Keep Fighting
1 Samuel 23:1-14, 25-29
Pierre Cannings, Ph.D.

I.   The Right Fight vs. 1-5

a. Philistines Fighting
  i. Philistines
      1. The verse seems to connect well with 22:2. There David was in the stronghold of Adullam with four hundred men. Here he begins to use his power for the relief of his own people when oppressed by the Philistines.
      2. The king chosen was Saul, whose wars with the Philistines can be traced from the beginning of his reign (1 Sam 13) until its tragic end on Mount Gilboa (1 Samuel 31). The eventual victor, however, was David, whose triumphs over the Philistines (1 Samuel 17; 18:6–9, 25–27, 30; 19:8) had gained him such renown as to arouse the jealousy and hatred of Saul. David was forced to flee, and eventually to become a vassal to his former foes the Philistines (1 Samuel 27, 29).
  ii. Keilah
      1. Less than three miles south of the cave of Adullam was the fortified city of Keilah (Khirbet Qila). A walled city located in the agriculturally productive Shephelah region of Judah, Keilah represented a desirable prize for the Philistines. It was only about twelve miles east southeast of Gath and was relatively isolated from other Israelite cities. These details, in combination with the time of year—early summer, either during barley or wheat harvest—meant that Keilah was an attractive and vulnerable target for Philistine plunderers.
      2. Threshing Floors
          a. the Israelites defeated the Philistines and captured the Philistines' "livestock" as booty. The captured Philistine livestock may have been flocks brought to the region of Keilah to consume the Israelites' pasture lands and grain fields; alternatively, they may have been beasts of burden the Philistines intended to use to carry off Israelite possessions.
b. Inquired
  i. Inquired - is to request, to ask and to beg

1. Before going into battle, Israelites would normally await a confirmation that the Lord would give the enemy into their hands (cf. Judg 1:2; 3:28; 4:14; 7:15; 1 Sam 14:12).
2. By asking Yahweh for permission to fight, David's politically advantageous rescue of Keilah is also given divine approval. For other divine inquiries see 28:6; 30:8; 2 Sam 2:1, and 5:19, 23. By referring to the enemy as "these" Philistines, David shows his disdain for them (cf. 14:6: "these uncircumcised"). David wanted to help beleagured members of his own tribe and to advance Israel's cause against their persistent enemy. The divine affirmative answer instructed David to "save" Keilah. This gave David the function of the judges, who "saved" Israel from those who plundered them (Judg 2:16 and often).
3. When David heard that the Philistines were attacking Keilah, he obtained Yahweh's permission to fight them. A second oracle from Yahweh quieted the fears of David's men. The Philistines suffered many casualties in the battle, but the inhabitants of Keilah were saved

   ii. Shall I go and Attack
1. In the tradition of previous Spirit-anointed deliverers, David responded to the news with a desire to lead his fellow Israelites in battle against the enemy.

   iii. God answered
1. God
2. Attack
3. Deliver

c. Men
   i. Afraid - fearful
1. The command to go "against the Philistine forces" (v. 3), an army with superior armaments and greater numbers, did not seem divinely inspired. In fact, David's troops were even "afraid" of doing battle with the comparatively weaker Israelite army under Saul's command—how much more so the Philistines
2. Divine inquiries often appear in pairs (e.g. 1 Sam 30:8), but the second inquiry in this case served to acquire reassurance in view of the men's anxieties.

   ii. Ranks of the Philistines
1. While the word "ranks" seems to be a bit strong for the Philistine raiding party that must have been involved, the word brings out well the terror felt by David's men.

d. David Inquired
   i. God Answered
1. Arise
2. I will give Philistines

a. Into you Hand
            b. David therefore repeats his inquiry of the Oracle and receives a direct command and a promise
            c. "I am giving the Philistines into your hand," is a standard rubric from Holy War
    e. The Fights 5-14a
        i. David and Men Fought
            1. Led away livestock
            2. Struck down with great slaughter
                a. Slaughter
                    i. The "great slaughter" (v 5) echoes the Israelite losses at Beth-shemesh (6:19) and David's own earlier victory over the Philistines (19:8). David saved the Judean inhabitants of Keilah (v 5) in fulfillment of the commandment given in the answer to his first inquiry (v 2).
        ii. Delivered Keilah
            1. Deliver – to help save from danger
            2. Contrast to Saul

II.   Another Fight vs. 6-13
    a. Abiathar
        i. Abiathar the priest
            1. The son of Ahimelech and priest of David (1 Sam 22:20–23). Abiathar fled to David with an ephod after the massacre of the priests of Nob at the hands of Doeg the Edomite. Saul had ordered the slaughter after hearing that Ahimelech had harbored David, supplied him with bread and a sword, and also inquired of God on his behalf.
            2. This verse adds to and modifies the report of Abiathar's desertion to David in 22:20. Although the previous notice implied that Abiathar had gone to the Forest of Hereth, the present verse has him come directly to Keilah
        ii. Ephod - A garment worn by priests, especially one of the sacred vestments of the high priest
            1. Abiathar's presence in David's camp was especially important because he had "brought the ephod." Abiathar's ephod was presumably like the cultic garment mentioned in the Torah (cf. Exod 28:6–35) that had attached to it a pouch containing the revelatory Urim and Thummim. Thus with Abiathar's arrival David now had acquired access to the only revelatory device sanctioned by the Torah (cf. Num 27:21). The deficiencies and questions that

