



David Finds Strength in God: Mercy leads to being Merciful (1 Sam 29-30)

Notes: Week Seventeen

New American Commentary¹

(15) David is Exempted from Fighting Against Israel's Forces [29:1-11](#)

[29:1-5](#) Beginning with this section the author steps back in time a few days and returns to the story thread last encountered in [28:2](#). This is discernible from the fact that at the beginning of this episode the Philistine forces are still assembled by the waters of the Yarkon River “at Aphek” (v. [1](#)), whereas in [28:4](#) they have moved to Shunem. David is with the Philistine forces at the more southerly site, while Saul and his forces “camped by the spring in Jezreel” (v. [1](#)). Apparently Saul chose this favorable site—one that provided the Israelite forces with a ready supply of water as well as food—because they anticipated northerly Philistine troop movements designed to take control of the Valley of Jezreel, a vital segment of the major trade route connecting Egypt with Mesopotamia.

As the Philistine forces pulled out of the supply center at Aphek “with their units of hundreds and thousands, David and his men” (v. [2](#)) accompanied them. Since they had been residing in Philistine-controlled territory by permission of Achish king of Gath (cf. [27:2-6](#)), they were “marching at the rear with Achish.”

However, when the other Philistine commanders learned that “Hebrews” (v. [3](#)) were in their ranks, they immediately raised some serious questions— and with good reason. In a previous battle against Saul and the Israelites, the Philistines had allowed some Hebrews who had been under their protection to join their army, and the results had been catastrophic. Hebrew soldiers wearing Philistine markings and armed with Philistine weapons had turned against their hosts in the heat of battle and had begun killing them (cf. [14:21](#)). The chaos and confusion that resulted from that mistake caused the Philistines to kill many of their own men (cf. [14:20](#)).

Though Achish was no doubt keenly aware of that military disaster, he was convinced that David and his men would not recreate it. After all, the Philistine king had observed David “for over a year” (v. [3](#)) and had received gifts of plunder from him purported to have come from Israelite settlements. Through it all, Achish had “found no fault in” David. In fact, Achish was so confident of David’s loyalty that he had made him his bodyguard for life (cf. [28:2](#)).

However, the other Philistine military commanders were skeptical and “furious” (Hb., *qāṣap*; NIV, “angry”; v. [4](#)) with Achish for endangering the lives of their soldiers by putting “an officer of Saul king of Israel” (v. [3](#)) in the Philistine army. Abandoning the protocol of deference usually accorded a king, the commanders ordered Achish to “send the man back.” Otherwise, David “might become an adversary” (Hb., *śātān*; NIV, “he will turn against”) to the Philistines “during the fighting.”

1. Robert D. Bergen, *New American Commentary – Volume 7: 1, 2 Samuel*, (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 1996), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 269-280 .

The commanders understood that David had a motive for betraying his Philistine hosts—the desire to “regain his master’s favor.” In a possible allusion to David’s treatment of Goliath’s corpse (cf. [17:51, 57](#)), they suggested that David would purchase Saul’s favor with the currency of “the heads of our own men.” David certainly had demonstrated the capacity to kill Philistines. In fact, so effective was David in battle against the Philistines that his exploits were celebrated in both song and dance among the Israelites (cf. [18:6–7](#)).

[29:6–11](#) Achish acquiesced to the demands of his fellow Philistines. Calling his trusted bodyguard before him, the king tactfully informed David of his expulsion from the Philistine army. Achish began with an effusive affirmation of David’s service record. “As surely as the LORD lives,” David had proven himself “reliable” (v. [6](#))—and certainly financially profitable (cf. [27:9](#)); the Philistine king had “found no evil” (Hb., *rā’â*; NIV, “fault”) in him. Then revealing the rift that existed between the commanders, Achish noted that “in the eyes of the rulers you are not good” (Hb., *tôb*; NIV, “the rulers don’t approve of you”)—even though he personally “would be pleased to have” David serve beside him in battle. Having provided this affirming introduction, Achish issued three brief orders to David: “return” to Ziklag, “go peacefully,” and “do nothing the Philistine rulers would consider evil” (v. [7](#)).

