

The Refuge of Despair

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1 Samuel / Despair; Compromise / 1 Samuel 27

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Text: 1 Samuel 27

Call: *"The grass withers and the flower fades,"*

Response: *"But the word of the Lord endures forever."*

The Refuge of Despair

1. The Fear of David – A Fear That Falters (v1-7)

1.1 The Despair and the Decision (v1-2)

1.2 The Dwelling and the Deception (v3-4)

1.3 The Distance and the Disguise (v5-7)

2. The Strategy of David – A Strategy That Schemes (v8-12)

2.1 The Raids and the Rationale (v8-9)

2.2 The Report and the Ruse (v10-11)

2.3 The Reputation and the Risk (v12)

3. The Verdict on David

4. Application And Call To Christ

5. Questions For Study

Introduction

As we come to 1 Samuel chapter 27, we must not forget the spiritual heights of chapter 26. There, David stood in the valley of decision and chose the path of restraint. Though Saul pursued him with murderous intent, David refused to strike the Lord's anointed. He displayed a love that waited and a trust that rested, and those two pillars of godliness shone brightly against the darkness of Saul's rebellion.

But now, in chapter 27, the tone shifts. The man who once trusted God's timing begins to lean on his own understanding. The same David who spared Saul twice now despairs of ever being safe. He says in his heart, "I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul," and with that thought, he flees to Philistine territory. It is a moment of compromise born not from rebellion, but from weariness and unbelief.

This chapter bears no record of communion with God, only the quiet unfolding of human strategy. David seeks refuge, not in the Lord, but in the land of the enemy. And though God's silent providence continues to unfold, David's heart seems distant from the God who delivered him from lions, giants, and kings. While we do that, we must always remember, the heroes of the Bible, except Christ, were sinners like us. Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and David all had moments of fear, folly, and failure—but God's grace still worked through them. Today, we see David in one such moment.

This evening, we will take a close look at the often hidden danger of despair, and how fear can lead even the faithful into compromise. Though David falters, God remains faithful. This chapter will expose the quiet drift from trust to self-reliance, and points us to Christ, who never compromised, but trusted the Father to the end.

1. The Fear of David – A Fear That Falters (v1-7)

1.1 The Despair and the Decision (v1-2)

David in **verse 1** is overcome by fear and speaks in his heart, concluding, “I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul.” This is not the David we saw in earlier chapters. Previously, when faced with danger, David went to his knees in prayer. He brought the priest, consulted the Lord through the Urim and Thummim, and waited for divine direction. But now, he consults the most deceitful counselor he can find, his own heart. Jeremiah 17:9 warns us, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” David doesn’t pray. He doesn’t seek the Lord. He simply decides.

Proverbs 3:5–6 reminds us, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.” But David leans inward. Fear doesn’t always roar; it whispers. And when it whispers long enough, it reshapes our theology. David no longer speaks to God; he speaks to himself. He forgets the promises and begins to plan his own survival. This is the birthplace of compromise: when fear drowns out faith. David was not just afraid though. He carried the weight of six hundred men, their families, and his own household. Logistical needs, threats from Saul, and previous betrayals all pressed on him. This does not excuse sin, but it explains the very human pressures behind his choices.

So he acts. **Verse 2** tells us David arose and went over to Achish, the king of Gath. This is not rebellion, it’s weariness. David isn’t shaking his fist at God; he’s folding his hands in exhaustion. But even weariness can lead us to dangerous places. Isaiah 30:1–2 warns against seeking safety apart from God: “Woe to those who go down to Egypt... without asking for my direction.” The enemy’s camp may offer rest, but it cannot offer peace.

1.2 The Dwelling and the Deception (v3-4)

When we look at **verse 3**, David settles in Gath with his men and their families. This isn’t a temporary visit, it’s a relocation. Psalm 1:1 warns us not to walk in the counsel of the wicked, but David is now living among them. He plants roots in compromise, and brings others with him. When leaders settle in sin, they don’t go alone. Their families, their followers, their testimony, everything is affected.

And it seems to work. **Verse 4** says Saul stopped pursuing him. The threat vanishes. But at what cost? Hebrews 11:25 speaks of the fleeting pleasures of sin. The pressure lifts, but the presence of God fades. Sometimes the enemy backs off not because we’ve won, but because

we've surrendered. Saul's silence isn't victory, it's a warning that David has stepped out of the battle.

