

1 SAMUEL—WEEK 21

GOD RULES



F. Michael Slay

A DEEP Study

The Fellowship of Ailbe

*The Cover Picture is David and Goliath by Titian (1487–1576)
On display in the church of Santa Maria della Salute in Venice, Italy*

Ziklag is burned, and everyone's family is carried off by the Amalekites. But David seeks the LORD's will and is blessed in recovering them. Thus, he declares a statute for the distribution of spoils.

As Samuel predicted, Saul's life finally comes to an end as he's injured in battle and falls on his sword.

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! Samuel, Week 21 — God Rules
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1 1 Samuel 30:1–8

Now it happened, when David and his men came to Ziklag, on the third day, that the Amalekites had invaded the South and Ziklag, attacked Ziklag and burned it with fire, and had taken captive the women and those who were there, from small to great; they did not kill anyone, but carried them away and went their way. So David and his men came to the city, and there it was, burned with fire; and their wives, their sons, and their daughters had been taken captive. Then David and the people who were with him lifted up their voices and wept, until they had no more power to weep. And David's two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail the widow of Nabal the Carmelite, had been taken captive. Now David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.

Then David said to Abiathar the priest, Ahimelech's son, "Please bring the ephod here to me." And Abiathar brought the ephod to David. So David inquired of the LORD, saying, "Shall I pursue this troop? Shall I overtake them?"

And He answered him, "Pursue, for you shall surely overtake them and without fail recover all."

Paybacks baby! The Empire Strikes Back. Remember this?

And David and his men went up and raided the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites. For those nations were the inhabitants of the land from of old, as you go to Shur, even as far as the land of Egypt. Whenever David attacked the land, he left neither man nor woman alive, but took away the sheep, the oxen, the donkeys, the camels, and the apparel, and returned and came to Achish.. — 1 Samuel 27:8–9

While David was meeting with Achish, he left his family and their whole city unguarded. So, the Amalekites get some payback, but, amazingly, they don't kill anyone. Maybe they don't know what David did to their cities. Or, maybe it was divine intervention.

In any case, it's still a disaster. The people are so upset that there's talk of stoning David. It doesn't come to that, but the situation is super tense. David is under great pressure. So, what does he do?

But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.

It's in moments like this that people often act like atheists. There's no time to waste, David! Let's go.

But David keeps his wits, checks with the LORD first, and gets a green light.

This is the spiritual version of due diligence.

The takeaway here is that no decision is so obvious that we can skip praying about it. Note well, this doesn't have to change your decision to make a difference. You may learn things from the prayers that affect your attitude or how you interpret what happens next.

Or your decision may gain a blessing. That's what's about to happen to David.

2 1 Samuel 30:9–15

So David went, he and the six hundred men who were with him, and came to the Brook Besor, where those stayed who were left behind. But David pursued, he and four hundred men; for two hundred stayed behind, who were so weary that they could not cross the Brook Besor.

Then they found an Egyptian in the field, and brought him to David; and they gave him bread and he ate, and they let him drink water. And they gave him a piece of a cake of figs and two clusters of raisins. So when he had eaten, his strength came back to him; for he had eaten no bread nor drunk water for three days and three nights. Then David said to him, “To whom do you belong, and where are you from?”

And he said, “I am a young man from Egypt, servant of an Amalekite; and my master left me behind, because three days ago I fell sick. We made an invasion of the southern area of the Cherethites, in the territory which belongs to Judah, and of the southern area of Caleb; and we burned Ziklag with fire.”

And David said to him, “Can you take me down to this troop?”

So he said, “Swear to me by God that you will neither kill me nor deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will take you down to this troop.”

David catches a huge break here. He encounters an Egyptian servant who had basically been left to die by his Amalekite master.

The Egyptian catches a break too. He didn't die of the illness that made his master discard him like a piece of trash, and now he won't starve either. Needless to say, his loyalty to his former master is shot.

So he negotiates with David to ensure his survival.

This is a great illustration of God's plans unfolding in real time.

When the LORD told David that he should pursue the Amalekite raiders, the Egyptian servant was already sick, abandoned, and alone.

Of course, if the Amalekite master had treated his servant decently, none of this would have happened. Now the Amalekites will be chased down.

But evil is as evil does. The Egyptian servant had little chance of being treated with compassion by these raiders. The minute he's a burden instead of a help, he's gone.

Once again, we see God using evil for good.

And the takeaway is the age-old lesson about goodness.

Always do the right thing without “calculating” whether it will be to your benefit—because the universe has an Author who cares about doing the right thing.

3 1 Samuel 30:16–22

And when he had brought him down, there they were, spread out over all the land, eating and drinking and dancing, because of all the great spoil which they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah. Then David attacked them from twilight until the evening of the next day. Not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men who rode on camels and fled. So David recovered all that the Amalekites had carried away, and David rescued his two wives. And nothing of theirs was lacking, either small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything which they had taken from them; David recovered all. Then David took all the flocks and herds they had driven before those other livestock, and said, “This is David’s spoil.”

Now David came to the two hundred men who had been so weary that they could not follow David, whom they also had made to stay at the Brook Besor. So they went out to meet David and to meet the people who were with him. And when David came near the people, he greeted them. Then all the wicked and worthless men of those who went with David answered and said, “Because they did not go with us, we will not give them any of the spoil that we have recovered, except for every man’s wife and children, that they may lead them away and depart.”

David’s mission to recover his family is perfectly successful. Everyone is safe and sound, plus there is spoil above and beyond the livestock lost when the Amalekites raided Ziklag. David christens all that “*David’s spoil.*”

But a curious rift develops, and it’s not over David calling all the extra spoil, “David’s spoil.” It’s over what to *do* with the recovered spoil—the stuff that was theirs before.

