

Week 13: *David among the Philistines*

Hook



Main Point: God remains faithful when we are discouraged.

A March 2022 report from the American Psychological Association found that 87 percent of the 3,012 U.S. adults polled reported that a “constant stream of crisis without a break over the last two years” significantly impacted their mental health. At the time of the survey, the world was two years into the COVID-19 pandemic and weeks after Russia invaded Ukraine. Lindsey McKernan, an associate professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Vanderbilt University Medical Center, described the state of Americans’ mental health, saying Americans were “already in an overwhelmed and depleted place,” and that the invasion was “new threat to our safety.”¹

Q: In what ways have the stressors of the past few years impacted your mental and emotional state?

Q: How do you typically respond to challenges? How does that response change as new challenges are added to existing ones?

Q: What is the best course of action when you feel depleted? What sorts of behaviors make things worse when you are depleted?

RECAP: In this section of our study (weeks 8–17), David was on the run from Saul. It’s a long period in our study and in the text because it was a long period in David’s life – eight years. The text will continue to contrast Saul and David, showing David’s integrity and trust in the Lord. Last week, we saw David spare Saul’s life for the second time and Saul admit that David was more righteous than he was. That would be the last time David and Saul would ever see each other. This week, we’ll see David flee to Israel’s

enemy, the Philistines, and how he navigates staying faithful to God while serving a pagan king.

It is during this time that David wrote most of the psalms that are labeled in relation to particular events in his life (Psalms 56, 34, 57, 142, 52, 63, 54). Other psalms may have been written during this time as well, but they are not specifically labeled as such. This season of David's life, particularly, taught him to lean on God as his refuge and fortress.

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Book

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1 Samuel 27:1–6 [Read]

Talking Point 1: Remain focused on God's promises during seasons of exhaustion and fear.

Q: Why did David feel the need to flee to the land of the Philistines?

This is the first time in the story we have heard David's internal thoughts, the thoughts of his heart (27:1). David was discouraged, and concluded that, one day, he would "perish at the hands of Saul" (v. 1). God promised David that he would sit on the throne of Israel, yet David allowed his circumstances to negatively and falsely inform his thought life. Was this the same man who had once bravely faced Goliath? Years on the run had seemingly taken its toll. How long would David have to wait for God's promises to be fulfilled? As Ron Moore and Bob Russell put it, "Samuel's anointing oil had lost its fragrance."²

This was a huge shift, and the story makes it abundantly clear that David went to the land of the Philistines *only because* he came to the conclusion that Saul would kill him. Certainly, the God who had promised David the throne would continue to protect him and provide for him despite Saul's looming threat. However, in this instance, David's emotions took the driver's seat and he bought into a lie.

David chose to go to Gath, where he had briefly fled earlier in the story, after he had eaten the showbread from the tabernacle and been given Goliath's sword (21:10). At that time, he was afraid of Achish, the king of Gath, and pretended to be a madman before him so that Achish told his servants to send David away. At this point, the king's name is still Achish, but it is unclear whether it's the same king or his son or even if "Achish" is simply a title, not a name, such as "Pharaoh" in Egypt.³ Even if it were the same person, it's believable that he wouldn't have remembered David nor have realized it was the same person. This time, David came with his 600 men and their families with a formal request for asylum. It is unlikely that anyone would have recognized him.

When David arrived at Gath, he lived "with Achish" with all 600 men and their families (27:3). This doesn't mean that they all dwelled under the same roof; that's a lot of people! It's referring to living in the royal city (27:5). The opening few verses don't describe David officially asking for asylum, but that is what would have had to happen with that many people (and "with Achish" implies it). In that culture, David would have had to come before the king and make a covenant, a suzerain/vassal treaty like the one God had made with Israel. The suzerain (Achish) would provide David (the vassal) a place to live and protection from David's enemies and in return, David would give him a

percentage of his crops, flocks or spoils from war along with any other stipulations Achish required.

The text doesn't give us any of the details of their covenant, but in the next section, David went out to war for Achish and brought spoils back to him, further supporting the implication that this was a suzerain-vassal treaty (27:8–12).⁴ David wasn't joining Gath; he was seeking asylum in a foreign nation. But David asked for their own land outside the royal city (27:5).

