

A Bible Adventure

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Exploits of a King-to-Be

A retelling of 1 Samuel 29–30

During the time when David was in self-exile because King Saul sought to kill him, circumstances forced him and his men to live in the country of the Philistine King Achish, an enemy of Israel. David promised allegiance to Achish in return for a place to stay, and since Achish knew that King Saul was David's enemy, he gave David the little town of Ziklag to inhabit. Finally, in their wanderings, David and his followers had found a temporary home.

Then renewed war broke out between the Philistines and Israel, and King Achish was expected to use all his able-

bodied men, including David's, in the fight against Israel. This put David and his men in a difficult position; how could David fight against his own people and kindred?

On the day when all the soldiers gathered for the attack, and the lords of the Philistines trooped on by hundreds and thousands, David and his soldiers went in the rearguard with King Achish.

"What are those Hebrew soldiers doing in our ranks?" one of the Philistine princes demanded of King Achish, when it was noticed that six

hundred Israelite men were among the Philistine army.

"David and his men have been loyal to me," King Achish responded, "and I have found no fault in them."

"Let him not fight with us," said another commander. "He could turn on us in the middle of the battle—what better way for him to regain favor with King Saul. Isn't David the one that women sang about, saying, 'Saul has

slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands?'"

Finally, Achish relented.

"I would have been pleased to have you and your men fight with me," he told David after drawing him aside. "I know that you are good in my sight, as an angel of God. Still, the princes of the Philistines do not wish for you to fight with us in this battle. You may return home."

See "A Giant Challenge" and "To Win an Enemy" for earlier stories on King David's life.

So David and his men left for home, quietly grateful that they would not have to face their own people in battle. But when they returned to Ziklag, they found to their horror that the town had been burned to the ground! While the men had been away, the Amalekites had ransacked the town and had carried off the women and children, along with everything David and his men possessed.

“We should never have left in the first place,” one man muttered. “King Achish does not deserve our loyalty.”

“If we would have stayed, this would not have happened,” said another.

“David is to blame,” said the angriest of the men. Some were even speaking of stoning him.

David, hearing his men’s distress and mutinous cries while battling his own grief at the capture of his two wives, cried out to God for guidance.

“Should I pursue this raiding party?”

“Pursue them,” God replied. “You will overtake them, and without fail you will recover all.”

David roused his men and set off after the Amalekites. They drove themselves so hard that by the time they reached the brook Besor, two hundred of them were so tired they could go no further. The rest left these men behind at the brook with the baggage and hurried on.

By chance, they came across an Egyptian lad lying in a field, sick and faint with hunger. He was a servant of one of the Amalekites who had raided Ziklag, and on the way back, he had fallen ill. His master had left him lying in the field. David’s men fed the lad figs and raisins, and soon he was feeling well enough to talk.

In return for David’s promise that he would neither kill him

nor return him to his master, the lad told David which way the Amalekites had gone, and soon David’s four hundred men were on their way again.

That evening, they caught up with the enemy, and saw the Amalekites spread out, eating and drinking and dancing and celebrating the great spoil that they had reaped from the Philistines and from out of the land of Judah. In the midst of the drunken soldiers, David and his men saw their wives and children, bound and shackled.

David gave the order to attack, and the four hundred soldiers dashed to the rescue of their loved ones. They fought from dawn until dusk, and were victorious, recovering all that had been taken, including

their livestock. Wives were reunited with their husbands and children with their fathers. David and his men also claimed the rest of the Amalekites’ plunder.

Though everybody was overjoyed, an argument arose. Some of the selfish and wicked men who had fought along with David said that those who had stayed behind had no right to any of the Amalekites’ plunder. But David disagreed.

“We cannot be this way about what God has given us,” he said. “It was God who protected us and delivered our enemy into our hands. God has given us these spoils of victory, and those who stayed with the supplies will share equally with those who went into battle.”

See “Heroes of the Bible: King David” for more on this fascinating Bible character.