The 400 men who accompanied David on his raid resent the 200 who were too exhausted to make the trip. They say, “*Because they did not go with us, we will not give them any of the spoil that we have recovered, except for every man’s wife and children, that they may lead them away and depart.*”

What’s wrong with that? Why are they referred to as *wicked and worthless men*? Sure, David should call them out for their immature attitude, but “worthless”?

They think the victory was theirs and not the LORD’s. They fail to recognize the “amazing luck” of the abandoned Egyptian servant as anything special. They also think they’re “better” than the 200 whose strength failed.

Being that clueless makes one worthless to the service of the LORD.

This is a more complicated, and important, point than it seems at first glance. Unintended consequences are everywhere. The forces of evil play 3D chess in ways we know nothing about. That’s why David was right to seek the LORD’s will before embarking on the “obvious” path of chasing the Amalekites down.

The unknowns are just too great.

4 1 Samuel 30:23–31 (ESV)

But David said, “You shall not do so, my brothers, with what the LORD has given us. He has preserved us and given into our hand the band that came against us. Who would listen to you in this matter? For as his share is who goes down into the battle, so shall his share be who stays by the baggage. They shall share alike.” And he made it a statute and a rule for Israel from that day forward to this day.

When David came to Ziklag, he sent part of the spoil to his friends, the elders of Judah, saying, “Here is a present for you from the spoil of the enemies of the LORD.” It was for those in Bethel, in Ramoth of the Negeb, in Jattir, in Aroer, in Siphmoth, in Eshtemoa, in Racal, in the cities of the Jerahmeelites, in the cities of the Kenites, in Hormah, in Bor-ashan, in Athach, in Hebron, for all the places where David and his men had roamed.

This is the antithesis of what “*the wicked and worthless men*” wanted to do. David sees the spoil as *what the LORD has given us*. Therefore, it should be distributed amongst the LORD’s people.

The fact that they were able to recover 100% of everything taken is amazing. It should be obvious to everyone that this was no mere coincidence.

So, David makes this equal distribution *a statute and a rule for Israel from that day forward to this day*.

The Hebrew word translated as “statute” (חֹק, *hoq*) is derived from the verb (חָקַח, *hqq*), which means to inscribe or write by cutting—in other words to decree permanently. The Hebrew word translated as “rule” (מִשְׁפָּט, *mish-paht*) is derived from the verb (שָׁפַט, *sho-pait*) which means to judge or govern.

So, this is a permanent judgement, part of Israel’s rules of war, forevermore.

David’s statute recognizes a principle of war that Israel has yet to learn—it’s the whole nation that wins or loses. War isn’t just about the soldiers. The statute gives everyone a sense of “ownership,” thus motivating them.

It won’t be long before all of Israel will be carried off into captivity. Then they’ll understand that the war effort involves everyone.

Today’s passage uses a curious phrase to describe the noncombatants—he *who stays by the baggage*. The Hebrew word translated as baggage (כְּלִים, *kay-leem*) literally means tools or implements. David’s statute is the beginning of appreciating logistics.

Armies need food. Modern armies need fuel and ammunition. Running out of any of these things can be catastrophic. Thus, winning a war depends not just on the combatants, but on the nation supporting them.

In 2022, logistics problems stalled the Russian invasion of Ukraine before it could reach Kiev. A mighty army became sitting ducks. They ultimately withdrew after suffering heavy losses.

David proclaimed the equal distribution statute because it’s righteous, but it turns out to also be practical.

5 1 Samuel 31:1–13 (ESV)

Now the Philistines were fighting against Israel, and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines and fell slain on Mount Gilboa. And the Philistines overtook Saul and his sons, and the Philistines struck down Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchi-shua, the sons of Saul. The battle pressed hard against Saul, and the archers found him, and he was badly wounded by the archers. Then Saul said to his armor-bearer, “Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and mistreat me.” But his armor-bearer would not, for he feared greatly. Therefore Saul took his own sword and fell upon it. And when his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell upon his sword and died with him. Thus Saul died, and his three sons, and his armor-bearer, and all his men, on the same day together. And when the men of Israel who were on the other side of the valley and those beyond the Jordan saw that the men of Israel had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned their cities and fled. And the Philistines came and lived in them.

The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. So they cut off his head and stripped off his armor and sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines, to carry the good news to the house of their idols and to the people. They put his armor in the temple of Ashteroth, and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-shan. But when the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, all the valiant men arose and went all night and took the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons from the wall of Beth-shan, and they came to Jabesh and burned them there. And they took their bones and buried them under the tamarisk tree in Jabesh and fasted seven days.

Saul’s suicide is cowardly and wrong. We have seen David, and now Saul’s armor bearer, refuse to strike the LORD’s anointed. Saul, even though badly wounded, should recognize that his being anointed means something. He could have honorably gone down in battle, instead of by his own hand, but he *predicted* that he might be mistreated.

Then Saul said to his armor-bearer, “Draw your sword, and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and thrust me through, and mistreat me.”

In the end, Saul was controlled by fear.

In contrast to Saul’s cowardice, *the inhabitants of Jabesh-gilead* launch a daring midnight raid to recover his body. They risk their lives so that he can get a proper burial.

In a way, this means that Saul was right. The Philistines did mistreat him. They mistreated his dead body in outrageously dishonorable ways. Who knows what they would have done with his live one.

But all this is secular reasoning. God is in control. Saul should have acted as if he understood that.

But he never has.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. When have you forgotten to pray?
2. What's your favorite example of God using evil for good?
3. When have you seen someone oblivious to a blessing?
4. When have you seen allegiance to righteousness turn out to be practical?
5. What makes you doubt that God is in control? What assures you that He is?

Items for prayer: