

David's Faith Falters

1 Samuel 27

1 Samuel 27 - *"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 anymore in any part of Israel. So I shall escape out of his hand.'"* ² Then David arose and went over with the six hundred men who were with him to Achish the son of Maach, king of Gath. ³ 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. ⁴ And it was told Saul that David had fled to Gath; so he sought him no more.

⁵ Then David said to Achish, "If I have now found favor 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?" ⁶ So Achish gave him Ziklag that day. Therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day. ⁷ Now the time that David dwelt in the country of the Philistines was one full year and four months.

⁸ And David and his men went up and raided the Geshurites, the Girzites,^[a] 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. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ 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." ¹¹ 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 behavior all the time he dwelt in the country of the Philistines. ¹² So Achish believed David, saying, "He has made his people Israel utterly abhor him; therefore he will be my servant forever."

Background Notes

The second half of 1 Samuel could be entitled, "The Ups and Downs in David's Faith-Life." We have seen David on the mountaintops as well as in the valleys in his life of faith. Think of his victory over Goliath in chapter 17. What a mountaintop of faith! Young David with a slingshot going up against an armor-clad, battle-hardened Philistine giant! David prevailed because of his faith in the Lord. But just four chapters later we see David in the valley of despair, running from King Saul, going to the Philistine king, Achish for safety, and having to pretend that he was crazy! This was certainly not a highlight in David's life of faith.

God delivered David and we saw him once again on a mountaintop of faith at En Gedi (1 Samuel 24). There he spared Saul's life, knowing that this was the righteous course of action. David knew that the Lord would protect him and plead his case. But then in the very next chapter, 1 Samuel 25, David reached another low point in his life of faith when he almost took his own revenge against Nabal. He certainly was not depending on the Lord, nor was he strong in faith.

However, in 1 Samuel 26, David was back on the mountaintop! In full dependence on the Lord he again spared the life of King Saul in the wilderness of Ziph. Remember what David said to King Saul at that time? “...*I would not stretch out my hand against the LORD’s anointed*” (1 Samuel 26:23). Now you don’t make a statement like that if you’re not walking by faith.

In 1 Samuel 27, David was once again down in the valley of little faith. He went back to King Achish of the Philistines for protection! We don’t read of David praying about this decision, and we don’t read that he consulted Abiathar, the priest, who was with him and had the ephod. This lapse of faith led David into further problems, including lying to hide his activities, as well as almost having to go to war against his own people! We’ll see that the Lord had to rescue David from this valley of little faith.

David certainly went up and down in his life of faith and dependence on the Lord in these chapters. But before we come down too hard on David, we must confess that when we look at our own lives as believers, our faith is not always strong, either. In fact, many of us spend far too much time in the “valley of little faith.” We don’t pray enough. We try to do things in our own strength. We fear for our security. We coast along, living the good life. We’re unwilling to step out in faith in spiritual battle. We depend more on the world than we do on the Lord. Isn’t it true that all of us can identify with David here in his failure, and his lack of faith, and his lack of dependence on the Lord?

Doctrinal Points

1. Believers can make the same mistake more than once.

David first went to Achish and the Philistines for protection in 1 Samuel 21. If David had not feigned insanity, Achish’s servants would likely have killed him. Wouldn’t you think that David would have learned his lesson? But fear can make you do things that you thought you’d never do again. David went back to Achish and the Philistines for protection - can you believe it? Yes, we can believe it, because believers can make the same mistake more than once. Remember Abraham? Abraham went down to Egypt in a time of famine, and because of fear for his life he lied about Sarah. God graciously delivered Abraham from the consequences of his mistake (Genesis 12), but Abraham made the same mistake again in Genesis 20! He went to the land of the Philistines, and again he lied about Sarah because he feared for his own life. Once again, God delivered Abraham out of his dilemma. We look at these accounts and say, “How could Abraham be so blind? And how could David be so faithless?” Listen - just as they made the same mistake more than once, so can we! That’s what the Bible is teaching us here. Be warned. Believers can make the same mistake more than once.

