

DAVID'S DECISION FOR SAFETY (1 SAMUEL 27:1-4)

Between Chapter 26, where David boldly infiltrates Saul's camp and takes his sword and bottle, and Chapter 27, David loses confidence. He becomes convinced that he won't survive Saul's pursuits and will eventually die by his hand. David decides to flee to the enemy, embodying the old saying, "the enemy of my enemy is my friend." Likely exhausted, David chooses to seek protection from the Philistines.

We must note an inconsistency in David's thinking at this point. In 1 Samuel 21, he had fled to the Philistine king for refuge but soon realized the disaster of his decision and feigned madness to escape. Now, he returns to the same situation. David appears desperate, illustrating the duality of his character - at times bold, at other times driven by fear. Despite proclaiming, "It is better to trust in the LORD than to put confidence in man" (Psalm 118:8), he now places his confidence in man. This serves as a reminder that all men, even the greatest among us, have their "feet of clay."

King Achish of the Philistines was the same king before whom David feigned madness. Likely, David formed a political alliance this time, benefiting both Achish and himself. Remember that David previously had no army, followers, or strength. Now that David has something to offer, maybe Achish decides that David is not a threat. Or perhaps Achish is simply adhering to the adage, "keep your friends close and your enemies closer."

Regardless of the circumstances, David does find refuge in the land of the Philistines. This move results in Saul ceasing his relentless pursuit of David, bringing what is no doubt a welcome respite for him. It's a significant turning point in David's life, offering him a chance to regroup and strategize for his future.

DAVID'S ALLIANCE WITH ACHISH, KING OF GATH (1 SAMUEL 27:5-7)

David also demonstrates his strategic acumen by requesting a city in which to dwell, thereby not becoming a burden on King Achish. This move of providing a city within a king's reign was not uncommon and was practiced at least until the 1500s. It was an indirect method of taking care of family, friends, or alliances. The tax revenue from the city would become the property of the one given the "keys" to the city. This arrangement ensured that David had a source of income and was self-sufficient, further solidifying his strategic alliance with Achish.

Ziklag, the city granted to David, became more than just a place of residence; it was a strategic base for his operations. From Ziklag, David was able to gather strength and plan his moves. Notably, he conducted raids against the Geshurites, Girzites, and Amalekites. However, he cleverly portrayed these actions to Achish as raids on territories of Judah. This "half-truth" allowed him to maintain the support of his fellow Jews, who appreciated his efforts against their enemies, while also earning the praise of Achish, who believed David was weakening his own people. Thus, Ziklag became a pivotal location that enabled David to navigate his complex political and social landscape. Later, Ziklag became part of David's Kingdom, and was mentioned as part of Judah in the return of Nehemiah (Neh. 11:28).

The scripture states that David resided in Philistine territory for "a full year and four months" (v. 7). In Hebrew, the words literally say "days and four months". Some scholars argue that a span of 16 months seems lengthier than what aligns with known chronological markers. However, the timeline of King Saul's reign is notoriously challenging to determine. Regardless of David's stay's precise duration, which we'll assume as 16 months for our discussion, this period led to David losing favor with his men and people. In retrospect, David's decision to reside in Philistine for such an extended period seems to have been ill-advised.

DAVID'S BRUTAL CAMPAIGN (1 SAMUEL 27:8-12)

David embarks on a brutal campaign against the historic enemies of Israel, who were also "of old the inhabitants of the land" as per verse 8. This aggressive move is open to interpretation. Some may view this as an indication of God's favor upon David, allowing him to exert his strength and protect his people. Others may interpret this as David relying on his own strength instead of trusting in God's providence. This period of David's life presents a complex picture of a man caught between survival, strategic alliances, and his personal faith.

One could argue that Joshua should have removed all these citizens during the conquest, and that David is now stepping in to do what Joshua failed to do. In another perspective, one could also argue that David is simply hellbent on establishing strength for his own cause.

I tend to take a more negative view because of David's conduct in verses 10-12.

When Achish asked David for a report on his military activities, David claimed that his campaigns were focusing on "the south of Judah," specifically against the Jerahmeelites and the Kenites (v. 10). This was a blend of truth and fabrication. While David's raids were indeed carried out in "the south of Judah," they were not directed against the Jerahmeelites, a Jewish clan (see 1 Chron. 2:9), or the Kenites, the tribe of Jethro, which had long been allies with the Jews. By spinning this tale, David was attempting to ingratiate himself with Achish, who would be led to believe that David was attacking his own people.

Verse 11 presents the stark truth: David "left neither man nor woman alive" (v. 9) to ensure no one could report the truth to Gath. This allowed David to maintain his deception, risking either his standing in Philistia or an attack from Achish.

There is no good spin on this. David had turned brutal, likely to save his own skin.

Achish makes the only conclusion one could make upon accepting the report as true: David will now forever be hated by Israel, and therefore he will be forced to be "my servant for ever" (v. 12).

CONCLUSION

1 Samuel 27 presents a complex and conflicted David, a man who is strategically brilliant yet morally compromised. He has dug a hole for himself by aligning with the Philistines and deceiving King Achish. His actions, driven by fear and a need for survival, have far-reaching consequences that will become apparent as we progress further into his story. David's story serves as a reminder that even the best of men can falter when faced with fear and desperation. As we move forward, we will see David continue to navigate his complicated circumstances and the repercussions of his decisions.