The Warriors Left Behind

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While King Saul was trying to kill him, David went and hid among Israel's worst enemies, the Philistines. That may sound crazy, but David convinced the Philistine king that he hated Saul and was making his own attacks against Israel, and from those raids he brought back plunder and gave it to the king. But he wasn't attacking Israel at all. Since David's men stayed in the Philistine city of Ziklag rather than the capital city of Gath, they could attack Israel's enemies but lie to the king about it!

David may have fooled the king, but the Philistine soldiers didn't trust David's men one little bit, fearing they might try to help the Israelites when a battle started. So, when the king sent him away before a battle, David pretended to be upset and headed back to Ziklag. But when he and his men got home, they found they had a new problem.

This story comes from 1 Samuel 30:1-31.

David's men laughed all the way back to Ziklag.
Getting sent home was just what they wanted.
The Philistine army worried when they could see David
but they should worry when they COULDN'T see him!
The men were talking about which enemy city they should attack next
when they saw smoke in the distance.
It was coming from Ziklag!
They started running toward home… but they were too late.

Ziklag had been burned to the ground.

David and his men began to cry as they searched the ruins
for the bodies of their wives and children,
but they found none. Perhaps they had run away!
There was still hope they were alive!
They began to track the raiders.
Other towns had also been attacked
and they learned the attackers were Amalekites,
sworn enemies of David,
and they had taken all the women and children away as slaves.

When David's men heard this,
they were angry and terrified all at once for their families.
They were so upset that they even began to talk about stoning David!
But David trusted God. He called for their priest and asked him,
"Does God want me to chase these cowards? Can we still catch them?"
And the priest said, "Yes, David, God is with you!
Not only can you catch them,
but you can save all of your families if you hurry!"
So David and his men, all 600 of them, took up their weapons
and chased after their enemies as fast as they could run.

They came to a brook called Besor Brook,
                    and nearly 200 of David's men were too tired to cross it.
              So David took the other 400 and continued their pursuit.

      And some time after they crossed the brook
           they found an Egyptian man laying in a field, too weak to move.
      They brought him to David, who ordered that he be given food and water.
                 And once he was well, he told them:
                          "I was a slave to an Amalekite warrior,
                    but I fell sick after our raid and my master left me to die.
                       I have been in that field for three days and nights
                              and I thought I would die. Thank you."

David asked him, "Will you lead me to those raiders?"

The young man said, "If you promise not to kill me
                       or give me back to my master, then yes, yes I will."

So the Egyptian slave led David and his men to the Amalekite camp.
           The Amalekites were eating and drinking and dancing,
                          celebrating all the plunder they had taken.
      Imagine their surprise when David's men charged into their party!
           There were so many Amalekites
                 that the fighting lasted the rest of the night and into the next day.
                 Only 400 of the raiders escaped, because they fled on camels.

      And David and his men found all of their families and all of their flocks;
                       everyone and everything was recovered,
           plus the other plunder the Amalekites had taken from David's enemies.

But when they returned to Besor Brook,
                 where the other 200 men were waiting,
           the 400 didn't want to share any of the extra plunder with them.
                 "Why should we?" they asked. "They didn't fight with us.
                       Give them their families and let them go home."

David wasn't happy with that at all!
                          "How can you talk like that? *We are a family!*
      We share all the plunder we've taken,
           regardless of whether we fought in the battle or guarded the equipment."

David made that a law for all of Israel,
           a law that was followed even after he became king.

Furthermore, David sent a large part of the plunder
                 to the Israelite towns whose leaders had continued to support them
                          even after Saul had turned against them.

If you want to know why David became such a beloved king in Israel,
you can see some of the reasons why in this story.
He cared for ALL of the people he ruled,
not just the popular and powerful people,
and he didn't forget the people who helped him
when he needed help the most.

When God described David as "a man after My own heart,"
this is part of what He had in mind.
It is a lesson we can learn from as well.