



Please turn in your Bibles to 1 Samuel 29 (p. 235, pew Bible). If you been with us the last two weeks, you know that David has gotten himself into a real fix. To get away from Saul, David has gone to live among the Philistines. By the time we come to chapter 29, David has been with them for well over a year and has gained the trust of Achish, the king of the Philistines. As they prepare to go to war with the Israelites, Achish expects David and his men to join him in battle. This puts David in a precarious position. If David does *not* go with Achish, he will be deemed a coward not to mention an ingrate who had been his protector and benefactor for the last sixteen months. But if David does go, he would be considered an enemy of Israel, who would reject David's rule if Saul in the event that Saul died. And if Saul were to be killed in this battle (which we know ends up being the case), the blame would be laid at David's door. So, David is in a real quandary!

As I thought about David's predicament, I thought of Aaron Brown, the son of the pastor of the church that my family attended when I was in middle school. Aaron was was friends with my youngest brother, who was the same age, about 5-6 years old at the time. Aaron was a good kid but had a way of getting himself into trouble – unintentionally.

Do you all know what a "Junglegym" is? It's a piece of playground equipment made up of metal pipes on which kids can climb, hang, and sit. [show pic]



This particular model, called a "Dome Climber," was the kind we had on our church playground. One Sunday after church, we heard a boy crying and yelling, "Help! Help me! I'm stuck!" A few of us ran out to the playground, and there was Aaron, perched on the top of the dome. He was sitting on top of a bar, with his leg hyperextended under another bar and the heel of his foot resting on top of the next bar. He was totally helpless, unable to get out of this jam, and it took quite a bit of maneuvering to free him.

Sometimes in life, we're like Aaron on the Junglegym. We're moving about this way and that, trying to figure things out as we go, only to work ourselves into a jam. Thankfully, ***when we get ourselves into a fix, God is still faithfully at work.***

He mercifully comes to our rescue and works over and in and through that situation to accomplish his good purpose in our lives. As we follow the narrative of 1 Samuel 29, notice how the Lord orchestrates the course of events to rescue his servant David.

Verse 1 sets the stage for the impending battle between the Philistines and Israelites:

Now the Philistines had gathered all their forces at Aphek. And the Israelites were encamped by the spring that is in Jezreel.

- 1 Samuel 29:1

The location of their respective camps shows us that the narrator pushed “fast forward” to focus on Saul in the previous chapter and now pushes “rewind” to get us back to the present situation with David. We know this because Aphek is 30 miles north of Gath but is 40 miles south of Shunem, which is where the Philistines are camped in chapter 28, the night before the battle occurs. So, at this point, they are still making their way north.

In the meantime, the Israelite forces “were encamped by the spring that is in Jezreel.” Jezreel was a junction of various travel routes. From there the Israelite forces would be deployed on Mount Gilboa, which is where they are in chapter 28, the night before the battle. The “spring that is in Jezreel” is the source of the river Harod at the foot of Mount Gilboa. In fact, “Gilboa” is a Hebrew word that means “bubbling fountains.” Today, the spring of Jezreel is part of a public park in Israel.¹

Chapter 29 begins and ends at “Jezreel,” which is near to the site of Saul’s death. “The same Philistines who mortally wound Saul (ch. 31) are the ones who unwittingly rescue David.”² How does this come about? By the mighty, merciful providence of God. We see his sovereignty at work through the sequence of events in chapter 29.

Dissension **(vv. 1-5)**

Continuing on to verses 2-3, we read, “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, the commanders of the Philistines said, “What are these Hebrews doing here?”

As the Philistine forces move north, David and his men form the rear guard, along with King Achish and his commanders. They don’t like this arrangement and say so, asking Achish, “What are these Hebrews doing here?” Their question drips with disdain.

- ⇒ The word *Hebrew* comes from the name “Eber,” who is listed in Genesis 10:24 as the great-grandson of Noah’s oldest son Shem, the forefather of the Semites, which included the Canaanites, Hebrews, Arabs, and other peoples in the ancient Near East. Eber was a distant ancestor of Abraham, the father of the nation Israel.
- ⇒ A person who is prejudiced against Jewish people is often called an anti-Semite. People who referred to the Israelites as “Hebrews” often meant it as a racial slur,

¹ Joyce Baldwin, *1 and 2 Samuel: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, gen. ed. D. J. Wiseman (Downers Grove, IL: 1988), p. 164.

