

TURN BACK AND GO IN PEACE

1 Samuel 27:1-28:2 & 29:1-11 (Key verse 29:7)

Turn back and go in peace; do nothing to displease the Philistine rulers

God has set a path for each and every one of us. This path symbolizes God's plan and purpose for our lives. And includes everything in our lives that God uses to mold and prepare us so we can live up to God's plan and purpose. Sometimes, we really do not like to walk on the path God chose for us. Like David, in today's passage. So like him, we abandon God's path to go off in our own direction in pursuit of our own peace. But this only has destructive consequences. I pray that through today's passage, we may accept the path that God has chosen for us. And if we have abandon God's path, we may hear God's loving words to TURN BACK and go in peace. Amen!

Now today's passage begins shortly after David's encounter with Saul in the previous chapter. So, before we look at verse 1, let's do a quick recap of the events leading up to today's passage. David just got married to the intelligent and beautiful Abigail, when his scouts told him that Saul yet again came searching for him.....to kill him. (26:1-2) David could not believe his ears.....Especially after he recently spared Saul's life.....do you remember when Saul came to relieve himself in the cave David was hiding? (24:1-7) No one can blame David for thinking after that encounter that this would be the end of Saul's relentless pursuit of him, right?! That finally, after 4 years of trying to kill him, Saul would realise that David is not a threat..... and therefore Saul would finally LEAVE DAVID ALONE!!! But sadly, this was not the case!!! Saul continued to pursue David, to capture and kill him!

Then with God's help, what did David do? Yes, David snuck into Saul's camp while he was sleeping.....Was it to kill Sauland so put an end to his 4 year nightmare? No!! Surprisingly not!Instead, it was to merely steal Saul's spear and water jug.....so David could confront Saul with evidence a second time..... that he meant him no harm! David's cry of frustration still rings in our hears: Why is my lord pursuing his servant? What have I done..... and what wrong am I guilty off? That you keep hunting me down – to kill me!! (26:18) Then, after realising David had spared his life a second time, how did Saul respond? Yes.....Saul admitted that he was wrong to pursue David.....and said, "I have sinned.....Surely I have acted like a fool and have erred greatly...I will not try to harm you again." (26:21)

Now, let's look at verse 1. But David thought to himself, "One of these days I will be destroyed by the hand of Saul." David did not believe Saul. David knew that he could not trust a single word from Sauland it became crystal clear to David..... no matter how many times he spared Saul's life.....and regardless of him being absolutely innocent of any wrong doing.....Saul would relentlessly pursue him until he is destroyed by the hand of Saul...... Until now, David trusted God, to help him deal with his **Saul-Problem**, right? And until now God was faithful to David, as he perfectly protected David from falling into Saul's murderous hands.

However, after FOUR YEARS of running and hiding.....ducking and diving.....David's spirit grew so weak and weary That he simply became too discouraged and tired to trust God for His continued deliverance!! So David said (Look again at verse 1) the best thing I can do is to escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will give up searching for me anywhere in Israel, and I will slip out of his hand." Actually, as an Israelite.....and more especially.....the future king of God's people..... to leave Israel and live among the idol worshipping Philistines was the WORST THING David could do!! (As we will see in the rest of the passage.) But David was so discouraged and simply so desperate to get away from Saulthat he foolishly.....gave up trusting in the LORD and leave the land of promise..... leave the people of God..... to instead go and find "protection" among the Philistines.

Look at verse 2. So David and the six hundred men with him left Israel and went over to Achish son of Maok king of Gath in the land of the Philistines! Here, we must know very clearly that..... God was not leading David to the land of the Philistines. Indeed, God allowed it! But going over to Achish son of Maok.....came as a result of David's own sinful thinking.....and him in a moment of weakness turning away from God..... to take a different path from the one God set for him to..... deal with the Saul problem in his life. God's path for David required David to patiently trust God with his life.....to patiently wait on God to deal with Saul..... in God's own time and His own way. But David rejected God's path. And turned onto a new path.....his own path.....away from Saul! And away from God.

