

1st Samuel 27:1-28:2; 29:1-11
David's Weary Faith

Introduction

1. Our passage today is probably one of the most difficult in all of 1st Samuel, primarily because it's not exactly clear how to interpret it
 - a. Chapters 27 & 28 tell the story of David fleeing to the land of the Philistines, conducting raids in the south and then seemingly offering to go on the attack with the Philistines against Israel
 - b. Sandwiched in the middle of this story, we have the famous event where Saul seeks out a medium and conjures up Saul
2. Most pastors and scholars approach the text in one of three ways (as do most commentaries):
 - a. Some view the passage from the viewpoint sin:
 - 1) They see David's escape to the land of the Philistines as a lack of faith and trust in the LORD
 - 2) They view his military campaigns in the south as murderous rampages intended to fill his own coffers
 - 3) They see in this passage another moral failure of David, much like his sin with Bathsheba
 - b. Others view the passage in quite the opposite manner, from the viewpoint of David's righteousness:
 - 1) They see David's escape to the Philistines as an ingenious plan to deceive the Philistines and infiltrate their ranks
 - 2) They view his military campaigns in the south as a continuation of Joshua's conquest, something Israel failed to do but now being fulfilled by David
 - 3) They see only faith and righteousness by David in these events
 - c. A third interpretation approaches the passages more neutrally by trying to avoid the extremes of the two approaches above:
 - 1) It views the escape to the land of the Philistines not as a lack of faith or trust, but rather a moment of despair or spiritual weariness on David's part
 - 2) It understands the military campaigns in the south not as murderous rampages or a continuation of Joshua's conquest, but rather simply defending the southern tribes of Israel from their enemies (similar to what David did for the city of Keilah)
 - 3) This approach doesn't try to resolve all the tension, or answer all the difficulties in the passage
3. I find myself feeling most comfortable with the third approach for a number of reasons and I hope to make those clear as we walk through the passage

A. David flees to Gath (27:1-4)

1. It's pretty clear after David confronts Saul for the last time (chapter 26) that he isn't going to fall for Saul's confession a second time; he isn't going to return and trust Saul again

2. David realizes that Saul will not stop and that his options are limited (1): **"Then David said to himself, "Now I will perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than to escape into the land of the Philistines. Saul then will despair of searching for me anymore in all the territory of Israel, and I will escape from his hand."**
 - a. Saul will continue to peruse him, and with a much more massive army (with thousands of trained soldiers compared to David's hundreds of rag-tag dissidents), David was likely to end of dead.
 - b. The only option, David thinks, is to flee to where Saul wouldn't pursue him—the Philistines

3. So, David and his men, along with their families (likely 1000 to 2000 people) flees to the land of the Philistines (2-3):
 - a. He heads specifically to Gath and likely chose it because according to recent archeological finds it was likely largest city in the region at the time, and home of the King, Achish
 - b. This was a strategic move on David's part
 - 1) Can you image what the Philistines would have thought when they saw thousands of Israelites roaming within their borders led by David? They likely would have been slaughtered
 - 2) The evidence in the passage suggests that David was able to convince Achish that he had been run out of Israel and was an enemy of Saul, and therefore no threat to the Philistines
 - 3) In fact, as we will see, David works to establish Achish's trust
 - c. As David thought, once Saul learned of David's departure he stopped pursuing him (4)

4. There are some clues that I feel help us properly understand these verses:
 - a. One clue is that in almost every case where David makes a big decision in 1st and 2nd Samuel, he inquires of the LORD
 - 1) There are between 7 and 9 such times depending on how you count them
 - 2) This is a critical time in David's life and he is faced with one of the most important decisions of his life so far
 - 3) So, if ever there was a time to ask for the LORD's direction it was now
 - b. However, and this is the second clue, there is no evidence that David prayed or asked for the LORD's help in determining what to do this time—he just makes the decision to flee to the Philistines:
 - 1) Let's get something straight—it isn't sin to make decisions without praying and the author doesn't suggest David was sinning
 - 2) However, one thing we will notice as we go through the text is that God is not mentioned even a single time in this entire story
 - 3) Sometimes we get an impression on what the author is subtly trying to communicate by what they include or exclude from the text
 - 4) That might be the case here—is he suggesting that David, in a moment of despair, left God out of the decision?

5. Something that continues to amaze me about myself (in a not too favorable sense) is that often times when faced with a difficult challenge or trial, it takes me a few days before I stop relying on my own strength or reasoning and realize I haven't sought the LORD's counsel or prayed to Him about it

- a. Do you ever find that true about yourself?
- b. I suspect that's what happened to David here—maybe because he's weary, beaten down, in despair and just not remembering all that God had done to protect him in the past
 - 1) He's been on the run since day one, chased by a madman and his army of 3000 soldiers bent on killing him
 - 2) He's been living in caves and the wilderness, having to beg for food
 - 3) He has no only his family to care for and protect, but a host of other disenfranchised citizens that have come to him for protection
 - 4) He's pleaded with his enemy to no avail and finds himself in a place where he sees his only options are to wait for Saul to ultimately capture and kill him or flee to his enemies and hope he survives
 - 5) So, he flees because he thinks it's the best option

