

## FROM TRAGEDY TO TRIUMPH

### INTRODUCTION

The Holy Spirit holds back until chapter 31 the record of the battle at Jezreel – to which the Philistines headed north from Aphek – and takes us first to David's city of Ziklag – to which he headed south from Aphek, 29. 11.

The significance of chapter 30 lies, in part, in the evidence it furnishes that, while Saul was (unsuccessfully) engaged in fighting one of Israel's enemies – the Philistines – in the north, David was (successfully) engaged in fighting another of Israel's enemies – the Amalekites – in the south. It is not difficult to imagine some of David's opponents in Israel later pointing to David's earlier flight to Gath and putting out the false rumour that David and his men had played a part in the Philistine victory over Israel and in the death of Saul and his sons. It was important to keep the record straight – that David had a water-tight alibi – that, at the time of Israel's débâcle at Gilboa, he had been all of an hundred miles away.

The key expressions in the chapter are undoubtedly 'but David encouraged ('strengthened') himself in the Lord his God', v. 6, and 'David recovered all', vv. 18-19.

And a chapter which opens with an account of David's own 'city' being 'spoiled' by the Amalekites closes with an account of David sending 'spoil' taken from the Amalekites to many cities in David's own tribal area of Judah, vv. 26-31.

### CHAPTER DIVISION

- Verses 1-6a**      **The anguish:**  
*(i) A city burned and families captured, vv. 1-3*  
*(ii) Deep grief which resulted in tears shed and almost in bloodshed, vv. 4-6a*
- Verses 6b-15**    **The pursuit:**  
*(i) David finds strength and direction from God, vv. 6b-10*  
*(ii) David finds an Egyptian servant, vv. 11-15*
- Verses 16-20**    **The victory. 'David recovered all'**
- Verses 21-31**    **The spoil:**  
*(i) sharing with colleagues – a lesson in equity, vv. 21-25*  
*(ii) distributing to friends – a lesson in gratitude, vv. 26-31*

The first and last sections of the chapter begin with more or less the same words: 'when David ... came to Ziklag', vv. 1, 26.

### EXPOSITION

#### **Verses 1-3**      **A city burned and families captured**

**Verse 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.'* 'On the 'third day', that is, after David had been dismissed by Achish from the Philistine forces. This means that it must have been six days or so since David and his men had left Ziklag for Aphek – if not longer – giving the Amalekites ample time to take advantage of the situation.

But it may well be that the Holy Spirit is drawing our attention to this particular time-note as evidence – yet again – of God's perfect timing. For just two verses before this we read how Achish had ordered David, 'Rise up early in the morning ... and as soon as ye be up early in the morning, and have light, depart', 29. 10 – and just one verse before we read, 'So David and his men rose up early to depart in the morning, to return into the land of the Philistines', 29. 11. The chapter division robs us of the clear and precious connection between these statements. Had David and his men arrived even just a few days later, it is most unlikely that, even with the benefit of Abiathar's ephod and the Egyptian servant's directions, they would have been able to catch up with the Amalekites in time to stop their captured wives and children being sold into slavery. As it was, David and his men arrived back in Ziklag long before the Amalekites had expected – to the Amalekites' great cost!

The Amalekites were an ancient nomadic race, descended from 'Amalek', one of Esau's grandsons and a chieftain of an Edomite tribe, from whom the race took its name.<sup>1</sup> They were Israel's age-long enemies – being the very first

people to attack Israel after their Exodus from Egypt, Exod. 17. 8-16. 'Remember', the Lord had later said to Israel through Moses, 'what Amalek did unto thee by the way, when ye were come forth out of Egypt; how he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary; and he feared not God', Deut. 25. 17-18. That attack had been as *cowardly* as it had been *vicious* – the most powerful and savage tribe of the area ambushing Israel from behind, massacring the stragglers of a weary people. It seems therefore that little had changed over the centuries since, and that the present Amalekite raid was wholly in character. For they apparently took advantage of the fact that David and his fighting men were out of the picture, having joined the Philistine war effort, to launch their attack on David's defenceless city. Indeed, we learn later that, at this time, the Amalekites also attacked other areas in both the land of Judah and the land of the Philistines, v. 16, no doubt exploiting the opportunity provided by the absence of both the Israelite and Philistine armies – now preparing to fight it out far up in the north.

It is possible that the Amalekites deliberately extended their raid as far as Ziklag ('invaded the south, *even to* Ziklag', literally) in direct retaliation for David's earlier attacks on them. Indeed, the statement that the Amalekites 'had *invaded* the south, and ('even to') Ziklag, and *smitten* Ziklag' corresponds very closely in the Hebrew text to the statement back in chapter 27 that "David and his men ... *invaded* the ... Amalekites ... and David *smote* the land', 27. 8-9.

Quite likely, at some time, you have either heard or read that this Amalekite raid only proved possible because, back in chapter 15, Saul had deliberately spared and not utterly destroyed the Amalekites as he had been told by the Lord to do. And, maybe, that the Amalekite who removed Saul's crown and bracelet at Gilboa was able to do so only because Saul had deliberately spared and not utterly destroyed the Amalekites then. I have to say that I don't believe either of these statements to be correct. We must be careful not to read into the narrative of chapter 15 what isn't there. And it will be worth us taking a few minutes to clear up a few common misunderstandings about that passage.

The facts are as follows. Verse 5 of chapter 15 speaks of Saul's attack on 'a (probably better, 'the'<sup>2</sup>) city of the Amalekites' and of an ambush he laid for the Amalekites 'in the valley' (or 'ravine'), with verse 7 reporting how Saul inflicted a crushing defeat on the Amalekites throughout their homeland – 'smiting' ('striking') them from 'Havilah' (the location of which is unknown but was probably in northern Arabia) to 'Shur' (on the eastern border of the Nile delta), v. 7. That is, Saul's campaign against the Amalekites was both intensive and extensive – reaching down to the very border of Egypt.

As part of a summary of Saul's military exploits, the close of chapter 14 also speaks of Saul's attack upon the Amalekites: 'he gathered an host, and smote the Amalekites', v. 48. There is some uncertainty as to whether the opening clause should be translated 'he gathered an host ('an army)', as in the KJV and NKJV, or, more likely, I suspect, as 'he acted valiantly', as in most other translations – including JND, RV, RSV, ESV and NASB. In favour of the KJV rendering, we could point to the army of 210,000 men which Saul is said to have mustered against the Amalekites in chapter 15 verse 3. But in favour of the second rendering, the word translated 'gathered an host' is that translated 'valiant' in 'valiant man' (literally 'son of valour') in the immediate context, 14. 52.<sup>3</sup> Nor am I sure whether chapter 14 verse 48 refers only to the campaign recorded in chapter 15 or whether Saul acted similarly on other occasions also. But the one thing which is certain is that chapter 14 verse 48 forms part of very *positive* assessment of Saul's military achievements, 14. 47-48.

Again, and most importantly, verse 8 of chapter 15 says explicitly that Saul 'utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword', with verse 9 qualifying this by the sad statement, 'But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep' etc. Given that our chapter, along with several others<sup>4</sup>, refers to Amalekites after Saul's campaign in chapter 15, the expression 'utterly destroyed all the people' must mean that Saul slew all those who were in his power to slay – that he slew all who fell into his hands. But the key point to register is that Saul most certainly *did not deliberately spare* any of the Amalekites who it was in his power to kill – with the sole exception of the 'Agag' of Amalek. I say '*the* Agag' because it seems clear that 'Agag' wasn't a personal name but a royal title among the Amalekites, similar to 'Pharaoh' among the Egyptians and 'Abimelech' among the Philistines.<sup>5</sup> Although the text doesn't say so, I suspect that Saul's reason for sparing this Agag was to boost his own status by exhibiting the humiliated king of Amalek as a trophy of his victory and, quite possibly, as often happened in such circumstances, his personal slave.

That some of the Amalekites escaped from Saul's offensive is hardly surprising. There was a vast territory, much of it wilderness, in which they could take refuge – and the Amalekites were adept at living as nomads.

What is perhaps surprising – and may point to failure on Saul's part – was that so many Amalekites escaped. The raiding party of our chapter was so large that 400 young men managed to escape from David's attack. Nor can we excuse Saul on the grounds that in our chapter David himself failed to catch and kill that 400 – because the troop which David led itself numbered only 400 in total, v. 10, whereas Saul commanded the main army of Israel, numbering, as we have seen, 210,000.

