioth in Ramah', 19.19, and extends to chapter 27, '*and it was told Saul* that David was fled to Gath: and he sought no more again for him', 27.4. Chapter 23 in particular is littered by references to who is told what – and who knows what.

In order:
- David is informed by men about the plight of Keilah, v.1
- David is twice told by God to intervene and to save Keilah, vv.2, 4
- Saul is informed of David's whereabouts, v.7 (The first information Saul received about David since 22.6.)
- David knows of Saul's plot to harm him, v.9
- David is informed by men about Saul's movements, v.10
- David has Saul's movements confirmed by God, v. 11
- David is informed by God about the willingness of the men of Keilah to betray him, v.12
- Saul is informed that David has escaped from Keilah, v.13
- David is aware that Saul is still seeking his life, v.15
- Saul is informed by the men of Ziph of David's movements, v.19
- Saul has been informed that David is cunning and shrewd, v.22
- Saul tells the men of Ziph to keep David under surveillance and to report back, v.23
- David is informed of Saul's approach, v.25b
- Saul is informed ('heard') of David's exact whereabouts, v.25c
- Saul is informed of a Philistine invasion, v. 27

Our chapter highlights the fact that both sides – 'the pursuer' and 'the pursued' – benefited from highly effective intelligence networks. In Saul's case, the knowledge he obtained through his network was supplemented by information volunteered by others in the surrounding area, v.19. In David's case, the knowledge he obtained through his network was supplemented by information provided by heaven itself, vv.2, 4, 11-12!

We last saw David in 22.6, but now, in the opening section of chapter 23, the spotlight moves back from Saul to David. And anyone reading straight through from the closing section of 1 Samuel 22 into the opening section of chapter 23 cannot miss the stark contrasts – Saul is the slayer of the defenseless priests of Nob, 22.16-19; David is the saviour of the defenseless inhabitants of Keilah, 23.1-5. In an outburst of rage, Saul, with the aid of Doeg, 'smote' the city of the priests, 22.19; in an act of courage, David, with the aid of his men, 'smote' the Philistine aggressors, 23.5.   In chapter 22, Saul's hands are covered with blood by Doeg, Saul's chief herdsman, but, in chapter 23, David's hands are strengthened in God by Jonathan, Saul's eldest son, 23.16.

CHAPTER DIVISION

The chapter opens with the men of Keilah being 'saved' – immediately by David, but, in a deeper sense, and ultimately, by the Lord Himself, vv. 2, 4, 5 – and closes with David being saved – immediately by the Philistines, but, in a deeper sense, and ultimately, by the Lord Himself.

Verses 1-6   **(a) Keilah saved by David *from* the Philistines**

Verses 7-13   **(b) The men of Keilah willing to 'deliver' David into Saul's hand, v.12**
                        David in danger of being enclosed in a town, v.7

Verses 14-18   **(c) David's hand strengthened in God**

Verses 19-26   **(b) The men of Ziph willing to 'deliver' David into Saul's hand, v.20**
                        David in danger of being enclosed in a wilderness, v.26

Verses 27-29   **(a) David saved from Saul *by* the Philistines**

Note that the 'Keilah' section of the chapter, vv. 1-13, centres around two instances where David made double use of the priestly ephod to inquire of the Lord – first to save the men of Keilah from the marauding Philistines, vv.2, 4-5, and second to save him and his men from the murderous Saul, vv.11-13.

EXPOSITION

Verses 1-6   **Keilah saved by David *from* the Philistines**

Verse 1. *'Behold, the Philistines fight against Keilah, and they rob the threshing-floors'.* Tidings reached David of a Philistine raid against the city of Keilah. The city was perched on a steep hill just a few miles to the south-east of Adullam, at no great distance from the Philistine border. Being so near the border, it was a fortified and walled town, and was not itself therefore in any great danger from a Philistine raiding party. But threshing-floors were normally situated outside the cities[1], and the threshing-floors of Keilah were clearly no exception. The threshing-floors were where the grain was stored and stacked prior to threshing – and where, after winnowing, the threshed grain was stored in heaps until taken home.[2] The threshing floors of Keilah therefore offered easy and attractive plunder[3] to the Philistines. For the inhabitants of Keilah, the Philistine raids were not only intensely frustrating because of their fruitless toil, but worrying because of the loss of their basic food supply.

It is interesting that, though David was informed of the problem, there is no suggestion that Saul was. (Yet it is clear from v.8 that Saul could reach Keilah with relative ease if he chose.) Perhaps it was now widely known that Saul was most unlikely to intervene. It could hardly have escaped public notice that Saul had for some time been more concerned with killing David than with killing Philistines. Time was when the Philistines had been 'his enemies', 14.47, but more recently he had come to think and speak of David as his 'enemy' - 'Saul became David's enemy continually', 18.29; ' Saul said unto Michal, Why hast thou deceived me so, and sent away mine enemy, that he is escaped?', 19.17. Indeed, Saul's last - very public - action had revealed him to be a man far more interested in slaughtering innocent Israelite priests, who he suspected of being sympathetic to David, than in sorting out Philistine raiding parties.

How sad! In response to the people's demand, God had provided them with a king 'that he may *save* my people out of the hand of the Philistines', 9.16. Now it is left to David to *'save'* the inhabitants of Keilah, v.5. Alas, the Saul of chapter 23 is a very different man to the Saul of chapter 11, who, with large-hearted impulse, raced to *'save'* (see 'to save us', 1 Sam. 11.3) the men of Jabesh-gilead from the attack of Nahash the Ammonite, 11.1-11. Once it could be said that 'Saul delivered Israel out of the hands of them that spoiled' them, 14.48 ('spoiled' translates the same Hebrew verb as rendered 'rob' in 23.1) - but no longer!

It was Saul's business to deliver Keilah from the Philistines. But, on account of his obsession with eliminating David, he was clearly no longer fulfilling his role as king over Israel. And so, if Saul wasn't doing his job, the Lord would use David to do it. Perhaps here we discover another reason why, through the prophet Gad, the Lord had called David to return to the land of Judah, 22.5 - He had work for him to do there.

Verse 2. *'David enquired of the Lord, saying, Shall I go and smite these Philistines?'* Note that it was David who took the initiative. Through the prophet Gad, the Lord had earlier instructed David to return to the land of Judah, 22.5, but the Lord does not now tell David what he is to do when there. It was David who asked God whether he should get involved – not God who asked David to do so. It was David's own genuine sympathy for the weak and helpless among the Lord's people which stirred him into action.

There was no constraint at all on David to endanger his life for the sake of Keilah. Many of us, in David's position, might well have said, 'Be fair! I have more than enough on my own plate at the moment – I have more than enough troubles of my own – what with Saul hounding me at every turn', or, 'Frankly, this isn't my responsibility. Saul is officially the king, not me. Let him deal with it. That's his job'. Looking into my own heart, can I honestly say that I have never felt something of the sort? Made aware of someone else's pressing need, have I never responded, 'It's not my worry … I've got enough problems of my own … let someone else do it'? Ouch!

But David wasn't a man to brood on his own troubles – he was a man after God's own heart, sharing something of God's feelings for His people, and fired with a desire to advance their welfare.