plagued David's previous efforts to know God's will (cf. vv. 2–4) were dealt with in a convincing way
2.
b. Saul
   i. Told about David
      1. Saul should have been glad that his Judean rival had bested the Philistines in the battle of Keilah. Instead, he saw in David's trip to Keilah a strategic mistake that would let him capture David within an enclosed city. Saul, ever distrustful, demanded precise information from the Ziphites about David's location in the trackless desert.
   ii. God has delivered David to Saul
      1. Never spoke to God
      2. Never Inquired of God
         a. Human strategy
         b. From his information-gathering network Saul learned that David was at Keilah (v. 7). Saul took this as a divinely engineered circumstance that would enable him to capture David. Accordingly, "Saul called up all the people"
         c. (Vv 7–13) Saul mistakenly believed that God (not Yahweh!) had delivered David into his hands since his rival had entered a city with two doors sealed by a bar, in which he would presumably be much easier to trap than in the open spaces of Judah. Instead of rejoicing in the salvation which Yahweh had given to Keilah, Saul tried to take advantage of David's tactical mistake
      3. Delivered – Saul was in no danger just to his earthly kingdom and pride
      4. David was shut in the city
      5. Entering city with double gates and bars
   iii. Summoned All People for war
      1. Besiege
c. David Knew and Inquired
   i. Spoke to the Ephod
      1. Lord God of Israel. Your Servant
      2. Your Servant
         a. Saul is coming Keilah
         b. Destroy the city on my Account
         c. Tell your servant
         d. The account of David's escape from Saul at Keilah is highlighted by his inquiring of Yahweh on two occasions. Each inquiry consists of a pair of questions.
         e. On hearing that Saul was marching on Keilah David again inquired of Yahweh, this time via the ephod. Yahweh's

answers led David and his six hundred men to flee (vv 7–13). Saul's pursuit of David in the desert was kept from success by Yahweh, but David, nevertheless, was afraid (vv 14–15).

3. Tell me
   a. Will Keilah surrender David and his men
   b. The answer: "Yes, Saul was coming against Keilah." David then asked if the citizens (literally "lords," cf. Josh 24:11; Judg 9:23) of Keilah would hand him over to save their city. The question and its answer highlight the ungratefulness of the citizens of Keilah and the nobility of David.

4. The Lord said…
   a. They will surrender you
   b. Yahweh's military support for David in this chapter was both offensive (v 4) and defensive (v 14). David himself was afraid now, and not just his men (v 3) since he perceived that Saul's search was for his very life

ii. David
   1. They arose
      a. 600 men
      b. At the time of his retreat from the city, David's band numbered "about six hundred"—a 50-percent increase from the time when he was at Adullam (cf. 22:2).

iii. Saul gave up pursuit to Keilah

III. Every Day v. 14b
a. Escaped to the strongholds
   i. The next confrontation between Saul and David is introduced by a complicated but imprecise set of geographical notices. David occupied various strongholds in the wilderness, or, somewhat more precisely, in the hill country (Keilah was in the Shephelah), in the wilderness of Ziph. Ziph was also a city of Judah (Josh 15:55) and is usually identified with Tell Ziph , a site about thirteen miles SE of Keilah and nearly five miles SE of Hebron]
b. Saul Sought him every day
   i. Sought
      1. The verse reads like a summing up of the history, so far as relates to this part of David's life. It may have concluded the account of his wanderings in one of the documents:
   ii. God did not deliver him
      1. Deliver
      2. Into his hand