Ironies abound in Achish’s relationship with David. A study of the author’s portrayal of the Philistine king suggests that Achish was intended to serve simultaneously as a type and a foil for Saul. Both kings made David their personal bodyguard (cf. [22:14](#); [28:2](#)); both were impressed with David, particularly his fighting abilities, yet both ended up removing him from the ranks of their armies; both were responsible for David’s making his abode in southern Judah; and both badly misjudged David. Saul considered David his mortal enemy, yet he was in fact his most loyal subject; Achish considered David his most trusted subject, yet he was in fact his most dangerous enemy. Both kings also made inappropriate use of oaths taken in the Lord’s name (cf. [14:39](#); [29:6](#)). The parallels between Saul and Achish suggest that Saul was indeed a king “such as all the nations have” (cf. [8:5](#)).

Using David as the link that bound these two kings together also invites comparisons between David and these men. In such comparisons David is seen to be superior—the only figure of truly royal stature in the triangle of men. In the presence of Achish and Saul, David is seen for what he is, the man after God’s heart (cf. [13:14](#); [Acts 13:22](#)).

David responded to his dismissal with an appropriate—although undoubtedly feigned—expression of displeasure. Inquiring into the nature of his offense against the Philistines, he asked to know what complaints had been filed “against your servant” that prevented him from being able to “go and fight against the enemies” (v. [8](#)).

The enemies David wanted to fight against were those of “my lord the king,” words that were perhaps intentionally ambiguous. The situation would lead us (and especially Achish) to assume he was referring to Achish his king. But David may have been thinking secretly of Saul as his lord and king (cf. [24:8](#); [26:17](#)). Or was David’s reference to king Yahweh? The reader is left to weigh David’s past activities in the courts of both earthly kings, in addition to his spiritual heart, to determine against whom he would have fought in the upcoming battle.

Having issued the difficult orders to David, Achish returned to his compliments. Though other leaders believed differently, to Achish David was “as good as an angel of God” (v. [9](#)). Even so, this “angel” must fly away from the Philistines and “leave in the morning as soon as it is light” (v. [10](#)), taking the entire Israelite contingent with him. Maintaining his image as an ideal servant, David obeyed. He got his troops up before sunrise, went south “back to the land of the Philistines” (v. [11](#)), while the Philistines proceeded north “up to Jezreel.”

The events of this chapter must be viewed as the providential supply of an alibi, excusing David from any involvement in the death of king Saul. This chapter answers any who might have accused David of conspiring with the Philistines to bring about the downfall of the Saulide dynasty. The events indicate that David could not and did not assist the Philistines in armed hostilities against the Israelites or their king. In fact, on the day of Saul's death David and his men were a hundred miles away killing Amalekites, fulfilling a Torah command that Saul had neglected (cf. [15:18–19](#); [Exod 17:15–16](#); [Deut 25:17–19](#)).

5. David Conquers the Amalekites as the Philistines Defeat Saul

This relatively brief section presents the simultaneous actions and yet contrasting destinies of Israel's first two kings, Saul and David. On the one hand, David was here fulfilling the mandate of the Torah regarding the Amalekites and receiving the resulting blessing of a restored family and the increase of possessions. On the other hand, at the very moment David was enjoying success and blessing, Saul was experiencing the full force of a Torah curse, including the loss of his family and possessions.

Both David and Saul were fighting traditional enemies of Israel in the events recorded in this section, and both men sought divine guidance in their respective undertakings. To the south, David consulted the only form of revelation sanctioned by the Torah before going forth to slaughter the Amalekites, who had temporarily dispossessed David and his men of their families and worldly goods during a lightning raid on Ziklag. To the north Saul sought insight from a medium, a revelatory means expressly forbidden by the Torah, before waging war against the Philistines. As a result of Saul's sinful actions, the Lord used the Philistines as agents of divine judgment to bring down on Saul's head the just punishment for his rejection of the Torah (cf. [1 Chr 10:13–14](#)).

