

Dr. Robert Chisholm, 1 & 2 Samuel, Session 16, 1 Samuel 29-31

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This is Dr. Bob Chisholm in his teaching on 1 and 2 Samuel. This is session 16, 1 Samuel 29-31. Chapters 29 and 30 are Escaping a Tangled Web, and chapter 31, Death of Saul and His Sons.

In our next lesson, we're going to look at 1 Samuel 29, 30 and 31. 29 and 30 go together. They really are one episode and the focus is going to be on David.

And then in chapter 31, we're going to read about Saul's death on the field of battle. I've entitled 1 Samuel 29 and 30, Escaping a Tangled Web. And then 1 Samuel 31, the death of Saul and his sons.

You'll recall that what the author is doing at this point is going back and forth between David and his men and Saul and his army. In chapter 27, the focus is on David. He flees the land, decides to go and live among the Philistines, passes himself off as a loyal subject of Achish, king of Gath, is so successful at this that Achish wants David and his men to join him in battle against Israel.

And in chapter 28, verse 2, we're just sort of left hanging on that. Then the focus shifts to Saul. Saul is desperate for a word from the Lord.

The Lord is not speaking to him. And so, Saul, in violation of the Mosaic Law, goes to a medium in Endor. She conjures up the spirit of Samuel and Samuel simply reiterates what he had told Saul back when he was alive.

The Lord has rejected you as king and the day has now come for you to be removed from the throne. In chapter 29, the focus is going to shift back to David. And we're going to pick up the story where we left it in chapter 28, verse 2. There's actually a chronological flashback at the beginning of chapter 29.

We talked about this earlier. According to chapter 28, verse 4, the Philistine army was assembled in Shunem at the time that Saul visited the medium in Endor. They were ready to fight the Israelites in battle the very next day.

The next day, the Philistines and Israelites fought at Mount Gilboa, according to chapter 31, verse 1. But in chapter 29, verse 1, where we're beginning this lesson, the Philistine army is still in Aphek, which was located about 40 miles southwest of Shunem. So, the events of chapter 29 must have occurred before Saul's visit to Endor. The Philistine army isn't even up there yet.

But by delaying the report of David's expulsion from the Philistine army, which is what is going to happen in chapter 29, until after the account of Saul's visit to Endor, the narrator heightens the tension of the story's plot. As we hear Samuel announce Saul's impending death, we wonder if David and his men will be there and will have to face Saul in battle, perhaps. Could David and Jonathan actually come face to face in battle? We're wondering about some of these things.

Worse yet, could he somehow be responsible for Saul's death after all of this effort to avoid raising up his hand against the anointed of the Lord? So, the placement of the material is for dramatic effect, I think, in some ways, where we've got all of these questions. Another important thing that's going to happen in chapter 29, the Philistines are gathering their forces at Aphek. This reference to the Philistine troops congregating there is pretty ominous, because the only other time in 1 and 2 Samuel that Philistine troops were seen in Aphek was in 1 Samuel 4-1, just prior to Israel's tragic defeat and the capture of the ark.

And remember what happened that day. Eli's sons died because they took the ark out into battle with them, and the rejected priest Eli, when he heard the news, fell over, and died. In the upcoming battle, which is going to be described in chapter 31, the rejected king Saul and his sons would die.

And so, there are some parallels, and these are developed in this section, especially in chapter 31. I think the author wants you to think of the death of Saul on the battlefield, the rejected king, who could have had a dynasty, but forfeited it, as parallel to that earlier event when Eli, who could have had a priestly dynasty, but forfeited it, died as well. And so, there's some narrative typology, we call it here, where one event foreshadows another, and they're connected thematically in the mind of the author.

But let's get back to David. David is in a difficult situation. He has been told that he is going to go out and fight with the Philistines against the Israelites.

And the Philistines are gathering their forces at Aphek, and the Philistine rulers are marching out in there with all of their troops, and David and his men are marching at the rear with Achish of Gath. So, all the Philistines are coming together, including Achish from Gath and his forces. And the commanders of the Philistines see this, and they say, what about these Hebrews? Remember, foreigners will often call Israelites Hebrews.

And Achish, who really believes in David, in verse 3 of chapter 29 says, is this, not David, who was an officer of Saul, king of Israel? He has already been with me for over a year. And from the day he left Saul until now, I have found no fault in him. Well, David's deception has worked well.

We know that David has not disowned his people. He's been doing the work of the Lord, killing Amalekites. But Achish has been tricked.

The Philistine commanders don't have this same view of David. They were angry with Achish, and they said, send the man back, that he may return to the place you assigned him. He must not go with us into battle, or he will turn against us during the fighting.