a. Yahweh did not surrender David into Saul's hands (v 14). That providential note sums up the theological function of the encounters between Saul and David in this chapter. Not even the perfidy of the citizens of Keilah, who were willing to hand David over just after he had saved them from the Philistines, nor the disclosure of David's hiding place by the Ziphites could end David's freedom
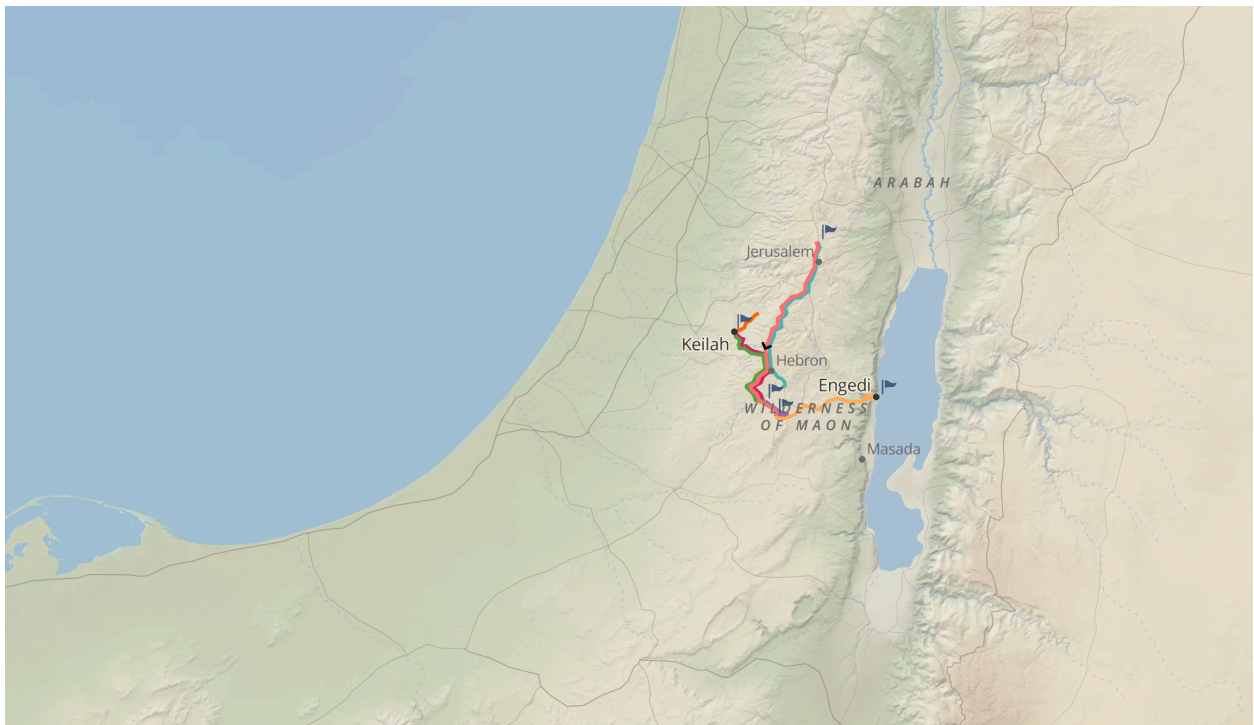
Philistines -

The clashes between the Philistines and the Israelites are vividly reflected in the book of Judges. Despite the heroic exploits of Samson (Judges 13–16) and Shamgar son of Anath (Judg 3:31), the pressure of the Philistines was relentless, as seen in the tales of the migration of part of the tribe of Dan, who traveled [1]N in their search for a safe refuge.

---

[1]N north (ern)

Further evidence of the advance of the Philistines can be found in the defeat of the Israelites at Ebenezer (the Philistines had already reached Aphek), resulting in the loss of the ark of the covenant and the destruction of the holy precinct Shiloh (1 Sam 4; cf. Jer 7:12, 14).

Samuel's victory over the Philistines (1 Sam 7:5–14), even if it is historical, did not appreciably reduce the pressure of the Philistines. The people demanded a king to lead them in war. The king chosen was Saul, whose wars with the Philistines can be traced from the beginning of his reign (1 Sam 13) until its tragic end on Mount Gilboa (1 Samuel 31). The eventual victor, however, was David, whose triumphs over the Philistines (1 Samuel 17; 18:6–9, 25–27, 30; 19:8) had gained him such renown as to arouse the jealousy and hatred of Saul. David was forced to flee, and eventually to become a vassal to his former foes the Philistines (1 Samuel 27, 29).

After the death of Saul, David was crowned king of Judah in Hebron (2 Sam 2:1–4), apparently with the consent of the Philistines. When David was chosen king over all Israel, however, and moved his capital to Jerusalem, the Philistines realized their danger and attacked. David's victories over the Philistines made Israel the leading power in the land of Canaan. We may assume that Gath became a vassal state to Israel. This change is suggested by David's mercenaries from Gath, who were under the command of Ittai the Gittite (cf. 2 Sam 15:18–22), and by his bodyguard, the Cherethites and the Pelethites (2 Sam 8:18; 15:18; 20:7, 23; 1 Kgs 1:38, 44; 1 Chr 18:17). The crushing defeat inflicted by David appears to have put an end to the Philistine Pentapolis; henceforward each city-state acted independently in its own selfish interest. It seems likely that the Philistines made a defensive alliance with Pharaoh to protect them against David; otherwise it is difficult to explain how Pharaoh was able to capture Gezer and give it as a dowry to his daughter, the wife of Solomon (1 Kgs 9:16). Forty years later apparently the same geopolitical situation enabled Shishak to invade Judah and Israel (1 Kgs 14:25), because no Philistine city, except Gaza, his starting point, is mentioned in his list of conquered towns. After the death of Shishak, Egypt was no longer a power in Asia. In the constant struggles between the Philistines and Israel (cf. 1 Kgs 15:27; 16:15) and the Philistines and Judah, in which the Philistines turned to the Edomites and the Arabs as allies (cf. Amos 1:6–8; 2 Chr 21:16–17), Judah sometimes prevailed (2 Chr 17:11; 26:6), and sometimes the Philistines (2 Chr 21:16–17; 28:18, until a new factor appeared on the scene, Assyria.[2]

Keilah-

KEILAH OF JUDAH (קְעִילָה, *qeʿilah*). A city of the Shephelah assigned to the tribe of Judah (Josh 15:44). David saved the city from Philistine attackers (1 Sam 23:1–5). However, the city's inhabitants planned to turn him over to Saul, so David and his men fled the city (1 Sam 23:7, 11–13).[3]

---

[2] H. J. Katzenstein, "Philistines: History," ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 326–327.