When this pivotal series of events concludes, Saul and all his credible heirs to the throne are dead; David, on the other hand, is poised to become Israel's king and to establish a dynasty as all of his heirs are restored to him.

(1) David Defeats the Amalekites

[30:1–31](#)

[30:1–5](#) “David and his men” traveled southward along the coastal plain some fifty-five miles, arriving at “Ziklag on the third day” (v. [1](#)). In their absence, however, the Amalekites had burned David's recently acquired city to the ground. This attack on David's base of operations was no doubt in retaliation for assaults David and his men had carried out against the Amalekites during the past sixteen months (cf. [27:8](#)) and was timed to coincide with David's expected northern tour of duty.

Before the Amalekites burned the city, however, they had taken captive all its inhabitants (v. [2](#)). In doing this the Amalekites' actions were reminiscent of ancient Mesopotamian invaders, who also had attacked a city in the territorial region of Judah (cf. [Gen 14:11–12](#)), and invite a comparison of David's actions with those of Abraham in a previous day. None of the Amalekites' captives had been killed, perhaps because they were intended as bargaining chips with David or for sale in slave markets (cf. [Amos 1:6, 9](#)). Their act of kidnapping, however, was a capital offense according to the Torah (cf. [Exod 21:16](#)), and David would not countenance this especially personal violation of the Lord's revealed will.

As David and his men made their way back to Ziklag, they were no doubt elated and relieved at being exempted from a treasonous encounter with their fellow Israelites. However, the upbeat mood vanished

when they arrived at Ziklag (v. [3](#)). Tragedy rivaling that of Job (cf. [Job 1:12–19](#)) was multiplied six hundred times over as each man discovered the loss of all his possessions and the disappearance of spouses and children. So overwhelming was the discovery that “David and his men”—some of the toughest men on the planet—wept until they were exhausted (v. [4](#)). David now found himself bereft of all three of his wives: Michal, who had been taken away by Saul (cf. [25:44](#)), and now Ahinoam of Jezreel, and Abigail (v. [5](#)).

[30:6–8](#) The Israelite soldiers grieved especially over the loss of their “sons and daughters” (v. [6](#)). As they speculated about the abuse and pain their children may have faced at the hands of the Amalekites, the men became “bitter in spirit.” The bitterness soon turned to raging anger and found a focus in David, whom “the men were talking of stoning.” David “was greatly distressed” by all of this, as any leader would have been when faced with a tragedy that was in part of his own making. Nevertheless, he did not let the situation master him; instead, he “found strength in the LORD his God” (cf. [23:16](#)).

One reason for that strength lay in the fact that David had the freedom to communicate with the living God. David could not reach out to the Philistine army for help in pursuing the Amalekites, nor could he rely on the armies of Israel; yet he could—and did—reach up to Yahweh of Armies to request help. With the aid of Abiathar the priest, David “inquired of the LORD” (v. [8](#)) by means of “the ephod” (v. [7](#)). Likely David did so by means of the Urim, or Urim and Thummim, which were kept in a breastpiece attached to the ephod (cf. [Exod 28:28–30](#)). In answer to David’s question about the advisability and probable success of a mission to pursue the Amalekites, the Lord indicated that David and his men would “certainly overtake them and succeed in the rescue.” No doubt David’s faith in this divine word did help him “find strength”!

The author skillfully used vv. [6–8](#) to draw yet one more sharp distinction between David and Saul. During a time of great distress both men sought supernatural guidance for battle. Chronologically, they probably were seeking guidance on the very same day. However, one defied the Torah; the other utilized its gracious provision. Saul sought help from a medium and received the promise of death; David sought help through an Aaronic priest using the ephod and received the promise—later fulfilled—of life and blessing.

