



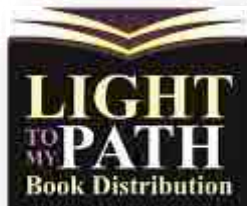
# 1 & 2 SAMUEL

**A Devotional Look  
at Israel's Transition  
to Leadership under  
Her Kings**

**F. Wayne MacLeod**

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A Devotional Look at Israel's Transition  
to Leadership under Her Kings



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*Sydney Mines, NS, CANADA*

## 1 & 2 Samuel

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Suzanne St. Amour, Diane MacLeod

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## PREFACE

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First and Second Samuel record the history of Israel and its transfer of leadership from judges under God to earthly kings. It is the story of a people who struggled with their identity as the people of God, different from the nations around them. It is more particularly, however, the story of three of Israel's leaders.

Samuel was committed to the Lord by his mother and raised as a temple servant to Eli, the priest. He became the last judge of Israel, ushering in a new period for the nation under the leadership of earthly kings.

Saul rose to power as Israel's first king. His life was characterized by an inability to trust the Lord and wait for His leading. His obsession to pass on the reign to his son led him to relentlessly pursue David, the Lord's choice of king in his place.

David, one of Israel's greatest kings, began as a shepherd. Through a miraculous set of events in his life, God brought him into the palace of King Saul. David proved to be a great military man and quickly rose to power in Saul's army. His confidence in God is noted, but so were his failures as king. His family life caused him grief and his enemies were often a threat, but God's hand was on him and despite his shortcomings and failures, David was a man who sought God with all his heart.



As you read these books take the time to consider the people God used. See how Israel struggled with their calling to be different from the nations. See how Israel's leaders were used by God despite their failures. While they all suffered the consequences of their sins and shortcomings, the Lord used them to advance His Kingdom in Israel. These books humble us as we realize that God does not use us because of our strength and wisdom but despite our failures. He accomplishes His purposes through ordinary people like us who struggle with this world and its temptations.

Take your time reading this book. Allow the Holy Spirit to give you insight into the application of each section. My prayer is that the Lord would stir each reader to step out in deeper trust and confidence in the Lord God. May you know His blessing as you read and may the Lord be pleased to use this simple study to bless and encourage you in your personal walk with Him.

F. Wayne MacLeod

# INTRODUCTION

## TO 1 & 2 SAMUEL

---

### *Author:*

Originally the books of 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings were seen as one continuous story of this period of Israel's history. Likely the best indication as to the authorship of 1 and 2 Samuel comes from 1 Chronicles 29:29-30:

As for the events of King David's reign, from beginning to end, they are written in the records of Samuel the seer, the records of Nathan the prophet and the records of Gad the seer, together with the details of his reign and power, and the circumstances that surrounded him and Israel and the kingdoms of all the other lands.

This verse has led many to believe that 1 and 2 Samuel did not have one single author but three (Samuel, Gad and Nathan).

### *Background:*

The books of 1 & 2 Samuel cover a period of about 150 years in Israel's history. Israel was in a period of transition. Judges had been ruling in the land under the Lord God.

Samuel was the last of these judges. Unlike many of the other judges in Israel at the time who were military leaders, Samuel was a prophet. It was during his leadership that the people of Israel decided they wanted to have an earthly king like the nations around them. Samuel saw this not only as a rejection of his own leadership but also as a rejection of the Lord God as King of Israel (see 1 Samuel 8:6-7).

Because of Israel's insistence, God gave them permission to anoint an earthly king. This transfer of kingship from God to an earthly king revealed an increasingly secular mind-set in Israel. Samuel would play a very important role in the transfer of the nation's leadership to an earthly king.

1 Samuel deals with the story of Samuel and his rise to power as the last judge of Israel. It also traces the reign of Saul, the first king of Israel. 2 Samuel tells the story of David, his rise to power and his reign as one of Israel's greatest kings.

### *Importance of the Books for Today:*

The books of 1 and 2 Samuel are important because of what they show us about this period of Israel's history as God's people moved from having Him as their king to having an earthly king. Israel began to look to the nations and to their earthly leaders for direction and guidance and not to the Lord. We see how easy it is for us to fall into the same trap today.

It is important to notice that God did not stop His people from turning from Him as their true King to earthly leaders. He reminded them of the consequences of their actions but allowed them to make up their own mind. This has some important lessons for us in our day. God will allow

us to make our own decisions. Sometimes those decisions are unwise. While we may suffer the consequences of those decisions, God's purpose will not be threatened. In fact, throughout the books of 1 and 2 Samuel we find men and women of God making bad decisions. Eli, the priest, chose not to correct his sons and this resulted in deep corruption in the priesthood. Saul refused to wait on the Lord which ultimately brought the Lord's curse on him and his family. David sinned through a sexual relationship with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband. Each person suffered the consequences of their decisions but God's purpose for His people continued. In an age of great turning away from God, we need to understand that God is still sovereign. He is not threatened by our failures and rebellion. His purposes will stand.

It is particularly striking in the book of 2 Samuel to see the struggles David faced in his life. As one of Israel's most respected kings, he lived for years in fear of his life. Fleeing from Saul he had often no place of his own. Even David's family caused him great grief. One son raped his sister. Another son murdered his brother. Absalom openly defied his father and slept with his concubines in public. God's chosen servants are not always spared from struggles. In fact, it is often through these struggles that they are refined.

First and Second Samuel are about a period of transition in the life of Israel. It was a transition, away from God and His leadership of their nation. God demonstrates great grace and patience with His people at this time. Though His heart is often grieved, He remains faithful to them. It is a lesson for us as we deal with our brothers and sisters in their failures and struggles.

# 1

## HANNAH'S BURDEN

---

Read 1 Samuel 1:1-28

It is not always easy for us to understand the purpose and plan of the Lord God. Sometimes His blessings come in the midst of great trials and suffering. God's ways are not the same as ours.

As we begin the book of 1 Samuel, we meet a man by the name of Elkanah. Verse 1 tells us two things about Elkanah. First, he was from Ramathaim. Bible scholars seem to agree that Ramathaim is also known as Ramah, located in the territory of Benjamin. This is confirmed for us in verse 19 where it clearly states that Elkanah and his wife Hannah lived in Ramah. Second, Elkanah was a Zuphite. This reference is likely to the fact that Elkanah was the son of Zuph as recorded for us in verse 1 (see also 2 Chronicles 6:33-36).

Elkanah had two wives. The name of the first was Hannah. His second wife was Peninnah. While Peninnah had children, Hannah had none (verse 2). We need to understand how difficult this would have been for Hannah. We will speak about this later.

