

Friends, today we are going to spend the bulk of our time exploring 1 Samuel 27 and 29 (starts on page 249).

In chapters 18-25, we have seen Saul pursuing David in order to capture and kill him. About six years have passed during this time.

Remember, Saul is the king of Israel, but David is the anointed king, the one God has chosen to succeed Saul.

In chapter 26, like in chapter 23, some Ziphites once again betray David by telling Saul where he is hiding. However, like in chapter 24, David ends up having an opportunity to sneak up on Saul and kill him. Yet, because he realizes this is not what God desires, he refuses to do so. When Saul realizes that David has once again spared his life, he expresses gratitude. He says to him:

1 Samuel 26:25 – “You are blessed, my son David. You will certainly do great things and will also prevail.”

Then David went on his way, and Saul returned home. This is not the happy ending of the story, however. Saul likely was sincere, but like others who struggle with mental illness, his feelings could change very quickly.

1 Samuel 27:1a – David said to himself, “One of these days I’ll be swept away by Saul.”

In other words, one day Saul’s efforts to kill me are bound to succeed.

1 Samuel 27:1b – “There is nothing better for me than to escape immediately to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will stop searching for me everywhere in Israel, and I’ll escape from him.”

The land of the Philistines is what now would be the western part of Israel, along the Mediterranean. It is not a big geographical move, but it is significant because it is a self-

imposed exile. The chosen king of Israel will no longer be in Israel.

1 Samuel 27:2 – So David set out with his 60 men and went to Achish son of Maach, the king of Gath.

We have heard of this guy before in chapter 21. There David had fled to Gath to escape Saul and then realized that the people there wanted to kill him because he had killed their champion warrior, Goliath.

So David, very creatively, pretends to be insane. The text says he would scribble on the walls and let saliva run down his beard. King Achish said, “This man is crazy! Get him out of here! I have enough crazy people in my kingdom already!” Yet, because it would have been dishonorable for the king to kill someone who is insane, David’s life is spared.

Now, about two years later, David is back in the city of Gath again, this time with his 600 men and their families, including two of his wives. His plan seems to work.

1 Samuel 27:4 – When it was reported to Saul that David had fled to Gath, he no longer searched for him.

This time, David approaches King Achish, not pretending to be insane, but as a shrewd political negotiator. Rather than living in Gath itself, they will inhabit Ziklag, a village about twenty-five miles southwest of the city. During the next sixteen months...

1 Samuel 27:8 – David and his men went up and raided the Geshurites, the Gittites, and the Amalekites.

These people were enemies of Israel. Oh, they were not usually friends of the Philistines either, but David is fighting battles against Israel’s enemies more than against the enemies of Gath.

However, when David reports to Achish, he tells him (verse 10) he was raiding villages “in the south country of Judah.” In other words, David says, “Achish, I am attacking my own people. They are not only your enemies, but they are allied with Saul.” David is once again deceiving Achish. And to make the deception work, during these military raids...

1 Samuel 27:11 – David did not let a man or woman live to be brought to Gath, for he said, “Or they will inform on us and say, ‘This is what David did.’” This was David’s custom during the whole time he stayed in the Philistine territory.

Just like his ruse of insanity, this deception works.

1 Samuel 27:12 – Achish trusted David, thinking, “Since he has made himself detestable to his people Israel, he will be my servant forever.”

Remember, he believes David has been attacking towns in Israel, thus the people certainly would not want him as their king. He figures David is stuck in the role of being a Philistine general. He is mistaken.

Yet, as often happens when you are deceiving people, David’s whole plan almost blows up. Achish and the four other Philistine kings decided to go to war against Israel.

1 Samuel 28:1b – So Achish said to David, “You know, of course, that you and your men must march out in the army with me.”

Oh oh! David’s ruse is that he and his men were going out and fighting fellow Israelites, when really they had been fighting the enemies of Israel.

Was Achish suspicious about that claim? We don’t know, but now David faces a huge dilemma. He can fight and kill his own countrymen, aiding the Philistines. Or he can rebel against the Philistine king and lose all the benefits of having him as his protector.