[30:9–10](#) Acting on the divine assurance provided them, “David and the six hundred men with him” (v. [9](#)) traveled perhaps sixteen miles south until they “came to the Besor Ravine” (modern Wadi Ghazzeah [?]), the largest and deepest wadi in the heartlands of southern Judah. At this point one-third of David’s troops, “two hundred men” (v. [10](#)), halted their pursuit of the Amalekites, for they “were too exhausted to cross the ravine.” This is not surprising, for prior to their sixteen-mile race after the adversary they had marched several miles to Ziklag and then exhausted themselves emotionally dealing with the discovery of lost possessions and family. However, after regrouping the forces “David and four hundred” other men who still possessed the capacity to carry on the task “continued the pursuit.”

[30:11–15](#) As David’s forces continued their southwesterly trek, “they found an Egyptian in a field” (v. [11](#)). The man was half-dead when he was discovered, but David realized that this individual might be able to provide him with crucial information regarding the Amalekites. The man was given food and drink, a more sumptuous meal than the usual rations of a soldier on patrol and one that may have been the envy of David’s own men. It was doubtless made all the tastier for the Egyptian because he had been starving.

The writer’s detailed description of an Egyptian captive’s meal in the midst of one of the most tension-filled narratives in 1 Samuel certainly seems odd and perhaps inappropriate. In fact, if this narrative was intended only to be a record of David’s military exploits it would be. However, the writer possessed multiple agendas in putting this narrative together. By showing David’s kind and gracious treatment of this Egyptian sojourner, the author demonstrated that even in the midst of personal tragedy David was

sensitive to Torah injunctions regarding the treatment of aliens, particularly Egyptians (cf. [Exod 22:21; 23:9; Lev 19:34; Deut 23:7](#)).

This incident with the unnamed Egyptian sojourner thus measures the circumference of David's soul. David was wracked with emotional pain, but he was not so wrapped up in his own problems that he could not help another person in need. The greatness of David's character is seen in the greatness of his provision for an alien in need.

David's obedient act of kindness toward the Egyptian produced benefits for all. For his part the Egyptian "was revived." To David's benefit the Egyptian provided information and assistance that enabled the Israelites to see the fulfillment of the Lord's promise (v. [8](#)). In the course of his interrogation David learned that the man was an abandoned slave (v. [13](#)) who had materially participated in the Amalekites' military operations at Ziklag.

From the Egyptian David also learned that the Amalekite raiding party's itinerary was extensive and included raids on three different regions: (1) "the Negev of the Kerethites" (v. [14](#)), a coastal area inhabited by allies of the Philistines who possessed Cretan roots (cf. [Ezek 25:16](#)); (2) "the territory belonging to Judah," part of the holdings of David's ancestral tribe east of Ziklag; and (3) "the Negev of Caleb," a special allotment of Judah's territory centered around Hebron (cf. [Josh 14:13–14; 15:13–15](#)).

In spite of the fact that the Egyptian to whom he had been so gracious was also one who had helped destroy his village, David asked a remarkable favor of him: "Can you lead me down to this raiding party?" (v. [15](#)). David was now placing the success or failure of his entire military mission—to say nothing of the hopes of six hundred families for reunion and restoration—in the hands of a man he had known for only an hour, one who had admitted to torching David's possessions. It was a dangerous gamble, but it also was David's best hope, one that apparently had been sent to him by the providential hand of God.

The Egyptian, knowing that he also had much at risk in this venture, asked for some assurances of protection before agreeing to David's terms. He required David to take an oath "before God" that he would not be executed for what he had done, nor would he be returned to the Amalekites.

[30:16–20](#) Apparently David agreed to these terms, for the foreigner "led David down" (v. [16](#)) to the Amalekite camp.

In their drunken, celebratory state the Amalekites were out of battle formation, "scattered over the countryside," and in no condition for combat. David's men, though nearing exhaustion, were highly motivated and newly energized by the discovery of their enemy in such a vulnerable state. Seizing the opportunity, David led his men in a lightning raid on the camp and "fought them from dusk until the evening of the next day" (v. [17](#)).

David's incredible risks and efforts paid off handsomely for the Israelites, as two major objectives were met. First, the Amalekite army was all but wiped off the face of the earth. So completely were the Amalekites nullified by David's efforts that they were not mentioned again as an opponent of Israel until the time of Hezekiah (716–687 B.C.; cf. [1 Chr 4:43](#)).

