
In the Wrong Army

1 Samuel 29²⁸

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I have a news story for you.

What if the media had discovered a foreign national, possibly Russian or Iranian, has developed his own militia unit and is now serving in the US military. They have been conducting major campaigns on behalf of the USA and now are going to be put into the field in the Ukraine to fight against the Russians.

How would we respond if it as revealed that a presidential candidate had put together a successful American militia unit but he had hired himself out to Russia to fight for them in the Ukraine? He had been given a town in Russia to govern and was reporting directly to one of the Russian military commanders or to Putin himself? Or he had been fighting in the Middle East for ISIS who had given him a small province in Iraq as his own? Now he is running for president...

What do you think about such news?

Well I have news for you - this is almost exactly the situation we have recorded for us in 1 Samuel 27-29. Now, the enemies of Israel are gathering for a major military campaign against Israel. Among the gathering of Philistine lords and military units is a Philistine ruler and commanded named Achish. And his body guard and Special Forces unit are commanded and made up of Israelites.

1 Samuel takes us out to the field where there is a massive gathering of Philistine forces preparing for a sustained campaign.

The Response to David's Presence

(v. 1-5)

¹ Now the Philistines had gathered all their forces at Aphek. And the Israelites were encamped by the spring that is in Jezreel. ² 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, ³ the 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."

The Military Review

(v. 1-3a)

From the 1 Samuel 28:4, we know that the Philistines were mustering at Aphek to invade Israel. Israel was encamped on the southern end of Jezreel Valley at the foot of Mt Giboah.

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The lords of the Philistine city-states are reviewing the troops. Our author is conveying a vast size and sheer numbers the Philistines had gathered. The threat is huge and Israel is in real danger.

Yet, they recognize one commander and his militia. When they come to Achish there surrounding him as his personal bodyguard and special forces, is someone they know. They are surprised that this Hebrew, this Jew is there.

The Justifying Defense

(v. 3b)

Not surprisingly, they question Achish about it.

Achish response does several things.

Yes, they are right. This is who they think it is. This is David, the servant of Saul.

But he is a former servant of Saul because he has deserted Saul and is now serving Achish. In that day, loyalty would not have been thought of as to "nation" but to king or sponsor. So David as viewed as abandoning his serving of Saul to joining to Achish. This is important for Israel and for us to know. This may be an insight into how David is thinking. Saul is no longer worthy of fealty. To leave serving him is not to leave serving the Lord.

David has a spotless record in serving Achish. Now this is just dripping with irony. David and the reader knows better. But it tells us that David has been serving for years. Achish is more than satisfied with the service David has rendered. The irony actually has the effect of affirming David in the minds of the Israelite. As we read this, we know that David is faithful and loyal to God and God's people.

The Expelling Demand

(v. 4-5)

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?'"

The Philistine lords demand David's expulsion. They don't care about Achish's arrangements with David. They don't care if Achish is the king. To them this is foolish. They are angry probably feeling that Achish has been less than forthright with them. It is clear that if Achish had brought this arrangement to the Philistine lord's attention earlier, they would have disallowed it. However, they are willing to allow David to return to the town where he has been living in Philistine and whatever duties he had there. But they don't trust him to go to battle with them.

The Philistine lords declare their reasons. Their thinking is entirely understandable. What if David turns on us in the battle? It has happened before that Hebrews in the midst of a Philistine army turned the tide of battle (1 Samuel 14:12). David will know our plans. He will be in the middle of our army. He has regularly defeated us with smaller armies. He has an elite unit that he is commanding. If he turns on us, we will lose our heads. Here is an allusion to Goliath. Besides, he has been celebrated in Israel for his mighty deeds. He is even

more accomplished and popular than Saul we are going out to fight. And what if the people join with him?

No, absolutely, not. David is not going to be allowed to go to battle with them.

The Release of David's Enlistment

(v. 6-10)

So this conversation takes place out of David's sight and hearing.

The Command Transmitted

(v. 6-7)

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."

Achish goes to David to send him home. But Achish affirms that he believes he has made the right decisions in regards to David. He lets David know he thinks it is best.

However, Achish has to do what he is told by the other Philistine lords. David is not approved nor accepted to serve in the Philistine army. So he needs to return to his city. He cannot fight with the Philistines.