Saul had been commanded by 'the Lord of hosts', 15. 2 (the true 'Commander-in-chief' of the forces of Israel), to wipe out the Amalekites, v. 3 – in the words of Samuel, to 'fight against them until they be consumed', v. 18. And I suspect that the survival of such a large number of Amalekites indicated a failure on his part to see through this task to completion. But the point I want to make is that, at no time, was Saul guilty of 'sparing' the lives of the Amalekites. Saul's great sin in chapter 15 consisted in joining the people in 'sparing ... *the best of the sheep, and of the oxen ... and all that was good*' for sacrifice to the Lord at Gilgal, vv. 9, 15, 21, 24. For this act was in direct violation of God's express command. And, as Samuel effectively pointed out to Saul, *incomplete obedience ranks with God as disobedience*. And it was the key role which Saul as king, and therefore as the one ultimately responsible, played in

sparing the Amalekite *beasts* which cost him his kingship. Following Saul's presumption back in chapter 13, Samuel had made it clear to Saul that God would terminate his dynasty ('thy kingdom shall not continue'), but now he made it clear to Saul that he would himself have the kingdom taken from him – that is, that he would *personally* be cut off in God's time and his kingship pass to another.<sup>6</sup>

But the point stands, and I repeat it, at no time is there any suggestion, from Samuel's words or anywhere else in the text of scripture, that Saul ever deliberately spared the Amalekites. The most which *could* be said, therefore – and it is by no means certain that scripture itself is even saying this – is that a Amalekite raid on the scale recorded here at the beginning of chapter 30 proved possible only because Saul failed to see through to completion the task which God had set him in chapter 15, to 'fight against' the Amalekites 'until they be consumed'.<sup>7</sup> But he most certainly did not intentionally spare them!

**Verses 2-3.** *'Had taken the women captives, that were therein: they slew not any, either great or small, but carried them away ... 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'*. I noted earlier that there is a close parallel between the statement made in v. 1, that the Amalekites 'had *invaded* the south, and ('even to') Ziklag, and *smitten* Ziklag', and the statement made back in chapter 27 that "David and his men ... *invaded* the ... Amalekites ... and David *smote* the land', 27. 8-9. And yet there is one striking contrast between these two episodes – which lies in the way in which the two attacking bands treated the women of the places they attacked. For reasons we know well, David and his men 'left neither man nor woman alive', 27. 9; cf. v. 11, whereas the Amalekites took 'the women captives', 30. 2, 5 – along with the children, v. 3. It was not that the Amalekites were more merciful than David but that the two sets of circumstances were very different. Whereas David had manoeuvred himself into a situation where he couldn't afford to leave any survivors, the Amalekites were undoubtedly swayed by financial considerations. We know from Judg. 6 that the Amalekites had worked closely with the Midianites in the past, Judg. 6. 3; 7. 12. And we know from the early history of Joseph that the Midianites were always ready to sell others into slavery, Gen. 37. 36. I think it true to say therefore that to the marauding Amalekites the women and children were as much a part of their spoil as was anything else. There was no profit in dead bodies. But there was considerable profit in living slaves. And yet, although we have little difficulty in accounting for the Amalekites' practice at the merely human level, we must surely also acknowledge the over-ruling hand of God in all this. David could never have 'rescued his two wives', v. 18, and the wives and children of his 600 men, v. 22, if the Amalekites had treated them as he had treated the families of the Amalekites back in chapter 27!

#### **Verses 4-6a      Deep grief which resulted in tears shed and almost in bloodshed, vv. 4-6a**

**Verse 4.** *Then David and the people that were with him lifted up their voice and wept, until they had no more power to weep'*. No doubt it had been with heavy heart that David and his men had journeyed the 40 miles or so back from Aphek to Ziklag. Any hopes they had entertained of fighting for God and country against the Philistines had been well and truly dashed by the determined objections of the Philistine lords. I suppose that if there was anything which tempered their sense of frustration and disappointment and cheered their spirits it was the thought of their homes and families – the thought of the hugs and excited welcome which awaited them.

But it was a band of 600 tired men who finally drew near to their city – for in the last few days they have covered some 80 miles of Philistine territory – first north to Gath and Aphek and now back again – and while at Aphek had no doubt suffered great stress and apprehension when they had come under the suspicion of the Philistine rulers.

And now, as, with weary steps, they approached Ziklag – their home and refuge for over a year now – they saw, and maybe smelt, the smoke! It isn't difficult to imagine either their looks of disbelief or their accelerated pace. And then they stood in the heap of smouldering ruins – *their city* razed to the ground with no sign of a living soul. *Their city*, which, only a week before, had been so vibrant with life – so noisy with the well-wishes of their families – lay as silent as the grave. No hugs or excited welcome! No loving wives or children. At that moment the bottom dropped out of their world. Their city had vanished into smoke and their families into captivity.

It was all too much, and some of the toughest men alive broke into weeping, 'lifting up their voices' in typical oriental manner as loud wailing mingled with their tears. They wept until, translated literally, 'there was no strength in them to weep' – the word 'strength' being that used to describe Saul's weakness at Tekoa back in chapter 28, when he fell along the ground because 'there was no strength in him', v. 20. And these very men would soon weep for Saul himself – for 2 Sam. 1 tells us, 'they mourned, and wept, and fasted until even, for Saul, and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the Lord', 2 Sam. 1.12 – but of that they knew nothing now – today's sorrow was reserved for their lost families.

Let us note in passing that there is no shame in grown men weeping. The New Testament not only contains many references to the tears and weeping of Paul but tells of the tears and weeping of the Lord Jesus Himself.<sup>8</sup> Would we knew more of tears – shed, of course, for good and for spiritual reasons.

**Verse 5.** *'And David's two wives were taken captives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite'*. David's two wives are singled out for special mention to bring home to us something of David's own personal grief – to emphasise that he also had lost those particularly dear to him – as a backcloth to his distress noted in the following verse when the grief of his men for their loved ones caused them to turn on him. The Holy Spirit wants us to appreciate that David himself was personally affected by the disaster.

**Verse 6a.** *'And David was greatly distressed; for the people spake of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved ('bitter', literally<sup>9</sup>), every man for his sons and for his daughters'*. I note that the reference to 'their sons, and their daughters' in verse 3, receives added emphasis here, where they are the objects of special

concern to David's men – and again in verse 19 where they figure prominently in that which David is said to have 'recovered'.

As is often the case with those in deep anguish, the sorrow of David's men turned to anger, and they sought relief for their feelings by venting their rage upon somebody – in this case on the man whose decisions had led to their unsustainable loss. You can almost hear their words of censure: 'Whose idea was it for us to forsake our homeland in the first place? Whose idea to come to this Godless country? Whose idea to ask for a place well away from the safety and security of Gath? Whose idea to launch provocative raids against the Amalekites? David's! And who, aware that the Amalekites must have known that, on whichever side we fought, we would be absent from our base on account of the big Philistine/Israel conflict, left our families entirely defenceless by joining the Philistine battle force? Who? David, that's who!' It all proved too much for them, and David's noble band rose up against him.

Such indignation and mutiny wasn't anything new in Israel's history, of course. Moses had once experienced something similar at Rephidim, when the people had blamed him for all their perceived troubles, driving him to cry to the Lord, 'What shall I do unto this people? they be almost ready to stone me', Exod. 17.4. Interestingly, that incident immediately preceded a cowardly attack by the Amalekites whereas this incident followed one.

In the case of Moses, a rod and a rock solved his problem. David has no such rod! And all of a sudden he found himself in far greater danger of being slain by his own men than he ever had been of being slain by either Saul or the Philistines.

And at this moment, David hit rock bottom. There was nowhere further for him to fall. Saul had driven him out of his homeland. The Philistine lords hadn't wanted him. His family was gone. Everything he owned was gone. He was responsible for the loss of all his men held dear. And now – the last straw – even his closest comrades and friends of many years were themselves on the verge of battering him to death with stones. David wasn't having a good day! Or was he? For it was now, when every human support failed him – when utterly bankrupt of his own resources and schemes<sup>10</sup> – that he sought his refuge, strength and sufficiency 'in the Lord his God'. And that was not a bad place to reach! Perhaps it was David's good day after all.

In David's response to his crisis, he stands out in marked contrast to Saul, who, faced with a crisis of his own in chapter 28, had resigned himself to despair and darkness. Indeed, I note that the expression 'greatly distressed' here used of David is the very same expression used by Saul himself to describe his feelings to Samuel then, 'Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up? And Saul answered, I am sore (*greatly*) distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me', 28. 15. But, whereas Saul had then sought his help from a medium and his counsel from a dead prophet, David sought both his help and his guidance from the Lord, vv. 6b-7. And whereas, as we saw previously, Saul had 'inquired of the Lord' in vain through 'the Urim' and Thummim, carried in the high priest's ephod – in that 'the Lord answered him not', 28. 6 – David called for the ephod and 'inquired of the Lord', and the Lord 'answered him', vv. 7-8.

