

WEEKLY DEVOTIONAL GUIDE

May 22

MONDAY

Heading back to Ziklag and driving the captured livestock before him, David comes back to the 200 men who were too exhausted to follow him into battle. Some of the 400 who were with David (described as *wicked men*) insist that the 200 should not get a share of the spoils since they did not fight. But David announces that they would get an equal share. He states the principle this way: they that go down to do battle shall get the same share as those who stay by the stuff. The poet put it this way: "They also serve who only stand and wait." That remained a principle in Israel.

READ: I Samuel 30:21-25

These 400 men were more wicked than we might, at first, think. In returning the wives and children to the 200, they were relieving themselves of any responsibility to care for them. And in giving them to their husbands and fathers, while at the same time taking away their goods and livelihood which had been stolen from them, they were thereby taking away their ability to feed them and care for them. Greed seems to be the main factor here. A less-or-them-means-more-for-me kind of thinking. The exact kind of thinking which we must stay clear of at all costs!

TUESDAY

Arriving back in Ziklag, David sent some of the spoils of victory to all the places that he and his men were "wont to haunt" says the King James. (that is, to all the places they had been in past years and months and were likely to go again)

READ: I Samuel 30:26-31

David demonstrates generosity and gratitude in sending presents to the various people and places listed here. And piety. He declares that these are "the spoils of the enemies of the Lord," thus giving credit to the Lord for his victory. But he also shows wisdom. The day when he will ascend to the throne is drawing near. He will need the support of these groups. That's a Proverb: *A man's gift makes room for him*. David is putting that Proverb to the test before it became a Proverb! Generosity is always good. Gratitude is never out of place. Like two wings on a bird, together, they keep us flying straight!

WEDNESDAY

The Philistines attacked and routed Saul's army at Mount Gilboa. Then they furiously chased after the retreating Israelite army, killing Jonathan and two other sons of Saul. Saul himself was mortally wounded by an arrow, and he commanded his sword bearer to finish him off. He said that he did not want a Philistine to be the one to kill him. His armor bearer was too afraid to kill his own king so Saul took a sword and "fell on it" killing himself. Seeing this, his armor bearer killed himself.

READ: I Samuel 31:1-5

What can we say about Jonathan dying? He was noble, loyal, and good. He was not a part of his own father's corrupt regime. He would not stand in David's way to the throne and had already told him so. Yet he died in the battle along side of those who had supported Saul in his waywardness; along side of others who cared not for the things of the living God; along side of the Philistines who worshipped idols of stone. This is what we can say: that the difference between good and bad is made not primarily in this world but in the world to come! Death *comes to all, but after that, the judgment*. But the confidence of the believer is this: the judgment has already come for my sin. For me, it's death and then Glory!

THURSDAY

So on the same day, Saul, three of his sons, his armor bearer, and most of the guards who were around him all died. When the rest of Saul's army saw the commotion and realized that Saul had been killed, they run for their lives. The Philistines win the battle and claim the towns lying before them.

READ: I Samuel 31:6-7

The prophet Hosea, years later, wrote about this: *Where is a deliverer for the cities which had long demanded a king?* In other words, the king they had demanded was not what they had hoped for, or even what they reasonably could expect. He didn't protect nor deliver them. After this battle, the cities were claimed and occupied by the Philistines and would remain in their hands until a later date when David will re-conquer them. Their king was not the moral or military tower of strength that the people imagined he would be. So it is with any of our plans which circumvent what God has for us. "The best laid plans of mice and men..." when they do not center around the plans of God, lead to failure and defeat.

FRIDAY

The next morning, the Philistines were out in the fields looking for valuables on the dead, and they came across Saul and his sons. They cut off his head and ripped off his armor. They send his head around the countryside to confirm that he was actually dead. They put his armor in temple to their goddess Ashtaroth, and attach his body to a wall in Beth-shan.

READ: I Samuel 31:8-10

The Philistines did not come across the body of Saul until the next day! He had killed himself thinking that he was about to be captured. In fact, Saul may very well have had time to escape or at least to arrange that he be removed from the battlefield and the likelihood of capture. But God had said that he would die that day, and God's word will never return to Him empty or unfulfilled. Even in something as gross as this, we find comfort in God's Word being fulfilled. For we have entrusted our eternal destiny to God on the basis of what He has said in His Word. That sure and certain Word of God.

SATURDAY

The people of Jabesh-Gilead (just across the Jordan River) hear what the Philistines had done to flaunt their victory and disgrace Saul and his sons' bodies. When they hear the details, the valiant men of that region go and collect the dead bodies, and carry them back to Jabesh. There, they burn them, and then bury the bones that didn't burn. And then they mourn for seven days.

READ: I Samuel 31:11-13

These 'valiant' men might have served Saul better had they come a few days earlier and joined his army before the battle. Nevertheless, better late than never. Perhaps it is the regret that they didn't join the fighting which drives them now to become so courageous. Whatever the reason, they risked their own safety to get the bodies of Saul and his sons and spare them further degradation. There is a time to seek safety and there is a time to take a risk. There is sometimes a risk involved in standing up for the Lord. We need to ask for God to give us wisdom and discernment to know what time it is! We need to be willing to stand! #31