David gives Achish the impression he will fight against the Israelites, and **1 Samuel 28:2** says he is promoted to the role of the king’s top bodyguard, kind of head of the Secret Service.

But what will David’s real decision be? Well, the author of Samuel builds suspense and then leaves his readers hanging. Instead of telling us the rest of the story, he turns his attention to King Saul and doesn’t even mention David in the rest of chapter 28. Now, I don’t really like when that occurs in a novel, movie, or in the Bible. I want to know what happens next. So, instead of making you wait until next week to find out what happens, we will skip over the section on Saul and go to chapter 29.

1 Samuel 29:1 – The Philistines brought all their military units together at Aphek.

Gath is one of five city/states in the Philistine federation. So, Achish is one of five kings. As the army assembles, David and his men are marching with Achish.

1 Samuel 29:3a – The (other) Philistine commanders asked, “What are these Hebrews doing here?”

Achish responds:

1 Samuel 29:3b – “That is David, a servant of King Saul of Israel. He has been with me a considerable period of time. From the day he defected until today, I’ve found no fault with him.”

That explanation is not good enough for the other Philistine leaders. They insist:

1 Samuel 29:4b – “He must not go down with us into battle only to become our adversary during the battle. What better way could he ingratiate himself with his master (meaning Saul) than with the heads of our men?”

I suspect their fears may have been justified. Achish gives David the verdict:

1 Samuel 29:9b – “I’m convinced that you are as reliable as an angel of God. But the Philistine commanders have said, ‘He must not go into battle with us.’”

So Achish sends David and his men back home to Ziklag, the town he had given to them to live. Once again, the Lord has rescued David. It seemed he would have to choose between fighting against his own people or revealing that he had been deceiving Achish all along. Neither happens.

When they arrived in Ziklag, however, they find...

1 Samuel 30:1 – The Amalekites had raided the Negev (that region) and attacked and burned Ziklag.

Knowing the Philistines were engaged in battle with the Israelites, the Amalekites figured the town ripe for picking.

1 Samuel 30:2 – They also had kidnapped the women and everyone in it from youngest to oldest. They had killed no one but had carried them off as they went on their way.

This is devastating...

1 Samuel 30:4 – David and the troops with him wept loudly until they had no strength left to weep.

Two of David's wives have been kidnapped. Yet, his men blame him.

1 Samuel 30:6 – David was in an extremely difficult position because the troops talked about stoning him, for they were all very bitter over the loss of their sons and daughters. But David found strength in the LORD his God.

The Lord then instructs David to pursue the Amalekites and rescue those kidnapped. As David and his men travel across the desert, they meet an Egyptian, a slave of one of the Amalekites, who had been left behind when he became sick. He confirms the Amalekites had raided and burned Ziklag. The man then agrees, based on David's promise of protection, to lead them to the Amalekites. They find...

1 Samuel 30:16b – The Amalekites spread out over the entire area eating, drinking, and celebrating because of the great amount

of plunder they had taken from the land of the Philistines and the land of Judah.

Their partying and drunkenness made them sitting ducks for David's army.

1 Samuel 30:17 – David slaughtered them from twilight until the evening of the next day. None of them escaped, except four hundred young men who got on camels and fled.

Though not exactly Apache helicopters, in the ancient world camels provided relatively rapid transportation, especially in a desert.

There seems to be a very happy ending.

1 Samuel 30:18-19 – David recovered everything the Amalekites had taken; he also rescued his two wives. Nothing of theirs was missing from the youngest to the oldest, including the sons and daughters, and all the plunder the Amalekites had taken. David got everything back.

Yet, there is a complication. As they pursued the Amalekites, two hundred of David's six hundred men...

1 Samuel 30:21b - ...had been too exhausted to go with him and had been left at the Wadi Besor.

When these guys are reunited with the rest of David's army...

