

1 Samuel Chapter 29

1 Samuel 29:1 "Now the Philistines gathered together all their armies to Aphek: and the Israelites pitched by a fountain which [is] in Jezreel."

“Gathered ... pitched”: The Philistines were assembling for battle while the Israelites were still camping by the spring. This picks up the story line originally started (in 28:1), but which was sidelined to communicate Saul’s encounter with the medium.

“Aphek”: Located about 24 miles north of Gath (4:1).

“Jezreel”: Only a few miles south of Shunem and 40 miles northeast of Aphek, Jezreel was north of Mt. Gilboa.

This is a continuation (from chapter 28), where Saul had just been told that he and his sons will die in this war with the Philistines. "Aphek" means a fortress. This area of Jezreel has been a popular place for battles. Achish believes the men of David are with them and against Israel. We must remember that all of this is a plan of God to replace Saul.

1 Samuel 29:2 "And the lords of the Philistines passed on by hundreds, and by thousands: but David and his men passed on in the rear guard with Achish."

The orderly advance of this great military nation is thus described. The “lords”: a different term for the expression “princes.” There were apparently in the Philistine federation five sovereign princes, of whom Achish of Gath was one. Beneath these were other chieftains, who seemingly had great control over the sovereign princes.

"David and his men": David, in return for the lands round Ziklag given him by the King of Gath, seems to have owed a kind of military service to his suzerain Achish. The difference in the arms and equipment of the Israelite warriors in the division of David, which was marching under the standard of Gath, no doubt brings questions. The general appearance of the Hebrews was, of course, well known to their hereditary Philistine foes.

God has placed David and his men at the rear of this group so they will not be involved in the death of their brother Hebrews. The other Philistines that are not with Achish, do not like the idea of David and his men being in this group.

Verses 3-10: Achish trusted David (“you are as good in my sight as an angel of God”), but the other Philistine commanders did not. This was God’s providence at work because their distrust prevented David from having to fight against the Israelites, something that surely would have kept him from being accepted as their king.

1 Samuel 29:3 "Then said the princes of the Philistines, What [do] these Hebrews [here]? And Achish said unto the princes of the Philistines, [Is] not this David, the servant of Saul the king of Israel, which hath been with me these days, or these years, and I have found no fault in him since he fell [unto me] unto this day?"

“No fault”: David had proven himself as an honorable and righteous man before Achish, who knew that he could trust David.

The Philistines will have Hebrews in front of them and Hebrews behind them, and this begins to bother them. Achish quickly comes to the defense of David and his men. He is not aware that David killed as many Philistines as he did. You remember, he thought David was raiding Israelites when he came and shared his animals he had won in battle.

1 Samuel 29:4 "And the princes of the Philistines were wroth with him; and the princes of the Philistines said unto him, Make this fellow return, that he may go again to his place which thou hast appointed him, and let him not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he be an adversary to us: for wherewith should he reconcile himself unto his master? [should it] not [be] with the heads of these men?"

“He be an adversary to us”: The Philistine lords were not as willing as Achish to give favor and trust to David. Being very shred in their estimation of potential hazards, they realized that he might be feigning loyalty to the Philistines in order to seize a strategic moment in the battle when he could betray and fight against them.

The other Philistines do not like the explanation that Achish has given for David and his men. Their fear that David's loyalty will return back to Saul, is really bothering them. They insist that Achish send David back to wait out the battle. They do not want David and his men to turn on them in battle, and they will have to fight on both sides. They believe that David would become an adversary to them to win favor back with Saul. "Adversary" in this, means opponent or arch-enemy. They are just sure that David and his men will turn on them, to find favor with Saul.

1 Samuel 29:5 "[Is] not this David, of whom they sang one to another in dances, saying, Saul slew his thousands, and David his ten thousands?"

“David, of whom they sang”: The fame of David had spread throughout the land. The Philistine lords were no stranger to the skill and victories that God had given to mighty David.

These men are aware of the reputation that David had for killing thousands of the Philistines. The main reason he was in trouble with Saul, was because of the songs the women had sung about David killing tens of thousands of Philistines. These Philistines are not sure that David would not turn on them, and kill thousands again.

1 Samuel 29:6 "Then Achish called David, and said unto him, Surely, [as] the LORD liveth, thou hast been upright, and thy going out and thy coming in with me in the host [is] good in my sight: for I have not found evil in thee since the day of thy coming unto me unto this day: nevertheless the lords favor thee not."

“As the Lord liveth”: When seeking the highest standard by which to assure David of his credibility, Achish swore by the existence of David’s God. It is evident that the pagan world knows of God, but the irony is that their knowledge does not necessarily lead to repentance.

It is strange for a Philistine to recognize the Eternal God. That is what is in the statement of Achish above however. It truly is the LORD who gets David out of this battle. The LORD has already determined that Saul and the Israelites will lose this battle to the Philistines. This is divine intervention and to keep David from being involved in this destruction of the Israelites, Achish sends David home.

1 Samuel 29:7 "Wherefore now return, and go in peace, that thou displease not the lords of the Philistines."

Not only in a peaceable manner, easy and satisfied, as David was at his very heart to hear this; but that all prosperity and happiness attend thee. The Jews distinguish between wishing persons to go in peace, and to go to peace. The former they observe has not issued happily, when the other has, and the instance in the wish of Jethro to Moses or of David to Absalom.