[3] John D. Barry et al., eds., "Keilah of Judah," *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

Inquired - is to request, to ask and to beg[4]

ABIATHAR, SON OF AHIMELECH (אֶבְיָתָר, *o'evyathar*). One of two high priests during the reign of David. A descendant of Phinehas, son of Eli. His name means "my father is rich."

Background and Significance
Little is known about Abiathar prior to his introduction in 1 Sam 21–23 (Koehler and

ABIATHAR (PERSON) [Heb ʾebyātār (אֶבְיָתָר)]. The son of Ahimelech and priest of David (1 Sam 22:20–23). Abiathar fled to David with an ephod after the massacre of the priests of Nob at the hands of Doeg the Edomite. Saul had ordered the slaughter after hearing that Ahimelech had harbored David, supplied him with bread and a sword, and also inquired of God on his behalf. The text is not consistent concerning the precise location of Abiathar's delivery of the ephod to David. Earlier David is reported to have been in the forest of Hereth in Judah (1 Sam 22:5), yet we are later informed that Abiathar had fled to David at Keilah (1 Sam 23:6). A common solution, based on the LX[5]X, is to understand this verse as referring to Abiathar's earlier flight and that he later accompanied David to Keilah. There is some confusion concerning the relationship between Abiathar and Ahimelech. In 2 Sam 8:17 the M[6]T reads "Ahimelech the son of Abiathar," which conflicts with 1 Sam 23:26 and 30:7, whereas the Syriac reads "Abiathar son of Ahimelek." The Hebrew of 1 Chr 18:16 points to a similar confusion, but reads "Abimelech son of Abiathar." The LX[7]X, Syr, and V[8]g suggest "Ahimelech" in line with 2 Sam 8:17. The reference to Abiathar in Mark 2:26 is usually explained as a result of this confusion in 2 Sam 8:17. However, it is difficult to see how Mark could have made such an error when the reference was to the incident with David at Nob where he accepted the consecrated bread from Ahimelech. The parallel passages in Matt 12:1–8 and Luke 6:1–5 both omit any reference to Abiathar.

The episode represents an important transition in the narrative of Saul's decline and David's rise since Saul has become increasingly isolated, culminating in his complete estrangement from Yahweh. The murder of the priests of Nob and the transfer of the ephod to David by Abiathar symbolizes Yahweh's complete withdrawal from Saul and his continuing presence with David. Abiathar provides an important medium of communication between Yahweh and David by consulting the ephod on David's behalf (1 Sam 23:9–12). McCarter (*1 Samuel* A[9]B, 366)

---

[4] Ludwig Koehler et al., *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 1371.
[5]LXX Septuagint
[6]MT Masoretic Text
[7]LXX Septuagint
[8]Vg Vulgate
[9]AB Anchor Bible

understands the episode as depicting David as the protector and preserver of the priesthood of Nob, whereas Saul is depicted as its destroyer. Gunn (1980: 88) understands the episode in literary terms; Abiathar provides David with access to the ephod and thus access to the divine realm of foreknowledge.

Those who treat the narratives in historical terms also see the relationship between David and Abiathar as particularly significant. During the rebellion of Absalom, Abiathar is willing to accompany David in his flight from Jerusalem (2 Sam 15:24–36). He and Zadok are said to be responsible for the ark of the covenant of God. Zadok and Abiathar are told by David to return to Jerusalem (15:27–28). They later (17:15–22) inform David, through their sons, of Hushai's warning not to wait at the fords of the wilderness. Bright (*BH*[10]*I*, 200–1) sees David's strategy here as a brilliant move to combine Abiathar, as the representative of tribal Israel, with Zadok, as the representative of   V 1, p 14   the indigenous Jerusalemite priesthood. Abiathar's support for Adonijah and Zadok's support for Solomon in the struggle for succession to the throne of David is often understood in similar terms. The representatives of tribal Israel were ousted in a purge at the beginning of Solomon's reign with Abiathar being exiled to Anathoth. Solomon spared him only because of his service to David (1 Kgs 2:26). Zadok's appointment in his place (1 Kgs 2:35) is understood in terms of the victory of urban Canaanite religious specialists. However, in the subsequent list of Solomon's officers, Abiathar is still recorded as priest alongside Zadok (1 Kgs 4:4); presumably, this refers to the beginning of the reign. The exile of Abiathar is presented in the Deuteronomistic History as the fulfillment of the word of Yahweh against Eli (1 Sam 2:30–36). This forms part of the common prophecy-fulfillment scheme in Deuteronomistic History. The implicit assumption that Abiathar was a descendant of Eli presumably rests upon 1 Sam 14:3.[11]

Ephod - A garment worn by priests, especially one of the sacred vestments of the high priest.[12]

Deliver – to help save from danger

Afraid – fearful

---

[10]*BHI* J. Bright. 1981. *A History of Israel.*3d ed. Philadelphia

[11] Keith W. Whitelam, "Abiathar (Person)," ed. David Noel Freedman, *The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 13–14.

[12] Ronald D. Roberts, "Ephod," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

Form/Structure/Setting

In this chapter David escapes twice from Saul, with a meeting with Jonathan interspersed between the two accounts. The unit concludes with David moving on to En-gedi, the site where the next encounter with Saul takes place. The last verse is 24:1 in M[13]T, but 23:29 in English texts.

