
1 SAMUEL 16-31

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INTRODUCTION

David enters the scene in this lesson, a humble shepherd, youngest son of his father, yet chosen by God's prophet to replace the fallen Saul, as demonstrated in the first half of 1 Samuel. Though he will later sin on his own and lose great privileges as a result, in these chapters David is presented as a righteous man, striving to be loyal to the king who

resents and tries to kill him. This is in contrast to Saul who steadily descends from his earlier righteous and humble position, exhibiting anger and murder and consorting with witches. The rise of David in favor with God and man is thus contrasted with the fall of Saul, out of favor with God and under attack by his enemies with no one to turn to for help.

DAVID INTRODUCED (16:1 – 17:58)

INTRODUCTION

With the Lord's rejection of Samuel (1 Samuel 15:23-28), the kingdom was promised to "a neighbor" (15:28). Following the Lord's direction, Samuel anointed David but did it in private for David's and probably his own protection. Thus David and his family knew it was him but Saul did not, at least in the beginning. This gave David the ability to be brought into the court of Saul without fear. Later Saul's anger only increased with his realization that

David was the new king and that David was preferred by many people, including his own son and daughter.

These first chapters let us begin to compare and contrast Saul and David. Both were handsome and outwardly attractive, but David strove to be obedient to the Lord while Saul more and more was driven by his own pride and fears.

COMMENTARY

David anointed (16:1-13)

At the end of 1 Samuel 15, it says that “Samuel mourned for Saul” (15:35) because of the choices that Saul had made. Chapter 16 starts by continuing the thought with the Lord asking Samuel, “How long wilt thou mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him from reigning over Israel?” (16:1). The Lord instructed Samuel it was time to find a new king with the family of Jesse (‘possess’) of Bethlehem.

To avoid raising Saul’s suspicions, the Lord instructed Samuel to go to Bethlehem ostensibly to sacrifice, which is always a legitimate reason for a prophet to visit a location. When he arrived, the people at first feared that he might have come to render judgment, but he assured them he had come peaceably. After sanctifying Jesse and his family, he had them come before him one by one. The oldest was Eliab (‘my God is father’) who like Saul looked regal. But the Spirit spoke to Samuel words now famous about how the Lord chooses people: “the Lord seeth not as a man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart” (16:7), or as another translation says, “the Lord sees into the heart” (JSB, 591). After all the sons had gone past and Samuel had been prompted that none were right, he asked if there were more. “There remaineth yet the youngest, and, behold, he keepeth the sheep” (16:11). This youngest son, named David (‘beloved’) was called and the Spirit told Samuel he was the one, so Samuel anointed him. The anointing was done in secret with only David’s family watching, thus protecting David’s life. Samuel returned home to Ramah, his mission accomplished.

The description of David says he was “ruddy” (16:12), probably meaning a redhead. It also says he had a “beautiful countenance, and goodly to look at” (16:12). Another translation says he was “handsome to behold and making a splendid appearance” (NAB).

David’s life in many ways is a type of Christ. Here the humble shepherd became the anointed king. Jesus was often compared to a shepherd, both by himself and his disciples (e.g., Matthew 9:36; 26:31; John 10; 1 Peter 2:25).

In Saul’s court (16:14-23)

In the meantime, Saul was experiencing some kind of depression or mental disorder (the term translated “evil spirit” in 16:14 could also mean a variety of things, including ‘vicious temper,’ which Saul exhibits). The text implies that when the Spirit of God came upon David (16:13) it also departed from Saul (16:14) and was replaced by an evil spirit (which the JST corrects in every place to be *not* from the Lord). Saul’s advisors thought music would help so they sought for a musician and came up with the name of David. Saul called for him and David came with gifts and played for Saul, helping him during his troubled times. As a result, Saul grew to like David very much (the Hebrew word translated “love” in 16:21 can mean love, like, or friendship) and made David his armor bearer.

