

1 SAMUEL—WEEK 17

CHANGE OF PLANS



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

*The Cover Picture is David and Goliath by Titian (1487–1576)
On display in the church of Santa Maria della Salute in Venice, Italy*

This section begins with David in Keilah. After realizing the danger and inquiring of the LORD, David flees to the hills, and Saul gives up on his plans to trap David in the city. But the chase continues and the Ziphites betray David. A timely incursion by the Philistines distracts Saul, and David is saved yet again.

Then David gets a golden opportunity to kill Saul, but he declines. The incident causes Saul to repent.

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1 1 Samuel 23:6–14

Now it happened, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David at Keilah, that he went down with an ephod in his hand.

And Saul was told that David had gone to Keilah. So Saul said, “God has delivered him into my hand, for he has shut himself in by entering a town that has gates and bars.” 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. 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.”

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.”

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.

And David stayed in strongholds in the wilderness, and remained in the mountains in the Wilderness of Ziph. Saul sought him every day, but God did not deliver him into his hand.

One guy escapes the slaughter of the priests—*Abiathar the son of Ahimelech*. We aren’t told how he pulled that off, but he did it with the ephod (with the Urim and Thummim). That’s providential because David can now use it to inquire of the LORD.

City walls keep people out but also keep people in. David could be trapped by those walls. Saul knows that and David knows that.

So, David uses the Urim and Thummim to discern what will happen if he stays. Then he skedaddles.

This too is providential because when Saul learns that David has left Keilah *he halted the expedition*.

Keilah is saved again.

David is blessed to have access to the ephod, which allows him to inquire directly of the LORD (and to even know the answer with certainty).

We can inquire too, but interpreting the answer can be challenging. (It sure is for me.) Unfortunately, my reaction is often to skip inquiring at all.

That’s a catastrophic and sinful mistake.

2 1 Samuel 23:15–24

So David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life. And David was in the Wilderness of Ziph in a forest. Then Jonathan, Saul's son, arose and went to David in the woods 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. Even my father Saul knows that." So the two of them made a covenant before the LORD. And David stayed in the woods, and Jonathan went to his own house.

Then the Ziphites came up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, "Is David not hiding with us in strongholds in the woods, in the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon? Now therefore, O king, come down according to all the desire of your soul to come down; and our part shall be to deliver him into the king's hand."

And Saul said, "Blessed are you of the LORD, for you have compassion on me. Please go and find out for sure, and see the place where his hideout is, and who has seen him there. For I am told he is very crafty. See therefore, and take knowledge of all the lurking places where he hides; and come back to me with certainty, and I will go with you. And it shall be, if he is in the land, that I will search for him throughout all the clans of Judah."

So they arose and went to Ziph before Saul. But David and his men were in the Wilderness of Maon, in the plain on the south of Jeshimon.

At this point, everyone knows that David is simply running from Saul. The idea that he's "lying in wait" is obviously nonsense, and Saul has given up any pretense of that.

Jonathan has sided with David and encourages him by announcing confidence in David's destiny as king. He even tells David that his *father Saul knows that*. Sadly, Jonathan isn't entirely right when he says, "*You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you.*"

He won't live to see that day.

Then we see the Ziphites try to help Saul by disclosing David's location. Ziphites are of the tribe of Judah, reinforcing the idea that inter-tribal rivalry isn't the thing Saul said it is. David is of the tribe of Judah, and the Ziphites are perfectly happy to betray him to the Benjamites.

But what must the Benjamites following Saul be thinking? They've been told that the Judahites wouldn't give them the time of day, but they're betraying their anointed one. That'll open their eyes, right?

Just kidding. If they were thinking, they would have seen through Saul's games long ago. But they're in the grip of "task momentum," something we should all watch out for. Once we're immersed in a task, we tend to lose track of why we started it to begin with. We're focused on finishing, but facts and/or the Holy Spirit can prompt a reassessment. Then comes the super tough task of wondering if it's all a waste.

Always be open to updates, even painful ones. Big lessons can come from this.

3 1 Samuel 23:25–29

When Saul and his men went to seek him, they told David. Therefore he went down to the rock, and stayed in the Wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard that, he pursued David in the Wilderness of Maon. Then Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain. So David made haste to get away from Saul, for Saul and his men were encircling David and his men to take them.

But a messenger came to Saul, saying, “Hurry and come, for the Philistines have invaded the land!” Therefore Saul returned from pursuing David, and went against the Philistines; so they called that place the Rock of Escape. Then David went up from there and dwelt in strongholds at En Gedi.

It looks like curtains for David. Saul’s army is *encircling David and his men to take them*. It looks like there’s no escape.

But suddenly they’re “saved by the bell.” Saul hears of a Philistine incursion and he has to dash off to handle that. Letting the incursion wait until he has finished off David simply isn’t an option. Not only is battling the Philistines his main job, it’s why Israel wanted a king in the first place. If he let his personal vendetta against David take priority over that, no one would buy his explanation.

Besides, David fought the Philistines just a little while back. He didn’t let his spat with Saul take priority.

So Saul has to let David get away.

This is a wonderfully simple example of how God uses evil for good. So is Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor leading to the US entering WWII and defeating Hitler. And, of course, there’s Joseph’s brothers selling him into slavery.

