

# Psalmist-Man: Far From Home

1 Samuel 27:1-28:2 June 11, 2023

King David is one of the most significant figures in Old Testament history. He's also a significant figure in *future* history.<sup>1</sup> Certain episodes of his life are some of the first stories children in Christian homes hear from the Bible. Today we're going to look not at one of his great triumphs but one of his mistakes.

We don't do it to gloat or to suggest that we're better than him. We're doing it because we're *just like him!* We are people who experience doubt and fear and uncertainty as we walk with God. And we are prone to missteps in our spiritual lives. Studying these examples provided for us in Scripture help us to avoid similar mistakes and they remind us of what is true about the grace of God, the presence of God, and God's directives for our lives.

In chapter 27, the year is 1012 B.C.<sup>2</sup> David is *not* king yet. He has served faithfully in Saul's court and as an army general. He had already slain Goliath and was anointed as the next king of Israel. As Saul collapsed into paranoia and madness, he decided David needed to die. He made multiple attempts on David's life, and more than once, David went on the run. It was after one of these episodes that our text begins.

**1 Samuel 27:1 - David said to himself, "One of these days I'll be swept away by Saul. There is nothing better for me than to escape immediately to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will give up searching for me everywhere in Israel, and I'll escape from him."**

David is going to live for an extended period of time in Philistine territory. It's going to lead to terrible consequences where David is separated from God, nearly loses his family, and becomes a barely recognizable version of the man he really was.

The problem starts in that opening phrase: "David said to himself." They say that 96% of adults have an internal dialog with themselves but only 25% have one out loud.<sup>3</sup>

David wasn't just *conversing* with himself, he was *counseling* himself. The term used for "said" is a common one, almost always meaning simply "to say." But there *are* times when it is translated as "command." And there are times when it is used before God gives a revelation of some kind.<sup>4</sup> What do we see David doing? He gives himself a prophecy and then uses it as a basis to make a major life decision. He says, "One of these days, I'll be swept away by Saul."

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<sup>1</sup> See Ezekiel 34, 37

<sup>2</sup> CSB Study Bible Notes

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.webmd.com/balance/why-people-talk-to-themselves>

<sup>4</sup> *Theological Wordbook Of The Old Testament*

David was a prophet,<sup>5</sup> but in this case his prophecy was totally wrong. It didn't come from the Lord, it came from his own fear. It came from his weariness.<sup>6</sup> He had spent a long time running with many close calls. His life was in danger. We sympathize with the difficult situation he found himself in.

But instead of theorizing about what he thought was going to happen, it would've been better for him to remind himself of what *had* already happened. Because God had made David very specific promises and He had backed them up by delivering David from Saul's hand again and again. Saul tried to pin David to a wall with a spear more than once, but the Lord delivered him. Saul sent a kill squad to get David in his house, but the Lord delivered him. David was nearly betrayed and handed over to Saul by the very people he rescued in the city of Keilah, but the Lord delivered him. At the stronghold of Horesh, in the wilderness of En Gedi, in the wilderness of Ziph, again and again, Saul pursued and reached out to crush David, but every time the Lord delivered him. Sometimes *miraculously*. Just before our text, in chapter 26, the Lord caused a deep, Sleeping-Beauty-like sleep to fall on Saul and all of his men so David could escape.

That's the conversation David should have had with himself. It's what we should tell ourselves when we're struggling, when we're afraid, when we feel like the walls are closing in or our future is threatened. David knew it, too. At a different point in his life he wrote Psalm 143, where we read:

**Psalm 143:3-5 - <sup>3</sup>For the enemy has pursued me, crushing me to the ground...<sup>4</sup>My spirit is weak within me; my heart is overcome with dismay. <sup>5</sup>I remember the days of old; I meditate on all you have done; I reflect on the work of your hands.**

That's what guides a Christian to the right choices. Herbert Lockyer found that the Word of God contains 7,147 promises from God to man.<sup>7</sup> The Apostle Paul wrote the letter of Philippians while in prison, facing execution. From *that* position, he said - astonishingly - "Don't worry about anything. The God of peace is with you. He will guard your heart. Instead of worrying, think about what is true. Dwell on what you have learned about the Lord and the promises He has made and the proofs He has shown."

