

## **Man Does This — God Does That!**

**1 Samuel 23**

**By Dr. Derek W. H. Thomas**

Now turn with me if you would to 1 Samuel chapter 23, 1 Samuel chapter 23. And there are a few people here tonight who probably have not been part of the regular series on Samuel so let me tell you the story in a minute or so to place us in some kind of context here.

Last week in chapter 22 David received terrible, terrible news that the priest, the high priest at a place called Nob, Ahimelech has been murdered, slain at the behest of King Saul. And along with him eighty-five other priests and all of their families, perhaps as many as two hundred, have been killed. And David said, "It's all my fault." And in part it was. He had gone to Ahimelech as he was fleeing from King Saul who is set on killing him and he had told the high priest that he needed bread, the show bread — five loaves of the show bread. He had told Ahimelech that he was on a secret mission for the king, which was true...sort of. But as soon as Saul heard it, he saw it as an act of conspiracy and ordered that Ahimelech and his priests all be slain and there was a man there to do it — Doeg the Edomite.

Well, now we pick up the reading in chapter 23. Before we read it together let's look to God in prayer.

*Lord our God, this is Your Word. We thank You for the Scriptures. We thank You that in the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, we have Your holy, inerrant, infallible Word that holy men of old wrote as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. This is a word written for us that tonight, by Your Spirit, it might come and instruct us and challenge us and convict us and motivate us and enrich us. Lord we want tonight to be taken up with You. We want You to fill our horizon. We are tired Lord of the things that consume us from day to day that are trivial by comparison. Will You not come now as we study this chapter together? By Your Spirit help us to read, mark, learn, inwardly digest. For Jesus' sake we ask it. Amen.*

This is God's Word. 1 Samuel chapter 23:

Now they told David, "Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are robbing the threshing floors." Therefore David inquired of the

Lord, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" And the Lord said to David, "Go and attack the Philistines and save Keilah." 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?" 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." 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.

When Abiathar the son of Ahimelech had fled to David to Keilah, he had come down with an ephod in his hand. 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." And Saul summoned all the people to war, to go down to Keilah, to besiege David and his men. David knew that Saul was plotting harm against him. And he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here." Then said David, "O Lord, the God of Israel, your servant has surely heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah, to destroy the city on my account. Will the men of Keilah surrender me into his hand? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard? O Lord, the God of Israel, please tell your servant." And the Lord said, "He will come down." 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."

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. And David remained in the strongholds in the wilderness, in the hill country of the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God did not give him into his hand.

David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life. David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh. And Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God. And he said to him, "Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Saul my father also knows this." And the two of them made a covenant before the Lord. David remained at Horesh, and Jonathan went home.

Then the Ziphites went up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, "Is not David hiding among us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hachilah, which is south of Jeshimon? Now come down, O king, according to all your heart's desire to come down, and our part shall be to surrender him into the king's hand." And Saul said, "May you be blessed by the Lord, for you have had compassion on me. Go, make yet more sure. Know and see the place where his foot is, and who has seen him there, for it is told me that he is

very cunning. See therefore and take note of all the lurking places where he hides, and come back to me with sure information. Then I will go with you. And if he is in the land, I will search him out among all the thousands of Judah." And they arose and went to Ziph ahead of Saul.

Now David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the Arabah to the south of Jeshimon. And Saul and his men went to seek him. And David was told, so he went down to the rock and lived in the wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard that, he pursued after David in the wilderness of Maon. Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain. And David was hurrying to get away from Saul. As Saul and his men were closing in on David and his men to capture them, a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Hurry and come, for the Philistines have made a raid against the land." So Saul returned from pursuing after David and went against the Philistines. Therefore that place was called the Rock of Escape. And David went up from there and lived in the strongholds of Engedi.

Well, thus far God's holy, inerrant Word.

Now there are a series of contrasts between chapter 22 and chapter 23. In chapter 22 Saul is the destroyer of Israel. In chapter 23 David is the savior of Israel. In chapter 22 Saul is always complaining that nobody tells him anything. In chapter 23 David is being told by God. In chapter 22 Saul's friend is Doeg the Edomite who has blood on his hands. In chapter 23 David's companion is Jonathan who strengthens David's hand in the Lord.

