

1 Samuel 23:1-13

The Philistines Rob the Threshing Floors.

1 Samuel 23:1 - "Then they told David, saying, Behold, the Philistines fight against Keilah, and they rob the threshing floors."

There is a story within a story here in the rescue of the city of Keilah from the Philistines.

The phrase "they rob the threshing floors" grabbed me. What does it represent spiritually?

The threshing floor is where the fruit of the harvest ends up, at the end of the growing season, after cutting down the sheaves and threshing them to separate the wheat grain from the chaff, and finally after winnowing, the blowing away of the chaff by the threshing wind which is then burned up. The harvest is the grain - some used for making bread, other for storage and some to use as seed for the next harvest.

Robbing the threshing floor would occur at the very end - when the grain was ready to be stored and used. The joy of the harvesters once the work is done is the culmination of the process.

The harvest can represent believers who have been saved and brought into the church. Or it can also represent the final fruit or outcome of any kind of mission or ministry.

Spiritually, to "rob the threshing floor" is to deprive us of the joy and sustenance of Christ's work in us and among us, as well as the possibility of a future harvest.

The word here is "rob" = *šāsâ* - to plunder, destroy, rob, spoil

The image of the Philistines robbing the threshing floor may relate to the accusation by **Malachi 3** in which Israel is told they have "robbed God" in tithes and offerings.

- **Malachi 3:9-11** - "Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation. Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. And I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast her fruit before the time in the field, saith the LORD of hosts."

The holding back of tithes - 1/10th of the harvest signifying that God was the owner and we are merely stewards - was also linked to the inner attitudes of the Israelites:

- **Malachi 3:14-15** - "Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the LORD of

hosts? And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered."

They were probably not saying this openly - but it was in their thoughts, concealed.

A different word is used here - "rob" = *qāḇa* - to rob, defraud from a root meaning "to cover" or hide, with the figurative meaning "to illegally obtain by deception, defraud."

- **Proverbs 22:23** - "For the LORD will plead their cause, and spoil (*qāḇa*) the soul of those that spoiled (*qāḇa*) them."

The Rich Young Ruler

In the New Testament, Jesus is asked by the rich young ruler what must be done to inherit eternal life (**Mark 10: 17-22**). In his list of the commandments, only in the Gospel of Mark does He add "Defraud not."

"defraud" = *apostereō* - to keep something back through deception or fraud.

One scholar offers a unique viewpoint: "In some technical and pharisaic sense, yes, the person has met the terms of the Mosaic law. But Jesus sees that this person has accumulated wealth, and determines... that this wealth has been achieved by fraud – that is, by denying people what, in God's eyes, they truly deserve and taking it for oneself.

"It isn't strictly "stealing." It isn't strictly "bearing false witness." But it is a different kind of taking-for-one's-own something that someone else deserves or has a legitimate claim to. It's fraud in Jesus' eyes."

"One way of looking at this is to see that Jesus expects us to recognize how much we have been and are a part, whether intentionally or not, of the fraud of denying people what, in God's eyes, they deserve.

"It is to recognize that fraud can be to deprive in an unjust manner what rightly belongs to others – whether that unjust deprivation is personally designed, willed and carried out, or if it is the result of being a part of an unjust structure or system that has the consequence of denying people what is rightfully theirs."

See <https://goodfaithmedia.org/question-marked-what-did-jesus-mean-by-dont-defraud-cms-14967/>

In the end, Jesus tells the rich young ruler to "sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor."

James makes this even more clear:

- **James 5:4** - "Behold, the hire of the laborers who have reaped down your fields, which

is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of Hosts."

James is commenting on **Deuteronomy 24:14** - "Thou shalt not oppress (‘āšaq) an hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of thy strangers that are in thy land within thy gates"

This verse uses a different word (‘āšaq) for "defraud" than *qāḇā*, but the Greek Septuagint translates it with the same Greek word - a form of "apostereō."

And this sin is listed along with the most grievous:

- **Malachi 3:5** - "And I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right, and fear not me, saith the LORD of hosts."

By examining all these words for "rob," we see that "robbing the threshing floor" can involve not only outright stealing by thievery or threat of violence but also deceptive fraud by bamboozeling someone out of what is rightfully theirs.

We Can Be Robbed and Defrauded of our Joy

But for believers today, there are no actual Philistines coming after our harvest. Instead, the enemy is working from within and among us using deception. How then do we defraud each other, or ourselves? By holding back what is rightfully owed to our brethren.

- **Romans 13:8-10** - "Owe no man anything, but to love one another, for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law."

i.e. we are defrauding our brethren when we hold back our love. It rightfully belongs to them.

Withholding or keeping back who we are, withholding love and even exhortation. By having hidden agendas. By resisting the weaving of ourselves together into the body of Christ to become one. By maintaining our separateness, living in a secret world. By throwing up defenses and smokescreens, deflecting and hiding.

Not only joy, but our freedom is at stake:

- **Galatians 5:1** - "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage."

