

1 Samuel 30: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] 1 Samuel chapter 30 Now when David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day, the Amalekites had made a raid against the Negev and against Ziklag. They had overcome Ziklag and burned it with fire, and taken captive the women and all who were in it, both small and great.

They killed no one, but carried them off and went their way. And when David and his men came to the city, they found it burned with fire, and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. Then David and the people who were with him raised their voices and wept, until they had no more strength to weep. David's two wives also had been taken captive, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail the wife of Nabal of Carmel.

And David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because all the people were bitter in soul, each for his sons and daughters. But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God. And David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, Bring me the ephod. So Abiathar brought the ephod to David. And David inquired of the Lord, Shall I pursue after this band?

[1 : 04] Shall I overtake them? He answered them, Pursue, for you shall surely overtake and shall surely rescue. So David set out and the six hundred men who were with him, and they came to the brook Besaw, where those who were left behind stayed.

But David pursued, he and four hundred men. Two hundred stayed behind, who were too exhausted to cross the brook Besaw. They found an Egyptian in the open country and brought him to David.

And they gave him bread and he ate. They gave him water to drink, and they gave him a piece of a cake of figs and two clusters of raisins. And when he had eaten, his spirit revived, for he had not eaten bread or drunk water for three days and three nights.

And David said to him, To whom do you belong? And where are you from? He said, I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite. And my master left me behind because I fell sick three days ago.

We had made a raid against the Negev of the Cherethites, and against that which belongs to Judah, and against the Negev of Caleb, and we burned Ziklag with fire. And David said to him, Will you take me down to this band?

[2 : 07] And he said, Swear to me by God that you will not kill me or deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will take you down to this band. And when he had taken him down, behold, they were spread abroad over all the land, eating and drinking and dancing, because of all the great spoil that they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah.

And David struck them down from twilight until the evening of the next day, and not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men, who mounted camels and fled. David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken, and David rescued his two wives.

Nothing was missing, whether small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything that had been taken. David brought back all. David also captured all the flocks and herds, and the people drove the livestock before him, and said, This is David's spoil.

Then David came to the two hundred men who had been too exhausted to follow David, and who had been left at the brook Besaw. And they went out to meet David, and to meet the people who were with him. And when David came near to the people, he greeted them.

Then all the wicked and worthless fellows among the men who had gone with David said, Because they did not go with us, we will not give them any of the spoil that we have recovered, except that each man may lead away his wife and children, and depart.

[3 : 25] But David said, You shall not do so, my brothers, with what the Lord has given us. He has preserved us, and given into our hand the band that came against us. Who would listen to you in

this matter?

For as his share is who goes down into the battle, so shall his share be who stays by the baggage. They shall share alike. And he made it a statute and a rule for Israel from that day forward to this day.

When David came to Ziklag, he sent part of the spoil to his friends, the elders of Judah, saying, Here is a present for you from the spoils of the enemies of the Lord. In 1 Samuel chapter 30, David and his men, having been sent back from the battle against Israel by the Philistines, who don't trust them, arrive in Ziklag to find that their wives and children had been taken.

As we've already noted, in this book, there is a developing contrast between David and Saul. Saul is on the brink of a battle against the Philistines, and now David is going to fight against the Amalekites, and the two will be contrasted.

Back in chapter 15, Saul was rejected for his failure to deal with the Amalekites, and now David is attacked by them, and we will see that he does considerably better. The Amalekites taking the women and children while the men are away is in keeping with their form of behaviour described in Deuteronomy chapter 25, in verses 17 and 19 of that chapter.

[5 : 00] Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you came out of Egypt, how he attacked you on the way when you were faint and weary, and cut off your tail, those who were lagging behind you, and he did not fear God.

Therefore, when the Lord your God has given you rest from all your enemies around you, in the land that the Lord your God is giving you for an inheritance to possess, you shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.

You shall not forget. In the context of Deuteronomy chapter 25, the blotting out of the memory of Amalek is contrasted with the way that the one who performed the leveret marriage seeks to avoid his brother's name being blotted out.

The contrast is between those who come to the aid of the weakest and those who seek to prey upon the weakest. The Amalekites were characterised by the latter. Later on in the history of Israel, in the story of Esther, Haman the Agagite, another Amalekite, will seek to wipe out the entire people.

Peter Leithart observes the contrast between David and the Amalekites. The Amalekites abandon the weak straggler, the Egyptian servant whom they leave behind, much as they had preyed upon the weak stragglers after the Exodus.

[6 : 06] It is David's kindness to the weak straggler, the Egyptian servant that no one else would pay regard to, that enables him to discover the Amalekite's destination. It's on account of his compassion for the weak, the trait that sets David apart from the Amalekites that will enable him to defeat them.

Had he not had compassion upon this Egyptian servant, it's quite possible he never would have discovered the Amalekites and overtaken them and recovered the captives. As we've already seen in the reference from Deuteronomy chapter 25, the paradigmatic encounter with the Amalekites occurred after the Exodus in chapter 17 of the book of Exodus.

After an Exodus event, the Amalekites seek to attack. This should probably be related to the larger Exodus themes that are playing out here. David's Exodus from the land of the Philistines and returned to the land of Israel as king and the contrasting anti-Exodus of Saul who is going to go down to the grave.

In the story of the Exodus and also some of the prefiguring narratives, there is an assault upon the woman. We can think of the attack upon the newborn babies and the emphasis upon the women who are delivering the children in chapters 1 and 2 of the book of Exodus.

We might also think of Sarah who is taken by pagan kings and Rebecca who almost is. The serpent attacks the bride and the true Adam has to deliver the bride from the dragon.

[7 : 26] David here is playing that part. There is a new Exodus pattern playing out and David's mettle will be shown. Lighthart notes the repeated emphasis upon three-day periods in the story at this point.

They arrive in Ziklag on the third day in verse 1. The Egyptian revived after three days and three nights without food and drink in verse 12. News of Saul's death arrives on the third day after he returned to Ziklag in 2 Samuel chapter 1 verse 2.

The third day is a day of transition. This isn't a motif exclusive to 1 Samuel but is something that we find on several occasions in the Old Testament. The third day is a day of revived and reversed fortunes and this third day is associated with a greater reversal.

David's great opponent Saul will be defeated making it possible for David to be raised up to rule in his place. In the fight against the Amalekites David's prominence is emphasised.

It's as if David were the only man fighting and David struck them down from twilight until the evening of the next day and not a man of them escaped except 400 young men who mounted camels and fled.

[8 : 30] David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken and David rescued his two wives. Nothing was missing whether small or great sons or daughters spoil or anything that had been taken. David brought back all.

David also captured all the flocks and herds and the people drove the livestock before him and said this is David's spoil. Then David came to the 200 men who had been too exhausted to follow David and who had been left at the brook Besaw and they went out to meet David and to meet the people who were with him and when David came near to the people he greeted them.

David wins a great victory with a relatively small force. He has only 400 men with him but the Amalekites are described as spread abroad over all the land. Only 400 men of the Amalekites escape accentuating the contrast between David's number of men and the number of the Amalekites.

David's entire force is the same size as the small remnant of the Amalekite band. Here we might think about the parallels between David and Gideon. There's a focus at the end of the chapter upon the gifts that David gives.

He shares the spoil with the men left behind reminding us perhaps of the principles for sharing spoil in Numbers chapter 31 verses 25 to 31. He gives gifts to the elders of Judah.

[9 : 44] This generosity will provide a basis for his rule. David is a generous man and increasingly behaving like a king who wins loyalty through such gifts. As Peter Lighthouse observes, rather than being the king who takes as described in chapter 8, David is a king who gives.

A question to consider. Why do you think that the text gives such attention to David's making the principle for sharing the spoil a statute and a rule for Israel?