

Opportunities & Providential Care

1 Samuel 29

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 4-15-2012

Introduction – reminder that David is not backslidden (Psalms 86,131,141, 1Chron. 12:16-18; etc. See sermon on chapter 27)

Though there is debate on this, Christians have tended to say that David's problems in this chapter were his own fault. They say that David was in trouble because he left Israel against God's will, because he was backslidden, because he was self-seeking, because he didn't pray, because he didn't trust God, because he independently set up his own civil government, etc. And if any of you were not here when I preached on chapter 27, you can get the information on why that theory is wrong in that sermon. In that sermon I show how every one of those myths is directly contradicted by other Scriptures. And I won't repeat what I said in that sermon. But if you weren't here, I think it is helpful for you to know upfront that I believe from the Psalms and other Scriptures that David was walking by faith and was not living in willful rebellion in this chapter.

But there is a second misconception that we have already dealt with. This misconception says that it was not appropriate for David to fight against Saul or even to pretend to fight against Saul. I believe that fighting against Saul was only *one* possible contingency plan that David had, but even if it was the *only* plan, it was Biblically allowed. And I can't repeat all of the evidence, but let me give a brief review of the various ways that David related to Saul.

Up to chapter 21, David was unbelievably loyal to Saul and sacrificial for him even though Saul has mistreated David. In chapter 21, he fled in order to save his life, and to refuse to do so would have been suicidal. It boggles my mind that some people say that David should have stayed put and trusted God. No, that would have been presumption. It's a faulty view of trust. So he fled in chapter 21. And that's a form of resistance that Christ commanded us to use in certain circumstances. But we saw that just because David was authorized to resist by fleeing did not automatically authorize every form of resistance. So, even though 400 men joined him in chapter 22, he refused to fight against Saul. In fact, on two occasions he was willing to risk the anger of his men by not killing Saul. And we saw that the reason he

ferociously protected Saul and refused to kill him was that he was not a magistrate during those times. He didn't have the jurisdiction.

But things changed in chapter 23. The mayor of Keilah asked David to join him in fighting against the Philistines. He did so, and God gave David a magnificent victory, and the whole city rejoiced, and they asked him to stay. So David decided to stay in Keilah and make it his base of operations. And even when Saul went down to besiege Keilah, David had no intentions of leaving. That is very significant. It indicates that he had no problem with fighting Saul, so long as it was jurisdictionally lawful - which this would have been under a magistrate. However, when by divine revelation he realized that the men of Keilah were too fearful to stand by him, and when God told him that they would turn him over to Saul, he had no choice but to flee. He could not fight without that kind of jurisdictional covering, because at that point he was not a civil magistrate. But the passage is clear - if he had had that civil magistrate's authorization, he would have stayed and fought. Without it, he didn't have that choice. David was not a revolutionary.

And that is illustrated again in chapter 24 where David had a chance to kill Saul, but refused because he still lacked jurisdiction. In chapter 25, Samuel dies, and a new kind of opportunity arises. David attends his funeral, perhaps hoping that the leaders of Israel will take sides and depose Saul. It was an ideal opportunity. But they fail to engage in interposition, which means that he once again had no choice but to flee. In chapter 26 David spared Saul's life a second time, giving as his reason that he had no jurisdiction as a private citizen. It had always been a jurisdictional issue.

But things changed when he became king in chapter 27. David declared war on the Geshurites, Girzites, and Amalekites. This was not self-defense as earlier. This was declared war. He had jurisdiction to engage in offensive warfare with other nations. Then in chapter 28 David professed to be quite willing to fight against Saul. And of course, in this chapter, David actually marches out to fight against Saul.

I believe that the differences between all of those chapters can only be accounted for by the Reformed doctrine that armed resistance to tyranny must be authorized by a civil magistrate who has declared war. And if you want to know more about that and the other principles of resistance to tyranny, read the book, *A Defense of Liberty Against Tyrants*, written in the

1500's by a French Huguenot author, with the pen name of Junius Brutus. You can download it off of the Biblical Blueprints website. Of course, there is a whole lot more to the story than that. But I at least wanted us to cool our heels a bit if we are judging David for marching against Saul or at a minimum pretending to march against Saul. That is not Biblically an issue. And I believe the writer of this book makes that quite clear in this chapter (especially verses 3-5). It's a very clever literary technique that the author uses.