We know what will happen. He'll go out with us, and then he'll turn on us, just creating panic and confusion. How better could he regain his master's favor than by taking the heads of our own men? He probably wants to get in good with the king, Saul, over there.

What better way to do it than infiltrate our forces and then turn on us in battle? We know what this guy's like. Isn't this the David they sang about in their dances? Verse 5, Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands. This has been mentioned before by the Philistines.

They know that Israelite song very, very well, and they don't like it, and they really don't trust David. So, I hope you see what's happening here. David, despite all his deception and his maneuvering, needs the Lord's providence to get him out of this, and once again, it's Philistines who are going to be used to the Philistine commanders other than Achish that the Lord is going to use to get David out of a difficult situation.

Remember when Saul was breathing down his neck, Philistines invaded the land, and Saul had to go and defend the land and break off his chasing David? So Achish calls David, and he says, as surely as the Lord lives, you've been reliable, and I would be pleased to have you serve with me in the army. From the day you came to me until today, I have found no fault in you, but the rulers don't approve of you.

So, turn back and go in peace. Do nothing to displease the Philistine rulers. And at this point, you might think, well, David's going to just breathe a sigh of relief and say, as you wish.

No, he's actually going to protest, and we really don't know what his motives are. This is often the case in the biblical narrative, there are gaps. What is David thinking here? What's behind these words? Perhaps, as commoners are wont to do, and David is really functioning that way in this story, he wants to make it look good.

He doesn't want to be too eager to leave, because that might confirm the Philistine rulers' skepticism. So, he's got to make it look good. He knows they're not going to let him go, so he wants to protest a little bit to make it look good.

Maybe he's decided to do exactly what the Philistine rulers suspect he will. Maybe he'd like to get out there and turn on the Philistines and be able to fight for Israel. But at any rate, we don't know.

And verse 8 says, But what have I done? asked David. What have you found against your servant from the day I came to until now? Why can't I go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king? And Achish, of course, is going to hear those words and think that he is David's lord, the king, but David is deceptive here. And it's possible that he's referring to the Philistines.

Why can't I go and fight against the enemies, i.e. the Philistines, of my lord and king, i.e. Saul? David's words are ambiguous. And he's in deception mode here. So, three other times he's called Saul my lord, 1 Samuel 24 and 26.

And Saul is his king as well. And David called him that, my lord the king, three times in those chapters. So, David may be playing a little word game here.

He may be trying to get Achish to change his mind so he can go out and do the very thing the Philistine rulers are afraid that he would do. But it's not going to happen. At any rate, it serves as a good way.

David is protesting. He's making it look like he's carrying out the ruse to the very end. Achish answered I know that you've been as pleasing in my eyes as an angel of God.

Nevertheless, the Philistine commanders have said he must not go up with us into the battle. So, get up early along with your servants, come with you, and leave in the morning as soon as it is light. And so that's what David and his men do.

And so, we see that God in his providence, using the skepticism of the Philistine rulers, which in there they may very well have been correct about David's intentions, uses that to get David out of a very difficult situation. And so, in terms of the apology of David, the defense of David, what the author is doing here is, I think, saying, you know, there's some fake news out there. The fake news is that David actually went over to the Philistine side.

He lived with them, he served them, and he was out there with the Philistines on the day that Saul and his sons were killed. He is a traitor, and he should not be king of Israel. Benjaminite fake news.

But what the author is saying here is, no, no, no, that's not the way it played out. David did go over to Philistine territory. He tricked Achish.

Even when he was serving under Achish, he was killing our arch-enemies, the Amalekites. He never attacked Judah. He was killing Amalekites and others of our enemies, going back to the time of Joshua.

That's what he did. And before that battle, before he ever got up to Shunem, before the Philistine troops advanced up there to where they were going to fight the battle, back in Aphek, he left. He was forced to leave because the Philistines knew who he was and they didn't trust him, and he left, and he never raised a hand against Israel in battle.

He was gone by that time. And that brings us to chapter 30. David and his men reached Ziklag, and when they got there, they realized the Amalekites had raided the Negev and Ziklag, and they attacked Ziklag, burned it, and they've taken captive their wives and their children.

And so, it must have been a shock to David and his men. They found it destroyed by fire, their wives and sons and daughters taken captive, according to chapter 30, verse 3. And David and his men weep aloud. They have no strength left.

You can imagine. You come to a place, and your families are gone. David's two wives had been captured.

David was greatly distressed because the men were talking about stoning him. So, David's men have kind of turned on him here. There were kind of a bunch of outlaws anyway that congregated around him, and each one was very bitter, and they're going to blame David.

People will often do this. When the circumstances turn bad, you've got to find somebody to blame. Well, let's blame the ruler.