Elkanah was a religious man. From verse 3 we see that it was his practice each year to go up from his town to worship the Lord in Shiloh. At this time in the history of God's people, Shiloh was the centre of worship. Jerusalem would eventually take on this role but in the days of Samuel, Shiloh was where the ark of the Lord was located (see Joshua 18:1). The priest of the day was a man by the name of Eli. He was assisted by his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas.

Verses 4 and 5 tell us something else about Elkanah. He would provide his wives with portions of meat for sacrifice. It should be noticed that part of the sacrifice would go to the priest and the other part would be eaten by the person offering the sacrifice. While his wife Peninnah had sons and daughters to feed with this meat, Elkanah gave a double portion to Hannah who had no children. Verses 5 and 6 are quite clear as to the reason for this. Elkanah loved Hannah and felt her pain at not being able to have children. He wanted to encourage her and remind her of his love for her even though she had not given him a child.

There was another reason why Elkanah gave Hannah a double portion of meat. He did so because of the way that Peninnah treated Hannah. Peninnah kept provoking Hannah and irritating her. This may have taken the form of ridicule and mocking because Hannah could not have children. Peninnah was merciless in her irritation. Verse 7 tells us that every time they went up to Shiloh as a family, Peninnah would provoke Hannah to the point where Hannah would end up crying and refused to eat. This grieved Elkanah because he loved Hannah. Again, the gift of extra meat was to show her that he was aware of her pain.

Elkanah was sensitive to Hannah and her pain. He would speak words of comfort to Hannah when Peninnah provoked her. He would encourage her to eat. He reminded

her of their relationship: "Don't I mean more to you than ten sons," he would say (verse 8). In saying this he was reminding Hannah that he loved her even though she could not give him a son. Obviously Elkanah's words were of some comfort to Hannah. In verse 9, we have record of her eating again.

On one particular occasion, after eating, Hannah stood up and cried out to the Lord "in bitterness of soul" (verse 10). That day she made a vow to the Lord. She told Him that if He would give her a son, she would give him back to the Lord for all the days of his life. She also told the Lord that his hair would never be cut. This is likely a reference to a Nazirite vow of separation (see Numbers 6:1-21).

As Hannah prayed, Eli the priest was nearby. He noticed that her mouth was forming words but there was no sound coming from her lips. This seemed strange to Eli and he began to wonder if she was drunk. He challenged her on this, accusing her of drunkenness.

It is hard to say why Hannah did not speak her words to the Lord out loud. It may be that her request was a very personal one. This prayer was really between her and God alone. It may also have been because of the intensity of her pain.

In verse 15, Hannah told Eli the priest the reason for her strange behaviour:

I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD. Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief.

This word from Hannah seemed to reassure Eli that she was not drunk. He backed off and blessed her instead saying: "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of Him." There was something about this encounter that seemed to bring comfort to Hannah. Verse 18 tells us that she left Eli's presence, had something to eat and was no longer downcast. It seems that she had a peace in her heart that day about the request she had brought to the Lord for a child. Maybe she knew that day that God had heard her.

Something had happened when Hannah prayed to God that day. Her peace of spirit is indicated in the fact that she rose up early the next morning and worshiped the Lord before returning home to Ramah. Verse 19 tells us that God remembered Hannah. He answered her prayer and she conceived and gave birth to a son. We can only imagine the excitement and blessing this brought to Hannah. She knew that this child was an answer to prayer. She would call him Samuel because she had asked the Lord for him. The word "Samuel" sounds like the Hebrew phrase, "heard of God."

As she had promised the Lord, Hannah dedicated her son to His service. The next time Elkanah went to the annual sacrifice, Hannah brought her son to Eli the priest (verse 25). She reminded him that she was the woman who had cried out to the Lord in her agony and grief. She told Eli how she had prayed for this boy and how the Lord had granted her request. She offered her son to Eli to minister with him in the service of the Lord. Samuel would stay in Shiloh and be trained under Eli for full time ministry.

Hannah is a wonderful example of perseverance in prayer. She had a loving husband but her burden for a child seems to be God-given. Despite her husband's comfort and love,



Hannah was not content. She seems to know deep inside that God had something more for her. She could not be content until she had heard from God and had accomplished His purpose. We need to see more people like Hannah in our day. Hannah could not let go of her burden despite the fact that it seemed impossible for her to have a child. She did not give up but kept seeking God until she had heard from Him and knew He would release her burden.

Hannah was quite willing to give her son to the Lord. This would mean that she would not have the opportunity to watch him grow up. She would be separated from her young boy but she knew that God had a purpose for him and so she willingly surrendered him for His glory.

It is hard to say why God allowed Hannah to suffer so much at the hand of Elkanah's other wife. It is hard to say why God allowed her grief to build over the years. Personally, I have found myself in this situation different times in my life. It is as if we pray and God does not hear. We cannot stop praying and seeking, however. God will not give us relief from our burden. Sometimes years pass and there is no answer. The burden remains and continues to build. In God's time, the dam breaks and His answer comes. There are some things for which we must fight. What is most encouraging here is that God did answer Hannah's prayer and she was able to persevere until she had seen the answer.

## For Consideration:

- What are some of Elkanah's qualities as a man of God and as a husband?
- How does Elkanah demonstrate that he cares for Hannah and her struggle? Do you show the same understanding to your spouse and his/her problems?
- What do you think it would have been like for Elkanah to live with Hannah during this time?
- What do you suppose happened the day that Hannah prayed to God in Shiloh? Did she hear from God that day? What seemed to change for her?
- What do we learn about the importance of perseverance in prayer? How easy would it have been for Hannah to give up hope of ever having a child?
- Have you ever had a burden like Hannah that you could not seem to let go? Explain.

## For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you wisdom to know when a particular burden is from Him.
- Ask God to help you to be more understanding of your husband or wife and his/her burdens.
- Ask God to give you grace not to compromise when you need to persevere under a particular burden.

## 2

### HANNAH'S PROPHECY

---

Read 1 Samuel 2:1-11

In the previous chapter we saw how Hannah prayed to the Lord for a child. Hannah's inability to conceive had been a tremendous burden for her. Elkanah's other wife Peninnah, often provoked Hannah to tears because she was not able to have a child. Hannah cried out to the Lord from the depths of her heart and the Lord worked a miracle in her life, giving her a son. Hannah dedicated this young boy to the Lord. On this particular occasion, she had brought Samuel to the temple in Shiloh. She would leave him there to be trained by Eli, the priest and to be brought into full time service of the Lord God.

