

# Wilderness Training

1 Samuel 23:1-29

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## **Introduction:**

God has a pattern He frequently follows of sending us to the wilderness for training.

- When Israel came out of Egypt, He trained them in the wilderness.
- When Jesus was anointed by the Spirit and began His public ministry, the first thing the Spirit did was drive Him into the wilderness to be tested.
- When the Holy Spirit was poured out on the church, the new believers were immediately brought into a time of rejection and testing.
- When Paul was converted, the Lord sent him to the wilderness for learning, and to this the Lord added a period of rejection from the suspicious church.
- When Paul established churches, he taught them to expect much tribulation and persecution.
- Jesus and all the NT apostles and prophets taught the church of a coming time of great hardship that would come in their generation—and it certainly did—many of the apostles and thousands of believers were executed by unbelieving Jews in collusion with Rome.
- We could go on with personal testimonies among us.

When you get down to it, this present world is a time of wilderness training.

- We have our David, the LORD Jesus Christ, who bore the cross in this world and who now, though in glory, suffers with His church in the world, being full of compassion, yet full of wisdom and love—love that knows we need the wilderness to be complete.
- It is not that we need to be punished, but it is rather that God constituted us to be a people who learn through living under His word and Spirit and gracious help in a hard world. Don't resent it—embrace the blessing of His training. You need it.
  - As Jesus said, "If it is possible, let this cup pass from Me."
  - If it had been possible, He would never have had to suffer as He did.
  - It was entirely necessary, else His loving Father would have spared Him.
    - It is the same for you.

This does not mean that we should be hard and have no compassion.

- Consider Jesus and His compassion as our David who, though now in heaven, leads us through the wilderness today:
  - **Heb 4:14-16: Seeing then that we have a great High Priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast *our* confession. <sup>15</sup> For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**

Today in First Samuel 23, we have David being trained in the wilderness with the men God had brought to serve with him.

- Here there is valuable instruction for us as we follow Jesus and go through the wilderness of this world with Him as our David.
- Our text is 1 Samuel 23, the entire chapter. Hear now, the reading of God's holy Word:

**1 Sam 23:1-29: Then they told David, saying, "Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah, and they are robbing the threshing floors." <sup>2</sup> Therefore David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I go and attack these Philistines?" And the**

LORD said to David, "Go and attack the Philistines, and save Keilah." <sup>3</sup> But David's men said to him, "Look, we are afraid here in Judah. How much more then if we go to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?" <sup>4</sup> Then David inquired of the LORD once again. And the LORD answered him and said, "Arise, go down to Keilah. For I will deliver the Philistines into your hand." <sup>5</sup> And David and his men went to Keilah and fought with the Philistines, struck them with a mighty blow, and took away their livestock. So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah. <sup>6</sup> Now it happened, when Abiathar the son of Ahimelech fled to David at Keilah, *that* he went down *with* an ephod in his hand.

<sup>7</sup> 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." <sup>8</sup> Then Saul called all the people together for war, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men. <sup>9</sup> When David knew that Saul plotted evil against him, he said to Abiathar the priest, "Bring the ephod here." <sup>10</sup> 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. <sup>11</sup> 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." <sup>12</sup> 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*." <sup>13</sup> 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.

<sup>14</sup> 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. <sup>15</sup> So David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life. And David *was* in the Wilderness of Ziph in a forest. <sup>16</sup> Then Jonathan, Saul's son, arose

and went to David in the woods and strengthened his hand in God. <sup>17</sup> 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." <sup>18</sup> So the two of them made a covenant before the LORD. And David stayed in the woods, and Jonathan went to his own house.

<sup>19</sup> 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?" <sup>20</sup> 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." <sup>21</sup> And Saul said, "Blessed *are* you of the LORD, for you have compassion on me. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> 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."

<sup>24</sup> 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. <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> 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.

<sup>27</sup> But a messenger came to Saul, saying, "Hasten and come, for the Philistines have invaded the land!" <sup>28</sup> Therefore Saul returned from pursuing David, and went against the Philistines; so they called that place the Rock of Escape. <sup>29</sup> Then David went up from there and dwelt in strongholds at En Gedi.

Thus far the reading of God's Word. May He use it for our edification.

In this passage, we find six lessons we are taught in the wilderness.