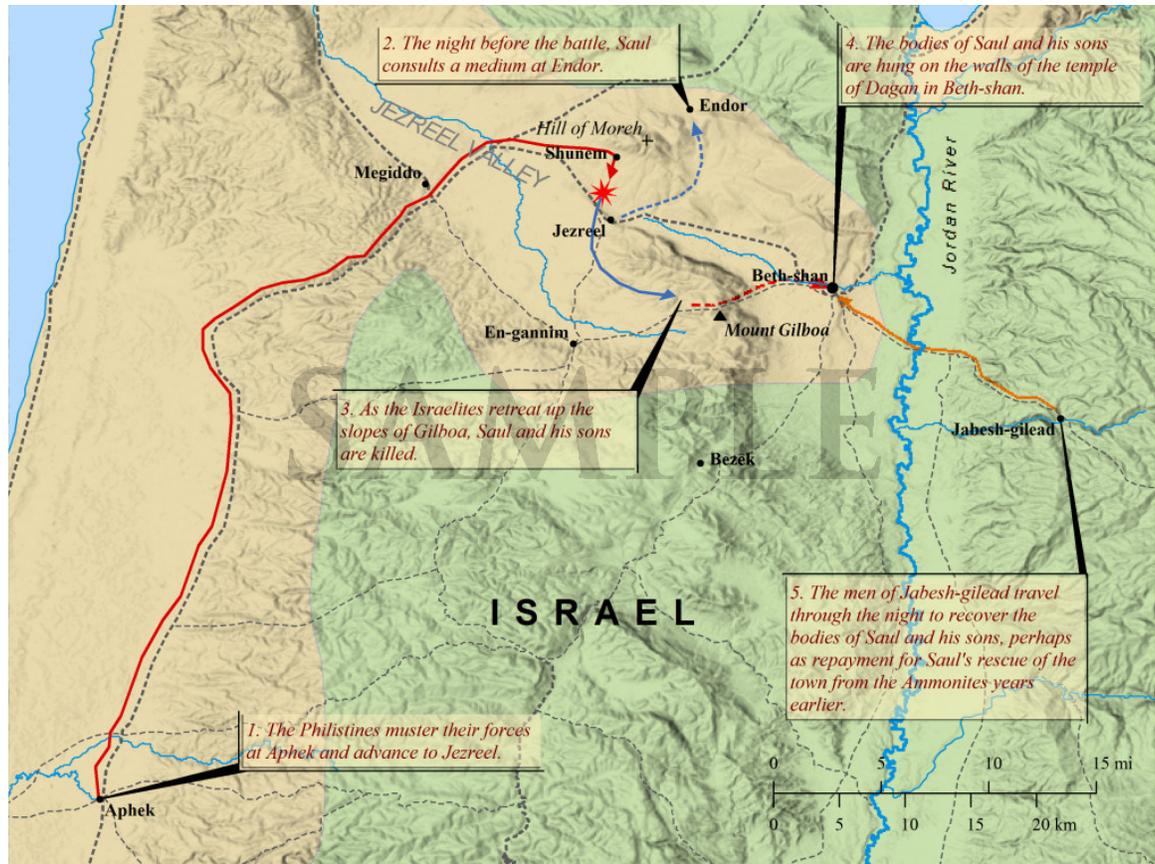
I. David has options (vv. 1-2)

A. All the Philistines move northward (v. 1)

1. This would weaken Philistine protection of their five main cities (and is later taken advantage of by the Amalekites – see chapter 30)

Let's take a look at the options that David had. Verse 1 says,

1Samuel 29:1 Then the Philistines gathered together all their armies [notice that phrase – “all their armies”] at Aphek, and the Israelites encamped by a fountain which is in Jezreel.



