

I Samuel

Lesson 42 - Chapter 27 and 28

David has given up all hope in reconciling with the unstable and thoroughly fallen King Saul; as a result he took the drastic and morally questionable step of moving his large and growing army of disaffected Israelites and (no doubt) their families out of Israel after he made a deal with the Philistine King of Gath. Some years earlier David fled to Moab and had intentions of allying with the King of Moab and residing there; but a prophet, Gad, told David that he was not to leave Judah and live outside of Israel to escape Saul (yet here he was doing just that).

Achish welcomed David and his 600 men as defectors, whereas only a couple of years earlier he had seized David as he fled, alone, from Saul's wrath. David had to pretend that he was insane in order to escape to Judah and Moab. But now he has voluntarily returned to Philistia with a bargaining chip: an army to help the King of Gath achieve his ambitions.

At first David and his men stayed in the royal city of Gath as guests of the King but that wore thin on both sides so David asked if he could be granted a place out in the countryside to move his army. Achish was only too glad to comply because no doubt there was friction between David's people and his from both a political and a social perspective. After all we do have a large contingent of Hebrews suddenly moving in with what had been up to now a long-time sworn enemy; an enemy with a substantially different culture (a pagan Philistine culture) than that of these Israelites.

It's important to understand that just as Israel had been a confederation of 12 independent tribes ever since they entered the Promised Land under Joshua, and that Saul was the first to have some limited success in uniting these tribes towards nationhood, so it was for the Philistines. Philistia was not a sovereign nation under a single government leader. At this time it consisted of 5 independent kings over 5 cities and their outlying territories. They were a confederation of 5 small kingdoms consisting of the same ethnic people and they were close allies, but that's as far as it went. So the King of Gath made this decision on his own to allow David and his army to settle in his territory. The other 4 Philistine kings probably didn't benefit from this arrangement and even thought it dangerous. In fact we'll see in the next chapter that they were quite suspicious of David.

Achish assigned David the village and area of Ziklag for his own. For David this was ideal; this

would have been a racially mixed village comprised of some Hebrews and some Philistines. Ziklag was at one time an Israelite town belonging to Judah; that the Philistines captured it and now controlled it by no means meant that the Hebrews were kicked out. Rather those Hebrews remained who were willing to accept vassal status or even subjugation to Achish (or those who really had no means to leave and go elsewhere) and they were joined by Philistines who moved in. This would have been a much more comfortable and familiar accommodation for David and all of his men and their families than the thoroughly Philistine capital city of Gath.

Further David was deep enough into Philistine territory to discourage Saul from pursuing him, yet far enough into the Philistine countryside that Achish wouldn't be entirely aware of David's daily activities. But there was disadvantage as well; Ziklag was sufficiently isolated to be vulnerable to attack from the various tribes of desert marauders including the Amalekites.

Let's re-read part of chapter 27 to get started.

RE-READ 1ST SAMUEL 27: 7 – end

Once David and his men had gained a measure of trust from Achish and established themselves in their territory of Ziklag (a time listed as 1 year and 4 months), there began a substantial change in their behavior; they attacked and plundered nearby tribes as a means to make a living. No doubt they learned much about Philistine military tactics and methods and this served them well both now in their raiding and later on when David was King and had to take on the Philistines in battle. Our CJB and others say that David's army especially picked on the Geshurites, the Gezerites, and the Amalekites. Actually it was probably just the Geshurites and the Amalekites. The Hebrew word typically translated as Gezerites is **Gizri** and it literally means "separated or cut-off ones". The Geshurite people were known to have lived primarily in the Transjordan region, but there is record of a group of them migrating to the Gaza area. So very probably the intention of this Biblical wording was originally meant to explain that those who David attacked were some Geshurites who had migrated to the upper Sinai, towards Shur. They were a band of Geshurites who had **gizri** (separated themselves) from the main tribal stomping grounds on the east side of the Jordan River and moved near to Philistine territory.

