

The Bible is filled with fascinating stories of people and their struggles, and how they were able to persevere because of their faith. David is always a great example of this. When I think of many things happening to a person at once, I usually think of Job, and how he lost nearly everything that he had in one day. But David also had some hair-raising days. There were a couple of days in his life where so many things were going on it is difficult to see how he kept his composure.

I would like to talk about a time of transition when David's life changed from that of hunted to king in only a few days. This story is told in 1 Samuel 27 through 2 Samuel 1. Here, as we study these events we will see how David's faith made him strong in the midst of great trials. We want to try to understand as much as possible what is going on through David's mind and heart. You should remember that David became hunted because of Saul's jealousy. David tried to hide in his homeland, but Saul kept hot on his trail. Twice David had the opportunity to kill Saul, but did not because Saul was the Lord's anointed. Finally, David decided that to keep from having to fight Saul to protect himself, he needed to leave the country. Unfortunately, the surrounding nations were not that friendly. The Philistines were always enemies. But David had little choice. Let's begin by reading 1 Samuel 27:1-7,

*But David thought to himself, "One of these days I will be destroyed by the hand of Saul. The best thing I can do is to escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will give up searching for me anywhere in Israel, and I will slip out of his hand." So David and the six hundred men with him left and went over to Achish son of Maach king of Gath. David and his men settled in Gath with Achish. Each man had his family with him, and David had his two wives: Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail of Carmel, the widow of Nabal. When Saul was told that David had fled to Gath, he no longer searched for him. Then David said to Achish, "If I have found favor in your eyes, let a place be assigned to me in one of the country towns, that I may live there. Why should your servant live in the royal city with you?" So on that day Achish gave him Ziklag, and it has belonged to the kings of Judah ever since. David lived in Philistine territory a year and four months.*

This must have been very difficult for David, for he had to go into enemy territory to try to save himself. It was like being between a rock and a hard place. But for some reason, Achish allowed David to stay with him, and was pleased with him. It is always amazing to me how David inspired loyalty from those whom it was not expected. David had already tried this with either this Achish or his father, for we read in 1 Samuel 21:10-14,

*That day David fled from Saul and went to Achish king of Gath. But the servants of Achish said to him, "Isn't this David, the king of the land? Isn't he the one they sing about in their dances: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands?" David took these words to heart and was very much afraid of Achish king of Gath. So he pretended to be insane in their presence; and while he was in their hands he acted like a madman, making marks on the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard. Achish said to his servants, "Look at the man! He is insane! Why bring him to me? Am I so short of madmen that you have to bring this fellow here to carry on like this in front of me? Must this man come into my house?"*

I don't know what happened in the meantime, but David finally found safety where Saul is afraid to go. David ingratiated himself with Achish by deceiving him about where David's men were raiding, making him think that he was attacking the domain of Saul. Reading in vss 8-12,

*Now David and his men went up and raided the Geshurites, the Girzites and the Amalekites. (From ancient times these peoples had lived in the land extending to Shur and Egypt.) Whenever David attacked an area, he did not leave a man or woman alive, but took sheep and cattle, donkeys and camels, and clothes. Then he returned to Achish. When Achish asked, "Where did you go raiding today?" David would say, "Against the Negev of Judah" or "Against the Negev of Jerahmeel" or "Against the Negev of the Kenites." He did not leave a man or woman alive to be*

*brought to Gath, for he thought, "They might inform on us and say, 'This is what David did.'" And such was his practice as long as he lived in Philistine territory. Achish trusted David and said to himself, "He has become so odious to his people, the Israelites, that he will be my servant forever."*

David had to be very ruthless to keep his activities unknown. But through all of this Achish falls for the act hook, line, and sinker. Achish trusts him as he does no other, even to the extent of honoring him as appointing him as his bodyguard for life, as we read in the next few verses, 28:1-2,

*In those days the Philistines gathered their forces to fight against Israel. Achish said to David, "You must understand that you and your men will accompany me in the army." David said, "Then you will see for yourself what your servant can do." Achish replied, "Very well, I will make you my bodyguard for life."*

Now David is in a real dilemma. He must carry on with his act or show his deceit. But if he marches with Achish, how can he really attack his own people? Achish puts him in the rear of the column, and you can imagine he has some hard thinking to do. The Bible never tells us what he would have done if he had the chance. But I believe that he would not have attacked Saul due to his loyalty to his people, his respect for the Lord's anointed, and his love for Saul's son Jonathan.