The first step in David's failure was that he spoke to himself, rather than letting God speak to him. He knew better, but he gave into fear and reached for the quickest rip cord. His solution was to go to the Philistines. Now, this is an absolute scandal. One scholar says it would be like Winston Churchill spending 1914-1918 in Berlin, currying the favor of the kaiser.<sup>8</sup> Not only was it a scandal, it was also just a bad idea. David had *already tried this* once before, and it went terribly. He fled to the very same city, came before the very same king, and the servants all said, "Wait... *isn't this the guy who killed, like, ten thousand of us in battle?*" David barely made it out of there alive.

But in the *human* way of thinking, that was the only *safe* place to go because Saul could not match the Philistines in military strength. So David says, there's *nothing better* for me to do.

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<sup>5</sup> Acts 2:29-30

<sup>6</sup> Faithlife Study Bible Notes

<sup>7</sup> Herbert Lockyer *All The Promises In The Bible*

<sup>8</sup> Robert Alter *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation With Commentary*

**1 Samuel 27:2-3 - <sup>2</sup>So David set out with his six hundred men and went over to Achish son of Maoch, the king of Gath. <sup>3</sup>David and his men stayed with Achish in Gath. Each man had his family with him, and David had his two wives: Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail of Carmel, Nabal's widow.**

Gath was not only the capital city, it was also the home of Goliath. That's a little awkward. I'm guessing David left Goliath's sword back at camp when he met with the king.

The first time David fled to Gath, it was just him. This time, it's different. The group he has in tow may be two or three thousand people.<sup>9</sup> His choices are impacting the physical, emotional, and spiritual lives of all the people around him.

They may have been safe from Saul, but at what cost? They were cut off from the community of Israel. They were cut off from worship in the Lord's tabernacle. They were separated from the unfolding purposes of God in the land. Now they were living in the lair of their worst enemies - exposed to danger, exposed to their godless, pagan culture, like lambs among hungry wolves.

This is about as bad a situation as a group of God's people could be in. The error is compounded when we realize that, back in chapter 22, after David had gone to Gath the first time, the Lord sent him a prophet named Gad who said this to him: "Don't stay in the stronghold. Leave and return to the land of Judah." *That's* where the Lord wanted him. When David went back to Judah, the Lord spoke to him and directed him. While there, Jonathan, the prince of Israel, came and renewed a covenant with David. He prophesied to him that David *would* be king and that Saul would never lay a hand on him. Jonathan told David, "don't be afraid!"<sup>10</sup> But here he is, ignoring all of that. He *knew* these promises. He received words from the Lord. He had a wise and spiritual wife who had given him excellent counsel before. But David ignored all of that and made the mathematical decision.

**1 Samuel 27:4 - <sup>4</sup>When it was reported to Saul that David had fled to Gath, he no longer searched for him.**

On paper the plan "worked." But this medicine had serious side effects. David has gone over with his fighters - an act of treason. They're living with the king of the Philistines. John Woodhouse writes, "*You do not live 'with' a king except under his sway.*"<sup>11</sup> What *else* would they have to concede? David sees a place to hide, Achish sees a servant to command.

We talk about "settling." We tell young people not to settle when it comes to finding a spouse or a job. David was settling for a measure of temporary security at a disastrous cost. They couldn't have a proper spiritual life there. They were isolated. They were exposed to a terrible culture. They were

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<sup>9</sup> John Woodhouse *1 Samuel: Looking For A Leader*

<sup>10</sup> 1 Samuel 23:15-18

<sup>11</sup> Woodhouse

bowing their knees to an earthly king and would have to make serious concessions. David recognizes this, so he tries to soften the impact of his bad decision.

**1 Samuel 27:5-6 - <sup>5</sup> Now David said to Achish, "If I have found favor with you, let me be given a place in one of the outlying towns, so I can live there. Why should your servant live in the royal city with you?" <sup>6</sup> That day Achish gave Ziklag to him, and it still belongs to the kings of Judah today.**

David is relying on the favor - the *grace* - of a Philistine king instead of trusting in the grace of God. "Achish, *YOU* protect me, *YOU* provide for me, *YOU* tell me where to go." When all the while, God had already been doing those things for them.

David gets Ziklag. And I imagine this would've made him feel better in his heart, because Ziklag *technically* belonged to Israel. It was part of the possession God gave back in the time of Joshua, but Israel didn't take hold of it. The area belongs to the Philistines, but David can say, "Well, I *am* in the boundaries of Judah, so I'm obeying God *and* obeying my new Philistine master." But we know you can't do both. David has totally compromised. Often when we're compromising spiritually, we convince ourselves that it really is the right thing to do. But anyone could tell David wasn't following the Lord, wasn't trusting the Lord. He was taking orders from God's enemies.

How can we tell? He outs himself in verse 5. "Why should *your servant* live in the city with you?" *Your servant*. The slayer of Goliath. The man who wrote in Psalm 26, "I do not sit with the worthless or associate with hypocrites. I hate a crowd of evildoers, and I do not sit with the wicked."

**1 Samuel 27:7 - <sup>7</sup> The length of time that David stayed in Philistine territory amounted to a year and four months.**

Sixteen months may not seem like a lot in the grand scheme, but remember the effect this would have on the families. No sacrifices. No feasts. No worship in the presence of God's glory. No accomplishing the Lord's purposes. And, during that time, David became a brutal, lying marauder.

**1 Samuel 27:8-12 - <sup>8</sup> David and his men went up and raided the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites. From ancient times they had been the inhabitants of the region through Shur as far as the land of Egypt. <sup>9</sup> Whenever David attacked the land, he did not leave a single person alive, either man or woman, but he took flocks, herds, donkeys, camels, and clothing. Then he came back to Achish, <sup>10</sup> who inquired, "Where did you raid today?" David replied, "The south country of Judah," "The south country of the Jerahmeelites," or "The south country of the Kenites." <sup>11</sup> David did not let a man or woman live to be brought to Gath, for he said, "Or they will inform on us and say, 'This is what David did.' " This was David's custom during the whole time he stayed in the Philistine territory. <sup>12</sup> So Achish trusted David, thinking, "Since he has made himself repulsive to his people Israel, he will be my servant forever."**

Again, I suppose David might have convinced himself that he was doing what God wanted - these were peoples that were supposed to be conquered when Israel came into the Land - but it's obvious that he's not doing this because it was for the Lord. He only attacked people who were *also* enemies of the Philistines.<sup>12</sup> His activities were purely to finance his life in Ziklag and the way he was doing it was sickening. The great-grandson of Ruth became totally ruthless. When David was king and God gave him victory from all his enemies on every side he didn't act like this. When fighting the Moabites, he would leave a third of them alive.<sup>13</sup> He would *subject* foreign enemies and, we're told, he administered justice and righteousness for all his people.

While in Ziklag, he butchered everyone, *not* because it was a divine directive, but because he needed to cover his tracks. Verse 11 said "this was David's custom." It's a term that also means *this* was the *justice* of David during his stay in Ziklag.<sup>14</sup> It wasn't *real* justice. It was self-serving and without mercy. But David had to *keep* living a lie and then covering those lies. But, as we see in verse 12, his lifestyle of lying drew David further into the grip of the Philistine king.

The situation came to a head in chapter 28.