This turn of events is quite shocking, right?! We never expected David of all people, to turn away from God.....and follow his own path!! We know David as the man after God's own heart. We know him as the man who always enquired of the LORD before he does anything. We know him as the man who by faith killed the Philistine champion Goliath. We know him as the man who faithfully relied on God in all circumstances. We also know his as the shepherd king who faithfully took care of God's people. Yet, here we can see,

that David was just an ordinary human as you and me. An ordinary man pushed beyond his human limits. And instead of trusting God for His continued deliverance, David sadly chose to abandon God. And set out on his own path. Then what was the consequence of David's decision? Let's find out by looking at the rest of the passage.

Let's look at verse 3. Things started off promising for David, when king Achish received David and allowed him and his men, with their wives and children.....to settle with him in the royal city of Gath. Not long after, David received the news he so desperately longed for. Look at verse 4. When Saul was told that David had fled to Gath, he no longer searched for him. We can be sure that David and his men threw a big party in celebration!! Finally, after four difficult years of suffering and hiding and ducking and diving.....they were free from Saul!! This was exactly what David so desperately wanted! To be free from Saul!!! This sounds amazing, right!?

Not quite!! David's freedom from Saul meant captivity to the Philistines. Remember, David was an Israelite, and therefore part of God's covenant people. Moreover, God appointed David as the future king of Israel.....yet here he was living among the "uncircumcised" or shall we say.....unbelieving Philistines.....in the Royal Philistine city of Gath!! David was like a fish on dry land, completely out of place!! Surely, David did not belong among unbelieving men and women.....among the enemies of his people Israel. Yes, he was now free from Saul.....but at the expense of his peace.....both in himself and with God. So what did David do? Did he return to God? Did he return to Israel?

Look at verse 5. No! David did not return to God. Instead, David compromised and said to Achish, "If I have found favor in your eyes, let a place be assigned to me in one of the country towns, that I may live there. Unlike in the Royal city, in a country town David would at least be able to live somewhat isolated from king Achish and other Philistines. Look at verse 6. So on that day Achish gave him Ziklag, a town that was about 30 km away from Gath, and right on the Israelite/Philistine border.....and David lived there, in Philistine territory a year and four months.

Again, this doesn't sound too bad, right!? I mean, somehow David could have the best of both worlds. On the one hand David enjoyed Achish's protection in Philistine territory. And on the other hand he was not that far away from his home land Israel, in fact he was just on the other side of the Israelite border. Sounds ideal right? Far from it!! When we look at verses 8-12 we see that David ended up in the worst possible situation! Let me explain.

One of the reasons Achish, king of Gath, welcomed David to Gath and allowed David to stay in Ziklag.....was the fact that David had 600 fighting men, which Achish wanted to use as his own private army, with David as their commander. In other words, David and his men were welcome to stay under Achish's protection, but only as long as they go on raids in the neighbouring countries.....to supply Achish and his people with riches, like sheep and cattle, donkeys and camels, and clothes. This meant David's stay in the land of Philistine was dependent on pleasing and obeying Achish, a Philistine king.....instead of pleasing and obeying the LORD his God!

We would never imagine that David of all people, would ever agree to these terms. Yet, his heart became so hardened towards the LORD, that he not only agreed to it but seemingly embraced it. Look at verses 8-9. Now David and his men went up and raided the Geshurites, the Girzites and the Amalekites. These were all enemies of Israel! Which shows that at least.....David hasn't totally turned against God and His people, yet! Later, we will see that David actually rode out to wage war against his own people!! However, in the meantime, whenever David attacked an area, he did not leave a man or woman alive, but took sheep and cattle, donkeys and camels, and clothes. Then he returned to Achish. But when Achish asked David, "Where did you go raiding today?" David would lie to Achish, saying he raided towns in Israelite territories. (10) In this way David deceived Achish to think that he was indeed against his own people for rejecting him.....and in so sought and gained Achish's favour and trust.