Second, David and his men recovered the persons and possessions the Amalekites had previously seized. In fact, so complete was the restoration that "nothing was missing" (v. [19](#)); everything was brought back into Israelite control. Especially significant was the fact that the Israelite prisoners of war were set free, including David's wives and everyone else, "young or old, boy or girl."

Because of the magnitude of their victory, David's troops took control of large quantities of goods and livestock left behind by the Amalekites. Much of this booty had previously been owned by the Kerethites, Calebites, and other Judahites. However, David and his men came into possession of it by right of conquest—after all, they were the ones who put their lives on the line to attack the Amalekites, and it was already lost to the previous owners.

As leader of the strike force, David received the largest portion of the booty; “he took all the flocks and herds” (v. [20](#)). Most, if not all, of these animals would have come from the Amalekite raids on sites other than Ziklag. The remaining “property” (Hb., *miqneh*; NIV, “other livestock”) was to be divided up among David's troops.

[30:21–25](#) As the victorious band made its way northward, the troops eventually returned to the two hundred men left behind (v. [21](#)). When David met them, “he inquired about their welfare” (NIV, “greeted them”); as a good general he was concerned that these temporarily disabled soldiers would be recovering. Significantly, he did not rebuke them or deride them for failing to participate in the raid on the Amalekites.

David's conciliatory attitude, however, was not shared by all of the other four hundred men who accompanied him into battle. Some wicked men resented the fact that these two hundred had not joined in the heat of battle. In their opinion those who fought should “not share” the plunder with those who sat on the sidelines. Each nonparticipant might be allowed to “take his wife and children” back, but there should be no reward beyond that.

David intervened in the developing confrontation and in the process created a “statute and ordinance” (v. [25](#)) regarding the distribution of plunder that was to be followed by Israelite armies for centuries thereafter—literally, “from that day to this” (v. [25](#)). Simply stated, the policy was that “the share of the man who stayed with the supplies is to be the same as that of him who went down to battle” (v. [24](#)). This policy was based on three foundational premises.

The first presupposition was theological in nature: all plunder gained in battle was ultimately a gracious gift from the Lord (v. [23](#)). Thus, David rejected the view that booty was payment to a worker for services performed in battle. By viewing plunder as sacred gift, not secular gain, David highlighted the truth that “the battle [and its perhaps lucrative outcome] is the LORD's” ([17:47](#)). In theory, all of the Lord's people might be eligible to partake of the Lord's gifts.

The second presupposition was also theological in nature, designed to provide a better perspective on plunder: booty was actually one of the lesser gifts provided by the Lord to those who actively fought in war. Two things were more important than material gain in war: personal protection and the defeat of the enemy. Resentment among the front-line fighters stemming from a less-than-expected share of plunder was blunted when one realized that the Lord had already provided them two other gifts of greater value.

The third presupposition is that of corporate equality. This presupposition recognizes that (1) successful military operations require the performance of many different tasks, some of which must be done away from the heat of battle; (2) each job is vital to the success of the whole effort; and (3) therefore “all” team members should “share alike” (v. [24](#)) in the fruits of success.

[30:26–31](#) When David returned to the war-scarred village of Ziklag, he wisely chose to invest some of his newly acquired resources in building relationships with “the elders” (v. [26](#)) who controlled settlements located throughout southern Judah. Perhaps he did so with the intention of creating a network of treaties that would allow him to move his sizable band of soldiers and their families back into Judahite territory, away from the bad memories and destruction of Ziklag.

But there may have been another reason. The fact that David presented his gift to them as a “present [Hb., *bĕrākā*; “blessing”] for you from the plunder of the LORD’s enemies” suggests that he was also using this gift as an announcement of his messianic status. David was the Lord’s anointed (cf. [16:12–13](#)); but rather than proclaim his status with mere words, he would announce it with deeds. As would be expected of the Lord’s anointed, David had fought the Lord’s enemies (cf. [Exod 17:15–16](#); [Deut 25:17–19](#)). As would be expected of the Lord’s anointed, he was now bringing blessing to the Lord’s people. David’s use of the phrase “the LORD’s enemies” in preference to “the Amalekites” provides the key to this interpretation. It casts David’s military exploits as a “crusade”—that is, essentially theological in nature—not a “conquest”—that is, fundamentally profane and secular. His actions against the Amalekites were not vengeance for burned houses and displaced families; rather, they were acts of spiritual obedience—the fulfillment of ancient Torah mandates and the fulfillment of timeless prophecies.

