

The Life of David

David Rejected by the Philistines

1 Samuel 29:1-11

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Scripture

In our study of the life of David, we have noted that the final few chapters of First Samuel are not in chronological order. They are arranged thematically. Chapter 27 shows us David's dilemma, caused by his temporary faithlessness. Chapter 28 shows us Saul's dilemma, caused by his permanent faithlessness. Chapter 29 shows us David's deliverance, as he is saved by the Philistines. And chapter 31 shows us Saul's death, as he is destroyed by the Philistines. In these final chapters, the author shows us the difference between a person who has a personal relationship with God (David) and a person who has no personal relationship with God (Saul).

Today we are going to study 1 Samuel 29:1-11, the chapter that shows us David's deliverance, as he is saved by the Philistines.

So, let's read about David's rejection by the Philistines in 1 Samuel 29:1-11:

¹Now the Philistines had gathered all their forces at Aphek. And the Israelites were encamped by the spring that is in Jezreel. ²As the lords of the Philistines were passing on by hundreds and by thousands, and David and his men were passing on in the rear with Achish, ³the commanders of the Philistines said, "What are these Hebrews doing here?" And Achish said to the commanders of the Philistines, "Is this not David, the servant of Saul, king of Israel, who has been with me now for days and years, and since he deserted to me I have found no fault in him to this day." ⁴But the commanders of the Philistines were angry with him. And the commanders of the Philistines said to him, "Send the man back, that he may return to the place to which you have assigned him. He shall not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he become an adversary to us. For how could this fellow reconcile himself to his lord? Would it not be with the heads of

the men here? ⁵ Is not this David, of whom they sing to one another in dances,

‘Saul has struck down his thousands,
and David his ten thousands?’”

⁶ Then Achish called David and said to him, “As the Lord lives, you have been honest, and to me it seems right that you should march out and in with me in the campaign. For I have found nothing wrong in you from the day of your coming to me to this day. Nevertheless, the lords do not approve of you. ⁷ So go back now; and go peaceably, that you may not displease the lords of the Philistines.” ⁸ And David said to Achish, “But what have I done? What have you found in your servant from the day I entered your service until now, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?” ⁹ And Achish answered David and said, “I know that you are as blameless in my sight as an angel of God. Nevertheless, the commanders of the Philistines have said, ‘He shall not go up with us to the battle.’ ¹⁰ Now then rise early in the morning with the servants of your lord who came with you, and start early in the morning, and depart as soon as you have light.” ¹¹ So David set out with his men early in the morning to return to the land of the Philistines. But the Philistines went up to Jezreel. (1 Samuel 29:1-11)

Introduction

Most of you have heard of the expression: “Waiting for the other shoe to drop,” which means “waiting for something to happen you feel is inevitable.” Do you know where the expression originated? Apparently, it came from the tenements of New York City in the late 19th and early 20th century, where apartments were built with bedrooms on top of one another. It was common to hear your upstairs neighbor take off a shoe, drop it, and then repeat the action. It became shorthand for waiting for something

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you knew was coming.¹

David had been anointed as a teenager to be the next king over Israel. God had promised this. However, David waited a long time for the other shoe to drop, that is, to become king.

David served Saul in his army for a number of years, and was extremely successful in his military campaigns. But then Saul became murderously jealous of David when he heard the women of Israel sing, “Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands” (1 Samuel 18:7; 21:11). So, for more than seven years Saul hunted David like the elusive prey that could never be caught.

After sixteen unsuccessful attempts by Saul to kill David, David had had enough. He went with all his followers to live in Philistia. Achish, the king of Gath, one of the five lords of Philistia, granted David safe haven in a town called Ziklag.

For sixteen months, David attacked and destroyed Israel’s ancient enemies. David falsely told Achish that he was attacking Israelite strongholds, and gullible Achish believed David.

Because Achish believed that David had turned against Saul, Achish decided that it was time for a major military campaign against Israel. He told David to join him, and appointed David as his own personal bodyguard. This is the setting for today’s lesson.

Lesson

First Samuel 29:1-11 shows us that the Lord always preserves his own people, even when they act foolishly.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. The Dilemma for David (29:1-2)
2. The Disapproval of David (29:3-5)
3. The Discharge of David (29:6-11)

¹ See <https://www.inc.com/melanie-curtin/the-origin-of-waiting-for-other-shoe-to-drop-15-other-common-idioms.html>.

I. The Dilemma for David (29:1-2)

First, let's look at the dilemma for David.

First Samuel 29:1 says, **“Now the Philistines had gathered all their forces at Aphek. And the Israelites were encamped by the spring that is in Jezreel.”** Aphek was actually about 30 miles southwest of Jezreel. The author of First Samuel is describing what happened several days before the attack against Saul and the Israelites. **The Philistines** were mustering their troops for the upcoming battle. Verse 2 says that **“as the lords of the Philistines were passing on by hundreds and by thousands, and David and his men were passing on in the rear with Achish.”**

First Samuel 6:17 tells us that Philistia had five lords: one for Ashdod, one for Gaza, one for Ashkelon, one for Gath, and one for Ekron. Achish was the lord—also known as the king—of Gath. Presumably, the other lords and their armies mustered first, and then Achish and his army brought up the rear. Since Achish had made David his personal bodyguard, **David and his men were passing on in the rear with Achish.** This set up the disapproval of David, which we shall look at next.

