

THE INCIDENT AT KEILAH

I Samuel 23

KEILAH

Outside of I Samuel 23, the town of Keilah is only mentioned twice in the Bible. It is listed among the cities given to the tribe of Judah by Joshua in Joshua 15:44. Later, its rulers at the time, helped rebuild the wall around Jerusalem after the return from the Babylonian Captivity (Nehemiah 3:17, 18). Additional information about the town learned from I Samuel 23 includes its fortification with walls and gates - Verse 7; and it being a farming community in need of threshing floors - Verse 1. Other than these examples, Keilah is not prominent enough to merit further mention.

THE BACKSTORY

King Saul had dropped all pretense about his active plan to kill David. David was in the early days of the years he would spend hiding like a fugitive from Saul wherever he could. The incident at Keilah occurred early in that period. David and his men were moving around in the wilderness areas of Judah when Abiathar, the priest, found him and told him Saul had ordered the slaughter of all the Lord's priests because he believed Abiathar's father had assisted David in escaping from Saul (I Samuel 22). David accepted Abiathar into his group with a promise to protect him.

WHAT BROUGHT DAVID TO KEILAH

David then received word that the Philistines planned to attack and pillage Keilah (I Samuel 23:1). He asked God if he should go and the Lord said Go. (I Samuel 23:2). His men were reluctant to expose themselves in this way. Still, after praying again and receiving God's promise of victory, they won the battle, saving the inhabitants of Keilah (I Samuel 23:3-5). I wonder if David thought he might have found a place to live behind its walls and gates and among a people grateful because of what he had done for them? If he thought that, he was soon proven wrong.

THE BETRAYAL AT KEILAH

Saul was soon informed of David's whereabouts and said I have him now, shut in and ripe for the taking. David heard about Saul's plans to attack Keilah and sought the Lord to discover if he should stay in there or leave (I Samuel 23:9-10). He asked the Lord if the men of Keilah, who David had just saved the lives and futures of, would turn him over to Saul (I Samuel 23:11-12). The Lord told him they would betray and turn him over to Saul (I Samuel 23:12).

DAVID'S RESPONSE

David, who was in Keilah out of his desire to obey God, could have at that moment, in bitter rage, destroyed the inhabitants of Keilah as he had the Philistines. But he didn't. The future king simply got his men and his things and left. He left to resume a life on the move, trying to stay a step ahead of Saul, his heart still fixed on serving God. We all have experienced situations where we did what we could to help someone out of our desire to serve the Lord and then have them turn on us in one way or another. It's not easy to face that kind of letdown. But David kept his eyes on his Lord and was greatly rewarded - just a little food for thought for anyone facing disappointment.