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1 Samuel 27:1-12

21st Message

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# SELLING OUT UNDER STRESS

*SERIES: KING DAVID IN THE WILDERNESS*

The Christmas holidays can be a stressful time, a season when we keenly feel the tension between the way things ought to be and the way they really are. Rather than having a soothing effect upon us, the holidays often exacerbate the pain of old, unrealized longings. Today, as we embark on a New Year, many among us are more in touch with the deepest yearnings of their hearts than at any other time.

King David of Israel experienced many of the same tensions and longings during his wilderness wanderings. In the wilderness he realized he had yearnings that had never been satisfied. As a young boy, he had been consecrated king of Israel by the prophet Samuel. Life seemed to hold limitless possibilities for the boy king. In his first test, he had a glorious victory over the Philistine giant, Goliath. But shortly thereafter, David became a victim of Saul's jealousy, and he had to flee to the wilderness. Even there David could find no rest from the pursuing Saul and his armies. He found no place to call his own, no safe haven where he could settle down and live a normal life.

David's longing for a permanent home is our theme today as we take up our studies once more in the life of the Old Testament king. The key word in chapter 27, where we resume our studies, is the verb *yashab* (meaning, to sit, live, dwell, with the idea of settling down). This word is used six times in the chapter (vv. 3,5,5,7,8,11). David is driven by his desire for a permanent place to dwell. As long as Saul was king, David knew he had no hope of finding such in Israel, so he sets about finding a way to escape once and for all his stressful wilderness existence: He goes over to the Philistines to make his home among them. He decides to look to the world to meet his deep longings for a place of his own.

As we begin the New Year, I know that some of you are facing this very temptation. You feel that nothing could be worse than the prospect of another year of the same old cycle. You have lived in stressful circumstances so long you have grown weary. You are ready to go over to the other side for a while. Our text today serves as a warning when we are so tempted.

First Samuel 27, verses 1-4, sets the stage for our study.

## I. Seeking a Permanent Escape (27:1-4)

Then David said to himself, "Now I will perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than to escape [*escaping I will escape*] into the land of the Philistines. Saul then will despair of searching for me anymore in all the territory of Israel, and I will escape from his hand." So David arose and crossed over, he and the six hundred men who were with him, to Achish the son of Maach, king of Gath. And David lived with Achish at Gath, he and his men, each with his household, even David with his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the Carmelitess, Nabal's widow. Now it was told Saul that David had fled to Gath, so he no longer searched for him. (1 Sam 27:1-4 NASB)

### (a) Tensions of a Fugitive

What a remarkable departure this is for David from the previous chapter! He had just scored a notable victory with Saul, when the king had confessed his wrongdoing, before two armies, his own and David's. But now, just a short time later, the praise that had been heaped upon him is dampened by his own depression; the bright rays of hope are darkened by despair.

We can sense David's growing despondency in some of his songs that are assigned to this period, prior to his departure to Gath. His stress was long and drawn out, his soul downcast over the delay of the coming promised salvation. His plaintive questions, "Why?" and "How long?" are the prevalent themes of Psalms 10, 13 and 22:

**Why, O LORD, you do you stand far off?**

**Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble? (Ps 10:1 NIV)**

**How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?**

**How long will you hide your face from me? (Ps 13:1)**

**My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?**

**Why are you so far from saving me,**

**so far from the words of my groaning? (Ps 22:1)**

Yet, in the midst of David's depression, God continued to deliver his servant in amazing ways. The voice of the Lord reminding David of the sure promises of God came through Samuel, Jonathan, Abigail, and finally Saul himself. Further, the prophet Gad had directed David to take his stand in Judah and set up his standard there (22:5). But David has had enough. Verse 1 reveals the impact of the constant stress on his soul.

### (b) Too Much, Too Long!

Then David said to himself, "Now I will perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than to escape [*escaping I will escape*] into the land of the Philistines. Saul then will despair of searching for me anymore in all the territory of Israel, and I will escape from his hand." (27:1)

Notice that David no longer speaks to God: "Then David said to himself." How things have changed! David now speaks not to God, but to himself (literally, "to his heart"). There is no mention of prayer in this chapter. David has had enough. He senses that God is far off. The weight of responsibility is his now, he senses, not God's. He feels abandoned. Have you ever felt that way? If you have, remember that this is part of the curriculum for the wilderness.