In verses 1-10 Hannah takes a moment to express her deep gratitude and praise to the Lord for the gift of a son. Filled with the Spirit of God she speaks prophetically to her nation. This is in sharp contrast to where she was in the last chapter. We will take a moment to examine her prophecy in this chapter.

Hannah began her prayer by expressing her happiness and delight to the Lord. It is important that we notice the object of her delight and rejoicing. One would think that because she had given birth to a son after so many years

of barrenness that her delight would be in her son. While she did rejoice in the birth of Samuel, the object of her delight and rejoicing here was in the Lord.

My heart rejoices in the LORD," she began (verse 1). The birth of Samuel meant that God had showed His care for her. The Lord had not abandoned her in her time of need. Hannah's deep longing was to know the love of God and His favour on her life. This would most clearly be demonstrated for her in the birth of a child. By giving her a son, God showed her that He had not forgotten her. This was a gift from the heart of God to Hannah that proved to her that He delighted in her. More than anything else, Hannah needed to know this deep love and favour of God. It was for this reason that her great delight and rejoicing was not primarily in her son but in her Lord and His gift of love to her.

Notice also in verse 1 that Hannah declared that the Lord, her horn, was lifted high. The horn was a symbol of honour and strength. When a horn was lifted up, it was ready to do battle. The horn that bowed down was one that was humbled and disgraced. This is where Hannah was prior to the answer to her prayer. She bowed her head in disgrace and shame. She was depressed and agonized in her heart. Now that God had given her a son, all shame and disgrace was removed. She could lift up her head. She felt proud and honoured.

It was God who had lifted up her horn. It was God who had taken away her shame. The great God of all creation had reached down from heaven to touch her particularly. I don't think we will ever fully understand why God would reach down to lift us up out of disgrace and shame. Why should he notice us? Why should he be bothered to consider our need? While we may never fully understand this, this is

what God delights in doing. He reached down to Hannah and touched her in her need. He healed her womb. He healed her grief. He restored her soul so that she could proudly walk as His child; knowing His wonderful love for her personally.

Because of what God had done, Hannah could boast over all her enemies. Elkanah's other wife had made Hannah's life miserable. The community in which she lived was no doubt perceived to be her enemy as they looked down on her barrenness. Her own womb had been her enemy. Her thoughts had often brought her despair and grief. We can be sure that Satan delighted in holding her captive in her depression and grief. All this was in the past, and she now boasts of the greatness of God. When her thoughts told her that she was nothing, she reminded herself of the wonderful gift of love God had given her in this son. She boasted of the grace, mercy and compassion of a wonderful God who had blessed her.

She delighted in the deliverance of the Lord in her life. God had set her free from her depression and grief. He had set her free from her sense of uselessness and despair. No longer was she bound by these terrible enemies. She was completely free.

In verse 2, Hannah lifted up the name of the Lord. She knew now that there was no god like the Lord God of Israel. There was no one like Him in holiness. He did what was right all the time. Even when He made her wait for the answer to her prayer, God was not guilty of sin. She recognized now that He was completely innocent of all evil and wrongdoing. In saying this, she recognized her own guilt and impatience as she waited on God for the answer to her prayers.

Notice also in verse 2 that Hannah said that there was no one besides God. In saying this, she is dedicating herself to honouring Him alone. She would worship only Him and recognize Him alone as her God.

The Lord was a Rock for Hannah. She knew that she could run to Him in her time of need. He would protect and keep her in the storms of life.

I am quite sure that Hannah knew these things prior to the Lord answering her prayer, but there was a difference now. These things were very personal now that God had reached out to her and answered her request. Her knowledge of God's protection and mercy were no longer just thoughts and doctrines in her mind. She had experienced these things in real life.

In verse 3, Hannah spoke prophetically to the proud and arrogant people of her day. She warned them not to speak proudly. These individuals had great plans for their lives. They boasted of what they would do. Hannah understood the frailty and helplessness of human beings without God. Her own barren womb was a symbol of proud humans boasting of great things.

Hannah reminded those who would boast and speak in the arrogance of their human hearts that God saw everything. The day was coming when all their deeds would be weighed by God and they would stand before Him to be judged.

On that Day of Judgment, the bows of the warrior would be broken. The strongest warrior would not be able to stand before the Lord on that day (verse 4). Those who had everything they needed in life but rejected the Lord

would suddenly find themselves empty of all that mattered. They would stand naked and helpless before God.

This was not the case for the humble, however. Those who stumbled in this life would be armed with the strength of the Lord (verse 4). Those who were hungry would hunger no more. Those who could not bear children would know the blessing of the Lord. Notice the reference in verse 5 to the barren woman bearing seven children. The number seven is the number of perfection or completeness. Hannah is saying, in all this, that God lifts up those who wait on Him and seek His help and guidance. She had experienced this in her own life.

Hannah proclaimed that the Lord brought both death and life (verse 6). He had brought life into the deadness of her womb. He was the author of life but He would also judge those who turned from Him. The Lord sent poverty and wealth. All we have comes from Him and He can remove it in an instant. He exalts those who are humble but can also quickly humble those who are proud and arrogant (verse 7). The God of Israel is a God who raised the poor from the dust and lifted the needy from the ash heap to seat them with princes and inherit their throne.

Notice in verse 8 how Hannah is confident that the foundations of the earth were the Lord's. It was He who set the world in its place. There is nothing the Lord cannot do. There is no foe too great for Him to conquer. He who set the earth on its foundation is fully able to meet us in our need.

Hannah reminds us that the Lord would guard the feet of His saints. That is to say, He will keep watch over them to protect them. He will be with them wherever they go. He will be beside them to guide and direct in whatever

situation they find themselves. This is not the case for the wicked. These individuals will be silenced in darkness. They will not know the light of God's presence but will walk in the darkness of their own sin.

Hannah makes a very profound statement in verse 9. "It is not by strength that one prevails." In our day, it is easy to feel that victory goes to the strong. We look up to those who seem to have everything together. Hannah reminds us, however, that the victory is not for the strong. The strong go down as quickly as the weak. The enemy's arrow does not only strike the weak. He takes down the strong as well as the weak. It is not our strength that will keep us in the day of battle.

Hannah is confident that those who oppose the Lord would be shattered. God would rise up against His enemies. He would stand up to judge all who have turned their backs on Him.

