

In the last sermon, David allied with Achish, leading Achish to believe David was a loyal ally. Skipping chapter 28, we continue with chapter 29, the continuation of David's story in Gath. In 1 Samuel 28:1-2, David and his men become Achish's bodyguards, setting the stage for upcoming conflict in Philistine military operations.

THE SETTING (1 SAMUEL 29:1-2)

The Philistines, led by Achish, prepare to battle Israel's King Saul. They set up camp near a fountain in Jezreel, suggesting a long journey from Gath, possibly via the Red Sea, Edom, Moab, and over the Jordan. The fountain could be Ein Herod, where Gideon once camped during his battle against the Midianites.

The Philistine army was large, with soldiers marching "by hundreds, and by thousands" (1 Samuel 29:2). David and his men, serving as Achish's bodyguards, were positioned at the rear, showing Achish's trust in them.

In ancient warfare, this rear placement allowed the king to oversee the battlefield and make tactical decisions, while also ensuring their safety. The term "rereward," found in the King James Version of the Bible, refers to this rear guard, protecting the army from potential rear attacks.

THE PHILISTINE COMMANDERS' OBJECTION (1 SAMUEL 29:3-5)

When the Philistine commanders question David's presence, their suspicion is understandable due to his history as an Israelite hero. Achish defends David saying, "I have found no fault in him." However, David has misled Achish about his intentions and Achish falsely believes he rescued David from Israel. This misunderstanding complicates their alliance, highlighting the risk of alliances based on deception.

The Philistine leaders, unconvinced by Achish's faith in David, demand his return to Ziklag. They fear potential risks or that David may exploit a battle situation to reconcile with his master at the cost of Philistine lives. Their skepticism underscores the tension in David's delicate position among the Philistines.

The Philistine commanders doubt David, referencing the song that praises his victories - "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands" (1 Samuel 29:5). This song indicates David's fame as a warrior even beyond Israel. While this reputation is a source of Israelite pride, it incites fear among the Philistines, complicating his Philistine standing.

ACHISH'S DEFENSE OF DAVID (1 SAMUEL 29:6-7)

Achish assures David of his trust and respect, using the name of David's God, "the LORD". This isn't indicative of Achish worshipping YHWH, but rather a common practice among polytheists who liberally used various god names.

This phenomenon of foreign kings using the God of Israel's name is also seen in Jonah 1:14 and Daniel 4:37. In Jonah 1:14, non-Israelite sailors acknowledged the God of Israel while pleading for their lives. Similarly, in Daniel 4:37, King Nebuchadnezzar, a non-Israelite, praised the King of heaven, referring to the God of

Israel. These instances show non-Israelite figures in the Bible acknowledging the God of Israel, usually as a respectful gesture towards Israelites.

Achish sends David away to satisfy the Philistine leaders, leaving David's intentions unclear. Despite David's past respect for Saul's anointed status, questions arise about his possible actions against Saul. Given his loyalty, it's unlikely and possibly, his release could be a relief, avoiding potential conflict with his people.

DAVID'S RESPONSE (1 SAMUEL 29:8)

David, taken aback by Achish's request, pleads his innocence and questions the reason behind his dismissal from the battle. His words reflect either feigned shock and regret or a genuine turn against Saul and his own people. Considering David's track record of deception throughout his interactions with Achish, it seems more plausible that his surprise is a pretense. It's likely that David is relieved to have found a way out of the precarious situation of potentially having to fight against his own people.

Regardless of the circumstances leading to David's dismissal from the battle, it is important to note that this event likely saved his future reign. As it transpires, Saul loses his life in this very battle. Had David been present and participated, his involvement could have drastically altered the course of his destiny and the future of the Israelite monarchy.

ACHISH'S FINAL VERDICT (1 SAMUEL 29:9-11)

Achish, having faced the opposition of his commanders, finally yields to their counsel and insists that David and his men depart. He makes it clear that his decision is final and there is no room for negotiation. Despite his personal trust in David, Achish acknowledges the potential risks that his advisors have pointed out and chooses not to go against their collective wisdom. With the break of dawn on the following morning, David and his soldiers obediently leave the Philistine camp, marking the end of an unusual and precarious alliance. Meanwhile, the Philistine army advances to Jezreel, ready to engage in a crucial battle that will ultimately reshape the course of history.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen David caught in a web of deception, forming an uneasy and precarious alliance with Achish, the king of Gath. His situation highlights the potential pitfalls of straying from reliance on God and instead trusting in our own understanding. The Philistine commanders' suspicions and their subsequent demand for David's dismissal expose the inherent risks in such alliances, especially those built on untruths. Despite his seeming loyalty to Achish, David's true allegiance lies with his people, the Israelites.

However, David's dilemma of misplaced trust is not yet over. As we venture into the next chapter, we will find that David's decisions have far-reaching consequences. His wives, the wives of his men, their children, and all their possessions will soon find themselves in grave danger. This further emphasizes the need for wisdom and discernment, and the importance of placing trust in the Lord rather than in human alliances.