And notice that although God had been faithful to deliver David again and again Saul's perspective remained the same. No matter what David did, or what Saul himself agreed to do, the king was still determined to murder David. As long as Saul remained in the land, David was working from a position of weakness, so he had no way of bringing an end to Saul's pursuit.

This is what leads David to seek a permanent, once-and-for-all end to his stress. The fugitive resolves, "Escaping, I will escape." To-

day, we would say, "I'm out of here!" The Hebrew may suggest a note of haste, as well as the intensification of the verbal idea. The verb is reflexive; David feels he must act for himself.

### (c) Escape to Gath

So David and his 500 men forsake Israel and set out for Gath. There they will offer their services to Achish, the king of Gath, Israel's arch enemy. "The narrator reveals the seriousness of the changeover by giving it considerable amount of space," and the fact that they take their families in tow.<sup>1</sup> Earlier, David had learned that Achish could be taken in. This is the same king before whom David had acted the part of the madman. So David sells himself and his men as professional mercenaries to Achish. No doubt Achish made a promise to protect David from Saul's armies. So David and his entourage move into the royal city. David's ploy is successful. Saul gives up his pursuit, and David gets the relief he so desperately sought.

Believers often adopt the same kind of solutions to their problems. Weary of walking by faith in an insecure wilderness, they make unholy alliances with the world in an effort to acquire permanent relief. Some angrily resign their jobs to seek better situations. Some unmarried believers, tiring of loneliness, marry unbelievers, hoping for relief. Others tire of marriage and make unholy alliances with the courts, which are all too eager to accommodate their plans for divorce.

There is a lesson for us here: we should never make life-changing decisions when we are depressed.

In the next scene, David makes a request of Achish.

## II. Settling Down in a Permanent Home (27:5-7)

Then David said to Achish, "If now I have found favor in your sight, let them give me a place in one of the cities in the country, that I may live there; for why should your servant live in the royal city with you?" So Achish gave him Ziklag that day; therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day. And the number of days that David lived in the country of the Philistines was a year and four months. (27:5-7)

### (a) A "Humble" Move

Although Gath apparently is a safe haven, David is still somewhat uneasy. All of his movements must be made in full view of the royal court, thus his activities are a bit restricted. So he makes a request of the king to live in another city, a place more in keeping with his station in life, in more "modest" surroundings, out in the fields. Achish immediately offers him Ziklag. But Achish has an ulterior motive. He "intended to use David and his troops to protect the southeastern flank of Philistia facing the tribal elements occupying the Negeb."<sup>2</sup>

But if Achish is pleased with this arrangement, David is even more so. He too has his reasons for accepting Achish's offer. David Roper comments:

Ziklag lay close to, the southern border of the land of Israel, quite well situated for David's purposes. It had the advantage of being away from Saul's territory and isolated from Gath and other centers of Philistine population. Originally it was an Israelite city that had fallen into Philistine hands. It was one of the Canaanite cities at first given to the tribe of Judah (Josh 15:31), and then handed over to Simeon (Josh 19:5; 1 Chr 4:30). The Philistines had seized it, but apparently never inhabited it. It was an abandoned town. David and his people moved in bag and baggage.

### (b) Settling Down at Last

At last, David and his men can settle down. They have their little corner of the world, far from the wilderness of fear, fright and flight to which they were accustomed. Peace was at hand. In Ziklag they could plough the fields and sow their crops. Here at last they could look forward to a hot meal. Here their children could play in safety. Here they could reflect with their wives, without fear of attack from Saul.

But paradoxically, in this safe haven David faces an even greater quandary than he ever confronted in the wilderness. As the newly acquired mercenary of Achish, Israel's enemy, would he turn on his brothers and jeopardize his destiny as Israel's future king, and with it the divine order of history? We find the answer in the next section.

