

## **1 Samuel: Samuel to King David**

### **Chapter 29 – God intervenes**

*[Please note : sections in blue type are not broadcast on every radio station.  
NKJV Version of the Scriptures used unless otherwise stated.]*

“When the drums of war beat it is too late to sharpen swords!” Some have attributed this to Winston Churchill in a speech given during the inter-war years. As we come to chapter 29 of 1 Samuel the drums of war are certainly beating loud and clear. However, before we read the chapter let us just consider for a moment how we have arrived at this situation. The people of Israel had wanted a king of their own – one who would lead them in battle, one who would bring national pride to the nation. In a clear rejection of the authority of God, they had chosen Saul, a man head and shoulders taller than his peers.

Saul, like most of us, was a man who combined strengths and weaknesses. In many ways he was not a bad choice, but God had clearly told him that his sons would not succeed him, and that the kingdom would be taken from him and given to another – David.

We might ask ourselves why this was, what terrible evil had he done that merited such unsparing judgement? Some time ago in our studies in 1 Samuel, we saw in chapter 13, verses 13 and 14 that Saul had offered sacrifices to God, to find out if he had God’s favour. He had not been prepared to wait for a priest to do the work that only they were authorised to perform. Combining the role of king and priest was something that would have to wait for the Messiah (Psalm 110), and no ordinary man could encroach on that. We ought to take this salutary lesson seriously. We may want to do something good, something religious – but if it is not done in the way that God has set out, we do wrong. Not all sin involves committing murder, robbing a bank or cheating on one’s spouse.

What Saul should have done, when he became aware of God’s choice for the one to be king, was to abdicate and allow David to become king. Jonathan, Saul’s son, had already concluded that David would be the next king instead of him. However, what followed was a period of intense persecution, as Saul fought to maintain his power and leave an inheritance for his own family. In choosing such a path he began an inexorable march to war and to his own death.

In chapter 27, David had taken the decision to go to Achish, one of the Philistine kings. We should remember that the Philistines were not a united people group but rather a loose confederation of city states. As King of Gath, Achish welcomed the arrival of David – better to keep one’s enemies close, and it would be no bad thing to have an effective fighting force of over 400 men working with and for him rather than in outright hostility. It is probable that having the support of David and his men would have boosted his own power in relation to the other Philistine kings. David had asked Achish for his own land so that he and his men could settle there, rather than be an expense to king Achish. He had been granted the town of Ziklag. Originally this was part of the inheritance of Simeon, within the territory of Judah, but it appears that it was never really conquered by the Israelites and its possession remained disputed. In taking full possession of Ziklag, David was strengthening the southern border of what would be one day his kingdom, and

in making skirmishing raids against the Amalekites and the other Philistine lords, David had an eye for the future. Interestingly, Ziklag is mentioned in Nehemiah 11:28 as one of the towns that returning Israelites resettled after their captivity in Babylon. It was clearly then a part of what was considered to be Israelite territory.

Some commentators have criticised David for going over to Achish and working for the Philistine king. What was a true Israelite doing in company with the long-standing and bitter enemy of the people of God? They think that David had failed in his devotion to God and his faith had let him down. It is certainly true that even great men and women of God have times when their faith falters and mistakes are made. It is also true that the saint of God has no place allying themselves with the enemies of God or with the world system that surrounds us. I think a little caution is needed as we read these Old Testament stories. We should not judge others with the light of the revelation of God that we have in the New Testament. Our understanding and appreciation of God is so much greater than theirs. Besides, in his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul clearly teaches that it is not for us to judge the actions and the motives of another servant of God. We will all give an account for our own actions, not those of another. God is well able to divine both motive and thought and action, and judge rightly based on the whole. We, who see but a part, are not well placed to make these kinds of judgements. It is, of course, certainly true that the Christian today has no place in making alliances with the world, at whatever level that may be. 1 John 2:15 – 17 makes this more than clear:

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”

The believer's strength and support are entirely heavenly in origin and come from our Father. It is to Him alone that we should look. However, I am not convinced that chapter 29 of 1 Samuel is the picture to use to make this vital point. The greater danger lies in the fact that in trying to decide whether David was right or wrong to be in the employ of Achish will lead us to miss the more important truth that this chapter clearly teaches; namely, that we have a Sovereign God that is able to work all things to accomplish His purposes.

“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).

This is the real lesson of this chapter, and we will now read the chapter and see this illustrated in two ways.

