

# Who Are You Chasing?

## Today In Your Reading...

David is still on the run, avoiding King Saul, who has turned on the son of Jesse and sought to kill him. However, the Lord has protected David in desert caves and forest strongholds. He has even sent to him armed men, experienced warriors, who have defected to David's side.

No doubt the most shocking scene in today's passage was that of the slaying of the 85 priests along with the inhabitants of Nob. Saul's actions proved that he had lost his mind by this point; even his own guards would not carry out the King's order. Saul had to ask an Edomite named Doeg to do it. Who is to blame for this terrible crime? In one sense, the death of the priests was a result of David's deception (21:1-15). In another sense, this tragedy was the judgment of God for the sins of Eli and his sons (2:31-36; 3:11-14). However, Saul bears the brunt of guilt in this massacre, because he ordered it.

When I read about these two men — Saul and David — I can't help but consider and contrast what it was that consumed their thoughts, their words, and their activities. **Each man had a driving passion, and each man's passion motivated a pursuit.** Saul's passion was to get even with David, as he thought David had wronged him somehow. He was consumed with jealousy towards him and wanted to prove his superiority, to get ahead by eliminating him once and for all. Thus, Saul's passion drove him to pursue David at all costs, with every fiber of his being, with every resource in his power, and with every minute of his day. His pursuit of David was all-consuming, and he would not rest until it was accomplished.

David's passion, on the other hand, was to be pleasing in God's sight, to do right by Him. Even when in hiding, we see David's heart expressed in his words. "O my Strength," he wrote, "to You

I sing praises, for You, O God, are my refuge, the God who shows me unfailing love" (Psalm 59:17). "I will praise the Lord at all times; I will constantly speak His praises" (34:1). "I pray to You, O Lord, for you are my place of refuge. You are all I really want in life" (142:5). **David's passion was a relationship with God; thus, he pursued the Lord with all of his heart.**

## Daily Reflection

What is your passion in life? What are you pursuing with your time, energy, and resources? Do you see yourself in Saul or David?

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**Saul wanted to be like someone else.** He was not content with what God had given him. He was not happy with his purpose in life. Instead, he always compared himself to someone else and sought the approval of others.

Whose approval are you chasing? In whom do you find your contentment?

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**Don't waste your life pursuing the image or approval of others; instead, make the Lord your passion and pursuit.**

# Drop Your Sword

April 17 — 1 Samuel 23:13-25:44

## Today In Your Reading...

David had a chance to eliminate two enemies — King Saul and a fool named Nabal. Saul continued to pursue David, seeking to kill him out of jealousy; but, the Lord arranged it so that the table was turned and David, instead, had a chance to kill Saul in a cave. However, David's conscience bothered him and he could not bring himself to take Saul's life (24:5). Instead, he said to the King, "May the Lord judge which of us is right and punish the guilty one. He is my advocate, and He will rescue me from your power" (24:15).

Nabal was a wealthy man who refused to help David and his men when they had need of provisions. Instead of assisting David, he insulted him. Out of anger and revenge, David intended to kill Nabal and his entire household; however, Abigail, Nabal's wife, intervened and pleaded for their lives. "Don't let this be a blemish on your record," she said. "Then you won't have to carry on your conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed and vengeance" (24:31). David thanked Abigail for her good sense and for keeping him from taking vengeance into his own hands. Soon after this, the Lord dealt with Nabal Himself and rewarded Abigail by giving her to David in marriage.

Taking offense, getting angry, wanting to retaliate, getting revenge — all of these are natural responses to personal affronts. When someone hurts us or our loved ones, we immediately want to take up our sword, as David did (25:13), and strike back or do harm. However, **as sinful, fallen creatures, we can never avenge ourselves with pure motives.** Our vengeance is tainted with selfishness and pride; and, instead of making things better, *we make things worse.* Either we go too far, we incur the retaliation of others, or we start a bitter feud that will never be quenched.

**The Lord's way is better**, which is to allow Him to be our advocate, to give Him the role of judge between us and the offending party. We are instead called to forgive and to love our enemies, not to strike back and do evil. As hard as that is, it is the right thing to do.