Now this is the Lord's protection of David. God's power has put in the minds of the Philistine lords to do what feels naturally to them. But God's providence is moving David out of the battle field. And just so you know, Saul is about to die on that battlefield.

The Integrity Defended

(v. 8)

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?"

David hears a questioning of his integrity. Of course, there is a question. Why is he protesting? How does he hear what is being said? Why doesn't he just accept this and go his way?

It seems to me that the author's purpose is to show that David is a man who sees himself as serving others. He has been driven from serving Saul by Saul's own hatred and murderous actions. He has attached himself to Achish. Since he has, he will be faithful to serve Achish well. David is a faithful man.

The Expulsion Affirmed

(v.9-10)

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."

Achish once again affirms that David is blameless. But he is not going to go against his military commanders. Those commanders will be leading and fighting in the battle. Achish as king is likely to be safely in the rear as would David. So he sends David home. His orders are for David to get up early in the morning and take his military unit and return to their town in Philistia.

Now this part of David's history would have been well known to the Jewish people. What would they have thought? How is David any different than Saul? Saul may have been foolish, self-centered and irreligious. But at least he never fought for the Philistines. What questions could have been raised over the succession of the throne of Israel to David?

This statement then from Achish is meant to answer those questions. Achish is sorely wrong in his thinking about David's loyalty. But what he is saying, the God through the author is saying to Israel about David. In all this David is blameless. He is as an angel of God. What does Achish know about God's angels? Is the narrator pointing us through this phrase to David's likeness to *the* angel of the Lord in the Old Testament? It would difficult not to see the words *blameless* and *angel of the Lord* with linking David and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Return with David's Militia

(v. 11)

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.

These last two sentences are simple but will lead into the desperate situations David and Saul will find themselves in the next two chapters

David into Philistia

David complies with Achish's command. He is ever the submissive servant. He gets up early. He has prepared his men. They break camp at dawn and begin the ride back to their town and their families. But they are not headed to a quiet time at home. Trouble is waiting...

Philistines into Israel

The whole Philistine camp also packs up and begins moving towards Jezreel. The Israelites who lived through this time would shudder. These next days and hours will be dark ones indeed for Israel.

Reflect and Respond

David's self-justification in the midst of clear deceit is *interesting*. He has put himself in a difficult position. In spite of misreporting what he is doing, he still questions why he is being challenged.

Here is the providence of God.

The pagans in this story, Achish and the Philistine lords and commanders, all are making decisions. They are interacting with the world around them in a way that is consistent with their backgrounds, cultures and thoughts. Yet, they are doing exactly what God has purposed and planned. Though God is working them, their thoughts, emotions and decisions are entirely natural to them.

God is at work to get David off the battlefield where Saul is going to die. Yes David is being sent home. But no one will be able to say that he was a part of the carnage that wrought the end of the house and throne of Saul.

One of the purposes of this story to affirm the blamelessness of David. Whether David's deceptions are morally right or wrong is not a question God is interested in here nor is the narrator putting forward.

David has left the service of Saul. David has actively sought to make peace with Saul. He has chosen twice not to kill Saul when he easily could have. David is not seeking to overthrow Saul, something that would have relatively easily given David's popularity and military skills. But David clearly does not see himself as in the service of Saul any longer.

David has not attacked Israel nor done anything that would bring Israel harm. What he would have done if these events had not taken place we do not know. That is useless speculation. The only possible history is the one that has been recorded for us in these chapters.

David has been a faithful servant and submitted to the leadership he has chosen to serve under. We may question whether that choice was good or even right. We may not question the desire of David to submit to Achish yet at the same time prosecute unrelenting raids against the peoples who occupied the land what was Israel's and who had never been driven out as commanded by God.

David is blameless. This word marks his conduct and Achish's commendation. This word *blameless* is a word used all through the Bible as one of God's purposes for all of God's people. God's purpose and providences are working to "present us blameless before the Lord" in the day of His appearing.

Once again, David is presented as pointing us to Christ:

David is a type of Christ. In many ways he is a shadow, a sign and a symbol of the coming final king.

David is also imperfect and inadequate. He is not fully satisfying as the future king. He falls short and sometimes seems to act foolishly. This causes us and all of God's people to long for and to lean towards the perfect King, the Lord Jesus.

In our own lives like David's, what appear to be demotions, denials and dismissals are God's good providences. They may feel like disappointments. But God is at work. He is accomplishing His purposes. It is always best to happily submit to Jesus.

