

David Among the Philistines

First Samuel 27:1 to 28:2 and First Chronicles 12:1-22

DIG: Given King Achish's last encounter with David, how do you think he felt about David's arrival and settlement in Gath? Why does David desire to move to Philistia? What was David's motive for totally annihilating those whom he raided? Was David justified in raiding the outlying towns (First Samuel 15:2-3)? In what ways did David deceive Achish (First Samuel 28:1-2)? What was the result?

REFLECT: David escapes Sha'ul only to land in Achish's lap. When has an escape play of yours turned into a similar "out-of-the-pan-into-the-fire" experience? What good, if any, came of the fiery situation? What are you getting away with right now (at home, work, school or social setting) that you fear someone might blow the whistle on? What long-standing agreement with the Lord remains unfulfilled in your life?

1012-1011 BC

In reality, the story of the rise of David continues beyond Sha'ul's death in Chapter 31 and through the accounts of David's elimination of other rivals to his divinely granted rule over Isra'el in Second Samuel Chapters 1 through 5. At the same time, however, there is a distinct literary break (see **By - Sha'ul and the Medium at Endor**), which begins the narrative that describes Sha'ul's final hours. So the scene depicting David's escape to the land of the Philistines is a convenient point to highlight David's rise and Sha'ul's decline.¹⁶⁵

It was with a measure of desperation that David felt that he was prepared to consider approaching the very enemies he had successfully fought on Isra'el's behalf, and offer them his services. Not that he had any intention of turning traitor to his beloved Y'hudah, but he would have to appear to do so in order to reassure his Philistine allies. This was not David's first attempt to enlist Philistine protection (see **Aw - David at Gath**), but that effort would not have helped him on this second attempt. This time the situation was very different.¹⁶⁶

God's name is not mentioned either in First Samuel 27:1 to 28:2, or in First Samuel 31. This suggests that Sha'ul had entered his final battle against the Philistines without YHVH's assistance (ominously in 28:6), and that David did not consult ADONAI (maybe believing that he could not do so because he was no longer in Isra'el, his homeland, see the comments on First Samuel 26:19-20a) when he decided to escape to Philistine territory.¹⁶⁷

The Reason for the Fight: Even though Sha'ul had promised not to harm him (see **Br - Sha'ul Promises Not to Harm David**), David still did not trust the king. So he thought to himself, "One of these days I will be destroyed by the hand of Sha'ul." He obviously didn't believe that Sha'ul had repented. "The best thing I can do is to escape to the land of the Philistines." This sojourn to Gath would end his running from Sha'ul, and he would shortly become king over all Isra'el. Then Sha'ul will give up searching for me anywhere in Isra'el, and I will slip out of his hand (First Samuel 27:1). David was immortal until God's purpose for him had been fulfilled. YHVH had already promised him that he would be king.

So David and six hundred men with him left and went over to Achish son of Maok 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 Sha'ul was told that David had fled to Gath, he no longer searched for him (First Samuel 27:2a-4). This implied that it was David's move to Gath that stopped Sha'ul dead in his tracks. It also showed that Sha'ul's second change of heart was as temporary as his first change of heart.

Ziklag: After living with Achish at Gath probably for a month or two, David asked Achish, "If I have found favor in your eyes, let a place be assigned to me in one of your country towns, that I may live there. Why should your servant live in the royal city with you?" David wanted to be away from the watchful eye of the Philistines, and to avoid assimilation with the Philistines. He still saw himself as a loyal Israelite. So on that day Achish gave him Ziklag. Within the territory controlled by Gath, he goes to his final stopping place before moving back into the Land, which was Ziklag. Originally it was assigned to the tribe of Y'hudah (Joshua 15:31). But they did not occupy it and the Philistines retained it. Ziklag was in the southeast corner of Gath's territory, and was far enough away from the heart of Philistine territory that it gave him an opportunity to carry out his own agenda without being discovered. And it has belonged to the kings of Judah ever since. This shows that the books of Samuel were written sometime after the division of the Kingdom.¹⁶⁸ David lived in Philistine territory a year and four months (First Samuel 27:5-7). David was about 28-29 years old during that time and lived sufficiently long in Ziklag to build up relationships with Israelites living in the far south (First Samuel 30:26-31).

These were the men who had been with David for the sixteen months that he lived in Philistine territory while he was banished from the presence of Sha'ul. They were among the warriors who helped him in battle; they were armed with bows and were able to shoot arrows or to sling stones right-handed or left-handed. They were from the tribe of Benjamin, which was Sha'ul's tribe, and the defection of some of his men to David was a sure sign that the pendulum had swung against the faithless king. Even though they were Sha'ul's fellow tribesmen, they recognized that YHVH had chosen faithful David. Ahiezer

the Benjaminite chief and Joash the sons of Shemaah the Gibeathite; Jeziel and Pelet the sons of Azmaveth; Berakah, Jehu the Anathothite, and Ishmaiah the Gibeonite, a mighty warrior among the Trinity (see Ej - [David's Mighty Warriors](#)); Jeremiah, Jahaziel, Johanan, Eluzai, Jerimoth, Bealiah, Shemariah and Shephatiah the Haruphite; Elkanah, Ishiah, Azarel, Joezar and Jashobeam the Korahites; and Joelah and Zeadiah the sons of Jeroham from Gedor (First Samuel 27:2b; First Chronicles 12:1-7).

