



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

Notes: Week Seventeen

1 Samuel 29-30 (HCSB)

Philistines Reject David

29 The Philistines brought all their military units together at Aphek while Israel was camped by the spring in Jezreel. ² As the Philistine leaders were passing in review with their units of hundreds and thousands, David and his men were passing in review behind them with Achish. ³ Then the Philistine commanders asked, “What are these Hebrews doing here?”

Achish answered the Philistine commanders, “That is David, servant of King Saul of Israel. He has been with me a considerable period of time. ^[a] From the day he defected until today, I’ve found no fault with him.”

⁴ The Philistine commanders, however, were enraged with Achish and told him, “Send that man back and let him return to the place you assigned him. He must not go down with us into battle only to become our adversary during the battle. What better way could he regain his master’s favor than with the heads of our men? ⁵ Isn’t this the David they sing about during their dances:

Saul has killed his thousands,
but David his tens of thousands?”

⁶ So Achish summoned David and told him, “As the LORD lives, you are an honorable man. I think it is good ^[b] to have you working ^[c] with me in the camp, because I have found no fault in you from the day you came to me until today. But the leaders don’t think you are reliable. ⁷ Now go back quietly and you won’t be doing anything the Philistine leaders think is wrong.”

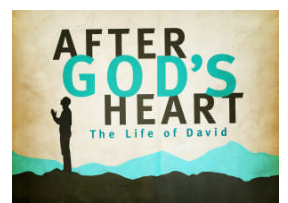
⁸ “But what have I done?” David replied to Achish. “From the first day I was with you until today, what have you found against your servant to keep me from going along to fight against the enemies of my lord the king?”

⁹ Achish answered David, “I’m convinced that you are as reliable as the Angel of God. But the Philistine commanders have said, ‘He must not go into battle with us.’ ¹⁰ So get up early in the morning, you and your masters’ servants who came with you. ^[d] When you’ve all gotten up early, go as soon as it’s light.” ¹¹ So David and his men got up early in the morning to return to the land of the Philistines. And the Philistines went up to Jezreel.

David’s Defeat of the Amalekites

30 David and his men arrived in Ziklag on the third day. The Amalekites had raided the Negev and attacked and burned down Ziklag. ² They also had kidnapped the women and everyone ^[e] in it from the youngest to the oldest. They had killed no one but had carried them off as they went on their way.

³ When David and his men arrived at the town, they found it burned down. Their wives, sons, and daughters had been kidnapped. ⁴ David and the troops with him wept loudly until they had no strength left to weep. ⁵ David’s two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelite and Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite, had also been kidnapped. ⁶ David was in a difficult position because the troops talked about stoning him, for they were all very bitter over the loss of their sons and daughters. But David found strength in the LORD his God.



⁷ David said to Abiathar the priest, son of Ahimelech, “Bring me the ephod.” So Abiathar brought it to him, ⁸ and David asked the LORD: “Should I pursue these raiders? Will I overtake them?”

The LORD replied to him, “Pursue them, for you will certainly overtake them and rescue the people.”

⁹ David and the 600 men with him went as far as the Wadi Besor, where 200 men who were to remain behind would stop. ¹⁰ They stopped because they were too exhausted to cross the Wadi Besor. David and 400 of the men continued in pursuit.

¹¹ They found an Egyptian in the open country and brought him to David. They gave him some bread to eat and water to drink. ¹² Then they gave him some pressed figs and two clusters of raisins. After he ate he revived, for he hadn’t eaten food or drunk water for three days and three nights.

¹³ Then David said to him, “Who do you belong to? Where are you from?”

“I’m an Egyptian, the slave of an Amalekite man,” he said. “My master abandoned me when I got sick three days ago. ¹⁴ We raided the south country of the Cherethites, the territory of Judah, and the south country of Caleb, and we burned down Ziklag.”

¹⁵ David then asked him, “Will you lead me to these raiders?”

He said, “Swear to me by God that you won’t kill me or turn me over to my master, and I will lead you to them.”

¹⁶ So he led him, and there were the Amalekites, spread out over the entire area, eating, drinking, and celebrating because of the great amount of plunder they had taken from the land of the Philistines and the land of Judah. ¹⁷ David slaughtered them from twilight until the evening of the next day. None of them escaped, except 400 young men who got on camels and fled.

