

Prophesy against Philistia

²⁸ This is the burden which came in the year that King Ahaz died. ²⁹ "Do not rejoice, all you of Philistia, Because the rod that struck you is broken; For out of the serpent's roots will come forth a viper, And its offspring *will be* a fiery flying serpent. ³⁰ The firstborn of the poor will feed, And the needy will lie down in safety; I will kill your roots with famine, And it will slay your remnant. ³¹ Wail, O gate! Cry, O city! All you of Philistia *are* dissolved; For smoke will come from the north, And no one *will be* alone in his appointed times." ³² What will they answer the messengers of the nation? That the LORD has founded Zion, And the poor of His people shall take refuge in it.

The topic for this morning is the enemy that won't go away.

This morning we are looking at the Philistines. Our text tells us about God's judgment on the Philistines that Isaiah is announcing. This can easily be lost on all the other judgments that are pronounced on various peoples in that area. But there is a lot here to be considered.

The first mention we have of the Philistines is in Genesis 10:14. We are told which descendant of Noah the Philistines came from. The next mention is Genesis 21 where Abraham has dealings with a local king-Abimelech. Abimelech was the king of Gerar, a Philistine city. We are told that the king returns to the land of the Philistines when he is done meeting with Abraham. This was the time when Abraham said that Sarah was his sister in an effort for Abraham to protect his own life. In that story we find another example that the heroes of the faith were not as much heroes as people like us who had experienced the grace of God. Now there is something interesting here that I never considered before.

Genesis 21:22-24 (NKJV)

²² And it came to pass at that time that Abimelech and Phichol, the commander of his army, spoke to Abraham, saying, "God *is* with you in all that you do.

²³ Now therefore, swear to me by God that you will not deal falsely with me, with my offspring, or with my posterity; but that according to the kindness that I have done to you, you will do to me and to the land in which you have dwelt."

²⁴ And Abraham said, "I will swear."

Here we see that the **first dealings that Abraham had with the inhabitants of Philistia** were good ones. In fact Abraham promised to treat Abimelech with the kindness he had experienced at Abimelech's hands. I didn't expect this. This leads me to believe that Abimelech's heirs were no longer in control when the

Israelites entered the promised land. I have read since then that this is the widely held view. These peaceful inhabitants would soon be replaced with a more violent brood.

The next mention of the Philistines is when Isaac does the same thing with his wife. Like father like son I guess.

The next mention is when Israel is coming out of Egypt. We find this:

Exodus 13:17 (NKJV)

¹⁷ Then it came to pass, when Pharaoh had let the people go, that God did not lead them *by way of the land of the Philistines, although that was near; for God said, "Lest perhaps the people change their minds when they see war, and return to Egypt."*

So we see that the Philistines are considered as an enemy of the Israelites from this time forward.

The next mention is in the book of Joshua. It is when Joshua is ready to die.

Joshua 13:1-3 (NKJV)

¹ Now Joshua was old, advanced in years. And the LORD said to him: "You are old, advanced in years, and there remains very much land yet to be possessed.

² This is the land that yet remains: all the territory of the Philistines and all *that of the Geshurites,*

³ from Sihor, which *is east of Egypt, as far as the border of Ekron northward (which is counted as Canaanite); the five lords of the Philistines--the Gazites, the Ashdodites, the Ashkelonites, the Gittites, and the Ekronites; also the Avites;*

So we see that the Philistine territory is part of what God promised to the Israelites. It is part of the promised land. It wasn't mentioned in the list of lands that the Israelites were to conquer earlier. But, after the fact it, is reported as property they **failed** to take. So the Israelites had failed to conquer the land. They had victories. But they were too easily satisfied. They were satisfied with less than God's best for them. They were willing to coexist with their undefeated enemies. We will come back to this later.

Now who were these Philistines? What were they like?

Well first off they were a prominent force in the area for centuries. In fact the word **Palestine** comes from the word **Philistine**. So they were associated with the territory. They were a fixture there. Like we think of Russians when we think of the land of Russia, people back then would think of Philistines when they think of

the territory from the shore of the Mediterranean back several miles into the mainland.

The land they inhabited had several major advantages. First it was coastal land. So they had the opportunity to be a sea faring people. They could trade in order to gather wealth. Second, their land was flat. And third it was very fertile. So it would easily support a big population.

