

1 Samuel 30

Today our study of the book of 1 Samuel ends with a lesson on chapter 30. This is a strange place for the study guide to end because 1 Samuel actually has 31 chapters. If you stop reading at chapter 30 then you will miss key parts of the narrative. I think it would be wise to cover the whole story, and *not* stop just before reaching the end.

When chapter 30 begins, David has just returned home. At this point in David's life he was on the run from King Saul. Since Saul was determined to find David and kill him, David took refuge inside Philistine territory. One day during his time there the Philistines went to war against Israel. David tried to join them in their fight, but the Philistines were uneasy about having David in their midst. They remembered all the times David led Saul's army to victory against the Philistines. So, rather than letting David fight for the Philistines against Israel, they made David go back home.

When David returned home, however, he found bad news. David and his men had left their families and possessions in the town of Ziklag – but when they arrived they found that *everything* was gone. The Amalekites had raided the town, kidnapped everyone, stolen all their goods, and then burned the town to the ground:

1 Samuel 30:1: “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;

2 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.”

To David this must have seemed like an exceptionally cruel blow. When David was young he had been content to be a shepherd. Things were fine for a while, but then Samuel came and anointed him as the next king over Israel – and ever since that day his life had become increasingly difficult. For example, when he went to the front lines to bring food for his brothers, his older brother immediately started yelling at him – even though David hadn't done anything:

1 Samuel 17:28: “And Eliab his eldest brother heard when he spake unto the men; and Eliab's anger was kindled against David, and he said, Why camest thou down hither? and with whom hast thou left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know thy pride, and the naughtiness of thine heart; for thou art come down that thou mightest see the battle.

29 And David said, What have I now done? Is there not a cause?”

Eliab refused to fight Goliath or take any kind of stand against Israel's enemies, but he *was* willing to yell at David. David ignored his older brother, fought Goliath, and killed him. When David went to celebrate his great victory over the giant, the people praised him – and that immediately caused King Solomon to become suspicious of David:

1 Samuel 18:6: “And it came to pass as they came, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of musick.

7 And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.

8 And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom?

9 And Saul eyed David from that day and forward."

Keep in mind that David had just saved Israel from the Philistines. He had fought and killed Goliath – something no one else in the entire country was willing to do. In reward Saul had promised him the hand of his daughter in marriage. Did Saul keep that promise? Absolutely not. Instead of rewarding David, the *very next day* Saul tried to kill him:

1 Samuel 18:10: "And it came to pass on the morrow, that the evil spirit from God came upon Saul, and he prophesied in the midst of the house: and David played with his hand, as at other times: and there was a javelin in Saul's hand.

11 And Saul cast the javelin; for he said, I will smite David even to the wall with it. And David avoided out of his presence twice."

After this incident Saul spent *the rest of his life* trying to kill David. We don't have the time to go over all the evil things that Saul did. The king forced David to run for his life, and after he was gone Saul took David's wife and gave her to someone else:

1 Samuel 25:44: "But Saul had given Michal his daughter, David's wife, to Phalti the son of Laish, which was of Gallim."

Did the Mosaic Law really allow King Saul to take someone's wife and give her to another man? Of course not. Michal was David's wife, but Saul didn't care. He was determined to do whatever he wanted.

So David was forced into exile. He was anointed king, but that was little more than a bad joke. David had lost his home, he had lost his wife, and he had lost his possessions. He had to be constantly on the run because Saul was trying to kill him. It was a very bad life.

While he was hiding from the king, David tried to do what was right. When the Philistines came against Keilah, Saul refused to defend them – he was too busy trying to kill David. So David defended the town and defeated the Philistines. In return, the men of Keilah decided to betray David to Saul and have him killed:

1 Samuel 23:12: "Then said David, Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul? And the Lord said, They will deliver thee up."

David could not find a home no matter where he went. Even when he risked his own life to save his fellow countrymen, those men immediately turned around and tried to get David killed. There was just no place for him in Israel – so David abandoned Israel and fled to the country of the Philistines.

Amazingly, he was able to find refuge there. Israel would not let David live within her borders, and Israel's king was determined to murder this innocent man, but a foreign country – the very country David had fought in battle repeatedly – was willing to give him a place to live. David had now lost his country on top of everything else, but at least he had a safe place to live.

Now remember, David was the anointed king of Israel. That should have meant something – but in practice that promise only made David's life worse. David had lost everything he had and been driven from his home, but at least David had a new place to call home. He might have lost his wife, but at least God had given him another one. Perhaps David could start over in the land of the Philistines. Perhaps there he would find peace.

And then he returned home to Ziklag and found that everything was gone.