On Pentecost, the believers gathered in the Temple, which was built on land that had served as the "threshing floor of Atad" later called Araunah or Ornan the Jebusite (2 Samuel 24, 1 Chronicles 21:15, 2 Chronicles 3:1). The shaking, the rushing wind and

the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, as well as the tongues of fire, were all symbolized by the threshing floor process. The gifts and fruit of the Spirit are part of the harvest that can be robbed and lost.

If a congregation experiences enough of that, it will find itself with no harvest left and therefore no sustenance, freedom or joy.

Respond with Repentance

Generally when the word "rob" = *šāsâ* is used, it refers to God delivering over Israel to plunderers because of their sins. Perhaps that was the reason Keilah was subjected to the robbing of their threshing floors (we'll see that after this they were willing to betray David).

The solution is to invite the Messiah (David) into the mix. Keilah appealed to David. When David was told twice by God to go and smite the Philistines and "save Keilah" he responded and won the day and "smote them with a great slaughter."

We can't fix the situation, we can only confess and ask Jesus to be present - to invite Him into our problem, our weakness, our need. To let the cross and our repentance take care of our sin. This is a more refined and clearer view of what Paul meant when he said "revenge the disobedience." Jesus Himself wields the sword, revealing that "It is finished" on the cross.

Then, instead of seeing our harvest plundered, we will experience the joy of the harvest, pictured in Boaz and Ruth on the threshing floor, and at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Now let's look at the rest of this story.

Inquiring of the Lord

1 Samuel 23:2 - "Therefore David inquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go and smite these Philistines? And the LORD said unto David, Go, and smite the Philistines, and save Keilah."

Should David attack without being directed by his King, Saul? Should he risk his small band against the Philistines?

Possibly David inquired through the prophet Gad, who might have been still with him. Later Abiathar arrives with the Ephod and the Urim and Thummim, which was the vehicle for his second appeal to God.

The rabbis note that the Gematria numerology number for name Abiathar is 613, the number of the Torah's commandments.

1 Samuel 23:3-4 - "And David's men said unto him, Behold, we be afraid here in Judah:

how much more then if we come to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines? Then David inquired of the LORD yet again. And the LORD answered him and said, Arise, go down to Keilah; for I will deliver the Philistines into thine hand."

His men had some doubts, which turned David again to inquire of the Lord for their sake. Now he was assured of victory.

1 Samuel 23:5 - "So David and his men went to Keilah, and fought with the Philistines, and brought away their cattle, and smote them with a great slaughter. So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah."

The Philistines had brought cattle or sheep with them to feed their army, and these were captured by David.

1 Samuel 23:6 - "And it came to pass, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David to Keilah, that he came down with an ephod in his hand."

This is just an explanatory sentence to show that Abiathar had joined David near Keilah before the battle to describe how David had inquired of the Lord.

Saul Imagines a Trap for David

1 Samuel 23:7-8 - "And it was told Saul that David was come to Keilah. And Saul said, God hath delivered him into mine hand; for he is shut in, by entering into a town that hath gates and bars. And Saul called all the people together to war, to go down to Keilah, to besiege David and his men."

Besieging a town would be far easier than hunting for David among the caves in the wilderness. He called together the people for war, ostensibly against the Philistines, but really planning to entrap David.

David Inquires of the Lord Again

1 Samuel 23:9-11 - "And David knew that Saul secretly practised mischief against him; and he said to Abiathar the priest, Bring hither the ephod. Then said David, O LORD God of Israel, thy servant hath certainly heard that Saul seeketh to come to Keilah, to destroy the city for my sake. Will the men of Keilah deliver me up into his hand? will Saul come down, as thy servant hath heard? O LORD God of Israel, I beseech thee, tell thy servant. And the LORD said, He will come down."

The Jews (in Babylonian Talmud, Yoma, fol. 73. 1, 2.) gather, that two things are not to be asked together of the Urim and Thummim; and if they are asked, answer is made only to one, and the answer is only made to that which it was proper to ask first; and that which is asked out of order should be asked again, which was the case here, as follows:

1 Samuel 23:12 - "Then said David, Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into

the hand of Saul? And the LORD said, They will deliver thee up."

Even though David had saved the town, the town magistrates would be pressured by Saul to turn David over to him.

1 Samuel 23:13 - "Then David and his men, which were about six hundred, arose and departed out of Keilah, and went whithersoever they could go. And it was told Saul that David was escaped from Keilah; and he forbore to go forth."

Before Saul can gather his troops, David and his men flee, seeking safety and shelter wherever they can.

As we stop to examine each of these incidents while David is fleeing from Saul, it's almost like the "stations of the cross" of Jesus' path to his crucifixion. Each experience has something to show us about our spiritual walk.

Being in the wilderness recalls Jesus' 40 days of temptation in the wilderness. Each of David's battles, and his encounters with Saul, and his traveling around Israel recall Jesus and the disciples walking up and down through the towns of Israel. David's path led to his anointing as king and establishing the Davidic Kingdom. Jesus' ministry was the breaking through into history of His Heavenly Kingdom.