But to march in with Achish and suddenly turn traitor does not seem a part of David's character. How could he do this? Perhaps it is through God's providence that the other princes and leaders of the Philistines do not trust David and object to his presence in their army. David keeps up the act (I think) and promises loyalty, but he turns back and heads for home. Reading from 1 Samuel 29:1-11,

*The Philistines gathered all their forces at Aphek, and Israel camped by the spring in Jezreel. As the Philistine rulers marched with their units of hundreds and thousands, David and his men were marching at the rear with Achish. The commanders of the Philistines asked, "What about these Hebrews?" Achish replied, "Is this not David, who was an officer of Saul king of Israel? He has already been with me for over a year, and from the day he left Saul until now, I have found no fault in him." But the Philistine commanders were angry with him and said, "Send the man back, that he may return to the place you assigned him. He must not go with us into battle, or he will turn against us during the fighting. How better could he regain his master's favor than by taking the heads of our own men? Isn't this the David they sang about in their dances: "'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands'?" So Achish called David and said to him, "As surely as the LORD lives, you have been reliable, and I would be pleased to have you serve with me in the army. From the day you came to me until now, I have found no fault in you, but the rulers don't approve of you. Turn back and go in peace; do nothing to displease the Philistine rulers." "But what have I done?" asked David. "What have you found against your servant from the day I came to you until now? Why can't I go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?" Achish answered, "I know that you have been as pleasing in my eyes as an angel of God; nevertheless, the Philistine commanders have said, 'He must not go up with us into battle.' Now get up early, along with your master's servants who have come with you, and leave in the morning as soon as it is light." So David and his men got up early in the morning to go back to the land of the Philistines, and the Philistines went up to Jezreel.*

I wonder why David did not go out a ways and then attack in support of Saul and Jonathan. If he had known that the battle would go so terribly for Jonathan, would he have tried to help? Saul ended up consulting the medium at Endor and learned that he is destined to die in battle. But David returns to Ziklag to find that disaster has struck. Reading in 1 Samuel 30:1-4,

*David and his men reached Ziklag on the third day. Now the Amalekites had raided the Negev and Ziklag. They had attacked Ziklag and burned it, and had taken captive the women and all who were in it, both young and old. They killed none of them, but carried them off as they went on*

*their way. When David and his men came to Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep.*

Could David been plagued in his mind by thinking that this was a punishment for marching against the Lord's anointed? Imagine the emotions that are running through his heart at this point. He knows that the land of Israel is being invaded by a powerful Philistine force. He has just lost his home and his family. As a leader, he has allowed the ruin of all of his men's families as well. He has cried his heart out, and then finds out that his men are talking about stoning him. But immediately after this, in verse 6, we find a key verse: "But David found strength in the LORD his God." This should be a great lesson to all of us! What a confusion of emotions in David's heart, but he kept his mind clear. Instead of thinking that God was punishing him, he sought the word of God.

David does not usurp the office of the priest, but has Abiathar inquire of the Lord. God tells them to pursue the enemy and they will succeed in overtaking them. God provides David with a mistreated captive who leads them to the raiders, who making themselves drunk. They fought them the whole day and retrieved all of their goods. Even through this struggle, David is able to treat his men fairly who cannot keep up with the pursuit. He institutes an important principle: those who guard the baggage also share the spoils. David also in a shrewd political move shares the spoils with the elders of Judah. He is preparing for the time when he can come back home.

Meanwhile a greater tragedy is befalling the nation of Israel. As we read in 1 Samuel 31:1-3,

*Now the Philistines fought against Israel; the Israelites fled before them, and many fell slain on Mount Gilboa. The Philistines pressed hard after Saul and his sons, and they killed his sons Jonathan, Abinadab and Malki-Shua. The fighting grew fierce around Saul, and when the archers overtook him, they wounded him critically.*

We know the rest of this story, how Saul fell on his sword to keep from being abused by the Philistines. David had been back in his home of Ziklag for two days before news came of the defeat of the army of Israel and the death of the royal family. We read how David and his men reacted in 2 Samuel 1:11-12,

*Then David and all the men with him took hold of their clothes and tore them. They mourned and wept and fasted till evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the army of the LORD and the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.*

This news cuts David to the heart. The man who brought the news thought that he was doing David a favor and claimed to have helped dispatch king Saul. David, because of his respect for the Lord's anointed has this messenger killed. The fact that he was an Amalekite, the same nation that raided Ziklag only days earlier, might have had something to do with this also.

David composes a song of sorrow from the depths of his heart. We read in 2 Samuel 1:19-27,

*"Your glory, O Israel, lies slain on your heights. How the mighty have fallen! "Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines be glad, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised rejoice. "O mountains of Gilboa, may you have neither dew nor rain, nor fields that yield offerings of grain. For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul--no longer rubbed with oil. From the blood of the slain, from the flesh of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, the sword of Saul did not return unsatisfied. "Saul and Jonathan-- in life they were loved and gracious, and in death they were not parted. They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. "O daughters of Israel, weep for Saul, who clothed you in scarlet and finery, who adorned your garments with ornaments of gold. "How the mighty have fallen in battle! Jonathan lies slain on your heights. I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women. "How the mighty have fallen! The weapons of war have perished!"*

What great emotions run through the heart of David. But he never let discouragement and despair affect his faith in God. What a wild few days he had when he was changed from the hunted to king in Judah, for after the death of Saul and Jonathan he asked for the Lord's guidance, went to Hebron, and was crowned king of Judah. What a tempestuous life! But God was the calm in that storm and we should all take a lesson from this. God will see us through every situation if we keep him in our hearts.