1.3 The Distance and the Disguise (v5-7)

In **verse 5**, David asks Achish for a separate city, and Achish gives him Ziklag. Psalm 20:7 says, "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God." And here, David is trusting in diplomacy, not devotion. This is strategic separation, not spiritual repentance. He wants space, but not exposure. He's managing his compromise, not confessing it. Ziklag becomes a place where he can live in shadows, close enough to the enemy to be safe, far enough to feel autonomous.

Verse 6 tells us Ziklag becomes his base. But it's not holy ground. Proverbs 14:12 warns, "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death." Sometimes the places we build in compromise become the very places God must burn to bring us back.

And so David remains there for over a year. **Verse 7** marks the time, but it's the silence that speaks louder. Psalm 32:3-4 describes the spiritual dryness of unconfessed sin: "When I kept silent, my bones wasted away." No psalms. No prayers. Just survival. This is the slow erosion of communion with God, not through rebellion, but through routine. David is active, but absent. Busy, but barren. It's possible to live in spiritual exile while appearing successful.

2. The Strategy of David – A Strategy That Schemes (v8-12)

2.1 The Raids and the Rationale (v8-9)

David begins conducting raids against ancient enemies. **Verse 8** shows decisiveness and brutality. Romans 3:8 warns against doing evil that good may come. And here's the danger: one way a Christian may try to silence a guilty conscience over compromise is by immersing themselves in outwardly righteous activity. They say in their heart, "I don't want this sin to trouble me, so I'll drown it out by filling my life with God-honoring work everywhere else." David's raids weren't passive, they were strategic, effective, and silent. It's a picture of spiritual busyness masking spiritual brokenness.

Verse 9 shows David bringing spoils to Achish. Micah 6:8 calls us to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. But David's victories become tools of manipulation. He uses the spoils not to honor God, but to maintain his cover. This is the danger of compromise, it twists even legitimate success into a means of self-preservation. When our wins are used to protect our sin, they no longer glorify God.

2.2 The Report and the Ruse (v10-11)

In **verse 10** David lies to Achish, claiming his raids target Israelite regions. Proverbs 12:22 says, "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord." This is where compromise begins to multiply. When a Christian compromises in one area of life, they give sin a foothold in the heart. They may reason, "I'll take my small pleasure here, but serve God faithfully everywhere else. This little indulgence will refresh me so I can be cheerful in my obedience." But sin never stays small. It spreads. It seeps into other areas of life, and soon the believer finds themselves lying to cover their tracks, hiding behind spiritual busyness, and managing appearances instead of walking in the light. David's compromise leads to deception, and his deception leads to deeper entanglement. One sin opens the door to another. David's cunning won him temporary safety, but the deceit also planted seeds of future danger. When we try to save ourselves through shortcuts or compromise, we often sow hidden problems that will later confront us.

Verse 11 shows the cost. David leaves no survivors. Luke 12:2 reminds us, "Nothing is hidden that will not be made known." But for David, silence must be maintained at all costs. David's sword is now serving his strategy, not his Savior. When reputation becomes more important than righteousness, we will do whatever it takes to keep the lie alive.

2.3 The Reputation and the Risk (v12)

When we reach **verse 12**, Achish trusts David completely. He's convinced that David has severed every tie to Israel. The deception has worked. David's success in hiding his compromise has earned him favor with the enemy, but it's a dangerous favor. Proverbs 29:25 warns, "The fear of man lays a snare." And now we see the snare tightening. David's own success in deceit becomes the trap he cannot easily escape. The enemy is convinced. David looks loyal. But compromise always carries risk, because it's never content to stay hidden. What begins as survival will eventually demand surrender. And the longer we wear the mask, the harder it becomes to take it off.

You'll have to come back two Sundays from now for chapter 29 to see the trap close around David. But in chapter 28, in the first two verses, David's lies of loyalty earn him a deadly assignment. Achish doesn't just trust David, he drafts him. He says, "You must understand that you and your men are to go out with me in the army." And David replies, "Then you shall know what your servant can do."

It's a chilling moment. The man after God's own heart is now expected to march against God's own people. The snare has tightened. The mask must stay on. And the next step is unthinkable.

How did it come to this? How did the shepherd of Israel end up conscripted by a pagan king?

This is not just David's story, it's often ours. The path from fear to compromise is well-worn. And unless we return to the Lord, it always ends in loss.

This is the ultimate cost of compromise... it doesn't just confuse your witness, it recruits you for war against the very kingdom you once defended. David's despair led to compromise. Compromise led to deception. And now deception demands allegiance. The favor he gained now demands blood, not from his enemies, but from the very people he was called to protect.

