

# Achish Sends David Back to Ziklag

## First Samuel 29:1-11

**DIG:** Why were five Philistine kings present? What reservations did the Philistine generals have about David fighting on their side? What did King Achish think? Why? Do you think David would have fought against Isra'el? Or was he bluffing? Why?

**REFLECT:** In your life right now, where are you "between a rock and a hard place," caught in the middle of a situation that you have no control over? In such dilemmas, how does your faith in God affect how you decide? Is the LORD obligated to step in and save us from results of our own sinful decisions? Do we reap what we sow? How would David reap what he had sown in the years to come?

**1011 BC**

This was the battle in which Sha'ul and Y'honatan died (see Bz - [Sha'ul Takes His Own Life](#)), and it was therefore providential that the hand of ADONAI kept David and his men from having to fight against their own people, the Israelites. David was about 29 years old.

**The Philistine Generals rejected David:** The Philistines gathered all their forces at Aphek, and Isra'el camped by the spring of Jezreel. Here the Philistines were some thirty miles (or 48 kilometers) further north of Aphek, well on their way to the Valley of Jezreel, but still about forty miles (or 64 kilometers) or two days short of Shunem where they would set up camp. At that time, the Israelite army was already in Jezreel getting ready to take up their positions for battle on Mount Gilboa (First Samuel 28:4a). Therefore, the battle would take place in three days.

As the Philistine generals marched with their units of hundreds and thousands, David and his men were marching at the rear with Achish. As the troops were reviewed, all five of the Philistine rulers were present representing the cities of Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron and Gath. Their personal involvement demonstrated their perception that this battle was crucial.<sup>169</sup> Therefore, it was a sizable army. David and his men happened to be a part of the army of Gath. And as they passed before the reviewing stand, the Philistine rulers were obviously uneasy at the presence of David the Israelite and his six hundred men, so they asked: What about these Hebrews (First Samuel 29:1-3a)? The other four Philistine rulers were irate that Achish could possibly be so naïve as to think it safe to include David in the order of battle for their invasion of Isra'el.

If the Philistine rulers were hostile to David's presence, Achish could not say enough in David's defense: **Is this not David, who was an officer of Sha'ul king of Isra'el? He has already been with me for over a year, and from the day he left Sha'ul until now, I have found no fault in him.** This shows how well David was able to mask his own activities. **But the Philistine rulers were angry and said: Send the man back, that he may return to the place you assigned him. He must not go with us into battle, or he will turn against us during the fighting (exactly what David was thinking). How better could he regain his master's favor than by taking the heads of our own men?"** pointing to the Philistine troops marching by in full display. **The other four Philistine rulers had accurately perceived David's true intent, namely, to turn on them in the heat of battle so as to strike a decisive blow for Isra'el.**

But ADONAI had other plans. There would be no rescue of Sha'ul because YHVH would bring up Samuel in two days to declare to the Israelite king that he would indeed die in the upcoming battle (see [By - Sha'ul and the Medium at Endor](#)). David had no way of knowing that and, in his predicament, saw no other alternative than to strike the Philistines in the heat of battle. But like I said, God had other plans.

The Philistine rulers concluded their critique by reminding Achish of the song sung by the women of Isra'el in honor of David and Sha'ul. **Isn't this the same David they sang about in their dances, "Sha'ul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands? (First Samuel 29:3b-5)?** That Jewish saying had become famous, even among the Philistines and they took the song as a sign of solidarity between David and Sha'ul. **The Philistine rulers suspected that David had aspirations for the throne of Isra'el. David, they argued, could become acceptable to Sha'ul and Isra'el only by putting Philistines to death, so they demanded that he should be sent back to Ziklag.**<sup>170</sup>

**David Was Sent Back to Ziklag:** So Achish, not willing to buck his peers, called David and to impress him with his own sincerity, he used the name of David's God and not his own. The Philistine ruler said to him, **"As surely as the LORD lives, you have been reliable, and I would be pleased to have you serve with me in the army. From the day you came to me until today, I have found no fault in you, but the other four rulers are unconvinced and don't approve of you. Now turn back and go in peace; do nothing to displease the Philistine military rulers (First Samuel 29:6-7).**

**"But what have I done," asked David? "What have you found against your servant from the day I came to you until now? Why can't I go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?"** David pretended to be outraged - but this saved him from his deadly dilemma. For the third time Achish vindicated David's honor and dependability, saying: **I know that you have been as pleasing in my eyes as an angel of God. The threefold**

formula of Pontius **Pilate's** acquittal of **Yeshua** sounds like a strange echo of the words of **Achish**. **Pilate** declared of **Messiah**, "I find no fault in this man in anything of which you are accusing him" (Luke 23:14 Aramaic Bible in Plain English). Having examined **Jesus**, **Pilate** rendered his verdict: I find no guilt in Him (John 18:38 NASB). And then, for the third time **Pilate** spoke to the crowd, "What crime has this man committed? I have found in him no grounds for the death penalty" (Luke 23:22).

Nevertheless, the Philistine rulers said, "He must not go up with us into battle." Now get up early, along with [the Israelites] who have come with you, and leave in the morning as soon as it is light. So **David** and his men got up early in the morning to go back to the land of the Philistines. And the Philistines went up to **Jezreel** (First Samuel 29:8-11). On the one hand, **YHVH** saved **David** from his dilemma; but on the other hand, **God** didn't want **David** to turn on the Philistines and save **Sha'ul** because **ADONAI** had already decreed that the king would die in three days.<sup>171</sup>

Thus **David**, doubtless relieved, avoided fighting against his own countrymen . . . and did so with the blessing of the Philistines. It was very ironic that the very same Philistines who would finally dispose of **Sha'ul** were the ones who unwittingly rescued **David**.<sup>172</sup>