

CHAPTER 27

David was a man after God's own heart, and yet he had his faults, which are recorded, not for our imitation, but for our admonition; witness the story of this chapter, in which, though,

I. We find, to his praise, that he prudently took care of his own safety and his family's (v. 2-4) and valiantly fought Israel's battles against the Canaanites (v. 8-9), yet,

II. We find, to his dishonour,

1. That he began to despair of his deliverance (v. 1).
2. That he deserted his own country, and went to dwell in the land of the Philistines (v. 1, 5-7).
3. That he imposed upon Achish with an equivocation, if not a lie, concerning his expedition (v. 10-12).

<0270>1 SAMUEL 27:1-7

DAVID'S RETURN TO GATH

Here is,

I. The prevalency of David's fear, which was the effect of the weakness of his faith (v. 1): *He said to his heart* (so it may be read), in his communings with it concerning his present condition, *I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul*. He represented to himself the restless rage and malice of Saul (who could not be wrought into a reconciliation) and the treachery of his own countrymen, witness that of the Ziphites, once and again; he looked upon his own forces, and observed how few they were, and that no recruits had come in to him for a great while, nor could he perceive that he got any ground; and hence, in a melancholy mood, he draws this dark conclusion: *I shall one day perish by the hand of Saul*. But, *O thou of little faith! wherefore dost thou doubt?* Was he not anointed to be king? Did not that imply an assurance that he should be preserved to the kingdom? Though he had no reason to trust Saul's promises, had he not all the reason in the world to trust the promises of God? His experience of the particular care Providence took of him ought to have encouraged him. He that has

delivered does and will. But unbelief is a sin that easily besets even good men. When *without are fightings, within are fears*, and it is a hard matter to get over them. *Lord, increase our faith!*

II. The resolution he came to hereupon. Now that Saul had, for this time, returned to his place, he determined to take this opportunity of retiring into the Philistines' country. Consulting his own heart only, and not the ephod or the prophet, he concludes, *There is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape into the land of the Philistines*. Long trials are in danger of tiring the faith and patience even of very good men. Now,

1. Saul was an enemy to himself and his kingdom in driving David to this extremity. He weakened his own interest when he expelled from his service, and forced into the service of his enemies, so great a general as David was, and so brave a regiment as he had the command of.

2. David was no friend to himself in taking this course. God had appointed him to set up his standard *in the land of Judah*, ⁽¹²¹⁵⁾ 1 Samuel 22:5. There God had wonderfully preserved him, and employed him sometimes for the good of his country; why then should he think of deserting his post? How could he expect the protection of the God of Israel if he went out of the borders of the land of Israel? Could he expect to be safe among the Philistines, out of whose hands he had lately escaped so narrowly by feigning himself mad? Would he receive obligations from those now whom he knew he must not return kindness to when he should come to be king, but be under an obligation to make war upon? Hereby he would gratify his enemies, who bade him go and serve other gods that they might have wherewith to reproach him, and very much weaken the hands of his friends, who would not have wherewith to answer that reproach. See what need we have to pray, *Lord, lead us not into temptation*.

III. The kind reception he had at Gath. Achish bade him welcome, partly out of generosity, being proud of entertaining so brave a man, partly out of policy, hoping to engage him for ever to his service, and that his example would invite many more to desert and come over to him. No doubt he gave David a solemn promise of protection, which he could rely upon when he could not trust Saul's promises. We may blush to think that the word of a Philistine should go further than the word of an Israelite, who, if an Israelite indeed, would be without guile, and that the city of Gath should be

a place of refuge for a good man when the cities of Israel refuse him a safe abode. David,

1. Brought his men with him (v. 2) that they might guard him, and might themselves be safe where he was, and to recommend himself the more to Achish, who hoped to have service out of him.

2. He brought his family with him, his *wives* and *his household*, so did all *his men*, v. 2, 3. Masters of families ought to take care of those that are committed to them, to protect and provide for those of their own house, and to *dwell with them as men of knowledge*.

IV. Saul's desisting from the further prosecution of him (v. 4): *He sought no more again for him*; this intimates that notwithstanding the professions of repentance he had lately made, if he had had David in his reach, he would have aimed another blow. But, because he dares not come where he is, he resolves to let him alone. Thus many seem to leave their sins, but really their sins leave them; they would persist in them if they could. Saul sought no more for him, contenting himself with his banishment, since he could not have his blood, and hoping, it may be (as he had done, ^{<OR&S>1} Samuel 18:25), that he would, some time or other, *fall by the hand of the Philistines*; and, though he would rather have the pleasure of destroying him himself, yet, if they do it, he will be satisfied, so that it be done effectually.