1 Samuel 30:22 – All the corrupt and worthless men among those who had gone with David argued, “Because they didn't go with us, we will not give any of the plunder we recovered to them except for each man's wife and children.”

But David said, “No, we will share equally.”

1 Samuel 30:23 – “My brothers, you must not do this with what the LORD has given us. He protected us and handed over to us the raiders who came against us.”

Because it was the Lord who had won the battle, David believed the plunder belonged, not just to

his army, but to all the people of Israel. This chapter ends with David sending gifts to towns all across the territory of Judah.

OK, a lot happens in these two and a half chapters. So, what is God saying to us today through this portion of His Word?

Well, I don't see many obvious lessons in this passage. Yet, the Lord has used this passage to remind me of a very important truth:

We need to distinguish between things which are black and white, clearly right or wrong, and the gray areas of life.

Let me explain: Everything that happens in our text occurs during David's self-imposed exile in the land of the Philistines. Remember, after receiving a blessing from Saul...

1 Samuel 27:1 – David said to himself, “One of these days I'll be swept away by Saul. There is nothing better for me than to escape immediately to the land of the Philistines.”

Friends, do you think David's action is motivated by faith or fear?

Yes, Saul has been chasing David all over Israel. Yet, even though there is no immediate threat, David flees into pagan territory and appears to seek protection, not from the Lord, but a Philistine king.

Was that the right thing for him to do?

Remember, 1 Samuel is a God-inspired, historical narrative. It is a true story. Yet, it is not always easy to discern whether the author is simply reporting what happened or if he is making a moral/spiritual point through that event.

To me, it seems David should not have gone into Philistine territory. But the text doesn't really say that. It would be foolish and wrong for me to insist David is guilty of committing a sin.

There are a couple of other things that happen in this passage which are a bit troubling:

One is David's continual deception throughout chapter 27. He tells lie after lie to Achish, the Philistine king. That certainly was wrong, right?

Yet, even as he paints himself in a corner through his lies, God rescues him in chapter 29, as the other Philistines don't want David and his men in the battle.

Was God OK with David not telling the truth to Achish because he was a pagan ruler and really an enemy of God? Maybe I am missing something, but I don't think the text is clear about that. And I hope none of us are totally comfortable with...

1 Samuel 30:17 – David slaughtered them (the Amalekites) from twilight until the evening of the next day.

Apparently, it was twenty-four hours of killing thousands of people (everyone except those 400 guys escaping on camels).

Were David and his men simply the tool God was using to execute justice upon the wicked Amalekites or is this about David getting revenge because he is very angry that these men had kidnapped two of his wives?

I might think it is the latter, but it would be foolish for me to point a finger at David because, even though the text doesn't say the Lord commanded David to do all this killing, neither is there anything that indicates that the Lord was displeased with what David did.

OK, Pastor Dan, you are confusing me! So, we don't really know whether David was doing the right thing when he fled into Philistine territory, when he deceived the Philistines, or when he slaughtered the Amalekites. What good does it do for me to know that?

Well, it helps us remember that there are ditches on both sides of the road when it comes to moral clarity.

In our society, there are folks who try to take what God has made clear and make it confusing.

They try to muddy the waters. **This is most obvious when it comes to sexuality.**

The Bible is clear, very clear, that the sexual relationship is to be confined to a marriage relationship between a man and woman. Other sexual relationships, whether they are heterosexual or homosexual, are not pleasing to God.

Now friends, I have no desire to beat up on people involved in these other sexual relationships. In fact, if you are here this morning and you have been sleeping with someone who is not your husband or wife, I am really glad you are here this morning.

But, I am not going to tell you that what you are doing is OK. It is wrong. It is sin.

Now, I am not saying your sins are any worse than my sins. But, what you are doing is wrong. And just like me, you need God's grace and forgiveness in your life. This can only be found through trusting in Jesus Christ. And then, by God's grace, you need to turn away from your sin and seek to do the right thing.