- Let's jump right in with the first lesson.

**I. In the wilderness, the LORD calls us to serve others and to count on Him for assistance in our service (vs. 1-5).**

A. It is interesting to see how the LORD calls David to serve Keilah at this time.

1. There he is in the wilderness, a fugitive,
  - with 400 men who have no place to call home,
  - hunting for their daily food and provisions in the wilderness while constantly watching out for Saul, dealing with heat and cold, illness, quarrels among the men, and all the rest.
2. There he is and he gets this message, **"Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah, and they are robbing the threshing floors."**

B. How is he expected to respond?

1. He is in the wilderness trying to stay alive. Saul is sending out the national media to alert everyone to be on the lookout for this dangerous offender. What does Keilah have to do with him?
2. David's response is quite wonderful.
  - He asks God, probably through his prophet Gad, if he should go and deliver them—
3. The LORD answers him clearly: **"Go and attack the Philistines, and save Keilah."**

C. Naturally, his men, most who have not yet learned to trust the LORD the way David has, object (v. 3): **"Look, we are afraid here in Judah."**

- Remember that they were in Judah, rather than a foreign land, because the LORD told David to go there through the prophet Gad...
1. This is the perfect occasion for them to learn to trust God—that He will help them when they fight His battles.
  2. So David, knowing their weakness, does not reproach them, but asks the LORD a second time...
    - And the LORD graciously indulges them by answering a second time with the same sure words (v. 4): **"Arise, go down to Keilah. For I will deliver the Philistines into your hand."**
  3. Then they go and they have great success.
    - Not only do they save the city from being hungry that winter, but they also drive off and strike the Philistines with a mighty blow and take the animals they brought, probably to transport all the grain they came to take.
      - The livestock were their train cars or pick-up trucks.
      - So Keilah was enriched, God was glorified, and David's men were learning to be bold as soldiers for the LORD.

D. The lesson for you is obvious.

1. When you are in the wilderness, is that time to stop serving?
  - Is that the time to say, "What can I do? I need help more they do?"

- No! It is the time to do what you can. It is the time to step into ways of service. You lose marvellous opportunities when you draw up in your shell.
  - The LORD wants you to love and help other people in the wilderness too.
2. This message smacks me hard.
- I have things to do in our Presbytery right now that are overwhelming to me.
    - Don't I have enough on my plate?
    - Besides, who am I to address these problems that others are having?
  - What a foolish way to look at it.
    - The question is not "who am I?" but "Who is my God?" and "What does He want me to do?"
    - It is true that there are times when it might be that I should decline certain things if they cause me to neglect other things that I am clearly called to do.
      - But very often, that is not the case.
3. Brothers and sisters, do what God has put before you and given you to do!
- You will learn wonderful lessons in the wilderness when you learn to serve others in the wilderness.
    - That is one of the first lessons.
    - Is work slow? Do you have broken health? Then find things you can do! Get going for the LORD. You will be surprised where it might lead you.

➤ The second lesson:

## II. In the wilderness, the LORD exposes the plots of our enemies so that we do not fall into their traps (vv. 6-11).

A. We see here that Saul heard that David was in Keilah.

1. He is thrilled because he supposed he can easily capture him by attacking the city.
  - This is so backwards. Saul was the king, but here you have David protecting Keilah and Saul getting ready to attack it—and his attack would be worse than the Philistines' attack that David just saved them from!
  - At Nob, Saul had already shown what he might do to any city that helped David, killing every person for presumably siding with David against him—when David wasn't even out to get Saul at all in the first place!
  - We are told in verse 8 that: **"Saul called all the people together for war, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men."**
    - When he called "all the people" before, it was sometimes as many as 200,000! Was this the forces he called against David?
    - I wouldn't put it past this demonised man. He was obsessed with getting David and seems to have convinced himself that David is trying to kill him.
2. But how did Saul know?
  - We live in the day of cell phones; they lived in the day of messengers and had networks of friends in every place who could be trusted.
  - We are going to see that both David and Saul constantly have people telling them things—later we will see how Jonathan seems to have no problem finding David in the wilderness even though he is hiding from Saul.