On the other hand, those who love Him and honour His name will know His strength and enabling. He will strengthen and anoint His own. True strength and victory come from the Lord alone. Hannah had experienced this in her life. She was unable to bear children. Because of this she was ashamed and humbled. There was nothing she could do to change this. In her grief, she turned to the Lord and discovered a source of enabling and power that she had not experienced before. God did the impossible in her womb and life sprang forth out of the deadness of that womb. It is often not until we understand and accept our hopelessness that God will do what is necessary to lift up our horn.



## For Consideration:

- Who was the object of Hannah's delight? What did God's gift of a son show Hannah about God and His love?
- Would it be fair to say that Hannah longed more to know the love of the Lord than to have a son?
- God reached down to Hannah in her particular need. What does this teach you about God and His desire for you personally?
- Hannah's grief in chapter 1 is very intense. Was this grief necessary? Do those who look to the Lord still experience grief?
- What did Hannah's trial teach her about God?
- Hannah teaches us that victory is not to the strong? What is the source of our victory as believers? How should this cause us to live?

## For Prayer:

- Have you delighted in other things more than the Lord? Ask Him to open your heart to delight in Him more.
- Do you know personally the intensity of God's love for you? Take a moment to pray that God would show you the depth of His love for you personally.
- Are you facing a particular trial right now? Ask the Lord to give you grace to trust Him fully and wait on Him.

- Thank the Lord that He delights to reach down from heaven to us in our need.

### 3

## HOPHNI AND PHINEHAS

---

Read 1 Samuel 2:12-36

This next section of chapter 2 gives us a glimpse of the spiritual condition of Israel in the days of Samuel. We meet Eli's two sons in this chapter. They are contrasted here with Samuel.

Eli's sons Hophni and Phinehas served in a priestly capacity in Shiloh. Though they served in this role, they were wicked men. We read in verse 12 that they "had no regard for the Lord." They were not concerned for the glory of God nor did they respect or honour Him in their service. We have some examples in this chapter of the kind of thing they would do as priests of the Lord.

According to the Law of Moses, when an Israelite brought a peace offering to the Lord, they were to give the priest the right thigh and the breast (see Leviticus 7:31-35; 10:14, 15). The rest of the meat was to be returned to the person who had made the offering for their own personal use. Verses 13 and 14 tell us that when a person came with a meat offering to Hophni and Phinehas, it was their practice to take a three-pronged fork and plunge it into the pot and whatever came up with that fork they would keep for themselves. This was in violation of the Law of Moses which

only permitted the priest to have the right thigh and the breast. Hophni and Phinehas disregarded the law. They were stealing from the people who offered the sacrifice by taking the best meat for themselves and by taking more than they were permitted by the law.

Not only were Hophni and Phinehas stealing from those who came with their offerings but they were also stealing from the Lord God. According to Leviticus 3:16, all fat belonged to the Lord and was to be offered as a sacrifice to Him. Hophni and Phinehas disregarded this law. In verse 15, they required "a gift" from the person offering the sacrifice before the fat was burned to the Lord. They would only accept raw meat which had the fat. In doing so, they were taking the fat for themselves and not offering it to the Lord as required by law.

Verse 16 tells us that if the person offering the meat, asked that the fat be burned off first, according to the law, the priest's servant would say, "No, hand it over now; if you don't, I'll take it by force." This shows us how far from the Lord the spiritual leaders of Samuel's day had fallen. They had no regard for the Lord God. All they were concerned about was themselves and how much they could profit from their position. In reality, they were treating the Lord's offering with contempt (verse 17). God is looking for servants whose heart is to honour and glorify Him. Hophni and Phinehas were only interested in themselves.

In verses 18-21 we move from Eli's sons Hophni and Phinehas to Samuel who was ministering in the presence of the Lord at that time as well. These were not good times in Israel. God's servants were far from God. Eli had not been able to raise sons who respected the Lord. He was now given the responsibility to teach Samuel the ways of the Lord. Humanly speaking, Samuel could have had

better teachers and mentors. God's ways are not our ways, however, and it would be through Eli and the example of his sons that Samuel would receive his instruction.

We are not told what Samuel was doing in those days as he served the Lord with Eli. Notice in verse 18, however, that he wore a linen ephod. The ephod was a garment worn by the priests who ministered before the Lord.

Verse 19 tells us that every year Samuel's mother would make him a little robe and take in to him when she went to Shiloh with Elkanah to offer their annual sacrifice. In making this robe for Samuel, Hannah was reminding him of her concern and love for him and her commitment to stand with him in his calling.

Eli the priest would bless Elkanah and Hannah when they came to offer their sacrifice. Notice his blessing in verse 20:

May the LORD give you children by this woman to take the place of the one she prayed for and gave to the LORD.

We learn from verse 21 that the Lord God heard this blessing of Eli and was gracious to Elkanah and Hannah. Hannah conceived and gave birth to three sons and two daughters. God heard Eli's request even though he had not been a good priest and had allowed his sons to blaspheme the name of the Lord. God blessed Hannah for her willingness to dedicate her son to Him. He opened her womb and gave her five children to replace Samuel. God will honour those who honour Him. These verses contrast Hannah's sacrifice with Hophni and Phinehas' greed and disobedience.

In verse 22, we return to Eli and his sons. It seems that Hophni and Phinehas had been hiding some of what they were doing from their father Eli. From verse 22, we understand that it was only when Eli was very old that he heard everything his sons were doing. It would appear from this that Eli had not been careful to watch over the daily sacrifices, but left this matter with his sons. He did not seem to be well connected with the people or his sons.

Notice in verse 22 that Hophni and Phinehas were sleeping with the women who served at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. The role these women played in the worship of the day is not clear. We do catch a glimpse here, however, of the immorality of the day. That this immorality was part of the life of the priests shows us that the spiritual need in the land was very great.

When Eli finally learned what his sons were doing he questioned them.

Why do you do such things? I hear from all the people about these wicked deeds of yours. (verse 24).

He warned them of the evil they were doing and reminded them that God would judge them. Eli's sons listened to their father but his words did not change their ways. They continued in their evil path. Verse 25 tells us that it was the purpose of God to put Hophni and Phinehas to death.

It may be of significance to note that while Eli did speak to his sons about their evil ways, he did not stop them from serving. Their sins were very serious. They were blaspheming the Lord. This would clearly have been cause to dismiss them as priests. Eli did not stop this but allowed them to continue in the work. In so doing, he himself was

not living up to his responsibilities as high priest of the day. Even Eli seemed to be slack in his commitment to the Lord.

These were days of terrible evil. The spiritual leaders of the day were not concerned for the glory of God. The people of the land grieved over the state of spirituality among the leadership of their day.

