

Lesson 15: Out of Enemy Hands (First Samuel 23)

5 6 Picture Comparison: First Samuel 22:6–23:13 versus First Samuel 14

Picture #5 was the episode where Saul had Doeg kill the priesthood, and the communication link with God then passed to David through Abiathar and the ephod.

Picture #6 was about the Battle at Keilah and how David used the ephod with great success.

Theme: The oddly-placed narrator’s comment about Abiathar having the ephod served to focus our attention on the theme of inquiring of God.

1 Samuel 14

The scene begins with the children of Israel hiding in caves and rocky hills for fear of the Philistines.

(14:1) Jonathan decided to engage the Philistines taking just his bodyguard with him, but without his father’s army as back-up.

Jonathan is known for acting independently of his father’s army when fighting the Philistines, and he doesn’t hesitate to engage them with only a small contingent of men. Jonathan goes into battle, but he waits for a sign from God that he should go. God gives him the go-ahead.

Where is Saul?

(14:2) *“And Saul was sitting in the outskirts of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree which is in Migron. The people who were with him were about six hundred men.”*

(14:3) *“Ahijah the son of Ahitub, Ichabod’s brother, the son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the LORD’s priest in Shiloh, was wearing an ephod. But the people did not know that Jonathan had gone.”*

1 Samuel 23

Begins with David and his men hiding in just such a cave in the rocky hills. David’s men are afraid to leave the refuge of the cave for fear not just of the Philistines but Saul as well. We gather that from verse 3.

(23:1-2, 13) David hears about the battle and decides to engage the Philistines with only a small contingent of men.

This is the first time David has entered into battle independently of Saul and the armies of Israel. David inquires of God, and God gives him the go-ahead.

Where is Saul?

(22:6) *“When Saul heard that David and the men who were with him had been discovered—now Saul was staying in Gibeah under a tamarisk tree in Ramah [high place], with his spear in his hand, and all his servants standing about him—”*

(23:6) *“Now it happened, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David at Keilah, that he went down with an ephod in his hand.”*

(23:13) *“So David and his men, about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah and went wherever they could go . . .”*

Chapter 14 doesn’t give us Saul’s dialogue with his servants that we have in Chapter 22, nor does it have a parallel to Saul killing the priesthood. That episode was included to show how the ephod transferred to David. The similarities in the pictures pick up again when Saul hears of the battle underway.

Now we come to the comparison of how David and Saul conduct themselves in battle in regards to inquiring of the LORD. That is our theme.

1 Samuel 14

Saul inquires of God two times in the course of battle. First, in regards to the battle with the Philistines, Saul started to inquire of God but stopped.

(14:18-20) "Now it happened, while Saul talked to the priest, that the noise which was in the camp of the Philistines continued to increase; so Saul said to the priest, 'Withdraw your hand.' Then Saul and all the people who were with him assembled, and they went to the battle . . ."

Saul saw Jonathan's battle with the Philistines, he started to inquire of God but stopped short, and just went to battle.

1 Samuel 23

David first inquires of the LORD in regards to the battle with the Philistines:

David inquires of God two times in the course of battle. First, in regards to the battle with the Philistines . . . David inquired of the LORD, and the LORD gave him the go-ahead. David's men balked, so David inquired again, and the LORD gave the go-ahead again. (23:2-5)

(23:5) "And David and his men went to Keilah and fought with the Philistines . . ."

1. Why didn't Saul follow through with inquiring of God the first time?
2. Did David allow himself to be driven by a sense of urgency?
3. Was David swayed by his men's resistance to going into battle?

In both scenarios, we see that Saul has besieged his own people:

1 Samuel 14

The people have been forced to go without food until Saul has avenged himself on his enemies.

(14:24) "And the men of Israel were distressed that day, for Saul had placed the people under oath, saying, 'Cursed is the man who eats any food until evening, before I have taken vengeance on my enemies.' So none of the people tasted food."

Saul had, in essence, laid the people under siege by denying them food. And there is a tense moment when Jonathan eats some honey and the people have to decide whether or not to betray Jonathan to his father.

But by the time the people accomplish Saul's objective, they are so hungry that they fall upon the spoil and begin killing and eating the meat with the blood in it. Saul's actions drive them to sin.

1 Samuel 23

Saul proposes to lay the people of Keilah under siege until he avenges himself on David.

(23:8-10) "Then Saul called all the people together for war, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men. When David knew that Saul plotted evil against him, he said to Abiathar the priest, 'Bring the ephod here.' Then David said, 'O LORD God of Israel, Your servant has certainly heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah to destroy the city for my sake.'"

Keilah is already beleaguered after the Philistine raid. They will not be able to endure a siege, but Saul doesn't care. His only goal is to avenge himself, whatever the cost. It's the same M.O. with Saul.

The second time Saul inquired of God was when he wanted to continue the battle with the Philistines.

(14:36-37) "Now Saul said, 'Let us go down after the Philistines by night, and plunder them until the morning light; and let us not leave a man of them.' And they [the people] said, 'Do whatever seems good to you.' Then the priest said, 'Let us draw near to God here.' So Saul asked counsel of God, 'Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will You deliver them into the hand of Israel?' But He did not answer him that day."

