

David at the Brook Besor: I Samuel 30

Introduction

The narrative of David's generosity at the brook Besor is the hinge point of I-II Samuel. Yet, its greatness is often missed. What makes a narrative about Amalekites and exhausted men so important? The answer is found in the extraordinarily rich typology that undergirds this story as well as a final striking contrast between Saul and David. I Sam. 27-31 describe the rebirth of Israel as the Lord reverses the fortunes of David and Saul. The brook Besor reveals what the wilderness had prepared David to be: A king who gives gifts (rather than "takes" with his hand).

- Chronology: Philistines gathered at Aphek, 29:1
- David is sent home from Aphek to Ziklag, 30:1
- Philistines arrive at Shunem, 28:1,4
- Saul becomes fearful and consults a witch at Endor, 28:8-15
- On the next day, Saul is killed in battle on Mount Gilboa, 31:1-13

A great final contrast is being made between David and Saul

- When threatened by their enemies, Saul and David seek "help" in different places
- While David is defeating the Amalekites, Saul is falling on his sword.
- This all happened in one week. Creation: This is the final week of Saul, and a new week began David's rise to power. Old Adam died on the 6th day, and the New Adam rose to bring Sabbath rest to Israel on the 7th day.

The Third Day

This typology also draws our attention to the theme of the "third day." Paul says that Jesus' resurrection on the "third day" fulfilled the Scriptures (I Cor. 15:4). Perhaps the best way to understand this is to see the "third day" as a continual motif of the Old Testament. On the third day of Creation, plants sprung up from the dry land (Gen. 1:11-12). On the third day, Abraham and Isaac arrived at Mount Moriah and Isaac is "raised" from the dead (Gen. 22:4). On the third day, the Lord descended to Mount Sinai to "cut" a covenant with Israel (Exod. 19:11). And it was on the third and seventh days, that one who had been defiled by a corpse had to be sprinkled to be purified from their "living death" of uncleanness (Num. 19:12). In all of these passages death was transformed into life on the "third day."

Notice the cluster of three-day passages surrounding this narrative in David's life: I Sam. 30:1; 30:12; II Sam. 1:2. This indicates that David is experiencing a crucial turning point, a "resurrection." This "third day" marks a significant transition in the life of Israel. On this "third day" Israel's old king dies and another king is raised to new life and plunders the enemy. This "death and resurrection" also marks the beginning of a new Israel and is the turning point of I and II Samuel. Israel's history turns on the death and resurrection of a king on the third day.

A Tale of Two Kings

The Lord miraculously delivered David and his men from having to choose between fighting Saul or Achish, but following this great deliverance, David has to face perhaps his greatest test yet. On arriving back at Aphek, David and his men discovered that the Amalekites had burned their city and had taken their women and children captive. Notice the pathos (vs. 4): They all weep until they have no strength and David is greatly distressed because the men want to stone him. At the same time,

Saul's heart "trembles greatly" (28:5) at the sight of the Philistine army. Both seek strength in the Lord.

- 28:6 – The Lord did not answer Saul. Remember that Saul has killed all the priests of Nob in chapter 22 for inquiring of the Lord for David! Abiathar alone escapes.
- 30:6 - David "strengthens himself in his God" and seeks guidance from Abiathar.
- David has a "hearing heart". Saul has consistently ignored God's word. He even finally seeks guidance in an unlawful way.
- Crises reveal where we believe salvation is found. David and Saul represent the two choices that face each one of us: Utter dependence on wisdom of man or the word of God.

"These texts contrast Saul and David's two ways of life—irrational tyrant vs. passionate God-pleaser. One takes the road to Endor, the other seeks the counsel of Abiathar, priest of Yahweh. This is the story of black magic vs. divine revelation, subterfuge vs. submission, of deceit vs. dependence...The first anointed one consistently rejects Yahweh's authority as sovereign in Israel while the second anointed one is committed to nothing but Yahweh's authority. Saul follows his own instincts without regard for divine approval while David is satisfied with nothing less than God's approval." – Bill Arnold

After David "strengthens" himself in God (vs. 6) on the "third day" he is reborn in an explosion of life: His name is used 25 times in chapter 30. David, "went," "smote," "recovered," "brought back," "took sheep and cattle," and the spoil was called "David's spoil." David is everywhere doing everything almost single-handedly. Saul, on the other hand, "descends" into battle and falls on his own sword.

The Gift-giving King

Even before his victory David has begun to act like a king, a very different king than Saul. When a third of his men are unable to continue from exhaustion, David leaves them to guard the baggage at the Brook Besor. Saul imposed a fast on his men (I Sam. 14) and forced them to fight even when they were exhausted and hungry. He even threatened to kill Jonathan for eating a little honey. After leaving the brook, David comes upon an Egyptian slave who had been left behind for dead by the raiders. Before David says anything to him, he gives gifts: bread, water, figs, and raisins (vs. 12). David is nothing like the kings of the other nations. He is a king who dispenses life to both "Jew" and "Gentile."

After the battle, David refuses to listen to certain "worthless men" who insist that those who were left behind should only get back what they lost. Instead David applied the general rules of the Torah in a way that emphasized generosity (Num. 31:25-31). The men who were left behind were treated as those who went into battle. In doing so, David not only proves himself a lawkeeper, but his application of the Torah became a "statute" in Israel, indicating that, like Yahweh, he was a lawgiver as well.

A Day of Pentecost

In this account of David's victory and the beginning of his ascent to the throne, the text emphasizes the *result* of his victory even more than the victory itself. David not only gives rest and an equal share of plunder to his men at the brook Besor, but he also gives gifts to the elders of Judah (vs. 26). David has begun to look more like a king, but not the kind of king described by Samuel (I Sam. 8:10-18). Rather than taking from Israel, David is a king who brings a rebirth of the Spirit and who

gives gifts to men. His life points to Jesus who bound the strong man to plunder his house and give gifts to his church. As with David, the gift of His Spirit brought a rebirth of Israel, but this time Israel was reborn into a people without borders, a mighty nation who will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea. It is not a mystery then, why God's people, wherever they are found, are a people of gifts.