Summary. When David heard that the Philistines were attacking Keilah, he obtained Yahweh's permission to fight them. A second oracle from Yahweh quieted the fears of David's men. The Philistines suffered many casualties in the battle, but the inhabitants of Keilah were saved (vv 1–5). Abiathar fled to David and brought the ephod with him (v 6). On hearing that Saul was marching on Keilah David again inquired of Yahweh, this time via the ephod. Yahweh's answers led David and his six hundred men to flee (vv 7–13). Saul's pursuit of David in the desert was kept from success by Yahweh, but David, nevertheless, was afraid (vv 14–15). Jonathan and David met in the desert and concluded a covenant. Jonathan acknowledged David's coming kingship and said that his father did as well (vv 16–18). Some Ziphites informed Saul about David's location in the wilderness, but Saul's pursuit was broken off when the word arrived about a new Philistine attack. The king turned back to handle the enemy; David moved on to En-gedi (vv 19–24:1 [EVV[14]. 23:29]).

The account of David's escape from Saul at Keilah is highlighted by his inquiring of Yahweh on two occasions. Each inquiry consists of a pair of questions. The medium of inquiry with the second pair is the ephod, under the administration of Abiathar; the medium of inquiry in the first pair of questions is not specified. Most commentators believe that v 6 is secondary and/or out of place. It reports the arrival of Abiathar with the ephod in his hand. If this notice were in v

---

[13]MT Masoretic Text
[14]EVV. English versions or verse numbers

2, it would clarify how David inquired of Yahweh in the first pair of questions. A location after v 9 might be a better place for the notice if it were an original part of the account. Its somewhat awkward position in v 6 suggests it was a gloss added to link Abiathar's use of the ephod in v 9 with his arrival in 22:20.

The account of David's escape from Saul in the wilderness concludes with an etiology for the name of a geographical geological formation (v 28). Vv 14–15 provide the setting and the introduction for the main body of the escape account, which begins in v 19.

The visit by Jonathan in vv 16–18 is assigned to Dtr[15]. by Veijola (Ewige Dynastie, 88–90). After the narrative sentence in v 16, Jonathan delivers an Oracle of Salvation in v 17, which suggests four reasons why David is not to fear. V 18 tells what David and Jonathan did at the end of the meeting.

Comment

(Vv 1–5) The Philistine attack was on Keilah, identified with Khirbet Qîlā (M[16]R150113), about eight miles NW of Hebron and some 3 miles S of Adullam (see 22:1). Although Adullam and Keilah were assigned to Judah according to Josh 15:35 and 44, their location in the Shephelah presumably exposed them to raids from the neighboring Philistine regions. Threshing floors would be the logical thing to attack because of the immediate use for grain and the low level of defenses associated with them, and loss of this crop would bring great hardship to the peasants. By asking Yahweh for permission to fight, David's politically advantageous rescue of Keilah is also given divine approval. For other divine inquiries see 28:6; 30:8; 2 Sam 2:1, and 5:19, 23. By referring to the enemy as "these" Philistines, David shows his disdain for them (cf. 14:6: "these uncircumcised"). David wanted to help beleaguered members of his own tribe and to advance Israel's cause against their persistent enemy. The divine affirmative answer instructed David to "save" Keilah. This gave David the function of the judges, who "saved" Israel from those who plundered them (Judg 2:16 and often). David's men admitted their fear even in the heartland of Judah. How much worse it would be if they would have to fight in contested territory near Keilah, where they would have to face the battle ranks of the Philistines. While the word "ranks" seems to be a bit strong for the Philistine raiding party that must have been involved, the word brings out well the terror felt by David's men. Hence we decided not to emend the text on the basis of LX[17]X (contra McCarter). The Philistine battle ranks were mentioned ten times in chap. 17.

Divine inquiries often appear in pairs (e.g. 1 Sam 30:8), but the second inquiry in this case served to acquire reassurance in view of the men's anxieties. David's point of departure, according to the present literary context, would be the Forest of Hereth (22:5; cf. Drive[18]r). God's answer, "I am giving the Philistines into your hand," is a standard rubric from Holy War (cf.

---

[15]Dtr. Deuteronomistic History
[16]MR Map Reference
[17]LXX Septuagint
[18]Driver Driver, S. R. *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel*.*

von Rad,[19] *Der Heilige Krie*[20]*g* 7–8), and it implies that the battle too is the Lord's (cf. 17:47). David began the assault by driving away the cattle, who were, perhaps, beasts of burden brought along by the Philistines to take off their plunder (Hertzberg). The "great slaughter" (v 5) echoes the Israelite losses at Beth-shemesh (6:19) and David's own earlier victory over the Philistines (19:8). David saved the Judean inhabitants of Keilah (v 5) in fulfillment of the commandment given in the answer to his first inquiry (v 2).

(V 6) This verse adds to and modifies the report of Abiathar's desertion to David in 22:20. Although the previous notice implied that Abiathar had gone to the Forest of Hereth, the present verse has him come directly to Keilah. Furthermore, the priest brought with him the ephod, by which "yes" or "no" answers could be obtained from the deity (for a discussion of the ephod see 1 Sam 2:18, 28; 14:3). David also used Abiathar to consult via the ephod in 30:7–8.