In any case David's methods were utterly ruthless; his army killed everyone they encountered, men and women, and took all their belongings and their domesticated animals as loot. Very probably the Geshurites were allies of the Amalekites (or at least on friendly terms) and so from one perspective David may have felt quite justified in annihilating the Geshurites along with the mortal enemies of God, Amalek. But on the other hand there is no mention that David felt that he was fighting a Holy War or that he was under God's direction to slaughter these folks (and I seriously doubt that David was actually so delusional as to think that it was a pious act to regularly plunder and kill them).

Both Christian and Jewish Bible commentators have strained to find proper justification for David to engage in such activities; some have gone so far as to make the killing and looting a divinely directed purpose (even if it was mysterious). I cannot go that route. There is no attempt by the writer of these passages to characterize David's attacks as good or evil, but merely to report them as historical fact. The purpose is specifically to raid and plunder and then David would report the results to Achish. Without doubt the devious and cunning David is working both sides of the highway; he is attacking enemies of Israel, which will endear him to the many clans that form Israelite Judah; and those who he is attacking are apparently also not friends of the Philistines so the Philistines are OK with it too. By bringing a report of his activities to Achish, and certainly a portion of the booty as a gift, David is gaining Achish's trust and admiration as well as increasing Achish's treasury.

Verse 10 paints a picture of David's nearly complete autonomy as he operates his army out of Ziklag. The king of Gath doesn't tell David who to raid; rather he asks David who David has decided to raid. "Who are you raiding today?" asks Achish, and David would tell him, "the Negev of Judah, or the Negev of the Jeremeelites, or the Negev of the Kenites" or something along those lines. What is instructive is that it is always the Negev of somebody; Negev has become a formal place name but in David's day it more meant "the southern territory", or simply "the south". Today we would identify these areas as those that center around Beersheba and then further south to areas approaching the Arabian Peninsula. Notice that these areas are far away from Saul's area of influence, the north of Canaan, thus giving Israel's king no cause to oppose David's forays.

Verse 11 says that the reason that David killed all the Amalekites and Geshurites was so that they didn't report the details of his activities to Achish; thus we are left with no doubt that David's purpose for slaughtering these people had little if anything to do with God's general command to Israel to destroy Amalek. Killing those people allowed David to operate in secret; King Achish knew only of the amount of plunder that David decided to tell him about. David could have amassed much more in the way of weapons and wealth than Achish had any idea about. Further the Philistines were not barbarians and they may not have approved of David's ruthlessness or tactics.

But verse 12 reveals something that we must not take lightly; that because David operated in the Negev of Judah (meaning territory that belonged to the tribe of Judah, his own tribe), Achish figured that David must now be seen as a pariah to his own people. And thus he has burned all bridges to his past and David is now nothing less than a naturalized Philistine.

Are we to assume that David has completely fooled Achish and has no intent of actually being loyal to Philistia? Could it be that this whole thing is a ruse and David is actually doing things distasteful to him, but it is all for a higher purpose? Or is David so far off the reservation that he truly has let his circumstances dictate that the dark side of his character, his evil inclination, has taken firm hold? It's almost as though he's at least got one foot onto the same road that Saul eventually chose and it led to a failed kingship and total abandonment by Yehoveh. As I said earlier, this topic is carefully avoided by commentators because of the can of worms that it opens. But I think that it is one that demonstrates a great lesson to us. Heroes (including Bible heroes) are by nature flawed; and yet those major flaws are often what facilitate their heroic actions.

I can recall my father who served in WWII telling me about General Patton, and that he was loathed by his men and feared by his enemies. This was because Patton was as arrogant as a Roman Emperor, as attention seeking as a Diva, as ruthless as Genghis Khan, and as stone cold as a mortician. But he was also a brilliant tactician and simply loved war. He had no use in this world if it wasn't as a warrior. Patton was a typically flawed hero who achieved great victories largely because he had no problem doing things other men would never think to do or allow themselves to do.