- Their methods worked a lot better than we might think. Of course, there were traitors and such—but we have even more ways for our information to get into the wrong hands.
- B. David finds out that Saul is after him and so is able to escape.
1. We told in verse 9 that he heard about Saul’s plot—it would have been hard to hide!
    - It was by God’s sovereign hand of providence that David learned about this, even it was by very ordinary means.
  2. But David also had direction from the LORD that Saul did not have.
    - Saul had killed His priests in Israel, except for one, and now that priest had come to David. We saw that last week, and now we see when he came in this passage.
      - Furthermore, God was not sending Saul any prophets to help him, but David had Gad and other prophets in God’s mercy.
  3. You can see the guidance that David got...
    - The priest had a method that was to be used for the king and other high officials to get “yes and no” answers from the LORD.
      - Since Abiathar had come to David with the ephod, David asked two simple questions... Will Saul come to destroy Keilah (will he actually do that just to get David!) and will the people of Keilah hand him over to Saul.
    - The answer to both questions is “yes.”
      - Verse 13 says: **So David and his men, about six hundred** [notice they have increased by 200], **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.**
- You see how David and his men were saved because they had special guidance—
- C. But what does this have to do with us? We don’t have a priest with an ephod.
1. No. We don’t need it. We have something far better!
    - Our David is Jesus and He is both our priest and our king. He leads us from heaven. We have access to God through Jesus our mediator who Himself is both God and man!
  2. He from His throne continually alerts His church to those who plot against Him and against us as His followers.
    - He exposes their schemes and He enables us and those who lead us through many different means to protect us against their attacks.
    - We have seen this in First John... the world, the flesh, and the devil plot and scheme to lead us away from the one true Christ...
      - Think of all the antichrists that have been around since the first century when John said there were many already at the time when he wrote.
      - We see them in history. First they tell us that Jesus is not really man, then that He is not really God.

- They tell us that His word is not reliable, that we have a spark of divinity within, that we are not fully fallen—the list goes on and on.
  - As we saw last week, our enemies work in other ways too, by presenting other kinds of idols.
    - They constantly try to motivate us the way Saul did to pursue an earthly reward (houses and lands and positions) and not worry so much about pleasing God—especially when it gets in the way of “more important things.”
3. Our Lord graciously enables us, as Psalm 92 in our Psalter puts it, “to see the spies and hear what plotters say.” That is actually a good translation the NKJV has, and seems to better fit the context.
- In any case, Paul says (2 Cor 2:11): **“lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices.”**
  - When Jesus was in the wilderness as we read about in Matthew 4, He saw what Satan was up to and did not fall into his snare.
  - We have an anointing from the Holy Spirit and through the blessing of godly leaders who expose the world, as well as false teachers and teachings of devils.
4. See that you seek help from the Lord when you are in the wilderness—from Him, His Word, His Spirit, Christian ministers and elders, parents, and Christian friends.
- When you are in the wilderness, you are more vulnerable and easily led into the snares of enemies—in the wilderness, you want relief and you turn to the world for help in your desperation like David did in our study a couple of weeks ago.
  - Jesus will never do that. Turn to Him and He will lead you safely through the wilderness. He will expose those who mean you harm for what they are.
    - Snakes and devils and destroyers—even though they masquerade as friends and may even believe themselves to be friends—will not prevail against us!
    - Only the LORD is to be trusted—especially in the wilderness. You have the best guidance of all! This is not about which stock to buy, but about how to live well for all eternity for the glory of God in the house of the LORD.

➤ Now the third lesson:

### **III. In the wilderness, the LORD leads us to be patient with the weakness and ingratitude of those we serve (vv. 12).**

A. Look at verse 12 again and remember that David had just saved Keilah.

1. Having asked the LORD if Saul would indeed come and attack Keilah because of him (a shocking thing), he also asks what these men he had benefited would do if Saul came:
  - V. 12: **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.”**
2. What sort of thanks is that? He might have been very angry with them.