In a suzerain-vassal treaty, a vassal was typically given a plot of land to work so he could give a portion of his flocks or crops back to the suzerain. But David and his men weren't currently in the business of farming or shepherding; they were an army. Their trade deal with Achish was that they would go to war for him and bring back the spoils. Since they weren't farming or raising animals, it was somewhat unusual for David to ask Achish for land as well. Yet Achish gave him an entire town.

The exact location of Ziklag is unknown, but it is in the Negev, which is geographically far from Gath. This allowed David and his people to remain separate from the Philistines even while serving Gath as vassals. Ziklag was also part of the inheritance God promised to the tribe of Judah, so this was David receiving what God intended to be his anyway (Joshua 15:31), a foreshadowing of how David would finally take the land God had intended them to have from the beginning of the Exodus.

David is not perfect. This passage reminds us that even those with godly character can be weighed down by discouraging circumstances. Every one of us will face a time in the "wilderness," a season of waiting, trials and tribulations, a period in which things aren't working out the way we thought they would. It becomes easy to believe lies and lose sight of God's faithfulness. The question is, how will you respond?

Scripture memory, prayer and meditation on God's Word are crucial for navigating these times. Hebrews 3:13 points us to another vital element: the value of staying connected to other believers:

But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

The presence of invested and connected believers in your life can serve as a safeguard for you, keeping you from buying into the lies of the Enemy. Fight the temptation to isolate when you lose heart.

Q: How does worry impact your decision making?

Q: What role does Scripture memory play in helping you during times of discouragement?

Q: How has your LifeGroup Bible Study proven itself crucial during "wilderness" seasons in your life?

1 Samuel 27:7–11 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Remain loyal to God's kingdom.

Q: Why might the text tell us these were the inhabitants of the land “from of old”? What does this tell us about what didn't happen during the conquest of the Promised Land?

While David was in alliance with Achish, he went out to battle and brought the spoils back as his payment as a vassal. If we read this passage too quickly without paying attention to the names, we might miss what David did here. David attacked the non-Israelite people who were still living in the Promised Land. The Geshurites, Girzites and Amalekites were all enemies the Israelites were supposed to have driven out of the Promised Land but didn't. So were the Philistines, including Gath.

The fact that Achish was there at all was because Israel had never conquered the whole Promised Land as they were supposed to. Joshua 1–12 describes the battles of the conquest, but Joshua 13 lists all the cities that had yet to be conquered when Joshua died (Joshua 13:1–7). Joshua's last words to the people were that they would have to continue to fight, and if they were faithful, God would drive these enemies out of the land (Joshua 23:1–13). But Judges 2 tells us that Israel was unfaithful to God and worshipped the gods of the people around them, which is what He told them would happen if they remained in the land. When a godly judge was in leadership, the people would follow God, but when that judge died, they went back to idolatry. This made God so angry that He said He would no longer drive out the nations from the land (Judges 2). And so there were Philistines and other people groups in the land in the time of David.

David fought the enemies of Israel, fulfilling what God had originally told Israel to do during the conquest (27:8). But David told Achish that he was fighting against the people of Israel (Judah) and their allies (Jerahmeelites and Kenites) (27:10) (Israel wasn't supposed to make allies of foreign nations in the Promised Land; Saul was breaking this law.) Achish thought David was making himself an enemy of Israel and so would never be able to return there and would always be Achish's vassal (27:12). In reality, David was conquering more of the Promised Land for Israel and driving these pagan nations out of the land.⁵ Although lying and deception are wrong, God used David's sinful actions to accomplish some of the cleansing of the land that He had intended the first few generations of Israel to do. David remained loyal to Israel while serving as a vassal of Achish. Though he deceived Achish, a pagan king, he remained loyal to God, his true king.

Q: In what ways did God demonstrate His faithfulness in this story?

Q: Who has your loyalty? What do you do when allegiance to God conflicts with your commitment to others?

1 Samuel 28:1–2 and Psalm 31 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Put your trust in the Lord and wait on Him.

Q: How did this part of the story put David in a hard position?

Q: How was David's answer to Achish somewhat ambivalent? How does the story leave us wondering exactly what David will do?

This is where David's actions placed him between a rock and a hard place. Achish trusted him and thought David was on his side. He believed that David has been attacking his own people on behalf of Achish. So when all the Philistine cities decided to gather their armies together to war against Israel, Achish told David that he will go into battle with Achish, assuming David would have no problem with it. As Achish's vassal, David was expected to go with him into battle. It was not a request.