3. The Verdict on David

Awakening Church, is David guilty in this chapter of all these things? I want to make sure we are not quicker than God when it comes to the judgment of David. So, before we march David to the gallows of our sermons, let's sit in the dust with him for three minutes.

There are four accusations usually hurled at him in this chapter. Let's hold each one up to the light, honoring the sin where it is real, yet refusing to add to our own personal condemnation to the verdict of scripture.

1. Fleeing to the Philistines. Is this trusting human strategy over God's providence?

Yes and no.

Yes, in that David never inquires of the Lord (the silence is deafening). That is unbelief.

No, in that the text never calls the move itself rebellion. After years of miracles, David may genuinely have feared presuming on grace. "If I stay in Israel and keep needing miraculous deliveries, am I testing the Lord?"

Responsible shepherds sometimes lead the flock out of the storm, even into

uncomfortable fields. The sin is not necessarily the border-crossing; the sin is doing it without prayer. The motive can be a mix of 60% weary faith and 40% self-reliance. Only God knows the exact ratio, and He hasn't told us in the text.

2. Settling in Ziklag . Is this establishing a base of compromise; is this self-preservation over holiness?

Guilty as charged on the surface.

Yet we need to notice that David immediately asks for a separate town. He does not move his wives and children into the idolatrous heart of Gath; he puts geographical distance between his family and the Philistine altars.

Think of it as Lot pitching his tent toward Sodom, not yet in Sodom. David is sliding, but he hasn't let go of the rope entirely. Ziklag is a halfway house between faith and apostasy. Is this dangerous? Absolutely. Is this a 100% damnable decision? I don't think the text explicitly says that.

3. Slaughtering the tribes. Is this murder to cover David's sinful motive? Is this killing as camouflage?

On the surface, I can see how so many might arrive at that conclusion and no other.

What happens when we consider Deuteronomy 25:17–19 and Exodus 17:14–16 still stand: "Blot out the memory of Amalek...do not forget."

David is the first Israelite leader since Joshua to actually obey the command to the letter, no survivors, no livestock spared.

The same sword that killed God's enemies also appears to have buttered Achish's bread. Here is the deep and complicated Reformed doctrine of concurrence: God's sovereign will and man's responsible will meet in the same act. David obeys the Law for the worst reason (cover story), yet God still advances His justice through a compromised instrument. That should make us tremble in front of a holy God who works all things in accordance with his will.

4. Lying to Achish. Is every lie an abomination, or are some actions simply strategic? Scripture is clear: God delights in truth, yet He also works through flawed people in desperate times.

Rahab hid the spies and is praised for her faith (Hebrews 11:31).

The Hebrew midwives disobeyed Pharaoh, and "God dealt well with them" (Exodus 1:20).

But note this carefully, the Bible commends their faith, not their falsehood. God honored the trust in Him that motivated their actions, not the deception itself. He works through the crooked lines of human fear, but He never blesses the crookedness.

David's deception of Achish, then, is not holy strategy, it is sin born of fear (Proverbs 29:25). He did not lie because God led him to, but because fear drove him to secure his own safety. Yet even here, grace reigns. God's providence overrules David's failure, using a sinful act to preserve His covenant people. The fruit was good, but the root was rotten, a clear reminder that God can draw straight lines with crooked sticks, but the stick is still crooked.

And before we grow self-righteous in judgment, note what the Holy Spirit omits.

- In Genesis 12:13, Abraham's lie is labeled deceit.
- In Genesis 20, Sarah's half-truth is exposed as fear, not faith.

But in 1 Samuel 27, twelve verses pass with divine silence. No rebuke, no commentary. That silence is not approval, it is restraint. God records the failure but withholds editorial scorn, teaching us that His grace does not cancel His holiness, and His holiness does not cancel His mercy.

So we see David, sinning, fearing, surviving, and yet upheld by sovereign grace. God will not let us judge him more harshly than He does. We are not called to excuse the lie but to tremble at a God who preserves liars by mercy and redeems their failures for His glory.

So where does this leave us?
Exactly where we started:
David is a mirror, not a monster.

We too flee to "Philistia" when the promises feel slow.

We too build Ziklags, carefully negotiated compromises that let us keep one foot in the world.

We too wield Scripture like a sword while our hearts are cold.

We too tell "necessary" lies and call them wisdom.