David can be legitimately called a type, a shadow, of a Messiah. The true Messiah would even come from David's hereditary lineage. But that in no way means that David WAS an early version of Messiah; nor does it mean that David's character is to be compared with Yeshua's. If we can learn anything from this it is that David was a mere man even though he was hand picked by Yehoveh to be the first King over a united and sovereign Israel. He could be tempted and fail; he could be moral and idealistic and yet commit terrible injustices out of pragmatism. When faced with personal peril he could be unbelievably courageous (as in the Goliath incident), and he could become fearful and take any path to survival no matter who else was harmed in the process (as in the priests of Nob massacre). And here we find David unapologetically throwing in with Israel's arch enemy, the Philistines, for protection and friendship. In fact there is every indication that unless God intervened yet again, David could have remained in the service of Achish as a Philistine all of his days. There is no hint of a plan by David to eventually return to his own people in Judah.

David had a heart for God, for this there can no debate; but he also had a desire for life and to live as a leader of men. We'll find out later that he also had a desire for beautiful women, no matter what their legal marital status. He had a bit of a crusader mentality and so would put his own life on the line to right what he saw as moral wrongs. He valued life on the one hand, but on the other hand he could take life without remorse if he felt it was justifiable in his own eyes. He was amazingly deep and introspective as demonstrated by his many Psalms; he was also impulsive and rash as demonstrated by his determination to kill Nabal for merely being insulted, and to keep his own activities private by killing countless men and women so that Achish couldn't question them. And yet, God loved him and used him mightily and (outside of God's own Son, Yeshua) may be the most revered Bible hero by Christians and Jews, and the most beloved of the divine Father.

This ought to give each of us who loves the Lord the greatest hope. Even when we fail, miserably, provided we maintain unwavering loyalty to God, He will continue to claim us. Even through those stages of our lives that we're too embarrassed to reveal to those closest to us, and after some of our darkest moments, God can still use us for His Kingdom if we will stick to Him and not close off the possibility (on our own accord) due to our shame and guilt and belief that there is no way that we are anything but shattered and useless vessels.

Folks, for unfathomable reasons God decided to love mankind and to use imperfect beings to achieve His perfect and holy purposes. Despite the rocky road, and doubling back, and false starts, and failed attempts that are inherent to all the endeavors of humankind the Creator made a choice. It is common among Christians to say, "Well, God uses men because they are all He has to use". Not true. Yehoveh has legions of Angels to do His bidding. They are more obedient and more powerful than we are. They are created more holy and even allowed into God's presence. Yehoveh didn't choose David because David was more perfect or more able than other men; He chose David because He foreknew that despite his failures and stumbling David would always choose Yehoveh.

We all have a little David in us, but we also all have a little Saul in us. So who among us will become David; who will become Saul? Which we become is the result of our free wills not some unchangeable cosmic destiny that we were born under. Saul was not brought into this world condemned to become the Anti-King, and David was not born with assurance of becoming the anointed King. Saul and David each knew the God of Israel, and each also put their foot onto the wrong path more than once; one corrected his way, sincerely sought forgiveness and went on to become God's friend. The other embraced the wrong path, shook his fist at God and became God's enemy.

Let's move on to chapter 28.

READ 1ST SAMUEL CHAPTER 28 all

The political situation is that a major confrontation is brewing between Israel and the Philistines. Verse 1 begins, "in those days"; this is a standard Hebrew phrase that is meant to give us a time reference and to initiate a new subject. Therefore what this chapter describes sequentially happened after the events of chapter 27, yet not long after so there is a definite connection between the two stories.

The reasons for this coming war aren't given because they're not relative to the purpose of the story. Achish says to David that it's a foregone conclusion that David will fight on the side of the Philistines against his fellow Hebrews. Right?

David was caught in a vise. Up to now his removal from his own people Israel and his binding himself to Israel's enemy, Philistia, proved advantageous and highly profitable. But he had chosen to participate in a dangerous game and it was only a matter of time before he would have to take a public stance: would he fight for his own people or against them? Even more, who are his people, now? With whom is he identified?