Again, this does not sound too bad, right? At least David did not kill his own people!! However, David's compromising attitude and deceiving spirit forced him to become a merciless mass murderer. Look at verse 11. David did not leave a man or woman alive to be brought to Gath, for he thought, "They might inform on us and say, 'This is what David did.'" David just drifted further and further away from God..... and closer and closer to the Philistine king, Achish.....until Achish trusted David and said to himself, look at verse 12:"He has become so obnoxious to his people, the Israelites, that he will be my servant for life." Can you imagine David, the future king of Israel and man after God's own heart.....to be labelled a lifelong servant of a Philistine king!! It sounds ridiculous right!! But that is exactly how far David had wandered from God.....on a path he chose for himself.....until we can hardly recognise the man of God; who we have learned to love and respect over the last few weeks! If this happened to David, then surely this can also happen to you and me!

But this is not where David's backsliding ended! Look at chapter 28:1-2. In those days the Philistines gathered their forces to fight against Israel. Achish said to David, "You must understand that you and your men will accompany me in the army." All this time David had lied to Achish, telling him that he raided the people of Israel. Now David was forced to live the lie he gave to Achish. But surely, at this David would snap out of his rebellion, right?! I mean surely he cannot fight against the very people God wanted David to lead and care for! But look at what David so defiantly said in verse 2.you will see for yourself what your servant can do. Not only did David referred to himself as Achish's servant, but he was willing to go and fight with Achish against his own people. Now some people say that David was really operating as a "double agent" and he planned to turn on the Philistines in the midst of battle. But the text gives us no reason for such an optimistic perspective. Rather, the text indicates that David had come to a very low place in his life. Amplified by the fact that Achish wanted to make the future king of Israel, his bodyguard for life."

Look at chapter 29:1-2. The Philistines gathered all their forces at Aphek, and Israel camped by the spring in Jezreel. As the Philistine rulers marched with their units of hundreds and thousands, David and his men were marching at the rear with Achish. What a mess David got himself into, right! David found himself in a place neither he nor anyone else would ever even imagine.....among the ungodly, ready to *fight against* God's people. If David murdering Nabal and all the men in his household, two weeks back, would be a huge mistake.....then David going into war with the Philistines would be an absolute catastrophe. How could he then ever be the shepherd king of Israel, whom that God had called him to be! Indeed, the path David chose for himself.....led him in the complete opposite direction of the path that God had set out for David!

At this stage, it seems David had reached the point of no return. How could he turn back? Yes, only with God's clear and direct intervention. And that is exactly what God did.....through the commanders of the Philistines. Look at verse 3. As David and his men were marching at the rear with Achish, the commanders of the Philistines spotted them and angrily asked Achish: "What are these Hebrews doing here?" And Achish told them, "This is David, the servant of King Saul of Israel. He's been with me for years, and I've never found a single fault in him from the day he arrived until today." (NLT) Look at verses 4-5 (read with me) But the Philistine commanders were angry with Achish and said, (Angry Voice!!) "Send the man back, that he may return to the place you assigned him. He must not go with us into battle or he will turn against us during the fighting. How better could he regain his master's favor than by taking the heads of our own men? Isn't this the David they sang about in their dances: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands?" Wow!! The Philistine rulers knew exactly who David was! And they vividly remembered how the Israelites sang songs about him when David killed their champion Goliath when he was just 15 years old yet. Somehow, we would expect the Philistine commanders to be thrilled to now have a mighty soldier like David on their side!! Yet surprisingly, they were angry to see him with them! And insisted that Achish sent David back.

Let's look at verses 6-7. **(Read with me)** So Achish called David and said to him, "As surely as the Lord lives, you have been reliable, and I would be pleased to have you serve with me in the army. From the day you came to me until today, I have found no fault in you, but the rulers don't approve of you. Now turn back and go in peace; do nothing to displease the Philistine rulers."