And so, while Saul's crisis as the leader of his people drove him further and further from God, David's crisis as the leader of his men drove him home to Him.

### **Verses 6b-10 David finds strength and direction from God**

**Verse 6b.** *'But David encouraged himself ('strengthened himself', literally) in the Lord his God'*. In his book 'Facing Loneliness', J. Oswald Chambers, wrote, 'When Jeremy Taylor, the Puritan, had his house burgled, all his choicest possessions taken, and his family turned out of doors, he knelt down and thanked God that his enemies had left him the sun and moon, a loving wife and many friends to pity and relieve, the providence of God, all the promises of the gospel, his faith, his hope of heaven, and his charity toward his enemies!' Oswald Chambers rightly added, 'With wealth such as this, no burglar could impoverish him'. Well, David may, for now, have lost his wives as well, but he, as Jeremy Taylor, was still rich in that he still had his God and God's 'promises'.

David may not have been able to speak at this time of 'my city', 'my house' or 'my possessions', but he could still speak of 'my God' and it was to 'the Lord *his* God' that he now turned. As far as we know, David hadn't sought the Lord when leaving Judah for the land of the Philistines back at beginning of chapter 27, nor at any time since. But all was now changed.

And David's experience here has much in common with that of Israel in a future day, to whom the Lord says through Hosea, 'I will hedge up thy way with thorns, and make a wall, that she shall not find her paths. She shall follow after her lovers, but she shall not overtake them; she shall seek them, but shall not find them: then shall she say, I will go and return to my first husband; for then was it better with me than now', Hos. 2. 6-7. And, as Israel then, David now returned to home base! And David proved, as Israel will, that 'whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth ever son whom he receiveth', Heb. 12. 6 – that sufferings and trials are meant to teach us something, not least that these experiences are a sign and token of God's love.

But what does it mean that 'he strengthened himself in the Lord'? To me, these words recall what is said back in chapter 23 of Jonathan's last visit to David, when he 'went to David into the wood, and strengthened (the same word as here) his hand in God', 23. 17. And Jonathan did this by sharing with David his confidence that 'the hand of Saul my father shall not find thee; and thou (emphatic) shalt be king over Israel'. That is, Jonathan strengthened David by turning David's eyes to God and by reaffirming the Lord's promises to him that his future was assured – that, in God's time, the kingdom would be his. And it is this which strengthens – the focusing afresh on God – on His presence, power and promises. And, with no Jonathan to hand, that presumably is what David did for himself here.

And with his eyes well and truly back on the Lord, David soon found that nothing was too hard for his God – that not even his present predicament was hopeless. In much the same way as, a thousand years later, the apostle Paul in

his very weakness found strength. For with the statement that 'David strengthened himself in the Lord' before us, we do well to compare the words of the apostle in 2 Corinthians. 12, 'he (the Lord Jesus) said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my *strength* is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities (weaknesses), that the power of Christ may rest upon me', 2 Cor. 12. 9. And, like Paul with his perplexity over his thorn in the flesh, David, in his perplexity about the frustrations of Aphek and the devastation of Ziklag, found that, though we may not always be able to grasp the Lord's ways with us, we can always grasp His hand! And that is precisely what David did. And, with 2 Corinthians 12 still in my mind, I note that the writer to the Hebrews, having registered that 'the time would fail me to tell of ... David', went on to speak of how men of faith such as David, 'out of weakness were made strong', Heb. 11. 34. But, perhaps with even greater relevance to David's actual situation at Ziklag, when his closest colleagues turned away from him, we might think also of Paul's later words to Timothy, 'At my first defence no man stood with me, but all men forsook me ... *notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me*', 2 Tim. 4. 16-17.<sup>11</sup>

And David proved that, when all the props had been kicked away, the Lord was there with him and for him.

**Verses 7-8.** 'David said to Abiathar the priest, Ahimelech's son, I pray thee, bring me hither the ephod'. It was a pity, of course, that David hadn't asked for the ephod at the beginning of chapter 27! But, even in David's waywardness, Abiathar hadn't forsaken him and had stuck with David through all his trials. Much later Solomon said to Abiathar, 'I will not at this time put thee to death, because ... *thou hast been afflicted in all wherein my father was afflicted*', 1 Kings 2. 26. And now David turns to his high priest – who, as it happened, was uniquely qualified to sympathize with David and his men at this time because he himself had once lost his entire family, 22. 17-22. How much more blest are we in that we have a Great High Priest, who 'in that he himself hath suffered being tempted ... is able to succour them that are tempted ... for we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin', Heb. 2. 18; 4. 15 – that we have a Great High Priest who has graduated from the college of suffering and has an unrivalled capacity to sympathise with us in all our trials and troubles.

In asking the priest to bring the ephod, David was applying the principle stated by the Lord to Moses concerning another great leader, Joshua, long before, "he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask counsel for him ('inquire for him', the word of our verse) after the judgment of Urim before the Lord: at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, both he, and all the children of Israel with him', Num. 27.21.

'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'. 'He answered him' – as we have noted earlier, Saul's consultation in chapter 28 had ended in human weakness and despair, while David's here ended in divine strength and direction. The Lord's response was immediate, clear, and full of encouragement, saying, literally, 'Pursue; for overtaking you will overtake, and delivering you will deliver'. And no doubt the word 'deliver' is significant – showing that the principal object of the mission was not so much one of revenge as of recovering all that had been taken.

**Verse 9.** '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'. As Ziklag had been burned to the ground, David and his men had no opportunity to refresh and revive themselves. Yet the already exhausted men set out with renewed vigour across the most barren and inhospitable territory in hot pursuit of the enemy. Time was not on their side. Clearly the raiding party had a good lead, the trail was getting cold, and there was a very real danger that they would simply disappear into the wilderness.

The brook Besor lay several miles south of Ziklag and it was there that 200 hundred of David's troop 'stayed'. But we mustn't forget either the physical or the psychological condition of these men. By the time they had reached Ziklag, they had travelled in full battle-gear – in just a week or so – some eighty miles or more, and, with no break, had now pushed on south to the 'brook'. The word translated 'brook' is properly that for a 'torrent', and usually described a river bed or ravine which in the rainy season became a raging torrent.<sup>12</sup> With the best will in the world – and they knew that the lives of their own families were at stake – 200 of David's 600 men simply couldn't summon the energy to cross the Besor, involving no small climb down, and an even harder climb up the far side.

**Verse 10.** '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'. I note that the word translated 'faint' is very closely connected to a word meaning 'a corpse, a dead body'.<sup>13</sup> It is that word which is used to describe the bodies of the 185,000 Assyrian troops in 2 Kings 19. 35, which verse the KJV rather humourously translates, 'when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses'. Apart from the possible confusion between the Israelites who rose early in the morning and Sennacherib's army which had been wiped out by a single angel in the night, I cannot suppress a smile at the expression 'dead corpses' – I guess that there aren't many other kinds! And I take it that the use of this particular word 'faint' here in 1 Samuel 30 is telling us that these 200 men were, as we would say today, 'dead-beat'. From what we learn later, it seems that it was at the insistence of David and the others of his men that the 200 remained behind. Verse 21 speaks of them as those who 'could not follow David, whom they had made ... to abide at the brook Besor'. And I regard David's decision to leave the 200 as an evidence of the same feelings of kindness and consideration which he soon showed to the Egyptian young man who had himself been left behind – but for a far less worthy reason – by his Amalekite master. It seems also that David's later reference to the one 'that tarrieth by the stuff', v. 24, suggests that he took the opportunity to leave with the 200 those supplies which he felt were too cumbersome to take across the ravine, and which would have served only to slow down those who continued. Remember that Ziklag had been put to the torch and therefore offered no storage facilities!

