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David at Gath
First Samuel 21: 10-15

DIG: Gath was the strongest of the five Philistine cities. It was the birthplace of Goliath. Why then does David go there? Why do you think David wore Goliath's sword? Why does David feel it is necessary to act like a madman? What sort of marks does he make and where does he make them?

REFLECT: When have you turned a situation around from being a passive recipient of the actions of others, to being assertive and prepared to take necessary steps? Are you in that situation now? What are you going to do? When has an "insanity plea" or role-play worked for you? How do you honestly face fear? While you were in the valley of the shadow of death, as you look back on that experience, where was God for you?

1015 BC

These verses are an interruption to the main plot of **David's** struggle with **Sha'ul**. They bear witness to the different contracts and elements of support **David** has developed, to which he can appeal in time of distress. Two important points emerge for the developing characterization of **David**. First, probably now 25, **he** is no longer an innocent and unknown shepherd boy. **He** now is well known, with alliances **he** can count on, with allegiances **he** can summon, and with political savvy about **his** own future. **He** has important political resources at **his** disposal. Second, **David** is no longer a passive recipient of the actions of others, as **he** has been throughout **Chapters 16** through **19**. Now **he** is assertive and prepared to take necessary and bold initiatives. It is a measure of the skill of the narrator that **David's** character is traced in this way.[80]

David knew that **Doeg the Edomite**, would inform **Sha'ul** of **his** whereabouts, **David** immediately **fled** for **his** life. The chase was on. **David feared that he would be safe nowhere in Isra'el, and was therefore driven to take refuge with the Philistines and offer himself for service. After David received**

Goliath's sword from Ahimelek, David fled from Sha'ul, and throwing all caution to the wind, **he went to Achish king of Gath.** With a subtle appreciation for humor, the narrator records that **David** fled twenty-three miles to the enemy city of **Gath**, **Goliath's** hometown, wearing **the giant's** old **sword**.[81]

Perhaps **David** was going to try to enlist as an unknown soldier in the service of **Achish**, but things changed as **he** was immediately recognized. **But the servants of Achish said to him, "Isn't this David, the king of the land?** Now **Sha'ul** was **the king of the land**, but due to **his** many exploits against **the Philistines, they** applied this title to **David** showing **him** a large measure of respect. **The natural exaggeration of a popular rumor. Achish** no doubt had heard the Israelite gossip. **Isn't he the one they sing about in their dances, 'Sha'ul has slain his thousands, and David his ten of thousands' (First Samuel 21:10-11)?" He** knew what the women sang, and presumably **he** knew how the comparison enraged **Sha'ul**. The narrator builds a compelling case for the inevitability of **David's** kingship.



David took these words to heart and **he** understood that **they** viewed **him** as the true king, **and was very much afraid of Achish, the king of Gath** for over forty years**. So he pretended to be insane in their presence.** In those days, an insane person was considered to be possessed by the gods. **And while he was in their hands he acted like a madman** (the verb translated **he acted like a madman** is used elsewhere in the Bible to describe **drunkenness** as in **Jeremiah 25:16**)**, making marks on the doors of the gate and letting saliva drool down his beard.**

Achish had seen enough and **said to his servants, "Look at the man! He is insane! Why bring him to me?" Achish** probably held the common ancient superstition that harming lunatics brought bad luck. Sarcastically declaring: **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" (First Samuel 21:12-15)? Achish's attempt to place the blame on his servants for David's introduction to his court seems to be an example of the common defense mechanism of anticipating criticism, by turning the blame on others. Hence, **David** was merely left alone. **David's** deception of **Achish** worked, as it would again in **Chapters 27** and **29**. But this experience in **Gath** led to the writing of two **Psalms**: **to see link click Ax – The Philistines Seized David at Gath** and **Ay – David Pretended to be Insane Before Abimelek**.

He will visit **Gath** again, but here, **he** was a lone fugitive with no one **he** could trust. This was probably **his** lowest point. But although **he** was **in the valley of the shadow of death he** discovered that **ADONAI** was with **him**, enabling **him** to devise plans and survive danger.