

# **The Life of David**

## **David Flees to the Philistines**

*1 Samuel 27:1-28:2*

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## David Flees to the Philistines

### Scripture

When David was still a teenager, God called him to become the next king over Israel. However, David's ascension to the throne was still many years away. David served Saul for a number of years, but eventually Saul became extremely jealous of David and wanted him killed. David became a fugitive on the run from Saul. And for more than seven years, Saul tried to kill David.<sup>1</sup> In fact, one commentary notes that Saul tried to kill David 16 times!<sup>2</sup> Even though David had God's promises reiterated to him on numerous occasions, he got weary of being on the run from Saul. So, David got away from Saul by fleeing to the Philistines.

So, let's read about David fleeing to the Philistines in 1 Samuel 27:1-28:2:

**<sup>1</sup>Then David said in his heart, "Now I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I should escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will despair of seeking me any longer within the borders of Israel, and I shall escape out of his hand." <sup>2</sup>So David arose and went over, he and the six hundred men who were with him, to Achish the son of Maach, king of Gath. <sup>3</sup>And David lived with Achish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household, and David with his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel, and Abigail of Carmel, Nabal's widow. <sup>4</sup>And when it was told Saul that David had fled to Gath, he no longer sought him.**

**<sup>5</sup>Then David said to Achish, "If I have found favor in your eyes, let a place be given me in one of the country**

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<sup>1</sup> Leadership Ministries Worldwide, *1 Samuel*, The Preacher's Outline & Sermon Bible (Chattanooga, TN: Leadership Ministries Worldwide, 2003), 230.

<sup>2</sup> John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), 1 Sa 26:2.

towns, that I may dwell there. For why should your servant dwell in the royal city with you?" <sup>6</sup> So that day Achish gave him Ziklag. Therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day. <sup>7</sup> And the number of the days that David lived in the country of the Philistines was a year and four months.

<sup>8</sup> Now David and his men went up and made raids against the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites, for these were the inhabitants of the land from of old, as far as Shur, to the land of Egypt. <sup>9</sup> And David would strike the land and would leave neither man nor woman alive, but would take away the sheep, the oxen, the donkeys, the camels, and the garments, and come back to Achish. <sup>10</sup> When Achish asked, "Where have you made a raid today?" David would say, "Against the Negeb of Judah," or, "Against the Negeb of the Jerahmeelites," or, "Against the Negeb of the Kenites." <sup>11</sup> And David would leave neither man nor woman alive to bring news to Gath, thinking, "lest they should tell about us and say, 'So David has done.'" Such was his custom all the while he lived in the country of the Philistines. <sup>12</sup> And Achish trusted David, thinking, "He has made himself an utter stench to his people Israel; therefore he shall always be my servant."

<sup>28:1</sup> In those days the Philistines gathered their forces for war, to fight against Israel. And Achish said to David, "Understand that you and your men are to go out with me in the army." <sup>2</sup> David said to Achish, "Very well, you shall know what your servant can do." And Achish said to David, "Very well, I will make you my bodyguard for life." (1 Samuel 27:1-28:2)

## Introduction

Richard Phillips notes in his commentary that some years ago, a society of atheists published a tract highlighting the failures of various Bible characters. For example, they said that Abraham was willing to sacrifice the honor of his wife to save himself. They

referenced the Bible verses that confirmed this, and also noted that Abraham is called “the friend of God.” They asked, “What kind of God would befriend so dishonorable a man?”

The tract also said that Jacob was a liar and a cheat, and then noted that God made Jacob a prince of his people. They asked, “What does this say about the character of a deity who would call himself ‘the God of Jacob?’”

Next, the tract mentioned that Moses was a murderer, and yet God picked Moses to bring his law into the world.

And then the tract mentioned David, who was the worst of all. He seduced Bathsheba and then had her husband killed to cover it up. The tract noted that David was “a man after God’s own heart.” They asked, “What kind of God could find so much to praise in such a man, and why would anyone serve him?”

Phillips goes on to ask how we as Christians should respond to such accusations that are contained in this tract. First, we acknowledge that everything contained in this tract is true. In fact, Christians affirm that every character in the Bible—with the exception of Jesus Christ—is flawed, totally depraved, and sinful to the core. Moreover, in this sense, the Bible is unique in that, unlike all other religions, it showcases the faults and failures of its heroes.

Our second response to the accusations contained in the tract is that the Bible highlights the sins of all people in order to show that there is only one sinless person—Jesus Christ—and he alone is able to save sinners. God saves sinners, and he makes them his own dearly beloved children. While atheists disdain God for doing so, Christians actually respond in love and gratitude to God for saving them.<sup>3</sup>

David was indeed a great hero in the Bible. But, like every other Bible character, his faith at times did falter and fail.

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<sup>3</sup> Richard D. Phillips, *1 Samuel*, ed. Philip Graham Ryken and Richard D. Phillips, Duguid Iain M., 1st ed., Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012), 459–460.

