

The Weight of the Crown

David Strengthened Himself in the Lord his God

1 Samuel 29-30

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Now when David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day, the Amalekites had made a raid against the Negeb and against Ziklag. They had overcome Ziklag and burned it with fire and taken captive the women and all who were in it, both small and great. They killed no one, but carried them off and went their way. And when David and his men came to the city, they found it burned with fire, and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. Then David and the people who were with him raised their voices and wept until they had no more strength to weep. David's two wives also had been taken captive, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel. And David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because all the people were bitter in soul, each for his sons and daughters. But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God (1 Sam. 30:1-6).

Over the years, I've compared living in the will of God to an orbit around the moon. The idea is that there are gravitational forces in play that cause you to be on an unseen path or orbit. There is movement that is beyond your control.

Sometimes the "will of God" orbit brings you into the sunshine. Life is bright, warm, and clear. But there are other times when the providential orbit brings you to the dark side of the moon. The light from the sun is eclipsed with a shadow. On the dark side of God's will, it feels cold, dark, and ominous. The gravitational forces are still in play. You're moving. You know that one day the sun will peak over the horizon but enduring through the "dark side" of God's will is really hard. The bright side and dark side are both part of God's will, but they are not the same experience.

The way we talk about God's will often tips toward the bright side. We intuitively think about God's will as providing clarity on a decision, revealing his direction, or providing an answer. It is all of that. But God's will also involves the dark, uncertain, and confusing moments. If we think of God's will like an orbit, we are reminded that there are bright spots and there are dark spots. But it's all part of God's will.

That's important for us to consider today because I would suspect that most of us know what it's like to be on the dark side of God's providential orbit. There's probably a number of us who are there right now.

As we come to the end of 1 Samuel, we are witnessing the rise of David and the downfall of Saul. David has likely been on the run for over a decade, and we know that his life of exile is just about over. But he doesn't know that. Instead, he faces two moments of rejection. Now, these will lead to victory. However, the trajectory is risky and painful.

Chapters 29-30 show us the providential hand of God on David's life through rejection and rescue. Remember that even though David is featured prominently in this text, the entire book is about God. There's a plan, a divine orbit, in play here that is instructive.

The Rejected

Chapter 29 takes us back to the situation with David's connection to the Philistines that we covered in chapter 27. The account of the witch of Endor occupied chapter 28, and now the scene shifts to the Philistine army's impending invasion of Israel.

Interestingly, the chapter begins with a reference to Aphek. This was not only a convenient location for battle in the Jezreel Valley area, but it is also the location of the battle where the ark was captured in 1 Samuel 4. This defeat led, in part, to the people's desire for a king. They hoped that their king would deliver them from the Philistines (1 Sam. 9:16). And after all the drama, we're back at Aphek with a threat from the Philistines.

Verses 2-3 tell us that, as the Philistines were organizing their army, there was a concern expressed about David and his men being involved. Achish, the king of Gath, defended David since he viewed him as a loyal mercenary. But the other leaders of the Philistines protested:

"... Send the man back, that he may return to the place to which you have assigned him. He shall not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he become an adversary to us. For how could this fellow reconcile himself to his lord? Would it not be with the heads of the men here? Is not this David, of whom they sing to one another in dances, 'Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands'?" (1 Sam. 29:4-5).

Achish really had no choice here, and he delivered the message to David that he could not fight alongside the Philistines. Interestingly, David questioned this decision:

And David said to Achish, "But what have I done? What have you found in your servant from the day I entered your service until now, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?" (1 Sam. 29:8).

At the prompting of Achish, David and his men set out early to return to the land of the Philistines, a multiday journey back to Ziklag.

We're left to wonder about what David had been planning here. Had he been thinking that he'd use the Philistines to overthrow Saul? Had he been planning to double-cross the Philistines? Had he been stuck and pretending to be upset? We're not entirely sure.

