**David Among the Philistines**

1 Samuel 27:1-12 Key Verse 12:7

“David lived in Philistine territory a year and four months.”

Let me begin with this difficult passage by asking an uncomfortable question: Have you ever told a lie that ended up trapping you in a compromising situation? Today’s chapter is the beginning of the last stage of David’s life as a fugitive. We see David make a decision without faith, which puts him in a highly compromised situation that is going be very difficult to extract himself from. In the end, we’ll see it is only God’s mercy that fulfills his promise to rescue David and make him king. But for today, we want to learn how to avoid making compromises that can trap us in a life of deception.

1. David returns to Philistine territory with the families (12:1-8)

For seven chapters now, we’ve seen David living on the run from Saul and his murderous jealousy. David first fled to the Philistines, then to the cave of Adullam, then to the Forest of Hereth, as a band of other outcasts gradually gathered around him. With these men, David saved the city of Keilah, but soon had to flee there to the desert of Ziph, and then, when Saul heard he was there, to the desert of Maon, where the Lord rescued him from a close call at Sela Hammahlekoth, the “rock of escape”. Then David and his men went to the stronghold of En Gedi. There, while David and his men were hiding in a cave, he had a chance to kill Saul, but he refused to lay a hand on the king. Then they fled to Carmel, where wise Abigail prevented David from taking his own revenge on Nabal. Then in last week’s passage, we saw Saul pursue David to the Hill of Hakilah, where David again found Saul unprotected and he again refused to shed Saul’s blood. During all this, we saw Saul seem to repent twice and confess that David was more righteous than him, but did that ever stop Saul from pursuing David to kill him? No, it did not.

After all of this, how do you think David was feeling? We can get a glimpse of that in verse 1 of today’s passage. *“But David thought to himself, ‘One of these days I will be destroyed by the hand of Saul. The best thing I can do is to escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will give up searching for me anywhere in Israel, and I will slip out of his hand.’”* You can almost hear the exhaustion in David’s voice. For years now, he’s been trying to hide from Saul while staying in his home territory of Judah, based on the direction of the prophet Gad in chapter 22. But here it seems he has decided it’s too difficult and determines to go back to the Philistines. Who can blame him?

However, it is clear that here David has hit a limit to his faith. Look again at what he says in verse 1. “One of these days I will be destroyed by the hand of Saul.” Does this pessimistic claim match what David has seen and heard from the Lord? No, it does not. While he was still a youth, David was anointed by Samuel with the promise of becoming Israel’s king. On multiple occasions while David has been on the run, the Lord has miraculously rescued him from Saul. In Chapter 23, Jonathan came out to David and reminded him of God’s promise to him, saying very explicitly: *“Don’t be afraid. My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this.”* (23:17) And in Chapter 25, Abigail reminded David again of God’s promise to make him king of Israel and give him victory over all his enemies. Given all that David has seen and heard, if David’s faith was working here, he would not say, “One of these days Saul will get me.” Regardless of where he decided to go, David should believe in the Lord’s continued protection. But at this point, David’s fear and despair gets the best of him. He doesn’t pray or consult the Lord, and he makes a decision that isn’t based on faith.

In some sense, we can take comfort from this, seeing that David was not so different from us. All of us have made decisions not based on faith, some small ones and maybe some big ones. There have been times I have lost faith in God’s protection, especially when I felt worn out, and I have planned some kind of “pragmatic escape”. The Lord does not abandon us for these non-faith-based decisions but uses everything in our life to teach us. However, the decisions we make do have consequences, and the consequences of David’s faith failing him here are bad, as we’ll see.

Verse 2 tells us that David and the six hundred men with him went over to Achish king of Gath, where David had previously taken refuge. At that earlier time, David was all by himself. But now he has his six hundred men, and also, verse 3 says, *“each man had his family with him.”* It was no longer just soldiers that David was leading, but women and children as well—whole families. Clearly, this was another factor in David’s decision to leave Israel—his sense of responsibility for these hundreds of families that now depended on him for provision and protection. Verse 4 tells us, *“When Saul was told that David had fled to Gath, he no longer searched for him.”* David’s decision to flee to the Philistines did have the result he wanted; Saul did stop searching for him.