The second time David inquired of God was when Saul wanted to continue the battle with him at Keilah.

(23:8-11) "When David knew that Saul plotted evil against him, he said to Abiathar the priest, 'Bring the ephod here.' Then David said, 'O LORD God of Israel, Your servant has certainly heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah to destroy the city for my sake. Will the men of Keilah deliver me into his hand? Will Saul come down, as Your servant has heard? O LORD God of Israel, I pray, tell Your servant.' And the LORD said, 'He will come down.'"

4. What is Saul's order of inquiry?
5. What is David's order of inquiry?
6. Why didn't God answer Saul? (James 1:5-8)
7. Was Saul swayed by God's resistance to his continuing the fight?

1 Samuel 14

The focus of the battle turned at this point from Saul fighting the Philistines to an internal battle where Saul is hunting one of his own.

(14:41-42) "Therefore Saul said to the LORD God of Israel, 'Give a perfect lot.' So Saul and Jonathan were taken, but the people escaped. And Saul said, 'Cast lots between my son Jonathan and me.' So Jonathan was taken. Then Saul said to Jonathan, 'Tell me what you have done.' And Jonathan told him . . . Saul answered, 'God do so and more also; for you shall surely die, Jonathan.'"

The Urim and Thummim were almost Jonathan's undoing, for they placed him at his father's mercy. It is the people who have to rescue Jonathan.

(14:45) "But the people said to Saul, 'Shall Jonathan die, who has accomplished this great deliverance in Israel? Certainly not! As the LORD lives, not one hair of his head shall fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day.' So the people rescued Jonathan, and he did not die."

1 Samuel 23

After the narrative describes the battle with the Philistines, the focus suddenly turns to an internal battle where Saul is hunting David.

When David inquired of God the second time, it was also to seek a determination of the fate of his people, but his intent is not to kill but to save.

Instead of putting David at Saul's mercy, the Urim and Thummim saved him from both Saul and the people of Keilah who would betray him.

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

8. Why didn't the people stand up for David the way they did for Jonathan?
9. Saul always allowed himself to be swayed by the people for fear of losing their support. Did David's decision to follow God's directions lose him the support of his men?
10. Did David's decision to follow God's direction keep him from getting trapped?

1 Samuel 14

(14:46) *"Then Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, and the Philistines went to their own place."*

1 Samuel 23

(23:13) *"So David and his men, about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah and went wherever they could go. Then it was told Saul that David had escaped from Keilah; so he halted the expedition."*

Application

Two kings with exactly the same resources model a scenario for us. The key to their success or failure rested on their use of their communication link to God, but there were also some other subtle do's and don'ts that they give us.

What are some battle do's and don'ts?

7 8 9 David in the Wilderness

Read First Samuel 23:14-29.

In Chapter 23:1-13, we have seen the first of four pictures of God working to strengthen David and deliver him from Saul's hands. Picture #6 started the series. Now let's look at the next three pictures.

- **Picture #7 is the statement** that God did not deliver David into Saul's hands. (v14-15)
- **Picture #8 is the comforter** Jonathan who assures David that God would not deliver him into Saul's hand and that David's place in the kingdom is secure. (v16-18)
- **Picture #9 is the experience of deliverance** as God actively delivers David from Saul's hand (v24-29), just as He did in picture #6 in the battle of Keilah.

Pictures 7, 8, and the second half of 9 have tight chiasmic structures. The first two follow each other, but then there is a block of text that sets up the scene for the final picture of God's deliverance.

The Statement (v14-15)

11. Where is David?

12. When you are in the trenches of life as David is, knowing that a man like Saul is hunting you every day, day in and day out, and there doesn't seem to be an end in sight, does it feel like God is doing anything?

Application: A modern scenario

Here in America, we don't live with persecution the way that Christians in other countries do. I have never face persecution from Muslims or other religions who are antagonistic to our faith, so I cannot speak to that level of experience—yet.

But persecution happens in other venues as well, and a little closer to home.

Imagine what it would be like to have, let's say, an antagonistic boss or a client. The person doesn't like you. Maybe they want you removed from their realm. They are always on your case about something, and they wait for opportunities for you to slip up and then they land on you. It's not a situation you can get out of. Making peace with this person is not an option. So you live day-to-day with this feeling of being hunted and harassed. And when you get to the end of the day, and it has been another day when you have somehow managed to keep out of trouble, you breathe a sigh of relief for the moment and try not to think about tomorrow.

Does it feel like God is doing anything in that situation?

We often recognize what God has done for us when something unusual happens, but in the day-to-day living when nothing really good or bad happens, can be a little more difficult to see Him at work and give Him credit for our deliverance. But then we don't see the close calls that could have gone very wrong. We don't see all the machinations our antagonist is planning to catch us out over something, and how God frustrates that effort.

David is in a forest. When you are in the woods, you can lose a sense of direction, vision, and perspective—you can't see the forest for the trees. But when you crest that hill and look back at what you have come through, then you see God's hand in it.

This is a way that God works in our lives that can only be seen over time, and it is only experienced by those who endure. Living day-to-day under persecution is the endurance test of a king in pursuit of a crown. It takes time and patience and perseverance.

