



# CAPITOL COMMISSION

## The Hidden Providence of God (1 Samuel 29)

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*Capitol Commission state directors are missionaries who teach weekly verse-by-verse Bible studies for legislators, lobbyists, and staff members. These Bible studies are hand-distributed to each legislative office, emailed, and made available throughout the Capitol community. The love and grace of God compels us to proclaim the truth of the Gospel with a heartfelt compassion for the Capitol community, to faithfully teach and apply the Word of God, and it is our desire to build meaningful relationships that bear fruit for an eternity to come.*

With the Bible as our foundation and authority, the mission of Capitol Commission is obedience to the Great Commission (Matt 28:18-20) within the Capitol communities of the world. We are not a lobbying group attempting to garner votes or reform society. Our mandate is to see the hearts and lives of elected officials transformed with the Word of God. Capitol Commission is a ministry of the church seeking to proclaim the gospel message, and to help believers mature through the verse-by-verse teaching of Scripture. In the Bible, we see God's great love for the world, especially for those who have been placed in authority. This is the foundation for our ministry to you.

The church is instructed to submit and to honor government leaders (Rom 13:1-7), and as a matter of first importance, to pray for their salvation (1 Tim 2:1-4). Our desire is witness God transform the hearts and lives of elected officials, lobbyists, and staff members. We apply this mandate to four major areas of making disciples: (1) *evangelize* those who have not experienced saving faith in Jesus Christ; (2) *establish* those who desire to grow in their faith and knowledge of Scripture; (3) *equip* those called to spiritual leadership; and, (4) *encourage* churches to participate with us in ministry.

### Introduction

The final chapters of 1 Samuel are focused upon battle with the Philistines and the preparations of Saul for engagement. First Samuel 28:1 recorded "that the Philistines gathered their armed camps for war, to fight against Israel." Chapter 29 begins by stating, "Now the Philistines gathered together all their armies to Aphek. . . ." It should be apparent that chapters 28—29 were not arranged chronologically, but are certainly sequential. For instance, Samuel told Saul that he and his sons would be given "into the hands of the Philistines" and die "tomorrow" (28:19), which would mean that Saul's visit to the spirit medium at Endor "by night" (28:8) was immediately prior to the battle on Mount Gilboa (31:1). The sequence of events is important because it indicates yet another contrast between Saul and David.

"Now the Philistines gathered together all their armies to Aphek, while the Israelites were camping . . . in Jezreel" (29:1). (Jezreel was to the north of Aphek.) David and his men were sent home to Ziklag from Aphek (30:1), which would take them southward. Following their intent to gather "their armed camps for war" (28:1), "the Philistines

gathered together and came and camped in Shunem" (28:4). (Shunem and Gilboa are to the northeast from Aphek.) "When Saul saw the camp of the Philistines, he was afraid and his heart trembled greatly" (28:5), which led him to inquire of the spirit medium (28:6-25). The Philistines were "camped in Shunem" on the night that Saul went to Endor. Considering the geography of the land, the events of chapter 29 occurred prior to the Philistine march to Shunem. Samuel's words of judgment to Saul (28:16-19) were spoken on the night prior to the battle on Mount Gilboa, which would culminate in the Philistines overtaking Saul and his sons as prophesied.

Therefore, when David was sent from the Philistines at Aphek, he would arrive with his men at Ziklag "on the third day" (30:1). The same day that David arrived in Ziklag, he pursued the Amalekites because they had raided and "overthrown" the city "with fire." David and his men defeated the Amalekites and returned home to Ziklag on the same day that Saul and his sons were overtaken in the Battle of Mount Gilboa. It took a messenger three days to leave Gilboa and journey to Ziklag with the report that Saul was dead (2 Sam 1:1-2).

The contrast between Saul and David is obvious. Saul died in the Battle of Mount Gilboa on the same day that David was victorious against the Amalekites. The sequence of the events in chapters 28—29 indicate a period of six days from the time that David departed from Aphek until he received news with regard to Saul's death. Saul died midway through his week, whereas David would begin a new week as king over Israel. The number 7, of course, is meaningful and significant in Scripture because it "represents a mystic cycle of work and rest, within which God both accomplishes His purpose in the universe and cooperates with sanctified men."<sup>1</sup>

### ALL FOR GOOD TO THOSE WHO LOVE GOD

(29:1-11) The location of the Philistines at Aphek is significant. Earlier in Israel's history, they did not seek the Lord when entering into battle with the Philistines at Aphek. Consequently, the nation was defeated, the Ark was captured, and the priests were slain (4:1-22). The former incident proved that failure is always certain when God's people do not first seek His will.