² Brueggemann, Walter. *First and Second Samuel*. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. Louisville: John Knox, 1990), p. 199. Cited by Ronald F. Youngblood in *1, 2 Samuel*. The Expositor’s Bible Commentary, vol. 3, gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelein (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), p. 789.

similar to how an anti-Semite might call Jewish people “kikes” today. The Philistine commanders did not like David and didn’t want him and his men tagging along.

Achish replies to their question, “What are these Hebrews doing here?” with a question of his own: “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’” (v. 3b). “Days and years” is an idiom meaning a year or two. First Samuel 27:7 says, “David lived in the country of the Philistines ... a year and four months.” In all that time Achish “found no fault” in David.

Such was Achish’s perception. Little did he know that the whole time David had been living among the Philistines, he had deceived Achish by giving the impression that he was raiding towns that belonged to Judah or their allies when really he was attacking their common enemies and leaving no survivors to tell about it (see 1 Samuel 27:8-12). So, Achish thought David was now the enemy of Israel, and Achish was prepared to make David his bodyguard for life (see 1 Samuel 28:2).

⁴ But 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’?”

- 1 Samuel 29:4-5

As tensions mount between King Achish and his commanders, you can’t help but see the humor in their dispute. The commanders initiate the quarrel by asking, “What are these Hebrews doing here?” Then Achish replies with a question of his own, saying, “*Is not this David* ... who has been with me now for days and years...?” Now the commanders come back with another question, throwing Achish’s own words back into his face: “*Is not this David*, of whom they sing to one another in dances, ‘Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands?’” More than a decade later, this song was still a hit. The Philistines hearing that song would be like members of al-Qaeda hearing Toby Keith’s song, “Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue.”

The commanders are “angry” with Achish. He sees David as their ally, but they see him as their “adversary,” and rightly so. God is going to use this dissension between Achish and his com-manders to get David out of this jam.

Dialogue (vv. 6-10)

Achish knows he can’t go into battle at odds with his commanders. “A house divided against itself cannot stand” (Matt. 12:25). So, Achish is forced to have a talk with David.

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.”

- 1 Samuel 29:6-7

Achish is doing everything he can to keep the peace with David and to preserve their relationship. Achish begins with an unexpected oath, saying, “As the Lord lives...” Either he has committed himself to David’s Lord, the Lord God of Israel, which is highly unlikely given that he is on his way to fight Israel, or Achish is showing deference to David by not swearing by the Philistine gods.³ This certainly seems to be the case, as Achish assures David that he has found nothing wrong in him since the day he arrived. Now he tells David to go back peaceably so he doesn’t upset the military commanders.

While we’re glad for David’s sake that Achish regards him this way, the Philistine king doesn’t have a clue, does he? He tells David, “you have been honest” – but not really! He says, “to me it seems right that you should go out into battle,” but Achish’s opinion is based on a wrong perspective. Yet God is providentially using Achish’s perspective, coupled with his commander’s opposite perspective, to get David out of this pickle!

Achish tells David to “go peaceably,” realizing that David might have a problem with this sudden change of plans. To keep up the ruse, David puts up a fuss. “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?” When David says, “my lord the king,” Achish assumes *he* is the king David refers to, but David repeatedly addressed Saul as “my lord the king,” even in Saul’s worst moments, when he hunted David relentlessly and David spared his life on two separate occasions – their last two encounters, in fact (1 Sam. 24:8, 10; 26:17, 19). David’s real enemies *are* the Philistines, so their commanders are rightly concerned! But Achish is clueless. He falls for everything David says – hook, line, and sinker.

“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.”

- 1 Samuel 29:9-10

Though Achish would love to have David accompany him, he can’t allow it, given how his commanders feel about it. His mind is made up. The word “now” at the beginning of verse 10 indicates a sense of urgency. David must leave first thing in the morning. Bill Arnold sums up the situation perfectly, saying, “Achish thinks he is disappointing David by driving him away. In reality, he has become God’s instrument for delivering David from an impossible lose-lose situation.”⁴

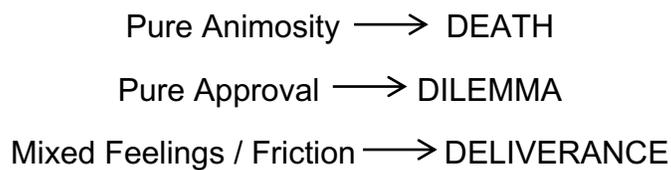
³ Baldwin, 165.