Have your Bibles open just for a second and keep your finger in Psalm 54. A number of psalms are written around various episodes in David's life and this particular psalm, Psalm 54, is written during the events that transcribe in chapter 23 of 1 Samuel. You'll see the heading — "When the Ziphites went and told Saul, 'Is not David hiding among us?'" Now look at verse 4 — "Behold, God is my helper." God is my helper. That's what David learned in this incident, this period in his life, that God is his helper.

Now I want to ask the question "How, how did God help David?"

This is the thing that he learned. As David thought back, as he meditated on the events that transpired, this was the lesson — God is my helper. God is the One who sustains me. And I want us to look at chapter 23 of 1 Samuel to ask the question, "How, how did God help him? How did God sustain him?" and the answer lies along three lines of thought.

## **I. God guided David.**

First, God guided him. God gave divine guidance. There's trouble in Keilah. Keilah is just a few miles south of Adullam's cave where David and these six hundred men, misfits - one and all according to 1 Samuel chapter 22 — David and his army, his rag-tag-and-bobtail army have been in Adullam's cave and Keilah is just a few miles south and the Philistines are robbing the threshing floor. These are David's people you understand. These are folk from Judah. This is where David is from. These are his people and they are in need. If they rob the threshing floor they are going to be in need, they are going to starve. And David asks, he asks God "Shall I go down and help them?" He asks God twice because his men are fearful enough where they are but they're even more fearful of going down to Keilah and mixing with the Philistines.

Among them is Abiathar, the son of his murdered father, Ahimelech. Saul has killed him. But the one person who escaped Saul in chapter 22 was this priest, Abiathar and he's come with the ephod. He's come with the ephod which contains these strange things called urim and thummim. Were they pieces of wood? Were they made of stone? Was one of them "yes" and one of them "no" or as some suggest both of them had a "yes" and a "no" and if there were two "yes's" it was "yes" and if it was two "no's" it was a "no" and if it was a "yes" and a "no" it was a "no answer." We don't know. What we do know is God spoke through Abiathar. God provided David with a word that could be trusted. God is giving to David guidance. He tells David to go down and he will be safe. He will have victory. God guides.

Now, He doesn't guide you and me in the way that He guided David, and we needn't get upset about that because we're not David. We're not the king of Israel. There is a uniqueness to what is happening here, but behind the uniqueness lies a principle — God guides. God guides His people. He guides every one of His people. Guidance is open to every single one of us.

What do we do when we need guidance? Well, we go as David does to God. We go in prayer. That's a good thing to do when you're looking for guidance. You commit it to the Lord. You ask God, "Shall I do this?" or "Shall I do that?"

But we have a word from God. It's called the Bible. And we must search the Bible, we must think biblically when we're looking for guidance.

Now there are certain things that are clearly wrong — the Ten Commandments, the ten words that we recited this morning at the Lord's Table. Adultery is always wrong. You don't need to ask God guidance — "Shall I commit adultery?" It is wrong. It is never. "Shall I murder?" It is always wrong. "Shall I give false witness about my neighbor?" No. We go to God's law and we find in God's law certain things that are wrong.

And we find certain things that are right. We embrace God's ideals. We're to love God with all of our hearts. We're to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. We're to give God everything that we've got. We're to give our neighbor everything that we've got. We've got to pursue the best. We've got to do what Romans 12 says, that we "present our bodies, a living sacrifice, which is a reasonable act of worship that are not conformed to this world but transformed by the renewing of our minds in order that we may prove, in order that by testing we may discern what the will of God is, that good and that perfect and that acceptable will of God." We ask for wisdom. We ask wise people that we trust — "Do you think I should do this? Do you think I should do that?" Now we're prone to ask people that we suspect will give us the answers that we want and therefore it's always good to ask more than one person and sometimes to ask one person who's answers you may not suspect will be the answer that you want and then you weigh them using the wisdom that the Scripture gives us to discern what is God's will. God guides. He leads us. It's the promise that David speaks about in Psalm 23. He leads us, He guides us, He directs our paths. That's what David is saying in this chapter. That's what he learned. He learned that God helped him, that he wasn't in the dark, nor are we in the dark. God has given to us the Bible, He's given to us the Scriptures that are able to make us wise unto salvation, that is able to prepare us and mold us and fashion us for every good work. God guides.