B. David conducts military raids in the south (27:5-12)

1. David moves to Ziklag (5-7):
 - a. These three verses summarize David's 16 months in Philistine territory, with vs. 8-12 providing details on what he did during that time
 - b. David approached the king and asked to move his entourage (likely over 1000 people counting women and children) out of Gath to one of the cities out in the country
 - c. The king grants his wish and gives him Ziklag, a city about 25 miles southwest of Gath:
 - 1) Ziklag was in the area originally given by God to Judah and Simeon during the conquest but they failed to conquer it and drive out their enemies
 - 2) The reason David gave for wanting to move out to the country may have been a ruse—he suggests that it wasn't right for he and his entourage to stay with the king in the royal city since they were the king's servants
 - 3) It appears David may have had other reasons for wanting to be so far away from Gath
2. David attacks Israel's enemies right under the Philistine's noses (8-12):
 - a. He attacks the cities of the Geshurites, Girzites, and Amalekites, kills all the people and takes away the spoils (v. 9 suggests that he returned to Achish to present the spoils to him)
 - b. There is disagreement among scholars and pastors as to the nature of these raids:
 - 1) Some see David's acts here as a moral failure—they claim that he was simply on a murderous rampage and enriching himself (since he killed all the people and "took away" the spoils)
 - 2) Other's see David's acts here as some lofty and righteous goal of picking up where Joshua left off and completing the Conquest
 - c. However, a better explanation is that David was merely attacking Israel's enemies and eliminating threats, doing it all directly under the nose of another enemy, the Philistines:
 - 1) The attacks were against Israel's enemies in the south (Judah)--All three of these people groups were Canaanites who were inhabiting land that God had given to Israel, but whom Israel had failed to drive out
 - 2) Some of the cities, like Geshur, were fairly large and heavily fortified, and posed a continual threat to Israel
 - 3) The Amalakites are mentioned on multiple occasions in this book, including a major battle against them in chapter 15, and their attack on David's city of Ziklag in chapter 30 when they destroyed it and carried away all the inhabitants, including David's family

- 4) God actually commanded the killing of the Canaanite inhabitants during the conquest, and David's doing so here prevented his plan from being discovered by the king
 - 5) Giving the spoils to the king, and telling him they came from attacks on Israel in the south allowed David to continue his attacks undetected and gain the king's trust
3. So, what do we make of this?
- 1) As we discussed above, God is not mentioned anywhere in our passage today, and one has to wonder why.
 - 2) We speculated above that maybe it was the author's way of indicating that David left God out of the formula
 - 3) That may be the case here—elsewhere we see David ask God whether he should attack his enemies, but he doesn't do that here; he just does it.
 - 4) What I find intriguing about this passage is that David's plan may have back-fired a bit on him because it puts him in a difficult spot (we will get to this in a minute):
 - a) Do we ever do that?
 - b) Do we ever forget to consider the LORD in what we do, or our actions? Making decisions based on simply what we feel is right or correct, or on our own abilities, without consulting Him?
 - c) Does it ever lead us into precarious or difficult situations?

C. David finds himself in a precarious situation (28:1-2; 29:1-12)
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1. David's ruse worked so well that he found himself in a precarious position—the Philistine king expected him to join in a major offensive against Israel and to become his bodyguard for life (28:1-12): **"Now it came about in those days that the Philistines gathered their armed camps for war, to fight against Israel. And Achish said to David, "Know assuredly that you will go out with me in the camp, you and your men." 2 David said to Achish, "Very well, you shall know what your servant can do." So Achish said to David, "Very well, I will make you my bodyguard for life.""**
 - a. It's not clear how we are to interpret David's words here, especially in light of his objection to King Achish when he asks David to stay back during the attack (29:8): **"David said to Achish, "But what have I done? And what have you found in your servant from the day when I came before you to this day, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?""**
 - b. It's unlikely that David truly intended to fight against Israel, but we aren't given any clue into what his actual plan was
2. Summarize 29:1-11:
 - a. The Philistines prepare to attack Israel, and David and his men take up positions in the rear with King Achish (1-2)
 - b. However, the Philistine lords objected to the presence of Hebrews in the ranks fearing that David and his men would turn on them (3-5)
 - c. As a result King Ashish asks David to return home (6-10)
 - d. David returns home (11)
3. Again, it's hard to know exactly how to interpret these events but I find it intriguing that immediately following this event we learn that while David is traveling with the Philistine army his home town is raided, destroyed and all the inhabitants taken away (chapter 30)

- a. As we've already seen, by potentially relying on his own wisdom/abilities and not consulting God, David put himself in a precarious position
- b. We see here that his actions may have led to additional consequences
- c. By going along with Achish and his army, David left his home and family undefended and vulnerable to attack
- d. Was this a consequence of David failing to consult the LORD?

Conclusion

1. As I've stressed throughout this passage, it's not real clear on how to interpret the events or what we can learn from them.
2. However, consider this:
 - a. The LORD is mentioned in every single chapter of 1st Samuel except one
 - b. In another chapter, he's only mentioned one time and that's by King Achish, the Philistine king
 - c. What two chapters are we talking about? The one's describing David's time among the Philistines
3. I suspect the author might be trying to tell us something about this year or so of David's life:
 - a. Could it have been that David was relying on his own abilities and cunningness at this time, rather than consulting the LORD?
 - b. Might it have led to some unintended consequences, like being expected by the king to fight against Israel or the raid on his home and family?
4. However, this is not to say that God was not present or active in David's life at this time:
 - a. David's victories over Israel's enemies in the south serve as evidence
 - b. David was provided a way out of his predicament with king Achish when the Philistine lords objected to his presence—might this be evidence of the LORD's work by Him providing a way out of a difficult situation for David without revealing his ruse?