David sent gifts to a significant number of settlements scattered throughout southern Judah: fourteen cities or clan territories are specified, though gifts were also sent to “other places” (v. [30](#)). David, however, did not send any gifts to Philistine or Kerethite cities. No doubt they were excluded because they were not members of God’s covenant community. Thus, David seems to have considered two factors when determining who received these blessings from the Lord: whether or not the Lord was the official God of the settlement and whether or not they were “places where David and his men had roamed” (v. [31](#)) during David’s period of internal exile.

The majority of the villages mentioned in vv. [27–29](#) remain unidentified by modern researchers. The “Bethel” (v. [27](#); lit., “House of God”; **LXX**, “Beth Sur”) mentioned here is not the site named by Jacob (cf. [Gen 28:19](#)), which is located in the tribal territory of Ephraim; instead, it would have been in southern Judah. “Ramoth Negev” (lit., “Heights of Negev”) is mentioned nowhere else in Scripture. “Jattir” is a location in Judah’s hill country set aside for the Aaronic priests (cf. [Josh 15:48](#); [21:14](#)) but is otherwise unknown. “Aroer” (v. [28](#)) is an unidentified Judahite settlement—not the former city of Sihon in Reubenite territory east of the Jordan (cf. [Josh 12:2](#)). “Siphmoth” is an unknown site. “Eshtemoa” is a city set aside for the Aaronic priesthood (cf. [Josh 21:14](#)) in southern Judah, not otherwise known. “Racal” (v. [29](#); **LXX**, “Carmel”) is also unknown. “The towns of the Jerahmeelites and the Kenites” were apparently settlements in the Simeonite district of central southern Judah.

“Hormah” (v. [30](#); lit., “Destruction”) was a site in the Simeonite region of Judah (cf. [Josh 15:30](#); [19:4](#)) the Israelites had conquered on at least three occasions (cf. [Num 21:3](#); [Josh 12:14](#); [Judg 1:17](#)). “Bor Ashan” (**LXX**, “Beersheba”) and “Athach” (**LXX**, “No”) are not mentioned elsewhere in the Bible and remain unidentified. “Hebron” (v. [31](#)), the largest and most historically significant city in southern Judah, was both a center for the Aaronic priesthood and a designated city of refuge (cf. [Josh 20:7](#); [21:11](#)). The fact that David sent gifts to three different sites associated with the Levites suggests that the future king was both giving a tithe, and more, of the battlefield acquisitions and also making special efforts to curry favor with this significant element in Israelite society.

Complete Biblical Library Commentary²

Chapter 29

29:1-11. The destiny of the Kingdom of Israel seems to be in the hands of the Philistines. As portrayed in the preceding chapter, Saul was helpless and the situation from the human perspective was hopeless. David seemed to be at the mercy of the Philistines and in circumstances unfavorable to provide leadership for his own people.

29:1-3. The Philistines had advanced their armies northward about thirty miles to Aphek at the sources of the Yarkin river where the plain of Sharon and the Philistine plain meet. There the Philistines staged their troops, preparing to fight the Israelites who were encamped across the valley by the spring, the source of the river Harod, in Jezreel located on the spur of Mount Gilboa three miles south of Shunem.

David and his mercenaries were marching at the rear with the military units from Gath under Achish. The army commanders representing the other Philistine cities questioned the wisdom of allowing these “Hebrews” (a common designation used as a synonym for “Israelites” by non-Israelites) to serve in the Philistine army. Achish, who had previously made David his “bodyguard for life” ([28:2](#)) rose to his defense. Achish acknowledged that David had previously served Saul, but in more than a year’s experience he had no reason to question his loyalty.