However, we need to look at the dilemma for David. Achish assumed that David had lived in Philistia now for sixteen months and he had come to believe that David was loyal to him. So, Achish recruited David to join him in going to war against the Israelites. Astonishingly, David agreed to do so.

David's dilemma was that if he told Achish that he would not go, then Achish would rightly have questioned David's loyalty. That would have caused David trouble with Achish. On the other hand, by going with Achish against the Israelites, he was appearing to fight against God's covenant people. This really was a major dilemma for David.

As we have examined the life of David, I have said that David is a type who foreshadows his greater Son, Jesus. But, having

joined the Philistines, David does not point us to Jesus. In this incident, David actually is like a typical wayward follower of Jesus. Commentator Rick Phillips says it best:

[David] has made a classic mistake to which we are also prone: attempting to lead a double life with respect to Christ and the world. David had sought a temporal salvation from the Philistines while he sought his eternal salvation with God. David was like a person today who wants to go to heaven and so professes faith in Jesus. But he also wants financial security, so he hoards his money and follows the stock market with religious devotion. He wants a satisfying career, so he compromises his integrity in the workplace. He wants pleasure and approval, so he drinks from the trough of sensual worldly entertainment. And desiring an eternity in heaven, on Sundays he goes back and pays his respects to Jesus Christ at church.²

There are people who want to go to heaven, but they also want the delights and pleasures of the world. You cannot have both. You must choose Christ. Or you must go with the world.

II. The Disapproval of David (29:3-5)

Second, let's note the disapproval of David.

As David and his men were passing on in the rear with Achish, **the commanders of the Philistines said, "What are these Hebrews doing here?"** (29:3a). These were not the lords (or kings) of Philistia, but rather the **commanders** (or generals) **of the Philistines**. They referred to the Israelites as **"Hebrews."**

Quick to defend his decision, **Achish said to the commanders of the Philistines, "Is this not David, the servant of Saul, king of Israel, who has been with me now for days and**

² Richard D. Phillips, *1 Samuel*, ed. Philip Graham Ryken and Richard D. Phillips, Duguid Iain M., 1st ed., Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012), 486.

years, and since he deserted to me I have found no fault in him to this day” (29:3b). Achish told the commanders that he believed that David had defected from Saul to himself, that David had proven himself loyal to Achish, and that therefore he found no fault in David.

But the commanders of the Philistines were not as gullible as Achish. In fact, they **were angry with him. And the commanders of the Philistines said to him, “Send the man back, that he may return to the place to which you have assigned him”** (29:4a). The commanders of the Philistines had three reasons for their disapproval of David.

First, they disapproved of David because he might turn against them in battle. They said in verse 4b, **“He shall not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he become an adversary to us.”** Actually, the commanders were simply remembering that this had happened to them on a previous occasion. Apparently, in a battle in which Saul’s son Jonathan defeated the Philistines, there were some Hebrews in the Philistine camp. During the battle, they turned against the Philistines and joined the Israelites (1 Samuel 14:21). The commanders did not want David and his men to turn against them in battle.

Second, they disapproved of David because he might use this battle to gain Saul’s favor. The commanders of the Philistines asked Achish, in verse 4c, **“For how could this fellow reconcile himself to his lord? Would it not be with the heads of the men here?”** If David turned against the Philistines and killed them, he might orchestrate a reconciliation between himself and Saul. The commanders did not want David to use this battle to gain Saul’s favor.

And third, they disapproved of David because of his fame. The commanders of the Philistines said in verse 5, **“Is not this David, of whom they sing to one another in dances, ‘Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands?’”** This victory song was sung because David had defeated the Philistines.

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They did not believe that David would be loyal to them this time.

So, for these three reasons the commanders of the Philistines disapproved of David joining them for the upcoming battle.

God's ways of orchestrating his preserving providences are often surprising. One of my Systematic Theology professors at seminary was Dr. John Feinberg. In his book *The Many Faces of Evil*, he tells the story of when his wife, Pat, was diagnosed with Huntington's Chorea—a genetically-transmitted disease that causes deterioration in the brain, thus causing deterioration of physical and psychological abilities. John and Pat were not only concerned about the future of her health, but the health of their children. If one parent has the gene that causes Huntington's, children of that parent have a 50% chance of suffering from the same disease. What was also troubling to John was that they had no warning that Huntington's was a possibility for Pat—and they should have been warned. Soon after the diagnosis, they requested a copy of Pat's mother's medical chart to see if there was any family history of the disease, and learned that Pat's mother had suffered from Huntington's, unbeknown to the family. Initially, Dr. Feinberg was angry, realizing this diagnosis came five years before he met his wife. It could have altered everything! But Feinberg writes of his realization that the hidden knowledge was a gift of grace from God:

For twenty years that information had been there, and at any time we could have found it out. Why, then, did God not give it to us until 1987?

