

## Samuel to King David David Hides with the Philistines 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 27

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New King James Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

None of us gets it right all the time. We all have episodes in our lives of which we are a little ashamed and on which we would rather not dwell, and the Bible is honest with us when it records the lives of its main characters. There is no doubt that King David is a major Bible character. He is the first and, in many ways, the greatest of the men God chose as Israel's kings. His prowess as a warrior has passed into popular language and culture: everybody knows what a 'David and Goliath' struggle is. He is also an ancestor of the Lord Jesus, and a type of Christ as both the great Warrior King and as the Shepherd of God's people.

But, like the rest of us, David had his 'off days', and today's chapter records one of those periods. By being honest in this way, the Bible, as inspired by the Holy Spirit, reassures us that we are not the only ones who get things wrong, and that our future can still hold restoration and much blessing in spite of our failures. So, let's work our way through this chapter of David's story with a sense of compassion for David, and see what help and encouragement we can find for ourselves in our struggles to live the life of faith to which we are all called.

### **Context**

First some context, just in case you are dipping into this chapter without having followed the story so far, or are unaware of what will happen soon after this! There had been three very significant events immediately prior to the time that this chapter deals with.

First, Samuel had died. Samuel was the last of the judges of Israel and he was also a great prophet of God. He was the man that God had chosen to anoint Saul as the first king of Israel. However, Saul was really the ideal of the people rather than God's choice. Saul was tall and impressive and, outwardly at least, he was everything human beings might imagine a king should be like. But Saul did not prove reliable, and he moved away from trust and obedience to God, so God had soon told Samuel to appoint David to replace him. Samuel had been an adviser and protector of David ever since that time, even though Samuel himself feared the jealousy and anger of Saul. With Samuel dead, David had become more isolated and friendless than ever.

Second, and on a more positive note, David had recently married Abigail! She was the widow of the foolish Nabal, who had badly mistreated David's servants and slandered David himself. She was a wise and resourceful woman and no doubt she was a support and an encouragement to David after the death of Samuel. It would be interesting to know what Abigail's advice to David might have been if he had asked her about the choices he made in this chapter!

Third, the chapter immediately before this one records the second time that David had magnanimously spared the life of Saul. David and his followers had been able to go right into the camp of Saul in a miraculous way, as he and his army slept out in the open country while they were pursuing David in yet another attempt to kill him. As David had stood by the sleeping Saul, David's men had wanted to take the unique opportunity of killing the man who had been trying to

kill them for years! David had refused, and in doing so, he had demonstrated his faithfulness and good character to both friends and enemies alike. Saul had praised David's kindness, confessed his own wrongdoing, and promised to stop pursuing David.

Now I don't blame David for not taking this promise of Saul's too seriously! Saul had made promises like this before and had failed to keep them, so his words were not really to be trusted. Saul was a bit like the Pharaoh in Moses' day; ready to agree to good actions while under immediate threat, but then reneging shortly afterwards when he had had time to reconsider, and the immediate threat had receded a little. We could also skip forward a few chapters and see that Saul and his sons would soon be killed in a crushing military defeat by the Philistines.

### **First Impressions**

On a superficial reading of these chapters then, we might note that David had just had a very encouraging success in his life of faith, when he had spared Saul, and that he was just a short time from being freed from the threat of Saul forever. Surely then, David would be on a bit of a spiritual high and ready to soar far above any everyday worries and concerns. If we are thinking like that, then the first verse of our chapter will come as a bit of a shock!

“And David said in his heart, ‘Now I shall perish someday by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape to the land of the Philistines; and Saul will despair of me, to seek me any more in any part of Israel. So I shall escape out of his hand’” (1 Samuel 27:1).

Why on earth did David's faith suddenly collapse at this point? How can such a strong character as David, immediately after a great triumph of faith, lose heart so much that he sounds thoroughly defeated and depressed, and is prepared to run away and hide? We see something very similar in the life of Elijah after his amazing triumph over the prophets of Baal, and perhaps we can find echoes in our own experience. In times of great difficulty God gives His servants the strength to stand bravely against overwhelming odds and, possibly, to win a significant victory. But the sense of victory can wear off very quickly, and the emotional reaction to the triumph, and a realisation of how close to disaster the person came, can lead to a down-swing in spirit in proportion to the upswing during the moment of great faith. There are more examples in the Bible than just David and Elijah, and no doubt Jesus, the perfect man, is the only person who did not experience these kinds of spiritual reversals. At the very least, that means we are not alone in our frailties and failings!