## **II. God provides encouragement to David.**

The second thing that He does is He provides encouragement. He provided David with encouragement and you see it particularly in verses 15 down through 18. He is in Ziph. He has learned now from God that these folk in Keilah, even though David has helped them, they're going to turn him in. So David flees with his men. And now he finds himself in the region of Ziph and it's near Hebron. It's about ten miles further south again. He's among his people. Saul is constantly trying to seek him and find him but he can't find him. And verse 16, Jonathan can find him. Saul can't find him but Jonathan can find him.

God has given to David a friend. In the midst of trials and difficulties, God gave him a friend. What a blessing that is to have a friend. What a blessing it is to have someone like Jonathan — loyal, trustworthy, who's prepared to put his life now on the line, to even go against his own father for friendship. This is, I think, the third occasion that we read of Jonathan making a covenant with David. It's a band of brothers. They're committed to each other for the good of the kingdom, for the good of what God has promised. And Jonathan comes and he strengthens David's hand. Do you see that at the end of verse 16? "He strengthened his hand in God." What a beautiful expression. David's being sought, his life is in danger, Saul is a paranoid megalomaniac, and Jonathan comes and says to David, "God has given His word. God has given a promise. You've been anointed by Samuel to be king. God's word can be trusted. God's

word is sure. God's word is steadfast. God's word is immovable. This is promise that you can trust." He directs him to the promise of God and strengthens him.

### **III. God delivers David.**

Now in order to see that a little clearly we need to see the third thing in this passage. Not only does God guide and not only does God strengthen David but God delivers him. God delivers him. There's a focal point in this chapter. It occurs at the end of verse 14 — "And Saul sought him every day but God did not give him into his hand." That's a kind of summary statement of all the events that are recorded in this chapter and in chapters that follow. Saul is always pursuing him but God does not give him into his hand. You see, it's that, "but God" factor isn't it? You can look at things from the perspective of the world, you can look at things through the perspective of circumstances. You can look at things from the perspective of trials and tribulations and then you can look at things from the perspective of God. These things are happening and they're terrible things.

You think you've got problems? David is having to live with the overwhelming, crushing thought that he's responsible for the death of over 200 people. He didn't kill them, Saul killed them, but if he hadn't gone to Ahimelech in the first place they would probably be still alive. In the midst of the most terrible things, devastating things, heart-wrenching things, there is this sovereign providence overruling power of God. Saul is looking for him but God does not deliver him into Saul's hands.

Now the Ziphites, they were David's people too, and they betray him. Do you still have your finger in Psalm 54? Look at how he begins Psalm 54 — "O God, save me by Your name, and vindicate me by Your might. O God, hear my prayer; give ear to the words of my mouth." Now listen, verse 3 — "For strangers" — they weren't strangers. They were kith and kin. These were men of Judah. These were David's people but they behaved like strangers. They behaved like enemies. "Strangers have risen against me; ruthless men seek my life; they do not set God before themselves. Behold, God is my helper."

Have you ever been betrayed by a friends, folks you thought you could trust? Saul's response here when the Ziphites turn him in, it's very typical of Saul — worry and paranoia and make sure that your facts are right and come back to me again and tell me where David is and you've got this nail biting account. David is here and Saul is closing in on him. They're on either side of a mountain. All that separates David from Saul is this mountain, this rock of deliverance. And then, just perfect timing, just absolutely perfect timing. A messenger comes running to Saul and says, "The Philistines are attacking our people. We need to go." And David is delivered again. This is all God's doing. This is all God's doing. David's life is almost over. He's almost caught, but God delivers him.