(Vv 7–13) Saul mistakenly believed that God (not Yahweh!) had delivered David into his hands since his rival had entered a city with two doors sealed by a bar, in which he would presumably be much easier to trap than in the open spaces of Judah. Instead of rejoicing in the salvation which Yahweh had given to Keilah, Saul tried to take advantage of David's tactical mistake. He called out (for the verb, see also 15:4) *all* his troops in order to put David and his 600 (see v 13) men under siege. As the word order in v 9 makes clear, David recognized that Saul was plotting against *him* and not, as would be expected, against *the Philistines*. The narrative contrasts the spiteful machinations of Saul with the successful military victories of David, which came by divine permission. Summoning Abiathar, the besieged David prayed to Yahweh, the God of Israel (vv 10, 11; cf. Jonathan's oath in 20:12). In vv 10 and 11 David's own piety and dependency are expressed by the self designation "your servant." Saul's impiety became clear when he tried to destroy the city of Keilah in order to kill David. David first checked to see if the report he had "really heard" (note the infinitive absolute in v 10) was true. The answer: "Yes, Saul was coming against Keilah." David then asked if the citizens (literally "lords," cf. Josh 24:11; Judg 9:23) of Keilah would hand him over to save their city. The question and its answer highlight the ungratefulness of the citizens of Keilah and the nobility of David. "Yes, they would hand him over," the ephod revealed, even though, the reader might add, David had just saved this city from pillaging by the Philistines. On hearing the divine answer, David made good his escape. What could his 600 men do in a pitched battle against "all the soldiers" (v 8) of Saul? David's pell-mell flight continued as he and his men wandered wherever they chose (v 13). Since David was no longer confined to one city, Saul called off his pursuit.

(Vv 14–15) The next confrontation between Saul and David is introduced by a complicated but imprecise set of geographical notices. David occupied various strongholds in the wilderness, or, somewhat more precisely, in the hill country (Keilah was in the Shephelah), in the wilderness of Ziph. Ziph was also a city of Judah (Josh 15:55) and is usually identified with Tell Ziph (M[21]R162098), a site about thirteen miles SE of Keilah and nearly five miles SE of Hebron. Though Saul sought David continually (v 14; cf. his seeking him or his life in vv 15 and 25),

---

[19]von Rad, von Rad, G. *Der Heilage Krieg im alten Israel*. 3rd ed. Göttingen: vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958.
[20]*Der Heilige Krieg* von Rad, G. *Der Heilage Krieg im alten Israel*. 3rd ed. Göttingen: vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958.
[21]MR Map Reference

Yahweh (see 14.a[22].) did not give David into Saul's hands despite the king's expectations (v 7). Yahweh's military support for David in this chapter was both offensive (v 4) and defensive (v 14). David himself was afraid now, and not just his men (v 3) since he perceived that Saul's search was for his very life (v 15). David's abode in the wilderness is further specified as Horesh (vv 15, 16, and 18). This may mean "wood" or "wooded height" (BD[23]B, 361b) although many associate it with Khirbet Khoreisa (M[24]R162095) some two miles S of Ziph.

Explanation

Yahweh did not surrender David into Saul's hands (v 14). That providential note sums up the theological function of the encounters between Saul and David in this chapter. Not even the perfidy of the citizens of Keilah, who were willing to hand David over just after he had saved them from the Philistines, nor the disclosure of David's hiding place by the Ziphites could end David's freedom. David went to deliver Judeans even when his men feared that his move involved a clash with the Philistines. The same Yahweh who would not give David to Saul gave the Philistines into David's hands (v 4). That was enough to quiet the fears of David's men and to insure victory.

Saul should have been glad that his Judean rival had bested the Philistines in the battle of Keilah. Instead, he saw in David's trip to Keilah a strategic mistake that would let him capture David within an enclosed city. Saul, ever distrustful, demanded precise information from the Ziphites about David's location in the trackless desert. But just when he was closing in for the kill, news came about another Philistine raid. How ironic that Saul, who had not rejoiced at David's victory over the Philistines in vv 1–13, is foiled by their inopportune reappearance.

Throughout the chapter divine oracles accompany David's adventures. "Go, smite the Philistines; I am giving them into your hand"—that's what Yahweh told David in two oracles before the battle of Keilah. After the battle, the message through the ephod, wielded by Abiathar, erstwhile priest of Shiloh and Nob, was that Saul would attack and that the citizens of Keilah would opportunistically hand David over.