## Daily Reflection

How do you most often respond when you are insulted or offended by someone else? Though your response may be pleasing to yourself, is it pleasing to God?

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What is it about us that causes us to respond in hateful ways? Why do we want to pick up our sword and right the wrong in our own way?

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**While the Lord's way is right, it is not easy.** He asks you to drop your sword and allow Him to deal with your "enemies." Dropping your sword frees your hands of any bloodguiltiness and liberates your conscience of wrongdoing.

# Angels of God

## Today In Your Reading...

David continued to avoid King Saul. Though he tried to express his innocence, the King wished to rid himself of this pesky pest. However, God gave David a second chance to kill Saul, but David went against the advice of his men, did the right thing, and spared Saul's life. "Surely the Lord will strike Saul down someday," he said, "or he will die in battle or of old age. But the Lord forbid it that I should kill the one He has anointed" (26:10). Even though Saul seemed genuine in his promise not to seek David's life, David took his family and followers and defected to the land of the Philistines for a short time. Ironically, he and his camp would find rest and safety there, until God revealed His plan for Israel and King Saul.

Meanwhile, the Philistines and Israelites went to war again, which gave Saul a great deal of anxiety. To alleviate his fears, he sought the Lord, but did not get a response. Thus, he pursued a medium in order to talk to Samuel the prophet. However, what he heard from Samuel was not helpful at all. In fact, the news Samuel shared was even worse, for Saul and his sons would be killed in battle and join Samuel in the land of the dead.

Throughout this account of the strife between David and Saul, I've been impressed with David's conscience, the fact that he sought the will of God as often as he could and desired to do the right thing. In the case where he had the chance to take Saul's life himself, he left judgment in the hands of God. Then, when living among the Philistines, David displayed commendable character. King Achish even commented on his exemplary behavior, when he said, "I swear by the Lord, **you are some of the finest men I've ever met**. As far as I'm concerned, **you're as perfect as an angel of God**" (29:6, 9).

## Daily Reflection

The compliment from Achish was not the first time someone noticed David's conduct. Remember Abigail said this to him, "The Lord will surely reward you with a lasting dynasty, for you are fighting His battles and you have not done wrong throughout your entire life" (25:28). But, before we get too high on David, let's remind ourselves that he was only a man, a fallen man. While he had a heart for the Lord, he had made many mistakes already. Even though these are lofty compliments, David was not perfect.

Still, there is an example to emulate here. How would you describe your reputation outside of your Christian circle? Are you in good standing with unbelievers? Do you have a good name?

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What is important about displaying godly character and conduct around unbelievers?

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Would the unsaved world observe your righteous behavior and be drawn to the Lord as a result? Are you "an angel of God," a testimony of what Christ can do in someone's life? **Your actions among the "Philistines" could have a tremendous impact for the Lord.**

# How the Mighty Have Fallen

April 19 — 1 Samuel 30:1-2 Samuel 1:27

Day 109 — 256 Days to Go

## Today In Your Reading...

David and his men, who were not allowed to fight alongside the Philistines against the Israelites, returned home to Ziklag, only to find that it had been destroyed and everyone in it carried away. Of course, they pursued their enemies, in order to rescue their loved ones. This event was a providential diversion, to keep David occupied while He brought an end to King Saul.

In the meantime, God used the Philistines as a means of judgment upon King Saul, his son Jonathan, and the army. All of them died in battle. "Saul died because he was unfaithful to the Lord. He failed to obey the Lord's command and he even consulted a medium instead of asking the Lord for guidance. So the Lord killed him and turned his kingdom over to David son of Jesse" (1 Chron. 10:13, 14). Thus, we have a transition in the monarchy; now, David will be crowned King and his reign will begin.

As I read today, I couldn't help but notice the exemplary character that David demonstrated, particularly his humility. First, when he and his men discovered that their families had been captured and carried away, he did not respond in prideful vengeance or arrogant anger. Though "David was in serious trouble, because his men were very bitter about losing their wives and children and they began to talk of stoning him, he found strength in God" (1 Samuel 30:6).

