

## 1 Samuel 21:10-15

(Also Psalm 34 and Psalm 56)

### David Flees to the Philistine Court

**1 Samuel 21:10-11** - "And David arose, and fled that day for fear of Saul, and went to Achish the king of Gath. And the servants of Achish said unto him, Is not this David the king of the land? did they not sing one to another of him in dances, saying, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?"

Apparently that little song had gone viral (**1 Samuel 18:7**)

Gath was 24 miles from Nob. Achish is also called "Abimelech" in **Psalm 34**, which David wrote describing his harrowing experience there, as well as **Psalm 56**. Abimelech is a sort of Philistine royal title like Pharaoh (**Genesis 20:3, 26:1**).

Gath was the old hometown of Goliath! A Philistine city. But if David had gone to any other nation which had good relations with Israel, the leaders would have been obligated to turn him over to Saul. At least with the Philistines he knew they would not turn him over.

Also, the rabbis note that after David consulted the Urim and Thummim he was convinced that God would protect him there. Perhaps he thought that he could disguise his identity - David going into the Philistine court would seem suicidal, so who would believe this was the mighty warrior David, public enemy No. 1 in the eyes of the Philistines?

[David's life foreshadows Christ. For comparison, note that Jesus and his family fled to Egypt from the murderous intentions of Herod - **Matthew 2:13-23**]

### "King of the Land"

"Is not this David the king of the land?" - What does "king of the land" mean?  
- either "land" means Israel and they had heard David had been anointed by Samuel,

[But also compare the Roman plaque on the cross, declaring Jesus "King of the Jews" (John 19:19). Thus both David and Jesus were declared king of Israel by gentile authorities.]

or...

- "land" means Philistia. By defeating Goliath, David should rightfully possess the lands of the Philistines, which had been part of Goliath's original proposed deal for a one-on-one fight with Israel's champion.

- See **1 Samuel 17:9** - " If he be able to fight with me, and to kill me, then will we be

your servants: but if I prevail against him, and kill him, then shall ye be our servants, and serve us."

In fact, Goliath's brothers (**1 Chronicles 20:4-8**) were the "servants of Achish" who approached the king and demanded they be allowed to kill David for having killed Goliath. Achish replied that Goliath was slain in a fair contest. But they responded that if Achish meant to abide strictly by Goliath's terms, then Achish should give up his throne and deliver it over to David.

The Philistines seem to express sort of a pitiful admiration for David mingled with wonder at seeing the doer of such splendid achievements now in poverty and in exile. David still had Goliath's sword in his possession! Not something that would endear him to the Philistines. There is no mention that they recognized it, but if they did, it certainly would have identified him as David.

### **Faking Madness?**

**1 Samuel 21:12-15** - "And David laid up these words in his heart, and was sore afraid of Achish the king of Gath. And he changed his behavior before them, and feigned himself mad in their hands, and scrabbled on the doors of the gate, and let his spittle fall down upon his beard. Then said Achish unto his servants, Lo, ye see the man is mad: wherefore then have ye brought him to me? Have I need of mad men, that ye have brought this fellow to play the mad man in my presence? shall this fellow come into my house?"

It's possible that Achish felt to have a madman in his presence or to kill him could cause evil spirits to bedevil him or his city. Remember that Saul's mad outbursts also were said to be caused by an evil spirit.

One interesting observation is that David may have been hoping to act the part of a jester with his scribblings and foolish behavior. But Achish already had a jester in his court and says he doesn't need another.

But 15th cent. Spanish rabbi Yaavetz HaDoresh explains that feigned madness is easily detected. The 16th cent. commentary Keli Yakar says that David was infused with a small measure of madness, which he consciously amplified.

The Septuagint translation also indicates that this was not strictly a feigned madness, but rather David was actually stricken with an epileptic seizure.

### **The Value of Madness**

In support of this theory, according to Midrash Shocheh Tov 34:1 commenting on **Psalm 34**, David told God that everything He created was beautiful, with one exception, whose purpose he could not fathom - madness. "What benefit does the world have of a lunatic, who rips off his clothing and whom children run after mockingly?"