Into the account of David in the wilderness of Ziph, the deuteronomistic historian inserted a cameo appearance by Jonathan, who encouraged him by Yahweh and declared that David would be king, with Jonathan as his obedient second in command. Even my father already knows that you will be the king! The scene closes with the two friends entering into a covenant relationship before Yahweh. Although the citizens of Keilah and the Ziphites were faithless, Jonathan emerges once more as faithful. Humanly speaking, he had the most to lose by David's

---

[22]14.a. 4Q[b], LXX; MT: "God."
[23]BDB F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs (eds.), *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford/New York: Clarendon/OUP, 1907; reprints with corrections, 1955; corrected ed., 1962)
[24]MR Map Reference

rise to power, but this Benjaminite heir apparent threw his political support behind David; he willingly assented to what, in the view of Dtr[25]., was the will of Yahweh.[26]

23:1–4 Less than three miles south of the cave of Adullam was the fortified city of Keilah (Khirbet Qila). A walled city located in the agriculturally productive Shephelah region of Judah, Keilah represented a desirable prize for the Philistines. It was only about twelve miles east southeast of Gath and was relatively isolated from other Israelite cities. These details, in combination with the time of year—early summer, either during barley or wheat harvest—meant that Keilah was an attractive and vulnerable target for Philistine plunderers.

David, who was presumably with his troops in the forest of Hereth (cf. 22:5) at the time of the Philistine attack, was informed of the events at Keilah. In the tradition of previous Spirit-anointed deliverers,[10277] David responded to the news with a desire to lead his fellow Israelites in battle against the enemy.

Before going into battle, Israelites would normally await a confirmation that the Lord would give the enemy into their hands (cf. Judg 1:2; 3:28; 4:14; 7:15; 1 Sam 14:12). In keeping with this tradition, David formally "inquired of the Lᴏʀᴅ" (v. 2), and received word that he should "attack the Philistines and save Keilah." The method David used to discern God's will is unknown; perhaps he was acting as a prophet (cf. 2 Sam 23:2; Acts 4:25). According to v. 6 David did not

---

[25]Dtr. Deuteronomistic History

[26] Ralph W. Klein, *1 Samuel*, vol. 10, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1983), 232–233.

[27107] Cf. Othniel (Judg 3:10), Gideon (Judg 6:34), Jephthah (Judg 11:29), Samson (14:6, 19; 15:14), and Saul (1 Sam 11:6).

have the ephod until Abiathar met him at Keilah.[10288] Whatever method David used, it did not seem to be satisfactory to David's men; they were unconvinced by the words of David's supposed revelation. The command to go "against the Philistine forces" (v. 3), an army with superior armaments and greater numbers, did not seem divinely inspired. In fact, David's troops were even "afraid" of doing battle with the comparatively weaker Israelite army under Saul's command—how much more so the Philistines. The men's concerns caused David to go before the Lord "once again" (v. 4). As before, the Lord responded favorably to David's request, promising him success.

23:5–6 Armed with that confirmatory word, "David and his men went into battle. Exactly as promised, the Israelites defeated the Philistines and captured the Philistines' "livestock" as booty. The captured Philistine livestock may have been flocks brought to the region of Keilah to consume the Israelites' pasture lands and grain fields; alternatively, they may have been beasts of burden the Philistines intended to use to carry off Israelite possessions.

While David was at Keilah, a large number of individuals joined his ranks (cf. v. 13). Of those who came to him there, none was more important to him than "Abiathar son of Ahimelech" (v. 6). Abiathar's presence in David's camp was especially important because he had "brought the ephod." Abiathar's ephod was presumably like the cultic garment mentioned in the Torah (cf. Exod 28:6–35) that had attached to it a pouch containing the revelatory Urim and Thummim. Thus with Abiathar's arrival David now had acquired access to the only revelatory device sanctioned by the Torah (cf. Num 27:21). The deficiencies and questions that plagued David's previous efforts to know God's will (cf. vv. 2–4) were dealt with in a convincing way.[29]

[28108] The NIV's translation of the perfect form יָרַד as a pluperfect ("had brought") creates difficulties, since v. 6 indicates Abiathar brought David the ephod "at Keilah," which he could not have done until after David took the city. Therefore, the point of v. 6 is that David did not have the ephod until after the battle.

[29] Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, vol. 7, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 231–232.

23:7–13 From his information-gathering network Saul learned that David was at Keilah (v. 7). Saul took this as a divinely engineered circumstance that would enable him to capture David. Accordingly, "Saul called up all the people" (v. 8; NIV, "his forces") to attack Keilah and seize David. Reports of this massive conscription order came to David, who immediately sought the Lord's will by means of the ephod.

As portrayed by the biblical writer, the central event in the Keilah episode of vv. 7–13a is David's pursuit of divine counsel by means of the ephod; 48 of the 103 Hebrew words in this section (47 percent) are used to depict this one seemingly minor incident. The author used the ephod-based interchange between David and the Lord to achieve several results relevant to the themes and theological intents of the book. First, the incident demonstrated David's reliance on the Lord; though David was Israel's greatest military hero, he would make no military move without divine approval. Second, the success David experienced in communicating with the Lord demonstrated the vitality of his relationship with the God of Israel. Third, the short narrative heightened the contrast between David and Saul; Saul would repeatedly fail to establish a link with the Lord, while David would have easy and extended dialogue with him. Finally, it demonstrated the effectiveness of the Torah-prescribed means of receiving divine counsel.

Presumably Keilah's residents had heard what Saul had done to Nob's citizens (cf. 22:18–19) and feared he would do the same to them if they were perceived to be supporting David. Certainly David wished to avoid inflicting harm on his group or on the people of the city. Consequently, he and his men left quickly before Saul could set out against him there. David's course of action produced the intended effect: Saul "did not go" to Keilah and destroy it. At the time of his retreat from the city, David's band numbered "about six hundred"—a 50-percent increase from the time when he was at Adullam (cf. 22:2).[30]

[30] Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, vol. 7, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 236–237.