I find no hint in the text that David was in any way discouraged by having to reduce the size of his company by a third. It shouldn't surprise me if David recalled the battle with the Midianites and *Amalekites*<sup>14</sup> recorded in Judg. 6-8,

at which Gideon, with only 300 men, had, with God's help, occasioned the defeat of an enemy 135,000-strong! I guess that, compared with that, David's odds didn't look too bad! And I note that it had been said of Gideon and his 300 at one point that they had 'passed over', not, as David, the Ravine Besor, but the River Jordan itself, yet that they had continued 'faint but pursuing', Judg. 8.4, which is exactly what he and his men were – and that they saw their task through to completion. With such an encouraging incident flagged in his history book, David didn't require any sodden or dry fleece – or Midianite soldier's dream for that matter – to hearten him. He had been assured, not only by the God of Gideon, but by 'the Lord *his* God', v. 6, that he would recover all that had been taken! For 'the Lord his God' had given him His *undertaking* that he, David, would be *overtaking* the raiders.

And so, again, David headed out with 400 men, just as he had back in chapter 25. But with this marked difference – that, although in physical terms the challenge which now faced him was far more demanding than he had faced in chapter 25, he was in a far healthier spiritual condition than he had been then. And this time he sped at God's bidding and with God's blessing – not now to be delivered by Abigail's timely intervention and wisdom from bloodguiltiness, but to be the means, under God, of delivering Abigail from a lifetime of slavery or worse.

## Verses 11-15 David finds an Egyptian servant

**Verses 11-12.** *'They found an Egyptian in the field, and brought him to David.'* 'They found!' As simple as that and yet what a classic instance of God's amazing providence! It is quite possible that right up to the moment David didn't even know who it was that he was looking for. We can take it for granted that bands of nomadic raiders who burned down cities and rode off with the womenfolk and children weren't in the habit of leaving visiting cards!

But even if they had left sufficient clues for David to have worked out the tribal identity of the culprits, how was he to go about locating them? Having crossed the Besor, they had the vast Negev before them. But all could be safely left in the hands of the God who had assured David of the success of his enterprise!

The sick and starving young man David found was a slave – an Egyptian slave – probably indicating that at some time the Amalekites had raided parts of Egypt and taken captives from there as well. Though only a slave by human reckoning, this young Egyptian was God's gracious – and all-necessary – provision for David at this critical moment. And so often God catches up *seemingly* unimportant characters and happenings into the outworking of His will and purpose. When commenting on Nabal's servant, who alerted Abigail in chapter 25 to what was then going on, we cited, by way of example, Naaman's little maid in 2 Kings 5.1-18, and Paul's nephew in Acts 23. 12-24. Let us now add this unnamed Egyptian slave to our list. And again stand in awe of the wonderful working of God – who, in this case, (i) suffered this particular Egyptian slave to fall sick at just the right time, (ii) suffered his heartless Amalekite master to discard and abandon him, leaving leave him to die in the desert, and (iii) directed David's way to the very field where the starving slave lay, leaving it for David's 'Good Samaritan' heart to do the rest. And again it was surely providential that this Egyptian slave knew the exact route to be followed by the Amalekite raiders – possibly the same way by which they had earlier come. How true that 'Big doors sometimes swing on small hinges'!

*'Gave him bread, and he did eat; and they made him drink water; 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.'* As we noted earlier, because Ziklag had been raised to the ground, David and his men would have had little opportunity to obtain any fresh supplies or provisions. Yet, recognising that the young Egyptian was in an even worse condition than they were – for, as we learn, he had been both sick and eaten nothing for three days – they generously shared with him some of the little they had. And I see nothing in the text to suggest that they had any ulterior motive when they did so. I see no reason to believe that David ever suspected that the young slave had been connected with the raid on Ziklag – hence David's very open questions in v. 13. Indeed, it is not impossible that the young man's features clearly identified him as an Egyptian – and I know of no evidence that the Egyptians ever formed raiding parties. I suspect that, if anything, appearances pointed away from the starving and dehydrated slave having had anything to do with the devastation at Ziklag, and so don't regard the food and drink given him as a means of obtaining essential military intelligence.

*'They made him drink water ... a piece of a cake of figs, and two clusters of raisins.'* I find it interesting that the Holy Spirit records such details. It was our Lord who once said, 'whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward', Matt. 10. 42 – and the happy sequel here in 1 Samuel 30 shows that that underlying principle held true even back in the days of David. We as Christians would do well to file away the words of William Gurnall the puritan, 'He that shows any kindness to a saint, is sure to have God for his paymaster'.

The cakes made with figs and raisins were especially high in nutritional value. These were, we may remember, among the food items brought by Abigail to David in chapter 25. And David's action here shows him to be a very different kind of man to Abigail's first husband. For, whereas Nabal was willing to give nothing from his great bounty to supply the needs of the 'servants' of a fellow Israelite and a fellow tribesman, 25. 10, David generously supplies from his meager provisions the needs of the 'servant' (the same word) of a hated Amalekite – although David wasn't to know that yet.

And I guess that it would have been so very easy for David to have ignored the plight of this young man because of David's 'more important mission' of pursuing the destroyers of Ziklag. But that was not David's way. Some time ago, I came across the following true story. 'Some seminary students were asked to preach on the parable of the Good Samaritan. When the hour arrived for their sermon, each one was deliberately delayed en route to class. As the students raced across campus, they each encountered a person who pretended to be in need. Not one of the students stopped to help'. The writer commented, 'After all, they had an important sermon to preach'.<sup>15</sup> Ouch!

**Verse 13.** *'I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite; and my master left me, because three days ago I fell sick'*. Clearly his master's reaction to this slave's illness had been as *quick* as it had been *callous*. For the slave 'had eaten no bread, nor drunk any water, three days and three nights, v. 12. That is, immediately he had fallen sick three days before, his master had simply deserted him and left him to die. But the man's inhumanity was to cost him – and his fellow Amalekites – very dear! For, in God's providence, it proved to be the key to their undoing. Now David and his men have no doubt whatever about the identity of their foes.

**Verse 14.** *'We burned Ziklag with fire'*. One commentator claims, 'The emphatic "we" at the beginning of verse 14 suggests that the slave participated personally in the Amalekites' raids'.<sup>16</sup>

**Verse 15.** *'David said to him, Canst thou bring me down to this company?'* I guess that, given the slave's acknowledged contribution to the burning of David's city, to have refused to do so would have done nothing for his general health – or his life expectancy! But, wisely, the man who had been left for dead agreed to give new life to David's pursuit!

*'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'*. I am reminded of Samson's words to the spineless men of Judah who came to bind him and hand him over to the Philistines, 'Swear unto me, that ye will not fall upon me yourselves. And they spake unto him, saying ... 'we will ... deliver thee into their hand: but surely we will not kill thee', Judg. 15.12-13. And, with his God-given superhuman strength, Samson entertained no fears of being 'delivered' into the hand of his enemies. But this discarded slave didn't have Samson's strength – and he nursed no ambition to be 'delivered' back into the hands of his master!

It seems that the young man feared that David might have later traded him for some of the Amalekites' captives. But he needn't have worried – David was in no mood for 'bartering'! 'Battering' was more what David had in mind! And, if all went as David planned, there would soon be no Amalekite master to buy the young Egyptian back into bondage.

## **Verses 16-20 'David recovered all'**

**Verse 16.** *'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'*. The Amalekite raiding party was clearly large and well-equipped – as witness the fact that 400 young men were later able to ride off on camels. Because of the large amount of booty they had collected from the lands both of the Philistines and Judah, including large flocks and herds, v. 20, they had been able to move only slowly. And I guess the crossing of the ravine Besor had proved no easy or quick manoeuvre. But then the Amalekites knew that the Israelites and the Philistines were engaged in fighting each other a considerable distance away, and therefore saw reason neither to rush nor to take any precautions when they stopped for some extravagant victory celebration.

**Verse 17.** *'David smote them from the twilight even unto the evening of the next day'*. David and his men caught the much larger Amalekite force completely off guard. It is hard to form any clear idea how long the actual fighting took place. The word translated 'twilight' is ambiguous and is used elsewhere in scripture both of the twilight before the dawn and the twilight at sunset.<sup>17</sup> It isn't possible to decide between these two meanings on the grounds of the word itself – hence the fact that commentators – and some translations – are divided over its significance here.<sup>18</sup>

What we do know is that the fighting certainly lasted a long time – either from *the dawn* of Day Two (when the Amalekites were probably suffering from the soporific effects of their excessive eating and drinking), or the sunset of Day One (when David and his men could cause maximum confusion in the poor – and soon virtually non-existent – light) right through to the evening of Day Two. That is, upwards of either 12 or 24 hours. We are told that when the Egyptian slave brought David down to the Amalekite encampment, the Amalekites were engaged in 'eating, drinking, and dancing' – activities which seem to me far more appropriate for the evening and early night rather than for the dawn. If, therefore, David did launch his attack around dawn of day Two, David and his men must have spent the previous night resting after their long journey before engaging the Amalekites in combat.