If you look at the map, you will notice two things. First, the distance from the top of the map to the bottom of the map (where Aphek is) is about 45 miles. You have to go another 40 miles south before you even get to the first of the main Philistine cities. That's why verse 11 says that David traveled back to the land of the Philistines. What's marked here as Philistine territory is newly conquered. They have traveled way out of their main territory and all their armies are gone. This makes most of Philistia vulnerable.

The other thing that I want you to notice is that this Philistine expansion was threatening to cut Israel in half and perhaps even take over Israel completely. As Israel's future king, David cannot just sit by and do nothing. With all the armies concentrating on this northward expansion, he has several options open before him.

2. But David's option of taking advantage of that situation was providentially closed in 28:1-2.

One option would have been to stay in Ziklag and when the Philistines go north, to take advantage of the weakness by conquering the southern towns. There wouldn't have been any armies there. That would have aided Israel while letting the Philistine armies deal with Saul. But the author has already told us in chapter 28 that this option was closed. Let's read chapter 28, verses 1-2.

1Samuel 28:1 Now it happened in those days that the Philistines gathered their armies together for war, to fight with Israel. And Achish said to David, "You assuredly know that you will go out with me to battle, you and your men."

1Samuel 28:2 So David said to Achish, "Surely you know what your servant can do." And Achish said to David, "Therefore I will make you one of my chief guardians forever."

Well, this indicates that Achish isn't being entirely stupid. His relationship with David has been quite profitable, because every time David went out on raids, Achish got a huge cut from the loot. So he valued David and his men. But then, neither did he want to leave an army behind with all of his men travelling north. It's better to have David in sight close by his side.

3. The same passage also closed the opportunity for David's followers to vacate Ziklag and move elsewhere.

Of course, this closes off the opportunity for David to move his city elsewhere. If he had had time, he could have ordered an evacuation now that things were getting dicey. But with this request from Achish, his options are narrowed down to two:

4. Since David is a magistrate (27:6) he still had at least two other options before him:

a) Fight Saul with Philistine help (probably the least attractive option, but still legitimate)

He could take the option of fighting with the Philistines against Saul, and then to fight against the Philistines themselves either in this battle or later, depending on what God providentially opened up. And we have already seen that this could have been legitimate. Saul had been rejected by

God, Israel was not resisting his centralization of government, and David was not only anointed as king, but he had started a kingship in Ziklag. And since Saul had declared war on David, there is no reason why David could not go to battle against him. I believe that this would have been the least attractive of the options, but it would have been an option.

b) Attack the Philistines (as had happened in 14:20-23)

And the last option was one that David was quite familiar with from his history. You can see this option in chapter 14:20-23. And apparently the Philistines were aware of that option as well. They reference it. That passage says,

1Samuel 14:20 Then Saul and all the people who *were* with him assembled, and they went to the battle; and indeed every man's sword was against his neighbor, *and there was* very great confusion.

1Samuel 14:21 Moreover the Hebrews *who were* with the Philistines before that time, who went up with them into the camp *from the surrounding country*, they also joined the Israelites who *were* with Saul and Jonathan.

Commentators say that this is talking about Israelites who had joined the Philistine ranks. They were conscripted soldiers in Philistine uniform, and when they saw the direction that the battle was going, they start fighting against the Philistines as well. It was common practice in the ancient world to conscript all locals for battle.

Before the battle happens, David perhaps doesn't know how his men will be mixed in with the Philistine men, but he has probably instructed his captains on what to do, and on how they will take advantage of their position within the army to win a victory for Israel. It's incredible risk taking, but David tends to see the opportunities, not just the obstacles.

B. Achish has the important rearguard position (v. 2)

- 1. This could potentially provide David with an opportunity of dealing with two enemies at the same time. With David's army behind and Saul's armies in front, the Philistine's would be very vulnerable.**

And an amazing opportunity comes up when he finds out that Achish has been assigned the rearguard position. Verse 2:

1Samuel 29:2 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.

This was ideal. The rearguard was a crucial position. Narrowly defined, the rearguard was a covering detachment that protected the main column if they needed to retreat. And they did so by executing defensive or retrograde movements between the body and the enemy. But the rearguard was also used when the opposing army would try to flank you and attack you from behind. Because of the incredible casualties and the ferocious fighting usually required when they were put into use, those stationed in the rearguard were often the finest, bravest, and most skilled warriors. And so there was a sense in which Achish was being honored, and he in turn was honoring David.