Second, after his success in destroying the Amalekites and upon returning to camp, "Some trouble-makers among his men said, 'These men (who stayed behind) didn't go with us, so they can't have any of the plunder.'" But David replied, "No brothers! Do not be selfish with what the Lord has given us... We share and share alike — those who go to battle and those who guard the equipment" (30:21-25).

Third, after returning to Ziklag, David sent part of the plunder to the leaders of Judah, as a way of thanking them for their help when he and his men were hiding from Saul (30:26, 27). Finally, when David heard the news of Saul's death, he did not rejoice or gloat that his enemy was dead; rather he wept for his King and even wrote a song in his honor (2 Samuel 1:17-27).

## Daily Reflection

What are your impressions of David? How is he an example of how you should live your life?

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In David's song to Saul, he referred to him three times as "How the mighty have fallen." While Saul may have been mighty by human standards, he was also arrogant towards God; and, in his arrogance, he exalted himself several times and refused to obey the Lord's will. God makes it clear in Scripture that **He opposes the proud but He gives grace to the humble.**

Are you allowing pride to deceive you or are you cultivating humility in your life? How exactly does one cultivate humility?

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**He who exalts himself will be humbled; He who humbles himself will be exalted.**

# The Good Fight

April 20 — 2 Samuel 2:1-3:5; 23:8-39

## Today In Your Reading...

After King Saul's death, David moved his family and followers to Hebron, in the land of Judah. The leaders there crowned him King of Judah. Notice that David did not ask to be crowned; rather, he waited on the Lord's timing. However, those who remained loyal to Saul crowned his son Ishbosheth King. Thus, for a short period, there were two kings and, consequently, civil war between their armies. Still, David did not rush to conquer his competition but waited for the Lord to defeat his enemies.

In the meantime, David married four more times, for a total of six wives; by these women, six sons were born. We are not given any background on three of David's wives, nor are we told why God allowed these marriages. Polygamy (multiple wives) is one of the great mysteries of the Old Testament. It is contrary to God's standard for marriage — one man and one woman for life — and, yet, He allowed and even blessed it in some cases (i.e. Abraham, Jacob). The New Testament reiterates the single spouse standard. Any other options would dissolve the illustrative aspect of marriage, that of being a picture of Christ (the groom) and His Church (the bride).

We also read a list of David's warriors today, his "mightiest men." I particularly enjoyed visualizing the exploits of the Big Three — Jashobeam, Eleazar, and Shammah — as well as Benaiah, the commander of David's bodyguard, and the rest of the Thirty. While there were many people who followed David and thousands who were loyal to him, these men were noted for their conspicuous deeds, their courageous actions against the enemy. To be considered a mighty man in David's army was quite an honor. To be counted among the throng of the Giant Killer was to be the best of the best. They were fighting the good fight in the Lord's army.

## Daily Reflection

The author of *Hebrews* included a similar list in his book (11:1-40). We call it the Hall of Faith, men and women who were noted for their conspicuous deeds, particularly their trust in the Lord. All of them were "mighty warriors" in the army of God, fighting the good fight of faith.

Are you fighting the good fight of faith? Would you be listed among God's mighty and brave? Why or why not?

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You might think that you have done nothing noteworthy in your life, at least nothing to be mentioned in a list like the Hall of Faith. Well, neither have I; but, I have good news for us both. If you have surrendered your life to Christ, you are in the Lord's army. If you are in the Lord's army, which is today engaged against the enemy, then you are in the fight! Now then, **how you engage the enemy is up to you.**

Take up your spiritual armor, bombard your enemy through prayer, charge at his forces with the sword of Scripture and with your testimony of salvation, and serve the King faithfully. If you do these things (and you can), you will have fought the good fight, and **the King will say to you one day, "Well done, My good and faithful servant."**

# Wishing and Waiting

April 21 — 2 Samuel 3:6-4:12

Day 111 — 254 Days to Go

## Today In Your Reading...

Abner, the commander of Saul's army, who had become a great leader, was accused by King Ishbosheth of disloyalty (sleeping with one of the King's concubines). Abner took offense at the accusation and moved to transition his loyalty and followers to David. King David was happy to have Abner on his side, but Joab, the commander of his army, was not. Thus, Joab secretly plotted to kill Abner (for killing his brother). When David discovered this plot, he made sure that the people knew he had nothing to do with it, and he cursed Joab and his family.