## III. Living on the Razor's Edge (27:8-12)

Now David and his men went up and raided the Geshurites and the Girzites and the Amalekites; for they were the inhabitants of the land from ancient times, as you come to Shur even as far as the land of Egypt. And David attacked the land and did not leave a man or a woman alive, and he took away the sheep, the cattle, the donkeys, the camels, and the clothing. Then he returned and came to Achish. Now Achish said, "Where have you made a raid today?" And David said, "Against the Negev of Judah and against the Negev of the Jerahmeelites and against the Negev of the Kenites." And David did not leave a man or a woman alive, to bring to Gath, saying, "Lest they should tell about us, saying, 'So has David done and so has been his practice all the time he has lived in the country of the Philistines.'" So Achish believed David, saying, "He has surely made himself odious among his people Israel; therefore he will become my servant forever." (27:8-12)

The book of 1 Chronicles says that men from all the tribes of Israel began to defect from Saul and emigrate to Ziklag and identify with David's cause. "All of them were brave warriors," the Chronicler says, "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" (1 Chr 12:21-22).

David Roper's studies tell us what this great army accomplished:

From his base in Philistia David began to make sorties into the southern desert against some of Judah's ancient enemies: the Geshurites, Girzites and the Amalekites. These were aboriginal tribes who retained control of the land south of Judah, between Judah and Egypt and who were constantly harassing the Israeli settlers in the south. David plundered and looted village after village. But to keep the situation hidden from his Achish 'hosts' he had to adopt to policy of extermination, killing men, women and children, lest they inform on him. As the king's liege, David was required to give an account of his battles and share some of the booty from his victories. Achish would ask, 'Where did you go raiding today?' David would say, 'I've been raiding the Israelites and their allies, the Jerahmeelites (1 Chron. 2:9) and the Kenites (1 Sam. 30:29).' David had entered a course that demanded perpetual deceit. He had to keep lying to Achish, a deception utterly unworthy of his character. And yet, Achish is so deceived he thinks 'He has become odious to his people (literally, 'he has made himself stink'), now he will be my servant forever.'

The irony is that Achish thinks he has David as a loyal servant in *perpetuity* (Heb. *'olam*), when in fact, David has been uproot-

ing allies of the Philistines, who had been dwellers of the land from *perpetuity* (Heb. *olam*). Israelites in years to come would be stunned by David's success. Who was this David, they would ask, who could leap from the frying pan into the fire and not be scorched? Who was this man who gambled for high stakes in a foreign land and walked away a winner? Who was this man who was so confident that he manipulated Philistine cover to the advantage of Judah? This David was not just marvelously inventive, they would say, he seemed to be blessed with divine good fortune.

And how should we today regard this chapter in David's spiritual journey? Like any good accountant, at the end of the year we have to look at both sides of the ledger, the up side and the down side. Let's see how things add up.

#### IV. The Bottom Line of Selling Out

##### (a) Apparent Signs of Success

###### 1. Saul gives up his pursuit

It is obvious that David's plan met with a large measure of success. He made an alliance with the world in order to live less stressfully, with apparent success. Saul abandoned his pursuit, and David at last had his little corner of the world where no one could harm him.

###### 2. Achish is outwitted

David was the obvious winner in the battle of wits with Achish. Fokkelman comments: "The text...is framed by soliloquies" given over to the speeches of David and Achish. As they relate and the speeches overlap, it is clear "that the two men are by no means fighting for the same thing; each is doing his utmost to exploit the other for his own purposes." Notice that it is David takes the initiative in the speeches, and in his campaigns, and Achish only reacts to what he hears, and it is always a one-sided report.<sup>3</sup> Clearly, Achish was outmanned and outmatched. David comes across as the clear victor over the dull-minded Achish.

###### 3. David's campaigns are successful

David's sorties were incredibly successful. He accomplished what Saul was unable to do, that is, completely exterminate the Amalekites. Unlike Saul, who, at the cost of his own crown, left Agag alive, David took no prisoners. Notice, too, the loyalty of David's men to their leader. Not one of the more than 500 men leaked information to Achish about their exploits under David.

###### 4. David's army grows

David's reputation and personal charisma paid huge dividends during this period. Ziklag became the gathering place for new recruits. Choice men, drawn by David's charisma and unparalleled success, defected from Benjamin (Saul's own tribe) and Manasseh. The Chronicler labels them as top leadership ("captains of thousands") and highly skilled (ambidextrous) (1 Chr 12:1-2, 20).

David also attracted defectors from Gath during this period. The narrator carefully notes that David came to Gath with 600 troops, exactly the same number as the army that would subsequently have mercenaries from Gath, under the leadership of Ittai, in the service of David. "Six hundred men who had come with him from Gath" (2 Sam 15:18). It is interesting to note that Ittai remained loyal to David through thick and thin, although David had no intention of remaining loyal to his master, Achish.