¹⁸ David recovered everything the Amalekites had taken; he also rescued his two wives. ¹⁹ Nothing of theirs was missing from the youngest to the oldest, including the sons and daughters, of all the plunder the Amalekites had taken. David got everything back. ²⁰ He took all the sheep and cattle, which were driven ahead of the other livestock, and the people shouted, “This is David’s plunder!”

²¹ When David came to the 200 men who had been too exhausted to go with him and had been left at the Wadi Besor, they came out to meet him and to meet the troops with him. When David approached the men, he greeted them, ²² but all the corrupt and worthless men among those who had gone with David argued, “Because they didn’t go with us, we will not give any of the plunder we recovered to them except for each man’s wife and children. They may take them and go.”

²³ But David said, “My brothers, you must not do this with what the LORD has given us. He protected us and handed over to us the raiders who came against us. ²⁴ Who can agree to your proposal? The share of the one who goes into battle is to be the same as the share of the one who remains with the supplies. They will share equally.” ²⁵ And it has been so from that day forward. David established this policy as a law and an ordinance for Israel and it continues to this very day.

²⁶ When David came to Ziklag, he sent some of the plunder to his friends, the elders of Judah, saying, “Here is a gift for you from the plunder of the LORD’s enemies.” ²⁷ He sent gifts to those in Bethel, in Ramoth of the Negev, and in Jattir; ²⁸ to those in Aroer, in Siphmoth, and in Eshtemoa; ²⁹ to those in Racal, in the towns of the Jerahmeelites, and in the towns of the Kenites; ³⁰ to those in Hormah, in Borashan, and in Athach; ³¹ to those in Hebron, and to those in all the places where David and his men had roamed.

Footnotes:

- a. [1 Samuel 29:3](#) Hb obscure
- b. [1 Samuel 29:6](#) Lit *It was good in my eyes*
- c. [1 Samuel 29:6](#) Lit *you going out and coming in*
- d. [1 Samuel 29:10](#) LXX adds *and go to the place I appointed you to. Don’t take this evil matter to heart, for you are good before me.*
- e. [1 Samuel 30:2](#) LXX; MT omits *and everyone*

Holman Christian Standard Bible - *Study Bible*¹

1 Samuel 29-30

1 Samuel 29

29:1 The text now flashes back to [28:1-2](#), a time prior to the armies gathering at Shunem and Gilboa ([28:4](#)). Aphek was located along the Yarkon River; it marked the site where the Philistines had gathered years earlier to fight Israel during the days of Eli the high priest ([4:1](#)). The spring in Jezreel probably refers to a spring in the valley near the town. By camping at Jezreel, Israel gave the Philistines full access to the valley where Philistine chariots would be more effective.

29:2 David and his men joined Achish and the Philistine leaders as they prepared for battle. David's position behind them meant that if he turned traitor, Philistine forces could be trapped between Saul and David ([vv. 4-5](#)).

29:3 In response to the concerns of the Philistine commanders, Achish affirmed David's loyalty to him during the considerable period of time (16 months, [27:7](#)) that David had served him.

29:4 The Philistine commanders refused to accept Achish's explanation. If David should become their adversary during the battle, they could suffer heavy casualties. They also suspected that David, as one of Saul's former generals, might choose just such a time to regain his master's favor. The words heads of our men may recall the Goliath episode ([17:51](#)).

29:6 With his words, as the LORD lives, Achish recognized the power of God in David's life.

29:7 The Philistine leaders were not ready to kill David and his men, but they couldn't bring themselves to trust him in a battle against his own people.

29:9 Achish affirmed his faith in David, but he felt compelled to follow the counsel of his Philistine commanders.

29:10 Achish commanded David to leave early in the morning so he wouldn't hinder the Philistine advance northward. Your master's servants designated David's men who had defected from Saul to David.

29:11 David's departure providentially prevented him from participating in the battle that would claim Saul's life. Meanwhile, the Philistines went up to Jezreel (perhaps a reference to the valley rather than the town), where they soon would face off against Saul.