Now, one of the most interesting things about the Philistines is that they were not natives. They traveled by sea from the Aegean area, somewhere from Greece to Turkey. So the culture they brought in was completely different than the surrounding tribes. It is interesting to note that the Philistines in the Bible were the only people to be called “uncircumcised”. It may be that circumcision was a custom in the people living in Canaan, but **not a custom** the Philistines practiced. Another interesting thing about them is that they were advanced technologically. In fact, their technology gave them a military advantage. They knew how to work with iron. No one else in their area did. So their weapons were always superior to the Israelites.

Another interesting fact regarded their government. It was different than most. There were 5 kings. The text we read called them **the Gazites, the Ashdodites, the Ashkelonites, the Gittites, and the Ekronites**. The kings ruled their city along with the area that surrounded their city. They were autonomous, but they cooperated with each other. So when there was war, they were a united front. But for day to day purposes, they were their own entity. They were designed a little like the model of the states in the United States. This gave them an advantage in military pursuits because they were very organized and they could mobilize very quickly. The Israelites were not so organized.

I have always thought of the Philistines as dirty uncivilized barbarians. But that really isn't the truth. They were very admirable in some ways. Not moral ways or spiritual ways, but human potential ways.

Experts estimate from the number of olive oil pressing facilities they found that one of their cities may have put out a third of the Olive Oil that Israel **now produces with all its machinery**. They also produced a lot of fermented beverages. And their pottery suggests they did a lot of drinking. So they had some significant industry going on.

The biggest thing they had going against them is that most of them hated the one true God and God seemed to not hesitate in punishing them. That is not the one thing you want to get wrong. They worshipped Baal, Ashteroth and Dagon.

Now after Joshua, we learn in Judges that the Philistines had dominion over Israel. Judges 14:4. This was directly because the Israelites had sinned by following after other gods. So God sent Samson.

Now this is one of the stories that don't play out the way we want them to. We want a good hero, one who is noble and true and only acts through goodness. Samson isn't that kind of guy. Most of the Philistines that Samson killed were due to mistakes in Samson's life. His bad choices led to God accomplishing what God wanted to accomplish. I had spoken about this a few months ago. Much of what God accomplishes in our lives happens in the midst of our foolishness, and sometimes even wickedness. That is no excuse to be wicked or foolish. But it is comforting to know that we can't undo God's purposes.

First Samson picks a Philistine bride for himself. That results in 30 dead Philistines. Then he caught 150 pairs of foxes and lit them and destroyed much of their food and olive industry. Then the Philistines killed his ex wife and father in law. So he killed lots of them.

Then Samson's country men convinced him to allow them to capture him. They turned him over to the Philistines and he killed probably a thousand more of them.

Then enters Delilah and Samson's imprisonment which culminated in him destroying Dagon's temple and killing all the bigshots of the Philistines- over 3000 people. This put a big damper on the Philistine powerhouse.

After that Saul had some success against the Philistines. But the tide began to turn when David killed Goliath. There was a delay in the success because Saul turned his aggression on David. Oddly enough David ran to the Philistines for protection. It is very likely that it was not a **Philistine ruler** but a **vassal** of the Philistines that David ran to. A lot of the conquered peoples had no love for their conquerors, but they weren't going to directly cross them either.

But it is really King David and King Solomon that God used to drive the Philistines out of Israelite territory. It was clear that God wanted to display his power against the Philistine enemies. But they were never destroyed. They continued to be a threat and a thorn in their side.

We find that Uzziah had some victories against the Philistines. Remember it was Uzziah that died right before Isaiah was called by God to be His minister.

2 Chronicles 26:5-7

⁵ He (Uzziah) sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God; and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper. ⁶ Now he went out and made war against the Philistines, and broke down the

wall of Gath, the wall of Jabneh, and the wall of Ashdod; and he built cities around Ashdod and among the Philistines. ⁷ God helped him against the Philistines, against the Arabians who lived in Gur Baal, and against the Meunites.

Now, what was the purpose of the Philistines? Why did God allow them to be a thorn in Israel's side? Scripture is wonderful in that it reveals so many of the Lord's purposes.