But from David's perspective, this was an unbelievable opportunity. The four lords would be occupied with Saul's forces spread out in the Jezreel valley, and David's men would be behind them. Can you see the trap? David is probably thinking, "Awesome! Lord, I can see exactly what you want me to do. Between our forces and Saul's forces, we will decimate the Philistine army. This will be a perfect opportunity to help Israel." And as the author creatively suggests in verses 3-5, to also regain credibility within Israel.

2. However, the next verses frustrate that plan

But if David thought that, his hopes were dashed to the ground in the next verses. We really aren't told what David was thinking, but the author lets us be a fly on the wall within the Philistine camp.

II. God let's us be a "fly on the wall" of the Philistine camp. (vv. 3-5)

A. The other four lords see what Achish cannot see

The Philistine lords are aghast at what Achish was thinking of doing. I can just hear them saying, "Are you nuts?" Look at verses 3-5.

1Samuel 29:3 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?* [In other words, "I know who he is. Believe me, he will be

an asset. He goes on.] **And to this day I have found no fault in him since he defected to me.**”

From Achish’s perspective, David couldn’t possibly defect back to Israel. You’ve got to remember the ruse that David played. David claimed to daily be killing Israelites and claiming that all the loot that he gave to Achish was taken from Israelites. If that had been true, David would have become odious in the eyes of the Israelites. So Achish thinks that David is the perfect mercenary. He doesn’t dare fall into Israelite hands, and he is going to fight for his life, but he is also going to fight to protect his position as a raider under Achish. “This is a win-win situation. Of course he’s going to be loyal.” It seemed perfect to him.

But the other princes thought that Achish was insane. They were really ticked off because they could see what Achish was apparently blind to. Beginning to read at verse 4:

1Samuel 29:4 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?”

1Samuel 29:5 Is this not David, of whom they sang to one another in dances, saying: “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?”

Achish has assured them that they can trust David, but his answer makes them even angrier. In effect they were saying, “How can you be so stupid?” Maybe Achish was too young to remember what happened in chapter 14. There is evidence that he is the young son of the king of Ekron. So it could be that he is too young to remember what happened in chapter 14 when the conscripted Hebrew soldiers within the Philistine army turned on the Philistines. But these other four Philistine princes were more seasoned and they were not about to take any chances with the Hebrews. They don’t give Achish a suggestion. It is a command. They kick David out of the army and tell Achish that the decision is final. He has been outvoted.

B. This illustrates how blinded we can be with profit, pride, and power

And of course, we would have to agree with those four princes. It was a suicidal strategy. And this illustrates how blinded people can be by the

three p's – profit, pride, and power. They have been the downfall of many a leader. How often has profit (perhaps in a get rich quick scheme) made people lose everything? How often has pride made people make disastrous decisions? I love that scene in the last battle of the Patriot movie where British army makes a foolish decision to charge because of pride. But down through history you can see many foolish decisions because of the other p's as well.

III. Why was Achish so blind?

A. He had come to believe that Yahweh was real (v. 6a)

Let's look at the specific ways in which Achish was blind. Verse 6: **“Then Achish called David and said to him, ‘Surely, as the LORD lives, you have been upright...’”** I want you to notice that the word “LORD” is in all capital letters. Whenever you see that in the New King James Version Bible, that means it is the name Jehovah, or Yahweh. And they really ought to put Yahweh into the text instead of mistranslating it as LORD. Anyway, commentators have been puzzled as to why a pagan would swear by name Yahweh. It doesn't make sense to them. Philistines would swear by their own gods, not Yahweh. And that first picture in your outline is an amazing archeological find. It's an inscription where the Achish of our text here dedicates a temple to another god. And it identifies Achish, the king of Gath, as being the young son of the king of Ekron.