It might not be the ideal Christian life, but it is perfectly normal for our spiritual strength and energy to wax and wane. The mathematicians might say that the graph of our spiritual growth is not a straight line. The overall trend should be upwards as our experience with the Lord increases, but at any one time the actual line may be going up or down depending on our immediate circumstances. We could plot this kind of growth for all of the Bible characters, even great men like Abraham, so we should not be surprised, or dismayed, to find that our own lives follow this pattern.

In truth, David had plenty of good reasons to offer for his lowness of spirits at this point. He had faced years of persecution from Saul, being chased through deserts and around mountains, being perpetually one mistake away from sudden death. There was also the interminable 'delay' in the realisation of God's promises to David. Samuel had anointed him as king of Israel years before, and yet he was still no more than a fugitive with a few hundred followers and a price on his head. We could say piously that God never really delays His actions, and always works things out in His own perfect timing, but very few of us genuinely feel that way when some important event we anticipate in our own life does not happen in the timescale we would like! Challenging circumstances, especially over a protracted period of time, and a sense that God is not giving us

the blessings we expected in the time frame that we expected them, will often bring us to a low spiritual ebb and make us vulnerable to mistakes and temptations, as David was at this point.

In David's case, this led to a common enough response to overwhelming problems - he decided he would run away from his problems with Saul and attempt to blend in with another enemy. It was time, he thought, to stop taking a stand, to abandon the tough ground, and to keep his head down for a while. I certainly know how tempting such ideas can be at times, and David had suffered much more than I am ever likely to. When the enemy seems much stronger, or much more persistent, than we are, and God's promises seem far enough away to be little more than a mirage, we can easily be tempted to run away. We persuade ourselves that it is pointless sticking our necks out for what is right any longer. How much more sensible it would be to keep out of the firing line for a while, let things blow over a bit, and return to fight again on another, less terrifying, day.

If a fighter of the calibre of David, with all the skills and resilience he had built up as a shepherd, then a soldier, then a nomadic fugitive could be brought to the point of despair, then you and I will certainly not be immune from similar discouragement.

Perhaps those who are younger are the most tempted to try and blend in with the people and society around them, but every Christian feels that temptation sometimes; all the more frequently now that society in most western countries is becoming more and more hostile to Christian beliefs and teachings, and to those that seek to practice and defend them. Not speaking up for what we believe and keeping quiet about Christ and His claims on the life of every person, are all too easy to justify to ourselves, but the events of this and the following two chapters show us what happens when God's representatives hide themselves from view.

Here are the next couple of verses of 1 Samuel chapter 27:

“Then David arose and went over with the six hundred men who were with him to Achish the son of Maach, king of Gath. So David dwelt with Achish at Gath, he and his men, each man with his household, and David with his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the Carmelitess, Nabal's widow” (1 Samuel 27 vv.2-3).

Very few, if any, of our sins and failures harm only ourselves. David ran away from Saul by going to one of the five principal leaders of Israel's sworn enemies, the Philistines, but he did not go alone! 600 armed men who followed David went with him. These were loyal men who had followed David on many dangerous journeys and had helped to keep him alive, in spite of Saul's most determined efforts to hunt him down and kill him. Their loyalty was a commendable thing in general, but now it resulted in them all being taken to live in an enemy city.

Few of us have a band of close followers like David did, but we all influence and sway other people at some level. Those who have positions of responsibility, or leadership, need to be perpetually careful as to how their own behaviour might influence others to whom they have some kind of responsibility. Hebrews 13:7 says about those who have leadership positions,

“Whose faith follow.”

We need to pray that other believers might be given a good example of faith to follow in difficult circumstances, and to pray that we will be such examples ourselves.