But if David wasn't the kind of man to stand back and ignore a known need, neither was he the kind of man to rush in impulsively and immediately set about meeting it[4] – not without first asking the Lord about it. David wasn't going to make any rash move. Yes, he was noble and brave enough to propose confronting the Philistines, but he was also wise enough to refer to matter to the Lord first – hence 'Shall I go …?' In the face of known need, the front-line question for us all should be, 'What, if anything, does *the Lord* want me to do about it?'

David's natural (better, 'spiritual') instinct to 'enquire of the Lord', vv.2, 4, 9-12, revealed a lot about David's character, and served to distinguish him markedly from Saul. David saw himself as operating under the authority of God and His revealed will.[5] But Saul didn't see himself in the same light – and it was indeed Saul's failure to submit himself wholly under the authority of God's word which was the root-cause of his shipwreck as Israel's first king.[6]

'The Lord said unto David, Go, and smite the Philistines, and save Keilah'. Evidently Abiathar relayed God's answer, and interpreted the will of God for David, by means of the Urim and Thummim in the priestly ephod; see v.6 and Annex A.

Verse 3. *'David's men said unto him, Behold, we be afraid here in Judah: how much more then if we come to Keilah'.* Note the contrast between, *'the Lord said unto David'*, v.2, and *'David's men said to him'*, v.3. Although David had obtained clearance from God to 'go' and 'smite' ('strike') the Philistines, he certainly couldn't do that alone! He needed his men to 'go' with him. And they weren't too keen!

'Against the armies of the Philistines?' Given that Keilah was situated in the 'Shephelah', the foothills of Judah between the coastal plain on the west and the hill country on the east, David's men were clearly using the word 'Judah' in a limited and restricted sense – probably to describe the area of the lowlands around the actual towns.[7]

For David and his men to leave the relative safety of the dense and difficult terrain of the mountain[8] forest of Hareth, 22.5, to come out of hiding, and to venture out into the open country of the 'lowlands', would expose them, not only to the view of both Saul's men and the Philistines, but to attack by the 'armies' of the Philistines - with their numerous and terrifying chariots, 13.5. This was hardly a pleasant prospect!

It was bad enough trying to escape from Saul; was it really sane to launch a direct hit at the Philistines and provoke them to possible large-scale retaliation? Perhaps some of David's men had heard what happened years previously when 'Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and the Philistines heard of it … and the Philistines gathered themselves together to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the sea shore in multitude', 13.3-5. Indeed, the subsequent Philistine invasion reported in v.27 may suggest that such fears were far from groundless. It could well be that it was the 'great slaughter' of the Philistines at Keilah which provoked such a massive military response.

So their trepidation is not hard to understand. Even though their number had recently grown by 50%, the rag-tag group still numbered only 600, v.13, and, as yet, most of them had had no real experience of fighting. Evidently, they had yet to learn that the main reason for their very existence as a fighting unit under David's leadership was not to help him kill Saul and to take over the kingdom, but to deal with situations such as that at Keilah.

And so (with a rather transparent allusion to Robin Hood), although the 'outlaw of Hareth forest', 22.5, didn't take too kindly to the poor being robbed by the rich, initially at least, his 'band of merry men' were all for sticking to the forest!

Verse 4. *'Then David enquired of the Lord yet again'.* Although David no doubt listened carefully to the objections raised by his men, his concern was to obey God rather than men. He had already received his marching orders; namely 'Go', v.2. But to infuse fresh courage into his men, he 'enquired of the Lord' a second time.

'Arise, go down to Keilah; for I will deliver the Philistines into thine hand'. No, there had been no mistake. It *was* God's will for them to 'go' - and this time He reinforced the point by giving David the assurance that He had already effectively given him the victory; note 'I *am giving* the Philistines into your hands', lit.

Verse 5. 'Went... smote... saved'. This was, word for word, what God had earlier said David would do - 'go… smite... save', v.2. We can have complete confidence in 'every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God'!

'Brought away their cattle'. It seems that the Philistine raiding party had not only been plundering the threshing-floors of Keilah but driving off the flocks from neighbouring pastures. Little had David's men, when hiding furtively in the forest of Hareth, guessed that they would shortly be feasting on T-bone steaks from the Philistine's stolen cattle.

Verse 6. *'When Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David to Keilah … he came down with an ephod in his hand'.* This is inserted as a necessary explanatory note for the reader's benefit.

'An ephod'. The ephod brought by Abiathar was the ephod of the high priest - until recently that of his father, Ahimelech. According to Exodus 28, the 'breastplate of judgement' (in other words, 'the breastplate of decision') was linked inseparably to the ephod; note 'that the breastplate be not loosed from the ephod', Exod. 28.28. It was this breastplate which contained the Urim and Thummim, v.30. See Annex A for further information – but note in particular how Eleazar the priest enquired of the Lord on Joshua's behalf *'after the judgment of Urim'* that, 'at his (God's) word, 'the people should 'go out (to battle)', Num. 27.21.

To have a priest with the high priest's ephod therefore enabled David to seek the Lord's answers to specific enquiries - which is precisely what he had done in both v.2 and v.4. The purpose of the parenthetical v.6 is to explain *how it was he could do it* - and how it was that he was able shortly to save his own life - and the lives of his men - by obtaining information from God both about the actions of Saul and the attitude of the men of Keilah, vv.11-12. The God who had directed David by a prophet in chapter 22 (v.5), now directs him by the ephod in chapter 23.[9]

Sad though the circumstances were which brought them to him, how blessed David was to have both Abiathar and the high priest's ephod - on which his life would so soon depend! Saul was told 'that David was come to Keilah', v.7 – and would later be 'told that David was escaped from Keilah', v.13 – and on both occasions David's movements were informed by what he learnt from God through Abiathar and the ephod!

That Abiathar should have the presence of mind to bring the ephod with him is perhaps not surprising in that the possession of the 'Thummim' and the 'Urim' ranked among the greatest privileges of the house of Levi, Deut. 33.8.

Given that God told David to 'go down to Keilah', v.4, clearly Abiathar had joined up with David while he and his men were still in the forest - before they left for Keilah. The expression 'fled to David at Keilah' may well mean 'fled to David when David was facing the Keilah situation'.[10] On the other hand, the Septuagint may well be right in rendering the verse, 'When Abiathar son of Ahimelech fled to David, he went down with David to Keilah having an ephod in his hand'.

Verses 7-13   Men of Keilah willing to 'deliver' David into Saul's hand, v.12

The remainder of the chapter describes Saul's pursuit of David from Keilah, vv.7-13, to the wilderness of Ziph, vv.14-24a, and subsequently to the wilderness of Maon, vv.24b-28; concluding with David's flight to the strongholds of En-Gedi, v.29.

Verse 7. *'It was told Saul that David was come to Keilah'.* I wonder whether Saul was also informed *why* David had ventured there or *what he had achieved*. But, whether or not Saul knew that David had risked his own life to save others of the nation, this 'tip-off' brought Saul hot-foot to Keilah.

'Saul said, God hath delivered him into mine hand'. How sad that the apostate king should sink so low as to imagine that the holy One of Israel should stoop to furthering his own wicked, murderous plans - in blatant contradiction to the word of God to him on more than one occasion. Saul was clearly reading from the wrong script!