David and Goliath (17:1-58)

In the KJV, this story appears to ‘reintroduce’ David and his family, though we (and Saul) have already met him in chapter 16. This probably shows the editing of the Masoretic Text in later years. The LXX (Septuagint or Greek translation) has a much shorter version of this chapter that excludes verses 12-31, 41, 50, 55-58 and 18:1-5), indicating that these verses were either editorial additions or insertions from a different manuscript family that probably didn’t include chapter 16, so needed to introduce David in conjunction with the Goliath story. The Dead Sea Scrolls are not extant for chapter 17 except verses 3-5.

The location for the story is a valley called “Elah” (17:2) which is between the two towns of Shochoh and Azekah, both of which are just east of the Philistine city of Gath and southwest of Jerusalem. The two armies stood on opposite sides of the valley, seemingly at an impasse until “a champion” (17:4) from their camp challenged the Israelites to send one man out to meet him in personal battle. The man’s name was Goliath (‘splendor’). The KJV says he was “six cubits and a span” (17:4) tall, which would be about 9-1/2 feet, but the LXX has the number five (making him about 8 feet tall) and the older Dead Sea Scrolls version reports he was four (so about 6-1/2 feet, a tall but reasonable height). DSSB notes that this “illustrates how ancient narratives sometimes grew at the hand of narrators or scribes” (DSSB, 228). Goliath was very fearsome

not just because he was tall but because he was strong and well-armored, striking fear into the army of Israel.

David's three oldest brothers were part of Saul's army, and Jesse, their father, sent David to the front with supplies for his sons. Hearing Goliath mocking Israel, he became incensed and said to Saul, "Thy servant will go and fight with this Philistine" (17:32). Saul countered that David was young and inexperienced, but David shared how if a lion or a bear came and stole a sheep. David chased the animal and killed it. With that experience and most importantly the help of the Lord, David was confident he could also conquer "this Philistine" (17:37).

To help, Saul gave David his own armor but since he had no experience with armor ("I have not proved

them," 17:39), he determined to take them off. Instead, he took five small stones from a nearby stream. Seeing young David coming out, Goliath declared, "Am I a dog, that thou comest to me with staves [sticks]?" (17:43). The stick in David's hand could have been a walking stick, perhaps his shepherd's staff. It was more of a diversion because the real weapon was in his bag. Pulling one of the rocks from that bag, he quickly loaded it in his sling while running forward and flung it toward the unsuspecting Goliath. The stone was thrown hard and true and embedded itself deeply in Goliath's forehead, knocking him to the earth. David ran forward, withdrew Goliath's own sword and cut off his head. Seeing Goliath fall, the Philistines fled in fear and Israel chased them down. David kept both the head of Goliath and the man's armor as trophies. The head later ended up at Jerusalem, but the armor stayed David's personal possession.

DAVID DRIVEN FROM SAUL'S COURT (18:1 – 20:42)

INTRODUCTION

Though Saul apparently knows nothing about David being anointed king, his jealousy of David's success and popularity caused him to believe that David might be the one to replace him. He feared David and sought to kill him—first subtly by sending him to

war or asking him to perform dangerous acts, then when that did not work, by overtly calling for his death. Through it all David remains faithful to Saul and to the Lord, providing a contrast between the degenerating king and his righteous replacement.

COMMENTARY

Saul fears David (18:1-30)

As previously mentioned, verses 1-5 of chapter 18 are not the LXX version and are probably later additions to help introduce us to the friendship of David and Jonathan. These verses speak of the deep bond that quickly developed between David and Saul's son to the point where they covenanted with each other and Jonathan gave David his own mantle as a token of that relationship.

