

1 Samuel 29:1-11 and 30:1-31

David Remembers Who He Is

David had seemingly lost faith that God would continue to protect him from Saul, and had brought his men along with their families to Achish, a ruler of the Philistines, to serve him as a mercenary force. Now the Philistine armies had invaded Israel, and David might be forced to actually fight against his own people.

At the moment, David is serving as Achish's personal guard and therefore not on the front lines. David has apparently forgotten his destiny. But the other Philistine rulers remember. They remind Achish of his defeat of Goliath and how "David killed his ten thousands." They did not trust him to be present even in the rear guard during the battle.

1 Samuel 29:3 - "Then said the princes of the Philistines, What do these Hebrews here? And Achish said unto the princes of the Philistines, Is not this David, the servant of Saul the king of Israel, which hath been with me these days, or these years, and I have found no fault in him since he fell unto me unto this day?"

Achish swears David is now working with the Philistines, but he doesn't persuade them.

1 Samuel 29:4-5 - "And the princes of the Philistines were wroth with him; and the princes of the Philistines said unto him, Make this fellow return, that he may go again to his place which thou hast appointed him, and let him not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he be an adversary to us: for wherewith should he reconcile himself unto his master? should it not be with the heads of these men? Is not this David, of whom they sang one to another in dances, saying, Saul slew his thousands, and David his ten thousands?"

It probably didn't help that a number of men from the tribe of Manasseh arrived to support David. (**1 Chronicles 12:19-20**). That probably seemed suspicious to the Philistine lords.

So Achish is forced to send David and his men back to Ziklag.

1 Samuel 29:6-7 - "Then Achish called David, and said unto him, Surely, as the LORD liveth, thou hast been upright, and thy going out and thy coming in with me in the host is good in my sight: for I have not found evil in thee since the day of thy coming unto me unto this day: nevertheless the lords favor thee not. Wherefore now return, and go in peace, that thou displease not the lords of the Philistines."

David still insists on his loyalty to Achish. Apparently he still does not embrace his identity as the anointed king of Israel, chosen by God.

An alternative view of this is that this all be part of a continuing ruse by which David is trying to pretend loyalty until he figures out what to do.

But as we will see in the next chapter, David must confront the fruit of his lack of faith before returning to a position of faith in God's protection and distrust of his own plans.

1 Samuel 29:11 - "So David and his men rose up early to depart in the morning, to return into the land of the Philistines. And the Philistines went up to Jezreel."

1 Samuel 30 - Confronting a Disaster

When the Philistine armies invaded Israel, the Amalekites took advantage of their absence and came up from the south on a revenge raid against David, who had previously slaughtered their people.

1 Samuel 30:1-3 - "And it came to pass, when David and his men were come to Ziklag on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the south, and Ziklag, and smitten Ziklag, and burned it with fire; And had taken the women captives, that were therein: they slew not any, either great or small, but carried them away, and went on their way. So David and his men came to the city, and, behold, it was burned with fire; and their wives, and their sons, and their daughters, were taken captives."

This was the worst possible turn of events. David's plan to join the Philistines had now cost him and his men the loss their families.

1 Samuel 30:4-6 - "Then David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep. And David's two wives were taken captives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite. And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and for his daughters: but David encouraged himself in the LORD his God."

"greatly" = *m^oōd* - greatly, from a root meaning to stir coals and make them flame up

"distressed" = *yāṣar* - to bind, tie up, be perplexed, pressed upon (used in the phrase "to be between the straights" relating to the siege of Jerusalem)

It was the nadir of David's life so far. He was absolutely alone. In their grief, his men threatened to stone him, blaming David for their loss.

"the soul of all the people was grieved" = *mārâ* - bitter, rebellious, lashed as if with a whip, or cut with a razor (like the Waters of Mara - **Exodus 15:22-27**)

The Turning Point

It is at that moment that something remarkable happened. "David encouraged himself in the Lord his God."