Was he converted under David? I think everyone agrees that he was not. Would he swear by other people's gods? That's not the way ancient man swore. It would be meaningless to swear by someone else's god. To make an oath sound convincing you would swear by the god who has been the most benefit to you and whom you did not want to anger. So it's puzzling. One commentator suggests that he swore by God in general, and that the writer just inserted Yahweh, since Yahweh is the only true God. But that would make Scripture misrepresent the situation. The text quotes *his* words. So commentators are puzzled.

I believe the simplest explanation is this. Achish was a polytheist who believed in many gods. And polytheists are quite happy to have a new god on their side – the more the merrier. That's why they are polytheists. In India, Hindus are quite willing to accept Jesus as a god, so long as Jesus doesn't make them renounce their other gods. So if you want to have

notches on your gospel slingshot, go to India. You will get many Indians raising their hands and accepting another god into their home. But it doesn't mean that they are really converted. Whenever I preached over there, I insisted that God's wrath was upon them until they burned their idols and renounced their gods. They were not willing to do that unless they were serious. So the 24 or so converts that I have been instrumental with in India have stayed converts. We didn't have thousands like others did, but they were genuine conversions. So Achish is likely adding the God Yahweh to his life because he had been so financially benefited by David's Yahweh.

Here is probably what happened: When David came along and his God Yahweh seemed to magically save David and his men from any harm in daily battles over the last sixteen months, and seemed to prosper David with unbelievable amounts of plunder, Achish became more and more impressed with this God. This was a very powerful God. He was glad that this God had come into his service. And so, I see it as a pragmatic action of a polytheist. He believed that Yahweh existed, and was even happy that this God was giving him wealth. Why wouldn't he swear by the name of Yahweh? It would be convincing to both him and David. Yahweh seemed to be the most productive God so far when it came to loot. It makes perfect sense to me. It's no puzzle at all to me.

And so the first type of blindness is a blindness of thinking that God is on your side when you are not really on *His* side. And this can happen to Christians as well. In Joshua 5, Joshua asked the Messenger of the Lord, if *He* was on *Joshua's* side. And of course the Messenger of the Lord was the preincarnate Son of God. And God responded that that was not an appropriate question. God said, "**No, but as *Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come.***" And Joshua in effect said, "Yes sir!" and waited for God to give His commands and called *himself* God's servant. Achish had never done that.

B. But he was still the measure by which good and evil was judged (vv. 6b, 9)

And that brings up point B – who is the commander of Achish? Not Yahweh. Achish had never renounced his gods, or bowed his knee to Yahweh, or allowed Yahweh to dictate how he ruled. Having Yahweh on his side was a convenience, not a change of direction for his life. I want you to notice that Achish defines good and evil by his *own* judgment, not

Yahweh's. In verse 6 he says, "**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.**" [Notice the reference point for the definition of goodness – "is good in my sight." "I like what you have been doing. I think it is good." He continues:] **For to this day I have not found evil in you since the day of your coming to me. Nevertheless the lords do not favor you.**" Verse 9: "**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.'**"

C. He wanted to hang onto power, which meant that he had to please the other lords (v. 6c-7,9b)

So Achish is pulled between two competing motives – and both of them are self-serving motives. As a leader he doesn't dare to make the Philistine lords offended. He needs them to stay in power. He says, "**Nevertheless the lords do not favor you. Therefore return now, and go in peace, that you may not displease the lords of the Philistines.**" I don't want them getting upset. And he gives the same reason in verse 9.

D. But he didn't want to lose the most lucrative possessions that he had – David and his men (v. 10)

On the other hand, he doesn't want to make David and his men upset either. In fact, he is probably a little bit nervous about having David go back to his unguarded territory. So he needs to be polite. And of course, they have been a power-base for him as well as being the source of a steady and very lucrative income. He doesn't want to lose that. So he has competing, self-serving motives. And by the way, Achish thinks of them as *his* property. Notice in verse 10 he tells David, "**Now therefore, rise early in the morning with your master's servants who have come with you.**" [Interesting – "your *master's* servants who have come with you."] **And as soon as you are up early in the morning and have light, depart.**" He calls David's army, "your master's servants." The Hebrew word for servant was Ahvad (אָהַב), which means slaves or bond servants owned by a master. Even though he is polite to David, he doesn't think of these men as free men, but as his slaves. And he hopes that if David quietly goes away right now, that Achish can hopefully return to the way things were before.