God replied, "You question the value of insanity. I assure you that one day you will need it, and you will plead with Me to give you some of it." And in due course in the court of Achish David prayed for lunacy. After Achish dismissed him, the madness drained from David, and in gratitude for this miraculous deliverance David wrote **Psalm 34**.

Maybe I'm reading too much into it, but this is a remarkable incident.

Jesus, healing the man born blind, says his affliction came not because he or his parents sinned, but "that the works of God might be manifest" (**John 9:3-4**).

This viewpoint forces us to look differently at mental health issues in general, and emphasizes Paul's saying that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (**Romans 8:28**).

- **2 Corinthians 5:13** - "For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God: or whether we be sober, it is for your cause."

[David's mad scribbling on the doors of Achish's gateway recalls Jesus' writing in the dirt (**John 8:3-11**), which may have been pointing to a saying of Jeremiah: "O Lord, the hope of Israel, all who forsake You will be put to shame. Those who turn away from You will be written in the dust because they have forsaken the Lord, the spring of living water" (**Jeremiah 17:13**). Another writing incident was the finger of God writing on Belshazzar's palace wall the warning, "*Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin*" or "You have been weighed in the balance and found wanting." Could David's scribbles have unconsciously delivered a similar message to Achish? **Psalm 34:21** - "Affliction will slay the wicked, and those who hate the righteous will be condemned."]

## Psalm 34

### A Messianic Psalm

(Also a popular praise chorus - "I will bless the Lord at all times...")

This psalm is also the Haftorah reading for **Genesis 41:38-57**. David's heartfelt cry in the midst of a life-threatening situation in Achish's court harmonizes perfectly with Joseph's apparent lostness in Pharaoh's dungeon. As a Messianic psalm, this could also be seen as an insight into the thinking of Christ facing his crucifixion.

The superscription says: "A Psalm of David, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech; who drove him away, and he departed."

**1 Samuel 21:14** records the incident, but it doesn't concern Abimelech but rather Achish, the king of the Philistine city of Gath.

Rashi argues that Abimelech is a royal title, not a name. Both Abraham (**Genesis 20**) and Isaac (**Genesis 26**) had dealings with an "Abimelech." At the time of the Amarna

tablets (mid-14th century B.C.), there was an Egyptian governor of Tyre similarly named *Abimilki*, who is sometimes speculated to be connected with one or more of the biblical Abimelechs.

David might have written this much later, after reflecting on his life, as counsel for his children (vs. 11).

## Taste

The superscript says “A Psalm of David, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech; who drove him away, and he departed.”

“behavior” = *ṭaʿam* - taste, behavior

David changed his “taste” (or, what he desired as sustenance). He depended on his own wits, like Jacob, instead of on God, with almost disastrous results.

The same word is used in vs. 8 - “O taste and see that the LORD is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.”

Possible interpretation - We “taste” the Lord when we praise Him with our mouths. This is the activity in which we receive sustenance from Him and understand His goodness.

One theory is that the psalm is focused on David’s repentance from his actions and attitude before Abimelech/Achish, when he feigned madness. From this point of view, David's going to the Philistines was not such a good idea.

In **1 Samuel 21**, Achish's servants were reminding Achish that the Israelites had been boasting about David's exploits in battle. They had been exalting David's name. David hadn't acknowledged God's help in **1 Samuel 18**, and as a result of the people boasting about him, Saul became jealous (which led to David fleeing to Philistia). David is acknowledging that he should have boasted only in YHWH, and he is stating that he does and will do so since his repentance.

The rabbis said he fled to the Philistines after the Urim and Thummim assured him of protection. But here, in his changing his “taste” due to fear of man, he had really suffered want -- the lack of assurance of safety. David exhorts those listening to the psalm to taste the goodness of YHWH. Even though it seemed like David had to solve his own problem in Gath, if he had sought YHWH, he would have been satisfied in YHWH Himself, even if he had been killed by Achish. Nevertheless, God gave David a way out of the situation when there seemed to be no escape.

That’s why this psalm provides an interesting insight into Jesus facing his crucifixion.

**Psalm 34:18-20** - “The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the contrite (daka - crushed, pulverized) in spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him out of them all. He keeps all his bones; not one of them is broken.”