The fact that, on either interpretation, the battle took so long was due to some extent, I guess, to the Amalekites being 'spread abroad' over a large area – and may also suggest that, after the initial surprise, they put up fairly stubborn resistance. We have to remember that David had only 400 men with him.

But, given the Lord's response to David's second specific question in verse 8 – namely, that 'delivering you will deliver', the outcome of the fighting was never in doubt. And so, just as the Amalekites had earlier 'smitten' Ziklag, v. 1, so now, with the Lord's help, David 'smote' the Amalekites – and this time victory over Amalek wasn't dependent upon a Moses with hands held high and with the rod of God, Exod. 17. 9-13.

*'There escaped not a man of them, save four hundred young men, which rode upon camels, and fled'*. Camels<sup>19</sup> were first-class beasts of burden and provided the ideal means of swift movement for desert fighters such as the Amalekites. I note that the Midianite/Amalekite alliance which Gideon defeated in Judges 6-8 was equipped with 'camels without number', Judg. 7. 12. Here in 1 Samuel 30, camels provided a quick getaway for the survivors of the Amalekite raiding party. Inasmuch as, following many hours of fighting, the Amalekites who escaped equalled in number the total of David's band, it is obvious that the original Amalekite company had hugely outnumbered David's men.

**Verses 18-19.** *'David recovered ('delivered') all that the Amalekites had carried away: and David rescued ('delivered') 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 ('brought back') all'*. Verses 18 and 19 certainly underline the unqualified success of David's mission! On a point of detail, the word translated 'recovered' in v. 19 differs from the word which occurs twice in verse 18. The word in verse 19 means 'to bring back,

to return, to restore', and is used for instance in verse 12 of the Egyptian young man's spirit which 'came again' to him.<sup>20</sup> The word which occurs twice in verse 18 means 'to deliver, to rescue, to save', and, perhaps significantly, is found twice also in verse 8, where the Lord promised David that 'delivering you will deliver', literally.<sup>21</sup> That is, the Holy Spirit is stressing that the Lord had been faithful to His word.

The expression 'neither small nor great' is literally 'from the small even to the great' and is identical to the expression used in verse 2 of the women who had been captured – verse 2 being rendered literally, 'And they took captive the women who were in it (Ziklag), from the small even to the great'. I suggest therefore that the expression refers to the women here in verse 19 also, which explains the, otherwise somewhat curious, omission of any mention of the women at this point.

**Verse 20.** *'David took all the flocks and the herds, which they drove before those other cattle* ('before these cattle', literally), *and said, This is David's spoil*'. To understand this verse properly it is necessary to distinguish between two entirely separate sets of 'spoil'.

First, there was 'the spoil' which some of David's men spoke of as being 'recovered' ('rescued'), v. 22. That was the 'spoil' which had first been taken by the Amalekites from Ziklag, and included the 'cattle' referred to at the end of our verse. This 'spoil' was retained by David's men as that which belonged to its original owners – although, as we will see shortly, the less noble among the 400 who had actually defeated the Amalekites were in favour of withholding all of it from the 200 men who had remained at the brook Besor, and therefore of sharing the recovered possessions of the 200 among themselves.

Entirely separate to this was the 'spoil' which the Amalekites had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah, v. 16. It was this second set of 'spoil' – the 'flocks and the herds' of our verse – which David's men insisted became David's personal plunder – describing it as 'David's spoil'. But, in the event, and in marked contrast to the attitude displayed by the less worthy of his 400 warriors, David refused to hoard this booty to himself and distributed it as gifts to his friends among the elders of Judah, vv. 26-31 – which in itself gives some indication just how large David's personal 'spoil' was.

In summary, I would paraphrase our verse: 'David took all the flocks and the herds which the Amalekites had acquired in their other successful raids – both against Judah and against the Philistines. David's men drove these in front of the cattle which the Amalekites had taken from Ziklag, saying of the flocks and the herds, This is David's spoil'.

One point to note is that, from what we are told, neither David nor his men seem to have acquired anything which belonged properly to the Amalekites themselves. This would be entirely consistent with God's word to Saul through Samuel in chapter 15, by which Saul was told that no Amalekite 'oxen or sheep' were to be 'spared', 15. 3. We have seen before the high price which Saul was to pay for being party on that occasion to the people taking 'of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed', 15. 21. God's chosen king was unlikely to make the same mistake!

We noted at v. 18 how that the Lord had been faithful to His promise that David would deliver and recover all that had been taken. And we can hardly fail to note now that the Lord had proved, not only faithful, but gracious – in that He lavished on David a substantial quantity of additional 'spoil'.

## **Verses 21-25      Sharing spoil with colleagues – a lesson in equity**

The latter part of the chapter, from verse 21 to verse 31, details how David distributed the spoils of war – the Holy Spirit emphasising throughout David's leadership and diplomatic skills.

It is difficult to decide which English play-on-words better fits the section down to verse 25: 'The spoils which divided David and his men' or 'A victory almost spoiled'. Sad to say, both puns sum up the contents of the passage fairly well.

**Verse 21.** *'David came to the two hundred men, which were so faint that they could not follow David, whom they had made also to abide at the brook Besor: and they went forth to meet David ... and when David came near to the people, he saluted them*'. David came to *meet* and to *greet* the 200 men. The words, 'he saluted them' read literally, 'he asked them of their peace' – just as, back in chapter 25, through his ten young men, he had earlier asked Nabal 'of his peace', 25.5 lit.

I note in particular the words 'they *could not* follow David, whom they had *made* also to abide', by which the Holy Spirit is stressing that in no way was their absence from the battle field due to sloth, cowardice or even their own choice.

**Verse 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*'. Among David's 400 there were some mean and nasty characters – 'evil and worthless<sup>22</sup> men' – who proposed that the 200 should retrieve only their wives and children and that their recovered possessions – mainly cattle it seems – should be distributed among themselves, the 400.

For these men to deny to the 200 their own recovered goods, was for them, in principle, both to deny their obligations as part of the community of God and, in effect, to deny the Lord Himself as the true source of their victory. For this reason, if for none other, they could be described properly as both 'evil' and as 'men of Belial'.

I note that the words 'they went not with us' are literally, 'they went not with *me*' – indicating that this disagreeable element of the 400 had a spokesman – possibly a ringleader.<sup>23</sup>

**Verse 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* ('given') *the company that came against us into our hand*'. David began by generously, and diplomatically, addressing the troublemakers as 'my brethren'. But, in so doing, he was also making an

important point. To David, Israel stood or fell as a community – as God’s community – indeed, it is for this reason that the words ‘brother’ and ‘brethren’ occur so very frequently in the book of Deuteronomy.<sup>24</sup> The word which David used was loaded – he wanted to impress on all his men the importance of a community spirit and of community values.

David then attempted to straighten out his selfish comrades theologically – stressing that *everything* which they had brought back was not so much ‘the spoil that we have recovered’, as the worthless element viewed it in verse 22, but ‘that which *the Lord* hath given us!’ And this was very much how David regarded life in general – all he possessed he saw as having come ultimately from the Lord – expressed most eloquently perhaps in his prayer when he consecrated his offering and that of Israel’s princes for the building of the temple, ‘Both riches and honour come of thee ... all things come of thee, and of thine own have we given thee’, 1 Chron. 29. 12, 14.

David was well aware that, facing such huge odds against them as they had, the very fact that he and his men had survived the Amalekite battle at all was powerful testimony indeed to the fact the Lord had been with them. And he hammered this home to his tightfisted men, speaking to them in no uncertain terms of the Lord ‘who hath preserved (‘kept, protected’) us, and given the company that came against us into our hand’. We can hardly miss David’s double ‘given’ – that the Lord was the One who had both ‘given’ them their spoil *and* ‘given’ them their victory – and this directed deliberately by David at those who had then had the audacity to say, ‘we will not give them ...’, v. 22.

Before his first battle with a human foe, as a young man, David had gone on record as having told the Philistine champion, ‘This day will the Lord deliver thee into mine hand; and I will smite thee ... (not that I might get the credit, but) that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel’ 17. 46. Psalm 115 opens with the words, ‘Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory’, Psa. 115. 1. And, even if David didn’t write the psalm himself, which he may have for all I know, I am sure that David would have sounded a loud and hearty ‘Amen’ to that setiment. The viewpoint of these worthless men reflected the one attitude of mind which David found most objectionable – namely, that of assuming that victory over one’s foes came as a result of human effort and prowess. ‘You are not going to act that way, my brethren’, David pronounced, ‘with that which the Lord has given us, and who has protected us’ – in other words, ‘you should be thankful that you ever came back over the brook Besor at all!’

