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DAVID

A WORKBOOK FOR INDIVIDUALS AND SMALL GROUPS

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THE RECKONING

KEY SCRIPTURE PASSAGES:

1 Samuel 30:1-26; Psalm 6





HIS CONTEXT

After spending years fleeing from the murderous Saul, David can finally stop running. In the course of the long chase, David has, on more than one occasion, gained the upper hand and has chosen to spare Saul's life. For that reason, Saul has consented to stop pursuing him. But David is still wary of the mad king, and wants to keep his distance. So he and his men enter the land of the Philistines, far from Saul. Lacking the military resources to venture into enemy territory, Saul leaves David alone.

While among the Philistines, David wins the trust of Achish, king of Gath, who gives him the land of Ziklag, where David, his troops, and their wives and children settle temporarily.

While their families stay at Ziklag, David leads his men in many successful raids against other groups of Philistine peoples on Israel's behalf. Achish knows nothing about the raids, and eventually, he commands David and his men join the Philistine forces against Israel. All the while, David remains loyal to Israel and plans to undermine the Philistine maneuvers. Though Achish, who is unaware of this, trusts David, the Philistine commanders are suspicious of the Hebrews and protest their presence. So before the battle begins, Achish is forced to instruct David and his forces to return to Ziklag.

Fatigued from their journey, David and his men are surely encouraged by the prospect of reuniting with their families. But when they return to Ziklag, they find that the Amalekites have already been there—and what remains is a devastating scene.

HIS STORY

Not a single body to weep over. No lifeless child to cradle. No fallen bride to bury. This... This was worse than death. Their wives, their children—all gone. Taken.

Kneeling in the charred and smoking remains of what had been a vulnerable, makeshift village, David's chest ached. How could this have happened?

Slowly, the shouts of sorrow and anguish around him fanned into flames of anger. "How could David allow this?" the warriors began to demand. Their wives—taken. Their children—snatched as lambs by wolves. They trusted David. They followed him to battle. Where had God been when their babies were ripped from their wives' arms? Why had he not answered their daughters' tear-choked screams as they were carried off like animals?

"David must pay!" A steadily growing chorus of fury demanded his death. Murmurs about stoning began to circulate.

Tears blurred David's eyes, and he cried, "How long, O Lord, how long?" He felt as though his soul were being crushed.

As the small mob clustered around him, David found that he lacked the strength even to weep anymore. Raising his head, he heard their demands for justice. And no wonder; he too wanted justice. Perhaps they were right. Perhaps his death would bring them—and him—consolation.

But the fact remained that his death would not return their families. Looking heavenward, he rasped, "Save me, Lord, because of your love. Who can praise you from the grave?"

David slowly rose. "They don't need a martyr," he murmured. Around him, some of the men were already beginning to scan the blackened earth for stones.



But as he stood there in the center of loss and uncertainty, eyes shut, peace surged through his veins—a peace beyond his understanding. This was peace that could only come from the Lord.

He opened his eyes. “Bring me the ephod,” he commanded Abiathar.

The aged priest pushed through the gathering crowd. From the linen vest he withdrew two stones, one black and one white. David took the stones. “Shall I pursue this raiding party?” he asked aloud. “Will I overtake them?” He shut his eyes once again, his brow furrowed in concentration.

In the moment of seemingly eternal silence that followed, the entire company stared at the lowered stones. Then David raised his head. In a strong, sure voice he spoke.

The LORD has heard my cry for mercy;

The LORD accepts my prayer.

All my enemies will be ashamed and dismayed;

They will turn back in sudden disgrace!

Handing the ephod back to Abiathar, David faced the troops and raised a fist, his eyes gleaming with newfound clarity. “This act of cowardice will not go unpunished,” he called out. “You will see your wives, your sons, and your daughters again.”

Above the ghostly smoke of the ruined village, David’s voice rang out like a trumpet call. “Before these fires cool, we must pursue!”

* * *

David stopped at the edge of the gorge. Ahead of them lay their next crossing—the steep, jagged Besor Valley. His men were fatigued, blistered, but resolute. They had already been riding for three days, and had found no rest after their return to Ziklag. They had simply wrapped their bloodied feet tighter and marched on after David.

Faces fell as each man straggled in toward the dry brook. If it had been the rainy season, this place would have provided them much-needed refreshment. For now, they just had to press on. Some of the men stumbled as they fought to catch up to their waiting comrades. Their faces were hollow with exhaustion.

“Perhaps we could stay here with the baggage so as not to slow you down,” one haggard soldier suggested to David.

David considered it. While he knew the battle that lay ahead would likely demand all the men he had, he also knew it would demand strong and able men. Each moment spent waiting for these aching men compromised their odds of retrieving their families.

So he made the decision; the two hundred men who were unable to cross remained.

Tightening the torn rags on his own blistered feet, David prayed for strength as he found his first foothold down into the ravine. Silently, the remaining worn but determined soldiers followed.

They looked down the expanse of idyllic countryside. Braying laughter sounded from the rolling hills, where hundreds of Amalekites reveled in their ill-gotten spoils. But they would not savor the sweetness of victory much longer.

Under a cloudless sky, David’s army began their merciless retribution. From dusk to the evening of the next day, the exhausted army men brought death to all but four hundred Amalekites, who fled in fear.

When the last of the enemy was vanquished, bloodied men clutched their wives in tearful embraces. Children ran into their fathers’ arms. All were saved—everyone, everything, and more with the plunder of battle. From the field of slaughter, they had recovered life.