29:4-5. Uneasy about David’s presence, the Philistine commanders were angry. Aware of the popular acclaim David had had with the Israelites as a national hero, they mistrusted him. He might turn traitor and regain his place with his Israelite master by bringing him the heads of Philistine soldiers (cf. [18:24-27](#)).

29:6-11. Achish conveyed to David his own personal approval and expressed full confidence, assuring him that he would be pleased to have him serve in their army. However, since the commanders did not approve of him and demanded that Achish send these men back, he advised David to leave rather than to antagonize the Philistine rulers.

David protested, but Achish seemed helpless in his effort to keep David with him. Expressing full confidence in him, he reluctantly informed David that he and his men must be away at first light. Early in the morning, they left camp to return to Ziklag.

Since David had the firm conviction not to touch “the Lord’s anointed,” he must have been relieved to be extricated from his commitment to Achish to fight against his own countrymen and leave with the blessing of Achish ([v. 7](#)). It seems ironic that the Philistines, who finally disposed of Saul, unwittingly rescued David from participating in this crucial battle between the Philistines and Israel and unleashed one of their most formidable opponents.

2. *The Complete Biblical Library – Samuel*, (Springfield, IL: World Library Press, Inc., 1996), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "Chapter 29 & 30".

Chapter 30

30:1-31. The account in this chapter places David many miles away from the crucial battle at Mount Gilboa. David had been providentially dismissed by the Philistine commanders, yet he retained cordial relations with Achish in whose service he was beyond the relentless pursuit of Saul. Finding Ziklag had been raided by the Amalekites, he immediately pursued them and successfully restored the fortune of his men and their families as well as southern Judah. David's experience "offers a case study of the qualities that make for strong and compassionate leadership: persistence, empathy, faith in God, commitment to a cause, decisiveness, generosity. Saul disobeying God's prophet, defeated the Amalekites but lost his kingdom ([ch. 15](#)); David, seeking God's will, defeated the Amalekites and embarked on his reign ([ch. 30](#))." (Cf. Youngblood, 3:791).

30:1-6. Dismissed by the Philistines at Aphek, David and his men made the trek south to Ziklag, a distance of about fifty miles. Instead of a welcome home awaiting them when they arrived on the third day, they found the city raided and burned. Their wives with their children and everyone else had been taken captive. Tired, weary and hungry, they were so discouraged that they wept until they could weep no more. Reflecting on the situation, they held David as their leader responsible for this disaster.

Possibly, his men had disagreed with him on his Philistine policy, which tentatively involved them in the possibility of fighting with them against Israel. Then when they returned from Aphek, they faced the loss of their families and possessions due to their absence. Bitter about this loss, the men considered stoning David. Never, since David had fled from Gibeah and Saul, had David been so alone—bereft of family and friends—though he had often been in danger of death. ([Psalm 25:16f](#) could have been composed at this time.) David, in a deep crisis of leadership, was "greatly distressed" and turned upward to find "strength in the Lord his God." In contrast, Saul, when he was in a deep crisis of leadership, was "greatly distressed" ([1 Sam. 28:15](#) uses the same Hebrew word, , HED #[7173](#)) and turned to seek refuge in a medium.

30:7-8. David turned to Abiathar, the priest who had escaped and joined David when Saul executed eighty-five priests at Nob ([22:6-21](#)). At Keilah, David had obtained divine guidance through Abiathar, warning him that Saul would capture him if he remained there. Leaving Keilah, he moved southward to find safety in desert strongholds ([23:7-28](#)). David had two questions of immediate importance pertaining to their desperate situation. The Lord's response concerning both was specific and assuring: "Pursue them" and "You will certainly overtake them and succeed in the rescue."

30:9-15. Immediately, David with 600 men marched about twelve miles south from Ziklag to the Bezor Ravine or Brook Bezor, flowing westward from Arad and Beer-Sheba to the Mediterranean Sea about four miles south of Gaza. With 200 men "too exhausted" to cross the brook, David with a contingent of 400 men marched on to pursue the enemy.