**Verse 24.** ‘Who will hearken unto you in this matter?’ David was confident that their selfish suggestion would fail to commend itself to any wise, fair and right-thinking people.

‘As his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff: they shall part alike’ In this context the word translated ‘the stuff’ refers to the baggage.<sup>25</sup> And David laid down the principle that those who faithfully did their part in guarding the baggage formed as much part of the ‘team’ as those who did the actual fighting.

Although David didn’t actually say it, it must have been obvious to the 400 that, had the 200 accompanied them over the Besor, they would have slowed them down enormously because of their extreme weariness. Apart from which, no-one in their right minds would have left unprotected baggage around – just remember what happened to unprotected Ziklag – and so, if the 200 hadn’t stopped behind to guard the baggage, they, the 400, would have been heavily loaded. In the circumstances, then, the 200 staying behind had served the best interests of the whole 600. Viewed this way – and this was how David viewed it – every one of the 600 had made their contribution to the mission – and to the victory. It had been a team victory, and the team had numbered 600, not 400!

The translators of the Septuagint understood the point well. The Septuagint has the statement ‘for they were not inferior to us’ sandwiched between the opening question, ‘who will hearken to these your words?’, and the declaration, ‘according to the share of him that went down to the battle, so shall be the share of him that abides with the baggage’. And this is just the point David was making – the baggage-keepers were not inferior! And it would not surprise me in the least to find that, given David’s sensitivity to the feelings and needs of others, he deliberately made reference to the baggage in part to assure those who had been too weak to continue that even in their weakness they had played an altogether essential role.

**Verse 25.** ‘And it was so from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel unto this day’. David’s ruling became standard military procedure in Israel – from that very day! And it says much for David’s leadership skills that, though not yet king, he was able to impose his authority on such tough men as he led – who at times could be aggressive – back in v. 6 even speaking of stoning him – and at times very troublesome – as here. David’s policy of dividing the spoils of war in this way was in full harmony with what the Lord had instructed Moses in Numbers 31. For Numbers 31 reports how, following Israel’s war of vengeance on the Midianites after the Midianites had seduced Israel into the pagan worship of the ‘Ba’al of Peor’, ‘the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Take the sum of the prey that was taken (that is, from the Midianites), both of man and of beast, thou, and Eleazar the priest, and the chief fathers of the congregation: and divide the prey into two parts; between them that took the war upon them, who went out to battle, and between all the congregation’, Num. 31.25-27.

That is, in Num. 31, the sum of the spoil was first divided in half – with one half being shared equally between the relatively small number of men in Israel’s army, and the other half equally between the much larger number of those in the rest of the nation. Arithmetically, it followed, of course, that, at the *individual* level, the military men received a *greater portion* than those who had not been engaged in the actual fighting.

At that time, the Lord established two points. First, that any spoils taken in battle belonged to all the people of Israel collectively, and not only to those in the army. And, second, that those in the army, and who had therefore risked their lives, were to receive a larger personal share. And the first principle established in Numbers 31 had later been strictly applied by Joshua. Speaking to the 2½ tribes following the Canaan campaign, he told them to ‘return with much riches unto your tents, and with very much cattle ...: divide the spoil of your enemies with your brethren’ – that is, divide it with those had remained on the other side Jordan to guard the women, children and elderly, Josh. 22.

David reinforced the second principle established in Numbers 31, that of *equal shares* on an *individual* basis within the fighting force.

### Verses 26-31 Distributing spoil to friends – a lesson in gratitude

**Verse 26.** *'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'*. As I mentioned earlier, in contrast to the attitude displayed by the worthless and selfish men of verse 22, David had no intention of enriching himself at the expense of others. And his decision that 'the spoil' *originally taken from Ziklag* would be shared on equal terms among his 600 men, was matched by his decision that *his own personal 'spoil'* would be shared among the Judean towns which had earlier supported and helped him.

David gratefully acknowledged the kindness shown him – the shelter and relief afforded him – during the time when he and his men had been pursued relentlessly by Saul. And we must remember that a lot of water had gone under the bridge since those days, for David had spent the last sixteen months with the Philistines, 27. 7. But David was not a man to forget the past love shown by his friends in Judah in ministering to him and his men. Nor was his appreciation of their support conveyed in word and sentiment only – it was expressed in a most tangible, generous, and no doubt welcome, manner.

I do not doubt that, as many commentators suggest, David's kind gesture stood him in good stead later when the men of Judah came to anoint him as their king at Hebron, 2 Sam. 2. 3-4. But, unlike many of those commentators, I see no reason whatever to believe that David therefore acted out of some ulterior motive here – that he was wanting to grease his path to the crown through buying their future support and loyalty. And, against that opinion, I draw attention to four simple facts :

- (i) That David did not send gifts throughout all the key cities of Judah, but only, we are specifically told, to those in the area where he had been in hiding – to all the places where he and his men 'went about', v. 31 literally;
- (ii) That those to whom he sent were *already* 'his friends', v. 26. He had no need therefore to buy the friendship of these elders with any gifts – they had already proved themselves to be David's true friends in his time of need;
- (iii) That David had no way of knowing that Saul would die very soon and that David's anointing as king over the house of Judah was therefore imminent, 2 Sam. 2.4; and
- (iv) That David knew full well that it was *God's* purpose that he should be king – apart from the confirmation of this given to him through Jonathan, Abigail and Saul himself, there had been his anointing by Samuel – and that there was therefore no need for him to bribe men to bring this about.

As I see it, then, in distributing his personal 'spoil' as he did, David had his eyes well and truly on the past and *not* on the future. While acknowledging that the distributing of wealth was a recognized sign of power in the Ancient Near East, I therefore see no political implications in what David did here and consider David's distribution of his own spoil as the simple and genuine expression of a grateful heart.

I accept, however, that David may well also have had regard to the justice of what he was doing. For it is highly likely that some at least of the benefiting communities had themselves suffered looting when 'the land of Judah' had suffered from the recent Amalekite attacks. The Egyptian slave had informed David, 'we raided ... that which belongs to Judah', v. 14 (literally). Nor do we have only the word of the slave for it; the narrative itself reports that the Amalekites had taken 'great spoil ... out of the land of Judah', v. 16. David may well have felt it only right that those who had suffered 'great' losses should receive back that which he was now able to provide out of the plunder which his men had insisted became his.

I think one of the loveliest traits of David's character was his gratitude and appreciation for what others did for him. And it was not only that he *felt* appreciation but that he *expressed* it – sometimes, as here, in very tangible and striking ways.

We have seen earlier his gratitude for (a) *advice given* in his words to Abigail; 'blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou', 25. 32-33. Now here we see his gratitude for (b) *friendship shown*. In 2 Samuel 23. 15-17, we see his gratitude for (c) *efforts taken* – his appreciation for the extent to which others were prepared to put themselves out for him – in that particular case, seriously endangering their lives for him. In David's eyes, only God was worthy of such love and devotion.<sup>27</sup> In 1 Kings 2. 7, we see his gratitude for (d) *needs met* – for a timely gift of provisions – in that David instructed Solomon to 'shew kindness unto the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be of those that eat at thy table: for so they came to me when I fled because of Absalom thy brother'. At the time to which David referred, they had brought David a large supply of equipment and foodstuffs.<sup>28</sup> David had then been at Mahanaim, the place where Jacob, many centuries before, had been met by 'the angels of God', Gen. 32. 1-2. Barzillai and his household may not have been 'God's host (or, 'camp')', as Jacob described the angels, but they had certainly been mighty welcome! And David still recalled their kindness *on his death bed* – and took due steps to show his appreciation.

There can be no doubt therefore that David was careful to show gratitude to any who did him a good turn and who showed kindness to him – whether in terms of advice given, efforts taken, needs met, or, as here, friendship shown.<sup>29</sup>

And I note also that David appreciated acts of kindness shown not only to himself but to others. Jumping the gun a little, to the action of the men of Jabesh Gilead recorded at the end of the next chapter, I listen in to David's words to them shortly after, recorded at the beginning of 2 Samuel 2, 'Blessed be ye of the Lord, that ye have shewed this kindness unto your lord, even unto Saul, and have buried him. And now the Lord shew kindness and truth unto you:

and I also will requite you because ye have done this thing', 2 Sam. 2. 4b-7. David's sense of gratitude and appreciation was a great quality and virtue, and one we do well to imitate.