1. Jeremy Royal Howard, ed., *HCSB Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2010), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "1 Samuel 29-30".

1 Samuel 30

30:1 On Ziklag, see note at [27:6](#). The town was still under Philistine control ([29:11](#)). The Amalekites whom Saul should have destroyed ([15:1-3](#)) had raided the Negev (the southern region) and burned the city down.

30:2 Though Saul had nearly destroyed the Amalekites ([15:7-9](#)), they did not retaliate in kind. Rather, they kidnapped the women and everyone in the city.

30:5 David's two wives did not escape the Amalekite attack, so he shared personally in the grief that others experienced.

30:6 The pain the troops felt over the loss of their sons and daughters led some to blame David for their troubles. Nonetheless, David found strength (lit "strengthened himself") in the Lord his God, a testimony to his faith in difficult times.

30:7 David summoned Abiathar the priest to inquire of the Lord through the ephod (see note at [14:3](#)).

30:9 The Wadi Besor lay about 15 miles south of Ziklag.

30:10 A third of David's warriors were too exhausted to continue farther because of: (1) their 55-mile journey from Apek to Ziklag over three days ([29:11-30:1](#)), (2) the emotional pain of seeing Ziklag destroyed and their families gone, and (3) the 15-mile trek from Ziklag to the Wadi Besor.

30:14 The Cherethites lived along the coast near the Philistines ([Ezek 25:16](#)). The south country of Caleb denoted the region around Hebron ([Jos 14:13-14](#); [15:13-15](#)). The words we burned down Ziklag implicated the Egyptian in the battle; at the same time, it provided David a potential opportunity.

30:15 David asked whether the man now had more loyalty to those who had saved his life than to those who had left him for dead. The man's reply shows he realized he was in a difficult situation. He had implicated himself in the battle at Ziklag, so he wanted some assurance that David would not cast him aside as his master had.

30:16 The language emphasizes how the Amalekites were not expecting any kind of retaliation from either the Philistines or Judah, but they underestimated David's resolve.

30:17 Despite the long journey David and his men had undertaken, they received renewed energy from finding their families alive and from discovering the Amalekites so vulnerable.

30:18-19 The Lord's hand on David's army was evident as David recovered everything the Amalekites had taken, including all the people.

30:20 The phrase all the sheep and cattle designates additional animals not part of the people's assets at Ziklag, since it was called David's plunder.

30:21 On the 200 exhausted men, see note at [verse 10](#).

30:22 Normally the victorious soldiers would divide the spoils of the battle. Some of those who had fought did not want to share any of the plunder with those who were too tired to proceed past the Wadi Besor.

[30:23](#) David's reply revealed his character. He emphasized that the Lord had protected them and brought the victory. Who could have imagined the rescue of absolutely everything they lost with no loss of life?

[30:24](#) David's insistence that warriors and keepers of the supplies would share equally in the spoils parallels the concept of the unity of the body of Christ described in the NT ([Rm 12:3-8](#)).

[30:25](#) David's decision about the equitable distribution of plunder became a law and an ordinance for future generations. The specific mention of Israel anticipates David's reign over the entire country. On to this very day, see note at [6:17-18](#).

[30:26](#) The plunder of the Lord's enemies came most recently from the Amalekites, but it may have included property that the elders of Judah would recognize as formerly taken from them in Amalekite raids.

[30:27](#) The exact location of most of the places in Judah mentioned in [verses 27-31](#) is uncertain. Ramoth of the Negev is mentioned in [Jos 19:8](#). Jattir was a Levitical city ([Jos 21:14](#)), designated for the Levites with its surrounding pasture lands.

[30:28](#) Eshtemoa was also a Levitical city ([Jos 21:14](#)).

[30:29](#) The Jerahmeelites and Kenites lived in the areas where David had fought and destroyed Israel's enemies ([27:10](#)).

[30:30](#) Hormah was a place that the Israelites had fought and conquered at least three times ([Num 21:3](#); [Jos 12:14](#); [Jdg 1:17](#)).