What kind of living situation did David make for himself and these families in the land of the Philistines? It seems that king Achish welcomed David back. The first time David came to Achish, he pretended to be insane, scratching the walls and letting the drool run down his beard. But I guess Achish could see that David was all better now. In fact, David’s reputation had grown a lot since that time. By now, everyone had heard about how fairly and justly David conducted himself and his men even while living as a fugitive, including the protection David’s men offered to the regions where they stayed. So Achish was glad to have David with him again.

David, however, did not really want to stay that close to King Achish. Look at verse 5. *“Then David said to Achish, ‘If I have found favor in your eyes, let a place be assigned to me in one of the country towns, that I may live there. Why should your servant live in the royal city with you?’”* David is very modestly portraying himself as Achish’s servant and saying he is not worthy to stay in the “royal city” of Gath with him. But the true reason for David not wanting to stay in Gath, I think, was more practical. Now that David himself was quite a powerful commander, he wisely wanted to avoid coming into conflict with Achish’s generals and maybe even Achish himself. From Saul he had learned to be careful to avoid jealousy and not to create any unnecessary sense of competition. I’m sure David also wanted to preserve some independence of his own movements and actions, not being under Achish’s surveillance all the time. So we can already see that it was not really comfortable for David to remain in the land of Israel’s enemies, pretending to be their servants when that was not his true calling.

Achish agreed to David’s suggestion, and as verse 6 says, gave him the town of Ziklag. What does that mean? How can someone just give someone a town? Well, at the minimum, it simply means that David and the families with him had permission to live in and around the city and station his army there, with the understanding that David would use his army to protect the town. Probably David was given some administrative authority over the city as well. At any rate, David’s influence over this town quickly grew, to the point where, verse 6 tells us, it became a permanent possession of the kings of Israel.

Verse 7 tells us that David lived in Philistine territory for a year and four months. God did bless David in the land of Philistines with the town of Ziklag. This has some similarities to how in the book of Genesis God blessed Abraham in Egypt when he fled there to escape the famine in Canaan. In Egypt, Abraham was lying to Pharaoh out of fear, very similar to how David isn’t being totally honest with Achish here. Unfortunately, David’s compromise will lead to much worse actions.

1. David’s deception (8-12)

By the generosity of King Achish, David and the families with him now had a place to settle down in Philistine territory. But there was still one big problem: How could David feed all of these hungry mouths, 600 men and their wives and children? There was no time to grow their own crops. As a fighting man, David earned his keep the way he knew how, which is by raiding. Look at verse 8. *“Now David and his men went up and raided the Geshurites, the Girzites and the Amalekites. (From ancient times these peoples had lived in the land extending to Shur and Egypt.)”* Raiding is basically armed robbery, as most war-making always has been; we can’t claim there is anything virtuous about it. I suppose it was the only way that David felt he could survive. But there’s something even worse about these raids. Look at verse 9. *“Whenever David attacked an area, he did not leave a man or woman alive, but took sheep and cattle, donkeys and camels, and clothes. Then he returned to Achish.”* How could David do this, killing women and children as well? If you remember from Chapter 25, even when David was planning to get revenge on Nabal for insulting him, he said he would only kill the males in Nabal’s household. Then what could lead David to go this low?

In short, this is the result of David’s spiritual compromise. As we said, when David was living among the Philistines, he had to pretend to be something he was not. In his heart, David was faithful to God’s people Israel, and so he would not do anything against them; and yet while he was among the Philistines, he felt he had to pretend he was loyal to the Philistines. Let’s think about all that this deception led David to do.