Judges 3:1-4 (NKJV)

1 Now these are the nations which the LORD left, that He might test Israel by them, that is, all who had not known any of the wars in Canaan

2 (this was only so that the generations of the children of Israel might be taught to know war, at least those who had not formerly known it),

3 namely, five lords of the Philistines, all the Canaanites, the Sidonians, and the Hivites who dwelt in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Baal Hermon to the entrance of Hamath.

4 And they were left, that He might test Israel by them, to know whether they would obey the commandments of the LORD, which He had commanded their fathers by the hand of Moses.

Think about this. This does not say, these are the people that the Israelites failed to defeat. So God was forced to allow them in the land. He didn't want to, but His hands were tied. After all, the Israelites had free will so God had to respond to what they did or did not do.

No. God doesn't even mention their failure here, as if it was not even a consideration, as if this is what God planned to do from the very beginning.

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In this instance God was accomplishing several things. It is easy to see some of the advantages of having this enemy live on.

The **first** is that it would keep Israel on their toes militarily. They would have to keep learning the skill of fighting. As long as Israel has existed it has been surrounded by enemies. Learning how to fight is a necessity in that real estate.

Second, danger has a tendency to point you to God. As long as the Israelites need a God to protect them, they are more likely to call out to their God, to live to please their God. Look at our own lives. When do we call out to God the most? When we have to. When we have no one else to turn to.

Third, a common enemy has the tendency to bond people together. Nothing bonds people like a common enemy. When you are surrounded by enemies, you recognize how badly you depend upon your friends. It is that way in the church. We face a common enemy daily and we need support. In the same way Israel needed their fellow countrymen to help every time the wolf howled at the door. **Fourth**, danger has a tendency to promote realism about the world one lives in. I read recently about a European woman who was an outspoken proponent of pluralism and open borders. She was found dead, buried under rocks, after being brutally raped and murdered by Muslim immigrants, the people she spoke of so fondly. People who live in continual danger learn the importance of determining who our friends are and who our enemies are. It doesn't allow a person to live in the idealism of seeing all men and women as our brothers and sisters. It frankly knows better. And it takes steps accordingly. I don't think some of the liberal attitudes of inclusiveness would be so dominant if we lived surrounded by enemies like Israel has always done.

But God gives even greater insight in verse 4. God left the enemy intact to **test to see what His people would do**. He wanted to see if they would obey Him or choose something else.

This has been a recurring theme. Evil serves a good purpose. It would not exist if it did not. Choices always test us. Adversity always tests us.

We all have a sin that easily besets us. Fortunately we don't all have the same sin or we would be in trouble. But we all have a sin. If you don't know what it is, it is likely because you are not doing business with it. We all have that sin that is severely tempting to us.

Now maybe you have just wanted it to go away. Maybe you have asked God to take it away. Maybe you think you are not spiritual because you still deeply feel that temptation. Maybe you think God is letting you down because he doesn't make it easy for you. Maybe you lament the enemy that just won't go away. I guess we might as well give up all our alternative strategies and **learn how God does things**. He sometimes wants it hard because being hard produces things he wants. He wants us to **prove our faith**. He wants to strengthen our faith, which only happens with exercise. He wants us to show in the hard things of life what He really means to us. This is not just an Old Testament principle.

James 1:2 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, 3 knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. 4 But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

We should never think that we are failing the Christian life because the Christian life remains hard for us. The existence of temptations does not prove our failure. It just proves that we exist. What **we do** with the temptation displays our failure or success, our faith or our disbelief. God does not promise to take away the hard things in our lives in this life, primarily because the hard things serve His eternal purposes.

David said this is **Psalm 119 67 Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word.**

God ordains the Philistines in our lives. He sometimes uses **the enemy that won't go away** to accomplish things in our lives that nothing else would accomplish. It shows us things we would not see if we did not have the difficulty. It shows us room we have to grow and obey. It shows us God steadily accomplishing things in our lives as we obey him in the face of those enemies. **What Philistine has God left at your borders?** Recognize it as the tool of God and face it like Ephesians tells us. He tells us how to fight our Philistine.

Eph 6:14 Stand therefore, having girded your waist with truth, having put on the breastplate of righteousness, 15 and having shod your feet with the preparation of the gospel of peace; 16 above all, taking the shield of faith with which you will be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked one. 17 And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; 18 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints

Now, we are ready for our text.