[30:31](#) Hebron, Judah's natural capital, lay about 19 miles south of Jerusalem in the Judean hill country. Hebron was conquered by Caleb during Joshua's time ([Jos 14:13-14](#)), and it became both a Levitical city ([Jos 21:13](#)) and a city of refuge ([Jos 20:7](#)). After Saul's death, the city became David's capital for seven and one-half years ([2Sam 5:5](#)).

English Standard Version - Study Bible²

1 Samuel 29-30

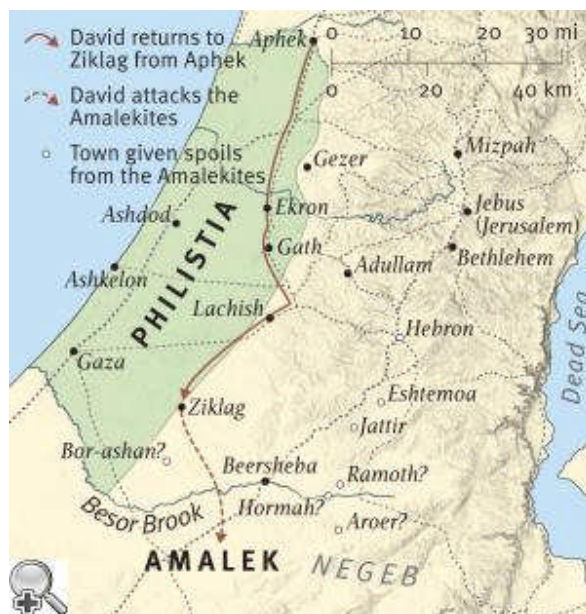
1 Samuel 29

29:1-11 *The Philistine Rulers Reject David.* Although Achish of Gath trusts David, the other Philistine commanders suspect that he would betray them, and they insist that he be sent home. In God's providence, David is thus spared the occasion to shed Israelite blood.

29:1 The story backtracks to right after [28:2](#), partially repeating [28:1](#). Here the Philistines are still at their gathering point in **Aphek**, while in [28:4](#) they had already advanced to Shunem. Aphek was also where the Philistines had camped in [4:1](#). Because it was at the northernmost point in the Philistine coastal plain, it was a strategic place to gather for a general attack on the Jezreel Valley. The **spring** is probably the spring of Harod, southeast of the city of Jezreel at the foot of Mount Gilboa; here Gideon encamped against the Midianites ([Judg. 7:1](#)).

David Recovers Plunder from the Amalekites

As David and his men sought refuge in Philistia, the Philistines gathered their forces at Aphek to attack the Israelites. The Philistine commanders, skeptical of David's loyalty in battle against his fellow Israelites, sent him to his home in Ziklag. When David arrived, he discovered that the Amalekites had raided the Negeb and burned Ziklag to the ground, carrying away many captives and belongings. David and his men pursued them, crossing the Besor Brook and attacking the Amalekites. He recovered all that had been taken, returned to Ziklag, and sent a portion of the spoils to the leaders of towns in the region (the locations of Bethel, Siphmoth, Racal, and Athach are unknown).



29:2-3 The **lords of the Philistines** are the rulers of the five Philistine cities (see [6:4](#), [16-18](#)). These *seranim* (Hb.) in [29:2](#), [6](#), and [7](#) seem to be the same as the **commanders**, or “rulers” (Hb. *sarim*; plural of *sar*), in [vv. 3, 4](#), and [9](#). An inscription from Ekron gives evidence that *sar* was the title of the ruler of a Philistine city.

2. Lane T. Dennis, ed., *ESV Study Bible, The: English Standard Version*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Bibles, 2008), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "1 Samuel 29-30".

29:4 Unlike Achish, the other Philistine **commanders** mistrusted David, fearing that he would seek to regain the favor of Saul (**his lord**) by presenting to him **the heads of the men here** (probably meaning “our heads”). One can see the hand of the Lord working even through the Philistine commanders to keep David from fighting the Lord’s people, which he had managed to avoid doing so far. That would probably have shut him off from being accepted by Israel as king (**27:8-12**) and would have been a terrible evil (see note on **25:32-35**).

29:6 It seems strange that Achish the Philistine ruler would say “**as the LORD lives.**” Yet to polytheistic people, to make an oath in the name of gods other than the gods they normally serve is not unthinkable. So this Philistine king may well have sworn to David by the God David worshiped.