First of all, we see that when David returned from his raids, he brought some of the spoils as to Achish as tribute. Certainly, that helped David get on Achish’s good side. But then, Achich got curious. Verse 10 says that Achish would ask David, “Where did you go raiding?” It’s a natural question to ask. But the towns where David actually raided, among the Geshurites, Girizites and Amalekites, were near Philistine territory, maybe even within it. David knew that Achish would be none too happy about that; and so he lied, saying that he went raiding “Against the Negev of Judah” or “Against the Negev of Jerahmeel” or “Against the Negev of the Kenites.” These are places near the territory of Judah, or even within it. David wanted Achish to believe that he was raiding his own country, to try to convince him that he had no more loyalty to Israel but only to the Philistines. But this was a lie, and when people want to keep up a lie, they can do things worse than they ever thought they were capable of doing. Look at verse 11. *“He did not leave a man or woman alive to be brought to Gath, for he thought, ‘They might inform on us and say, “This is what David did.”’ And such was his practice as long as he lived in Philistine territory.”* David killed everyone so that his raids would have no witnesses, so that Achish would not find out that he was not actually raiding Judah.

Was David’s deception of Achish successful? Yes, it was. In fact, it was too successful. Look at verse 12. *“Achish trusted David and said to himself, ‘He has become so obnoxious to his people, the Israelites, that he will be my servant for life.’”* Achish really thought that David was loyal to him and that he had David at his disposal. David’s successful deception creates an expectation from King Achish that’s going to cause more trouble for David later.

One thing that bothered me when I first started looking at this passage was that the author doesn’t clearly say it was wrong for David to kill innocent people in his raids. There is no prophet Gad here or wise woman Abigail stopping David from committing all this bloodshed. Does that mean that God was okay with what David was doing here? No, not at all. Sometimes God sends someone to convict us of our sin right away, but other times he lets it go for a while, and it’s only much later that we realize the consequences of our sin. But the consequences are always there.

Much later, after David’s kingdom is secure, he has the desire to build the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. But the Lord does not let him. Why not? The Lord sends David his word saying, *“You have shed much blood and have fought many wars. You are not to build a house for my Name, because you have shed much blood on the earth in my sight.”* (1Ch 22:8) One even sadder example of the consequences of David’s sin is when his son Absalom betrays him and stages a coup and he has to flee for his life.

David was a man after God’s own heart, and he lived a shepherd life, but in the end, he was not everything God was looking for. He could not be, because he had a sinful nature just like we all do. David was a “man of blood” and God needed a man of peace to be our true example. We know that David’s son Solomon, whose name means “peace”, ruled during a time of relative peace in Israel and he had the temple built. But he was a sinner too. Ultimately, God is pointing us toward another son of David who is the true prince of peace. Who is that? Only Jesus can be our true example worthy of imitation in all things.

David’s sins in this passage are a warning to show us how dangerous it is to live a double life, trying to seek God while also trying to fit in with the world of sin and greed. Hopefully we will never go as far as murder to keep up the deception like David did, but the same temptation is there for all of us in big and small ways. Even if we have a sincere desire to follow God in truth, we can feel the pressure of trying to look “normal” to worldly people, trying to look like our goals are perfectly in sync with theirs when they’re not. One woman of God confessed that when she was a young disciple, she felt a strong pull from her worldly friends to still go to godless drinking parties. Of course, we should witness to our unbelieving friends. But pretending to be the same as them when we’re not is not witnessing. Godless friends can be like our Achish; we may have them fooled for a while to think that we are just like them, but we know in our hearts that in the end that relationship can’t remain as it is.

James 5:16 says, *“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.”* When we find ourselves lying or falling into compromise, the right thing to do is to confess and come out of it quickly—bring it to the light. Otherwise, it’s unavoidable that it will lead to another compromise, and another lie, and then a worse lie, and who knows where we’ll end up. David committed a big sin in order to cover up a smaller sin. The Bible shows us the failings of even seemingly great people because we have to be aware of what our sinful nature is actually like. We have to be aware of how sin, as Msn. Paul said last week, is like a crouching tiger ready to leap, and we have to pray earnestly for God’s mercy to escape temptation. We can’t do it in our own strength. The good news is that, though David suffered a lot from the earthly consequences of his sin, God never abandoned him, and to the end David was able to humble himself and repent. The Lord will do the same for us. Let’s pray for God’s mercy in Jesus to escape the trap of a compromised walk.