

DAVID'S ARRIVAL IN GATH (V. 10)

After departing from Nob, David carries with him the hallowed bread given by Ahimelech, the priest, and the sword of Goliath, a previous spoil of victory (vv. 1-9). David now has sustenance and sword, yet, he has no place to go.

Unexpectedly, he departs for Gath, Goliath's very city, and seeks refuge from Achish. Achish may not be the actual name of the King, as it could be a title. Outside of the Biblical text, we know nothing about him. Though Gath has been excavated (Tell es-Safi), no archeological clues as to his reign have been unearthed.

It's ironic that David would go to the very location of the Jewish Kingdom's arch-enemy. Was it due to panic or lack of options? Or was it a case of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend?" Was David thinking that he could take Goliath's sword and cut a deal? Or was he thinking he could slay his enemies in Gath with the sword and gain a foothold? It's unclear why David goes to Gath, but there is an interesting outcome in verse 11.

RECOGNITION BY THE SERVANTS OF ACHISH (V. 11)

The King's servants make an unusual statement: "IS not this David the king of the land?" However, David was not the king of any land. He had been anointed by Samuel as the next king of Judea, but the extent to which this event was publicized is unknown. He definitely wasn't the king yet.

What if the servants were **recognizing David as the King of Gath**? It seems like a preposterous idea at first, but let's not forget 1 Samuel 17:9 in which Goliath proposed, "If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be your servants." Could it be that the servants of Achish were telling the king that **David has a legitimate claim to the throne**? Further, in bringing up the fantastic songs about David, are they saying, "we have a **huge** problem on our hands?"

DAVID'S REALIZATION AND RESPONSE (VV. 12-13)

Regardless of David's intention in going to Gath, the king's servants' fear that David had arrived to claim the throne instilled fear in David himself. He quickly became "sore afraid of Achish the king of Gath" (v. 12). This fear suggests that this situation was not part of David's original plan. Instead, he appears to have been taken by surprise by their reaction.

And so, as we have seen before, David makes a quick and seemingly rash decision. Knowing he needs to act, he acts crazy...literally. David "feigned himself mad" (v. 13), along with all the requisite behaviors of a madman.

This brings up so many questions about David and his leadership. Is David an impetuous young man who doesn't think through a situation before he gets himself into it? Or is David a brilliant young man who knows how to get out of a dangerous situation? Is David showing a habit of lies in order to protect himself, and is this a characteristic we want in a king?

As in the previous situation at Nob, I suspect that none of us can fully imagine what we would do in a sudden life-threatening situation. Especially considering David is a very young man, possibly not even 20, it seems we should be gracious in judgement. This grace is even more appropriate since we are at such a disadvantage of knowing the facts of the situation at hand.

Sometimes Christians engage in debates about the morality of behavior in certain biblical passages, like this one. In this case, the Bible itself does not debate, but merely states the facts. It might be best to leave it at that.

ACHISH'S DISMISSAL OF DAVID (VV. 14-15)

It seems as if the King did not know that it was David in his midst. With other things on the agenda, he chastised his servants for bringing this madman, and sent David on his way. Whether divine providence or quick thinking, David was spared what would have at least been a battle, if not arrest and death.

PSALM 34: A COMMENTARY ON THE GATH EXPERIENCE

THE PSALM ITSELF

Psalm 34 is inscribed as "A PSALM of David, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech; who drove him away, and he departed" (v. 1). Note that **Abimelech** is the same as Achish.

In verses 1-4, David gives praise to God for delivering him. This makes it rather difficult to call this deception an immoral act. Perhaps it was God's mean of getting David out of danger? David certainly sought it that way.

In verses 5-10, celebrate the salvation that the Lord gave in this tense situation. David's view is certainly that the Lord, "saved him out of all his troubles" (v. 6).

In verses 11-16 almost seem to be a "lessons learned" segment of the Gath experience. David seems to commit himself to trusting in the Lord and refraining from deceptive behavior.

Verses 17-18 give a general lesson, and a great encouragement: "THE RIGHTEOUS cry, and the LORD heareth" (v. 17).

In verses 19-22 David closes his **alphabetic acrostic** of praise. In verse 20 he celebrates, "He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken." This was shown to be a prophetic word of the coming Messiah, mentioned shortly after the death of the Lord when the Roman soldiers did not break the bones of the Savior.

CONCLUSION

What an encouragement that an account that seems so suspicious has become not only celebrated in the Psalm but even Messianic and Millennial in outlook. Ultimately, the Psalm celebrates the rescue that God will give to Israel at the Second Coming, when Messiah begins to reign. It is a reminder that **all is not what it seems**. In this case, what appears to be a bad decision and a moral failure turns out to be the grounds of the celebration of deliverance.