Again, in contrast to the terrible evil that was taking place in the land, we see from verse 26 that Samuel continued to grow in favour with the Lord and with the people. This verse is quite powerful in the context. Eli and his sons were not walking with the Lord as they needed to walk. They were not good examples to this young man Samuel. God's hand was on Samuel, however. In the midst of all this confusion, God was raising up a man who would walk with Him and serve Him with all his heart.

God used Eli to speak to his sons about their evil practices. Someone needed to speak to Eli, however, about his ways as well. In verse 27, God sent a prophet to him. This unnamed prophet had some harsh words from the Lord for Eli.

In verse 27, the prophet reminded Eli that the Lord had revealed Himself to his father's house when they were in Egypt under Pharaoh. Through their deliverance from Egypt the Lord God demonstrated His power and love for His people. He chose Eli's ancestors out of all the tribes of Israel to be His priest. As His priests, they received portions of the offering for themselves from the Israelites (verse 28). This was God's means of providing for their needs in return for their faithful service at the altar.

The prophet asked Eli why he scorned the sacrifices and offerings God had prescribed for them by taking what was

not theirs to take (verse 29). In particular, the prophet asked Eli why he honoured his sons more than he honoured the Lord by eating the choice portions of meat stolen from those who offered their sacrifices to the Lord. Even though Eli was aware of what was happening, he continued to fatten himself on stolen meat. As High Priest, Eli had not taken a stand against his sons and their evil. For this he was guilty before God.

In verse 30, the prophet told Eli that God would judge him and his family for their deeds. While God promised that Eli's house would be His priests forever, by their unfaithfulness they had broken that promise and would suffer the consequences. While God would honour those who honoured Him, those who blasphemed His name would pay the price for their blasphemy.

The prophet told Eli that the day was coming when the strength of his father's house would be cut short (verse 31). The curse of God would follow his family. Eli would not have an old man in his family line. In other words, Eli's descendants would die prematurely. They would not live long and prosperous lives. Even when good things were happening to other families in Israel, Eli's family would be distressed (verse 32). Even those whom God did not remove from His service would grieve His heart. All Eli's descendants would die in the prime of their lives (verse 33). This would be a sign to him that this prophecy was from the Lord (verse 34).

God would raise up a faithful priest to replace Eli and his evil sons. That priest would follow His law and do what God required (verse 35). God would establish the line of this new priest and he would live under His blessing. Eli's family would bow down to this priest begging for a crust of



bread and plead for even the most insignificant task to help feed their families (verse 36).

God takes the work of His kingdom seriously. He will honour those who honour Him but those who dishonour Him will suffer under His curse. Those of us who serve the Lord need to take our role seriously.

For Consideration:

- What does this chapter teach us about the spiritual conditions of Samuel's day? What is the spiritual condition of your land today?
- Eli's sons worked in the service of the Lord but served themselves and their own interests. Is it possible for us to do this today? Explain.
- What does this passage teach us about the seriousness of honouring and respecting the Lord and His ways? Are God's ways honoured in your land?
- Eli is presented here as a man who neglected his responsibility to his family and his God. Are you guilty of similar neglect?
- Samuel was trained in a context that was not spiritually healthy. What does this passage teach us about how God can work despite our circumstances?

## For Prayer:

- Ask God to cleanse your land of all its impurities. Ask Him to give us spiritual leaders whose heart is to honour the Lord and His purposes.
- Thank the Lord that He honours those who honour Him. Ask the Lord to help you to persevere even when you are not experiencing the reality of that promise.
- Thank the Lord that He is sovereign over circumstances. Thank Him for how He raised up Samuel to be a godly servant despite his training in a time of ungodliness. Thank God that He can use your circumstances to accomplish good.
- Ask God to give you courage to stand firm for the truth. Ask Him to show you if there is any way you are neglecting your duties in the area of your calling.

## 4

# GOD SPEAKS TO SAMUEL FOR THE FIRST TIME

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Read 1 Samuel 3:1-21

The level of spiritual life in Israel in the early days of Samuel was very low. Verse 1 tells us that the word of the Lord was rare and there were not many visions. The Lord God was not speaking through His prophets. We have already seen from the last chapter that Hophni and Phinehas were evil priests and did not have any regard for the Lord. If this is an indication of the condition of all the spiritual leaders of the land, the prophets were not in any condition to hear from God. The spiritual leadership of the day had turned their backs on God and He was no longer speaking through them to the people. We will see from this chapter that even Eli, as the High Priest, was not expecting God to speak.

Chapter 3 recounts the story of how Samuel heard from God for the first time. The story begins at night when Eli was an old man. His eyesight was failing and he could hardly see (verse 2). On this particular night, Eli was resting in his usual place. Notice from verse 3 that the lamp of God had gone out. This was yet another indication of the

spiritual condition of the land and the slackness of Eli the priest. Exodus 27:20-21 tells us that the lamp of the Lord was never to go out. Eli should have taken care of this but instead he was resting.

It is in this context that the Lord would speak to Samuel for the first time. Samuel heard an audible voice calling out his name, but did not recognize it as being from the Lord God. Thinking that it was Eli calling his name, he ran to him and asked him why he had called. Eli told him that he had not called him and that he was to go back to bed (verse 5).

When Samuel returned to his bed, he heard the voice of the Lord calling his name again. For the second time, Samuel ran to Eli. For the second time, Eli told him to go back to bed, assuring him that he had not called.

Verse 7 makes it clear that the reason this happened was because the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to Samuel. The reference to the word of God should not be confused with the written law of God. Samuel did not understand how God spoke to the prophets giving them words for His people.

For the third time, God called out Samuel's name. For the third time Samuel ran to Eli, telling him that he had heard his name being called. This made Eli think. He knew that he had not called Samuel and suggested that it might be the Lord who was calling him. He told him to return to bed and when he heard the voice a fourth time he was to respond by saying: "Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening."

While Samuel heard the voice of God calling, he could not hear any more from God until he actually recognized that voice as being from God. The first step for Samuel was to

recognize the voice of God calling him. The second step was then to turn his ears to God and listen to what He wanted to say.

When the Lord called the fourth time, Samuel took the advice of Eli and said: "Speak, for your servant is listening." This was all the Lord needed to hear from Samuel. Now that He had his attention, He could speak to him and share His heart with him. God is looking for our attention as well. As believers we need to tune our hearts to Him and His leading.

