

Where are the Ittais?

Ponder: Loyalty – a rare commodity

Scripture: “As the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, surely in whatever place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also your servant will be” (2 Sam. 15:21, NKJV).

What do you envision when someone mentions loyalty? Probably a good dog. They aren’t called “man’s best friend” for nothing!

On the other hand, what does the word “Philistine” bring to mind? Probably nothing good. Goliath, the bellowing, blaspheming giant whom young David killed with a sling and a stone, was a Philistine. Kings Saul and David regularly battled the Philistines. They’re the bad guys. But most rules have exceptions.

As King David fled from Jerusalem to escape his murderous son, Absalom, many supporters accompanied him. Among those was Ittai the Gittite, the leader of 600 Philistine mercenaries who formed the king’s bodyguard. (Why have foreigners as bodyguards? Simply because they have no motive to assassinate the king. It’s not as crazy as it sounds.)

David released Ittai and his fellows from service if they wished to avoid the conflict with Absalom. “Should I make you wander up and down with us today, since I know not where? Return, and take your brethren back. Mercy and truth be with you” (2 Sam. 15:20). But Ittai would have none of it! He pledged his loyalty to David “as the Lord lives.” He could just as easily have “sat this one out,” waited until the dust settled, and then served whoever the king was, whether Absalom or David.

After the battle in which Absalom was killed, we read no more of Ittai. Some speculate that he was killed in the intense fighting. If so, his pledge of loyalty “in death or life” takes on special meaning.

If Ittai, a Philistine from Gath (i.e. a Gittite) could be unconditionally loyal to David, shouldn’t you and I be unconditionally loyal to Jesus, the Son of David? Ittai didn’t owe David a thing – any obligation was absolved when David told him to go back. We, on the other hand, owe Jesus everything. We are bought and paid for. He has told us not even to look back (Luke 9:62).

David couldn’t promise Ittai anything but hardship. But Jesus promises us tremendous blessings now, plus the fact that any hardships we endure are unworthy to be compared to the eternal rewards for following Him.

Are you an Ittai?

Song: “I Have Decided To Follow Jesus; No Turning Back”

Prayer: Holy Father in heaven, we thank You for preserving this record of a loyal man. Please help us to learn from the example of Ittai, and to be loyal to the Son of David. In His name, Amen.