"That thou displease not the lords of the Philistines": And what would be the consequence of that he could not say, but suggests it would be most for his peace and safety to depart.

It was the desire of Achish for David to be with him, but he bows to the wishes of the other Philistine lords. Achish is telling David that he has no quarrel with him returning, and not being involved with this battle against the Israelites. The beautiful thing in this, is the working of the LORD. The LORD is protecting David in this. He will not be responsible for the death of Saul.

1 Samuel 29:8 "And David said unto Achish, But what have I done? and what hast thou found in thy servant so long as I have been with thee unto this day, that I may not go fight against the enemies of my lord the king?"

“The enemies of my lord the king”: David’s fidelity to Achish seemed to be at its climax in this expression of loyalty. David appears to have been fully prepared to do battle on behalf of Achish against his enemies, namely Israel. In light of David’s former refusal to stretch out his hand against the Lord’s anointed (24:6, 10; 26:9, 11-21): David might have been capitulating and compromising. He did not inquire of the Lord before going to live with Achish, nor did he inquire of the Lord as to wherever he should go out to battle with Achish. On the other hand, it could be that while David gave the appearance of loyalty, he actually believed the Philistines would not let him go out to battle, just as it actually happened (27:8-12). The providence of God kept David from fighting against the Lord’s anointed and his own countrymen.

David does not want to show his pleasure in the possibility of him not fighting against his own people. David reminds Achish that he has not come against him at any time. All of this loyalty is perhaps, to get in the good graces of Achish. I can easily see the working of the LORD in all of this.

1 Samuel 29:9 "And Achish answered and said to David, I know that thou [art] good in my sight, as an angel of God: notwithstanding the princes of the Philistines have said, He shall not go up with us to the battle."

An "angel of God" appears to have been a common Hebrew expression of commendation in those times (2 Sam. 14:17; 19:27). God sovereignly used the suspicion of the Philistine "Princes" to deliver "David" from the dilemma of either fighting against his own countrymen or betraying his true sentiments, thus facing the wrath of the "Philistines."

The degree to which Achish praised David has led some to believe that his eulogy was merely a formal attempt at flattery.

Even though David had killed so many Philistines, it appears he had been loyal to Achish. Achish feels some kinship with David. He feels that David has ministered to him personally as well as being a great help. This reminds me so much of the following Scripture:

Proverbs 16:7 "When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him."

1 Samuel 29:10 "Wherefore now rise up early in the morning with thy master's servants that are come with thee: and as soon as ye be up early in the morning, and have light, depart."

Meaning his six hundred men, who were considered as the servants and subjects of Saul, though with David: and which tacitly carried in it the objection of the Philistine lords unto them, that since they were the servants and subjects of Saul, they were not to be trusted in a battle with him. Lest finding an opportunity, they should seize it, and thereby ingratiate themselves into his favor again.

"And as soon as ye be up early in the morning, and have light, depart": He advises them to get away as soon as they could, lest the Philistines should fall upon them, and force them, and he could not say what mischief might befall them. Therefore for their safety it was best to depart as soon as they could see their way.

This seems to mean that some of the men of Saul have deserted and come over to the side of David at this time. Many of the Israelites knew the things that Saul was doing against David, was wrong. David would take all of his men and go back into the land of the Philistines at dawn the next morning, before the battle starts.

1 Samuel 29:11 "So David and his men rose up early to depart in the morning, to return into the land of the Philistines. And the Philistines went up to Jezreel."

"Jezreel": This was used to designate both a city about 56 miles north of Jerusalem as well as the plain of Jezreel, which served as a major battlefield for many nations. The city was situated in the territory of Issachar (Joshua 19:18). It was bounded on the north and south by Megiddo and Beth-shean (1 Kings 4:12), and on the west and east by Mt. Carmel and Mt. Gilboa.

This lesson is all about the divine intervention of the LORD to keep David pure and attacking his own people. By the third day after David left this area, he would be back in Ziklag, which was his own city. It would have been dishonest to stay and watch after Achish sent David away himself. The LORD Himself set this whole thing into motion. David is innocent of killing Hebrews. He is also innocent at this time of dishonoring his word to Achish.

1 Samuel Chapter 29 Questions

1. Where did the Philistines gather their army?
2. Where did the Israelites pitch their tents?
3. What does "Aphek" mean?
4. What does Achish believe about David?
5. How many Philistines came to this battle?
6. Where were David's men stationed?
7. Who complained about the men of David being in this battle?
8. Why did Achish say, that David would be loyal to him?
9. The Philistines would have Hebrews in _____ of them and Hebrews _____ them, if David stayed.
10. How had David deceived Achish?
11. What did the princes of the Philistines insist on David doing?
12. What did they say David would be to them to prove his loyalty to Saul?
13. What does "adversary" mean?
14. What did they say the women had sung about David?
15. What was the main reason David was in trouble with Saul?
16. What is strange about the statement that Achish makes in verse 6?
17. Who truly gets David out of this battle?
18. What does Achish tell David to do?
19. What beauty from the LORD is in this?

20. In verse 8, what does David remind Achish of?
21. What does Achish call David in verse 9?
22. When is David to return home?
23. Who has been added to David's men?
24. What is this lesson all about?