And it is good to give God thanks even for days when nothing really good but nothing really bad happens.

The Comforter (v16-18)

This section also begins and ends with a repeated note to David's location. He is in the woods—that connects this section to the previous section. This time Jonathan joins him to give him some encouragement.

This is the second chiasm (ABA). It begins with Jonathan going to David in the woods and ends with Jonathan leaving David in the woods. Then there is the parallel comments that Jonathan strengthened

David's hand in God and made a covenant between them before God. The focus of the chiasm is on Jonathan's dialogue.

13. What risk does Jonathan take to see David?

14. How does Jonathan encourage David?

15. How could Jonathan be so sure of these things?

16. How does Jonathan identify with David?

Application

Encouragement like this can be helpful, or not.

To be reminded of the kingdom that we are ultimately pursuing can strengthen us and help us to focus on the true reward and not just our current circumstances. It can help us reset our perspective in regards to which crown we are pursuing—an eternal crown of peace or just immediate relief in the temporal kingdom.

But the relief can be so very needed, and the reward can seem so very far from us in times like this. And if we consider that we might live a lifetime of persecution and die in pursuit of that vision of a reward, then the hope can lose a lot of its luster. It can be very hard to accept encouragement to continue on, particularly if our encourager seems removed from an understanding of our situation.

As much as Jonathan identified with David, his circumstances were vastly different from David's at this point in time. Jonathan lived like royalty where David was a fugitive hiding in caves. Jonathan's day-to-day needs were well-met while David suffered want. He offered no solution to David's current situation, but only talked about the future reward that David will receive if he presses on. He came into David's life for a fleeting moment to deliver this encouragement, then went back home to a relatively easier life and left David struggling in the wilderness.

Jonathan was completely removed from where David is physically, experientially, and even emotionally, but he identified with him as a co-heir in a future kingdom, and he was fighting his own battle with the same adversary, just in a different way. It was purely on this basis alone that he sought David out just to give him some encouragement.

Encouragers can be like this.

So, imagine you are David. You are the one in dire circumstances, alone, and feeling like an emotional wreck. One day a fellow believer seeks you out—maybe in person, or with an email, or phone call, or just a handwritten note—with what seems like a trite word of encouragement to press on for the kingdom and the reward. They aren't in your same circumstances. They aren't going to relieve your current physical suffering or offer a solution to your problems. They identify with you solely on the basis of a shared faith and hope, and their faith and hope are stronger than yours at the moment.

- Is their encouragement comforting?
- How do you define comfort?

Now imagine you are Jonathan. You are the trying to give comfort to a person who's circumstances you have difficulty identifying with. For example . . .

Scott McManigle shared this report from a missionary in Pakistan:

This week, Daniel from Pakistan was sharing about the seeming current strategy that Muslims are following in his country in order to tempt "Christians" to convert to Islam. Daniel shared that in Pakistan, the Muslims have the power, control, and wealth within the country. To be a Christian in Pakistan means persecution in many forms. From being prevented from buying food and drawing water in certain locations to outright physical attacks, martyrdom, and everything in between. Daniel shared that the desire for "wealth" and relief (from the persecution), lately, has been too strong of a temptation for many, and they are leaving "Christianity." One of the most difficult examples of this for him is when a wealthy Muslim family finds a beautiful Christian girl they want for their son. They will offer a large sum of money to the Christian family in exchange for them to give their daughter in marriage for their son. Daniel said that the temptation to receive such wealth has proven to be too tempting for many families.

Seeking relief from persecution is a big motivation to abandon the eternal reward.

How do we be a Jonathan in this case? How do we encourage a family who is under this kind of persecution to resist the temptation? What do they need to know or be reminded of?

A person's view and version of Christianity has to move away from being a mere religion to being a real relationship with the Almighty Creator of the Universe, Who loves them with a love that surpasses all knowledge, and Who has promised them an eternal hope and inheritance in heaven that He is preserving with His own divine power. This true version of Christianity is not only worth being persecuted for, but it's worth dying for.

Isaiah 40 challenges us with the same questions. God says "Comfort, comfort my people!" but when the voice in the wilderness asks Him how, He says, "Tell them their lives are like the grass." Is it comforting being told that our lives are fleeting and mortal? No. But then God goes on to give this glorious picture of His own strength and wisdom and faithfulness and eternity, and He leaves us with the question of where we seek comfort. Is it about our comfort in the temporal world that is here and gone like grass, or the comfort we will find in the eternal realm?

Isaiah 49-50 builds on this same theme. Israel declares the LORD has forsaken her, and God returns with a two-fold reassurance along the same lines as our passages today. First, He offers a verbal statement of His future deliverance after the time of persecution is over (Isaiah 49:14-26) and then he sends a Comforter who identifies with Israel in her suffering (Isaiah 50:4-11) and can say with assurance that the LORD will deliver her, even as Jonathan said to David.

Funny how this picture of comfort is presented here with Jonathan and David at the beginning of the time of the kings with David in exile, and again in Isaiah at the end of the time of the kings with Israel facing exile as a nation.