*'To the elders'*. I take it that David chose to send the relief to the elders of each city as they represented the most reliable centres of distribution. This seems to have been the practice later followed by the early church: 'the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: which also they did, and sent it to *the elders* by the hands of Barnabas and Saul', Acts 11. 29-30 – interestingly another instance of relief being sent to 'elders' in the land of Judah ('Judaea')! For us today it is equally important that we have confidence in those to whom we send out support and relief for distribution to those in need.

*'The enemies of the Lord'*. I note that, though those to whom David sent the gifts are specifically said to be 'his friends', David described the 'present' (the 'blessing', literally<sup>30</sup>) he gave as being part of the spoil taken, *not* from 'his enemies', but from 'the enemies of the Lord'. And the Amalekites were definitely that! We read in Exod. 17 that, following the Amalekites' cowardly attack on the weak and weary of Israel, 'the Lord said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book ... I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. And Moses ... said ... the Lord hath sworn that *the Lord will have war* with Amalek from generation to generation', Exod. 17.14-16. As one commentator wrote concerning that occasion, 'because they have mangled His flock, they must deal with its Shepherd'.<sup>31</sup>

**Verses 27-30.** *'To them which were in south Ramoth, and to them which were in Jattir, and to them which were in Aroer, and to them which were in Siphmoth'*. I note that several of David's 'mighty men' came from these towns – Ira and Gareb from Jattir, 2 Sam. 23. 40, and Shama and Jehiel from Aroer, 2 Sam. 23. 44. These areas therefore had provided David with some of his finest men as well as with goods and shelter.<sup>32</sup>

*'And to them which were in the cities of the Jerahmeelites, and to them which were in the cities of the Kenites'*, v. 29. It is clear from David's answer to Achish in chapter 27 – 'Achish said, Whither have ye made a road to day? And David said, Against the south of Judah, and against the south of the Jerahmeelites, and against the south of the Kenites', 27.10 – that both these groups were known to be sympathetic to Israel. Apart from the fact that they had settled on southern frontier of Judah. all that we know of the Jerahmeelites is that they were the descendants of one Jerahmeel, 1 Chron. 2.9, 25. As far as the Kenites were concerned, we know that Moses' father-in-law had been a Kenite, Judg. 4.11, and that the Kenites had accompanied Israel all the way to Jericho and then settled with the tribe of Judah in the wilderness of Judah, Judg. 1.16.

**Verse 31.** *'And to them which were in Hebron'*. Quite understandably, the list of specific places reaches its climax with Hebron, where David was later publicly anointed king, both over Judah in 2 Samuel 2 and then over all Israel in 2 Samuel 5, and where he established the first capital of his kingdom, 2 Sam. 2. 1-4, 11; 5. 3-5. Hebron was also one of the levitical cities of refuge, Josh. 20. 7, and, although David was no 'man slayer' pursued by an 'avenger of blood', while in the land of Israel, he had been pursued relentlessly by one who sought his blood<sup>33</sup>, and at Hebron he had found 'refuge'.

*'And to all the places where David himself and his men were wont to haunt'*. That is, where David and his men 'went about', v. 31 literally – from which we learn that the years which David spent fleeing from Saul had involved him in moving round over an extensive area and that the biblical narrative therefore provides us with just a handful of the hair-raising situations through which David and his men had actually passed.

## **Pick up the lessons :**

**Verse 4.** We noted that there is no shame in grown men weeping. Oh, that we knew more tears over our own spiritual condition and that of others, Phil. 3.18 – and that we knew what it was to weep in sympathy with those who weep, Rom. 12. 15.

**Verse 6.** We saw that David's experience at Ziklag had much in common with that of Israel in a future day, to whom the Lord says, 'I will hedge up thy way with thorns ...then shall she say, I will go and return', Hos. 2. 6-7. We need to learn, as David did in the past and Israel will in the future, that sufferings and trials are often a token of God's love – meant, when our hearts grow cold towards Him, to draw us back to Himself.

David found renewed spiritual strength by focusing afresh on God's presence, power and promises. Ask the Lord for help to do the same.

When, as happened with both David in the Old Testament and Paul in the New Testament, circumstances come our way which we cannot explain, let us draw consolation from the fact that 'though we may not always be able to grasp the Lord's ways with us, we can always grasp His hand'.

**Verses 7-8.** We noted that, even in David's waywardness, Abiathar, David's high priest didn't forsake him, that he stayed with him through all his hardships, and that he was uniquely qualified to sympathize with David and his men because, like them, he knew what it was to lose a whole family. Let us be thankful that we have a *Great High Priest* who never fails us, and who, because of His experiences when in the world, has an unrivalled capacity to sympathize with us in all our trials and troubles.

**Verse 12.** We saw how the Holy Spirit recorded the fine detail of what David and his men gave to the young Egyptian slave and I quoted the words of William Gurnall, 'He that shows any kindness to a saint, is sure to have God for his paymaster'. 'Let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith'.

I imagined how easy it would have been for David to have ignored the plight of the young slave because of David's 'more important mission' of pursuing the destroyers of Ziklag. And I recounted a story of some seminary students who failed to give help to someone apparently in need because they were on their way to preach about the Good Samaritan! May the Lord touch our hearts with the needs of others and save us from being in too much of a hurry to turn aside to meet those needs.

**Verse 16.** From the destruction of the Amalekites on account of their complacency, let us learn to be spiritually vigilant. 'Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall', 1 Cor. 10. 12.

**Verse 23.** We saw that David stressed that all that which he and his men had brought back with them had, in reality, been given to them by the Lord. How we regard what we have will determine how we use it. Let us always be ready, out of that which the Lord has entrusted to us, to 'distribute to the necessity of saints', Rom. 12. 13.

**Verses 24-25.** We saw that David regarded the baggage-keepers as in no way inferior! I am reminded of a story told by Captain Charlie Plumb, who flew 74 successful combat missions over North Vietnam.<sup>34</sup> In his book 'Insights into Excellence', Captain Plumb tells how he was sitting in a restaurant when a man came up to him and said, 'You're Plumb. You flew jet fighters in Vietnam. You were on the aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk. You were shot down! You parachuted into enemy hands and spent six years as a prisoner of war'. 'How in the world did you know all that?' asked the Captain. The man, who had been on the same ship, replied, 'Because I packed your parachute'. Captain Plumb recorded, 'I staggered to my feet and held out a very grateful hand of thanks. This guy came up with just the proper words. He grabbed my hand, he pumped my arm and said, "I guess it worked"'. 'Indeed it did', the Captain said. That night he thought of the many hours this man must have stood at a long wooden table in the bowels of the ship carefully folding parachutes. 'I wondered', Captain Plumb wrote, 'how many times I might have passed him on board the Kitty Hawk. I wondered how many times I might have seen him and not even said "Good morning", "How are you?" or anything – because, you see, I was a fighter pilot and he was just a sailor'. But in God's service there are no high ranking or low ranking people. We all depend on one another. Let's never forget those who 'pack the parachutes'. Many of the Lord's people serve Him faithfully and conscientiously in a host of behind-the-scenes ways, often providing support for some much more visible aspect of the Lord's work. 'In that day' the Lord, the righteous Judge, is going to reward His unknown and unrecognised servants just as He will reward those more prominent.

**Verse 26.** We saw that David was not the kind of man to forget the love shown in the past by his friends in Judah when they had ministered to him and his men. Hebrews 6 assures us that 'God is not unrighteous to forget your work, and the love, which ye have shewn to his name, having ministered to the saints, and (still) ministering', Heb. 6. 10. And we noted at the same time that David expressed his appreciation in a tangible and generous manner. Let us hear what the apostle John had to say – 'My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth', 1 John 3.18.

Finally, I suggested that David chose to send the relief to the elders of each city because they represented reliable centres of distribution. We too should take care that, when we send out support and relief for distribution to those in need, we use only trustworthy sources and channels.

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## End-notes

<sup>1</sup> See Gen. 36. 12, 16; 1 Chron. 1. 36. Some writers distinguish the nomadic Amalekites normally found in the Negeb and Sinai area, from the descendants of Esau, because Genesis 14. 7, which pre-dates Esau, refers to 'the country of the Amalekites'. The distinction is unnecessary if we regard the phrase as a later editorial description.

<sup>2</sup> See Keil/Delitzsch on 1 Sam. 15. 5.

<sup>3</sup> The basic meaning of the word is strength and power, and in the majority of cases the reference is to military prowess. See the very full section in NIDOTTE, number 2657, volume 2, pages 116-126. Also TWOT, number 624, volume I, pages 272-273.