- David and his men save them. Saul comes. They hand David over!
- B. But here David behaves in a very Christ-like way.
1. There is no indication of any offense at all.
    - Remember, he had not done this to ingratiate himself to Keilah. He had done this as an act of service to the Lord.
  2. He loved the people, for they were God's people. He knew they were terribly weak and could not be expected to stand up against Saul.
    - After all, Saul was the king and he was coming with a great show of force.
    - He would have a bad report about David who, though he had save the city, he would accuse of treachery and even say that this was an act of treachery.
    - What Saul would presumably do to the city (remember Nob) would be much worse than what the Philistines were looking to do.
- C. This is so much like Jesus.
1. Think of Him with His disciples.
    - How patient He was with their foolishness and slowness of heart to believe.
    - How patient He was when they all forsook Him in His most difficult hour when He needed them most.
      - He knew that it was all part of His suffering to be alone.
      - On their part, they did it not in malice but in weakness and confusion.
  2. We need to learn such patience.
    - Did you not get the recognition from others that you deserved?
    - Did you help them in their need but then they ignored you in your need?
    - Perhaps God wanted to draw you closer to Himself by leaving you to suffer alone. It wasn't right on their part, but can you still love them?
      - Does Jesus continue to love you? Have you not done far worse to Him?

➤ The fourth lesson:

**IV. In the wilderness, the LORD give us encouragement and support from our dear Friend (and friends) in timely ways (vv. 14-18)**

- A. This paragraph (vs 14-18) is about the coming of Jonathan.
1. David and his men left the city of Keilah for the mountains of Ziph.
    - It is easy to gloss over the words in verse 14 and 15, but they are an important backdrop for the encouragement that follows.
    - We are told that Saul was in relentless pursuit of David. We shall see that he still had a massive army too—and lots of informants.
    - David knows that Saul is out to kill him and he is hiding in the various caves and such that were in the region. Some of them are quite large, but he now has 600 men with him—both a comfort and a burden.
      - He must have been getting weary of it all and wondering how long it would continue!
      - Likely, he had no one to encourage him, but had to constantly motivate those who were with him. Of course, he had the LORD... and truly that is enough—but how encouraging to have a brother to speak, too.

2. But look—just at the right time—Jonathan shows up!
  - This dear brother risks his life to come to David at this time. He had to come in secret—informers were everywhere and many of them knew Jonathan—remember, he was Saul’s son!
    - That meant a lot in itself!
    - But Jonathan did not go on about his great love for David...
  - Jonathan did the best thing you can do for anyone as a friend.
    - Vs 16: **Then Jonathan, Saul’s son, arose and went to David in the woods and strengthened his hand in God.**
    - He did not say, “You have what it takes. You are strong, you are faithful. You can do it.” No...
    - **“He strengthened his hand in God!”**
      - David’s friend was used to refocus him on God and to remember His faithfulness and His promises!
      - What he tried to do before, this time he achieved.
3. You see what Jonathan said in verse 17 to strengthen David’s hand:
  - **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.”**
  - He reminded him that God had a plan that Saul could not stop. He had chosen David to be king. We need to be reminded of the promises of God in our need.
    - They are not trite unless we are in a rebellious unbelieving frame of mind.
    - They are precious and invigorating—they put our hand into the hands of God.
  - **<sup>18</sup> So the two of them made a covenant before the LORD. And David stayed in the woods, and Jonathan went to his own house.**
    - This is the last time we are told that they would see each other on earth.

B. I hope you that you have friends like that.

1. They are quite rare.
    - But whether you do or not, you can *be* a friend like that to others.
    - Those you minister to will not always appreciate it. David did not when he was on his pathway that landed him in Gath with the Philistines!
    - But it is still the right thing to do—point them to the LORD.
      - How wonderful it is when they receive it.
  2. And let me add that we *all* have a friend like that if we are believers.
    - The LORD Jesus truly is the most sympathetic helpful friend. He has known very hard trials and temptations, harder than we will ever know, and He is able to restore us to God. I quoted Hebrews 4:15-16 at the beginning
      - **<sup>15</sup> For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.**
- Yes, we should always go to Him.

3. But don't miss this. He always, eventually, comes to us if we are His!
  - Dear Christian, think back about all the times He has come to put your hand back in God's again (which is always His own hand).
  - How many times have you been on the brink of despair and He comes to restore your faith again.
  - And He does it just at the right time. He was the one, in fact, who sent Jonathan to David.
  - Be glad and rejoice.