And of course, it is very easy for any of us to have our value judgments skewed by the three p's of profit, pride, and power. The only way to avoid that is to crucify self and to have Jesus as the Lord and Commander of our lives.

IV. Does David really want to fight? (v. 8)

A. We aren't told if this is eastern play-acting, or if David was still trying to salvage his plan.

But there is one more question that some people are curious about, and that is, "Was David really as upset as verse 8 makes him out to be?" or is he putting on a show? I'm not sure we can know with certainty. But let's read the verse and give a stab at both possibilities (or perhaps a combination):

1Samuel 29:8 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?"

Some people believe that David is absolutely relieved that he does not have to go into battle, but he dares not show that relief. For example, one commentator said,

"There is more than a little humor in this scene (vv. 6-8). Achish stands there, apologetically emphasizing how he thinks David should go with him in this campaign and extolling David's faithfulness, which he has no reason to extol. On the other hand, David with disbelief on his face and exasperation in his voice protests the rejection he has no reason to protest. The deceived defends his deceiver, and the relieved disputes his relief!"¹

That is definitely a possible interpretation – and I think there may be an element of truth in it. But I tend to favor the viewpoint that David is hugely disappointed that he will not be part of a definitive and crushing blow to the Philistine forces as they are caught between Saul and his own growing army. The way the writer gives the opinion of the four princes in verses 3-5 is placed in a way to make the reader conclude that they are right – that this was David's plan.

¹ Davis, vol. 2, p. 161.

B. But God closes the door (vv. 9-11) because He is planning something far greater (chapter 30ff).

But whichever interpretation you take of David's motives, God closed the door in verses 9-11, and David and his men rose up early in the morning and returned south to the land of the Philistines. We only know from hindsight why God made that turn of events. Let me suggest four reasons why God closed this door.

First, God was about to discipline Israel in chapter 30. David's involvement would have complicated that.

Second, God wanted David to be tested with yet another short period of darkness (that's chapter 30) before He could elevate David to the throne. What happened in chapter 30 was a critical proving ground for David's kingship.

Third, God wanted David to come out of this situation with a vast amount of loot that he could use in 2 Samuel. And Lord willing, we will look at why in the future.

Fourth, God wanted to solidify David's leadership with these men. The next chapter would be an incredible test of their character and their mettle. It was an almost super-human call to endurance.

So the door to all four contingencies that David probably had in his mind were slammed shut. David interpreted providence this way, then this way, and then this way. But God closed the door on each possibility and (after a very short, dark time) He gave David something even better. And we will look at that in the next weeks.

Conclusion – Five additional applications.

But I do want to end the sermon by giving five additional applications very quickly. The first is that no matter how impossible our situations may seem to be, we need to approach them by faith that God is at work. When you do so, you will be looking for opportunities rather than being focused on Satan's obstacles. God is always at work in your life and working things together for your benefit spiritually, financially, socially, and in every way. I love the blessing that John gives in 3 John 2 – **“that you may prosper in all things and be in health, even your soul prospers.** God wants you to prosper in all things. That's God's intent for your life. David was convinced that that was true, so David constantly had eyes for what God was doing. We

need to get used to doing so ourselves. Look for the opportunities that God is opening up.

Second, be convinced that God can control and even use the citizens around us – and yes, can even our enemies. If we had not had protests we might not have found this great venue. We looked, just in case, and we liked what God had opened up. Well, I doubt that would have happened without the controversy. So I praise God for it. Sometimes God even uses opposition to open our eyes to how He wants to bless us.

Third, be convinced that God’s timing is perfect. When we get to chapter 30, David will be sorely tempted to think that God’s timing was disastrous. But it wasn’t. God’s timing is always perfect. We have been seeing God’s perfect timing in our family’s life. And actually, I see it day after day. I never cease to be amazed at God’s perfect timing.