In verses 11-14, the Lord shared His heart with Samuel. In verse 11, He told him that He was going to do something in Israel that would shock those who heard it. God told Samuel that He would judge Eli's sons because of their sins. He would also judge Eli because he did nothing to restrain them (verses 12, 13). The guilt of Eli's house would never be atoned for by any sacrifice or offering (verse 14). Their sentence had been passed and there would be no changing that sentence. God's mercy for the family had come to an end. They would be judged and suffer the consequences of their blasphemous actions.

We need to consider this prophetic word to Eli's family as a warning for us today as well. This prophecy shows us that the mercy of God does have an end. Speaking to the people of Noah's day, the Lord said in Genesis 6:3:

Then the LORD said, "My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years.

There is an end to God's mercy and compassion. The day is coming when God will stop pleading and issue His

judgment. This is what was happening here for Eli's family. God would no longer have compassion on them.

After hearing this word from the Lord, Samuel laid down until morning. We are left to wonder how much he slept that night. This was the first time he had heard from the Lord. The words he heard were very powerful words. This was a tremendous burden for a young boy to bear. Obviously, he was not sure what he was to do with the word the Lord gave him.

In the morning, Samuel got up and opened the doors of the house of the Lord as was his routine. Verse 15 tells us that he was afraid to tell Eli what the Lord had said to him. Obviously, Samuel had a respect for Eli his teacher. God was teaching Samuel an important lesson here, however. There would be times when, as a prophet, he would have to speak out against his own people and those in authority over him. God was teaching Samuel that there was an authority greater than human authority. As a prophet, Samuel needed to learn that God was his highest authority and he needed to be willing to risk everything to share what God had put on his heart.

Likely, Samuel tried to avoid Eli that morning. In verse 16, however, Eli called for him. When Samuel came to him, Eli told him not to hide anything. Notice the severity of Eli's language to Samuel in verse 17:

Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you.

Samuel was not very keen on sharing the harsh words of the Lord with Eli. Eli literally pronounced a curse on Samuel if he did not share the full word of the Lord with him.

Samuel needed to be ready to share what God put on his heart, regardless of how difficult that would be. This was the cost of being a prophet. A prophet could not fear what others would say. The prophet needed to be bold and speak all that God revealed.

In obedience to the Lord and to Eli the High Priest, Samuel shared all that God had put on his heart. He kept nothing from Eli. This would not have been easy but it was a necessary first step.

Eli listened carefully to Samuel and said, "He is the LORD; let Him do what is good in his eyes." It is hard to say what was behind this response. Eli was an old man and would shortly be passing away from this life. Maybe he simply didn't care anymore. What is clear is that we do not see any deep grief in his heart. He does not ask the Lord for forgiveness or cry out for his family. Eli simply accepts his judgment.

From that moment on, the Lord was with Samuel in a special way. This is not to say that God was not with him before this. We should understand, however, that God was with Samuel now in a new way. He was with him in anointing power in his new role as a prophet. Verse 19 tells us that none of Samuel's words fell to the ground. In other words, what Samuel spoke from God came to pass. The whole nation came to recognize this anointing and calling as a prophet (verse 20). God continued to appear and speak to Samuel at Shiloh where he "revealed Himself to Samuel through His word." In other words, Samuel grew in intimacy and understanding of God as God revealed Himself to him through His prophetic words for the nation.

For Consideration:

- What is the connection in this passage between the nation's spiritual condition and their inability to hear from God and know His leading? Could this be the case today in your land, church or personal life?
- The lamp of the Lord had gone out the evening God spoke to Samuel. What does this reveal to us about the spiritual condition of the land? How has the lamp of the Lord gone out in your land? What needs to be done to light that lamp again?
- Can you recognize the Lord's voice and leading in your life? What distractions keep you from hearing Him more clearly?
- What lesson was God teaching Samuel through this first prophecy? Would you be willing to stand firm and obey the Lord despite the difficulty?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to deal with anything that keeps you from hearing Him and knowing His leading in your life.
- Ask God to forgive you and your nation for allowing His lamp to go out. Ask Him to show you what you need to do to see that this lamp shines brightly again.
- Ask God to help you to recognize His voice more clearly.



- Ask God to forgive you for the times you chose to listen to human reason over the clear voice and leading of the Lord.
- Ask God to give you the courage of Samuel to take a stand and live in obedience to the leading and voice of God.

## 5

# GLORY DEPARTED

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Read 1 Samuel 4:1-22

In the last meditation, we saw the prophecy of Samuel regarding Eli and his descendants. God would bring judgment on Israel and on Eli's family because of their sin. In chapter 4, we read how the Lord brought about part of that judgment.

God raised up the nation of the Philistines against Israel. Verse 1 tells the story of how Israel went out to fight against the Philistines. As the battle raged, the Philistines deployed their forces and about four thousand Israelites were killed on the battlefield. Israel returned to their camp suffering heavy losses.

What is particularly interesting in this story is that when the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked the question: "Why did the LORD bring defeat upon us today before the Philistines" (verse 3)? These elders did not seem to understand the seriousness of their sin. They wondered why God was not delivering them and giving them victory, but they did not understand that the spiritual state of the nation had something to do with their defeat. They thought they could live the way they wanted and still expect the Lord to give them victory over their enemies.

Obedience and blessing often walk hand in hand. We cannot live in disobedience and still expect the blessing of the Lord.

Notice also that the people of Israel did not call for a prophet to hear from the Lord, which was the usual procedure. Instead, they decided to bring the Ark of the Covenant from Shiloh to protect them. They treated the Ark of the Covenant as a good luck charm. They figured that if the Ark of the Covenant was with them, they could not be defeated. Again, they ignored the sin that separated them from the blessing of the Lord. The elders of the land were not seeking to get right with God; they simply wanted His blessing in order to win their battle. This shows how little they knew of God and His ways.

In verse 4, men were sent to Shiloh to bring the Ark of the Covenant to the battle field. Hophni and Phinehas were there when the Ark was brought from Shiloh. It should be noted here that this was not a command of God. This was the idea of the elders. By treating the Ark as a good luck charm, they were blaspheming the name of the Lord.

Notice in verse 4 the reference to the fact that the Lord was enthroned between the cherubim. The cover of the Ark was made of gold and had two carved cherubim facing each other. The Lord promised to manifest His presence between the cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant (see Exodus 25:17-22). The Ark of the Covenant was one of Israel's most holy treasures. We see how Hophni and Phinehas, evil and wicked priests, enter the presence of the Lord to have this Ark thoughtlessly moved to the battle site to serve their own purposes.