It was David that got us into this, but in the midst of this stress that David was experiencing, he found strength in the Lord his God. He turned to the Lord, and the Lord gave him the strength that he needed to get through this. And then David said to Abiathar, what David does, he's very distressed, his men are threatening him, but he turns to the Lord, and he decides, I need a word from the Lord.

And so, he turns to Abiathar, and brings me the ephod. And Abiathar, that lone survivor, has been a good support for David. And David inquires of the Lord, and he says, should I pursue this raiding party? Will I overtake them? And the Lord says, yes, pursue them.

You will certainly overtake them and succeed in the rescue, which I think suggests everybody's still alive. You can rescue these people. And so, what's happening here?

Remember, why did Saul go to the medium at Endor? Because the Lord would not communicate with him.

Through dreams, through urim and thummim, through a prophet, the Lord was not communicating to Saul. But he communicates with David consistently throughout this story. So, in the defense of David, David is the one to whom the Lord communicates his will.

Saul is the one to whom the Lord will not even speak. So, ask yourself, who really is the chosen king of Israel? Don't believe the fake news. David and the 600 men with him come to the Besor Valley, where some stayed behind.

200 of them were too exhausted to cross the valley, but David and the other 400 continued the pursuit. So, there's kind of a plot twist here. David and his men are exhausted, and so he's not even going to have his full force when he confronts these Amalekites.

It's been a long trip for them, and they're tired out. But God's providence is at work. They found an Egyptian in a field, and they brought him to David.

And they give him some water to drink, some food to eat. They give him some figs and raisins. He's kind of revived.

He hadn't eaten anything or drunk anything for three days and three nights. The man's exhausted. And David said, who do you belong to? Where do you come from? And he says I'm an Egyptian.

I'm an Amalekite slave. And I became ill three days ago, and they just dumped me. They abandoned me.

My master did. We raided the Negev of the Kerethites, some territory belonging to Judah, and the Negev of Caleb, and we burned Ziklag. So, he was there.

He saw all of this. And so, David said, can you lead us to that raiding party? Do you know where they are going, and can you lead us there? And he said, smart guy, swear to me before God that you will not kill me, or hand me back to my master, and I will take you down to them. And so, David, he leads David down, and there they were, scattered over the countryside, eating, drinking, and reveling because of the great amount of plunder they'd taken from the Philistines and from Judah.

And so they are not in any position to be ready to fight. And so, David and his men fought them from dusk until the evening of the next day. None of them got away, except 400 young men who rode off on camels and fled.

So obviously, this Amalekite force was larger than David's. David has only 400 men at this point. They wipe out everybody except 400.

I mean, the impression I get is those 400 were a minority. But David surprised them, and they recovered everything that the Amalekites had taken, including his two wives. Nothing was missing.

Young or old, boy or girl, plunder or anything else they had taken, David brought everything back. And he took all the flocks and herds, and his men drove them ahead of the other livestock, saying, this is David's plunder. They come to the 200 men who were too exhausted to go on earlier.

And the guys who fought in the battle, and you can sort of understand why they're thinking this way, but they're called evil men and troublemakers. And they say, because they did not go out with us, we will not share with them the plunder we recovered. They can have their wives and children back, but nothing else.

And David says, no, my brothers, you must not do that with what the Lord has given us. So, David wants to look at it theologically. The Lord has given us this victory.

It wasn't you guys. It was the Lord that gave us the victory, really. And so, we need to be generous here.

And by the way, I mean, the reason these guys were exhausted was they had traveled approximately 70 miles, 55 miles from Aphek to Ziklag, and then 15 more to Wadi Besor. That was a long, long trip on foot. And so naturally, some are going to be tired.

But David intervenes here, and he makes sure that there's not an outbreak of violence among his men, and everybody gets their own share. In fact, verse 25 tells us David made this a statute and ordinance for Israel from that day to this, that everyone shares in the spoils of victory, even those who watch the baggage or are forced to stay behind. We're not going to show favoritism.

And so, when David reached Ziklag, he sent some of the plunder to the elders of Judah, who were his friends, saying, here is a gift for you from the plunder of the Lord's enemies. So, David reaches out to the men of Judah and perhaps anticipates that he is going to have to come back home at this point. So that brings us, actually, we can kind of summarize some lessons from this account, which I've entitled, again, 1 Samuel 29 30, Escaping a Tangled Web.

When his chosen servants find themselves in a precarious position, and David is in that, the Lord is able to deliver them by his providence and renew their faith through

his guidance and protection. You know, David had left because he was walking by sight, not by faith. I think by the end of chapter 30, he's back on track.

He's walking by faith, not by sight. And you see that in the contrast between his attitude and that of his men. And so, if we want to flesh that out a little bit, we could say that when the faith of his chosen servants wavers, and they find themselves in a precarious position of their own making, the Lord is able to come in and deliver from danger.