"encourage" = *ḥāzaq* - encourage, take hold of, confirm, to harden, grow strong, make firm

We are told to do the same:

- **Psalm 31:24** - "Be strong and courageous, all you who hope in the LORD."
- **Haggai 2:4** - "...be strong, all you people of the land, declares the LORD. Work! For I am with you, declares the LORD of Hosts."
- **Ephesians 6:10** - "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might."
- **1 Corinthians 16:13** - "Be on the alert, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong."
- **2 Timothy 2:1** - "You therefore, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus."

David was able to wake up out of his despair and re-establish in his own heart and mind his faith in God and his prophesied destiny. He remembered his true identity, and returned to that position with God that had made him courageous against Goliath.

David Inquires of God

1 Samuel 30:7-8 - "And David said to Abiathar the priest, Ahimelech's son, I pray thee, bring me hither the ephod. And Abiathar brought thither the ephod to David. And David enquired at the LORD, saying, Shall I pursue after this troop? shall I overtake them? And he answered him, Pursue: for thou shalt surely overtake them, and without fail recover all."

David leaves behind 200 of his men who were too exhausted to continue, and with only 400 men pursues the Amalekites. (This only magnifies the victory that God gave them, recalling Gideon's victory after sending away most of his men - **Judges 7:2**). They had already marched 88 miles. By leaving men with their baggage the rest could travel much faster.

They find an Egyptian slave who fell sick and was left behind by the Amalekites. They show kindness to this lowly man close to death. They give him food and drink and nurse him back to life. (This was in contrast to David's merciless behavior previously) Their kindness pays off because the Egyptian offers to lead David to the enemy camp.

This Egyptian slave was thus freed from his Amalekite master, in a sort of reflection of Israel's own redemption from slavery in Egypt at the Exodus.

1 Samuel 30:16-19 - "And when he had brought him down, behold, they were spread

abroad upon all the earth, eating and drinking, and dancing, because of all the great spoil that they had taken out of the land of the Philistines, and out of the land of Judah. And David smote them from the twilight even unto the evening of the next day: and there escaped not a man of them, save four hundred young men, which rode upon camels, and fled. And David recovered all that the Amalekites had carried away: and David rescued his two wives. And there was nothing lacking to them, neither small nor great, neither sons nor daughters, neither spoil, nor any thing that they had taken to them: David recovered all."

More probably David attacked in the early morning when the Amalekites were hung over from their celebrations.

A Talmud Note: The Amalekites were descended from Esau. In **Obadiah 1:18**, it says that only the descendants of Joseph will defeat Esau:

- **Obadiah 1:18** - "And the house of Jacob shall be a fire, and the house of Joseph a flame, and the house of Esau for stubble, and they shall kindle in them, and devour them; and there shall not be any remaining of the house of Esau; for the LORD hath spoken it."

The rabbis explain that David was able to defeat them because he received help from the men of Manasseh (Joseph's children - See **1 Chronicles 12:19-20**)

Also, when it says David "smote them from the twilight even unto the evening of the next day," the rabbis recall that when Israel fought Amalek in **Exodus 17:9**, Moses said "Tomorrow I will stand on top of the hill..." And when the plot by Haman (an Agagite/ Amalekite) was discovered, Esther said "let it be granted to the Jews which are in Shushan to do tomorrow also according unto this day's decree" (**Esther 9:13**).

Amalek represents the proliferation of evil in the world. But this is temporary since "tomorrow" Amalek and evil will be defeated, and Israel and justice will prevail.

Another Talmud Note: Four hundred Amalekites escaped on camels. In **Genesis 32**, when Esau pursued Jacob he had with him 400 men. When he departed, these men are not mentioned. The rabbis surmise that the men slipped away out of fear of being "burnt by the coals of Jacob." They were rewarded by God's allowing the 400 Amalekites to escape here. (Bereishis Rabbah 78:15)

The fact that the wives had not been violated and all those captured were saved alive was seen as a miracle and is reflected in **Psalms 91:7** - "A thousand shall fall at thy side, and ten thousand at thy right hand; but it shall not come nigh thee" (**Psalms 91:7**).

