

1 Samuel 29-30
May 7, 2023

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

You learned in our last study that David made a serious error by running from King Saul into enemy territory, i.e. the Philistines. He was allowed to stay in an area of Philistia called Ziklag. By moving to enemy territory, he alienated himself among his countrymen. In today's text, the Philistine commanders discover that David and his 600 men are with them to fight against Israel. They sounded an alarm and questioned his presence. They didn't trust him and wanted him gone! So they told Achish to tell David, "Thanks, but no thanks. Go back to Ziklag."

Q: This scenario highlights a most awkward situation. David was willing to go fight **with the Philistines** against his own people, the Israelites. So here's my question: "Do you think David was really going to fight against the very people he will rule over someday, or do you think he was bluffing? [Let people engage]"

Transition: The story reveals that David was sent back Ziklag, so David was not put in the position to fight against his own people, so that ends up being good news! Let's read the text and see how the rest of the story unfolds.

BOOK:

Achish Sends David Back to Ziklag

29 The Philistines gathered all their forces at Aphek, and Israel camped by the spring in Jezreel. ² As the Philistine rulers marched with their units of hundreds and thousands, David and his men were marching at the rear with Achish. ³ The commanders of the Philistines asked, "What about these Hebrews?"

Achish replied, "Is this not David, who was an officer of Saul king of Israel? He has already been with me for over a year, and from the day he left Saul until now, I have found no fault in him."

⁴ But the Philistine commanders were angry with him 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. How better could he regain his master's favor than by taking the heads of our own men? ⁵ Isn't this the David they sang about in their dances:

" 'Saul has slain his thousands,
and David his tens of thousands'?"

⁶ So Achish called David and 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 now, I have found no fault in you, but the rulers don't approve of you. ⁷ Turn back and go in peace; do nothing to displease the Philistine rulers."

⁸ "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?"

⁹ Achish answered, “I know that you have been as pleasing in my eyes as an angel of God; nevertheless, the Philistine commanders have said, ‘He must not go up with us into battle.’”¹⁰ Now get up early, along with your master’s servants who have come with you and leave in the morning as soon as it is light.”

¹¹ 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.

David Destroys the Amalekites

30 David and his men reached Ziklag on the third day. Now the Amalekites had raided the Negev and Ziklag. They had attacked Ziklag and burned it,² and had taken captive the women and all who were in it, both young and old. They killed none of them, but carried them off as they went on their way.

³ When David and his men came to Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. ⁴ So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep. ⁵ David’s two wives had been captured—Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel. ⁶ David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the LORD his God.

⁷ Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, “Bring me the ephod.” Abiathar brought it to him, ⁸ and David inquired of the LORD, “Shall I pursue this raiding party? Will I overtake them?”

“Pursue them,” he answered. “You will certainly overtake them and succeed in the rescue.”

⁹ David and the six hundred men with him came to the Besor Ravine, where some stayed behind, ¹⁰ for two hundred men were too exhausted to cross the ravine. But David and four hundred men continued the pursuit.

¹¹ They found an Egyptian in a field and brought him to David. They gave him water to drink and food to eat—¹² part of a cake of pressed figs and two cakes of raisins. He ate and was revived, for he had not eaten any food or drunk any water for three days and three nights.

¹³ David asked him, “To whom do you belong, and where do you come from?”

He said, “I am an Egyptian, the slave of an Amalekite. My master abandoned me when I became ill three days ago. ¹⁴ We raided the Negev of the Kerethites and the territory belonging to Judah and the Negev of Caleb. And we burned Ziklag.”

¹⁵ David asked him, “Can you lead me down to this raiding party?”

He answered, “Swear to me before God that you will not kill me or hand me over to my master, and I will take you down to them.”

¹⁶ He led David down, and there they were, scattered over the countryside, eating, drinking and reveling because of the great amount of plunder they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from Judah. ¹⁷ David fought them from dusk until the evening of the next day, and none of them got away, except four hundred young men who rode off on camels and fled. ¹⁸ David recovered everything the Amalekites had taken, including his two wives. ¹⁹ Nothing was missing: young or old, boy or girl, plunder or anything else they had taken. David brought everything back. ²⁰ He took all the flocks and herds, and his men drove them ahead of the other livestock, saying, “This is David’s plunder.”

²¹ Then David came to the two hundred men who had been too exhausted to follow him and who were left behind at the Besor Ravine. They came out to meet David and the people with

him. As David and his men approached, he greeted them. ²² But all the evil men and troublemakers among David's followers said, "Because they did not go out with us, we will not share with them the plunder we recovered. However, each man may take his wife and children and go."

²³ David replied, "No, my brothers, you must not do that with what the LORD has given us. He has protected us and handed over to us the forces that came against us. ²⁴ Who will listen to what you say? The share of the man who stayed with the supplies is to be the same as that of him who went down to the battle. All will share alike." ²⁵ David made this a statute and ordinance for Israel from that day to this.