Additionally, we need to remember that we know about the witch of Endor and the prophesy about Saul's death, but David knew nothing about this. He didn't know that Samuel had spoken to Saul from the grave. He didn't know that in a few days Saul would be killed at the hands of the Philistines.

Now, imagine if David were part of the Philistine army when Saul was killed. The story of David might have been written very differently and with unhelpful suspicion. Given David's protest, I think he had a plan in mind, and this rejection seemed challenging to whatever he had in mind.

If that's the case, then this rejection was actually part of God's protection for David. He was providentially kept out of the battle that would result in Saul and Jonathan's deaths. It seems that the Lord redirected David's steps because there was another plan in place.

A few weeks ago, I asked you to consider "What might God be doing here?" Do you know when we are most likely to need that question? It's when we are facing closed doors, hinderances, or some kind of rejection. Those scenarios are hard. They can be frustrating and confusing. And yet it's important to realize that God still works through rejection.

Can I remind you today that God's will always involves some kind of "dark-side orbit"? Just because you don't see how rejection fits within a plan, doesn't mean it's bad. God may be setting you up for something else or preventing you from a disaster. "Yes" is a part of God's will. And so is "no" or "not yet."

Rejection, while hard and painful, is part of God's plan.

The Rescuer

In chapter 30, things get a lot worse. It was a three-day journey back to Ziklag, and when they arrived home, they made a horrifying discovery. The Amalekites had raided the area, including the city: "they overcame Ziklag and burned it with fire and taken captive the women and all who were in it, both small and great . . ." (30:1b-2).

You can imagine the heartbreak and concern. The narrator repeats the terrible news:

And when David and his men came to the city, they found it burned with fire, and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive (1 Sam. 30:3).

There was widespread grief. They "raised their voices and wept until they had no more strength to weep" (v. 4). The tragedy of the moment completely spent them. Take careful note of the phrase "no more strength" because we'll come back to it.

The narrator also wants to make it clear that David was impacted too. Verse 5 tells us that his two wives, Ahinoam and Abigail, were also taken captive. But there's another problem:

And David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because all the people were bitter in soul, each for his sons and daughters . . . (1 Sam. 30:6).

Commentator John Woodhouse says:

"All of {David's} successes had been undone by this disaster. They were "bitter in soul" again. Their bitterness then turned to blame. David was, after all, responsible for the daring plan to

find safety in Philistine territory, along with the scheme to ‘make raids’ that had so terribly turned against them. It was not entirely unreasonable for the men to see David as responsible for their terrible loss. They began to talk of venting their grief-stricken anger on their leader.”¹

The point here is to not only demonstrate the terrible position in which David found himself, but also to link him with other leaders in Israel’s history, like Moses, who faced the disappointment and wrath of the people whom they led. It’s also possible that the narrator is showing how both David and Saul were in terrible spots. Saul told Samuel this regarding the Philistine invasion:

I am in great distress, for the Philistines are warring against me, and God has turned away from me and answers me no more, either by prophets or by dreams. Therefore I have summoned you to tell me what I shall do (1 Sam. 28:15).

Both Saul and David were in great distress. But unlike Saul, David found spiritual strength: “But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God” (1 Sam. 30:6). We’ll come back to this. For now, it’s important to see the contrast. Saul appealed to a witch. David called for the priest.

He inquired of the Lord. Some commentators wonder if this moment is happening at the same time as Saul’s consultation of the witch. While we don’t know about the timing, we do know how closely they are positioned in the 1 Samuel narration.

Saul was rejected. God won’t answer him. He consulted a witch. David was the anointed king. God’s hand was upon him. When he sought God, answers came. As we come to the end of the book, we see the divergent paths of these two men.

In verse 8, David received the answer from the Lord, and he set out with four hundred men to find their wives and children. Two hundred stayed behind because they were too exhausted. They began searching for their families, but they had no idea where they’d been taken. Providentially, they found an Egyptian servant who was left behind (vv. 11-15) and who could take them to the encampment of the Amalekites.