The rest of the chapter shows how Saul became fearful of David after people began to praise him for his success in the battle against Goliath. They praised Saul also but not as much as David: "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his tens thousands" (18:7). Growing in anger, he threw a

javelin at David while he was playing the harp (a lyre or hand-held stringed instrument). Saul made him a military commander to get him out of his sight but the praise he got from his leadership ("went out and came in" in 18:16 means to go out in front of them) also annoyed Saul. To rid himself of David, he promised him his eldest daughter if he would fight the Philistines, doing this in the hope that the Philistines would kill him instead of Saul needing to do it—prescient of a future incident with David and Uriah. David survived the battle but Saul gave the promised wife, Merab, to another man instead. Then Saul's daughter, Michal ('who is like God') told Saul she loved David (the only time in the Old Testament where a woman loving a man is called out, JPS, 597) so Saul arranged a marriage between the two still

with the hope that the Philistines would kill him by his demand of 100 foreskins from uncircumcised Philistines as the bride price. But David got not only that number but double the request, and Michal became his wife.

Defended by Michal and Jonathan (19:1 – 20:42)

After the wedding, Saul was so enraged with David that he commanded Jonathan, his son, and all his servants to kill David. But Jonathan talked his father out of him, reminding him that David had never harmed Saul and had only helped Israel. So Saul swore an oath not to kill David, but the oath was not kept. This is in contrast to David later who has the chance to kill Saul but does not. The story of Saul throwing a javelin at David is repeated—again, probably due to the editor bringing together two or more ancient records and including the duplicate event recorded at a different time.

Michal, David's wife, warned him that Saul was coming for him, and David fled north toward Samuel instead of south to his family home, as might have been expected, thus outwitting Saul. When Saul came, Michal first told everyone David was sick in bed, and had put an idol in his place with fake hair to deceive them. When her lie was discovered, she lied again saying that David had threatened to kill her if she did not conceal his departure. Learning through other sources that David was with Samuel, Saul went to find him. Years before, after meeting with and being anointed by Samuel, Saul had encountered prophets on the road, had been filled with the Spirit, and prophesied with them. This time he encountered a similar or the same group but with a different outcome—Saul degradingly stripped off his clothing and lay around naked all day and night,

speaking in a mock-prophetic manner. This caused people to speak the proverb uttered many years ago that Saul was among the prophets, only now in a sarcastic manner (cf. 1 Samuel 10:10-13).

David knew that Saul was after him, telling Jonathan, "There is but a step between me and death" (20:3). Chapter 20 describes how at the beginning of the new moon, Saul expected David to come to his table for dinner (as part of the monthly feast). David obviously feared going, so he arranged with Jonathan to go and determine Saul's intentions. They had a pre-arranged sign having to do with shooting arrows that would tell David if it was safe or if he needed to flee. When David didn't come, Saul was angry and asked Jonathan where David was. Telling his father David had gone to Bethlehem for an offering, Saul got angry at Jonathan for wanting David to be king instead of himself (when Saul died) and threw a javelin at him. Jonathan went and gave the sign to David to flee but only after they had a short but emotional reunion.

Starting in the 1950s, some have tried to re-interpret the relationship between these two men beyond the words of the scriptures and make them into gay lovers. The Bible offers no support for such an interpretation. True, the text says that they loved each other (Jonathan loved David "as he loved his own soul" in 20:17) and "kissed one another" (20:39) but that implies nothing more than a close friendship in that culture where kissing was used in greetings and departures, even among men (as it is today in the Middle East and many parts of the world). All serious scholarship continues to agree with the interpretation that David and Jonathan's relationship was a close heterosexual one only, and example of two great friends.

SAUL PURSUES DAVID (21:1 – 28:2)

INTRODUCTION

Out of jealousy and fear for his throne, Saul pursued David in many locations in southern Israel, from the borders near the Philistines to the shores of the Dead Sea. In two encounters, David was able to come close enough to Saul to kill him, if he had chosen. But both times he showed restraint and spared the king,

considering him the Lord's anointed and thus sacred, and both times he let Saul know that he had done nothing worthy of Saul's ire but rather was completely loyal to the king. In both cases, Saul backed off, the first time just for a while, but the

second time permanently (though if Saul had lived

longer he may have continued to pursue David).