²⁶ When David arrived in Ziklag, he sent some of the plunder to the elders of Judah, who were his friends, saying, "Here is a present for you from the plunder of the LORD's enemies."

²⁷ He sent it to those who were in Bethel, Ramoth Negev and Jattir; ²⁸ to those in Aroer, Siphmoth, Eshtemoa ²⁹ and Racal; to those in the towns of the Jerahmeelites and the Kenites; ³⁰ to those in Hormah, Bor Ashan, Athach ³¹ and Hebron; and to those in all the other places where David and his men had roamed.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

When we lean on the wisdom of the flesh, we always end up in trouble. It was only the grace of God that kept David from having to slay his own people.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Wiersbe, W. W. (1993). Wiersbe's Expository Outlines on the Old Testament (1 Sam 27-30). Victor Books.

II. Light and Darkness (27–30)

Chapters 27 and 29–30 deal with David’s victories as he sought the mind of the Lord, while chapter 28 pictures Saul’s terrible defeat as he sought aid in a witch’s house. Of course, David was not always walking in the will of the Lord, for it seems that his faith failed him when he went back to Gath to live under the protection of the enemy (chap. 27). He had gotten into trouble there before (21:10–15), but now he was the leader of a strong band of 600 men and his reception was much better. Still, David’s sojourn in enemy territory forced him to lie to the king (27:10–12), and when the Philistines did gather (29:1), David was almost forced to fight against his own people! When we lean on the wisdom of the flesh, we always end up in trouble. It was only the grace of God that kept David from having to slay his own people.

The contrast between chapters 28 and 30 is striking: Saul had departed from the Lord and therefore had no divine guidance (28:6), while David looked to the Lord for courage and direction (30:6–9). “Seek the Lord while He may be found” (Isa. 55:6, NIV) was a warning Saul did not heed. God enabled David not only to recover all his possessions and people, but also to gather the loot collected by the enemy. We appreciate his gracious spirit in sharing the spoils with those who tarried by the supplies, and also his kindness in sending gifts to the elders of Judah. The latter action probably had some political meaning as well.

It is quite another picture when we look at Saul’s midnight visit to the witch’s house (chap. 28). Samuel was dead, but even when he was alive, his ministry was not really appreciated by Saul. How sad when people discover their real friends too late. Saul’s only recourse was to visit a witch, and this was prohibited by the Law (Lev. 20:6). It is alarming to what ends people will go when they have turned their back on the Lord. There have been endless debates over the matter of Samuel’s appearance at the call of the witch. It seems likely that: (1) Samuel’s coming was of the Lord and not because of the witch’s art; (2) the witch was surprised when Samuel appeared; and (3) Samuel came because he had a special message for the king from the Lord. The witch could not have impersonated Samuel (in league with someone else) since she did not know Saul was coming. Nor is it possible that Satan could have accomplished this feat, since God would not allow Satan to deliver such a weighty message, nor would the Lord put His approval on a practice His Word condemned. The witch becomes a mere spectator once Samuel is on the scene. It is likely that Saul heard Samuel’s words (v. 20) but did not see Samuel’s form (vv. 12–14). Back in 15:35 and 16:1, Samuel’s separation from Saul had been accomplished and the king would see him no more.

It is unbelievable that King Saul, a man chosen by God, could ever participate in so wicked a deed; yet the record is there—“let him who thinks he stands take heed, lest he fall” (1 Cor. 10:12). Saul walked in darkness, not in light; he disguised himself (yet was actually revealing his true character); he allowed a woman to break the law; he brought shame and defeat upon his nation, his army, his family, and himself.

Merrill, E. H. (1985). *1 Samuel*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 1, pp. 454-455) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

a. *David’s dilemma (chap. 29)*

Chapter 29. On the eve of the battle **the Philistines** had rendezvoused **at Aphek**, precisely where they had defeated Israel and captured the ark about 90 years earlier (4:10–11). **Israel** took up positions **by the spring in Jezreel**, on the flank of Mount Gilboa, some 40 miles northeast of

Aphek. Among the troops of **Achish**, lord of Gath, were **David and his men**. Though **Achish** had implicit confidence in **David** (29:3) and argued with the other leaders that he should be allowed to fight against **Saul**, he was outvoted (vv. 6–7, 9). Understandably the other **commanders** feared that in the heat of **battle** David would defect to Israel (v. 4). **David**, offering a feeble protest (v. 8) but obviously greatly relieved, was discharged and returned to Ziklag.

b. David's diplomacy (chap. 30)

30:1–7. In David's absence from **Ziklag**, Amalekite raiding parties had **burned** the town and **carried ... off** his family and everyone else as prisoners. After great lament (v. 4) and his men's threat to stone him, **David inquired of the LORD** through **Abiathar the priest** concerning His will in the matter. The inquiry was made by means of **the ephod**, the high priest's apron-like garment which contained the Urim and Thummim, the sacred stones used to discern the will of God (cf. Ex. 28:30).

