

Norwood's Notes: Brief Summaries of Bible Stories

These "notes" are intended to provide a general overview of the basic stories of the Bible in the hope of building greater biblical knowledge and encouraging Bible reading and study.

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17 - Highlights from 1 Samuel 21-31, "David the Warlord"

Fleeing from King Saul to Ahimelech the priest, David led the priest to believe that he was on a special mission from the king and had left in haste without his sword or food for the journey. The priest gave him bread and also the sword of Goliath of Gath, the Philistine giant whom David had defeated so many years before. David then fled to the land of the Philistines, pretending that he had gone insane so that he would not be seen as a threat (1 Sam 21). He then escaped further to a cave and was joined by his family and many of the men loyal to him. Amassing a following of about 400 men, David placed his parents under the care and protection of the king of Moab. Then, following the advice of the prophet Gad, David took his men back to the land of Judah where they remained hidden in a forest (1 Sam 22).

When King Saul found that Ahimelech had given aid to David, he did not consider that the priest was misled, but wickedly ordered the death of eighty-five priests. One priest, Abiathar, escaped and fled to David for protection, telling him all that happened. David was sorrowful that his action resulted in the priests being executed.

When David heard that the Philistines had attacked the City of Keilah, he inquired of the Lord as to what he should do and the Lord told him that he would prevail in rescuing the city. With this victory, David's band of warriors swelled to 600 fighting men. King Saul continued his pursuit and David continued to evade him, moving from place to place, often staying in the wilderness (1 Sam 23). When King Saul heard that David was in the wilderness of Engedi, he took an army of a thousand men to attack him. However, as the king went into a cave to relieve himself, he did not know that David was hiding in that cave with some of his men who saw it as an opportunity for David to kill this undefended king who had sought his life. However, instead of taking advantage of the situation and killing his enemy, David told his men that he would not slay the Lord's anointed king and chose instead to simply cut off a corner of his robe. When Saul had finished relieving himself and rejoined his men, David called to him, bowed with his face to the earth, paying him homage, and revealed how he had spared the king's life (1 Sam 24). Shocked and ashamed, King Saul wept and confessed that he realized that one day David would indeed become king. David promised never to harm Saul's family, and the two departed from each other's presence.

The great prophet Samuel died and all Israel mourned for him (1 Sam 25). David had become a great warlord in exile and the men who followed him were mighty warriors. He married Abigail, a beautiful and wise widow of a wealthy but foolish and poorly behaved man named "Nabal," whom the Lord had struck dead. David also married Ahinoam. His first wife, Michal, had previously been given by her father to another man while David was in exile.

Unstable in his ways, King Saul pursued David yet again. But as he slept in the midst of his own army, David and Abishai, one of his mighty men, snuck into Saul's camp. But, instead of slaying the king, once again David spared his life, merely taking the king's spear and jar of water. When he was at a safe distance, he called to Saul and to the king's general, Abner, letting both know that, once again, the Lord had put Saul within his grasp, but David had done no harm to the king (1 Sam 26). A repentant Saul swore to never pursue David again. Out of caution, David fled to the land of the Philistines and was received with honor by his old enemy, Achish the king of Gath, who gave the city of Ziklag to David and his men. For more than a year, David raided the cities of the Philistines but reported to King Achish that he had instead raided the lands of the king's enemies (1 Sam 27). Fooled by this ruse, Achish was convinced that David was loyal to him and had become an enemy to the people of Israel.

As the Philistines assembled for battle against Israel, out of great fear and because he had no word from the Lord, King Saul sinfully consulted a witch, thinking that she could summon the prophet Samuel back from the dead, which was forbidden by the Law of the Lord. When an irritated Samuel actually appeared, the witch was shocked and terrified and Saul was told by the prophet that he would surely die in the coming battle (1 Sam 28).

The Philistine king, Achish, wanted David and his mighty men to fight by his side against King Saul and the men of Israel, but the Philistine soldiers feared that David would switch sides in the midst of battle, so Achish dismissed him and sent him away instead (1 Sam 29). Upon his return to his home, David discovered that the Amalekites had attacked Ziklag, set it ablaze, and had taken all of the women captive. But, the Lord was with David, and helped him to rescue all the women and defeat the Amalekites (1 Sam 30).

Meanwhile, the battle between the Philistines and the Israelites raged. King Saul was mortally wounded and, instead of being captured by his enemies, fell upon his own sword. Jonathan, the king's son and David's friend, was killed in battle. The Philistines were victorious and they took cities abandoned by the fleeing Israelites. The Philistines hung the bodies of Saul and Jonathan and his other sons on the wall of one of their cities. Valiant men from Jabesh-Gilead, who remembered Saul's rescue of their city years before, removed the bodies and buried their bones and mourned over them (1 Sam 31).