

1 Samuel 29 Chapter Introduction

29:1; The lords of the Philistines gathered their armies at Aphek (see 6:4,17-18; each of the five lords (or kings) of the Philistines ruled a major Philistine city: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Gath and Ekron). Once assembled at Aphek, the Philistine forces advance to engage the armies of Saul (see 28:4; Philistines encamp at Shunem and Israel at Gilboa, both encampments lie in the strategic Jezreel Valley).

29:2-5; As the Philistine forces paraded before the lords, or commanders of the Philistines, attention was drawn to the presence of Jewish forces in their ranks (i.e., "Hebrews"); even more so, the attention of the lords was aroused by the presence of their leader, the champion of the Hebrew armies, David the famed slayer of many Philistines (again the song about David is recited by the Philistines; see also 21:11 and 18:7, now this is the 3rd time it appears in 1 Samuel).

29:6-7; The lords of the Philistines determined that David and the Hebrew forces posed too great a risk to the Philistines on the battlefield. For in the heat of battle they could become their adversaries in order to reconcile themselves to Saul. David and his men had to go. Achish, the king of Gath, was outnumbered by the other lords. David would have to return to the city assigned him (i.e., Ziklag).

29:8-10; David protested the decision, but king Achish was powerless to change the decision of the Philistine lords. David's deception of Achish was masterfully done. Achish first praised David to the other Philistine kings in verse 3: "*I have found no fault in him to this day.*" Then in verse 9 Achish repeats his praise, however, this time to David himself: "*You are as blameless in my sight as an angel of God*" (or, 'a messenger of the gods'; Achish's 3rd vindication of David: vv. 3,6,9). However, the reality was just the opposite. In the words of OT scholar Dr. J. B. Scott, "While pretending to be [Achish's] friend, [David] raided Philistine towns in the neighborhood. He left no survivors to tell tales. He reported dutifully to Achish that he was raiding cities in Judah" (ZPEB, vol.2, p.34). Dr. Scott goes on to say, "The war lords of the Philistines wisely refused David [joining them]. David was forced to stay away from the battle providentially, for in it Saul and Jonathan would die" (Ibid). Thus David, by Divine intervention, remained blameless in his path to the throne.

The book of Samuel does not hide the blemishes of Scripture's prominent figures (cf. Eli, Hophni, Phinehas, Saul, David). But the inclusion of their unrighteousness deeds in the Biblical text is not an affirmation of God's approval. Rather, it merely represents a candid and true historical accounting. And against this backdrop of account after account of moral failures, the sinlessness of Jesus Christ becomes all the more striking and glorious!

29:11; "*So David set out with his men early [the next morning] to return to the land of the Philistines. But the Philistines went up to Jezreel.*" Thus this narrative segment both begins and ends with "Jezreel."