##### 5. A permanent crown possession

Under the guise of humility, David requested permission to leave the royal court for a more "modest" city, out in the fields. Ziklag, the possession he was given, would become a permanent royal city of the kings of Judah long after the Philistines ceased to be a political factor.

If you were a stock holder in this modest kingdom you would have very little to complain about over this year-end report. The company realized more than 100% growth. It boasted rapid new developments, a corporate take over, employee advancement, and, most important of all, all of its competitors had been forced out of the market. But, there is a down side to this story of success.

##### (b) The Down Side of Success

###### 1. A cost to David's soul

While we marvel at David's brazen outward speech and his bold-faced lies to Achish, we note that inwardly he was silent. This was a barren time for David's soul. He wrote no poetry and sang no songs in Ziklag. Israel's sweet singer had nothing to sing about. This is the price of deception. "David's soul could no longer sing praises to God because he had forsaken the shelter of the Lord's wings for the walls of a man-made city" (David Roper). This is what happens when Christians sell out to the world. They abandon the protection of God's loving care for the security of a man-made city. Though they may appear to have made a successful move, their spiritual silence belies the very circumstances they offer as proof of success.

###### 2. A cost to David's community

David's past reputation as a man of faith still energized people, and a new community made up of Jews and Gentiles gathered around him in Ziklag. David was man of prayer, possessed of a gift of Spirit—a combination that led to a life of unparalleled success against impossible odds. That is why people forsook all to follow him, giving him their unreserved loyalty. But they were coming because of his former reputation, not because of his present choices. In the same way, we too may be living on a reputation which we earned in the past, not on what we are doing today. Let us beware of this temptation.

Instead of using these people as instruments of life, David led them down the road of deception and death. And no one in the crowd had the courage to question his ethics. Thus the future king began to abuse the loyalties of his servants, sowing seeds which would reap a bitter harvest. Years later, David used the loyalty of his servants to procure Bathsheba to satisfy his own lusts. Later still he perverted his office as commander-in-chief to murder his close friend, Uriah the Hittite, in an effort to cover up his own adultery. Thus the loyalty of David's community was betrayed.

###### 3. A Cost to Israel's future

By seeking refuge outside of Judah, David unwittingly introduced his troops to the subtle seduction of the Philistines. Philistia was not a crude, barbaric culture. These people came from the Aegean, carrying with them the riches of Greek culture. They were an attractive people, gifted farmers, skilled artisans in pottery, superb tradesmen and advanced city planners. Yet their lives were permeated by idolatry. Some 600 years later, the Scriptures state because of intermarriage, the children of Israel spoke "the language of Ashdod" (Neh 13:24). They had been introduced into a pagan culture, and David, in part at least, was the trendsetter for the declension.

David paid a high price for his little corner of world peace. He forsook his worship, abused the loyalty of his friends, led them into deceit and death, and damaged Israel's future.

When you add it all up...

What good is success when your soul no longer sings?

What good are promotions when the cause has turned sour?

What good is a present peace when the price is a lost future and your grandchildren are embracing idols?

Trusting God is difficult. If we grow weary under the stress and tensions of this life, the world is eager to offer a solution for what seems like a small fee. The courts are more than eager to end your marriage. Alcohol may dull your pain for a while. You may find temporary relief, but at what a price?

This New Year's Day, I would ask you to make but one commitment. If you are under stress and if you feel abandoned by God, do not sell out to the world. Wait on God, and allow him to deliver you as he has done in the past. Then you can sing with David the words that he penned in better times:

**To Thee, O LORD, I lift up my soul.  
O my God, in Thee I trust,  
Do not let me be ashamed.**

**Make me know Thy ways, O LORD;  
Teach me Thy paths.  
Guide me in Thy truth and teach me,  
For Thou art the God of my salvation;  
For Thee I wait all the day. (Ps 25:1-2a, 4-5)**

Amen.

1. J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, Vol. 2, The Crossing Fates* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1986), 560.

2. Yohanan Aharoni and Michael Avi-Yonah, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, 3rd ed., rev. by Anson F. Rainey and Ze'ev Safrai (New York: Macmillan, 1993), 73.

3. Fokkelman, *Crossing Fates*, 558.

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