Imagine how you would feel if you were in David's position. God had given you a magnificent promise, but instead of helping you that promise cost you everything and forced you to live in the land of your enemies. You tried to do the right thing, but your every act of goodness was rewarded with evil. You kept the law and risked your life to save your countrymen, but in return the government did its very best to murder you.

This was a devastating blow. David had now lost everything – *again*. It seems that once again God had taken everything David had and left him with nothing:

1 Samuel 30:3: “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.”

It was all gone. Where was the mighty God who was supposed to watch over David? All David had seen was his enemies emerge victorious again and again and again. Once again the wicked had won and David had lost. What good was being righteous? What good was following the Lord? Saul was still king over Israel, and David was still on the run. Saul had the entire nation and everything he wanted, while David had lost all he ever had – *twice* – and was utterly broken.

In response to this terrible tragedy, all the men could do was weep:

1 Samuel 30:4: “Then David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep.”

David's followers were extremely upset. In fact, they were so upset over the loss of everything they ever loved and cared for that they wanted to kill David:

1 Samuel 30:6: “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...”

Even the few allies that David had were now talking about murdering him. David had nothing left – no friends, no family, nothing. The whole world was against him. Where was God in David's hour of need?

It would have been very easy for David to have walked away from God at this point. It would have been easy for him to have lost faith and decided that God's promises were worthless. After all, up to this point in his life David had not seen a single one of God's promises come true. His life had only gotten progressively worse.

There are many people who have gone through times of tremendous suffering in their life. There are those who have suffered enormous hardships – people who have lost sons and daughters, and who have lost wives and beloved family members. There are times when all of life just comes crashing down and it seems that there isn't anything left. Even though we have faithfully served God and done what is right, God has still taken everything we ever cared about. All we have to show for our lives of righteousness is pain and suffering and loss.

When this happens, some people choose to abandon God. Since God allowed that loved one to die instead of recover, then God must not really exist – or if He exists then He is evil. When the great test of faith comes, some people turn against God. They decided that since God has not lived up to their expectations and done what they wanted Him to do, they are going to reject Him and go in a different direction.

The truth is God cares a great deal about our faith, and God is going to test it. The Lord wants to see if our faith has any value to it at all. He wants to know if we will trust Him no matter what, or if we will only trust Him as long as God does what we want Him to do:

1 Peter 1:6: “Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations:

7 That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ:”

If we only trust God when things are going the way we want them to then we don't really trust God at all. After all, the word “trust” has no meaning if we are happy with our life and God is only doing things that we enjoy and understand! The only time we need to actually trust someone is when something happens that we *don't* understand. Are we willing to trust God even when all of life goes against us? Are we willing to trust God when He takes from us the things that we love most, and leaves us with nothing? Are we willing to trust God even when it seems that all of life is against us and we have nothing left? Those are the moment when we find out if our faith is real.

Not all faith is real. God deliberately tests us – not so that *He* can discover the truth about our faith, but so that *we* can know what sort of faith we have. God, after all, knows all things; He already knows if our faith is just a fraud. But it is easy for us to deceive ourselves.

David was faced with an exceptionally difficult test. What would you have done if you were in his position? If God took from you your wife, and children, and all your possessions; if He took from you your country and friends; and if those who used to be your allies now sought to kill you – would you still trust God? Would you still believe in His promises? Would you still believe that God was good?

David had reached an exceptionally difficult part of his life. In his great hour of need he did something amazing. Instead of turning against the Lord, he actually *sought* the Lord:

1 Samuel 30:6b: “...but David encouraged himself in the Lord his God.”

When faced with times of great trial, there are many people who choose to turn *against* God. They reject Him and seek comfort elsewhere. David did exactly the opposite. When he lost everything and his friends were calling for his execution, David sought comfort *in the Lord*. In his hour of need David sought the Lord. This was exactly the right thing to do. David's source of strength was the Lord; he still trusted in God and he still had faith in Him. David believed that the Lord would give him the strength he needed in order to see this through to the end.

David had no idea what was going to happen. He did not know how his life would turn out or how the day would end. But he did trust the Lord, and in his hour of trial he sought the Lord. David did not know *what* to do, but he did know *who to turn to*. So he asked the Lord what to do next – and the Lord gave him guidance:

1 Samuel 30:7: “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.

8 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.”

Note that David did not do whatever he thought was best; instead he stopped and asked the Lord what course of action he should take. Now, before we get too excited about this we need to put this into context. When this event took place the Bible was not yet completed. Most of the Old Testament (and all of the New Testament) had not been written. At this time the tabernacle was in operation and God had given Israel something called the Urim and the Thummim. The priests could use these mysterious objects to ask God questions and get specific answers back. Essentially, the people had the ability to send God a letter and receive a written reply. This is *completely different* from the modern practice of prayer.