In the meantime, David had requested that his first wife, Michal, Saul's daughter, be sent back to him; remember, Saul had given her to be married to David (1 Samuel 18:27). No doubt, this was a political move to unite Saul's kingdom with his, by way of marriage. However, Michal had been given to another man, Palti; and, thus, David's request tore her away from him.

After Abner died, two of David's men, Racab and Baanah, snuck away to murder King Ishbosheth. They thought the news of his death would please David but, instead, their report angered him, for they had killed an innocent man. David ordered the two assassins to be executed.

All of this amounts to a crazy turn of events. However, we see God using the sinful passions of men to unite the kingdom under David's rule. "He makes even the wrath of men to praise Him" (Psalm 76:10). What I find honorable is that David did not rush out and make these things happen on his own; rather He waited for the Lord to accomplish them in His time. David told Racab and Baanah, "As surely as the Lord lives," He is "the one who saves me from my enemies..." (2 Samuel 4:9). **David trusted the Lord enough to give Him time to work things out for His glory and David's good.**

## Daily Reflection

Do you tend to run ahead of God and attempt to work out your wishes yourself? Or are you more like David, patient enough to trust Him to accomplish what's best for you? Explain.

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What does running ahead of God, to accomplish your goals and desires, communicate to God or demonstrate to others?

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Clearly, there is a time to pray and wait, but is there a time to act? How do you balance praying and waiting with taking action?

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# Proceed with Caution

April 22 — 2 Samuel 5:1-6:11

## Today In Your Reading...

All of the tribes of Israel gathered to Hebron to anoint David as their King. After seven years, the entire nation rallied behind one man. The people came by the tens of thousands to show their support, and "there was great joy throughout the land of Israel" (1 Chronicles 12:40).

Everyone was glad to hear about David's rule, except their enemies, including the Philistines. They immediately gathered their army to deflate Israel's momentum. However, the Lord gave David a great victory. "His fame spread everywhere, and the Lord caused all of the nations to fear David" (14:17).

Then, David turned his sights toward Jerusalem; he planned to make it his home and capital city. The Jebusites who lived there were routed and removed and the new King had his citadel — the "City of David." From there he would reign for thirty-three years. "David became more and more powerful because the Lord God Almighty was with him" (2 Samuel 5:10). "He realized that the Lord had made him King over Israel and had made his kingdom great for the sake of His people." (5:12). In other words, as David became powerful, Israel benefitted as a nation and God's name was glorified. Under David's godly leadership, the Lord was blessing His people as He had promised.

However, though things were moving along nicely, David experienced a hitch in his plans. While relocating the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, Uzzah, one of the men helping to transport it, accidentally touched the Ark and died. David realized that the people of Israel had neglected the Tabernacle, the sacrificial system, and the Ark of God's presence during the reign of Saul, and he desired to restore all of them in his new capital city. But, when Uzzah was killed in the process, everything ground to a halt.

## Daily Reflection

It doesn't make sense. If David was trying to honor the Lord by moving the Ark to Jerusalem, then why would God allow someone to die in the process? David asked the same question. He was angry too (2 Samuel 6:8); but, evidently, he found his answer (1 Chronicles 15:1, 2).

God had given specific instructions to Moses and the people for how to transport the sacred objects. Only Levites were to carry the Ark. Thus, it was not the idea of moving the Ark to Jerusalem that God rejected, but rather it was the way in which the Ark was moved that angered Him.

**David had the right intentions but carried them out in the wrong way.**

Has this ever happened to you? Have you ever done something that you thought was God's will or that was honoring to His name, only to be met with difficulty or failure? Explain.

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It is easy, especially when things are going well, to believe that you have everything under control, that you have everything figured out. In those moments, your arrogance or self-reliance can get in the way and you can err, even in the small things. **Be careful not to do God's work your way.** As difficult as it is, *don't run ahead of Him and start calling the shots yourself.* Your plans will be frustrated, or they may fail altogether; and who knows, others like Uzzah may even get hurt. **Constantly consult the Lord and carry on with caution.** He wants you to succeed but in His way.