A short time before, the Lord had told David that He would 'deliver' the Philistines 'into his hand', v.4. Now, Saul told himself that God had 'delivered' David 'into his hand'. God was right, but Saul was wrong.

'For he is shut in, by entering into a town that hath gates and bars'. It seems that Keilah may have had just one gateway in its wall by which people could enter and leave the city. This gateway would have been sealed with two reinforced wooden doors, which were hinged to the sides, which met at the centre of the gateway, and which were secured with a heavy metal bar spanning the entrance horizontally.[11] Saul felt confident that with sufficient troops he could control the gate and so trap David.

Verse 8. *'Saul called all the people together to war, to go down to Keilah, to besiege David and his men'.* Having first brought God's *name* into his murderous design, v.7, he now brings God's *people* into it. What a distressing contrast to how Saul had begun his military exploits. Then he had sent messengers 'throughout *all* the coasts of Israel' to summon them to battle against the Ammonites, 11.7. Now he again summoned *'all* the people together to war'. But not 'to war' against the Philistines - or the Ammonites - or the Edomites - or the Amelekites - or the Moabites; cf. 14.47-48. Not at all - they were summoned 'to besiege David'. I do wonder, however, whether Saul told the people what he really had in mind or whether he left them believing that they were going to fight against the Philistines.

Referring back to v.1, we now know that Saul was indeed willing to make the journey and to fight at Keilah - though not to 'save' the city (as David did, v.5), but only to 'besiege' and 'destroy' it, vv. 8, 10! What irony - the *king of Israel* will lead the *army of Israel*, not to defend a *city of Israel*, but to do Philistines' work and to attack it!

Verse 9. *'David knew that Saul secretly practised mischief against him'.* Literally, 'that Saul was devising that which was bad against him'. There is no word in either the Hebrew or the Greek text to support the 'secretly' of the AV. And, at least as far as David was concerned, there was nothing 'secret' about Saul's purpose.

'He said to Abiathar the priest, Bring hither the ephod'. 'Bring' because the priest did not always wear it; Ahimelech said, 'The sword of Goliath … is here wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod', 21.9; and 'David said to Abiathar the priest … bring me hither the ephod', 30.7. In situations when David didn't know what he should do, his automatic reaction was clearly, 'Bring the ephod'! The inner desire of his heart was, 'Let me find out what God says about this situation'. *We* don't have an ephod but we do have the scriptures! Should not our cry then be, 'Bring the Bible – what does God say?' I don't have David's priest with an ephod, but I have that which is better – I have 'a great high priest', and, as David himself found, God's word as 'a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path', Psa. 119.105.

Verse 10. '*Thy servant hath certainly heard that Saul seeketh to come to Keilah, to destroy the city for my sake'.* Neither David nor the men of Keilah – nor, least of all, Abiathar – were under any illusion about how thoroughly Saul could 'destroy' a city if he put his mind to it, 22. 19!

Note David's threefold reference to himself in vv. 11-12 as 'Thy servant'. This was, after all, the only proper attitude of heart in which to seek direction from God. Compare David's words elsewhere; 'I am thy servant; give me understanding, that I may know thy testimonies', Psa. 119.125.

'Will the men of Keilah … will Saul … will the men of Keilah …?' Notice that each of the questions was presented in a form which required only a 'Yes' or 'No' answer. It may be that counsel asked of God by means of the Urim and Thummim always followed that pattern. See Annex A.

'The men'. The word used is 'ba'alîm', which, apart from obvious reference in other contexts to pagan deities, can sometimes signify 'lords', 'masters' or 'owners'. Here it may well describe the governing body of Keilah - effectively the City Council - as distinct from ordinary, private individuals. It is possible, however, that the word may simply refer to the 'citizens' of the city.[12]

Verses 11-12. *'And the Lord said, He will come down … they will deliver thee up'.*[13] Note that God answered first the question which, in logic, should have been asked first. Note also that He answered only one question at a time, thereby requiring David to re-submit the first question. In both cases, the recorded divine response consists of only one Hebrew word – and, in both cases, the answer was effectively 'Yes'.

'Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul? And the Lord said, They will deliver thee up'. On the face of it, for the 'men (whether the 'governors' or the 'citizens') of Keilah to have been willing to surrender and sacrifice their 'saviour' and his men to Saul, was base, inexcusable and incomprehensible ingratitude. 'Base'? – yes, certainly. 'Inexcusable'? – probably. But 'incomprehensible'? – no! The men of Keilah knew the punishment for being seen to support David in any way! It was common knowledge that Saul had recently visited terrible revenge on all the inhabitants of another city (the women and the children as well as the 'men') because one man there had unwittingly given David a little help. And now, for his attack on *their* city, the king has mustered 'all the people together to go to war'. If God was left out of the equation (and, according to the mathematics of the men of Keilah, He was) they had absolutely no hope of withstanding the forthcoming siege. What then would become of them and their families?

Having risked his life to save the men of Keilah from the Philistines, I suspect that the divinely revealed information that they would have delivered him into Saul's hands must have wounded David deeply. We all feel the sting of ingratitude. Let us therefore make it *our* aim to be grateful and appreciative people – both to the Lord and to all around who show us kindness.

Verse 13. *'David and his men … arose and departed out of Keilah … Saul … forbear to go forth'.* 'Ah', I hear someone say, 'so both answers given in vv.11-12 were wrong then! The men of Keilah *didn't* deliver David and his men into the hand of Saul – because David never gave them the chance, v.13a! And, in the event, Saul *didn't* bother to 'come down … to Keilah' – because, having been told 'that David was escaped', he 'ceased to go out', v.13b lit.'

Well, *were* the answers which God gave David wrong? Perish the thought!

Clearly, God's answers to both questions were, in one sense, hypothetical – His answers were based upon one key variable remaining unchanged – that David stayed put! God was saying that, *if* David remained in Keilah, Saul's army *would* come and attack the city. And, *if* David remained in Keilah, and Saul's men then came and attacked the city, the men of Keilah *would* turn David and his men over to Saul.[14]

The Lord's words to David were absolutely true – but they were dependent on David's own actions. And it was to inform those actions that David had sought this very information by asking the questions which he had.

Many years before, Hannah had exclaimed, 'The Lord is a God of knowledge', 2.3. And He is indeed that. For the Lord knows, not only all things actual – past, present and future – but He also knows all things which 'could have been' but weren't, all things which 'could be now' but aren't, and all things which 'could be in the future' but won't.

God told the men of Judah through Jeremiah that He knew the consequences of whichever decision they made: 'Thus saith the Lord, the God of hosts, the God of Israel; *If* thou wilt assuredly go forth unto the king of Babylon's princes, *then* thy soul shall live, and this city shall not be burned with fire; and thou shalt live, and thine house: But *if* thou wilt *not* go forth to the king of Babylon's princes, *then* shall this city be given into the hand of the Chaldeans, and they shall burn it with fire, and thou shalt not escape out of their hand', Jer. 38.17-18.[15]

Our passage illustrates the fact that God knows how every man, woman and child *would have* acted *if* their circumstances had been different to what they were. The Lord Jesus demonstrated this very kind of knowledge when speaking of the unrepentant cities of Galilee: 'Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for *if* the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, *they would have repented* long ago in sackcloth and ashes …And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for *if* the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, *it would have remained* until this day', Matt. 11. 21-23.[16] Note that he doesn't say, *'If … they might have'*, but *'If … they would have'*. It goes without saying that such knowledge speaks volumes about the status and identity of Jesus!

