

## 1 Samuel 23:14-29

### David Betrayed In the Wilderness of Ziph

**1 Samuel 23:14** - "And David abode in the wilderness in strong holds, and remained in a mountain in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul sought him every day, but God delivered him not into his hand."

*Ziph* is from a root meaning “liquify” - i.e. referring to asphalt, tar or pitch, which softens in the sun.

This was an inhospitable place. Ziph is used elsewhere to refer to a hellish environment as a result of God's judgment:

- **Isaiah 34:9-10** - "And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch (*ziph*) and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch (*ziph*). It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof shall go up for ever: from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever."

But it also is used for a substance that protects:

- **Exodus 2:3** - "And when she could not longer hide him, she took for him an ark of bulrushes, and daubed it with slime and with pitch (*ziph*), and put the child therein; and she laid it in the flags by the river's brink."

(Noah's Ark was also "pitched within and without with pitch" but uses a different word for pitch - *kōper*).

The very harshness of the surroundings were serving to protect David and his men.

Ziph is southeast of Hebron. The "strong holds" = *məšād* - mountain-fastness, coverts for ambush. A fortress where hunters seek their prey and to which they can flee, a safe retreat.

"God delivered him not into his hand" - Only God's providence kept David from being discovered by Saul's diligent searching.

### Jonathan Encourages David

**1 Samuel 23:15-16** - "And David saw that Saul was come out to seek his life: and David was in the wilderness of Ziph in a wood. And Jonathan Saul's son arose, and went to David into the wood, and strengthened his hand in God."

David and his band moved around, hiding in the mountains, then to a forest, and back.

The Targum says Jonathan "strengthened him in the Word of the Lord"

Rashi - "and he strengthened his hand" = He renewed the covenant which was between them.

i.e. Jonathan encouraged and strengthened David's ability to lay hold of God's promises and confidence in the Lord.

**1 Samuel 23:17** - "And he said unto him, Fear not: for the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou shalt be king over Israel, and I shall be next unto thee; and that also Saul my father knoweth."

Like John the Baptist, he knew that "He must increase, but I must decrease" (**John 3:30**).

This was either a prophecy, or both Saul and Jonathan now understood that David was the "man after His own heart" referred to by Samuel when he told Saul, "The LORD hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine, that is better than thou" (**1 Samuel 13:14, 15:28**).

**1 Samuel 23:18** - "And they two made a covenant before the LORD: and David abode in the wood, and Jonathan went to his house."

They made a covenant, or renewed their earlier one, now "before the Lord" in the presence of Gad the prophet and Abiathar who had the Urim and Thummim.

This was the last time they saw each other.

### Betrayal By the Ziphites

**1 Samuel 23:19-20** - "Then came up the Ziphites to Saul to Gibeah, saying, Doth not David hide himself with us in strong holds in the wood, in the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon? Now therefore, O king, come down according to all the desire of thy soul to come down; and our part shall be to deliver him into the king's hand. Now therefore, O king, come down according to all the desire of thy soul to come down; and our part shall be to deliver him into the king's hand."

After hearing what Saul had done to the priests of Nob for aiding David, the Ziphites thought it best to betray him to Saul. This could have happened before Jonathan's visit, and might be how Jonathan knew where David was hiding.

"Ziph" is a form of the word "forgery" in Hebrew, indicating to the rabbis that the Ziphites were liars.

"the hill of Hachilah, which is on the south of Jeshimon" - This was south of Jericho near the Dead Sea. Later a fortress was built there called Masada, which was strengthened by King Herod and was the site of a mass suicide during the Roman siege in 70 A.D.

## Psalm 54

- **Psalm 54:1** (intro) - "To the chief Musician on Neginoth, Maschil, A Psalm of David, when the Ziphims came and said to Saul, 'Doth not David hide himself with us?'"