30:8–31. Assured of victory (v. 8), **David** and his **men** pursued the Amalekites **to the Besor Ravine** (the Wadi el-Arish, some 20 miles south of Ziklag). When they finally **found** them (with the help of an **Egyptian ... slave of an Amalekite** [vv. 11–15]), David's **400 men** who were rugged enough to stand the rigorous march (vv. 9–10) defeated **the Amalekites (except for 400 young Amalekites who escaped on camelback, v. 17)** and retrieved all their families and property intact (vv. 17–20). **The 200** who had remained behind by **the Besor Ravine** (vv. 10, 21) wanted a share of the Amalekite booty. (On David's 600 men, see 23:13; 27:2; 2 Sam. 15:18.) So reasonable did their request sound to **David** that he established a principle **that day** that would thereafter prevail: **The share of the man who stayed with the supplies is to be the same as that of him who went down to the battle** (1 Sam. 30:24). But David's diplomatic masterstroke was his return of the properties stolen by the Amalekites from the cities and towns **of Judah** (vv. 26–31). Never would they forget his concern for them, and when the time came for him to declare his kingship at **Hebron**, he no doubt enjoyed their enthusiastic support.

Mathews, K. A. (1998). *The Historical Books*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (p. 119). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

God Spares David (29:1–11). This episode precedes the events in chapter 28 since the Philistines were gathered at Aphek (29:1) and then moved to Shunem in the Jezreel Valley (28:4; 29:11). This arrangement serves to heighten without interruption David's success against the Lord's enemies (continued in 1 Sam. 30).

The Philistines refused to include David in their battle against Israel. God used the discontent of the Philistines to spare David from fighting against his own people and jeopardizing, in their eyes, his place as the Lord's anointed. Achish apologetically dismissed David to Ziklag.

God Strengthens David (30:1–31). David and his men arrived in Ziklag, where they discovered the city burned and their families captured by raiding Amalekites. So distraught were the men that they threatened to stone David, but the Lord strengthened him. At the instruction of the Lord by the ephod of Abiathar, David pursued the Amalekites.

During the march, two hundred men remained behind because of exhaustion, but four hundred pressed ahead. With the aid of an Egyptian slave who was left behind by the Amalekites, David's men discovered their camp, overtook them, and retrieved all their

possessions. David won the hearts of his men and the elders of Judah by sharing with them—even the two hundred who stayed behind—a portion of the booty taken from the Amalekites.

Philbeck, B. F. (1972). 1 Samuel. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher's Bible Commentary (pp. 178-179). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

David Excluded from War (1 Sam. 29:1–11)

The passage—During his 16 months as a vassal of Achish, David had been able to avoid any hostile acts against his own people. As the Philistines prepared for war against Israel, however, he was instructed to accompany Achish into battle. As the Philistine troops were passing in review, the leaders noted with alarm the presence of the Hebrews at the end of the column. Achish defended his decision to bring David and his men on the grounds that they had adequately discharged their duties since David had first deserted to him. The lords of the Philistines, however, perhaps remembering the defection of Hebrew mercenaries in the battle at Geba (14:21), insisted on sending David back to Ziklag.

Explaining that he himself had full confidence in David's loyalty, Achish reluctantly ordered his vassal to return to his home base. Although he was probably relieved, David's role as a loyal Philistine vassal required him to protest the decision to send him to the rear. Nevertheless, he and his troops were prepared to leave for home at first light the next day.

Amalekites Attack Ziklag (1 Sam. 30:1–31)

The passage—After being suspended from the Philistine forces at Aphek, David and his men began a forced march back to Ziklag, which for some reason had been left without defenders. The weary soldiers covered nearly sixty miles in slightly more than two days, only to find their homes abandoned and in ruins.

Amalekite raiders had taken advantage of Israelite and Philistine preparations for war against each other by robbing and looting undefended towns in the southern portions of both countries. After taking captives to be sold in Egyptian slave markets, they melted back into the desert from which they had come.

David rallied his grieving men and sought divine guidance for his rescue attempts. Reinforced with a divine oracle assuring them of success, David's men began another forced march, this one to save their lost families. Their campaign was immeasurably aided by the discovery of an Egyptian slave who guided them to the Amalekite camp. Striking quickly before the Amalekites had an opportunity to harm their hostages, the Israelites routed the desert raiders.

David's men recovered their own goods and the spoil from many other cities as well. After distributing equal portions among his own troops, David shared the remaining booty with some of the more important communities in Judean territory. He wanted them to remember that while the Philistines were fighting Saul's army in the north, he was busy defeating one of Israel's inveterate enemies in the south.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (1 Samuel 29-30). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.