²⁸ This is the burden which came in the year that King Ahaz died. ²⁹ "Do not rejoice, all you of Philistia, Because the rod that struck you is broken; For out of the serpent's roots will come forth a viper, And its offspring *will be* a fiery flying serpent. ³⁰ The firstborn of the poor will feed, And the needy will lie down in safety; I will kill your roots with famine, And it will slay your remnant. ³¹ Wail, O gate! Cry, O city! All you of Philistia *are* dissolved; For smoke will come from the north, And no one *will be* alone in his appointed times." ³² What will they answer the messengers of the nation? That the LORD has founded Zion, And the poor of His people shall take refuge in it.

Do you see what this means? One day God will remove our Philistines. It will be on the day they no longer serve a useful purpose in our lives. Maybe it will be at

the end of our lives. But one day our Philistines will be removed. Praise God. That temptation you hate...no more. It will be gone. There will be no more struggle to obey God, to enjoy God's fellowship in peace and confidence. Our enemy will be defeated. His influence will be removed. And we will finally be free of both sin's power and sin's presence.

Now Isaiah is telling Philistia, don't get too happy to see your centuries old enemy overcome. Yes, Israel will be punished at God's hand. It is true. This country that continually put you in your place, this rod that struck you is truly going to be broken. That is true. But unlike you, they will return. Unlike you, they are loved by a true God, not an imaginary one.

The imagery here is one that people like Diane may get the most out of. It is talking about snakes. And out of one snake will come another that is worse than the first. The first snake is bad. Israel in the time of Solomon would have been a force to contend against. They would have been undefeatable. Their bite would have done great damage. But the second snake is a million times worse. In fact, what it presents is the image of a dragon. This is a snake that can fly. This is a snake that you cannot kill.

Even the poor children in this next kingdom will rest at ease. This presents a situation of great peace, of superior might. Even those who have no resources to protect themselves will be safe. The whole environment will be protected. The Philistines will no longer be any threat at all.

And look what will happen to the Philistines.

I will kill your roots with famine, And it will slay your remnant.

God is saying- there won't be anyone left of you. The Philistines as a people will be gone. And if there are any who safely hid in the hills, they will have nothing to eat. They will die of starvation.

While God was going to take His people **to the woodshed**, he is going to take the Philistines to **the hangman's scaffold**.

³¹ Wail, O gate! Cry, O city! All you of Philistia are dissolved; For smoke will come from the north, And no one will be alone in his appointed times."

This is the age old enemy of the Jews. This is the enemy that would not go away. And Isaiah is telling them well before it happens, mourn. Mourn because there will no longer be any Philistines left. Whatever is left of you will completely lose your identity. The smoke that was coming from the north would first be the Assyrians. And then the Babylonians. And presto, no more Philistines.

The devastation of invading armies is usually what smoke conveys. Cities are being burned and the Philistine cities are next in line.

And somehow in all of this there will be an understanding that even though the Israelites have been removed from their land, a remnant is returning. God is still taking care of His children.

³² **What will they answer the messengers of the nation? That the LORD has founded Zion, And the poor of His people shall take refuge in it.**

There is no people like the Jewish people. They are singled out in all human history as a people who have kept their identity throughout thousands of years of dispersion and persecution. I do not know how they play out in the end, but it is clear in Romans that they will exist. They will be there. They will have lasted from the day that Abraham left his home and Ur and went to the promised land to the day that Jesus Christ returns to end project earth part 1. And the poor of His people will take refuge in Zion.

I hope we are encouraged in this today. The fact that you are tempted to do a wrong thing is not proof that you are not a Christian. It is proof that you are breathing on planet earth. It is proof that God wants to **prove** your faith, to **test** your faith, to **build** your faith, and to show you the truth about yourself.

With that in mind, let's boldly take on those Philistines. If we have shrunk back or given in, today is the day to fight the fight of faith. Let's shoot for a day without that sin. Then a week without that sin. Then a month without that sin. Let's see what victory feels like. And then we will not only know **in our heads** that God is good, we will **taste it on our tongues**. We will **experience** the **peace** of God, the **love** of God, the **power** of God, the **joy** of God more fully.

Let's make it our aim to have victory against the enemy that God doesn't take away, with the underlying knowledge that some day in the future, God will take away that enemy forever.