David and his men struck the camp while the Amalekites were celebrating their spoils. They were victorious over the Amalekites and rescued their families. Verses 18-20 summarize the victory:

David recovered all that the Amalekites had taken, and David rescued his two wives. Nothing was missing, whether small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything that had been taken. David brought back all. David also captured all the flocks and herds, and the people drove the livestock before him, and said, “This is David’s spoil” (1 Sam. 30:18-20).

A few things that you need to know about these verses. First, they celebrate the complete restoration of what had been taken previously. Second, the name of David is very prominent: “David recovered,”

¹ John Woodhouse, [1 Samuel: Looking for a Leader](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 533.

“David rescued,” “David brought back,” “David captured,” “David’s spoil.” The blessing of God is clearly on David. The focus of leadership in 1 Samuel is shifting dramatically.

But the crisis isn’t over. In verses 21-25, the four hundred men who fought with David became possessive of the reclaimed property. They suggested that the two hundred men who stayed behind should just receive back their families, but not receive any of the goods.

David wisely refused to accommodate the selfish demands of the soldiers. Verse 22 describes them as “wicked and worthless.” He rebuked them, attributing the spoil to the blessing of the Lord (v. 23) along with the fact that the two hundred men stayed behind to protect the baggage.

What’s fascinating here is that the narrator indicates that this became a principle or rule in David’s kingdom. The anointed king was already creating policies and a culture in his kingdom. The contrast between Saul and David continues to emerge.

Finally, this text ends with David taking some of the spoils and distributing them to the elders of Judah (v. 26). Rather than having been a king who takes (1 Sam. 8:10-18), David was a leader who blessed. John Woodhouse writes:

“This chapter has revealed the kind of king who could replace {Saul}. He was a man who found his strength in God. He listened to God’s voice and eagerly obeyed. God gave him decisive victory over his enemies, enabling him to save his people. He ruled in the knowledge of God’s grace and therefore with equity and generosity. To be counted among the friends of this king was to be blessed. He was a king who gives.”²

It's quite a contrast from Saul and how this chapter began with rejection from the Philistine lords. After a long season of being on the dark side of God’s will, the dawn of a new day was beginning to emerge.

Strategies for Strength

Let’s go back to the phrase “David strengthened himself in the Lord his God” (v. 6). It’s positioned in a really dark place in David’s life. Rejected by the Philistines. His family was taken. His band of men wanted to kill him.

Can I invite you to embrace four strategies from Psalms for strengthening yourself in God?

1. **Perspective** - “My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever” (Ps. 73:26).

² John Woodhouse, [*1 Samuel: Looking for a Leader*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2008), 541–542.

When you are on the “dark side” of God’s will, remind your weary heart that there’s an opportunity for God to be your strength. Exhaustion and discouragement never negate God’s ability to help you. While you wait for God’s plan to unfold, you can strengthen yourself in God.

2. **Promises** - “My soul melts away for sorrow; strengthen me according to your word!” (Ps.119:28)

The heart of the Christian is not strengthened theoretically but practically with the promises in God’s Word. Don’t allow sorrow or fear to push you away from the Scriptures. Allow the Word of God—one promise at a time—to remind you what’s true. The promises of God fuel spiritual strength.

3. **Prayer** - “O LORD, you hear the desire of the afflicted; you will strengthen their heart; you will incline your ear” (Ps.10:17).

Strengthen yourself in God by talking to him when you are afflicted, confused, or hurting. God inclines his ear to those who lament. Don’t give God the silent treatment. Strengthen your heart through prayer.

4. **Presence** - “Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually!” (Ps. 105:4).

“Always with us”—that’s the assurance given to us. The enemy would have you believe that you’ve been abandoned, but it’s never true. God invites us to seek him and his strength with the assurance of his watchful care.

Perspective, promises, prayer, and presence. These are a few of the ways that we can strengthen ourselves in the Lord.

When you find yourself on the dark side of God’s will, strengthen yourself in the Lord your God.

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