En route, they found a starving Egyptian. Weakened by three day's hunger and thirst, he was revived by food provided by David's men. He identified himself as an Egyptian slave abandoned by the Amalekites because of sickness.

He then offered David details of the Amalekite raid of "the Negeb and Ziklag" ([v. 1](#)). They had raided "the Negeb of the Kerethites," an undefined portion of Judahite territory probably in the south Philistine Plain area where the Kerethites, coming from Crete, had settled.

Later, they showed special loyalty to David and served as his bodyguard unit. They also had raided “the Negeb of Caleb,” the area south of Hebron and northwest of Beer-sheba. What was most important to David was his report that they had burned Ziklag. In response to David’s request, this Egyptian agreed to lead David down to the raiding party, exacting a promise that he would neither be killed nor be turned over to his former masters, fates that might be expected by a treasonous slave.

30:16-20. Guided by this Egyptian, David found the Amalekites complacently encamped, greedily celebrating the great plunder they had taken from the Judahites and the Philistines. In excessive indulgence, they were caught off guard, eating, drinking and dancing. In a twenty-four hour conflict, David and his men decimated the Amalekites; however, 400 young men with their camels fled and escaped.

The scope of his success is summed up in the statement, “David recovered everything the Amalekites had taken.” David’s spoils included women and children as well as herds of sheep and cattle, which they took with them on their return.

30:21-25. Returning to the Besor Ravine, David, with his victorious unit of 400 men, was greeted by those who had been too exhausted to continue marching to overtake the enemy ([vv. 10, 21](#)). In the wake of this great victory, some of David’s men advocated that those who had remained at Besor would only have their families restored but would not participate in the spoils. David magnanimously addressed these “evil men and troublemakers” as “my brothers,” displaying positive leadership. He acknowledged that the Lord had given them protection and helped them defeat the enemy. Like Abraham ([Gen. 14:24](#)), Moses ([Num. 31:25-31](#)) and Joshua ([Josh. 22:8](#)), David boldly announced that all would share alike. The basis for distribution was simple membership in the community (cf. also [Matt. 20:14f](#); [1 Cor. 3:8](#)). David made this policy of all sharing alike a “statute and ordinance,” an established law in Israel (cf. [Gen. 47:26](#); [Exo. 15:25](#); [Josh. 24:25](#); [Ps. 81:4](#)).

30:26-31. The booty David took exceeded what he had before. Returning to “burned Ziklag,” David gave a gift “from the plunder of the Lord’s enemies” to the leaders in Judah. Friendship with these leaders had developed during recent months as they had helped him. This generosity, doubtless sincere, also served his plan of ingratiating him with the elders of Judah with whose support he would soon be crowned as king.

Thirteen towns are listed as recipients of David’s gifts. Most of these were located in a southern direction from Hebron: Ramoth Negeb (probably the same as Ramah in the Negeb, [Josh. 19:8](#)), about twenty miles south-southeast; Jattir, a Levite town ([Josh. 21:14](#); [1 Chr. 6:57](#)) thirteen miles south-southwest; Aroer, fifteen miles south of Jattir; Eshtemoa, also a town for the Levites, nine miles south-southwest; Rascal (probably Carmel), seven miles southeast; Hormah (sight of an early Amalekite victory over Israel; cf. [Num. 14:45](#)), probably four miles north of Aroer; and Bor Ashan, about twelve miles southwest.

Atach (probably Ether) was about fifteen miles northwest of Hebron. The cities of Bethel and Siphmoth are unknown or unidentified but are listed with cities in this vicinity as receiving gifts. The cities of the Jerahmeelites may have been south of Beer-sheba (cf. [27:10](#); [1 Chr. 2:9](#), 25ff). The cities of the Kenizites may have been in the Hebron vicinity ([27:10](#)). Hebron, an old Calebite city, is mentioned last, the city where David would be anointed king over Judah ([2 Sam. 2:1-4](#)) and king over Israel ([2 Sam. 5:3](#)).