Twice, apparently, David hid in the vicinity of the Ziphites when being pursued by King Saul. Each time the Ziphites, although of David's own tribe of Judah, told Saul of his location. They seemed to think it better to support the reigning king than to be kind to David, whom they considered a rebel. (See **1 Samuel 23:14-23; 1 Samuel 26:1**)

David's betrayal by the Ziphites echoes Jesus' betrayal by Judas, and indeed his rejection by his own people and nation.

- **Psalm 54:1-2** - "Save me, O God, by thy name, and judge me by thy strength. Hear my prayer, O God; give ear to the words of my mouth."

"by thy name" - That is, by God himself, for names are often put for persons.

"judge my cause" i.e. declare a judgment in my favor and then vindicate me.

David, like Christ, entrusted himself to God:

- **1 Peter 2:23** - "When they heaped abuse on Him, He did not retaliate; when He suffered, He made no threats, but entrusted Himself to Him who judges justly."

- **Psalm 54:3** - "For strangers are risen up against me, and oppressors seek after my soul: they have not set God before them. Selah."

The Ziphites, although Israelites, he calls "strangers" in regard of their treacherous conduct toward him, by which they showed themselves to be "estranged" from God.

"They have not set God before them" — They have cast off all regard to God's presence and authority, and all fear of his judgments. - *Benson Commentary*

- **Psalm 54:4** - "Behold, God is mine helper: the Lord is with them that uphold my soul."

Like Aaron and Hur literally upheld Moses' arms in prayer (**Exodus 17**). And, ultimately, as God upheld Christ in the wilderness, and in the garden, and on the cross.

## Treacherous Enemies

- **Psalm 54:5** - "He shall reward evil unto mine enemies: cut them off in thy truth."

"enemies" - *sharar* - a word only used five times, all in the Psalms. From a root meaning to twist or entwine, to make firm, thus to oppress, to be hostile. It seems to emphasize

the tricky and perverse way the Ziphites dealt with David.

"Cut them off" — Or, put them to silence. The enemy voices opposing Christ within us will be silenced.

Rashi - "with Your truth": Since You are truthful, and You said that You would wreak vengeance upon talebearers [the Ziphites] and those who pursue to kill, therefore, cut them off.

- **Psalm 54:6** - "I will freely sacrifice unto thee: I will praise thy name, O LORD; for it is good."

- **Psalm 119:108** - "O accept the freewill offerings of my mouth, O LORD, And teach me Your ordinances."

- **Hebrews 13:15** - "Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise, the fruit of lips that confess His name."

- **Psalm 54:7** - "For he hath delivered me out of all trouble: and mine eye hath seen his desire upon mine enemies."

God usually delivers us out of trouble by getting us *THROUGH* it.

"his desire" - not in the Hebrew. The last phrase should read "and mine eye hath looked upon mine enemies." - i.e. they came near enough to be seen by David, and that was all. God protected him.

In this case, David wished only to be spared, and later he would even spare Saul. Saul withdrew his forces from searching for David when he heard the Philistines had invaded.

Earlier the leaders of Keilah had betrayed David. Now the Ziphites did the same. This is a foreshadowing of how the people of Judea would reject Messiah, and how Judas would betray Him.

- **John 1:11** - "He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him."

- **Luke 17:25** - "But first He must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation."

**1 Samuel 23:21** - "And Saul said, Blessed be ye of the LORD; for ye have compassion on me. Go, I pray you, prepare yet, and know and see his place where his haunt is, and who hath seen him there: for it is told me that he dealeth very subtilly."

"Blessed be ye" - It was believed that someone who incriminates another will find himself cursed, according to **Deuteronomy 27:24** - "Cursed be he that smiteth his neighbor secretly." So Saul blesses them to assure them that by helping him apprehend

a criminal, they would not be cursed, but rather blessed.

"ye have compassion on me" - The focus on self-pity shown by Saul is remarkable. Earlier he had also complained "none of you is sorry for me" (**1 Samuel 22:8**). His madness was mingled with a hunger for sympathy.