<sup>4</sup> For example, 1 Sam. 27. 8; 2 Sam. 1. 2-14. It wasn't until the days of King Hezekiah, that some men of Simeon finally annihilated them, 1 Chron. 4. 43.

<sup>5</sup> See the note on 1 Sam. 21. 10.

<sup>6</sup> If in chapter 13, obedience was the stone on which Saul stumbled, in chapter 15, it is the rock which crushes him.

<sup>7</sup> The infamous villain of the book of Esther, Haman, was an 'Agagite', Esth. 3. 1 – quite possibly signifying of the royal line of the Amalekites. Josephus describes Haman as 'the son of Amedatha, by birth an Amalekite', Ant. XI. vi. 5. The Targums likewise claim that he was descended from Amalek of the stock of Agag. Interestingly, the book of Esther traces Mordecai's ancestry to king Saul, 2. 5. Saul disobeyed God's command, and spared Agag. Mordechai, in contrast, didn't spare Haman, but killed him. Saul spared the best of the spoil of Amalek, also contrary to God's command. Mordechai, in contrast, would not touch the available spoil, 9. 10, 15, 16, even though he had the Persian king's authorization to do so, 8. 11. The point to register is that the existence of an Agagite was not due to Saul having spared the Agag of 1 Sam. 15 – for Samuel speedily hewed the Agag to pieces and there was no way therefore that that Agag could have later fathered any successor. If – and it is a very big 'if' – Haman was descended from the Agag of 1 Sam. 15, his son and heir had already been born before Saul spared his life. All we can say is that, if Haman was of the royal Amalekite line, and had Saul managed to totally exterminate the Amalekite race, the Jews of Esther's day would have been spared the trauma of Haman's attempt to exterminate them!

<sup>8</sup> See Acts 20. 19, 31, 37; 21. 13; 2 Cor. 2. 4; Phil. 3. 18, and Luke 19. 41; John 11. 35; Heb. 5. 7.

<sup>9</sup> This is the word in 1 Sam. 22. 2; 'every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented ('bitter in soul', literally)'.  
<sup>10</sup> In the words of Annie Johnson Flint's great hymn '*He giveth more grace*', David had now, '*reached the end of his hoarded resources*'.

<sup>11</sup> David shared Paul's resilience, and could well have said at this time, in the words of J B Phillips's paraphrase of Paul's words in 2 Cor. 4 and 6, 'we may be knocked down but we are never knocked out! ...always "going through it" yet never "going under"', 2. 4. 9; 6. 9. The following poem is about a young boy competing in a race he desperately wanted to win, but who had fallen down three times, and expresses something of a similar determination :

'Defeat! He lay there silently, a tear dropped from his eye.  
"There's no sense running anymore—three strikes; I'm out—why try?"  
The will to rise had disappeared, all hope had fled away  
So far behind, so error prone, failed along the way  
"I've lost, so what's the use", he thought, "I'll live with my disgrace".  
But then he thought about his dad who soon he'd have to face.  
"Get up", an echo sounded low, "Get up and take your place.  
You were not meant for failure here, so get up and win the race".

'With borrowed will, "Get up", it said, "You haven't lost at all,  
For winning is not more than this—to rise each time you fall".  
So up he rose to win once more, and with a new commit,  
He resolved that win or lose, at least he wouldn't quit.  
So far behind the others now, the most he'd ever been,  
Still he gave it all he had and ran as though to win.  
Three times he'd fallen stumbling, three times he rose again,  
Too far behind to hope to win, he still ran to the end.

'They cheered the winning runner as he crossed, first place,  
Head high and proud and happy; no falling, no disgrace.  
But when the fallen youngster crossed the line, last place,  
The crowd gave him the greater cheer for finishing the race.  
And even though he came in last, with head bowed low, unproud;  
You would have thought he won the race, to listen to the crowd.  
And to his dad he sadly said, "I didn't do so well".

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"To me, you won," his father said, 'you rose each time you fell'".

'And now when things seem dark and hard and difficult to face,  
The memory of that little boy helps me in my race.  
For all of life is like that race, with ups and downs and all,  
And all you have to do to win—is rise each time you fall.  
"Quit! Give up. You're beaten", they still shout in my face.  
But another voice within me says, "Get up and win that race"'.  
(Extracted from 'Finishing Strong', by Steve Farrar, Multnomah Publishers, 1995, pages 23-24.)

(Extracted from 'Finishing Strong', by Steve Farrar, Multnomah Publishers, 1995, pages 23-24.)

<sup>12</sup> 'The word usually refers to a dry river bed or ravine which in the rainy season becomes a raging torrent', TWOT, number 1343, page 570. 'A wadi or torrent-valley; in summer a dry river-bed or ravine, but a raging torrent in the rainy season', article 'River' in the IVP New Bible Dictionary.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example, the word, rendered 'carcasses', in 1 Sam. 17. 46

<sup>14</sup> See Judg. 6. 3, 33; 7.12.

<sup>15</sup> 'Kindness: Reaching out to others', by Phyllis Le Peau.

<sup>16</sup> Ronald Youngblood in the Expositor's Bible Commentary.

<sup>17</sup> The twilight before the dawn in Job 3. 9; 7.4; Psa. 119. 147 – the twilight at sunset in 2 Kings 7. 5, 7; Job 24.15; Prov. 7. 9; Isa. 5. 11; 21. 4; 59. 10; Jer. 13. 16.

<sup>18</sup> See the scorecard in NIDOTTE, number 5974, volume 3, pages 191-192.

<sup>19</sup> Camels are well suited for harsh desert life. With a heavy coat as insulation, the camel perspires little; and its well-balanced system does not require much liquid. A camel can go for weeks or even months without water. When it does drink, it takes only enough to replace lost moisture. Each of its three stomachs can hold 5 gallons of water.

<sup>20</sup> See TWOT, number 2340.

<sup>21</sup> See TWOT, number 1404.

<sup>22</sup> For the significance of 'Belial' see the note on 1 Sam. 25. 17.

<sup>23</sup> Compare the words of the apostle John to Jesus, 'Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbid him, because he followeth *not with us*'.

<sup>24</sup> Compare Matt. 23. 8; Acts 7. 26; 1 Tim. 6. 2; 1 Pet. 3. 8.

<sup>25</sup> Compare 1 Sam. 17. 22 and TWOT, number 982, volume 1, page 440.

<sup>26</sup> And, if we can trust the report in the apocryphal Second Book of Maccabees, following one of the victories of Judas Maccabeus, Judas and his men 'divided among themselves many spoils, and made the maimed, orphans, widows, yea, and the aged also, equal in spoils with themselves', 2 Macc. 8. 30; cf. v. 28.

<sup>27</sup> Compare also his appreciation of the devotion of Ittai, 2 Sam. 18. 2. with 15. 19-22.

<sup>28</sup> See 2 Sam. 17. 27-29; and compare 2 Sam. 19. 31-39.

<sup>29</sup> I note also his appreciation of efforts made on behalf of others; 'Blessed be ye of the Lord, that ye (the men of Jabesh Gilead) have shewed this kindness unto your lord, even unto Saul, and have buried him. And now the Lord shew kindness and truth unto you: and I also will requite you because ye have done this thing', 2 Sam. 2. 4b-7.

<sup>30</sup> The word found back in 25. 27: 'this blessing which thine handmaid hath brought unto my lord'.

<sup>31</sup> D. R. Davis.

<sup>32</sup> When David was anointed king over all Israel, 1 Chron. 11.3, he appointed some of his leading officials from these cities. Zabdi, the overseer of the stores of wine, was from Siphmoth, 1 Chron. 27. 27<sup>32</sup>, and Shimei, who was given over the vineyards, was a 'Ramathite', 1 Chron. 27.27 – quite possibly, from 'south Ramoth' (literally 'Ramoth of the south country' – of the southern wilderness area of Judaea), so-called to distinguish it from Ramoth-Gilead (1 Kings 22 and 2 Kings 9). See A. F. Kilpatrick in the Cambridge Bible on 1 Samuel 30. 27.

<sup>33</sup> See the reference to David's 'innocent blood' in 1 Samuel 19. 5.

<sup>34</sup> Charlie Plumb flew 74 successful combat missions over North Vietnam and made over 100 carrier landings. On his 75th mission, just five days before the end of his tour, Plumb was shot down over Hanoi, taken prisoner, tortured, and spent the next 2,103 days as a Prisoner Of War. See <http://www.charlieplumb.com/book-insights.htm> - together with Captain Plumb's 'Military History' on the same website.