God's knowledge is unlimited. He knows everything which would have happened *if* people had acted differently to the way in which they did – with all the innumerable knock-on effects of every hypothetical action! That is, God knows, not only all things actual, but all things possible. He knows, not only all things which *will* be, but knows all things which *could* be - under any possible set of circumstances. It is one thing for God to know what the future *does* hold. It is something vastly greater for Him to know what the future *could* hold.[17]

Our passage is simply making it clear that God knew precisely what the men of Keilah *would have* done if 'push came to shove' - if Saul have besieged the city and given them the opportunity to hand David over to him in exchange for their own safety. In revealing this knowledge to David, the Lord enabled him to ensure that they didn't get that opportunity!

'David and his men … arose and departed out of Keilah'. Although David had it on divine authority that, put in a corner, the very men he had just *delivered from* the Philistines would have *delivered* him *to* Saul, David was not a man to harbour a grudge. He made no attempt to avenge himself on them. He simply 'departed'. Similarly, when, a thousand years later, the Son of David was rebuffed by the men of an unnamed Samaritan city, He simply 'went to another village', Luke 9.56. Such is the meekness of Christ that the Samaritan village would have no more to fear then from fire from heaven than Keilah had a thousand years before from David's sword, Luke 9.54-56.

'And went whithersoever they could go'. Literally, 'they went about wherever they went about'. That is, having no fixed plan, they wandered from one hiding-place to another.

Verses 14-18   David's hand strengthened in God

Verses 14-15. *'David abode in the wilderness in strong holds, and remained in a mountain'.* During this period of his life, David needed to keep on the move, and he generally established his bases in natural strongholds on mountain heights from where he could easily observe the approach of his pursuers.

'In the wilderness of Ziph'. The *town* of Ziph was some 12 miles south-east of Keilah, in the hill country of Judea, Josh. 15.48, 55. The *wilderness* of Ziph stretched for several miles south of the town and formed the western border of the vast 'wilderness of Judea' which stretched across to the Dead Sea and which offered abundant facilities for eluding Saul and his search parties.

'Saul sought him every day, but God delivered him not into his hand'. That is, though Saul was relentless and persistent, God didn't do that which, in a tight corner, the men of Keilah would have been willing to, vv.11, 12!

Verse 16. *'Jonathan Saul's son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God'.* Jonathan couldn't have arrived at a better time.

In the context of our chapter, Jonathan's friendship and encouragement shines as a bright light amid the dark *shadows* which were cast by, on the one side, the ingratitude of the men of Keilah, v.12, and, on the other, the treachery of the men of Ziph, v.19 - and, over*shadowing* all, the malice of Saul, v. 7. If David couldn't rely on the gratitude of those he had helped (the men of Keilah), or on people within his own tribal territory of Judah (the Ziphites), on whom could he rely? On whom could he depend? Ironically, on the son of Saul, his avowed enemy.

David's son Solomon was later to write, 'A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity', Prov. 17.17. Truly Jonathan's tracking David down now - with all the risks involved for him in that - was proof positive that he was a true 'friend' and soul-brother – prepared to stand by David through thick and thin.

Jonathan's *purpose* in coming to David was clearly to do exactly what he did do - to strengthen and encourage David 'in God'. Don't miss those last words! In effect, Jonathan strengthened David by putting David's weak hand into God's almighty hand! What breathtaking words we find in one of Asaph's psalms; *'Thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory'*, Psa. 73.23-24. Enjoy!

Let us learn from Jonathan that real *encouragement* means instilling *courage* into *discouraged* people by lifting their eyes and thoughts *towards God.*[18]

Later, in chapter 30 (when everything seemed against him, and when he was altogether beyond Jonathan's reach) 'David encouraged ('strengthened', the same word as here) himself in the Lord his God', 30.6. What a gracious God we have that, now, when the pressure is mounting on David and almost everyone seems against him, He provides him with a brief visit from his 'royal and loyal' friend.

David certainly wasn't the only great man of God to benefit from encouragement given by others. When the apostle Paul was experiencing a time of deep discouragement, God sent him Titus: 'I am filled with encouragement; I overabound in joy under all our affliction. For indeed, when we came into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but [we were] afflicted in every way; without combats, within fears. But *he who encourages* those that are [brought] low, [even] God, *encouraged us* by the coming of Titus', 2 Cor. 7.4-6 JND. Titus must have been as much a sight for Paul's sore eyes as, a thousand years before, Jonathan must have been for David's.[19]

Verse 17. *'He said unto him'.* Jonathan didn't 'strengthen' David's hand by bringing him a contingent of troops to supplement his 600 - after all, he had no guarantees that any such troops would not end fighting against his own father. Nor did Jonathan 'strengthen' David's hand by bringing him food or other supplies. Jonathan strengthened David's hand 'in God' - by bringing him something far better than either soldiers or supplies - by bringing him words! No, not harsh words about Saul - for this noble son of a king was careful to let not one undutiful word escape his lips - but tremendous words of encouragement. They were indeed welcome words from a welcome visitor.

'Fear not'. 'Fear'? Who? David? Yes, naturally speaking, David had plenty of grounds to be afraid. How much he now needed to hear this echo of his own words to young Abiathar not long before, 22.23. But is that all? Simply a nice sentiment, without real substance or foundation? Certainly not!

'The hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel'. That's it. Jonathan will revive David's spirit by pointing him to the sure and certain fulfilment of God's promise to him and of His purpose for him. Yes, of course, Jonathan's presence in itself was a comfort and an encouragement to David. But let us learn that to truly encourage and refresh others often needs more than just our presence - important as that is. Our presence on its own cannot provide the abiding and enduring encouragement which God's word does. We encourage others most by sensitively and wisely reminding them of the promises of God. Solid, lasting encouragement doesn't come so much from emotional closeness as from God's word. When visiting the 'shut ins' and downcast saints, be careful to take something of your own enjoyment of God's word with you.

'Thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee'. The emphasis falls on the pronouns - '*You* will be king over Israel, and *I* will be next to you'. Jonathan's self-denying generosity stands in marked contrast to the self-interest of the men of Keilah! Jonathan was totally committed to David's becoming the next king of Israel. His willingness to settle for second place is a million miles away from the ambitious request of the sons of Zebedee, Mark 10.35-37. James and John looked for special places of prominence next to our Lord in His manifested kingdom – places above those of the other apostles. Theirs was a case of self-seeking. Jonathan was made of other stuff – willing to forfeit his own right to succeed Saul in David's favour.