Some may say that it was pure coincidence that the Philistine commander's sent David back. Or that any smart ruler in their shoes would have done the same. However, in context of our entire study of the book of 1 Samuel – we can confidently say that God was working and speaking to David, through the Philistine rulers. **God called David to be the next king of Israel. And in preparation for being the king God wanted him to be..... God used Saul to mould David into a humble and obedient man, who unlike Saul, would at all times listen and obey God's word. Yet after four years of running from Saul.....David tapped out.....he gave up on God's plan and purpose.....Moreover, when he thought to himself instead of holding God's promise word.....David grew discouraged and tired to trust God for His continued deliverance!! So he stopped walking on the path God set for him. To instead, turn off onto his own path.....the wrong path that led into the direct opposite direction of God's path.....a path that instead of leading David to become Israel's shepherd king.....led David to ride out for war with the Philistines against his very own people.**

Yet, despite David's rebellion.....and despite his compromising and deceiving attitude.....God did not give up on David. Surely, God waited and waited for David to return to him by returning to the land of promise, Israel. Yet, finally, when David drifted too far away to ever return.....God gently blocked David from going any further. Look again at verse 7. Now turn back and go in peace. These were God's gracious and forgiving words to David. And with this God forced David to turn back.....to God and the path God has set for him!! In this way, God prevented David from going one step further in the wrong direction. This was for David's own good, as we will see in future studies. Amen.

But at that moment, David was not happy to be rejected by the Philistine rulers. And he protested saying, look at verses 8-11. “But what have I done?” asked David. “What have you found against your servant from the day I came to you until now? Why can’t I go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?” Achish answered, “I know that you have been as pleasing in my eyes as an angel of God; nevertheless, the Philistine commanders have said, ‘He must not go up with us into battle.’ Now get up early, along with your master’s servants who have come with you, and leave in the morning as soon as it is light.” So David and his men got up early in the morning to go back, not yet to the land of the Israelites but to the land of the Philistines. Nevertheless, after a year and four months.....and with the help of God.....this was the first step David took in the right direction.....in obedience to God. Let’s see next week how God fully restores David.

Personally, I thank God for giving me the opportunity to reflect on today’s passage. When I look back at the last 21 years, I can identify so many things that I wish could have gone differently. Most of these things are related to my huge struggle after completing high school to get some sort of direction in and purpose for my life. While many of my high school friends graduated from universities and others becoming national sport stars, I was aimlessly wandering around in England.....working in factories and Scottish farms. Humanly speaking I wasted 7 years of my life. Finally, at the age of 25 I managed to return to university. But again, instead of completing my degree in 4 years as many of my class mates did, it took my about 9 years to get my LLB. Again, many days it feels as if I just wasted so much time. Especially when I compare myself to my friends and peers. However, through today’s passage, I newly realised that though my path in life did not take me to places and allowed me to settle as quickly as many around me.....it remains my path.....a path that God has given specially for me and for my own good! Indeed, so many times I wished my path could just look like some of those around me. Also, I am tempted to give up or change the direction of my path. But I am encouraged through this passage to patiently and thankfully continue on the path God has given to me. Indeed, because of His path I could meet Jesus personally and deeply in my life. Also, because of His path I could grow as a campus shepherd and spiritual man of God. To take care of His people. Frankly speaking, I do not know what my path holds for me and exactly where God will lead me. However, one thing I learned from today’s passage, is that unlike David.....I must embrace God’s path for me and be proud of what the Lord has allowed me to learn and do in this world. I also learned that I must stay on God’s path no matter what.....yet when I do go astray.....I should quickly hear and respond to God’s voice to go back to His path to enjoy his peace.

And not only me, but each and every one of you. So many times we think we will have more peace when we simply conform to the ways and patterns of this world instead of walking on the path the Lord has set our feet. However, we should know, that no matter how difficult things are as we walk with God.....with God we will always be able to go in peace. The same cannot be said of the paths we choose for ourselves. Today, let’s obey God’s word to turn back to him and go in peace. Amen!