COMMENTARY

Saul kills the priests of Nob (21:1 – 22:23)

Fleeing for his life, David went to the priestly town of Nob (which some believe was on Mount Scopus near Jerusalem). At this time, that appears to be the location of the Tabernacle (probably a replacement after the destruction of the previous Tabernacle by the Philistines at the time of Eli's death) or at least the table of bread. Ahimelech (the grandson of Eli and the apparent high priest at this time) wondered why David was alone and David lied about his circumstances, saying he was on an errand for the king. David arrived as the priest, Ahimelech ('my brother is king'), was pulling the bread off the bread table from the previous week and replacing it with fresh. Needing food, David asked for the bread, though this was contrary to the instructions in the Law of Moses which said this bread was to be eaten by priests (Leviticus 24:5-9). The priest asked the Lord in his behalf and then gave him the bread. David also said that his departure had been very hasty and so he had no weapons. The priest told him that the sword of Goliath was in the sanctuary and David asked to have that sword that he might protect himself, which Ahimelech agreed to.

David then went to Gath to try and escape Saul, but he was quickly recognized and brought to the king. Faking insanity, David's behavior convinced the king that he was not a threat and he was able to escape.

Next he went to hide in a cave called Adullam near the border of the Philistines. There he got word to his family who was in jeopardy because of David's situation. Many of them joined him in hiding but David's parents he sent to safety in Moab, probably because he had ancestors there from Ruth. Other joined him and soon he had 400 supporters. But a prophet named Gad came and warned him to go to the land of Judah, so he left the cave and went to "the forest of Hareth" (22:5).

Saul had spies looking for David all over the land. Saul rallied his Benjamite followers to his support by reminding them that David would not give them land, fields, and positions of leadership as he had.

One of his followers, Doeg ('fearing'), had been at Nob when David came and saw him take the bread and the sword. He informed Saul of this and Saul went with his army to Nob to demand to know where David was. The priest, who had believed he was helping a man in the king's service, did not know David's location. In his anger, Saul commanded his troops to kill the priest Ahimelech and the others there at the sanctuary for their support of David. None of them were willing to do it until Doeg, the foreigner who didn't believe in YHWH, stepped forward and performed the grim task of killing 85 priests and Levites.

One of the sons of Ahimelech, Abiathar ('my father is great'), escaped and came to tell David what had happened. David blamed himself for their deaths because he had known Doeg was there. David counseled Abiathar to stay with him because otherwise Saul would surely try to kill him, too.

David spares Saul's life (23:1 – 26:25)

David heard that the Philistines were attacking the city of Keilah, stealing the crops just at harvest time. Through Abiathar (who had the ephod and thus likely the Urim and Thummim, too), David asked the Lord if he should go. Receiving a positive response, he told his men, but they were uncertain, so David asked again for them. With a second positive response from the Lord, they went to Keilah's rescue and saved the town.

Saul heard about David's victory and sent his men after him. Inquiring again through Abiathar again, David determined to leave and went to the wilderness of Ziph. (23:11-12 provide insight as to how the Urim and Thummim worked. The person asked one question and the priest reached in and pulled out one stone, which indicated 'yes' or 'no.' In this case, David asked two questions at first (verse 11) but only got an answer to the second one, so in verse 12 he asked the first one again and got the answer for that one. Only one question could be answered yes or no at a time.

While there, Jonathan somehow arranged a meeting with David. He declared to David that “thou shalt be king over Israel” (23:17), acknowledging his father’s fall.