The 600 armed men were not the only people that David led astray, David's two wives, and the wives and families of the 600 men, also followed David to Gath. No doubt David thought he was doing the right thing by them, taking them out of harm's way and protecting them from Saul. Sadly,

he protected them from Saul by exposing them to the even greater danger of living amongst the immoral and ungodly Philistines who were Israel's chief enemies at that time! We also can be in danger of making the same mistake. A natural desire to ensure that our children are as well educated and able to make as decent a life for themselves as possible, may lead us to encourage them to fit in with the society around them; a society that will always seek to move them further away from Christ, rather than draw them near to Him. If we underline that tendency by ourselves living as though this world and this life are really the most important things, we will be repeating David's error at Gath.

The next verse shows that David's plan was effective, in the short term at least. We read,

“And it was told Saul that David had fled to Gath; so he sought him no more” (1 Samuel 27:4).

David did indeed escape from Saul, but he had simply made a leap from the frying pan into the fire! Just because a plan of ours is successful it doesn't mean that God has approved and blessed it. God often allows us to make poor choices, partly because He respects our freedom to act as we wish, and partly to teach us some painful lessons about the things that can happen when we abandon faith in Him and start trying to be the captains of our own lives.

David now wanted to find a way to escape from living directly under the eye of the Philistine lord, so he made a request.

“Then David said to Achish, ‘If I have now found favour in your eyes, let them give me a place in some town in the country, that I may dwell there. For why should your servant dwell in the royal city with you?’” (1 Samuel 27:5).

From the point of David's arrival in the region of the Philistines to the point when he leaves it, we find him telling half-truths and lies. He had taken a false position, pretending to have defected from Israel, and subsequently his whole life became an extended lie to try and cover things up. Quite obviously, if he had declared openly that he was still a loyal Israelite, the Philistines would have executed him, so the only way to survive was to keep pretending, and David evidently thought that this would be much easier if King Achish was not watching him every day. So, David pretended that he was being humble, and said that he was not worthy of living in one of the five Philistine royal cities and should be allowed to go and live out in the country.

Verse six is perhaps a little surprising.

“So Achish gave him Ziklag that day. Therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day. Now the time that David dwelt in the country of the Philistines was one full year and four months.” (1 Samuel 27 vv.6-7).

Even though David had started living a life of deception, sheltering with Israel's enemies, God still brought blessing out of the situation. David was granted the town of Ziklag, and it continued to be an Israelite town from that point, although as we will notice in a minute, all this area should have belonged to Israel anyway. But that didn't justify David in what he did, even if it does demonstrate the generosity of God's grace. We can find plenty of other examples in the Bible of God sending blessing, and bringing something good, out of human failure. We should never use God's grace to excuse, or justify, our failures, but we can be both confident and grateful that our Father does not simply abandon us as soon as we go wrong, but that He remains faithful when we are not, and will bring something good out of every situation, even if we suffer for our faults first. Ziklag, by the way,

means winding or bending, and David certainly walked a winding path while he lived there, regularly bending the truth to save his skin!

David spent 16 months living like this. It was wasted time, with David headed in the wrong direction, not doing anything to serve the nation he had been appointed to lead. Those of us who have been believers for a long time will have had periods in our own lives that were as barren as David's time with the Philistines. Thank God, that He does not leave His servants in these places forever. We may have already proved in our own lives that God can bring us back to a place of liveliness and fruitfulness again.

Let's read a further four verses.

“And David and his men went up and raided the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites. For those nations were the inhabitants of the land from of old, as you go to Shur, even as far as the land of Egypt. Whenever David attacked the land, he left neither man nor woman alive, but took away the sheep, the oxen, the donkeys, the camels, and the apparel, and returned and came to Achish. Then Achish would say, ‘Where have you made a raid today?’ And David would say, ‘Against the southern area of Judah, or against the southern area of the Jerahmeelites, or against the southern area of the Kenites.’ David would save neither man nor woman alive, to bring news to Gath, saying, ‘Lest they should inform on us, saying, “Thus David did.”’ And thus was his behaviour all the time he dwelt in the country of the Philistines” (1 Samuel 27 vv.8-11).

