

The Books of 1 and 2 Samuel

Lesson 16: Ziklag Recovered; The Death of Saul -- 1 Samuel 29:1–31:13

Picture a man riding home tired. David and his six hundred have been mustered with the Philistine armies, caught in the worst kind of bind, and then, providentially, sent away from a battle they had no business joining. They turn south toward Ziklag, the little town that had become home, and on the third day they crest the last rise and see, instead of rooftops and cookfires, a column of smoke rising into a hard sky. The town is burned. The wives are gone. The children are gone. Everything they loved is simply gone. And the men weep, the Scripture says, until they have no more power to weep.

Then comes one of the loneliest sentences in the Bible. The people, grief turning to rage, speak of stoning David. His own men. The very ones he had led and fed and fought beside. And here, in the lowest hour of his life, we read the verse that explains the man God loved: “But David encouraged himself in the LORD his God” (1 Samuel 30:6). He did not encourage himself in his sword, or his record, or his six hundred. When there was nothing else, there was still the LORD, and that was enough.

This lesson holds two very different homecomings. David comes home to ashes and, by inquiring of God, recovers everything; “David recovered all” (30:18–19). Saul goes home, so to speak, by a far darker road, falling on his own sword on Mount Gilboa after a lifetime of setting aside the word of God. Two men who both began with promise. Two men who both faced the same Philistines on the same kind of day. One leaned on the LORD; one had long since stopped listening to Him. And the difference made all the difference, in this life and beyond it.

So we come to this study soberly. We will not gloat over Saul; the man whose body hung on the wall of Bethshan was once the tall young man who hid among the baggage, too humble to be made king. We will let his end break our hearts a little. And we will let David's leaning teach us where to stand when the smoke is rising and the town is gone and even our friends have turned. The God who let David recover all is the God who still says to weary people, encourage yourself in Me.

Group Discussion: When David came home to a burned-down Ziklag and his own men talked of stoning him, he “encouraged himself in the LORD his God.” What does that actually look like, and where do we more often turn first when everything falls apart?

Personal Reflection: Think of the lowest point you have walked through. Looking back, were you leaning on the LORD or on something else, and what would change in your present troubles if you deliberately encouraged yourself in Him?

Read 1 Samuel 29:1–31:13

Study Questions

1. When the Philistine lords refused to let David go up to battle (29:1–11), how do we see God's providence quietly protecting David from a terrible compromise, and what does this teach us about how God works through ordinary decisions?
2. Have you ever been spared from a sin or a snare by a circumstance you did not arrange, perhaps even resented at the time? How does seeing God's hand in that change the way you face today's frustrations?
3. At Ziklag "David encouraged himself in the LORD his God" (30:6). What does the text reveal about where a believer's strength is meant to come from when human support fails?
4. When have you felt the loneliness David felt, blamed by the very people you were trying to help? What would it mean for you, in that place, to encourage yourself in the Lord rather than in self-pity or defense?
5. Before pursuing the raiders, David "inquired at the LORD" (30:8), and only then pursued. What does this pattern of asking God before acting reveal about the heart God is looking for?

6. Where in your life are you most tempted to charge ahead without asking the Lord, trusting your own competence? What is one decision this week you could deliberately bring before God first?
7. David insisted that those who stayed with the supplies share the spoil equally with those who fought (30:21–25). What does this ruling reveal about God's sense of fairness and the value He places on every servant's part?
8. Do you ever measure your worth, or others', only by the visible, front-line work? How does David's statute reshape the way you view the quieter, unseen service in the Lord's church?
9. Saul died on Mount Gilboa (31:1–6) at the end of a life that, as Scripture later says, ended because he “kept not the commandment of the LORD” (1 Chronicles 10:13). What does Saul's tragic end teach us about the long, slow danger of a hardening, disobedient heart?
10. Name one specific way the Lord Jesus is using this passage, David's leaning and Saul's ruin together, to form your own heart toward trust and obedience right now.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Hebrews 3:12–14, the danger of a hardening, unbelieving heart that turns from the living God; 1 Chronicles 10:13–14, the inspired verdict on why Saul died; Psalm 27:1–5, the LORD as light, strength, and hiding place in the day of trouble; Galatians 6:7–9, the

sober law that we reap what we sow; Romans 15:4, that these things were written for our learning and hope.

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