People continued to tell Saul where David and his now six hundred men were, probably because they feared what Saul had done to the priests of Nob who did not tell him about David, so David and his group kept moving, first to Maon, then to En-gedi on the shores of the Dead Sea. David was hiding in a cave near En-gedi when Saul came looking for him. Saul decided to go into the very cave where David was and relieve himself (“cover his feet” 24:3). David snuck up from the back of the cave and cut the corner of Saul’s cloak or mantle (which he had probably removed), then slipped back into the deepest part of the cave. When Saul exited the cave, David went to the cave entrance, bowed himself down, and told Saul what he had done to show that “the Lord had delivered thee to day into mine hand” but that David had spared Saul because he was “the Lord’s anointed” (24:10). His proof was the piece of Saul’s mantle that he held up. David promised Saul that “mine hand shall not be upon thee” (24:12). Recognizing that David had indeed spared his life, Saul proclaimed that David was “more righteous than I” (24:17) and would one day “surely be king” (24:20). Then he retreated, leaving David in peace for the time being.

About this same time, “Samuel died” (25:1). Though Israel mourned him in Ramah, David moved to a new location in the wilderness of Paran, back to Maon. There he encountered a man named Nabal (“fool”) and his wife Abigail (“my father is joy”), of whom David sought provisions and support. Nabal insulted David’s messengers, and angrily asked, “Who is David? and who is the son of Jesse? there be many servants now a days that break away every man from his master” (25:10), implying that David’s rebellion against Saul was like a slave defying his master. David determined to attack Nabal for his insult and took men to do so. Hearing of their approach, Abigail took a large amount of provisions and came out to meet David. Bowing down to David, she bowed down and asked for his forgiveness on her husband’s behalf, giving David great praises. So David was pacified and happily took her offered provisions. Meanwhile, Nabal held a feast and got

drunk. As Abigail was telling him about her encounter with David, he apparently had a heart attack (“his heart died within him” 25:37) and died. David saw this as the Lord’s retribution and went to Abigail to seek her hand in marriage, to which she agreed. He also married “Ahinoam of Jezreel” (25:43), probably marrying her first because in lists of wives, she is listed first and she bore David his oldest son. Both marriages probably helped secure him allies in the region. This he did because Saul had taken his wife Michal (Saul’s daughter) and given her to Phalti of Gallim.

Once again, people came to Saul and told him where David was, so Saul went out to find him, David’s previous sparing of his life evidently forgotten. While Saul and his company slept, David took Abishai and crept close enough to take Saul’s spear and water container. Abishai encouraged him to just kill Saul, but David said, “who can stretch forth his hand against the Lord’s anointed, and be guiltless?” (26:9), refusing to do it. Standing on a hill far enough away to be safe but close enough to be heard, David called out to Abner who was with Saul. David accused him of not protecting the king and displayed the spear and water container as proof that he spared Saul’s life yet again. Saul heard the yelling and asked if it was David, to which he replied, “It is my voice, my lord, O king” (26:17). He again asked Saul what evil he had done to merit Saul’s anger and pursuit, when he was as a flea to Saul. Saul promised not to harm David anymore and David sent Saul’s spear back (perhaps the very one he had thrown twice at David in anger). David left and went his own way, having no confidence in Saul’s promise, but Saul did indeed stop hunting David from this time forward.

David takes refuge (27:1 – 28:2)

Feeling like he could not trust Saul anywhere within Israel itself, David fled to Gath and made an alliance with the Philistine king there, Achish. Becoming the king’s vassal, David asked for a place to live and Achish gave him Ziklag, south of Gath and on the way to Egypt. David and his men went to war with Israel’s enemies along the southern border but when Achish asked him about his raiding efforts, he claimed to be raiding Israel, leading Achish to believe that David had betrayed his homeland and

was totally loyal to the Philistine king. Even when the Philistines went to war against Israel, David declared that he would go to battle with them

against Israel. Thus David secured a place away from Saul's grasp.