But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive. — Genesis 50:20

These are the easy examples—where the good purpose is obvious—and thank God for them. We need the obvious cases to teach us how this can work.

But things are rarely that simple. God’s plans usually work out in intricate and complex ways. We can’t always see how *God meant it for good*. They simply look evil and that’s that.

The thing to remember is that God’s good purpose is always there. We may not see it right away, or ever for that matter.

In fact, we may see it and not recognize it. God’s purposes can be so advanced that we wouldn’t know them if they were right in front of us. This is because God’s purposes are higher than ours and are often over our heads.

Eternal consequences are infinitely more important than events in this life.

4 1 Samuel 24:1–7 (ESV)

When Saul returned from following the Philistines, he was told, “Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi.” Then Saul took three thousand chosen men out of all Israel and went to seek David and his men in front of the Wildgoats’ Rocks. And he came to the sheepfolds by the way, where there was a cave, and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the innermost parts of the cave. And the men of David said to him, “Here is the day of which the LORD said to you, ‘Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you.’” Then David arose and stealthily cut off a corner of Saul’s robe. And afterward David’s heart struck him, because he had cut off a corner of Saul’s robe. He said to his men, “The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD’s anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the LORD’s anointed.” So David persuaded his men with these words and did not permit them to attack Saul. And Saul rose up and left the cave and went on his way.

David’s refusing to strike the LORD’s anointed is like Saul’s guards refusing to kill the priests.

And the king said to the guard who stood about him, “Turn and kill the priests of the LORD, because their hand also is with David, and they knew that he fled and did not disclose it to me.” But the servants of the king would not put out their hand to strike the priests of the LORD. — 1 Samuel 22:17 (ESV)

“You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people. — Exodus 22:28 (ESV)

Respect for the LORD includes respect for His officers.

Of all the things that are going off the rails in the US right now, the widespread loss of respect for our officers, leaders, and elders might be the worst. Newspapers and other titans of the media have lost our respect, often justly. Many professors and visiting scholars have been shouted down by students, and this is never just. You can just feel our civilization unraveling.

While some of the disrespect is well deserved, all of it is harmful. Speech is one of the greatest gifts God has given man. It’s the key to teaching and learning.

But when people are lied to enough, they stop believing everyone. What can you learn from someone whose word you doubt? At best, any learning is slowed by the double-checking needed. At worst, badly needed warnings are ignored. Information, regardless of quality, is not being transmitted effectively.

And just think of what this does to the gospel. You tell someone the good news, but they assume your motives are bad. They’re so busy trying to figure out what your game is that they miss all your points. This is a tragedy.

However, the best countermeasure is the best evangelism anyway—lifestyle evangelism. You have to earn someone’s trust before they’ll pay full attention to the gospel. They won’t just trust you up front.

Good evangelism takes time.

5 1 Samuel 24:8–22 (ESV)

Afterward David also arose and went out of the cave, and called after Saul, “My lord the king!” And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the earth and paid homage. And David said to Saul, “Why do you listen to the words of men who say, ‘Behold, David seeks your harm’? Behold, this day your eyes have seen how the LORD gave you today into my hand in the cave. And some told me to kill you, but I spared you. I said, ‘I will not put out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD’s anointed.’ See, my father, see the corner of your robe in my hand. For by the fact that I cut off the corner of your robe and did not kill you, you may know and see that there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you hunt my life to take it. May the LORD judge between me and you, may the LORD avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you. As the proverb of the ancients says, ‘Out of the wicked comes wickedness.’ But my hand shall not be against you. After whom has the king of Israel come out? After whom do you pursue? After a dead dog! After a flea! May the LORD therefore be judge and give sentence between me and you, and see to it and plead my cause and deliver me from your hand.”

As soon as David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, “Is this your voice, my son David?” And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. He said to David, “You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil. And you have declared this day how you have dealt well with me, in that you did not kill me when the LORD put me into your hands. For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safe? So may the LORD reward you with good for what you have done to me this day. And now, behold, I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand. Swear to me therefore by the LORD that you will not cut off my offspring after me, and that you will not destroy my name out of my father’s house.” And David swore this to Saul. Then Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

David’s decision to not kill Saul feels Spirit led. His men recommend he do “the right thing” from a military point of view, but something checks David, and he cuts off the corner of Saul’s robe instead.

Then he does the really crazy thing and reveals himself to his pursuers. By all rights this should have been a fatal mistake, but it’s a stroke of genius. It proves his innocence to everyone within earshot and even causes Saul to repent. Saul goes so far as to announce, “*I know that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand.*”

David chose righteousness over secular “wisdom,” and the LORD blessed his choice spectacularly.

The big result isn’t that David is safe—Saul’s repentance won’t last—it’s that God is glorified. Everyone there witnesses, for just a moment, everything going well. It’s a glimpse of peace and righteousness.

The practical effects of this will soon fade, and folks will get back to their “hobby” of wasting time trying to kill each other. But for one beautiful afternoon, these soldiers get to see life as it ought to be.

Righteousness begets righteousness.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. When have you ever seriously erred by failing to pray?
2. Have you ever done or seen a life changing reassessment?
3. When have you seen God use evil for good?
4. When have you seen evangelism work like a charm?
5. Have you seen righteousness rewarded?

Items for prayer: