

## **David's Trial**

**1 Samuel 29-30**

By [Dr. Derek W. H. Thomas](#)

Now turn with me in 1 Samuel to chapter 29. And in addition to chapter 29 as your bulletin suggests I'm also this evening going to be looking at chapter 30. I think these two chapters just belong together and trying to separate them was just not working for me. Now we're almost at the end of 1 Samuel and in the fall, at least this is the plan now, we'll pick up in 2 Samuel and continue the story of David.

Now last week we were in chapter 28 and if you were here you'll know that Saul is disintegrating and visiting this witch at a cave in En-dor. Several of you, we were very time pressed — unlike tonight — we were very time pressed last week and I just never got to the point of answering that one question which was on everybody's mind in chapter 28 when the spirit of Samuel says to Saul that he and his sons will be “with him” tomorrow. And many of you wondered what that meant. Did that mean that I was wrong, after all, about Saul, that he was after all regenerate and that he was going to heaven.

And that's just asking way too much of that text. I just think that all that that means is that Saul, like Samuel, as far as this world is concerned, will be dead. There's so little insight into life after death in the Old Testament. Every now and then, and David for sure in some of his psalms, peaks over the fence or perhaps better, over the wall. It was Lloyd-Jones, I think, who described it in this way that in the Old Testament it's like a man jumping, trying to see over the wall, and every now and then he jumps high enough just to catch a little glimpse of what's on the other side. But after Pentecost all of that changes, and we're given an insight into what happens at death, and what happens at the time of the Second Coming, and the resurrection of the body, and of the new heavens and the new earth in a way that Isaiah glimpsed at the end of his prophecy. So, no, I haven't changed my mind about Saul.

I do think there is something going on here between Saul and Judas and I was trying to draw that analogy last week. There are so many similarities, particularly that last meal with the witch in chapter 28, it just sounds so much like the last meal of Judas. And the way it ends in verse 25, “Then they rose and went away that night,” and doesn't that remind you of Judas? It was night when he left. And those I think are just literary allusions suggesting that there is something of a typology going on here, certainly between David and Jesus but also sadly

between Saul and Judas. And we will see that again tragically in chapter 31 where there are some Judas-like allusions in chapter 31.

But tonight — I'm going to be like last week and be short of time if I don't stop — tonight we're going to look at chapters 29 and 30. And before we do so, let's look to God in prayer.

*Our Father in heaven, we are grateful once again for Your mercies to us and especially for the gift of Scripture. We thank You that holy men of old wrote, as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. Now as we read these two chapters together we ask for Your blessing that we might read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest and all for Jesus' sake. Amen.*

Hear now the Word of God:

Now the Philistines had gathered all their forces at Aphek. And the Israelites were encamped by the spring that is in Jezreel. As the lords of the Philistines were passing on by hundreds and by thousands, and David and his men were passing on in the rear with Achish, the commanders of the Philistines said, "What are these Hebrews doing here?" And Achish said to the commanders of the Philistines, "Is this not David, the servant of Saul, king of Israel, who has been with me now for days and years, and since he deserted to me I have found no fault in him to this day." But the commanders of the Philistines were angry with him. And the commanders of the Philistines said to him, "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'?"

Then Achish called David and said to him, "As the Lord lives, you have been honest, and to me it seems right that you should march out and in with me in the campaign. For I have found nothing wrong in you from the day of your coming to me to this day. Nevertheless, the lords do not approve of you. So go back now; and go peaceably, that you may not displease the lords of the Philistines." 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?" And Achish answered David and said, "I know that you are as blameless in my sight as an angel of God. Nevertheless, the commanders of the Philistines have said, 'He shall not go up with us to the battle.' Now then rise early in the morning with the servants of your lord who came with you, and start early in the morning, and depart as soon as you have light." So David set out with his men early in the morning to return to the land of the Philistines. But the Philistines went up to Jezreel.

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.

And David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, "Bring me the ephod." So Abiathar brought the ephod to David. And David inquired of the Lord, "Shall I pursue after this band? Shall I overtake them?" He answered him, "Pursue, for you shall surely overtake and shall surely rescue." So David set out, and the six hundred men who were with him, and they came to the brook Besor, where those who were left behind stayed. But David pursued, he and four hundred men. Two hundred stayed behind, who were too exhausted to cross the brook Besor.

They found an Egyptian in the open country and brought him to David. And they gave him bread and he ate. They gave him water to drink, and they gave him a piece of a cake of figs and two clusters of raisins. And when he had eaten, his spirit revived, for he had not eaten bread or drunk water for three days and three nights. And David said to him, "To whom do you belong? And where are you from?" He said, "I am a young man of Egypt, servant to an Amalekite, and my master left me behind because I fell sick three days ago. We had made a raid against the Negeb of the Cherethites and against that which belongs to Judah and against the Negeb of Caleb, and we burned Ziklag with fire." And David said to him, "Will you take me down to this band?" And he said, "Swear to me by God that you will not kill me or deliver me into the hands of my master, and I will take you down to this band."

And when he had taken him down, behold, they were spread abroad over all the land, eating and drinking and dancing, because of all the great spoil they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from the land of Judah. And David struck them down from twilight until the evening of the next day, and not a man of them escaped, except four hundred young men, who mounted camels and fled. 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."

Then David came to the two hundred men who had been too exhausted to follow David, and who had been left at the brook Besor. And they went out to meet David and to meet the people who were with him. And when David came near to the people he greeted them. Then all the wicked and worthless fellows among the men who had gone with David said, "Because they did not go with us, we will not give them any of the spoil that we have recovered, except that each man may lead away his wife and children, and depart." 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 Borashan, in Athach, in Hebron, for all the places where David and his men had roamed.

Well, may God bless that reading of His holy and inerrant Word.

Thomas Obadiah Chisholm died in 1960. He spent most of his life as a junior high school teacher. He had been converted in his mid to late 20s. He had tried the ministry for a couple of years and came to the conclusion this was not God's will for him and he spent the rest of his days teaching in high school. His life was relatively unremarkable except for one thing, the hymn that he wrote, "Great is Thy Faithfulness." If there is a lesson in these two chapters it is that — great is God's faithfulness. I think you could write over these two chapters, in fact you could write over the whole of Samuel as we bring this first book of Samuel to a conclusion — you could write 2 Corinthians 1:9 — "God is faithful." You could write underneath as a kind of footnote of these chapters 2 Timothy 2:13 — "If we are faithless, God remains faithful."

David has spent sixteen months with the Philistines, with Achish, one of the five lords of the Philistines. You remember back in chapter 5 of 1 Samuel, when the Philistines had taken the Ark of the Covenant, you remember and they had broken out in boils they had to send five golden mice. You remember that strange thing that they had to do for the tumors, perhaps because the mice had brought bubonic plague or something of that nature upon them, the five, of course, representing the five lords of the Philistines of which one of them is

Achish and four others we meet now in this chapter.

David has spent sixteen months in Ziklag, this town that they have occupied, David and his six hundred men. The book of Chronicles tells us that others had now joined David. Samuel doesn't mention it but Chronicles does. Some of Saul's men had defected from Saul at this period and had gone over to David so there may have been upwards of a thousand men in total and their wives and children so this was two thousand at a modest number of people, of mouths to feed. And David had made, you remember, the decision to cross over away from Saul and his men and from his home territory of Hebron and its environs, over now into the land occupied by the Philistines. He had been raiding in the southern Negeb, Canaanites, Amalekites indeed as we shall see in this chapter, but telling Achish that he had been raiding tribes of Judah, deceiving Achish. We looked into the whole business of the ethics of telling lies in warfare. It's part of what warfare is about. We wouldn't want to hobble a Christian soldier by having to tell the truth and not deceive the enemy when lives are at stake.

Now, this has got David into all kinds of trouble and difficulty, not least the cliff hanger at the end of chapter 27 when Achish, you remember, makes David his life-long body guard and then says, "Now we're going to go to war against Israel and you're going to come as my body guard." And the great question, before we looked at the disintegration of Saul in chapter 28, the great question was: Would David go to battle against his own people in league with the Philistines? Now they're preparing for battle and you can imagine the men of battle are being passed before the five Philistine lords. You have visions, perhaps, of Moscow in those gray, shady days when troops would pass before some military and political leaders on a much smaller scale, of course. But then these four Philistine lords see the Hebrews and David, and they're having none of it and David is urged to return to Ziklag.

### **I. God is faithful even when we are not.**

Now the first thing I want us to see is that God is faithful even when we are not. God is faithful even when we are not. 2 Timothy 2:13 — "When we are faithless, God remains faithful."

Now, some other commentators have been pretty harsh on David; some have questioned whether he should ever have been in Philistia. One of my favorite Old Testament commentators is Alec Motyer and he spares no ink in vitriol against David at this point in his life. He uses words like "gross" and "duplicitous" and "grizzly conduct" about David's actions in Philistia. Others, and it's the others that I've been following more or less in this interpretation of David — I've been listening to your interpretations, too, of David but I've been giving David perhaps more of the benefit of the doubt than some commentators do. I have some commentators on my side, you understand.

These are incredibly difficult times and it's easy for us to sit in these comfortable pews at First Presbyterian Church on a Sunday evening and “tut-tut” at David for doing this and that but honestly, what would you do? You've got a thousand fifteen hundred, maybe two thousand mouths to feed, you're on the run — are you to go back? Is that what David should have done, gone back to Saul and just dodged those javelins and remember David to pray three times a day and read your Bible? Or does he go in this terribly difficult situation over to the Philistines and play the double-agent game?

It's interesting to ask the question in verse 8 of chapter 29 — David says to Achish — you know, Achish has now tried to persuade him to go back to Ziklag and David is saying, “What have I done? Haven't I been faithful? What have you found in your servant from the day I entered into your service until now that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?” Now who is the “my lord the king” that David actually means there? Does he mean the enemies of Achish or does he actually mean as a double-agent against Saul's enemies, namely in the battle?

And this is, I think, what David was intending to do, that in the midst of this battle he would turn tables and fight the Philistines and win this great victory on behalf of Saul and on behalf of Israel. That's what the four Philistine lords suspected that David would do and it makes sense except it was enormously risky. There were absolutely no guarantees that David and his men would ever have been able to pull that off. And in David's protestations here in verses 8 and 9 he's being let out of this conundrum. God has used the four pagan Philistine lords to release David from this conundrum and David is protesting. And you want to say, “David, that's enough protest because Achish just might change his mind.” God has intervened here. This is an astonishing intervention of God's providence.

In Sunday school this morning we were looking at Psalm 124, written just after this period in David's life. If it hadn't been the Lord who was on our side, no let's say this again — “if it hadn't been that the Lord was on our side we would have been swallowed up.” But what happened? Do you remember the image that David uses in Psalm 124? We were like a bird let go from a trap. Have you ever seen a bird in a trap and then when that trap sort of breaks that “whoosh.” That bird goes. David has escaped and he's escaped by the providence of God. God has been faithful to His king. God has been faithful to His chosen one. You know, Ralph Davis put it so memorably I just can't improve on it. He says, “God prepares a table for us in the presence of our enemies and sometimes He makes our enemies prepare that table.” And that's exactly what's happening here. God has used these four heathen Philistine warlords to release David from an incredibly difficult conundrum. God is faithful even when we are not.

## **II. God is faithful even when things get worse.**

The second thing that we see here is that God is faithful even when things get worse. God is faithful even when things get worse. Do you remember how Amos begins his prophecy? He talks about somebody going out for a walk in the woods and he meets a lion and he runs away from the lion and he meets a bear. And he runs away from a bear and he gets inside his home and he shuts the door and he puts his hands on the wall and there's a snake there that bites him. That's some sermon. But that's exactly what's happening to David. He's just escaped like a bird from one moment of unimaginable trouble and he goes back to Ziklag and what does he find? He finds the place is torched. Now, we are told in the first verses of chapter 30, we are told by the author that everything's okay, the wives and children are fine. It was in fact standard practice not to kill them because they would sell them into slavery and make a lot of money that way. But "A," David doesn't even know who they were, who has done this, and "B," David doesn't know that they're even alive. His men turn against him. They cry so much they haven't got any strength left with which to cry. I'm saying God is faithful even when things get worse.

We tend to say when good things happens, "Isn't providence good?" we say. But you know, providence is good even when bad things happen because we believe that God is in control. God is sovereign. God will not let anything happen to you outside His will, even dark things, even terrible things, distressing things. God is still in control.

You notice in verse 6 David is in the depths now. His own men have turned against him. There's talk of stoning him. They're so cut up about their daughters and sons — actually there's no mention of their wives — but they're so cut up about their daughters and sons they're about to stone David. And you notice, at the end of verse 6, David "strengthened himself in the Lord." He strengthened himself in the Lord. Now that phrase has occurred before in Samuel. It occurs in chapter 23. And on that occasion it was Jonathan, Saul's son, David's friend, who "strengthened David in the Lord." And how did he do that? He did that by reminding David of the promise that Samuel had given him that he was the anointed one, that he was the next king of Israel. And in the depths of David's circumstances here, what did he do? He's strengthening himself in the Lord. He's not saying, "You know I need to pick myself up by my bootstraps. I need to think pleasant thoughts and just shut out all negativity." No, he's reminding himself of the promise, the promise that God has given to him.

He calls for the ephod. You know in the ephod were these two — what were they — pieces of wood or pieces of metal. They were kept in the priest's ephod, and the Urim and Thummim were the two pieces kept in the ephod, and when he calls for the priest's ephod — which Abiathar the son of Ahimelech had brought from Nob — he asks the Lord, he inquires, "Shall I go after this band?" And he gets a "yes." God is, at this period in the Church's infancy, this is the way God spoke. He doesn't speak like that anymore. It would be great if we could just

solve all our problems just by throwing, you know, sticks on the floor. But God has given us something much better than that. God has given us His Word, His Word. So when it says, "David strengthened himself in the Lord," what it's saying is he strengthened himself in the Word of the Lord, the promise of the Lord, the guidance of the Lord, the direction of the Lord.

The Amalekites had come. They had come for revenge. Now David has engaged in a scorched-earth policy with the Amalekites. He had killed men and women and children and livestock. He had engaged in holy war. He had engaged in the command that God had given to Israel to exterminate the Canaanites. Now, however difficult that is ethically, that is what God asked the Israelites to do and David had been carrying that out as an *agent provocateur*, as a double-agent to be sure. God is faithful even when things get worse. You ever find yourself saying things can't possibly get any worse? But they can. They can. And God is still faithful. His Word abides forever. It cannot be broken.

### **III. God is faithful in little things.**

But there's a third thing I want us to see and that is that God is faithful in little things. You know, David is setting out, but he doesn't know where to go. He probably doesn't even know at this stage that they're Amalekites and they meet this young slave, an Egyptian, and he's just lying there beside the road. He hasn't eaten or drunk anything for three days and they feed him. This slave had been discarded. Some Amalekite has just discarded him as worthless and God uses an Egyptian now to lead David to the camp of the Amalekites and David recovers everything, everything — all the wives, all the sons, all the daughters, all their goods — everything.

Now don't start applying that and saying, "You know, if I follow the Lord and I read my Bible and I believe His promises that God will give me back everything I've lost." No, David is a unique person here. David is the chosen king. This is God fulfilling His promise that through the line of David, Messiah will come. The Gospel hangs in the balance in these stories. If something happens to David, if David were to be suddenly wiped out, if Achish had come after David and killed him, God's promise would have fallen to the ground. We could have no confidence whatsoever in God's Word. God keeps His promise and He's faithful even in little things.

### **IV. God's faithfulness must be the standard of our ethical conduct.**

But there's a fourth thing I want us to see here and that is this: that God is faithful and God's faithfulness must be the standard of our ethical conduct. There are two things that happen at the end of this story. One is, when they're coming back, two hundred of the six hundred men had been left behind at a brook called



Besor. They had been too exhausted. It had taken three days to come from Aphek to Ziklag and probably another day to this river and they're just plain exhausted. So they remain there with the baggage and when the four hundred come back with all of the goods, the plunder of war — these aren't angels you understand. These are rough and ready soldiers and soldiery can make you rougher and readier. And they reveal something of their hearts and their lack of generosity because they say, "We're not sharing any of this with these two hundred men who didn't come and fight with us." And something bigger than what is contained on the page sort of emerges here, something of a largess of David's heart, something that we've not seen in David for a while. What kind of king is he going to be? Well not like Saul. He's going to be a king who's going to be fair and generous and king even to the lowly, even to the underprivileged, even to those who just sat and watched the baggage and didn't go to war.

Doesn't that remind you of something, something beyond the pages of Samuel, something of the kindness of God in the Gospel? That the Gospel and the goodness of the Gospel and the generosity of the Gospel comes to those who do not in any way deserve it, to the weak and lowly and disinherited. And then, right at the end of chapter 30, David sends gifts to all those people, those men, those elders in Israel with whom he and his men had stayed during that period of wandering in and around Hebron.

Right, you can say, "Well of course, David is just greasing the political wheel here. He wants to be king so he wants the favor now of these men." Saul, by this time, is probably dead — though David doesn't know it. The events here are out of chronological sequence and Saul will be dead in the next chapter but it's actually taking place right now. And you might be overcome with cynicism about David here and just say, "Well that's a typical politician's trick — send gifts to various people who you think you can curry their favor." Or is it yet another instance of something of the largess of David's heart? He has received so much. You know, if you read the psalms — Psalm 124, Psalm 59, Psalm 18 — all of them written around this period, David is becoming aware, incredibly aware of just how gracious God has been to him. He has escaped like a bird out of a trap.

I was telling the Sunday school this morning about this little bird that I had in my hands one time and it had developed a concussion because it kept knocking on the window and I had it in my hands and thought it was dead but then it came to. And "whoosh" it went. I can still hear the sound of those wings. It escaped! And when — that's what's happened to us in the Gospel. We have escaped the fires of hell by the skin of our teeth, that's what we've escaped. If it had not been for the Lord who was on our side — and David's generosity at the end, it's not just political cynicism. I think David is saying, "This is how a gracious heart responds. A heart that has received grace is gracious and kind and loving and generous and seeks the good of all the brothers and sisters."

You see, my friends, the Gospel really is at stake here in the life of this

extraordinary individual David. In his ups and downs God is faithful. God is faithful. That's the lesson here. It's not the cleverness of David. It's not the ingenuity of David. It's not the insight and wisdom of David, it's the incredible grace of a loving, faithful, God. He's the same God. He's your God and my God. If we believe in Jesus Christ and we are in union with Jesus Christ this is the kind of God that we have, a God who keeps covenant, a God who says, "No matter what happens, no matter what happens, I will never leave you or forsake you."

*Father, we thank You once again for these Old Testament Scriptures as we glimpse from afar the character of our God and the coming of our Savior. We pray now tonight again that You would hide these words within our hearts. For Jesus' sake we ask it. Amen.*

Please stand. Receive the Lord's benediction. Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

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