“Then the Philistines gathered together all their armies at Aphek, and the Israelites encamped by a fountain which is in Jezreel. And the lords of the Philistines passed in review by hundreds and by thousands, but David and his men passed in review at the rear with Achish. Then the princes of the Philistines said, “What are these Hebrews doing here?” And Achish said to the princes of the Philistines, “Is this not David, the servant of Saul king of Israel, who has been with me these days, or these years? And to this day I have found no fault in him since he defected to me.” But the princes of the Philistines were angry with him; so the princes of the Philistines said to him, “Make this fellow return, that he may go back to the place which you have appointed for him, and do

not let him go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he become our adversary. For with what could he reconcile himself to his master, if not with the heads of these men? Is this not David, of whom they sang to one another in dances, saying: 'Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?'" Then Achish called David and said to him, "Surely, as the LORD lives, you have been upright, and your going out and your coming in with me in the army is good in my sight. For to this day I have not found evil in you since the day of your coming to me. Nevertheless, the lords do not favour you. Therefore, return now, and go in peace, that you may not displease the lords of the Philistines." So David said to Achish, "But what have I done? And to this day what have you found in your servant as long as I have been with you, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?" Then Achish answered and said to David, "I know that you are as good in my sight as an angel of God; nevertheless the princes of the Philistines have said, 'He shall not go up with us to the battle.' Now therefore, rise early in the morning with your master's servants who have come with you. And as soon as you are up early in the morning and have light, depart." So David and his men rose early to depart in the morning, to return to the land of the Philistines. And the Philistines went up to Jezreel."

No doubt the Philistines thought that their plan to invade Israel in a co-ordinated and combined way was a clever plan. Their choosing of the plain of Jezreel would ideally suit their heavy war chariots and give them the military advantage over Saul and the Israelite army. So that they could act as a unified army rather than a disparate group of warbands the Philistine kings had all the war bands pass before them so that all could see, not only their combined strength but also familiarise themselves with who was who. The time came in this review, when David, and his men passed under review at the rear of those under king Achish. This obviously caused quite a stir amongst the Philistine high command. What was a Hebrew doing here amongst them as they gathered to fight the main Hebrew army.

At first, Achish stoutly defends David, declaring that he found no fault in David. It would not be the last time a Gentile king found no fault in a Jewish king! However, perhaps not unreasonably, the other Philistine kings were not convinced about David's loyalty. Their anger with Achish does perhaps suggest that although David had faithfully served and benefited Achish, his actions towards other Philistine lands and people had not been altogether benign. They issued an ultimatum to Achish and demanded of him that he send David away. This would diminish any future share of booty that would follow a Philistine victory for Achish. More importantly, in the minds of the other Philistine lords, it would remove a possible source of danger. After all, what was to stop David defecting to Saul in the heat of battle, thereby gaining his favour and leaving the rear of the Philistine lines dangerously exposed. All this was understandable military sense. They had first-hand experience of David's previous military exploits – many of them would have been amongst those who had fled having seen David kill their champion, Goliath, years earlier. Saul had indeed killed thousands of them, but David was a far greater threat.

So Achish summons David to himself. It is telling that Achish bears David no ill-will and gives him glowing testimony. However, when choice has to be made, the world will always stick to their own and so David is rejected. Achish commands that David and his men are to depart early the following day, before the battle is joined. Despite David's protestations of his innocence, Achish would not change his mind. The world may tolerate the believer, may benefit from their service and fidelity, but we should never believe that we belong.

As Christians, we are to be pilgrims in this world. Our home is heavenly and that is where we belong. It is the interests of God who inhabits that heavenly world that we are to represent here upon earth. To lose sight of who we really are is to lose connection to our strength and sense of direction in this life. Like David, we may protest our innocence and ability to do good in this world. It is difficult to understand why David was so keen to remain with Achish. No good could have come from his presence on the battlefield, taking up arms against his own people. Perhaps, the other Philistine lords saw more clearly than Achish, and David had planned to turn his coat. Perhaps like the Stanleys, at the Battle of Bosworth, he would have awaited an opportune moment to join the fray, on whichever side he deemed it worth his while. Such actions would have forever tainted his kingship.

So, David and his men returned, early in the morning, to Ziklag leaving the fate of a nation and a disobedient king in the hands of the Philistine lords, and the greater, stronger hands of a God who moved all! This was a battle that David was to play no part in for God had grander, greater plans for him.

It is such an important lesson to learn in life that God is working all things together for good – primarily His rather than ours as we would see it. It was John Darby who said that “God’s ways are behind the scenes, but He moves all the scenes which He is behind.” We live in a world consumed by fear and worry – no wonder there is a mental health epidemic. Whether it is the climate crisis and the state of planet Earth, whether it is the cost-of-living crisis and the state of my bank balance or whether it is the geopolitical crisis in Ukraine, Gaza and elsewhere and the state of my security we are bombarded by strident headlines predicting ever worsening catastrophe.

It is vital at times like this, and always, to remember that God is behind the forces of this world, and He is accomplishing His purposes, surely and certainly. The Earth is not going to burn up and become uninhabitable. The economy is not going to implode so that we all have nothing, and the world is not going to destroy itself in some nuclear conflagration that ends civilisation. We know this because the Bible tells us that God has other plans for this world.