And therefore, God's servants should look to him for security at all times. David could have avoided all of this if he had just kind of stayed home, but he didn't. But the Lord brings him through this difficult time.

That brings us to 1 Samuel chapter 31, where we're going to read about the death of Saul. So, the camera shifts back to Saul now. Remember that the night before, he had a confrontation with the spirit of Samuel back from the grave, and Samuel had simply reiterated what he had told Saul earlier.

The Lord has rejected you as king. The fact that he's not communicating to you should convince you of that. And your time is up now.

You are going to die in battle, and your sons are going to be killed as well. And so we read in chapter 31, verse 1, that the Philistines fought against Israel, and the Israelites fled before them, and many fell dead on Mount Gilboa. And the Philistines are in hot pursuit of Saul and his sons, and they kill his sons.

And there's the name you don't want to see, Jonathan, as well as Abinadab and Malchi-shua. The fighting grew fierce around Saul, and the archers overtook him, and they wounded him critically. And so, Saul takes an arrow or two, and he is critically wounded.

And so, Saul says to his armor-bearer, who is there with him, his faithful armor bearer, draw your sword and run me through, or these uncircumcised fellows will come and run me through and abuse me. Saul doesn't want to be tortured. He doesn't want to be humiliated in his death.

And so, he tells his armor bearer, just run me through. But his armor-bearer was terrified and would not do it. So, Saul took his own sword and fell on it.

And when the armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he too fell on his sword and died with him. And so, Saul is now dead. So is his armor-bearer.

And Saul and his three sons and his armor-bearer and all his men died together that same day. This story should remind you of Abimelech in Judges chapter 9.

Remember, Abimelech was a mass murderer. He had murdered his brothers in order to become king.

And then he got too close to a city wall when he was aggressively carrying out a campaign in Judges 9. And a woman took a millstone and threw it down upon his head and mortally wounded him. And he told his armor bearer, kill me, put me out of my misery. I don't want anybody to say a woman killed him.

So technically he wants the armor bearer to do it. And the armor bearer did. In this particular case, the armor bearer was not willing to do that.

Showing respect for Saul, maybe like David, I don't want, I'm not going to raise a hand against you. So, Saul has to kill himself. But the incident is similar.

And you might be reminded of that earlier incident. And I think there's a reason for that because there is a link between Saul and Abimelech. Saul, too, was a mass murderer.

He killed the priests of Nob, and wiped them out. And so, the fact that Saul is like Abimelech does not, that doesn't bode well for Saul and his memory and his reputation. He is a bad guy in the story, as it were, and he dies like another bad guy died earlier in the account.

The Israelites are defeated. The Philistines take towns and occupy them. The next day, 318, the Philistines come.

They strip the dead. They find Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. They cut off his head.

They strip off his armor. And they send messengers throughout the land of the Philistines to proclaim the news in the temple of their idols and among their people. And then they put his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths and fastened his body to the wall at Beit Shan.

So, Saul is humiliated. Israel is humiliated. This is a terrible day for the armies of Israel.

And when the people of Jabesh-Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, all their valiant men marched through the night to Beit Shan, and they took down the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall and went to Jabesh where they burned them. And then they took their bones and buried them under a tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and they fasted for seven days. The fasting would be in conjunction with mourning.

Why would the men of Jabesh-Gilead risk their lives like this? Well, you'll recall on Saul's finest day, 1 Samuel 11, remember the men of Jabesh-Gilead were threatened by Nahash the Ammonite. He was going to make a covenant with them, a treaty with them, if they agreed to have their right eye bored out. Nahash, not thinking that anyone would try to come to the rescue, and if they did his army would be able to defeat them, he allowed the men of Jabesh-Gilead to send for help.

Naturally, they sent to Benjamin, because in Judges we learn that way back in time, Benjaminite men had been married to women from Jabesh -Gilead, and so there's a connection between these places. And Saul, if you'll recall, was angered when he heard about this, and the Spirit of God came upon him, and he marched out, and he won a great victory. He ambushed Nahash and his forces, and he delivered Jabesh-Gilead, so it's natural that the men of Jabesh-Gilead have a very positive view of Saul.

He saved us. We've got both of our eyes because of this man, and he saved us from this Ammonite oppressor, this Nahash, and so they want to honor Saul, and they're willing to risk their lives to do it, and to their credit, they go and they rescue Saul's and the bodies of Saul and his sons and dispose of them in a proper manner. And so I think we'll stop there.

In our next lesson, we're going to continue with the aftermath of the death of Saul. We're going to see how David responds when he hears about this, and as we might expect, David is not going to be happy about it. He is going to mourn the death of Saul and his sons, and in particular, Jonathan.

And so, we'll begin our study of 2 Samuel in our next lesson.

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