When the Ark was brought into the camp, Israel raised up a great cry. They rejoiced in the presence of the Ark. The

cry of the Israelites was so loud that the ground itself shook (verse 5). The Philistines, hearing the uproar, questioned what had happened. When they learned that the Ark of the Covenant had come into the Israelite camp, they were afraid. Notice their response in verses 6-8:

A god has come into the camp," they said. "We're in trouble! Nothing like this has happened before. Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? They are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the desert.

The Philistines had heard of the wonderful work of God on behalf of His people. They knew the history of God's protection and deliverance. This caused them great fear.

I want to pause for a moment to reflect on what is happening in the Israelite camp. To all outward appearances, a great worship service is unfolding. The Ark of the Covenant is present in their midst. God's people rejoice in what they believe to be certain deliverance. They shout and cry out in faith proclaiming that deliverance. The sounds of their shouts of joy rise up and shake the earth. Fear fills the hearts of the enemy as they reflect on the God of Israel and His power.

What we are seeing here is, in reality, false worship. God's people were not honouring Him. Their focus was not on God but on themselves. Their rejoicing was not in God but in the hope of victory over their enemy. The Ark of the Covenant was merely a means of getting what they wanted. Had their focus been on God, the tone of that meeting would have been very different. Instead of rejoicing, they would have been weeping and repenting of the sins that

had separated them from God and stripped away their victory.

Despite their fear, the Philistines determined in their hearts that they would fight the Israelites (verse 9). When the battle resumed, confident Israel was defeated. Thirty thousand Israelite foot soldiers lost their lives in that battle. Israel retreated in defeat. The Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant and both Hophni and Phinehas died.

God would not be mocked. That day, He revealed to His people that He was not a God to be played with or used to suit human purposes. He was a God to be honoured and respected. He was a holy and sovereign God to whom they owed their lives.

The defeat on the battlefield was not the end to the judgment of God on the land. Verse 12 tells us that a Benjamite ran from the battle line to Shiloh. His clothes were torn and he was dirty from the dust of the road. When he arrived in Shiloh, Eli, the High Priest, was sitting on a chair by the road watching for news of the battle. He feared for the Ark of the Lord.

The Benjamite entered the town of Shiloh and told the inhabitants what had happened. The people of Shiloh sent up a cry of despair and grief. Eli heard this cry and asked what had happened (verse 14). The Benjamite hurried over to Eli to give him the news. He told the 98 year old priest that he had just returned from the battle line. When Eli asked what had happened, the Benjamite told him that Israel had fled before the Philistines and that there were heavy losses for Israel. He also told him that his two sons had died in the battle and that the Ark of the Lord had been captured.

It was the news of the capture of the Ark of the Lord that struck Eli the hardest. The Ark of the Covenant was a symbol of the presence of God in their midst. The capture of the Ark was evidence that the Lord God had removed His presence from His people. When Eli heard this news, the shock was so great that he fell backward off his chair, broke his neck and died.

Eli's daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas was pregnant at the time and very near the time of delivery. When she heard the news of the capture of the Ark, the death of her father-in-law and her husband, she went into labour and gave birth to a son. While her son was being delivered, she was overcome by the labour pains and died (verse 20). Before she died, however, she named her son Icabod saying "The glory has departed from Israel" (verse 22). The word "icabod" literally means "no glory."

The judgment of God fell harshly on the land. We need to understand here that while this judgment seems harsh, God was in cleaning out the land and preparing it for something greater. God had judged and removed His presence from these rebellious people, but He would move again in their midst to do a great work. Before He could renew and bless, He needed to remove the obstacles to that renewal and blessing.

For Consideration:

- What is the connection in this chapter between obedience to God and blessing?
- How easy is it for us to overlook sin as the cause of our lack of blessing?

- God's people brought the Ark of the Covenant into the camp in order to restore blessing. Why was this futile? What do we do today in an attempt to restore God's blessing?
- God's people seemed to treat the Ark of the Covenant like a good luck charm. Can we do this with God today? Explain.
- What do we learn in this passage about false worship? What is the difference between false worship and true worship?
- God needed to judge and cleanse the land of sin before He could restore His blessing. What does God need to remove from your life or from your land in order for His blessings to be restored?
- What evidence do you have of the presence of God in your land or your church?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to search your heart and show you if there is any obstacle that stands between you and the fullness of His blessing.
- Ask God to help you to worship Him in truth.
- Thank the Lord that He is a sovereign and holy God. Ask Him to forgive you for any times that you have not shown Him the respect He deserves.
- Ask God to cleanse your life, your church and your land so that the fullness of His blessing can be restored.

## 6

### THE ARK IN ENEMY HANDS

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Read 1 Samuel 5:1-6:21

In 1 Samuel 5:1, we read how the Philistines captured the ark of God, took it to the city of Ashdod, and placed it in the temple of Dagon, their principle god.

When the people of Ashdod woke up the next morning and came to the temple, they found that the statue of Dagon had fallen on its face before the ark of the Lord. The Philistines did not understand this at first. They picked up their god and put it back in its place.

When they returned the next morning, however, Dagon had fallen on his face once again before the ark of God. This time his head and his hands had broken off and were lying on the threshold of the temple. From that day forward no one entering the temple of Dagon in Ashdod would step on the threshold (verse 5). They did this out of respect for their god.

Let's take a moment to examine these verses in more detail. God was teaching the Philistines something very important. God cast the statue of Dagon to the ground. In doing this, He was showing the Philistines that He was



greater than their god. Dagon fell at His feet. He was powerless before the God of Israel.

While God was demonstrating His power, we do not have any record of the Philistines turning from their broken god. We see them picking him up, putting the pieces together and continuing to honour him. Reason alone should have convinced the Philistines of the foolishness of worshiping Dagon, but reason was not enough. Despite the evidence before them, the Philistines continued to serve their false god. There are many people like this in our day. God will show them that the way they are going will only lead to ruin but they continue on their path.

As long as the ark of the Lord was in Ashdod, God brought devastation on the people there and afflicted them with tumours. It is interesting to note that a footnote in the New International Version indicates that some ancient manuscripts state that the Lord also brought rats into their midst. From 1 Samuel 6:4, we see that when the Philistines returned the ark, they put five golden tumours and five golden rats on the cart with the ark. The devastation that took place that day may have been some kind of plague. The hand of the Lord was heavy on the people of Ashdod.

In verse 7, the people of Ashdod made the connection between the ark and the plague in the land. They called their leaders together to discuss what they needed to do with the ark. It is interesting to note that while God's people were defeated by the Philistines because of their sin and rebellion, God was still bringing victory over the Philistines. Without any human effort on the part of His people, the Philistines are being broken by the presence of God in their midst.