SAUL'S DEATH (28:3 – 31:13)

INTRODUCTION

The end of Saul, the first king of Israel, was indeed tragic. Having lost his prophet, Samuel, his high priest, and one of his best leaders, David, he greatly feared what the Philistines might do to him in war. So he should have. As David is celebrating a victory over the Amalekites who stole their families and property from Ziklag, demonstrating that God is

with him, Saul and his sons—including David's beloved friend, Jonathan—are being slaughtered by the enemies from the coastal lowlands, demonstrating that the Lord was no longer with Saul. Thus this lesson is the fulfillment of the words of Samuel in 1 Samuel 15:28 that the kingdom was torn from Samuel because of his wicked choices.

COMMENTARY

Saul's last night (28:3-25)

Chapter 23 would probably go best right before chapter 31 instead of here, since those stories go together. But we'll deal with them in the order they are presented in the text.

The Philistines had gathered together against Israel and Saul was fearful; "his heart greatly trembled" (28:5). The story reminds us of two things: first, Samuel was already dead, therefore Saul had no prophet to turn to, and second, he had followed the Mosaic decree in Exodus 22:18 and Leviticus 10:27, driving away all who followed after dark arts, such as necromancy and witchcraft. But finding himself without a prophet or even a priest (who was with David), Saul sought a necromancer anyway, disguising himself to avoid anyone knowing. The woman of En-dor ('fountain of Dor,' just north of where the armies were camped preparing for battle. This woman (often called 'the witch of Endor') pretended to call upon Samuel and speak his words to Saul. While the KJV makes it sound like she was able to have Samuel himself join them and speak, the text never truly says Samuel was there. In addition, the JST is very clear about her efforts and make substantial changes to these verses, not recorded in our Bible footnotes:

9 And the woman said unto him, Behold, thou knowest what Saul hath done, how he hath cut off

those that ~~have~~ **hath** familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land: wherefore then layest thou a snare for my life, to cause me to die **also, who hath not a familiar spirit?**

10 And Saul sware ~~to~~ **unto** her by the LORD, saying, As the LORD liveth, ~~there~~ **then** shall no punishment happen to thee for this thing.

11 Then said the woman, **the words of** whom shall I bring up unto thee? And he said, Bring me up **the words of** Samuel.

12 And when the woman saw **the words of** Samuel, she cried with a loud voice: and the woman spake to Saul, saying, Why hast thou deceived me? for thou art Saul.

13 And the king said unto her, Be not afraid: for what sawest thou? And the woman said unto Saul, I saw ~~gods~~ **the words of Samuel** ascending out of the earth; **and she said, I saw Samuel also.**

14 And he said unto her, What form is he of? And she said, **I saw** an old man ~~cometh~~ **coming** up; ~~and he is~~ covered with a mantle. And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped ~~with~~ his face to the ground, and bowed himself.

15 And **these are the words of** Samuel ~~said to~~ **unto** Saul, Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring

me up? And Saul answered, I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams: therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do.

In the initial printing of the JST in 1867, the publication committee of the Reorganized Church decided the addition in verse 9 was a separate clause, and printed it: "...cause me to die? Also, who hath not a familiar spirit?" This gives the sense that divining was commonly practiced. But the manuscript makes clear that the additional phrase should be added to the existing paragraph, which shows instead that the woman was attempting to declare her innocence in this matter. However, it is a declaration made out of fear, not truth, for subsequent verses demonstrate her practice of necromancy.

The word here translated "familiar spirit" is *ʾôb*, better rendered as 'witch' (a female term, in contrast to the male term 'wizard'; see, for example, 1 Samuel 28:3). Israel was forbidden to consult with such people (Leviticus 19:31; 20:27; Deuteronomy 18:10-11).

The addition of "the words" of in several places in this story changes Saul's request and the woman's response to the words of Samuel, rather than a physical apparition of the dead prophet. In Isaiah 8:19, such people are described as peeping (chirp or whisper) and muttering (mumble, mourn, or growl). Thus the JST change to have Saul request and the woman provide the words of Samuel is in keeping with their common practice. However, in an attempt to further legitimize her necromancy (and perhaps increase her fee), she added the claim that she saw Samuel himself.