## Lesson

First Samuel 27:1-28:2 shows us that even God's servants of great faith can falter.

Let's use the following outline:

1. David's Plan (27:1-4)
2. David's Place (27:5-7)
3. David's Practice (27:8-12)
4. David's Predicament (28:1-2)

### I. David's Plan (27:1-4)

First, let's look at David's plan.

When David was still a teenager, God chose him to replace King Saul and become the next king over Israel. But David would not be coronated for many more years. Over the course of these years, God repeatedly promised David that he was the anointed king over Israel and would eventually be enthroned as king. David's friend Jonathan affirmed that promise (20:13-15), as did David's wife Abigail (25:27-31). Even Saul admitted on two occasions that David would succeed him as king (24:20-31; 26:25).

But despite all these assurances that were given to David, he began to feel the pressure of being stalked and hunted and chased for more than seven years. In addition, David also felt the strain of caring for over 600 men and their families, which may have totaled between 2,000 and 3,000 people. Finally, the strain became too much for David, and he **said in his heart, "Now I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I should escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will despair of seeking me any longer within the borders of Israel, and I shall escape out of his hand"** (27:1). There may be two reasons for David's plan.

*First, he was discouraged.* Even though God's promise had been

reiterated to him many times, he did not see it coming to fruition. Instead, he was still on the run from Saul and after 16 attempts to kill him (even though by God's providential protection they had all failed), David was beginning to doubt God's promise.

There may be times when you are going through trials and difficulty. Don't doubt God's word. Believe that you belong to him, and that he will be with you and bring you safely to glory.

*And second, David did not pray.* He did not ask God what to do. He just decided that he would get away from Saul and go to the land of the Philistines. In fact, God is not mentioned at all in this entire chapter. Charles Spurgeon wrote, "In every other action of David you find some hint that he asked counsel of the Lord.... But this time what did he talk with? Why, with the most deceitful thing that he could have found—with his own heart, for 'the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked.'"<sup>4</sup>

We make so many mistakes when we do not go to the Lord in prayer, and seek his guidance on a matter. So, let us go to the Lord in prayer, especially when we face trials and temptations.

Having decided to leave, David, his two wives, **Ahinoam of Jezreel, and Abigail of Carmel, the six hundred men who were with him,** and their households went to the land of the Philistines (27:2-3). **And when it was told Saul that David had fled to Gath, he no longer sought him** (27:4).

## II. David's Place (27:5-7)

Second, let's notice David's place.

David arrived in Gath with 2,000 to 3,000 people. Incidentally, Gath was Goliath's hometown. Earlier, David had fled to Gath, but he had to flee from there. But now it appears that the king of Gath saw an opportunity to strengthen his own forces

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<sup>4</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, "The Danger of Doubting," in *The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit Sermons*, vol. 8 (London: Passmore & Alabaster, 1862), 151–152.

against Israel, because he knew that David was on the run from King Saul. After some time, **David said to Achish, “If I have found favor in your eyes, let a place be given me in one of the country towns, that I may dwell there. For why should your servant dwell in the royal city with you?”** (27:5). Perhaps David did not want to live so close to Achish, the king of Gath. Or perhaps David’s army were too much of a drain on Gath’s resources.

Whatever the reason, Achish agreed to David’s request. **So that day Achish gave him Ziklag** (27:6a). Scholars are not sure of the exact location of **Ziklag**, but it is believed to have been about twenty-five miles south of Gath, near the border of the Philistines and Judah.

The writer of First Samuel, writing many decades after this event, then makes an interesting comment, **“Therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day”** (27:6b). The kings of Judah were of course David’s descendants. Without knowing it, Achish gave David a place that David actually co-opted eventually into Judah.

The writer of First Samuel then noted, **“And the number of the days that David lived in the country of the Philistines was a year and four months”** (27:7). We may wonder what David and his army did for sixteen months. That brings us to our next point.

### III. David’s Practice (27:8-12)

Third, let’s observe David’s practice.

Verse 8a says, **“Now David and his men went up and made raids against the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites....”** These were people who lived in the vicinity of Ziklag. They were people who were hostile to the Philistines.

But the writer of First Samuel goes on to say about these people, **“...for these were the inhabitants of the land from of old, as far as Shur, to the land of Egypt”** (27:8b). Interestingly,

centuries earlier, God told the people of Israel through Moses that when they entered the Promised Land of Israel they were to “devote to complete destruction” the inhabitants of the land (see Numbers 33:50-56; Deuteronomy 7:1-5; 20:16-18). But, at the time of their entry into the Promised Land, the Israelites did not completely destroy all the people. It is entirely possible, therefore, that David was completing what the Israelites should have done centuries earlier, although the text itself does not confirm this.

When David attacked the various people, he took all the animals and destroyed all the people, so that there would be no survivors to report what David had done. **When Achish asked, “Where have you made a raid today?” David would say, “Against the Negeb of Judah,” or, “Against the Negeb of the Jerahmeelites,” or, “Against the Negeb of the Kenites”** (27:10). In other words, David lied. David’s raids against **the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites** would have been fine with Achish, because they were his enemies. But telling Achish that he was raiding Judah or allies of Judah perhaps was designed to get Achish to think that David was now an opponent of Judah and completely loyal to him.