Saul seeks David.—David delivers Keilah from the Philistines. Saul purposes to besiege him there. David, warned by the Oracle, leaves the city and dwells in the wilderness. The natives inform Saul, who makes another effort to capture him. At the critical moment however Saul is called away by a Philistine invasion. Between the two attempts, Jonathan visits David and encourages him, and the two make a bond of friendship.

The original thread of the narrative has been disturbed by the intrusion of the scene with Jonathan, and there are some minor fragments which seem to be interpolated.

1. The verse seems to connect well with 22:2. There David was in the stronghold of Adullam with four hundred men. Here he begins to use his power for the relief of his own people when oppressed by the Philistines. David is told: *the Philistines are fighting against Keilah*] a town which is reckoned to Judah, Jos. 15:44, though David's men had a different notion. If the identification with the present *Kila* be correct, the place lay only three miles south of Adullam.—*And they are plundering the threshing-floors*] a favourite act of robbery in a freebooting society. The treasure of the *fellahin* is easiest carried off at the time of threshing. Later it is apt to be hid in pits or stored in the strongholds.—**2.** David asked of the Oracle: *Shall I go and smite these Philistines?* The author does not deem it necessary here to explain how the Oracle came to be with David, and this is an argument against the originality of v. 6, at least in the place in which it now stands. The answer to the question is an affirmative.—**3.** David's men however object. In other cases we find them not easy to control.—*Behold we are afraid here in Judah*] the distinction between *Judah* and the territory of *Keilah* is perplexing. Possibly Keilah was tributary to the Philistines, so that David's men thought of it as Philistine territory. On the other hand Keilah, like Carmel, may have been reckoned to Caleb or one of the other clans not yet absorbed in Judah. *How much more if we go to Keilah against the army of the Philistines!* The argument is *a fortiori.*—**4.** David therefore repeats his inquiry of the Oracle and receives a direct command and a promise: *Rise, go down to Keilah, for I give the Philistines into thy hand.*—**5.** In accordance with the command, *David and his men went to Keilah and fought against the Philistines, and drove away their cattle*] which they had brought in order to carry off the plundered grain. ³¹³²B inserts *they fled before him* before the last clause. In any case, *he delivered* the inhabitants of Keilah.

6. The verse is obviously displaced. Designed as it is, to show how David could consult Yahweh, it ought to come earlier. Or, if the author supposed the former response to have been given in some other way than by the Ephod, then the proper place for this verse is later, after v. 9. The text has suffered in transmission, but may be plausibly restored so as to give the following meaning: *And when Abiathar son of Ahimelech fled to David, he came down to Keilah with the Ephod in his hand*] Keilah was the place to which he came down and he brought the Ephod,—these are data supplementary to the account of the slaughter of the priests.³³

³¹𝕲 The Greek version: Codex Vaticanus

³²B The Greek version: Codex Vaticanus

³³ Henry Preserved Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel.*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1899), 209–211.

7. Saul on hearing of David's place of sojourn said to himself: *God has sold him into my hand, for he has entrapped himself in coming into a city of doors and bars*] the king with a superior force would shut him in his cage as Sennacherib boasted afterwards that he had done to Hezekiah.—**8.** The royal summons was sent out and the whole people mustered *to besiege David and his men.*—**9.** David on hearing of the muster of the militia *knew that it was against him*] and not the Philistines as was ostensibly given forth (we may suppose) *that Saul was carving out an evil*] and he therefore prepares to consult God.—**10.** David recites the occasion of his anxiety.—**11.** The text of[34] is evidently in disorder. The question at the opening of the verse receives no answer and is repeated later. Omitting it, we get: *Will Saul come down as thy servant has heard? Yahweh, God of Israel, tell thy servant!* To this question an affirmative answer is given.—**12.** The second question—*Will the burghers of Keilah give me and my men into the hand of Saul?*—also receives an affirmative.—**13.** David and his men *left Keilah, and wandered hither and thither*] in consequence of which Saul abandoned his expedition. The ingratitude of the men of Keilah is the subject of animadversion by Schm[35]., but the better part of valour is discretion, and the town may not have been able to stand a siege. Whether it owed allegiance to Saul however may well be doubted.—**14.** The verse reads like a summing up of the history, so far as relates to this part of David's life. It may have concluded the account of his wanderings in one of the documents: *So David dwelt in the Wilderness*] the Wilderness of Judah is meant, overhanging the western shore of the Dead Sea.—*And Saul sought him continually, but Yahweh did not give him into his hand*. The allusion to the Wilderness of Ziph is an intrusion.[36]

---

[34] The received consonantal text of the Hebrew Bible.

[35]Schm. Sebastian Schmid. In Libros Samuelis Commentarius. Argentorati, 1687, '89. The name is usually given in the form *Schmid*, and I have conformed to this usage. Now I discover that he signs both his prefaces *Sebastianus Schmidt*.

[36] Henry Preserved Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel.*, International Critical Commentary (New York: C. Scribner's Sons, 1899), 211–212.