David responds to Achish such that Achish takes it to mean that David has given unquestioned loyalty to him. He is so taken by David's response that in verse 2 Achish makes David his **somer le'rosh** ("a keeper of my head"); that is his personal bodyguard. But if one looks closely at what David said to Achish the words were rather ambiguous. There was no promise of loyalty and really no commitment to fight alongside Achish. Rather all David said was that the king was well aware of what David's fighting capabilities were. If we stopped right here we'd think that David would do many things to enrich himself and aid the Philistines in the process if necessary, but there is little chance he'd actually fight against his own brethren on Achish's behalf. Thus that's why he was being so clever and vague in his response; but we'd be wrong.

To set the stage for what happens next the writer or editor of this portion of 1st Samuel reminds us that the greatest Prophet, Samuel, had died. In fact he had died before David defected to Philistia. Further after his death King Sha'ul had, for some unspoken reason, expelled all the diviners and necromancers from Israel (was it some temporary pang of religious fervor upon Samuel's death that prompted this?)

Necromancers were those who conjured up the spirits of the dead and communicated with them. There were other diviners who openly made contact with demonic spirits. No matter, the Torah Law forbids such a thing on any level.

CJB Leviticus 19:31 "Do not turn to spirit-mediums or sorcerers; don't seek them out, to be defiled by them; I am ADONAI your God. (Lev 19:31 CJB)

CJB Leviticus 20:6 "The person who turns to spirit-mediums and sorcerers to go fornicating after them- I will set myself against him and cut him off from his people. (Lev 20:6 CJB)

Verse 4 sets the scene: The Philistines have advanced for war and set up a battle camp at **Shunem**, which was located on a mountainside opposite of Gilboa where King Saul set up his opposing battle camp. Gilboa was located on the north-eastern edge of the Jezreel Valley. No doubt the two sides could see one another (that was customary in those days); by foot the two camps were no more than 2 hours apart. So we see that the coming battle would take place where countless battles had been fought for centuries, and would be fought for millennia: the Valley of Jezreel, the same place where the Battle of Armageddon will be waged. This was well north of Judah and the Negev where David operated. And this makes sense because Saul's tribal coalition consisted entirely, now, of the northern Israelite tribes and this is where the Philistines would have desired to operate more freely since their ally David had Judah under control.

When Saul took a long look at the Philistine army arrayed before him he went into a panic. Already the utter darkness of despair had gathered around Saul. He was condemned; he knew it, he felt it, and his tormented conscience convulsed in the knowledge of it. What was going to happen when the sun rose tomorrow and the two armies raced at one another with deadly intention? His overwhelming fear can only be understood in that it was finally sinking in that he

was on his own: the Lord God had abandoned him completely and permanently (after all, if not for this reason then what?) He had fought the Philistines on a number of occasions and usually came out with victory but this time he was filled with foreboding and terror. It was understood in that era that the first thing that any army did before firing the first arrow in anger was to consult their gods for direction. No doubt the Philistines had consulted with Dagan and were confident of victory. But what of Saul? Samuel made it clear that God had withdrawn from Saul and no amount of groveling or insistence would reverse the situation. Saul had no gods of his own to consult.

Knowing that he desperately needed some kind of direction and wisdom from the spiritual sphere to have any chance against the Philistines, he proceeded as though by using the standard Torah protocols in a mechanical fashion that the Lord would have little choice but to communicate with him and give him what he sought. Verse 6 explains that he used every means known to him to consult God but received no response. Thus we get a brief list of the Biblically approved ways that God communicated with men: by dreams, by Urim, and by Prophets. Dreams were a means that the Lord often talked to laypeople, common Israelites. The use of the Urim was limited to the High Priest and the passage saying only "Urim" is just short hand for not only the Urim and Thummim stones but also for choosing lots. Prophets spoke God's wisdom to the Kings. So not through his own dreams and not through the High Priest did God speak to Saul; and of course since Samuel was dead, Saul had no prophet to bring the Lord's oracle to him. To whom could he turn for answers?

Sha'ul took his usual route; he tried to go around God's laws and commands that he might obtain God's wisdom in an alternative way. Since you can't force a dream upon yourself or anyone else, and since the High Priest apparently tried in vein in Saul's presence but the Urim and Thummim would produce no answer, the only remaining choice was to get a Prophet to give Saul God's wisdom. And since Samuel, his prophet, was dead the only way to accomplish that was to have a necromancer call up Samuel from the grave.

As I was contemplating this I thought to myself, isn't that the way of humans in all ages and eras? Even Christians at times tend to think that we can ignore God's laws and commands and instead ask the Lord to bless our way. We get ourselves into a dire situation as a result, and then we hope (expect?) that the Lord will give us a different and better answer to our problem using unconventional (even un-Biblical) means. Or because He's merciful and He loves us, he'll suspend His eternal laws and commands just this once and give us a solution that we prefer better. Like Saul we try to find the loophole and go around the Lord's ways and principles and patterns, sincerely believing that perhaps another way will lead us to Him. It sounds so irrational when said out loud, but so logical when you try it.

Saul decided to suspend the law he had, as king, invoked: that all diviners and necromancers were to be expelled from Israel and if any remained and practiced their black arts they were to be executed. He invoked such a law rightly; communicating with spirits of the dead was one of the most heinous crimes against Yehoveh. But the moment he felt threatened, and his soul felt hollow from the absence of God, the King saw no conflict in trying to obtain the services of a spiritualist for himself.

We can look at this and chuckle a little at this ancient superstitious mind; but such beliefs live on today in abundance. You can go to the local Yellow Pages and find Fortune Tellers by the dozens. Politicians, the famous and the wealthy especially seek private Spiritual Advisors. I've seen TV Pastors invoke Nostradamus and the Mayan Calendar to back up their predictions, all the while calling on Jesus. How about the use of Tarot Cards, séances, Ouija boards, and Voo Doo? Some may think they're as harmless as playing Monopoly; but others are dead serious in their attempt to contact spirits and ghosts for information. Every single one of these (no matter whether sought out by a Jew, Christian, or agnostic) is nothing more than an attempt to get around God in order to acquire a higher wisdom in a very similar manner that King Saul was trying.

King Saul tells his closest advisors to go and find him a female necromancer. The Hebrew term is **Ba'alath Ob**; it literally means, "Ghost wife". A little more than 5 miles northeast from **Shunem**, the Philistine encampment, was a place called En Dor where a well known **Ba'alath Ob** lived. She had apparently agreed to quit her practice instead of leaving the area. Let's be clear: in general the diviners and necromancers spoken of in the historical books of the Bible were Hebrews unless an alternate nationality was given for them.

So very hypocritically, Saul disguised himself and went to the woman and said that he wanted to know the future by means of her bringing up the dead person that he named. The ancients believed that the dead had information on the future and this was invariably the reason for attempting to consult the dead. "Bringing up" meant exactly that; the dead were thought to live underground in an underworld, therefore if you wanted to communicate with them they had to come "up" to the world above the ground. Even more the ghost had to be "**brought** up", often against their will. Saul came at night to this woman because these rituals occurred after dark.

But the woman was leery and so she said that this wasn't something she ought to do since the king had ordered it stopped. In fact she thought it may have been a test, an attempt to entrap her that would surely lead to her death. But Sha'ul swore to the woman in Yehoveh's name that this was not the case and that no harm would come to her. Isn't it bizarre that here was Saul consorting in the act of Black Magic to consult dead spirits (a capital offense in the Torah

Law), but then swearing in the name of the God of Israel as proof of his sincerity to hold the **Ba'alath Ob** harmless! Saul wanted the divine to come to him by means of the anti-divine! Oh how I wish this was a rare occurrence among God's people but sadly it is all too common.

We'll continue next week to exam the King of Israel's attempt to contact God by means of witchcraft.