According to a recent study, people who tell small, self-serving lies are likely to progress to bigger falsehoods, and over time, the brain appears to adapt to the dishonesty. The finding, the researchers said, provides evidence for the “slippery slope” sometimes described by wayward politicians, corrupt financiers, unfaithful spouses and others in explaining their misconduct.

Participants in the study were asked to advise a partner in another room about how many pennies were in a jar. When the subjects believed that lying about the amount of money was to their benefit, they were more inclined to dishonesty and their lies escalated over time. As lying increased, the response in the brain decreased. And the size of the decline from one trial to another predicted how much bigger a subject’s next lie would be.

The findings suggest that the negative emotional signals associated with lying decrease as the brain becomes desensitized. As one of the researchers said, “Think about it like perfume. You buy a new perfume, and it smells strongly. A few days later, it smells less. And a month later, you don’t smell it at all.”<sup>5</sup>

Sometimes we tell lies—or shade the truth—to protect what we are really doing. We tell lies about who we are seeing or about what we are seeing. We tell lies about our performance or lack of performance. We tell lies when as believers we should be people of the truth. Let us not do so. Let us be people of the truth.

David’s lies, however, had the effect David wanted because **Achish trusted David, thinking, “He has made himself an utter stench to his people Israel; therefore he shall always be my servant”** (27:12).

#### IV. David’s Predicament (28:1-2)

And fourth, let’s see David’s predicament.

Achish now believed that David was on his side and that the time was ripe for an attack on Israel. So, **the Philistines gathered their forces for war, to fight against Israel. And Achish said to David, “Understand that you and your men are to go out with me in the army”** (28:1). Achish was under the impression that David had been effectively carrying out raids against Israel. Now was the time for an all-out war. This put David in a very difficult spot. How would he respond? How would you respond?

Surprisingly, but probably so as not to blow his cover, **David said to Achish, “Very well, you shall know what your servant can do”** (28:2a). David agreed to help Achish with his upcoming battle against the Israelites. Apparently, this pleased Achish, and so he **said to David, “Very well, I will make you my body-guard for life”** (28:2b). Clearly, David had so skillfully fooled

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<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2016/november/2110716.html>.

Achish that Achish trusted David with his very life.

David was in a real predicament because he was being conscripted to go and fight against his own people. Would he do it? Would he actually turn against his own people? Well, if you know the rest of the story, you recall that the Lord delivered David from this predicament. As we shall see in chapter 29, the commanders of the Philistines persuaded Achish to send David and his army back to Ziklag so that he would not perhaps become an adversary to Achish in the midst of the battle. In that instance, God providentially extricated David from his predicament.

Lies tend to grow and become predicaments that make for awkward situations. Let us not think that God will extricate us from our predicaments as he did David. God may allow us at times to suffer the consequences of our lies. He does so because a loving Father sometimes lets his children learn lessons the hard way.

### **Conclusion**

Therefore, having analyzed the incident of David fleeing to the Philistines as set forth in 1 Samuel 27:1-28:2, let us turn to Christ whose faith never faltered.

David's faith in God faltered so that he lied and took things into his own hands. And yet, even though David's faith faltered, God was faithful to him and preserved him for his future calling.

The faith of David's greater Son, Jesus Christ, never faltered. Even in the Garden of Gethsemane and on the cross, while he was undergoing excruciating suffering that would eventually take his life, Jesus still said to God, "Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). In every circumstance, no matter how hard or how difficult, Jesus trusted in his heavenly Father.

Gladys Aylward, missionary to China more than fifty years ago, was forced to flee when the Japanese invaded Yangcheng. But she could not leave her work behind. With only one assistant, she

led more than a hundred orphans over the mountains toward Free China.

In their book *The Hidden Price of Greatness*, Ray Besson and Ranelda Mack Hunsicker tell what happened: “During Gladys’ harrowing journey out of war-torn Yangcheng...she grappled with despair as never before. After passing a sleepless night, she faced the morning with no hope of reaching safety. A 13-year-old girl in the group reminded her of their much-loved story of Moses and the Israelites crossing the Red Sea.

“ ‘But I am not Moses,’ Gladys cried in desperation.

“ ‘Of course you aren’t’ the girl said, ‘but God is still God!’ ”

When Gladys and the orphans made it through, they proved once again that no matter how inadequate we feel, God is still God, and we can trust in him.<sup>6</sup>

Friends, even God’s servants of great faith can falter. But God is still God, and Jesus’ faith never faltered or failed. And because of his unfailing faithfulness, let us trust in him, no matter what our circumstances. Amen.

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<sup>6</sup> See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/1997/february/3015.html>.

# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church  
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and membership in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike maturity,  
equip them for their ministry in the church  
and life mission in the world,  
in order to magnify God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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