Jonathan was a realist. He knew that Saul would never willingly stand down as king. But he was confident that, when his father did go (and Saul was not a young man - probably now well in his 70s - see Annex A to chapter 18), David would be king.[20]

'And that also Saul my father knoweth'. Jonathan was right. Saul knew! Sometime after this meeting, he acknowledged to David, 'I *know well* that thou shalt surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thine hand', 24.20. After all, Saul could hardly doubt that David was destined by God to be the next king. He had been told bluntly by Samuel, 'The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and *hath given it to a neighbour of thine, that is better than thou'*, 15.28. The song of the women who welcomed back the triumphant warriors from the valley of Elah had alerted him to the likely identity of this 'better neighbour'. And David's invincibility in the face of all his schemes and assaults had clinched the matter. Oh, yes, Saul knew alright! And yet, sadly, undeterred, he would still do all in his power to frustrate the known purpose of God.

Verse 18. *'They two made a covenant before the Lord'.* And so, at what proved to be their last meeting, they renewed and confirmed the covenant between them; cf. 18.3, 20.16. Mephibosheth would be the living and lasting evidence that David fulfilled his part with honour.

'David abode in the wood, and Jonathan went to his house'. The words underscore the different circumstances and conditions in which the two men now lived. We hear a faint echo of this contrast - and especially the words 'to his house' - in an incident of our Lord's life when here; 'Every man went unto his own house. Jesus went unto the mount of Olives', John 7.52-8.1.[21]

Verses 19-26   Men of Ziph willing to 'deliver' David into Saul's hand, v.20.

Verses 19-20. *'Then came up the Ziphites to Saul to Gibeah,*[22] *saying, Doth not David hide himself with us … come down … and our part shall be to deliver him into the king's hand'.* The treachery of the Ziphites stands in striking contrast to the loyalty of Jonathan. David is now Israel's most wanted man - a man with a price on his head who can no longer be sure of anyone - even men of his own tribe.

The men of Ziph are as ready to hand David over to Saul as would the men of Keilah - but with far less excuse. Saul and his troops weren't coming down to destroy their city!

Verse 21. *'Saul said, Blessed be ye of the Lord'.* Out comes more of Saul's 'pious talk'. Earlier he had spoken of 'God' having 'delivered' David into his hand, v.7; now he wishes the blessing of 'the Lord' on those who would inform

on David. It is frightening that references to God could be so often on his lips when there was no place for Him in his heart.[23]

'For ye have compassion on me'. Taken together with Saul's earlier outburst there at Gibeah - 'there is none of you that is sorry for me', 22.8 - this has much to say about the king's deep feelings of self-pity. We recall that Saul hadn't been so strong on 'compassion' himself when others - the men of Keilah - were in real trouble!

Verse 22. *'Know and see his place where his haunt is'.* Literally, 'where his foot is'. That is, 'track him down as you would a wild beast'.

Verse 23. *'I will search him out throughout all the thousands of Judah'.* The 'thousands of Judah' refer either to families, as in 'present yourselves before the Lord by your tribes, and by your thousands', 10.19, or to villages and towns as in 'thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah', Mic. 5.2.

Verses 24-25. *'David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon'.* The wilderness of Maon lay about five miles south of Ziph in the wilderness of Judah – only a few hours' journey away.

'When Saul heard … he pursue after David'. The tension mounts. David's situation was becoming desperate.

The title of Psa. 54 reads, *'A Psalm of David, when the Ziphites came and said to Saul, Doth not David hide himself with us?'*[24] It seems likely to me that it was Saul's approach in v.25 which prompted the passionate opening cry of the psalm. Without any preamble, David went straight to the point, and cried out, 'Save me, O God, by thy name, and judge (vindicate) me by thy strength'. And well might David plead for God to put forth His 'strength' – for, on the human level, 'David and his men', v.24, had precious little strength compared to that of 'Saul … and his men', v.25. And yet David is not without hope – at the structural centre of his psalm we find his confidence, *'God is my helper; the Lord is of them that uphold my soul'*, Psa. 54.4 RV. [25]

David's oppressors may not have 'set God before them', Psa. 54.3, but David had most certainly set God before him! Sometimes the Lord permits His people to be reduced to dire straits that they may flee – not to the rock at Maon, v.25 – but to the Rock of Israel. David himself was later to sing, 'The Lord is my rock', 2 Sam. 22.2-3, 32, 47; 23.3.

But when David asserted 'God is my helper', he little realised just how much he was shortly going to need His help - and he would never have guessed in what form that help would come!

Verse 26. *'Saul went on this side of the mountain, and David and his men on that side of the mountain: and David made haste to get away for fear of Saul; for Saul and his men compassed David and his men round about to take them'.* What a real nail-biter! At this point the tension becomes well nigh unbearable.

'David made haste to get away for fear of Saul'. Literally, 'David was fleeing in terror (or 'in panic') to go from the face of Saul'.[26]

'Saul and his men compassed David and his men round about'. Guided by the Ziphites, Saul and his men had been drawing the net tighter and tighter around David and his men. Now they had practically enclosed them. David and his men were not only out-numbered but were now more or less surrounded. Quite likely, Saul had divided his forces into two companies to attack both flanks of David's men on the far side of the mountain, and were now closing in on them. Although David and his men were frantically hurrying to get away, Saul and his men were getting closer and closer.

David was finally trapped. The Hebrew word translated 'compassed … round about' is not the same that is usually rendered 'compass' or the like on some 90 occasions in the AV. This word, which occurs only seven times in all, is one of the words for 'a crown' and graphically expresses the way in which David and his men were being encircled. All means of escape were being sealed off. There was now no way out – and, unlike Moses, David didn't even have a Red Sea to dry up before him!

Did Saul permit himself a wry smile? He had earlier thought that he was able to trace the working of providence when he discovered David apparently cornered and enclosed in a fortified town, vv.7-8. No matter now that all that had come to nothing – he now has David cornered and enclosed again – this time by the side of a mountain. And this time Saul is confident that his prey will not – indeed cannot – escape!

But then Saul *could* be wrong! Perhaps God would yet intervene in some dramatic fashion to rescue David – perhaps He would open up the earth to swallow his opponents (as in Num. 16.32), or rain fire from heaven on those sent to apprehend His servant (as in 2 Kings 1.10, 12), or provide horses and chariots of fire to surround his servant (as in 2 Kings 6.17), or send an angel to wipe out the opposition (as in 2 Kings 19.35).

But, wait – what is all that shouting? Who is this breathless character, frantically yelling for the king?

Verses 27-29   David saved from Saul *by* the Philistines   (Or, 'Three cheers for the Philistines')

Verse 27. *'But there came a messenger unto Saul, saying, Haste thee, and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land'.* A messenger arrived to gasp out his urgent and disquieting news. Saul was to come post-haste – the Philistines had mounted a massive raid on the land.

Well, who would ever have predicted such a dramatic development – or the arrival of the Israelite messenger at such a critical moment? Ah, but God's resources are limitless. He didn't need to send anything or anyone from heaven – fire, horses and chariots of fire, or angel – to do His work. His enemies will do nicely!

We may be able to hazard a guess or two as to what it was that inspired the Philistines to launch their attack just then. Perhaps their intelligence network had picked up that Israel was especially vulnerable at that time – that the king's attention was focused exclusively on a young rival for the crown. After all, had not Saul let the attack on

Keilah's threshing-floors pass unchallenged? Possibly the Philistine lords concluded that Saul's advance way off to Ziph and Maon in the east gave them just the opportunity they needed – the territory of Israel nearest their border now stood unprotected.