The difference between David and us is not that he compromised and we don't. The difference is that the Hound of Heaven chased a liar, a butcher, a schemer all the way to Ziklag, and dragged 600 compromisers home with him. So yes, when we get the chance to do so, I want to preach that hell is hot against the compromise. But I also want to preach heaven louder still, about the Christ who receives compromisers,

washes them, and turns their Ziklag ashes into a throne. Now, as we finish up the text, let's look away from the mirror of David and run to the true Refuge of Christ.

4. Application And Call To Christ

David's heart whispered lies: "You're not safe. God has forgotten you. Take matters into your own hands." Despair doesn't always shout; it often whispers. And when it does, we are tempted to run. Tempted to run toward comfort, toward control, toward compromise. Like David, we can convince ourselves that survival is better than surrender, that strategy is safer than trust. But every refuge outside of Christ is a false one. Ziklag may offer rest, but it cannot give peace. The world's shelter always comes at the cost of your soul.

David, the man after God's own heart, fled to the enemy's camp. He wore the mask of loyalty to Achish. He fought battles in the shadows. He survived, but he did not sing. There is no psalm in this chapter. No prayer. Just silence, strategy, and the slow erosion of communion with God.

But where David compromised, Christ remained faithful. In 1 Samuel 27, David points to Christ not through his faithfulness, but through his failure, showing us our need for a better King who never compromises.

- David compromises under pressure; Christ remains faithful under temptation. David, fearing Saul, chooses survival over surrender. Jesus, tempted by Satan in the wilderness, chooses obedience over escape. Where David fled to enemy territory, Jesus stood firm in enemy territory and overcame.
- David hides behind deception; Christ walks in truth. David lies to Achish and lives in shadows. Jesus speaks truth, and walks in the light. His integrity is unshakable, even when it costs Him everything.
- David's silence marks spiritual dryness; Christ's silence marks submission. David is silent because he's drifting. Jesus is silent before His accusers because He's surrendering. One silence is avoidance; the other is atonement.
- David's favor with the enemy leads to danger; Christ's rejection by the world leads to salvation. David earns trust from Achish, but it nearly costs him his soul. Jesus is despised and

rejected by men, but through that rejection, He becomes the cornerstone of our salvation.

Awakening Church, look at David in Ziklag, calculating, hiding, surviving. Then look to Christ in Gethsemane, praying, sweating, surrendering. One sought refuge in the enemy's land. The other became our refuge by laying down His life. One feared death. The other conquered it.

So where are you running? What Ziklag have you built? What lies have you believed? That you're too far gone? That God's promises are too slow? That sin is safer than surrender? Repent. Christ is better. His wounds are your shelter. His obedience is your righteousness. His cross is your peace.

Here is the truth:

God is holy and just, and He created you for His glory.

You are a sinner, by nature and by choice, unable to save yourself, and deserving of His righteous judgment.

But Jesus Christ, fully God and fully man, lived the sinless life you could not, died the death you deserved, and rose again in victory.

His death satisfied the wrath of God.

His resurrection secured eternal life for all who believe.

Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, not by works, merit, or religious performance.

You must repent, turning from self-rule and rebellion, and trust in Christ alone for forgiveness, righteousness, and eternal life.

Jesus is Lord. Saving faith means submitting to Him as King and walking in obedience by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Awakening Church, the gospel call of Christ is not "Survive," but "Come and live." Not "Hide," but "Abide." Not "Scheme," but "Surrender."

Christ has not fled from you. He has come for you. He receives the weary, the wandering, the compromised, and makes them whole.

Come to Christ.

He is the refuge that never fails.

He is the King who never falters.

He is the Shepherd who brings His sheep home.

And He is calling you, even now.

5. Questions For Study

Please be encouraged to use these questions in family devotion throughout the week and Awakening discipleship group discussions.

1. What does David's decision to flee to Philistine territory (again) reveal about the danger of despair in the believer's heart?
2. How can weariness and fear lead us to compromise, even when we know God's promises?
3. Why is it spiritually significant that this chapter contains no recorded prayer or psalm from David?
4. In what ways does David's strategy reflect a shift from dependence on God to reliance on self?
5. How can we discern when our decisions are driven by faith versus fear?
6. What are the modern equivalents of "Ziklag", places we run to for refuge apart from God?
7. How does Christ's refusal to compromise in the wilderness contrast with David's retreat

in this passage?

8. What does this chapter teach us about the silence of God and the hiddenness of His providence?
9. How can we guard against the slow drift from communion with God to our own calculated survival?
10. Where do you need to repent of trusting in strategy, comfort, or control instead of in Christ?