

David among the Philistines (or a wolf among the sheep)

1 Samuel 27:1-28:2

I was troubled by this part of the story. To start with, David flees Saul's pursuit by escaping to the Philistines. David goes to King Achish of Gath, one of the five main cities of the Philistines and the home of Goliath. David takes his two wives and 600 men and their households with him. I'm not sure what the total number of people was but it would have been a town of its own. King Achish gives David the town/region of Ziklag to dwell within, which remained the property of David and his line (although, there is debate where the actual location of Ziklag was). David remains in Ziklag for a year and four months. Perhaps this sounds fair enough - ?

However, while David is with the Philistines and King Achish, David leads the massacre of villages of the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites (traditional enemies of Judah/Israel). All of these people dwelt south of Judah with David making raids even as far as Egypt – some of these peoples may also have been enemies of the Philistines, e.g. the Amalekites), killing the men and the women so no-one can report back to Achish while taking all the goods and spoils for himself.

It is my understanding that this was not the usual practice of war. Most of the time peace was offered so the nation would become a vassal nation. If not, the men were killed and women and children made slaves (see Deuteronomy 20:10-15). David's brutality here might be compared to 2 Samuel 8 where he defeated Aram and Moab but didn't even kill all the males, putting them to use in his kingdom.

Do I see David as a private citizen indulging a penchant for banditry and raiding against people no-one cares about or a man who is the anointed heir of Judah/Israel acting according to God's command against the traditional enemies of Israel/Judah/God's nation (see Deuteronomy 20:16-18). But then again, David doesn't do things according to either of these passages in the law. Again, how do we reconcile a God of love with the massacre of whole villages.

Then, when the Philistines go to war against Israel again, Achish expects David to fight with the Philistines. David's words, "Now you will see for yourself what we can do" imply that David is about to fight against his own people. And Achish appoints David as his body-guard. Given that last's weeks discussion highlighted the portrayal of David as cultural/national hero, this is pushing the boundaries.

Some of the commentaries I read about this time was that it was not a spiritually fruitful time for David. No psalms were produced during this time. Instead, David is like a wolf among the ~~sheep~~ Philistines.

- Does this passage change your view of David and his relationship with God?
- Discuss David's decision to go to the Philistines to escape Saul. Was it understandable, a loss of faith or something else?
- David seeks to find favour with Achish and ends up in a situation of compromise – discuss (I am deliberately not giving clues on how to answer this question).
- David essentially becomes a bandit. There is a lot of massacring of various peoples who were Israel's enemies and taking the plunder. From last week, in light of Brueggemann's suggestion that 1 and 2 Samuel are morality plays, what does this say about the morality of the time. Can you find parallels to our own time?

- What might this story of Saul's persecution of David and his fleeing into enemy territory represent in modern times?
- How do you think the author wanted the reader to view this part of the story?
- What can we learn from David's time with the Philistines? Note that God is not mentioned or called upon at all throughout this passage.
- Have we had times when we moved to a place that was away from God in a spiritual and/or physical sense.