David responded with an ambivalent, "Thus you shall see what your servant can do" (28:2). The "very well" in ESV is not as consistent with the Hebrew and makes it sound more as though David was agreeing to fight on Achish's side, but the literal Hebrew is simply "*thus/so* you will see." David was not saying this situation was "very well" with him. His ambivalence leaves his meaning open. Achish took it positively and answered – also using "thus" – that he would make David his chief guardian forever. But for us readers, who know he has been deceiving Achish, it is left open. Will he fight against Israel, or will he deceive Achish again? What was he really saying when he said to Achish, "You will see" – you'll see me turn on you in battle and destroy the Philistines, or you will see what God will do to rescue me?⁶

Samuel had prophesied that David would be king of Israel, not the chief of the guard for a Philistine king. How would he get out of this situation? Would he have to fight against his own nation to keep his cover with Achish or would he turn on Achish? Did David even have a plan or did his ambivalent answer show that he didn't know what he would do, but would trust God to provide a way out?

In Psalm 31, David provides us with a healthy response in times of crisis and uncertainty. "In you, O Lord, do I take refuge ... rescue me speedily!" (vv. 1–2). "But I trust in you, O Lord ... my times are in your hand, rescue me from the hands of my enemies!" (vv. 14–15). When we are in difficult situations, whether by circumstance or the result of our own sin, and we don't know what to do, all we can do is trust in Him. Later, we will see God rescue David from having to fight against Israel while being able to keep his favor with Achish (1 Samuel 29:1–11). God did provide a way out for David as He promises to do for us every time we are tempted to sin (1 Corinthians 10:13). We may not know exactly what God is doing or how or when He will rescue us. We just have to put our trust in Him and wait to see what He will do.

Q: Describe a time when God provided a way out of temptation for you.

Q: Why is it hard to wait for God's timing to rescue us? How can we grow in trust?

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Took

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In their book “Worn Out by Obedience: Recovering from Spiritual Fatigue,” Ron Moore and Bob Russell warn against the dangers of “self-counsel,” an act in which we refuse to listen to any voice but our own. This behavior can lead to lonely, dangerous places. About what to do when you’re weary and are in great danger of “self-counsel,” the authors have a suggestion.

God’s Word directs us from our counsel to His (Psalm 73:24). David, on his best days, said that God is the One who counsels him, and when his heart is saturated with Scripture, “even at night my heart instructs me” (16:7). Do you ever have nights when you can’t go to sleep? You toss and turn, and your mind begins to race. Then fear shows up. For those of you going through illness, nights can be the worst time. While others sleep, nights are lonely hours that invite your mind to entertain all the “what ifs,” and those “what ifs” never bring comfort. When our eyes are on our challenges, self-counsel takes over. Self-counsel opens the door for fear to walk in unchecked. However, when our focus is on the truth of Scripture, God is the One “who counsels [you].” Even when we are alone, “even at night,” comfort and encouragement is delivered to the heart focused on God’s Word.⁷

Q: In what ways is God’s Word remind us of His faithfulness?

Q: What verses do you meditate on when you feel depleted or discouraged?

Q: Who is the One “who counsels” you? What helps you to remain focused on God’s Word rather than “self-counsel”?

CHALLENGES

THINK: Are you currently working through discouragement and fatigue? What actions are you taking to keep the truth of Scripture at the forefront in your mind? Remember the words of Jesus in John 13:33: “I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.”

PRAY for God to reveal His will to you in His timing and give you the patience to wait for His timing even when things seem uncertain, and you aren't sure what to do. Thank God for always giving us a way out of temptation and pray for the strength and self-control to take the way out instead of giving in to temptation.

ACT: Commit to Christian community. Being here today is a great step! Remain steadfast in the consistency of your attendance in worship and LifeGroup Bible Study, particularly during seasons of discouragement.

NEXT TIME in *The Life of David*: Next week, we'll see Saul sink to his deepest sin yet – seeking the help of a medium rather than trusting in the Lord. This was Saul's lowest point, and his demise would soon follow.

¹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/health/health-news/americans-are-besieged-stress-poll-finds-rcna19288>

² Ron Moore and Bob Russell, [*Worn out by Obedience: Recovering from Spiritual Fatigue*](#) (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2017).

³ *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

⁴ Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Zondervan Academic, 2009).

⁵ Robert D. Bergen, 1–2 Samuel, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 1996).

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⁷ Ron Moore and Bob Russell, [*Worn out by Obedience: Recovering from Spiritual Fatigue*](#) (Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2017).