**1 Samuel 28:1 - At that time, the Philistines gathered their military units into one army to fight against Israel. So Achish said to David, "You know, of course, that you and your men must march out in the army with me."**

What a chilling thing to hear. "You know, of course..." You see, we can't serve two masters. Eventually we must choose. Will we go God's way, or will we go the way of our enemy? The problem was that when this choice came, David's trust in God had faltered. The pulse of his faith was barely registering. V. Philips Long writes, "*When faith falters, dubious actions often follow.*"<sup>15</sup> Let's see how David responded.

**1 Samuel 28:2 - <sup>2</sup>David replied to Achish, "Good, you will find out what your servant can do." So Achish said to David, "Very well, I will appoint you as my permanent bodyguard."**

My goodness! These are not the words of Judas Iscariot, or Lot, or Cain, or Absalom. This is David, the sweet Psalmist of Israel.

None of us is immune from spiritual missteps. That's why we need to pay attention to these Biblical examples and pay attention to how we are making decisions in our lives. What are the conclusions of our choices? What is motivating them? Is it fear of circumstances or fear of God? Are we being directed by human philosophy or by the leading of the Holy Spirit? Are we spiraling in doubt and worry or are we reminding ourselves of the truths of God as He has revealed them to us? Paul gave us this encouragement:

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<sup>12</sup> Ralph Klein *Word Biblical Commentary, Volume 10: 1 Samuel*

<sup>13</sup> 2 Samuel 8:2

<sup>14</sup> *TWOT*

<sup>15</sup> V. Philips Long *1 And 2 Samuel*

**1 Corinthians 10:12 - <sup>12</sup> So, whoever thinks he stands must be careful not to fall.**

We want to be careful people. David isn't making a mistake the rest of us couldn't make. Ours might be less *historic*, but the danger is the same. Here's David, ready to fight his own brothers on behalf of a fish-worshipping pagan because he's afraid the guy God has delivered him from over and over might finally get him one day.

Luckily, God was still present with David, even though David was AWOL from Israel. By providence God made sure David would be rejected by the other Philistine leaders. God is faithful even when we are unfaithful. God's grace can redeem us even if we've gotten ourselves into a terrible mess - He can bring beauty from ashes because of the power of His tender, gracious love.

That doesn't mean everything was magically fixed. When David gets back to Ziklag after this scene, their families have all been taken and the city has been burned. It's a climactic object lesson of a spiritual truth we learn in the New Testament.

**1 Corinthians 3:11-15 - <sup>11</sup> For no one can lay any foundation other than what has been laid down. That foundation is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> If anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw, <sup>13</sup> each one's work will become obvious. For the day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire; the fire will test the quality of each one's work. <sup>14</sup> If anyone's work that he has built survives, he will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If anyone's work is burned up, he will experience loss, but he himself will be saved—but only as through fire.**

David's work during these 16 months was the wood, hay, and stubble of Ziklag - *and it burned*. In a moment it was all taken away. His 600 troops were about to stone him. And, facing that defeat, David *finally* did what we wish he would've done back in chapter 27, verse 1: He found strength in the Lord his God. Not in the might of the Philistine army. Not in the plunder of the Geshurites. Not in the schemes he had to save his own life. He remembered who he was and *whose* He was. He remembered that God can be trusted, that God has spoken, that God will lead.

And because God is a God of grace, He was ready and willing to scoop David back up into His hand of protection. The Lord was there, all along, ever-gracious, ever-faithful, ever-kind, ever-true.

The same God is speaking to us today. He has *definite* opinions and directives for your life. His desire is to give you *peace* and *purpose* as you live out your life in the place and with the people He has assigned you. Yes, there are fearful things that come against us, but our strength is not in any worldly supply. It's in the Lord. He will not allow you to be swept away because He has made a covenant with you. He is trustworthy. He is here to restore and to reinforce and to refine you day by day as you walk with Him. Find refuge in *Him*, not in any Philistine king. If you hear this and realize you've made David's mistake, then do what David did at the end of this story: Find strength in the Lord your God. Pour out your heart to Him. Believe what He has said. Listen for His direction. All who take refuge in Him are happy because He *cares* for those who take refuge in Him.