As I wrestled with that question, I began to see his love and concern for us. God kept it hidden because he wanted me to marry Pat, who is a wonderful wife. My life would be impoverished without her, and I would have missed the blessings of being married to her had I known earlier.

God wanted our three sons to be born. Each is a blessing and a treasure, but we would have missed that had we known earlier. And God knew that we needed to be in a community of brothers and sisters in Christ at church and at the seminary who

would love us and care for us at this darkest hour.

And so he withheld that information, not because he accidentally overlooked giving it to us, and not because he is an uncaring God who delights in seeing his children suffer. He withheld it as a sign of his great care for us. There is never a good time to receive such news, but God knew that this was exactly the right time.³

We don't always understand God's ways. But God is always good. And he is always good to those who belong to him.

III. The Discharge of David (29:6-11)

And third, let's observe the discharge of David.

Achish was now stuck between a rock and a hard place. The origin of the idiom "between a rock and a hard place" can be found in ancient Greek mythology. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus must pass between Charybdis, a treacherous whirlpool, and Scylla, a horrid man-eating, cliff-dwelling monster. Ever since, saying one is stuck between a rock (the cliff) and a hard place (the whirlpool) has been a way to succinctly describe being in a dilemma.⁴ Achish's dilemma was to keep David with him (and incur the further anger of his commanders) or to send David back to Ziklag (and significantly weaken his army, and also dismiss his personal bodyguard).

Then Achish called David and said to him, "As the Lord lives, you have been honest, and to me it seems right that you should march out and in with me in the campaign. For I have found nothing wrong in you from the day of your coming to me to this day" (29:6a). Achish still believed David and his loyalty to him. **"Nevertheless,"** Achish continued, **"the lords do not approve of you. So go back now; and go peaceably, that you**

³ John S. Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 464-465.

⁴ See <https://www.gingersoftware.com/content/phrases/between-a-rock-and-a-hard-place/#.XbyNpS2ZPOQ>.

may not displease the lords of the Philistines” (29:6a-7). Achish made his decision: David had to return to Ziklag.

One would think that David would quickly thank Achish and leave. What a wonderful way out of his own dilemma! He would not have to fight against Saul and the covenant people of God. Astonishingly, however, **David said to Achish, “But what have I done? What have you found in your servant from the day I entered your service until now, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?”** (29:8). David protested his departure. He appears to continue his loyalty to Achish.

However, some commentators have noted an ambiguity in David’s answer to Achish. David used the phrase **“my lord the king”** on previous occasions not to refer to Achish but to Saul (1 Samuel 24:8; 26:17). It is possible that David did in fact want to fight against **“the enemies of my lord the king.”** That is, he wanted to fight against the enemies of *Saul*, which would of course be the Philistines. And perhaps that is why David protested his departure; he really did want to turn against the Philistines in battle.

Nevertheless, **Achish** stood firm and **answered David and said, “I know that you are as blameless in my sight as an angel of God. Nevertheless, the commanders of the Philistines have said, ‘He shall not go up with us to the battle.’ Now then rise early in the morning with the servants of your lord who came with you, and start early in the morning, and depart as soon as you have light”** (29:9-10). Achish resolved his own dilemma by commanding David to leave the battle and return to Ziklag. **So David set out with his men early in the morning to return to the land of the Philistines. But the Philistines went up to Jezreel** (29:11). The discharge of David was complete.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the incident of David rejected by

the Philistines in 1 Samuel 29:1-11, let us make sure that we have a personal relationship with God.

I mentioned at the start of the message that the author of First Samuel wanted to show his readers in these final chapters the difference between a person who has a personal relationship with God and a person who has no personal relationship with God. Saul did not have a personal relationship with God. He started off well, appearing to do the things that are true of those who have a personal relationship with God. But, after a while, Saul did not even bother, and he continually disobeyed God, thus demonstrating again and again that he had no personal relationship with God.

On the other hand, David did have a personal relationship with God. Even though David made some foolish mistakes and errors, such as going to live among the Philistines, God preserved him, even when he acted foolishly.

The difference between Saul and David is a personal relationship with God. God saved David from his error, whereas God allowed Saul to be destroyed, and the kingdom taken away from him. The lesson David learned from this incident of being rejected by the Philistines is summarized in Psalm 118: "The Lord is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation.... The Lord has disciplined me severely, but he has not given me over to death."

Friends, if you have a personal relationship with God, know that God will always preserve you. That is the essence of salvation. We should not of course set out to act foolishly, but even if we do and make mistakes, God will preserve us. The key is a personal relationship with God.

So, be sure that you have a personal relationship with God. Amen.

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and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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