On the other hand, it is by no means impossible that their attack came as retaliation for the 'great slaughter' which their raiding party had recently suffered, courtesy of David, at Keilah, v.5. When commenting on v.3, we noted how the Philistines had reacted back in chapter 13; 'Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and *the Philistines heard of it … and the Philistines gathered themselves together to fight with Israel*, thirty thousand chariots, and six thousand horsemen, and people as the sand which is on the sea shore in multitude', 13.3-5. It would indeed have been a delightful irony if it were David's 'good deed' at Keilah, which, under God, led to his rescue at Maon.

But, in the end, we don't know what human considerations stirred the Philistine war machine into action at that particular moment. Nor do we need to know! For we do know what we need to. We know that it was God's doing! We know that David's 'Save me, O God' prayer had registered in heaven!

And David's God was not only at work behind the scenes – He was moving the scenes! David once ended a psalm with the words, 'Thou, Lord wilt bless the righteous; with favour ('good pleasure') wilt thou *compass* him as with a shield', Psa. 5.12. With *God's* 'good pleasure' to 'compass' him as a shield, David had nothing to fear when Saul and his men 'compassed' him to catch him. (The word 'compass' in Psa. 5.12 is the same as in 1 Sam. 23.26.)

And so, if David received a visit from an unexpected friend in vv.16-18, he now experienced a deliverance from an unexpected quarter in vv.27-28! '*Unexpected quarter*', did I say? That is some understatement. At the beginning of the chapter David had rescued Keilah from the Philistines. At that time, *the people he had saved* would have *surrendered him into Saul's hand*; now, *the people he had smitten* arrive on the scene to *save him out of Saul's hand*. Note how the sovereign Lord employs His enemies for the preservation of His friends. Surely, our God is able, if He chooses, not only to prepare a table for us in the presence of our enemies, but to make those very enemies load the table!

'The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of trial', 2 Pet. 2.9 JND. He certainly does – and in so doing He sometimes works in the most surprising of ways. Our God has an unlimited number of wonderfully 'unguessable' means by which He is able to deliver His people

Two things in particular strike me about David's deliverance:

(a) I marvel at the way in which God used as His instruments men who were oblivious to the fact that He was using them. Whatever motivated the Philistines to attack Israel, it certainly wasn't with a view to saving David's skin. And they may well have never found out that that was what they had done.

Our God works His will through men who are unaware that He is doing so! The Lord, through the prophet Isaiah, expresses the point clearly when describing the nation of Assyria as a rod in His hand. He made it clear that He was completely in control of the Assyrians' actions and was sending them to discipline godless Judah against whom His anger burned. They were, He said, 'the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation'. He would send the Assyrian monarch 'against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey (the meaning of the name which Isaiah had given to his son Maher-shalal-hash-baz, Isa. 8.1,3)', Isa. 10.5-6.

The following verse is dynamite. 'Howbeit', God added, '*he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so*; but it is in his heart to destroy and cut off nations not a few'. That is, the Assyrian king was altogether ignorant of the fact that, in pursuing his own military ambitions, he was serving the Lord. He certainly wasn't consciously doing so. The Assyrian king's plans were simply to destroy as many nations as he could to expand his own empire.[27] Assyria was then simply an unwitting tool in the Lord's hand that He would use to accomplish His purpose.[28] And the very same was true of the Philistines in the days of David![29]

(b) I marvel at God's perfect, split-second timing. The One who orders and controls the cosmos moved the Philistines to invade Saul's territory, and caused the tidings of this calamity to reach the king's ear just as Saul's men were about to close in on David. If the Philistine invasion had taken place one week later, David and his men would have been pushing up daisies before the Philistines had crossed the border!

Fear not - God's clock keeps strict time. Ask Queen Esther and Mordecai! 'Then said Zeresh his (Haman's) wife and all his friends unto him, Let a gallows be made of fifty cubits high, and to morrow speak thou unto the king that Mordecai may be hanged thereon … And the thing pleased Haman; and he caused the gallows to be made *… on that night* could not the king sleep ('sleep fled away from the king', lit.), and he commanded to bring the book of records of the chronicles …', Esther 5.14-6.1. How much rested – not only for Mordecai and Esther, but for the entire Jewish nation – on the fact that that was the night when Ahasuerus suffered an attack of insomnia!

It has been well said that 'man's extremity is God's opportunity'. I have no doubt that, in the light of the day's events, David would have gladly signed up to that! How God delights to intervene and save when all human hope is gone – and that in ways which men would least expect. And He does so because He is God! Well may we exclaim with Paul, 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!', Rom. 11.33. Why not take the time to ponder some examples from your own experience of God's unexpected deliverances and perfect timing – and to let Him hear your thanksgiving?

Verse 28. *'Wherefore Saul returned from pursuing after David, and went against the Philistines'.* Sensing that this offensive posed a particularly serious threat, Saul saw no choice but to break off his personal vendetta against David for a while and to postpone his pursuit.

Josephus expresses the point well: 'He returned back again to oppose those Philistines, who were naturally *their* (Israel's) *enemies*, as judging it more necessary to avenge himself of them, than to take a great deal of pains to catch *an enemy of his own*'.[30]

Dale Ralph Davis recounts the story of an interesting prayer of Alexander Peden, one of the Scottish covenanters. 'Once Peden and some others were being pursued by horse and foot soldiers. Peden and his friends gained some distance from their pursuers and stopped for a needed breather and desperate prayer. Peden prayed, "Lord, this is the hour and the power of Thine enemies; they may not be idle. But hast Thou no other work for them than to send after us? Send them after them to whom Thou wilt give strength to flee, for our strength is gone. Twine them about the hill, O Lord…." The Lord answered with a cloud of mist between them and their persecutors'. It was an interesting prayer, 'Hast Thou no other work for them than to send after us?'[31] Certainly, in response to David's prayer, 'Save me', Psa. 54.1, God found 'other work' for Saul to do – and so 'there came a messenger'!

And so the chapter more or less ends as it began – with a Philistine attack. But the assault of v.27 was very different to that of v.1. And this in at least two respects:

(a) *In its object and scale.* In v.1 the object of the Philistine raid was simply to plunder 'the threshing-floors' around just one Israelite city. V.27 speaks of a much larger – and far more serious – offensive against 'the land' in general. Saul could – and did – choose to ignore the one. He dared not ignore the other.

(b) *In its effect and consequence for David.* One result of David confronting the Philistine raiders of v.1 was that he thereby drew Saul's attention *to* him and so almost enabled Saul's forces to surround and kill him. One result of Saul confronting the Philistine invaders of v.27 was that his attention was thereby diverted *from* David and so enabled David to escape from Saul's forces, which were surrounding him to kill him. If the Philistine incursion of v.1 spelt 'danger' for David, the Philistine incursion of v.27 spelt 'deliverance' for him. For the very people who were responsible for Saul almost trapping and killing David at the beginning of the chapter, in attacking Israel again were responsible for David's rescue and preservation at the end.