* * *





Tired, bruised, and torn, David felt joy. With his left hand he shielded his eyes from the sun. He watched the barren land teem with reunions. His right hand hung by his side, where his own son Amnon clutched it. The boy had refused to let go of him since the moment they met again.

As he watched, David realized that the widespread joy had begun to dissipate. As the initial elation at having recovered their families faded, some began to talk bitterly about the Amalekite loot they had collected. David had decreed that everyone—even the men who stayed behind—would share the spoils equally.

The loudest protester, a blood-speckled soldier with a fierce expression, finally marched up to David to present their complaint. “We will not share the plunder we recovered with them!” He stabbed his pointer finger toward the two hundred exhausted men who had stayed behind. “They didn’t go with us. We brought them their wives and children; that’s more than they deserve. We were tired too, but we kept going. We risked our lives while they rested! This isn’t fair. Leave the plunder to those who fought!”

David’s expression remained calm. He understood. It wasn’t fair. But there was something these men had forgotten. “No, my brothers.” David’s response was gentle but firm. “If this were man’s victory, you would be right to protest. But the Lord alone protected us and gave us victory today. Who are we to withhold what is not ours?” He looked around at the men who surrounded him. Some wore wondering expressions; others still looked indignant. “The men who stayed with the supplies will receive the same as the men who went to battle,” he repeated quietly. “All will share equally.”

In the murmur of voices that followed, Amnon wrapped his arms tightly around his father’s leg. The wide, black eyes of the future stared up at the man who reflected the very heart of their God.

// From the field
of slaughter,
they had recovered
life. //



HIS PLACE IN GOD'S STORY

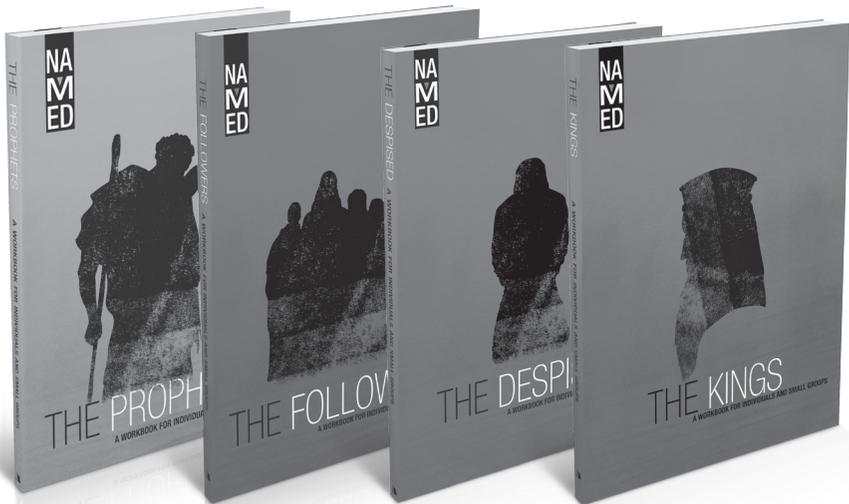
Throughout his life, David is faced with critical decisions that chisel him into the man who becomes capable of leading Israel and being a model of obedience while still being an imperfect human.

In this scene that unfolds in the Besor Valley, David finds himself with half of his followers furious over an issue of inequity. In that critical moment, David chooses grace instead of judgment. This decision not only rules the day; it also leads to a statute and ordinance for Israel. Perhaps foreshadowing his future descendant, Jesus, David reflects God's abundant mercy in his landmark decision.

This story calls to mind Jesus's parable of all the vineyard workers getting paid the same amount even though some work much longer than others. Such stories and parables illustrate what God's unmerited grace looks like and how contrary it is to human inclinations. Though stories of such imbalance may still chafe against our sense of fairness, it remains that this kind of mercy is our challenge, and what we are called to grow into as disciples of Christ, and as those who, like David, hunger after God's own heart.

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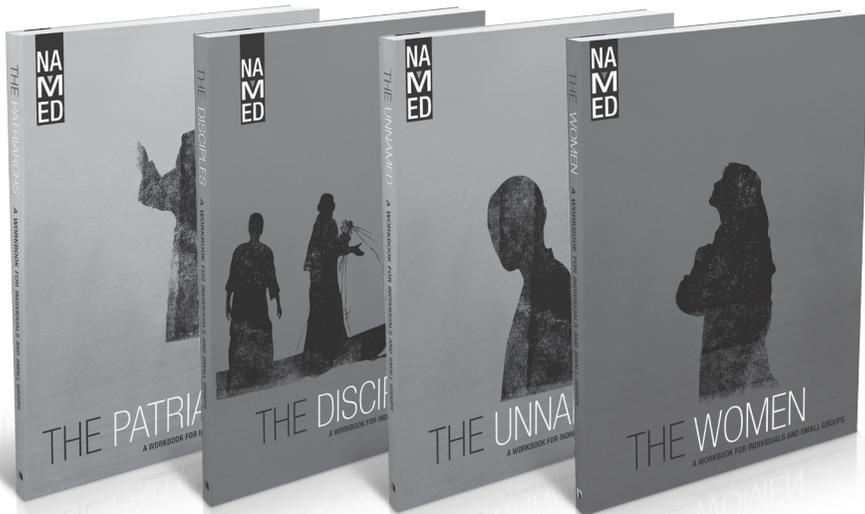
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