

1 Samuel 27: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0:00] 1 Samuel chapter 27 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. So David arose and went over, he and the six hundred men who were with him, to Achish the son of Maok, king of Gath.

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, Naphtali's widow.

And when it was told Saul that David had fled to Gath, he no longer sought him. Then David said to Achish, If I have found favour 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? So that day Achish gave him Ziklag. Therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day. And the number of the days that David lived in the country of the Philistines was a year and four months.

[1:06] Now David and his men went up and made raids against the Geshurites, the Gerzites and the Amalekites, for these were the inhabitants of the land from of old, as far as Shur to the land of Egypt.

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. When Achish asked, Where have you made a raid today?

David would say, Against the Negev of Judah, or against the Negev of the Jeremilites, or against the Negev of the Kenites. 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. And Achish trusted David, thinking, He has made himself an utter stench to his people Israel. Therefore he shall always be my servant.

In 1 Samuel chapter 27, David, despairing of the situation with Saul, goes into exile in Philistia. David will have to wait in Philistia until Saul has been removed from the throne.

[2:12] This descent into Philistia is similar to the descent into Egypt, and a connection between the Philistines and Egypt is found way back in chapter 10 of Genesis. In chapters 5 and 6 of this book, the Philistines brought the Ark into Philistia, and suffered many plagues as a result, before they returned the Ark to the land with many gifts.

The parallels with the story of the Exodus were not hard to see there. Here, once again, we have a story with many elements of the Exodus narrative pattern. As David goes to Philistia, he is given a part of the land of Philistia to live in, Ziklag, just as Israel was given Goshen in the time of Joseph. There is later an attack upon the bride, just as there is a threat to Sarah in chapters 12 and 20 of Genesis, and then Rebecca in chapter 26. As in other stories of Exodus, deception is an important and prominent theme.

David deceives Achish, the king of Gath. Achish is led to believe that David is attacking his own land, and utterly cutting himself off from his people as a result. However, throughout, David is deceiving Achish, just as he deceived him earlier, when he pretended to be mad before him.

The Philistines will end up sending David away from their land, and as he leaves, he has to fight against the Amalekites. This is yet another detail that reminds us of the original Exodus narrative, as Israel has to fight the Amalekites in chapter 17 of Exodus.

[3:36] What might the significance of an Exodus pattern be here? Perhaps we should see David as playing out the destiny and the identity of the people and himself. Another possibility is that

David is being set up as a comparison to a character like Moses.

David begins this chapter by giving up trying to find peace in the land while Saul is there. As long as he remains in the land, Saul will try and kill him, and so he decides he must leave the land with his men, and he leads 600 men with him to Achish, king of Gath.

600 men was a very sizable fighting force. Saul was accompanied by 600 men at various points in the preceding chapters, as it isn't just the 600 men who go with David, but their families, their wives, and their children.

It would not be surprising if he had over a few thousand with him. This would be quite a significant group of people leaving the land. Achish presumes that David is a rebel warlord, at war with his master king Saul, and he gives him the land of Ziklag.

This freed David from being directly under Achish's gaze. In 2 Samuel chapter 15 verse 18, we discover that 600 Gittites followed David from Gath. During this time then, it seems that David was significantly increasing his forces, gathering a large number of Gentiles around him, in addition to the Israelites who were following him at this point.

[4 : 56] While among the Philistines, David took his opportunity to attack various groups of peoples within the territory that had been allotted to Israel, but which had not yet been conquered by it. However, concerned that word might not get out to Achish, the king of Gath, David made sure that there was no one left to tell tales against him.

While he's attacking the Negev of various parts, he is secretly fighting for Israel. The theme of deception that has been prominent throughout the book of 1 Samuel continues to be a very important element of this chapter.

David's cunning resourcefulness allows him to live in perhaps one of the most dangerous places of all. He's living in the city of the great Philistine champion that he once killed himself, Goliath of Gath. A question to consider. What are some of the similarities that we can see with this story and David's situation in the land of the Philistines, and the stories of Abraham and Sarah and Isaac and Rebekah in chapters 12, 20 and 26 of the book of Genesis?