Fourth, learn from Achish that relating to God as if He is a giant vending machine placed in our universe for our benefit is a pagan way of looking at life. We are His bondservants and we must find pleasure in serving Him. Paganism uses God; Christianity asks God to use us. Those are totally different approaches to life. And we need to ask ourselves, “Is my view of God more pagan, or more Christian?”

Fifth, don’t be dogmatic that you know what God’s providence is dictating. Nothing in life is infallible except for the Bible. It sure looked like David might have had an opportunity to do something in Philistia, but that door was closed. Then it looked like he might have an opportunity to do a chapter 14 stunt in Israel. And that seemed to be an even stronger possibility when he became the rearguard. The providence was so perfect for wrecking havoc upon the Philistines that he no doubt saw this as a divine opportunity. But then God closed that door too, didn’t he? And then, when he is going South, he was probably discussing whether God might want them to raid the vulnerable districts of the Philistines. And of course the Amalekites shut that door in chapter 30.

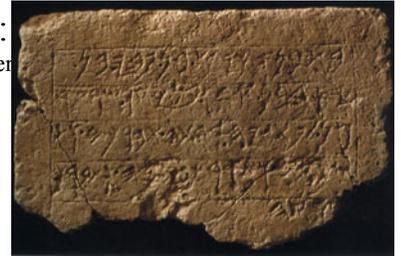
Here’s the point - though we should always look for divine opportunities that we can seize by faith (in fact that it is a critical component of a Biblical entrepreneurial spirit – expecting opportunities from God and seizing them), we must always have the flexibility of adapting to God’s providences as we move along. But no matter what God does with your

opportunities, know that He cares for you, and that His providences are working together for your good. Amen.

Opportunities & Providential Care

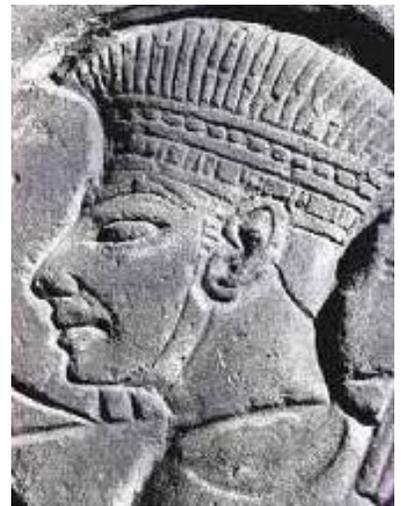
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By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 4-15-2012

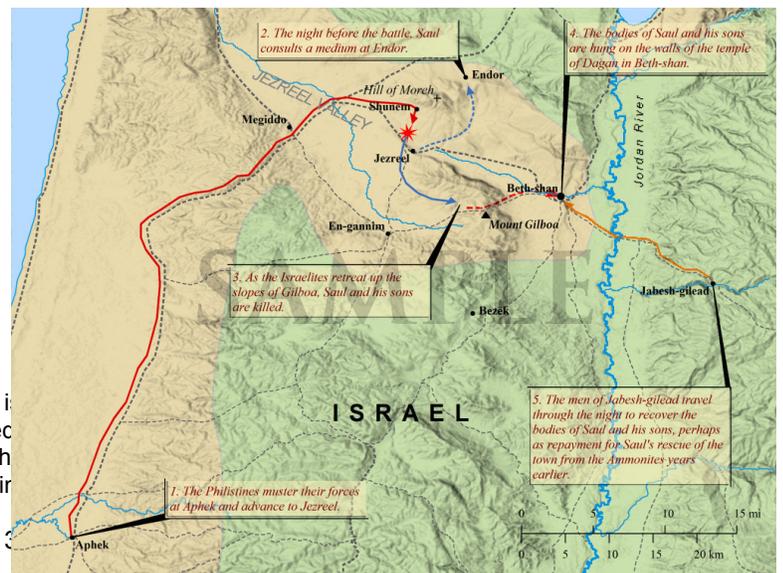


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 - B. But he was still the measure by which good and evil was judged (v.v 6b, 9)
 - C. He wanted to hang onto power, which meant that he had to please the other lords (v. 6c-7,9b)
 - D. But he didn't want to lose the most lucrative possessions that he had – David and his men (v. 10)
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