Fair Division of the Spoils

Unlike with Saul and his command from Samuel to not keep the spoils of the Amalekites, David here had no such command.

The extra spoil besides what was taken from Ziklag is in line with a principle of God's overabundant mercy. As David says in **Psalms 23:5** - "...my cup runneth over."

1 Samuel 30:20 - "And David took all the flocks and the herds, which they drove before those other cattle, and said, This is David's spoil."

Some of David's men objected to sharing the spoils with the 200 men who stayed behind. The scripture calls the "wicked men and men of Belial."

1 Samuel 30:22 - "Then answered all the wicked men and men of Belial, of those that went with David, and said, Because they went not with us, we will not give them ought of the spoil that we have recovered, save to every man his wife and his children, that they may lead them away, and depart."

"they went not with us" - Actually reads "with me" in Hebrew. The rabbis note that each man spoke in the singular, because each thought only about himself. Thus they are called "men of Belial" meaning "without the yoke of the Law or the sovereignty of the Lord."

But David emphasizes that they didn't EARN those spoils, they were a gift from God.

The 200 men had waited at the Brook Besor, which means "cheerful," possibly renamed for this incident after David's victory.

1 Samuel 30:23-24 - "Then said David, Ye shall not do so, my brethren, with that which the LORD hath given us, who hath preserved us, and delivered the company that came against us into our hand. For who will hearken unto you in this matter? but as his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff: they shall part alike."

This principle was written down as an ordinance permanently in Israel. And in fact had been the rule much earlier - with Abraham in **Genesis 14:23**, and in the war with Midian in **Numbers 31:27**.

This decision was based upon the custom of dividing the object of litigation between the parties; an easy way out for the judge. **2 Samuel 19:29**, for instance, shows the application of this rule and the same idea seems to constitute the formal element of Solomon's decision (**1 Kings 3:25**) to cut the baby in half.

1 Samuel 30:25 - "And it was so from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel unto this day."

The great 19th century preacher Charles Spurgeon, comments on this example of equity:

"You Little-Faiths, you Despondencies, you Much-Afraids, you Feeble-Minds, you that sigh more than you sing, you that would but cannot, you that have a great heart for

holiness, but feel beaten back in your struggles, the Lord shall give you his love, his grace, his favor, as surely as he gives it to those who can do great things in his name.”

Most of us are like these 200 - beneficiaries of those who went before us.

Then David sends portions of the spoils to elders of 13 cities in Israel, hoping to repair relationships that were strained because of his defection to the Philistines. Some of these people had helped David when he was on the run.

Our takeaway from these two chapters - when we find ourselves in a position like David, where we are distressed and perplexed and overwhelmed by self-doubt, guilt or trouble, we can find our true selves and "encourage ourselves in the Lord." When we remember that He took our sin, guilt, shame and blame - "blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us. He took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross" (**Colossians 2:14**).

When we remember our true identity, we can "speak to our soul" as David did in the Psalms, and "revenge the disobedience" (**2 Corinthians 10:6**).

Then we become "strong in the Lord," because in our confessed weakness, His strength is made perfect.

Then the "spoils" or the overflowing reward can be distributed to those around us. When "our cup runneth over," the blessings can affect our whole world.

Most importantly - Like David, who through God's miracle was able to save alive every one of those who had been captured by the Amalekites, so Jesus has saved and kept us from evil:

- **John 17:12** - "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled."

And later at His arrest:

- **John 18:7** - "Then asked he them again, Whom seek ye? And they said, Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus answered, I have told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, let these go their way: That the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none."

His words were fulfilled in the short term at his arrest, but in the eternal view, each member of His body, the church, is meant.