"contrite" = *daka* - crushed in spirit. The more that is left of our own strength or confidence, the less likely we are to depend on God. That's why the pressures, tribulations and calamities of life are a blessing if we have eyes to see.

Prophetically, it pleased the Father to crush the Son (see **Isaiah 53:10**)

- **Isaiah 53:5** - "But He was pierced for our transgressions, He was crushed (*daka*) for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed."

- **Isaiah 53:9-10** - "...He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth. Yet it was the LORD's will to crush Him (*daka*) and to cause Him to suffer; and when His soul is made a guilt offering, He will see His offspring, He will prolong His days, and the good pleasure of the LORD will prosper in His hand."

"Many are the afflictions of the righteous" - like Job, David understood that believers are not guaranteed exemption from pain or trouble. But God is always faithful in the midst of them.

David is saying he escaped from Achish in one piece. But this verse is also applied to Jesus in **John 19:36** - "For these things were done, that the scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of him shall not be broken."

But the verse has a multivalent meaning.

John combines **Psalm 34** with **Exodus 12:46** and **Numbers 9:12** to show that Jesus was the Passover Lamb sacrifice whose bones were not broken. All three meanings were fulfilled in Jesus.

- **Exodus 12:46** - "In one house shall it be eaten; thou shalt not carry forth ought of the flesh abroad out of the house; neither shall ye break a bone thereof."

**Psalm 34:21** - "Evil shall slay the wicked: and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate."

NET has - "Evil people self-destruct; those who hate the godly are punished."

The last verse is a parallel with **verse 20** - "He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken" - and is referring to the soul.

**Psalm 34:22** - "The LORD redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate."

See an interesting discussion of all this at [hermeneutics.stackexchange.com](http://hermeneutics.stackexchange.com):  
<http://buff.ly/2uatGBb>

Concerning Jesus as the Passover Lamb, see the Hadavar.org site:  
<http://buff.ly/2taM20U>

## Psalm 56

Intro: "To the chief Musician upon Jonathalemrechokim, Michtam of David, when the Philistines took him in Gath."

Jonath-elem-rechokim = "upon the dove of silence"

Gath was the city of Goliath. David had just taken Goliath's sword from Ahimelech the priest, so he had it in his possession when he arrived in Gath!

See **1 Samuel 21:10-15** for the setting.

**1 Samuel 21:13** - "And he changed his behavior before them, and feigned himself mad in their hands"

Rashi - Goliath's brothers were requesting permission from Achish to kill him. And he was among them as a mute dove.

- **Psalm 56:1-2** - "Be merciful to me, O God: for man would swallow me up; he fighting daily oppresses me. Mine enemies would daily swallow me up: for they be many that fight against me, O thou most High."

"swallow" = "to pant as a raging beast"

Paul/Saul is represented in just this position in persecuting the church:

- **Acts 9:1** - "And Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest"

## Internal Spiritual Warfare

The dangers of King Saul and the Philistines to David represent our own spiritual battles.

"This may be applied to the old man, the corruptions of nature, and the lusts of the flesh, which are continually warring against the spirit, to oppress it, bring it into captivity, and threaten to swallow it up." - *Gill's Exposition*

**Psalm 56:4** - "In God I will praise his word, in God I have put my trust; I will not fear what flesh can do unto me."

These words of faith and hope punctuate his cries for help to God.

**Psalm 56:5-6** - "Every day they wrest my words: all their thoughts are against me for evil. They gather themselves together, they hide themselves, they mark my steps, when they wait for my soul."

**Psalm 56:8** - "Thou tellest my wanderings: put thou my tears into thy bottle: are they not in thy book?"

Rashi - You know the number of the places to which I wandered, to flee. Place my tears in Your flask, and let them be preserved before You. Are they not in your accounting book?

**Psalm 56:11** - "In God have I put my trust: I will not be afraid what man can do unto me."

- **Matthew 10:28** - "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell."

There is another way of looking at David's feigned madness.

There are many aspects of the life of faith that look crazy to the world. We are "fools for Christ" according to Paul. Christ crucified is "unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness" (**1 Corinthians 1:23**).

Ultimately, we receive the same deliverance that Jesus did - His resurrection.