2. Believers should not “justify the means by the ends.”

“The ends don’t justify the means” is not a verse in the Bible, but it is a general biblical principle, and it’s certainly taught and illustrated here in 1 Samuel 27. From the perspective of human reasoning alone, it looks like David was making a wise move to go to the land of the Philistines again. After all, Saul wouldn’t chase him there. David could ask Achish for

a city in the country and set up a military base to operate from - and Achish did indeed give him Ziklag. Here David felt that his two wives, Ahinoam and Abigail, would be protected. Here others could join David and become part of his fighting force.

In fact, 1 Chronicles 12 says that's exactly what did take place: *"Now these were the men who came to David at Ziklag while he was still a fugitive from Saul the son of Kish; and they were among the mighty men, helpers in the war, ² armed with bows, using both the right hand and the left in hurling stones and shooting arrows with the bow. They were of Benjamin, Saul's brethren."* Read on in 1 Chronicles 12, and you'll see a listing of all the men who came to David in Ziklag. From Ziklag, David made raids on some of the ancient enemies of Israel, in order to provide for his troops. So from the perspective of human reasoning alone, it looks like David was making good decisions - accomplishing good protection for his family, building up a larger base of support for his future kingdom, and finishing the job of eliminating Israel's enemies (that should have been done many years before, at the time of the Conquest).

But what about the means for accomplishing these ends? We don't read of David depending on the Lord or being directed by the Lord when he went to the land of the enemy. Hebrews 11 doesn't say "by faith David went down to the land and king of the Philistines." No - that's not in Hebrews 11! Furthermore, David and his men became mercenary soldiers for Achish, a pagan king. David had to lie to Achish and he had to deceive Achish. Furthermore, David's raids were massacres, resulting in great carnage - not because David was fighting at the Lord's direction, but merely to cover his tracks so that Achish would not know what David was up to. It is not a pretty picture, and it certainly is not the testimony of a believer walking by faith. Believers should not "justify the means by the end."

Practical Application

Try to see your dilemmas coming before they face you.

Have you ever been faced with a dilemma? Chances are you could have avoided it if you had looked ahead and seen it coming. In 1 Samuel 29, David will be faced with the dilemma of fighting for Achish against his own people Israel, the people of God! David should have seen this dilemma coming. Did he really think that he could hire himself out to Achish - a Philistine, an enemy of Israel - and not end up fighting Israel? We might ask, "How dumb can you be?" And yet we do the same dumb things!

This has many applications in all areas of life. For example, we get ourselves into financial dilemmas because we don't budget our money, and we don't control the use of our credit cards. We buy cars and homes and furnishings and vacations beyond our means - and then we wonder why we're in debt? We should see a debt dilemma coming and do something about our spending habits before accumulating the debt. That's an obvious example, and we all need to be careful to avoid the dilemma of financial debt.

But what about some examples that are maybe not so obvious? Our country faces a moral crisis. Standards of decency and morality and human dignity are disappearing. Why? It should be obvious, but apparently it is not obvious to our

lawmakers and other leaders. We've turned away from God and from biblical values and standards. When God is asked to leave the classroom and the campus and the courtroom, He leaves, because God is a gentleman and He doesn't stay where He's not wanted. Without a biblical anchor, it's no wonder our country is experiencing moral drift and decay. As a nation we didn't look ahead and see the many dilemmas we would face when we severed our ties to biblical values and standards.

Then there are dilemmas that are closer to home. Christian parents should look ahead and see the dilemmas that they will face as their children grow up in this secular world. If Christian parents live a materialistic and worldly lifestyle with very little time or service for the Lord, they should not be surprised if their growing children fail to follow the Lord and perhaps even marry unbelievers. If Christian parents don't take control of the education that their children are receiving, they will face the dilemma of their grown children believing and supporting theories and lifestyles that are unbiblical and contrary to the Christian worldview. Many Christian parents have learned the hard way - because they didn't look ahead. Try to see your dilemmas coming before they face you.