Folks, we can get stuck in the ditch of moral ambiguity. When God, through His Word, the Bible, declares something to be wrong, it is wrong. The majority of people in our society may think it is OK, our friends may tell us it is OK, deep down inside we may even think it is OK, but if God says it is wrong, it is wrong.

As a church and as individual Christians, we need to heed the warning the Lord gives us...

Isaiah 5:20 – Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness, who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.

It is our job to proclaim the truth that God has revealed through His Word, even when that truth makes the people around us uncomfortable, even when it makes us uncomfortable. Some of you have heard me say this hundreds of times over the past twenty-five years.

Yet, there is also a ditch on the other side of the road. I am not quite sure how to describe it.

While the first ditch involves taking things that are black and white and pretending they are gray, this ditch involves pretending gray things are black and white.

It often turns into a legalism where we start thinking that people who make different choices than we do are not as godly as we are.

What am I talking about? Today, we saw David choose to go into Philistine territory, deceive the Philistine king, and slaughter the Amalekites. Were these good choices, the right choices? The Bible doesn't tell us.

When the Bible doesn't tell us whether something is right or wrong, then it becomes a gray area.

Maybe as we went through the passage this morning, some of you thought, "Pastor Dan, it was OK for David to go into Philistine territory. However, I think it was wrong for him to lie to Achish. And it was certainly wrong for him to kill all those people."

Friend, it is fine for you to have those opinions, but frankly, we don't know whether any of your opinions are correct. We simply don't have enough information to make any kind of judgment.

That same thing is true today. Yes, when someone is doing something forbidden by God through the Bible, it is sin, and if the Lord gives us the opportunity we should humbly and gently confront that person.

Here is a list of some of the behaviors today which are clearly wrong:

- Sexual relationships outside of marriage
- Drunkenness or abusing alcohol
- Using any illegal drugs
- Using racial slurs or having racist attitudes
- Taking God's name in vain or "crude talk"
- Cheating on taxes

- Not being honest in dealing with government agencies or insurance companies
- Abusing (physically, verbally or emotionally) a spouse or child
- Failing to honor your father or mother
- Having an abortion
- Refusing to forgive someone who has apologized to you
- Harboring an attitude of bitterness
- Gossip
- Refusing to apologize when you have mistreated someone

Those are things the Bible clearly says are wrong. And we should clearly, but gently, say that these behaviors are wrong.

There are many other times, however, when it is not clear whether what someone is doing is right or wrong:

- Should my sister marry that guy?
- Should my friend be buying a new car?
- Is it right for Joe to listen to that type of music?
- Should Jane go out to the bar with her friends after work?
- Is it wrong for Bill to travel to Minneapolis with a female co-worker?
- Should Sue have let her daughter get a tattoo?
- Should Jack and Ann send their kids to public school? To a Christian school? Should they homeschool them?

Folks, these are all questions to which the Bible doesn't provide an explicit answer.

You may have an opinion about whether what someone is doing is right or wrong, wise or unwise. Yet, remember that is what it is. It is your opinion.

It is not truth revealed by God in His Word. And whenever we have those opinions about someone else's choices, we need to remember what the Lord says through the Apostle Paul:

Romans 14:4 – Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To their own master, servants stand or fall.

In other words, it is not our job to decide whether someone else is making a good choice when it comes to these "gray areas" of life.

Friends, one of the most important qualities we need to develop is an ability to tell the difference between black, white and gray.

Some things are inherently and always wrong because the Bible says they are wrong. We need to avoid these things and encourage others to do so as well.

Other things are inherently right and always right because the Bible says they are right. We need to do these things and encourage others to do so as well.

And then there are "the gray things," situations where it is not clear what is right and what is wrong. When we face these situations, we need to seek wisdom from the Lord so we can make a good choice.

When someone else, especially someone else in the church, makes a choice in one of those gray situations, we need to remember it is not our choice, but theirs. If we agree with their choice, we can certainly affirm that; but if we disagree, it is usually best to just keep our mouth shut.

May the Lord help us to discern the black, white and gray areas of life and respond in a way that honors the Lord, which will also be for our ultimate good.