Supposedly, Saul informed the Ziphites, "When David was in my service, I asked him how he managed to avoid capture by the Philistines. He described his many stratagems for convincing the enemy that he is to be found in one place as he swiftly makes his way elsewhere. I know he can do the same now, and so it is essential that you discover every one of his hiding places."

He instructs the Ziphites to search out where David is hiding, to get firsthand information and not rely on hearsay:

**1 Samuel 23:23-24** - "See therefore, and take knowledge of all the lurking places where he hideth himself, and come ye again to me with the certainty, and I will go with you: and it shall come to pass, if he be in the land, that I will search him out throughout all the thousands of Judah. And 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."

After being encouraged and strengthened by Jonathan, David - who had previously been in "Ziph" (a hellish environment) - now was in the wilderness of "Maon."

*Maon* = "habitation," and is often used of the dwelling place of God

- **Psalm 90:1** - "[A Prayer of Moses the man of God.] Lord, thou hast been our dwelling place (*maon*) in all generations."

Still, David had "fear of Saul." But remember that David was always trying to avoid a confrontation with Saul and his army, who he recognized as the legitimate ruler. David still hoped to convince him that he was no threat.

**1 Samuel 23:25-26** - "Saul also and his men went to seek him. And they told David: wherefore he came down into a rock, and abode in the wilderness of Maon. And when Saul heard that, he pursued after David in the wilderness of Maon. And Saul went on this side of the mountain, and David and his men on that side of the mountain: and David made haste to get away for fear of Saul; for Saul and his men compassed David and his men round about to take them."

David and his men were encircled with no path to escape. It was a dire situation.

At this moment, according to the Midrash, "David exclaimed bitterly, 'Samuel anointed me and proclaimed me king, but for nothing! What will come of his anointment and his promise?' The Lord responded, 'You are calling Samuel false, but I can testify that he is trustworthy. As the verse states, "All Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew Samuel was faithful as a prophet to the Lord.'" Immediately God sent an agent to miraculously save

David."

### Philistines Invade

**1 Samuel 23:27-28** - "But there came a messenger unto Saul, saying, Haste thee, and come; for the Philistines have invaded the land. Wherefore Saul returned from pursuing after David, and went against the Philistines: therefore they called that place Selahammahlekoth."

Who was the messenger?

One Midrash insists it could not have been a human messenger, because no one would have the authority to order the king to "Haste thee and come." Therefore it must have been an angel dispatched by Divine Providence. This is supported by the verse, "He sent from on high and took me" (**Psalm 18:17**).

*Sela-hammahlekoth* = "the cliff of escapes" "rock of smoothness, or slippery rock"

David was able to "slip away."

The Targum has, "therefore they called that place the rock of division, the place where the heart of the king was divided to go here and there."

**1 Samuel 23:29** - "And David went up from thence, and dwelt in strong holds at Engedi."

Engedi means "spring of the goat" and is an oasis in the midst of an even more desolate desert than Ziph, lying by the Dead Sea but within the territory of Judah. Solomon compared his lover to "a cluster of henna blossoms from the vineyards of En Gedi" (**Song of Solomon 1:14**).

David concealed himself and his men in the caves surrounding Engedi.

Some say this is where David wrote **Psalm 63** - "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is."

---

What can we take from this story?

Saul wanted pity. Jonathan gave David something entirely different - encouragement. But not a false hope based on feelings or fantasy. He strengthened his hand in God. He met him where he was with truth and the good news that he would be king. He delivered this encouragement at some risk to himself.

That is the best we can do for a friend or brother who is in trouble, who is struggling in a seemingly God-forsaken environment, maybe chased by his own demons or pursued by guilt or under an unbearable burden. And like the treacherous Ziphites, our minds will betray us.

We all need help sometimes to grasp reality, the things God has said are true - It is finished on the cross! God is in control! My life is Christ!

When we become part of the body of Christ we in effect have made a covenant like Jonathan and David made to one another - to exhort, love and encourage each other in the Spirit.

- **Proverbs 27:17** - "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another."