It would not be too fanciful to say that God was at work in these latter chapters of 1 Samuel to prepare the nation of Israel to accept His choice of king – David, though few at the time would have recognised this. It would take the warlike depredations of the Philistines to remove Saul, as he would not go quietly. Little did they realise it, but the Philistines were at the zenith of their powers then and soon would be similarly judged by God for their evil behaviour. So, God is at work in the world still to prepare the world – not just the nation of Israel – to accept great David’s greater Son – the Lord Jesus, to reign. It may be that He allows evil despots to prosper for a time, but they will meet their full and just judgement. It may be that He allows the confusion of economies to make us realise how unsafe it is to rely upon this world’s possessions. God will undoubtedly order events so that an election result that He desires is accomplished, and for His purposes.

In all these events, and despite the outer surface turmoil, the Christian can be at peace and secure in the knowledge that we are in His hands. We live in His world, on His planet and it will last for as long as He has purpose for it. For us, there is a better world, a better life, to come. This is not some naive escapism; we have responsibilities to Him as stewards in all things. All will give an account of themselves to Him, either as Lord or as Judge. Whilst I may be able to lie and fool myself and others by an alternative version of truth, as some do today, in that day all will be laid open and plain. We would do well to live more in the understanding of that coming day.

God raised up Saul to reign but because of his disobedience, He cast him down. God raised up the Philistines as the sword of His judgement, but because of their ungodly ways, He cast them down. This world has little changed, and God is still at work.

You may be thinking that all this high politics and talk about wars of empires is a bit too much for me. After all what can I do about wars far away? What can I do to stop the planet from warming? What can I do about the rate of inflation? The story we have considered today though is also a story on the human, individual level, for at heart, it is the story of one man, David – a man after God’s own heart. In this chapter, I am reminded of two wonderful truths for the believer. First, there is always a way back to God for the backslider. Second, God will always provide a way for the believer to live life uprightly before Him.

What was David doing allying himself to Achish and even pleading with him to be allowed to stay amongst the Philistine army? I do not know and am not fit to judge. The record of Scripture does not say, and so we are wise not to make definitive statements. Perhaps David’s faith had wobbled, and he had lost sight of the promise of future glory. In an effort to protect his own life, and the lives of his loved ones he had sought the protection of the enemy. On the other hand, he might have viewed this as an opportunity to make common cause against other enemies, and in so doing bring stability to the lawless and dangerous southern border of what would one day be his kingdom. Perhaps both have some truth, for I know in my own life that I rarely do things out of a wholly pure motive. Rather, I am a mix of the desire to please myself and the desire to please God.

If David was in a condition of backsliding, out of touch with his God, then we can see how wonderfully his relationship was restored. We are never so far from God that there is not a way back. Perhaps he might have felt that his position was hopeless, and that God’s promises had been forgotten. He could not see for himself how all the hope of reigning was ever going to come about. If so, we see that within a matter of months his situation would be utterly transformed. He would become the king of Judah, and then later the king of all Israel. During that time, he would reign as one of her greatest kings. David certainly knew the truth of his own words:

“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You anoint my head with oil” (Psalm 23:5).

How much his experiences have proved a help and a comfort to many a saint over the centuries. Perhaps, as you listen to this broadcast, or read this transcript, you can remember better days, when your faith burnt bright, and your relationship to the Lord was strong and true. Maybe, along the way, mistakes have been made and God seems so far away. If so then be encouraged. There is always a way back, and a loving Father awaits to receive you. It does just take that first step!

Perhaps, David was feeling trapped in a web that he could see no clear way out of. He had gone to Achish with the best of intentions but had slowly been ensnared by his closeness to the Philistine lord. He might have been wondering how he could ever get out of his current situation. How could he ever raise his sword against God’s own anointed king without undermining his own authority to rule. How wonderful it is to see that God can even turn ungodly kings to do His will, and provide a pathway out of a problem for the child of God. God will always provide a way for us to walk in obedience to Himself.

Sometimes I find myself worrying that it is becoming impossible to live in a way that honours God in this world of moral fluidity. I worry that my children, or my grandchildren are being exposed to values that directly contradict His word and undermine the Faith. Is it possible to live for the Lord in just such a day? Well yes, and this part of David’s story shows us this. Again, David knew the reality of his words:

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, (and his life in the court of Achish would certainly count as one example of this) I

will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me” (Psalm 23:4).

In a world of ecclesiastical division and general abandonment of the absolute truth of the Bible, is it possible for the believer to meet together with other believers in a way that honours God and is in obedience to His word? Yes it is, and I am encouraged by the tremendous way that God provided for David in this chapter.

Let us learn well the lesson that God is still working all things together for good and learn to trust in Him. Thank you for listening to the Truth for Today talk on 1 Samuel 29: God intervenes, in the series on 1<sup>st</sup> Samuel, Samuel to king David, talk number T1385.

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