'Therefore they called that place Sela-hammahlekoth ('rock of the division')'. The hand of God was so evident in what had happened that David and his men made the 'rock' (presumably the 'rock' of v.25 – the same Hebrew word) a memorial of the day's events. They called it 'the Rock of the Division' or 'the Rock of the separation'[32] – probably to commemorate when Saul and David parted from each other in such remarkable circumstances. And ever afterwards, when David or others passed through that part of the wilderness, and lifted their eyes to that rock, they would remember that the Lord is truly 'God … mine helper'.

But David not only gave a new name to the place of his deliverance but he celebrated God's intervention in the close of Psa. 54: 'I will praise thy name, O Lord', he wrote, 'for it is good. For he hath delivered me out of all trouble', Psa. 54.6-7.[33]

Verse 29. *'Dwelt in strong holds at Engedi'.* When Saul returned from his – presumably successful – confrontation with the Philistines, David had moved on, some fourteen miles east, escaping to En-gedi, about half way along the western shore of the Dead Sea.[34]

'God is mine helper', David had said, Psa. 54.4. And, in our chapter, God had proved Himself to be just that in a variety of ways. At the beginning of the chapter, as a consequence of Saul's rage against the priests at Nob, He provided David with an unexpected, unique and wonderful means of obtaining guidance and direction, v.6. In the central section of the chapter, He provided him with unexpected encouragement and renewed friendship, vv. 16-18. And at the close of the chapter, he provided him with a most remarkable and unmistakable evidence of His providential care and protection – and that from an altogether unexpected quarter, v.27.

We note that, on no occasion – ever since Saul's first attempt to kill David, 18.11, right to the end of chapter 23 – did God intervene in any 'supernatural' or 'miraculous' way to deliver David – whether from Saul, from Achish or from the Philistines. We have read of no opening earth, of no fire from heaven, of no horses and chariots of fire, of no angelic 'demolition job'.[35] And yet, throughout chapters 18-23, we have seen occasion after occasion when the Lord most definitely *did* intervene to deliver David – and that sometimes in the most astonishing ways. Truly, in every crisis and through every trial, God was David's 'helper'. And the wonderful thing is that *we* can strengthen one another's hands in God with the confidence that 'He hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is *my* helper', Heb.13.5-6.

End-notes

[1] Compare Judg. 6.11, Ruth 3.2, 15.

[2] Compare 2 Kings 6.27; Joel 2.24.

[3] The word translated 'rob' means 'to plunder, to take spoil'. See 'the hands of the spoilers', Judg. 2.14; 1 Sam. 14.48; 2 Kings 17.20.

[4] Compare our Lord's actions in the outer court of the Jerusalem temple. 'Jesus entered into Jerusalem, and into the temple: and when he had looked round about upon all things, and now the eventide was come, he went out unto Bethany with the twelve. And on the morrow … Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves', Mark 11.11-15. There was nothing hasty about His reaction to what he saw. It was the following day when He took action. We recall that, prophetically, He said that the Lord God 'wakeneth morning by morning, he wakeneth mine ear to hear', Isa. 50.4. I take it that the Lord Jesus waited on a word from heaven before purging 'the house of prayer', Mark 11.17.

[5] Compare the words of the centurion at Capernaum, 'Lord, trouble not thyself: for I am not worthy that thou shouldest enter under my roof: wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed. For I also am a man set under authority, having under me soldiers, and I say unto one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Come, and he cometh; and to my servant, Do this, and he doeth it', Luke 7.6-8. The reason for the centurion's sense of unworthiness lay in the authority he believed Jesus possessed - that He had sufficient authority to heal his servant by simply speaking 'a 'word'. The centurion knew full well that authority in the Empire belonged ultimately to the Emperor, from whom it cascaded down by delegation to all officers of any rank in the Roman army. So when the centurion gave a command to soldiers of lesser rank it carried all the authority of the emperor, and they therefore obeyed him. The centurion believed that Jesus spoke and acted under - and therefore with - the authority of God. That is, that he - as the Lord Jesus (note the 'also') - possessed and wielded authority because He was 'under' it. Jesus spoke with all the authority of God and therefore distance was not an issue for Him - He could heal the centurion's servant with only His word.

[6] Saul was no longer 'little' in his own eyes, 15.17. As king, he clearly felt that he could 'modify' God's commands through His prophet if it suited him, 13.9-14; 15.8-29. Such presumption cost him dear! (See 'End-note' 10 to chapter 16.)

[7] See the comments on 'land of Judah' at 22.5. For Keilah being in the tribal inheritance of Judah see Josh. 15.21, 44.

[8] This seems to be the implication of God's instruction to 'go down to Keilah', v.4.

[9] When speaking of Saul enquiring of God, scripture refers to potential answers by way of 'dreams', 'Urim' and 'prophets'. We know that God spoke to David through the Urim/ephod and through prophets. I know of no evidence that God ever chose to use dreams to speak to David. This contrasts, of course, with the case of Solomon, 1 Kings 3.5, 15.

[10] Compare the notes by Keil and Delitzsch, and R. Payne Smith, *I Samuel,* The Pulpit Commentary.

[11] See, 'Thus saith the Lord … I will loose the loins of kings, to open before him (Cyrus) the two leaved gates ('the double doors', NKJV); and the gates shall not be shut', Isa. 45.1.

[12] See NIDOTTE, Vol. 1, pages 681-683; TWOT, Vol.1, page 119.

[13] Dale Ralph Davis comments, 'In what context was Yahweh's guidance given? Was it not in access to God through the appointed priest? And is that not the privilege I enjoy? Through a much greater one than Abiathar? What, after all, does Hebrews 4.14-16 mean? "Since we have a great high priest," we come to the throne of grace and find grace "for help at just the right time." Knowing whether Saul will come down to Keilah can't be any better than that'.

[14] For a slightly different case of an unspoken (but assumed) condition, see the sparing of Nineveh following God's announcement of its fall, Jonah 3.1-4, 10. Nineveh would certainly have fallen as God had said – if they had stayed as they were. Their declared destruction after 40 days presupposed that everything stayed as it was. When the men of Nineveh changed their lifestyle, then what God said would have happened no longer could happen. See the note on 'God's repentance' on page 112 of 'The Minor Prophets', Precious Seed Publications, 1992 - which note forms part of my exposition of the prophecy of Jonah.

[15] Again, God knew – and told Hazael – that his master Ben-hadad, the king of Syria, *would have* recovered from his present illness, *if* Hazael had not first suffocated him to seize his throne, 2 Kings 8.7-15.

[16] The words of Jesus make it clear that God will take account of such things when He judges. And by doing so His judgement will be entirely just and fair – and take full account of the differing opportunities and abilities which every person has ever had.

[17] And that knowledge is essential if He is to guide His people rightly and to over-rule all things for their ultimate good.

[18] In some ways, Jonathan is the Barnabas ('son of encouragement', Acts 4.36) of the Old Testament. When it became clear to Barnabas that God had chosen Paul to assume the dominant role in their partnership, he gladly stepped aside and became Paul's loyal supporter.

[19] We need to learn from the way in which, even 'the great apostle Paul' (as men speak) needed and appreciated the encouragement which others brought him. Note : 'I am glad of the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and

Achaicus: for … they have *refreshed* ('to give rest from toil'; the word of Matt. 11.28) my spirit', 1 Cor. 16.18, and, 'The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he *oft refreshed* ('to cause someone to feel cool) me', 2 Tim. 1.16. Here are three obvious lessons for us:

(i) Let's not fool ourselves - none of us are above the need of encouragement.