## **Application.**

Now what does this mean to us tonight? How can we possibly apply this to ourselves? Well, we're not the king of Israel. We probably don't have a Saul seeking us. It's more than probable that no one's taken out a contract on your life tonight.

Have you ever found yourself driving and all of a sudden, just like that, you have to slam on the brakes and you're just a millisecond away from a catastrophe? Someone is texting on their phone and they just pull over in front of you, or maybe it was you. (laughter) And your heart almost stops and then you're conscious of it throbbing in your neck and you can feel it pounding and you suddenly realize, "I could have been killed" or "I could have killed someone." Have you ever had to pull off the road because the thought is so overwhelming that you just have to pull off for a second to recover?

And then what? "Lord, thank you. I was not in charge. I was not in control of that, but You delivered me. This was Your hand. This was Your doing."

Do you see in Psalm 54 — you know these psalms help us. They're keys to help us interpret how David himself saw these incidents. David is thinking back on the betrayal of these Ziphites, handing him over to Saul. How close he was to being caught and killed. "God is my helper," you know, he wrote in his little journal, one of those little black ones you know you get in Barnes and Noble. One of those trendy ones.

What do I learn from this incident? My friends do you do that, things that happen to you on a daily basis — do you meditate on these daily things from the perspective of God? God is in charge. God is teaching you something. God is showing you His sovereignty, His power, His mercy, His deliverance. Can't you say it tonight with David? God is my helper, too, in this trial, in that difficulty, in that deliverance. The Lord is the upholder of my life.

John Patton was a missionary in the nineteenth century from Dumfries in Scotland. He went to the New Hebrides in Australia. He married this woman before he left, and the voyage took five or six months to get to that part of the world. Three months after they got there she gave birth to their first child and died in the process. Thirty-six days later the child died. Patton struggled on for four years and then went back to Australia and then back to Scotland and then he remarried. I've always wanted to hear the proposal — "Will you marry me and tomorrow we're going to sail to the other side of the world to an island where there are cannibals? My former wife died within three months of getting there. Will you be my wife?" She said, "Yes." She said yes.

What an extraordinary woman. They were to have forty years of marriage in an island seven miles by two miles full of cannibals. There were several incidents in

the course of Patton's life where missionaries were eaten but there was one night when the house he had built for his second wife, they were surrounded by these cannibals who were on some sort of narcotic deranged, threatening to kill them. All night long they were outside his house threatening to kill them. He had no means to protect himself. In the morning they were gone. The chief of that tribe who was there among them was converted. You know, the story says that nearly everyone on that island eventually was converted. It's an extraordinary tale. But the chief, when he was converted, Patton asked him about that night and the chief said, "We didn't attack because your house was surrounded by people with swords in their hands." "Angels," Patton said. God is my helper.

Now maybe you don't have a story like that, maybe you don't have a story like that, and maybe you do, an event in your life in recent days and there is no other explanation but a divine, sovereign intervention of God. God stepped in and changed the situation.

Now here's the test. Here's the test. Has it become for you something that has driven you more and more and more into the arms of this God? Has it given to you an increased confidence and faith in the Living God so that you can say, as David learned to say from this experience, "God is my helper, God is the One who upholds my life"? He learned from providence to trust in the Living God.

Are you doing that my friend? You know maybe one of the ways to do that is to do exactly what David does — write it down. Write it down. Write it down in one of those cool little black journals that are so trendy — God delivered me today. I never want to forget it. Christianity isn't just some notion in my head, it's a living thing. It's a real thing. It comes into play when you're driving your car on a highway and then suddenly, all of a sudden, God intervenes.

Let's pray together.

*Father we thank You once again for this extraordinary life of David, but from it too we want to learn as he learned to trust You, to see You at work in our lives, that Christianity is more than just notion, that it is a living, breathing thing in our day to day lives. So hear us and bless us and do us good for You are our Helper. You are the upholder of my life. For Jesus' sake, Amen.*

Please stand. Receive the Lord's benediction. Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.



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