29:8 fight against the enemies of my lord the king. One can suspect ambiguity here as to the identity of “my lord the king.” On the surface the phrase refers to Achish, but it is possible David was actually referring to Saul, whose enemies were the Philistines. Readers are not told what David was thinking, but the commanders may have been wise.

29:11 From here, the action splits. **Chapter 30** follows David’s actions, while **ch. 31** is a continuation of Saul’s actions in **28:5-25** and the Philistines’ actions in **ch. 29**. **The Philistines went up to Jezreel** by way of Shunem (cf. **28:4**, then **ch. 31**). Saul’s visit to the medium (**28:5-25**) occurred within this location. Jezreel is at the northwest foot of Mount Gilboa and guards the eastern entrance to the Jezreel Valley.

1 Samuel 30

30:1-31 Amalekite Raid on Ziklag and David’s Victory. David does the kingly work of delivering the people of Ziklag from their Amalekite captors, and of leading his own followers in dividing the spoil generously.

30:1 the third day. It was about 50 miles (81 km) from Aphek to Ziklag. The Amalekites surely knew that the bulk of the armies of Philistia and Judah (**v. 14**) had gone to the battle in the north, and they took advantage of that fact.

30:6 But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God, and God comforts and strengthens him. Rather than despairing, David turns to God in prayer and worship (cf. **Ps. 56:3-4**).

30:7 As in **23:9-10**, David has **Abiathar** inquire of the Lord, using the sacred lots kept in the ephod. The Lord is still guiding David (**30:8**).

30:9 If the hypothesis is correct that Ziklag was Tel esh-Sheriah and the **brook Besor** was Wadi Ghazzeah, this takes place about 12 miles (19 km) southwest of Ziklag.

30:11-12 Bread here may refer simply to bread, or it may be a general term for food, so that what they specifically gave the Egyptian is stated in the next sentence. The sugar of the dried fruit would have had an immediate effect.

30:14 “Cherethites” seems to be a synonym for “Philistines” in **Ezek. 25:16** and **Zeph. 2:5**. Since the Philistines are known to be of Aegean origin, the word probably derived from “Cretan.” So the **Negeb of the Cherethites** is probably southern Philistia. The **Negeb of Caleb** is the area south of Hebron.

30:17 The word translated **twilight** usually means “dusk” but occasionally it can also mean “dawn,” and the sense here is disputed. If it means “dawn,” David and his men probably waited until morning to attack in order to avoid killing their own people or letting the Amalekites escape, and the battle continued during the daylight hours until sunset, which would be considered the start of the next day (see note on [14:28](#)). The singular subject **David** in [30:17-20](#) stresses that this was David’s personal victory.

30:19 **Nothing was missing.** Under God’s direction ([vv. 8, 23](#)), David, who would soon be king, rescued every one of the people who had sided with him, and for whom he was responsible.

30:22 **Worthless** is also used variously to describe a supposedly drunken woman ([1:16](#)), Eli’s sons ([2:12](#)), the men who opposed Saul ([10:27](#)), Nabal ([25:25](#)), David as described by Shimei ([2 Sam. 16:7](#)), and the rebel Sheba ([2 Sam. 20:1](#)).

30:24 **They shall share alike.** David, who will rule as a righteous king, generously distributes the spoils of victory to all who sided with him, and even gives gifts to others ([vv. 26-31](#)) who will soon be his subjects.

30:25 **Rule** (Hb. *mishpat*) is translated elsewhere as “custom” ([2:13](#)), “ways” ([8:11](#)), and “rights and duties” ([10:25](#)).

30:26-31 See note on [v. 24](#). **Hebron** was the major city in the area. **Bethel** is not the famous Bethel ([7:16](#); [10:3](#); [13:2](#)) but an otherwise unknown city in Judah. **Jattir** and **Eshtemoa** are Levitical cities in the Judean hills ([Josh. 15:48, 50; 21:14](#)); **Bor-ashan** is probably Ashan in the Shephelah ([Josh. 19:7](#)). The locations of the other places are uncertain. The position of Hebron at the end of the list points toward David’s going to Hebron and being made king ([2 Sam. 2:4](#)).

NLT Life Application Study Bible³

1 Samuel 29-30

Chapter 29

29:4 The other Philistine commanders knew that David was the one who, as a young man, had killed their champion, Goliath ([17:32-54](#)), had killed hundreds of Philistine soldiers ([18:27](#)), and was the hero of Israelite victory songs ([21:11](#)). They were afraid that, in the heat of battle, David might turn against them. Although David was upset at this at first, God used the commanders' suspicion to keep him from having to fight against Saul and his countrymen.

Chapter 30

30:6 Faced with the tragedy of losing their families, David's soldiers began to turn against him and even talked about killing him. Instead of planning a rescue, they looked for someone to blame. But David found his strength in God and began looking for a solution instead of a scapegoat. When facing problems, remember that it is useless to look for someone to blame or criticize. Instead, consider how you can help find a solution.

30:7 David couldn't go to the Tabernacle to ask the Lord for guidance because it was in Saul's territory. Therefore, he called for the ephod, the only Tabernacle-related object he possessed. In the presence of the priest and this priestly garment, he asked God for direction. When David called for the ephod, he was really asking the priest to bring him the Urim and Thummim, which were kept in a pouch attached to the ephod. Only the high priest could carry and use the Urim and Thummim. (For more information on the ephod and its contents, see the note on [Exodus 39:1-21](#).)

30:11-15 The Amalekites cruelly left this slave to die, but God used him to lead David and his men to the Amalekite camp. David and his men treated the young man kindly, and he returned the kindness by leading them to the enemy. Treat those you meet with respect and dignity no matter how insignificant they may seem. You never know how God will use them to help you or haunt you, depending upon your response to them.

30:24, 25 David made a law that those who guarded the equipment were to be treated equally with those who fought in battle. Today it takes several people to provide the support services needed for every soldier in battle. In the church and other organizations, we need to treat those who provide support services equally with those on the front lines. Without bookkeepers, secretaries, trainers, and administrators, those with a public ministry would be unable to do their jobs. Are you on the front lines? Don't forget those who are backing you up. Are you in the support group? Realize that your position, although it may be less glamorous or exciting, is vital to the work of the entire group.

3. *Life Application Study Bible*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1988), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under "Chapter 29" & 456.

Life Essentials Study Bible⁴

A Principle to Live by:

Sincere Prayer

from 1 Samuel 29:1—30:31

*We should remember that God, as our heavenly Father,
is always available when we sincerely seek His help.*

David paid a terrible price for taking matters into his own hands and finding his security among the Philistines. He had deceived King Achish but not his Philistine commanders. They didn't trust David and his men to go into battle with them against Israel ([29:4-5](#)). Though Achish still believed that David was a loyal defector, he had no choice but to send him and his men back to Ziklag, the city the king had given David and his men and their families ([29:6-7](#)).

David and his men returned to their homes only to discover that the Amalekites had raided the city, burned it to the ground, and had taken all the women and children ([30:2](#)). At this point, David once again faced the seriousness of his self-centered sinful behavior. His own men threatened to stone him ([30:6](#)). In serious trouble, and probably understanding once again how foolish he had been, David turned to God for guidance and once again the Lord gave him a direct message ([30:7-8](#)). By God's grace, they were able to retrieve everyone alive.

We see here how human David really was. Unfortunately, we have tended to idealize him because of what he was like as a young shepherd boy with a heart for God. However, again and again he regressed to old sin patterns in his life. In fact, his greatest failure still lay ahead.

Even though David often regressed spiritually, God was always there to respond to his sincere call for help. Fortunately for all of us, the Son of God "is the same yesterday, today, and forever" ([Heb 13:8](#)). God is still our loving heavenly Father who will discipline us when we sin but who will never turn His back on us when we sincerely seek His forgiveness and help. This is really the primary message Jesus was teaching in the story of the prodigal son. The father was rejoicing and celebrating because his wayward son had been lost and was found ([Lk 15:24,32](#)).

Reflection and Response

Why is it so easy for all of us at times to regress to old self-centered sin patterns?

4. Gene Getz, *Life Essentials Study Bible*, (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2011), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 389.