➤ The fifth lesson:

**V. In the wilderness, the LORD shows us that treachery can arise from anywhere (vv. 19-23).**

A. What is with these Ziphites!

1. They were from David's own tribe and we read here in verse 19-23 that they went out of their way to inform Saul that David was nearby.
  - They let Saul know how delighted they would be to be the ones who delivered him into his hand.
    - Here, Jonathan, Saul's son, was putting David in God's hands...
    - And these treacherous men from David's own tribe of Judah want to put him in Saul's hand!
2. It is remarkable to see Saul declaring, "Blessed are you of the LORD."
  - Talk about taking God's name in vain! He did that before when he cursed Jonathan, but now he does it with a blessing which in many ways seems worse!
    - Blessed are you who are ready to destroy the LORD's anointed, the one He has chosen to be king!
3. We see how fearful Saul is—he wants to make sure that they know where David is because he is terrified of him.
  - As we saw last week, if Saul would join his son Jonathan in supporting David as the one chosen to be king, he could have confidence in God like Jonathan does.
  - But fool that he is, he continues to fight against God! What does he hope to accomplish? What do the Ziphites hope to accomplish?
    - Getting some houses and lands and positions in Saul's kingdom?

B. The application is obvious.

1. Choose you this day whom you will serve.
  - If the LORD is God, serve Him.
  - If not, then don't pretend that you have anything to do with Him. You are a hypocrite.
2. And if you are serving God, do not let your faith be shaken when evil men arise from within the church and even from among your own friends.
  - When you are in wilderness, you will often see who really loves the LORD and who is just along for the ride.

- It can be very unsettling to see it. But it is a lesson of the wilderness.
- Did Job see the truth about his wife when he was in the wilderness and instead of strengthening his hand in the LORD, she said, “Curse God and die?”
- We are not told if she repented. I hope that she did.

➤ The sixth lesson:

**VI. In the wilderness, the LORD sometimes surprises us with the ways that He uses to deliver us (vv. 24-29)**

A. David moves on to Maon by the time Saul gets to Ziph, and word came to David that Saul was pursuing him.

1. Note God’s faithfulness in letting him know, but this time it looks very bleak.
  - This is where C.S. Lewis or Tolkien would end a chapter.
    - David is one side of a mountain with a knife-like edge and Saul is encircling not merely the mountain, but David himself.
    - He has so many men that they are circling around from both sides and closing in—there is no pathway of escape for David and his men.
  - Vs. 26: **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.**
    - Here the Lewis chapter would end.
2. But look at what happens in verse 27.
  - **But a messenger came to Saul, saying, “Hasten and come, for the Philistines have invaded the land!”** <sup>28</sup> **Therefore Saul returned from pursuing David, and went against the Philistines; so they called that place the Rock of Escape.** <sup>29</sup> **Then David went up from there and dwelt in strongholds at En Gedi.**
    - What perfect timing!
      - Saul had overplayed his hand—bringing all his troops after David and now the land was open for a Philistine take over! Soon they would be in control of all the empty fortresses.
      - Saul had to leave and he was too fearful of David to pursue him with reduced forces.
    - And again—what perfect timing!

B. In the wilderness we often think there is no way out, but the LORD has an infinite number of creative ways to deliver us!

1. He can use a rain shower, a rumour, fire from heaven, ten plagues, the opening of the Red Sea, slipping through a hostile crowd unnoticed, a pagan ruler, or a message to a fearful king that the Philistines have invaded.
2. We do not know how He will do it, but we can be sure that He will if we are His.
  - Not that we may not lose our physical lives in His service—most of the prophets and apostles did. Many faithful servants of God have.
  - But if we have entrusted our souls to Him, He will provide the way of escape.
    - He is never without a way.

**Conclusion:**

It was a great privilege for the men who we read about in 1 Samuel 23 to have David as their leader in the wilderness as this time because he was fully following the LORD and trusting in Him.

- But David was not always consistent.

But we have it far better for our pilgrimage here on earth as Christians.

- Because our leader is the LORD Jesus Christ who passed through the heavens after conquering the wilderness and who reigns forever in glory at the Father's right hand.
  - Yet, as I told you in the introduction, He is with us and suffers with from His throne of mercy us while we are here.
- He leads us with complete wisdom throughout the course of our lives to train us that we may learn all that we need to learn to be prepared to serve Him in His eternal kingdom. We never have to be concerned about Him going astray.
  - We can follow Him with absolute confidence and dedication, being certain that He will not fail to bring a single one who has come to Him to the Father in glory.