Some Gadites defected to David at his stronghold in the wilderness. They were brave warriors, ready for battle and able to handle the shield and spear. They were fierce as lions, and they were as swift as gazelles in the mountains. Fierce as lions and swift as gazelles means they were mighty and experienced warriors. Ezer was the chief, Obadiah the second in command, Eliab the third, Mishmannah the fourth, Jeremiah the fifth, Attai the sixth, Eliel the seventh, Johanan the eighth, Elzabad the ninth, Yirmeyah the tenth and Makbannai the eleventh. These Gadites were army commanders; the least was a match for a hundred, and the greatest a thousand. This description is not about their rank, but their reputation. It was they who crossed the Jordan in the first month when it was overflowing all its banks (which makes the Gadites' achievement all the more noteworthy), and they put to flight everyone living in the valleys, to the east and to the west (First Chronicles 12:8-15).

Other Benjamites and some men from Y'hudah also came to David in his stronghold. David went out to meet them and said: If you have come to me in peace to help me, I am ready for you to join me. But if you have come to betray me to my enemies when my hands are free from violence, may the God of our ancestors see it and judge you. For some reason David feared possible treachery. Perhaps he remembered his betrayal by Doeg the Edomite, resulting the subsequent slaughter of virtually the entire priestly community (see Bd - [Sha'ul Kills the Priests of Nov](#)). Then the Ruach HaKodesh came upon (Hebrew: *labesh* meaning *clothed Himself*) Amasai, chief of the Thirty (see Ej - [David's Mighty Warriors](#)), and he said: We are yours, David! We are with you, son of Jesse! Success, success to you, and success to those who help you, for your God will help you. Amasai's words, therefore, have the character of prophecy, rather than mere well wishing. So David received them and made them leaders of his raiding bands (First Chronicles 12:16-18).

Some of the tribe of Manasseh defected to David when he went with the Philistines to fight against Sha'ul. (He and his men did not help the Philistines because, after consultation, their rulers sent him away. They said: It will cost us our heads if he deserts to his master Sha'ul). When David went to Ziklag, these were the men of Manasseh who defected to him: Adnah, Jozabad, Jediael, Michael, Jozabad, Elihu and Zillethai, leaders of units of thousands in Manasseh. They helped David against raiding bands, for all of them were brave warriors, and they were commanders in his army.

Day after day men came to help David, until he had a great army, like the army of God (First Chronicles 12:19-22).

David's Raids: Now being stationed in the southeast corner of Philistine territory, David and his men went up and raided the Geshurites, probably a small tribe dwelling between Philistia and Egypt (Joshua 13:2); the Girzites, Canaanites occupying Gezer, a town to the northeast of Philistia, and the long hated Amalekites, on the eastern frontier of Egypt. From ancient times these peoples had lived in the land extending to Shur, on the eastern frontier of Egypt, all the way to Egypt, but they were living within the borders of the Promised Land. (First Samuel 27:8). Therefore, David was merely finishing some of the work left undone by Joshua and the Judges, because YHVH had commanded the total destruction of these people earlier (Exodus 17:14; Joshua 13:13; First Samuel 15:2-3).

Whenever David attacked an area, he did not leave a man or woman alive, but took sheep and cattle, donkeys and camels, and clothes (see Af - [The Problem of Holy War in the TaNaKh](#)). Then he returned to Achish regularly to share the spoil with the king of Gath. When Achish asked, "Where did you go raiding today?" While actually raiding Jewish enemies, David would say that he had raided various tribes in Judah. It was deceptive, but necessary to stay alive. David would say: Against the Negev of Y'hudah, 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" (First Samuel 27:9-11).

In fact David fought against their common enemies, nevertheless, Achish trusted David and therefore was deceived in his report. Achish said to himself (because of his false belief that David did his raiding in the Negev of Y'hudah), "He has become so utterly despised to his own people of Isra'el, that he will be my servant for life" (First Samuel 27:12). Another Philistine of Gath (Goliath) had likewise prematurely predicted much the same thing for David's fellow Israelites (17:9). It didn't work out too well for him either.

The Preparation for War: When David was living in Ziklag, making his various raids, the Philistines gathered their forces to fight against Isra'el. Achish commanded David, "You must understand that you and your men will accompany me in the army." David and his men were to become part of the army of Gath against his own people, the Israelites. David's answer was ambiguous: Then you will see for yourself what your servant can do. He was bluffing. He was buying time because he had no other choice. David had no intention of fighting against his Jewish brothers. At just the right moment, he and his men would switch sides and fight against the Philistines. Achish replied: Very well, I will make you the head of my royal bodyguard for life (First Samuel 28:1-2).