The last book of the Pentateuch ("five books"), or Torah, used the word "remember" fourteen times (Deut 5:15; 7:18; 8:2, 18; 9:7, 27; 15:15; 16:3, 12; 24:9, 18, 22; 25:17; 32:7). The word "forget" is used nine times in the sense of remembering

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(4:9, 23, 31; 6:12; 8:11, 14, 19; 9:7; 25:19). Some things in the past must be forgotten (Phil 3:12-14), but others should never be forgotten. The early twentieth century philosopher George Santayana stated famously: “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” Israel had forgotten the prior experience at Aphek, and it would foreshadow the outcome of the impending battle. The nation would again have “Ichabod” written on their lives. God’s glory will always be removed as a consequence of sin against Him. However, just as God provided Eli’s replacement for priest (1 Sam 3:1-21), He “sought out for Himself a man after His own heart” (13:14) to appoint him as Saul’s replacement.

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The events of this chapter reveal how David’s decision to settle in Philistine territory nearly culminated in having to fight his own people. Throughout the experience, David was burdened again with unnecessary concern with regard to his life (cf. 20:3; 27:1). The Philistine commanders recognized David, and insisted that he return to Ziklag for fear that he would “become an adversary” to the Philistines (29:3-5; cf. 14:21). Achish defended David’s integrity (29:3, 6, 9; cf. 21:11; 2 Sam 14:17). God delivered David from this predicament because the Philistines prohibited him from fighting.

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IT IS CERTAINLY PROFITABLE TO EXAMINE OUR LIVES AND CONSIDER THOSE MOMENTS WHEN GOD WAS QUIET BUT ACTED PROVIDENTIALLY.

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First Samuel 29 does not state specifically that God delivered David because it is unnecessary. “There is no mention of God here, but we are dealing with a highly self-conscious theological literature that observes the undercurrent of divine governance without being explicit. Yahweh [God] is with David everywhere (18:12, 28), surely with him among the Philistines as elsewhere, surely in chapter 29 as in those places where it is explicitly stated. The narrator is not so disbelieving as to perceive the outcome of the narrative as luck.”<sup>2</sup> It is certainly profitable to examine our lives and consider those moments when God was quiet but acted providentially (not in a trivial manner, such as preventing us from spilling a hot drink, but truly guided our lives in mercy through overwhelming obstacles). The reason that God is quiet in those moments is for us to discover His care, so as we think in harmony with Scripture, there is truly meaningful worship.

The interaction of Achish with David is both ironic and interesting. It is ironic because Achish defended David,

especially his military expertise, yet prevented David from fighting with the Philistines in battle. Saul, however, regarded David as his mortal enemy, yet David had not harmed Saul in any manner. Saul is seen as a king “like all the nations” (8:5). David’s relationship with Achish and Saul proves that he is a man after God’s own heart (13:14). It is interesting that Achish swore by the name of the Lord to David that he disagreed with the Philistine commanders (29:6), but Achish had no choice but to order David to return home in peace (29:7).

David’s deliverance is not the first time that enemies were used to save him from an impossible situation (cf. 23:19-28). Although the Philistines were unaware of how God was using them, their demands for David are nevertheless effective. The experience is a reminder that none “has directed the Spirit of the LORD,” or been a “Counselor” to inform Him (Isa 40:13; cf. Rom 11:33). David’s experience does not guarantee that God will deliver us in the same manner, but it does teach that God is incomparable to us. He can make enemies our friends, and not only prepare a table for us in the presence of our enemies (Ps 23:5), but have our enemies serve as the hosts.

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The theme of the hidden providence of God is evident in all the events of chapter 29. Achish’s command for David to return to Ziglag was providential because it served to revive David’s relationship with the Lord (30:1-6). David was also prevented from avoiding conflicting with both Saul and the Philistines (29:8-11). Achish was God’s means for delivering David. David’s difficulty was the result of his wavering in trust for God to protect him from Saul. God did not abandon David, and David did not cease to love the Lord and desire to do His will, which is evident in the events of chapter 30. Although we may not always clearly understand God’s providence, “those who love God” may be assured that the Lord God may outpour His grace in unexpected ways. Our responsibility is to persevere in loving obedience to God’s will. “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose” (Rom 8:28).

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<sup>1</sup> Lewis A. Muirhead, “Numbers,” in *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church*, 2 vols., ed. James Hastings (New York: Charles Scribner’s Son, 1918) 2:92.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1990) 199.