A few geographical notes might be helpful at this point. Judah was the southern most tribe in Israel. The Philistine cities were in the south-west of the area that was assigned to Judah but never actually captured by the Israelites. Near the end of Joshua's life, as recorded in Joshua 13:1-3, he included the land of the Philistines and their five cities in the list of places yet to be possessed. Israel never took control of all this area, and the Philistines were a constant source of difficulty and strife until they were finally destroyed by the nations that took Israel and Judah captive. Gath is one of the five royal cities of the Philistines. David attacked local, non-Israelites who Israel also ought to have dispossessed years before in Joshua's time. In short, all of these problems were caused by the incomplete obedience of the nation during the times of Joshua and the Judges. The consequences of disobedience can last for generations, even after the people involved may have long been forgiven by God and restored.

David's raids on these people were ruthless – they had to be to cover David's tracks. He left nobody alive who could have told Achish what David and his men were really doing. David would come back from a raid with lots of livestock and other prizes and, when Achish asked David where he had carried out his raid, David would lie, and say it had been on the Israelites and their allies. The Jerahmeelites were part of the tribe of Judah (they were the descendants of Perez, a son of Judah), and the Kenites were the relatives of Moses' father-in-law. David simply killed anybody who might have exposed his lies to Achish and so endangered the lives of himself and his men.

Verse 11 makes it clear that David carried on these raids and lies for the whole 16 months that he lived amongst the Philistines. When you stop to think about it, it is shocking the way that David slid from seeking some respite from the attacks of Saul, to telling lies to a Philistine lord, then to the systematic killing of men and women to cover up what he was doing. I sincerely hope none of us ever ends up taking those kinds of shocking measures to hide our wrongdoing, but we do all know how easily making one false step can lead us on to a whole pathway of increasing falsehood. It would take some drastic interventions from God to bring David back to the place he ought to have been. We should watch our own lives carefully for the earliest signs of our drifting off course, and

pray that the Lord will open our eyes to see when we are going wrong, and give us the courage to change course quickly.

The last verse of chapter 27 says,

“So Achish believed David, saying, ‘He has made his people Israel utterly abhor him; therefore he will be my servant forever’” (1 Samuel 27:12).

Achish believed the lies which David was telling him and thought that he had enslaved David and made him dependent. If David really had carried out lots of raids on southern Judah, he would have been thoroughly hated by the Israelites and he would never have been accepted by them as their king. The Philistines knew all about David’s exploits against them, from killing Goliath to acting as one of Saul’s most successful generals against their armies. Ensuring that David never fought for Israel again, and even making him a loyal servant of the Philistines, would have been a great success for Achish, perhaps helping make him the leader amongst the various Philistine Lords, so Achish was very pleased with himself, and perhaps very ready to be taken in by David’s deception. But it is a very unhappy state of affairs when unbelievers are deceived by God’s people. It really is a world turned upside down when the servants of the True God, deliberately deceive ungodly people, not from any high motives even, but simply seeking self-preservation.

### **In Summary**

There are many positive things for us to find in this chapter: God never abandons His servants, God can bring blessing even out of David’s disobedience, God ultimately kept David from being harmed by both Saul and the Philistines. The disappointing thing is that I have no doubts that God could have done all of those things without David ever having to go and live with the Philistines, but that is what happens when faith falters.

David remains one of the great heroes of the Bible: his failures simply remind us that he was a flawed human being like all the rest of us, and I am glad that God’s word records them honestly. The question is not really ‘where did David go wrong’, but what can I learn from this that will help keep me from going wrong, or bring me back again quickly when I do?

God and Father, we are pleased to be reminded of Your wonderful patience, gentleness, and grace with Your servants when they make mistakes. We know that Your character has not changed, and that You act in the same ways towards us. Please make our recognition of Your grace increase our desire to not do the things that lead us away from You, but also, please help us never to despair when You have to point out our mistakes to us. We also ask that we might learn to be patient, gentle, and gracious with other people in our turn. Amen.

Thank you for listening to this Truth for Today talk in the series 1st Samuel, Samuel to King David, ‘Chapter 27, David Hides with the Philistines’, talk number T1366.

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