We no longer have the ability to use the Urim and the Thummim to get text messages from God. The reason God has brought that system to an end is because He has given us something better – the completed Word of God:

1 Timothy 3:16: “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

17 That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”

This is one of the key verses in the Bible – and one that we need to take to heart. What part of the Bible is inspired? *All* of it. What part of the Bible is useful? *All* of it. What information does the Bible give us? Enough information to enable us to do *all* good works.

What this means is that the Scriptures have given us all the information we need in order to live a life that pleases the Lord. God does not need to tell us anything else because He has already told us *everything*. The Bible is not lacking any information that we need in order to live a life that pleases the Lord. Now, it's true that there are many additional things that we would *like* to know, but there is nothing that we *need* to know that we were not told.

In David's time the Bible had not yet been completed. He did not have access to the full revelation from God. No one did in those days – so God allowed people to ask Him questions, and He would respond with direct answers. The Lord no longer does that because He has put everything we need in His Word.

Think about it. If God continued to give us new divine revelation then that would mean His Word was insufficient. It would mean that we needed to know things that God left out of the Bible – which would mean that the Bible does *not* tell us everything we need in order to do all good works. But if that was true then 1 Timothy 3:16-17 would be a lie. Since we know that God does not lie, that means the Bible *is* sufficient. Therefore, when someone comes to us with something like the Book of Mormon and claims that God has given *other* revelation that we need in order to honor God, we immediately know that they are lying. We already have everything that we need.

Should Christians still pray? Absolutely. Prayer is vital. But we have to understand that when we pray, God is not going to send us letters in the mail with new divine revelation. There are many ways God watches over us and uses His providence to guide us, but God is never going to give us new revelation. There is simply no need – because God has already given us everything we need to know.

In response to David's inquiry, God told David that he should pursue the Amalekites, because if he pursued them he would recover everything that had been taken. That must have been very encouraging news to David and his men! They had suffered a great loss, but God promised that they

would recover all that had been taken. But there was a problem. Some of David's men lacked the strength to go after the enemy:

1 Samuel 30:9: "So David went, he and the six hundred men that were with him, and came to the brook Besor, where those that were left behind stayed.
10 But David pursued, he and four hundred men: for two hundred abode behind, which were so faint that they could not go over the brook Besor."

This is really not surprising. Imagine how devastated you would be if you came home and learned that you had lost everything. News like that could easily render a person completely immobile – it could sap all the strength right out of them and leave them unable to do anything at all. When a time of great crisis comes, some people are overcome by the crisis and are too weak to do anything about it. When that happens it is critical for those who are strong to care for those who are weak. Two hundred men were too weak to fight – so the rest of the men went on to fight on their behalf.

There may be times in our life when we are strong and can fight for others. When those times come we ought to take a stand for them and serve them in their hour of need. After all, there may come a time when we are the weak ones who need others to stand on our behalf. That is how the body of Christ ought to work – with its members taking care of one another and seeking to serve one another.

David and his men pursued the enemy, but they didn't know where the enemy was. The Lord provided for them by putting an Egyptian in their path:

1 Samuel 30:11: "And they found an Egyptian in the field, and brought him to David, and gave him bread, and he did eat; and they made him drink water;
12 And they gave him a piece of a cake of figs, and two clusters of raisins: and when he had eaten, his spirit came again to him: for he had eaten no bread, nor drunk any water, three days and three nights.
13 And David said unto him, To whom belondest thou? and whence art thou? And he said, I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite; and my master left me, because three days ago I fell sick.
14 We made an invasion upon the south of the Cherethites, and upon the coast which belongeth to Judah, and upon the south of Caleb; and we burned Ziklag with fire."

Notice the amazing providence of God! David and his men wanted to recover their families, but they had no idea where the enemy was hiding. The reason they found this Egyptian was because he had become sick three days ago and his master heartlessly abandoned him to die. When did he become sick? Three days ago – which is *before* David realized he had a problem. God had providentially moving to help David recover everything that had been taken *before David even prayed about it!* David had no idea he had a problem, and yet God was already working to resolve it. The illness of this Egyptian was not an accident.

Could this Egyptian show David where the Amalekites were encamped? He certainly could:

1 Samuel 30:15: "And David said to him, Canst thou bring me down to this company? And he said, Swear unto me by God, that thou wilt neither kill me, nor deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will bring thee down to this company."

The Egyptian kept his word. He led David and his band of 400 people directly to the camp of the Amalekites. Now, an army of 400 is a very small army, but God is able to do great things through small groups. The Lord does not need a mighty force to provide mighty deliverance; in fact, it is often the case that God uses very small people to do very great things, for then it is clear that the victory was won by the arm of the Lord instead of the power of man. David and his men found the Amalekites – and at precisely the right time:

1 Samuel 30:16: “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.”

When David came upon them the Amalekites were not prepared for war. They were not in a defensive posture. In fact, they were in the middle of a feast, and they were drunk out of their minds. This made them easy targets. David and his men spent an entire day killing them, and only a few escaped:

1 Samuel 30:17: “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.”

This was an astounding victory. David's small force was vastly outnumbered, and yet they won. God did exactly what He said He would do: He gave them the victory. True to His word, every last thing was recovered:

1 Samuel 30:19: “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.”

God promised that everything would be recovered, and just as God had said, everything was recovered. You would think that this would be a cause of great rejoicing, and it was – but there was a problem. Four hundred men went with David to recover everything, but two hundred men were too weak to join the fight. When the battle was over and everyone was on their way home, the group of 400 tried to keep all the loot for themselves, and leave the group of 200 with nothing:

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.”

Keep in mind that the “spoil” that had been recovered was *the possessions of the people of Ziklag*. In other words, these wicked men wanted to keep the personal possessions of those 200 people! They wanted to become like the Amalekites and take things from their neighbors that did not belong to them. They refused to restore the things that had been stolen.

David refused to do that. He forced his men to give the 200 people their stuff back:

1 Samuel 30:23: “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.

24 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.

25 And it was so from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel unto this day.”

As you can see, the Lord was with David. It was true that David suffered a devastating loss, but the Lord was with him through it every step of the way. The truth is that there are times when God does not prevent the hard times from coming – but when the trials of life come, God accompanies us through them every step of the way. God helped David recover all that had been lost, and He put His plan in motion before David even discovered the loss in the first place. God gave David and his men a great victory and they recovered everything. This chapter may have started in great loss, but it ended in great victory – and the reason it ended in victory is because David never lost faith in God.

This, though, is not the end of the story. Although we are almost out of time, I'd like to point out that the chapter does not end at verse 25. After David and his men recovered everything that had been stolen, David took the opportunity to give gifts to the leaders of Judah:

1 Samuel 30:26: “And when David came to Ziklag, he sent of the spoil unto the elders of Judah, even to his friends, saying, Behold a present for you of the spoil of the enemies of the Lord;”

Why would David do this? Well, we need to remember that while David was fighting the Amalekites, Saul was busy fighting the Philistines. David won his battle against the Amalekites because the Lord was with him and gave him the victory. However, the Lord was *not* with Saul. When David inquired of the Lord he received an answer, but the Lord refused to answer Saul. So Saul did something incredibly wicked: he used witchcraft and sorcery to try to force the Lord to talk to him. The Lord did indeed talk to him – but He had nothing good to tell that wicked man:

1 Samuel 28:16: “Then said Samuel, Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing the Lord is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy?

17 And the Lord hath done to him, as he spake by me: for the Lord hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand, and given it to thy neighbour, even to David:

18 Because thou obeyedst not the voice of the Lord, nor executedst his fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore hath the Lord done this thing unto thee this day.

19 Moreover the Lord will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines: and to morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me: the Lord also shall deliver the host of Israel into the hand of the Philistines.”

Samuel told the king that the Lord had departed from Saul, that God was Saul's enemy, that Saul was going to lose the battle the next day, and that Saul was going to be killed. That is exactly what happened. While David pursued the Amalekites, Saul fought the Philistines and lost:

1 Samuel 31:6: “So Saul died, and his three sons, and his armourbearer, and all his men, that same day together.”

So here's what happened: by the time David returned to Ziklag with all of the loot, Saul was dead and Judah did not have a king. That is precisely when David sent gifts to the leaders of Judah. Do you know what the leaders of Judah did in response? They made David king:

2 Samuel 2:4: "And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah..."

In other words, David sent them all some really nice gifts, and in return they made David ruler over the country. I would say those gifts worked out really well for David.

When we read this chapter, it's easy for us to overlook just how hard this must have been for David. We know how the rest of David's life turned out – but David didn't. David could not look into the future and see that he would become king and reign for 40 years. David had no way of knowing that on that very day his enemy Saul was going to die. David didn't know that his troubles were almost over, or that he was just days away from being made king over Judah. From where he stood it looked like he had lost everything – but this was actually the final test before God's promises came true. On the other side of this test was *victory*. From David's vantage point it looked like he had lost it all, but in reality David was very close to winning. The dawn was close at hand and the years of pain were almost over. There was just one more difficult day to get through, and then a whole new life would begin.

There was no way for David to know that, of course. God did not tell him that the trials were almost over. But God didn't have to tell David because *David trusted Him*. When times were difficult and all seemed lost, David encouraged himself in the Lord. When David was at his lowest point he went to the Lord, and that was where he found victory.