Saul never saw or heard anything but the woman's voice. Her words, however, proved to be true, causing some to propose that the message was legitimately from God (for example, Keil & Delitzsch, *Commentary*, 2:542-542). But this account should not be construed as a true vision from God, though it certainly could be of Satan. Saul only went to this woman when he could no longer hear the voice of the Lord through His prophets or personal

revelation. "There is no reason to suppose that the Lord, who had refused to respond to Saul through legitimate avenues, would then send him a bone fide revelation through the diviner at En-dor" (Rasmussen, 251). President Joseph Fielding Smith noted: "If the devil never told the truth he would not be able to deceive mankind by his falsehoods. The powers of darkness would never prevail without the use of some light....There is nothing, then, in the history of the interview between Saul and the woman of Endor which, rationally or doctrinally, establishes the opinion that she was a prophetess of the Lord or that Samuel actually appeared on that occasion" (Student Manual, 1:283).

The words of the witch to Saul that he would lose the battle with the Philistines and his own life caused greater fear to come over him: "Then Saul fell straightway all along the earth, and was sore afraid" (28:20). Having been prepaid for her efforts—probably handsomely—she was willing to kill the fatted calf and make Saul and his men some good, motivated by Saul not having eaten in some time. In the end, "they rose up, and went away that night" (28:25), returning to the camp under cover of darkness.

David dismissed by Philistines (29:1-11)

As the Philistines marched to battle with Israel, David and his 600 men, who had covenanted with Achish the king of Gath to fight against Israel, marched in the rear of the company. The other Philistines leaders didn't like David there, given his history as a military leader with Saul. They feared it was all a ploy by David to turn on them in battle and have them fighting a two-front war (that was probably a valid assessment). So they told Achish to send David away, which he did after much arguing with them.

Destruction of Amalekites (30:1-31)

Returning to their temporary home in Ziklag, David and his men discovered that the dreaded Amalekites had beat them to there and had burned the city and carried off wives and children. Inquiring of God through the high priest, David and his men followed the Amalekites, hoping to find their families unharmed. So frantic were they that 200 men fell behind, unable to cross "the brook Besor" (30:9).

They soon found an Egyptian left for dead on the path. Giving him some food and care, they learned that he had been with the Amalekites as a slave but had fallen ill and been left to die. David covenanted with him that if he could lead them to the Amalekites' camp, he would let the man live. Let by this man, David's army attacked at night, killing everyone except some escapees, rescuing their families, and collecting plenty of booty.

There was some controversy when they returned about how to divide up the spoils, with those that fought advocating that those who fell behind should get nothing. But David reminded them the victory came from the Lord, not their own hand, so all who came were rewarded, whether they actually went to the battle or not. So they divided up the spoil among the men and among various villages in the area, thereby building support for David.

Saul's last day (31:1-13)

The next day, after Saul's visit to the witch of Endor, the Philistines engaged in great battle with the

Israelites. First, they caught up to and killed Saul's sons, Jonathan ('Jehovah has given'), Abinadab ('my father is noble'), and Malchi-shua ('my king is wealth'). Then Saul was hit by arrows from archers and fell but not dead. Seeing he would not recover, though, he commanded his armor bearer to slay him so the Philistines wouldn't "abuse" (31:4) him. But the man was too fearful of reprisals against him to kill the king, so Saul somehow managed to fall on his own sword and killed himself. Seeing this, the armorbearer felt like his life was in danger, so he also fell on his own sword. With Saul and his sons dead, the army fell apart and every man fled for his own security, giving the Philistines the victory. Occupying the area, they took Saul and decapitated his dead body, taking the head back to their temple but hanging his headless body on the wall of Bethshan (Beth-shean), along with his sons' bodies. A group of brave men from Jabesh crept near the city and took the bodies back to Jabesh, where they burned them, burying the bones under a tree and holding a fast of mourning.

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