(ii) Let us make it our habit to encourage and 'refresh' our fellow-believers. (Remember what Paul wrote to Philemon; 'the bowels of the saints are *refreshed* ('rested from toil') by thee, brother', Philem.7. Go for it!) Here is business of us all - and especially elders; 'We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, *encourage the fainthearted* (not 'the feebleminded' of the AV!), help the weak, be patient with everyone', 1 Thess. 5.14 NASB. And what a glorious - but neglected - ministry it is!

(iii) Let us reflect how much we owe to encouragers - to the modern-day equivalents of Jonathan, Stephanas, Fortunatus, Achaicus, Onesiphorus and Philemon. Identify some of them in your life and thank God for them today.

[20] How could Jonathan be so confident? Even if *he* was willing to stand aside for David, what about his brothers? What about the two who died with him on Gilboa? What about Ishbosheth - who Abner was later to sponsor as a candidate for kingship, 2 Sam. 2.8-10. Yet Jonathan clearly had good reason to believe that there would be no other claimants to the crown. I guess that, if he, as the living heir apparent, relinquished his claim in David's favour, none of his younger brothers would have made any move against him. (Abner only made such a move on Ishbosheth's behalf after Jonathan was dead.)

[21] No doubt many lessons are to learnt from 'the partings of scripture' – of Lot and Abraham, of Moses and Pharaoh, of Elijah and Elisha, of the Lord and the apostles, of Paul and Ephesian elders etc. Why not develop the idea?

[22] For details of the excavations at Gibeah, Saul's palace-fortress, see The Biblical World, pages 259-261, The Bible as History, pages 181-182, Biblical Archaeology (by G. Ernest Wright), pages 123-124. Part of the wall of the citadel at Tell el-Fûl is still standing today. (A coloured photograph of the part of the wall is on page 228 of the 'Illustrated Holy Bible', Readers Digest Association, 1971.)

[23] Compare, 'This people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me', Isa. 29.13; Matt. 15.8-9; Mark 7.6-7.

[24] Although David was to be betrayed again later to Saul by the men of Ziph, 26.1, the exact expression from the title of Psa. 54 occurs only on this occasion, v.19. The circumstances of chapter 23 also seem to fit Psa. 54 better than those in chapter 26.

[25] Compare 'God is my helper; the Lord is *among* them that uphold my soul', Psa. 54.4 JND.

[26] For the idea of terror and panic in the word I have rendered 'fleeing in terror', see NIDOTTE, Vol. 2, pages 229-230 and TWOT, Vol.1, pages 309-310; together with its use in 2 Sam. 4.4 and 2 Kings 7.15.

[27] The Assyrian king boasted that, so great was the authority of its princes, they were the equivalent of kings in other countries. He regarded the cities of Judah as no different to the cities of other nations and, mistaking Judah's God for just another god, he planned to do to Judah and Jerusalem just as he had done to other nations and their cities. 'For he saith, Are not my princes altogether kings? Is not Calno as Carchemish? is not Hamath as Arpad? is not Samaria as Damascus? As my hand hath found the kingdoms of the idols, and whose graven images did excel them of Jerusalem and of Samaria; Shall I not, as I have done unto Samaria and her idols, so do to Jerusalem and her idols?', Isa. 10.8-11; compare 2 Kings 18.33-35; 19.10-13.

[28] See also God's later employing of Nebuchadnezzar ('My servant') and the Babylonian nation, Jer. 25.9; 27.6; 43.10; Hab. 1.12-17. And still later, His employing of Cyrus, Isa. 44.28; 45.1, 13 with Ezra 1.1-3.

[29] The Bible has many such cases to offer. I cite just one from the New Testament. Luke tells us that 'when Festus (the newly appointed Procurator) was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Caesarea to Jerusalem. Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him, And desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him. But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Caesarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither', Acts 25.1-4. When Festus decided to return to Caesarea to hear the case against Paul, he had no way of knowing that Paul's life depended on him making that decision. And in many ways, the decision of Festus to leave Paul at Caesarea was remarkable. It flew right in the face of the '*favour*' which the Jews had asked of him, 25.3. This was noteworthy for two reasons. First, that the last action of his predecessor, Felix, towards Paul had been dictated by his desire 'to do the Jews a *favour*', 24.27 NKJV. And, second, Festus himself shortly asked Paul if he would agree to appear before him in Jerusalem because he wanted 'to do the Jews a *favour*', 25.9 NKJV. Yet on this, the critical occasion, Festus refused to do them a 'favour – thereby saving Paul from ambush and certain death. How different the history of Christianity would have been if Festus had decided differently! Yet Festus had no idea that, at that very moment, the Jews were poised to kill Paul, 25.3 – anymore than the Philistines had any idea that news of their attack would reach Saul at the very moment he and his men were poised to kill David.

Turning to a later case from Church History, in his comments on 1 Sam. 2.1-10, Dale Ralph Davis tells how John Calvin, when young, was forced to leave his native France. He 'was traveling eastward hoping to reach Strasbourg or even Basel. His desire was for a haven in which to study and write and thereby support the new Protestant faith. A straight line to Strasbourg was impossible, for a war was in the way. It was 1536, and Francis I and Emperor Charles V were having their third war; cannon, carts, and equipment plugged the roads. Calvin must detour to the south, pass through Lyon. He hoped to reach Lausanne on a certain day but failed; he would have to spend the night in Geneva. There short, stocky, fiery William Farel got hold of the young scholar and threatened him with the judgement of God if he did not stay to carry on the reformation in Geneva. Could we say that we owe Calvin's

impact in the Reformation to Francis I and Charles V? After all, it was, humanly speaking, their war that forced Calvin to pass through Geneva'. And, 'humanly speaking', it was a large-scale Philistine assault which saved the life of another young man – of whose seed in due course was to come the Messiah and Saviour of the world!

[30] Antiquities, Book VI, Chapter XIII, para.3.

[31] 'Looking on the Heart', page 196; based by D. R. Davis on 'The Shorter Catechism Illustrated from Christian Biography and History' by John Whitecross.

[32] Gesenius suggests the meaning 'rock of smoothness', 'of slipping away' or 'of escapings' – but I can find no support for this from BDB, TWOT or NIDOTTE.

[33] I believe that the opening verses of the psalm record David's feelings in 1 Sam. 23.25, but that the last two verses express his feelings in v.29.

[34] It is just possible that David composed Psa. 63 during this stay in the wilderness of Judah. (The title of Psa. 63 reads, 'A Psalm of David, when he was in the wilderness of Judah'.) And certainly the words of v.7, 'thou hast been my help', would have been appropriate to this occasion. But to me the psalmist's reference to himself as 'king', v11, points to David having written it when fleeing from Absalom – during which time many references are made to the wilderness; 2 Sam. 15.23, 28; 16.2; 17.16, 29. Indeed, the language of Psa. 63.1, 'my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is', seems particularly appropriate to 2 Sam. 17.29, 'they said, The people *is* hungry, and weary, and thirsty, in the wilderness'.

[35] For the relevant biblical references see the comment on v.26.