⁴ Bill T. Arnold, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 and 2 Samuel*, gen. ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), p. 387.

David's exit is more than a departure. It's divine deliverance.

Deliverance (v. 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 Sam. 29:11). Problem solved, thanks to God! It's amazing to see how the Lord worked through this situation to rescue David from the fix into which he had gotten himself. As I read this account, I was amazed at how God used the conflict between Achish and his commanders to get David out of an impossible situation. I played out the various scenarios and scribbled down this diagram:



You see, if Achish and his commanders all displayed pure *animosity* toward David as their adversary, they would have killed him. But if they all *approved* of David, they would have had him join them in battle, which would've put David in a real dilemma. But the sharp disagreement between Achish and his commanders leads to David's "honorable discharge" and dismissal. Dale Davis correctly states, "1 Samuel 29 is not the story of a lucky break but of a divine deliverance, a merciful deliverance."⁵

The presence of God permeates this chapter, but "the name of God is used only twice in this chapter (vv. 6-9), both times by Achish rather than David, perhaps implying that while David was in Philistine territory, he did not consult the Lord."⁶ As Pastor Mike noted when preaching on 1 Samuel 27, no psalms are recorded during the sixteen months that David is living among the Philistines. So, David's withdrawal was a merciful deliverance. He got himself into this fix. God got him out of it.

I find it interesting not only that Achish is the one who mentions God twice in this chapter, but also that Achish defends David's honor three times, saying, "I have found no fault in him" (v. 3), "I have found nothing wrong in you" (v. 6), "you are ... blameless" (v. 9). Doesn't this remind you of Pilate's three-fold declaration concerning Jesus: "I find no fault in him" (John 18:38; 19:4, 6). Achish's assessment of David was wrong, but Pilate's assessment of Jesus was right. Scripture says, "he never sinned, nor ever deceived anyone. He personally carried our sins in his body on the cross..." (1 Pet. 2:22, 24a NLT). "He was handed over to die because of our sins, and he was raised to life to make us right with God" (Rom. 4:25 NLT).

The apostle Peter declared that Jesus was "delivered up according to the prearranged plan of God" (Acts 2:23 NLT) to deliver us from God's righteous wrath against our sin.

⁵ Dale Ralph Davis, *1 Samuel: Looking on the Heart*. Focus on the Bible Commentary Series (Ross-shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2000, reprinted 2008), p. 303.

⁶ Youngblood, *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 788.

Apart from Christ we are hopeless, dead in our trespasses and sins, and doomed to suffer in hell forever, apart from God's glorious presence. That's the worst predicament of every person, yet Jesus provided the way of escape by taking our punishment for us. Scripture says,

Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.

- John 3:36

Have you been delivered from the wrath to come by putting your faith in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins? If not, I urge you to do so now. Scripture reassures us that "no one who trusts God like this – heart and soul – will ever regret it" (Rom. 10:11 MSG). "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" (Rom. 10:13 NLT).

If you have entrusted yourself to Jesus, be encouraged by today's sermon text. If God rescued you when you were his enemy, how much more will he show you mercy now that you're his friend, his beloved child? God's mercy is tenacious! Dale Davis reminds us, "Yahweh is not short-tempered with his people. His mercy and patience are not exhausted when we choose our foolish Philistias. Our bungling does not evaporate his mercy."⁷

***When we get ourselves into a fix,
God is still faithfully at work.***

In his most famous psalm, David testified, "Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Psalm 23:6). The Hebrew word for "follow" can also be translated "pursue" or "chase." That's the idea. God's mercy is tenacious. It pursues us wherever we go.

As you ponder the road you have walked, the twists and turns of your life, the mucky terrain you have traveled, can you not see glimpses of God's quiet yet faithful, guiding presence? Why not itemize those moments of mercy when the Lord was there to sustain, support, and rescue you?⁸

The words of an old hymn challenge us, "Count your many blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done."

⁷ Davis, 307.

⁸ Ibid., 304.