V. David's removal from Gath to Ziklag.

1. David's request for leave to remove was prudent and very modest, v. 5.

(1.) It was really prudent. David knew what it was to be envied in the court of Saul, and had much more reason to fear in the court of Achish, and therefore declines preferment there, and wishes for a settlement in the country, where he might be private, more within himself, and less in other people's way. In a town of his own he might have the more free exercise of his religion, and keep his men better to it, and not have his righteous soul vexed, as it was at Gath, with the idolatries of the Philistines.

(2.) As it was presented to Achish it was very modest. He does not prescribe to him what place he should assign him, only begs it may be in some town in the country, where he pleased (beggars must not be choosers); but he gives this for a reason, "*Why should thy servant dwell in the royal city, to crowd thee, and disoblige those about thee?*" Note, Those

that would stand fast must not covet to stand high; and humble souls aim not to dwell in royal cities.

2. The grant which Achish made to him, upon that request, was very generous and kind (v. 6, 7): *Achish gave him Ziklag*. Hereby,

(1.) Israel recovered their ancient right; for Ziklag was in the lot of the tribe of Judah (^{<653>}Joshua 15:31), and afterwards, out of that lot, was assigned, with some other cities, to Simeon, ^{<695>}Joshua 19:5. But either it was never subdued, or the Philistines had, in some struggle with Israel, made themselves masters of it. Perhaps they had got it unjustly, and Achish, being a man of sense and honour, took this occasion to restore it. *The righteous God judgeth righteously.*

(2.) David gained a commodious settlement, not only at a distance from Gath, but bordering upon Israel, where he might keep up a correspondence with his own countrymen, and whither they might resort to him at the revolution that was now approaching. Though we do not find that he augmented his forces at all while Saul lived (for, ^{<800>}1 Samuel 30:10, he had but his *six hundred men*), yet, immediately after Saul's death, that was the rendezvous of his friends. Nay, it should seem, while he kept himself close because of Saul, multitudes resorted to him, at least to assure him of their sincere intentions, ^{<822>}1 Chronicles 12:1-22. And this further advantage David gained, that Ziklag was annexed to the crown, at least the royalty of it pertained to the kings of Judah, ever after, v. 6. Note, There is nothing lost by humility and modesty, and a willingness to retire. Real advantages follow those that flee from imaginary honours. Here David continued for some days, even *four months*, as it may very well be read (v. 7), or some days above four months: the Septuagint reads it, *some months*; so long he waited for the set time of his accession to the throne; for *he that believeth shall not make haste.*

^{<878>}1 SAMUEL 27:8-12

DAVID SMITES THE AMALEKITES

Here is an account of David's actions while he was in the land of the Philistines, a fierce attack he made upon some remains of the devoted nations, his success in it, and the representation he gave of it to Achish.

1. We may acquit him of injustice and cruelty in this action because those people whom he cut off were such as heaven had long since doomed to destruction, and he that did it was one whom heaven had ordained to dominion; so that the thing was very fit to be done, and he was very fit to do it. It was not for him that was anointed to fight the Lord's battles to sit still in sloth, however he might think fit, in modesty, to retire. He desired to be safe from Saul only that he might expose himself for Israel. He avenged an old quarrel that God had with these nations, and at the same time fetched in provisions for himself and his army, for by their swords they must live. The Amalekites were to be all cut off. Probably the Geshurites and Gezrites were branches of Amalek. Saul was rejected for sparing them, David makes up the deficiency of his obedience before he succeeds him. He smote them, and *left none alive*, v. 8, 9. The service paid itself, for they carried off abundance of spoil, which served for the subsistence of David's forces.

2. Yet we cannot acquit him of dissimulation with Achish in the account he gave him of this expedition.

(1.) David, it seems, was not willing that he should know the truth, and therefore spared none to carry tidings to Gath (v. 11), not because he was ashamed of what he had done as a bad thing, but because he was afraid, if the Philistines knew it, they would be apprehensive of danger to themselves or their allies by harbouring him among them and would expel him from their coasts. It would be easy to conclude, *If so he did, so will be his manner*, and therefore he industriously conceals it from them, which, it seems, he could do by putting them all to the sword, for none of their neighbours would inform against him, nor perhaps would soon come to the knowledge of what was done, intelligence not being so readily communicated then as now.

(2.) He hid it from Achish with an equivocation not at all becoming his character. Being asked which way he had made his sally, he answered, *Against the south of Judah*, v. 13. It was true he had invaded those countries that lay south of Judah, but he made Achish believe he had invaded those that lay south in Judah, the Ziphites for example, that had once and again betrayed him; so Achish understood him, and thence inferred that he *had made his people Israel to abhor him*, and so riveted himself in the interest of Achish. The fidelity of Achish to him, his good opinion of him, and the confidence he put in him, aggravate his sin in

deceiving him thus, which, with some other such instances, David seems penitently to reflect upon when he prays, *Remove from me the way of lying.*