The Philistine leaders discussed the issue and decided to send the ark of the Lord to Gath, where a similar thing took place. The city was thrown into panic. Here again the people were afflicted with an outbreak of tumours (verse 9). Once again God is judging the Philistines. What is interesting here is that the Philistines themselves carry this judgment from one town to another as they move the Ark of the Covenant.

From Gath, the ark was moved to Ekron. All these cities are significant cities in Philistia. The people of Ekron had heard what had happened in the other towns. When the ark arrived in Ekron, the people cried out: "They have brought the ark of the god of Israel around to us to kill us and our people" (1Samuel 5:10) A great fear of the Lord seemed to be filling the whole nation of Philistia. Neither Dagon nor any other Philistine god could save them from the God of Israel. The Philistines knew the power of the God of Israel and they were afraid of Him. The whole nation seems to be brought to its knees like Dagon in the temple of Ashdod.

The city of Ekron was filled with panic and death (verse 11). The people cried out to their leaders to take the ark away from them. Verse 12 tells us that those who did not die in the city of Ekron were afflicted with tumours. The whole city was devastated. They could not endure the presence of the holy God of Israel.

What appeared to be defeat for Israel was in reality a powerful victory. The Philistines carried the ark of the Lord into their own land in triumph, but the God of Israel was not defeated. We may not always understand what God is doing, but we can be sure that He is leading us into victory. As Israel grieved the loss of the ark, God was working

powerfully through it to judge the nation of Philistia and bring it to its knees. He will do the same for us.

After seven months, the Philistines called for their priests and diviners. In 1 Samuel 6:2, they ask:

What shall we do with the ark of the LORD? Tell us how we should send it back to its place.

They realized that the ark was nothing but trouble for them. All sense of triumph over having captured it was gone. Many lives had been lost and great devastation had filled their land. As long as they had the ark in their presence, they were under a curse. It is interesting to note that the ark remained in the land for seven months. The number seven represents completeness and perfection in the Scriptures. Only when God had completed His judgment were the Philistines able to send the ark back to its place.

The Philistine priests told their people that if they were going to return the ark they were not to send it away empty. They told them that they were to bring a gold offering to the Lord. They assured them that when they brought this offering they would be healed. The priests suggested that the offering they should make was an offering of five gold tumours and five gold rats. The reason they chose five tumours and five rats had to do with the number of Philistine rulers (verse 4). Joshua 13:3 tells us that there were five rulers in Philistia, ruling over the five principle towns. The golden tumours and rats represented the tumours and rats that were destroying the country (verse 5).

In verse 6, the priests reminded the Philistines about what had happened in Egypt when Pharaoh held the Israelites in slavery. This resulted in the devastation of the land of Egypt. The Egyptians were only released from the curse

of God on their land when they let the people go (see Exodus 4-11). For this reason, the priests of Philistia recommended that they put the ark on a new cart and hitch it to two cows that had calved. Notice also that they recommended that these calves be taken from their mothers and put in a pen. We need to examine these recommendations in more detail.

First, notice that the ark was to be placed on a new cart. This was obviously to show respect to the God of Israel. Second, the cart was to be drawn by two cows that had never been yoked. That is to say, these cows had never been trained to haul a cart behind them. If these cows willingly submitted to hauling the cart without being trained to do so, then the Philistines would know that the God of Israel had accepted their sacrifice. Third, the cows were to have recently given birth to calves. Naturally these cows would never have left their calves. Their motherly instinct would have drawn them back to their young ones. If the cows forgot their calves, however, and took the Ark of the Covenant to Israel then again, this would be a clear sign that the God of Israel had accepted their offering.

The priests suggested that the Philistines place a chest beside the ark with the offering of five gold tumours and five gold rats. When all this was prepared, they were to send the ark on its way. It is of particular significance that they were to let the cows take the ark back to Israel themselves. The priest told the leaders to watch the ark. If the cows took the ark toward Beth Shemeh in Israel then the God of Israel would relieve them of the disaster He had brought to them. If the cows refused to take the ark back to Israel then they would know that what had happened to them was merely by chance and not a judgment of God (verse 9).

The Philistines did as the priest told them. They hitched the cows to the cart and penned their calves. After putting the ark of the Lord on the cart, along with the chest containing their guilt offering, they watched to see what the cows would do. The cows did not resist the harnesses. Ignoring their calves, they left the region of the Philistines and headed straight for Beth Shemesh in Israel. They did not turn to the right or the left. The Philistine rulers followed the cart to see what would happen. There could be no question now that that Lord God of Israel was leading those cows. They knew without question that the hand of the Lord God of Israel had been on them in judgment. They had no choice but to respect the Lord God of Israel as an awesome and holy God.

The people of Beth Shemesh were harvesting wheat when they looked up and saw the ark. We can only imagine the surprise and joy they felt that day at the sight of the ark. It is of particular interest that the cows led the cart to the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh where they stopped beside a large rock (verse 14). Right there the people chopped up the cart and sacrificed the cows as a burnt offering to the Lord God. The Levites took the ark of the Lord and the chest containing the golden tumours and rats and placed them on the rock. The people of Beth Shemesh brought other burnt offerings to the Lord and made sacrifices there in the presence of the Lord. Verse 16 tells us that the five rulers of the Philistines saw all this and returned to Ekron.

We should not assume that just because the ark was now in Israel there would no longer be any trouble. Even here in Beth Shemesh God struck down seventy men. These men looked into the ark and were struck dead for their unholy boldness and disrespect. This was a very heavy blow for the community and caused the inhabitants of Beth

Shemesh to send messengers to Kiriath Jearim asking them to take the ark to their town instead.

By killing these seventy men the Lord was showing His people that they were not to take Him lightly. He was teaching them to respect Him. These two chapters show us that God is holy. There is no god like our God. He is above all other gods. He brings about judgment on the earth. He accomplishes His purposes in ways that are strange for us to understand. He demands and deserves our utmost honour and respect.

For Consideration:

- What does this passage teach us about the ways of God? How are His ways different from ours? Have you ever seen God using what appeared to be a defeat to accomplish tremendous victory?
- What do we learn here about the hardness of the Philistine heart? What evidence did God give them of His power and holiness?
- Have you ever met people who, though they had seen the power of God around them, still refused to turn to Him?
- Explain why the return of the ark of the Lord was a miracle? What did this show the Philistines?
- What does this passage teach us about the importance of showing respect and honour to the Lord God?

- What does the passage teach us about God's judgment on His enemies?
- Does God need us to have victory over His enemies? Why do you suppose He chooses to use us anyway?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you failed to see how He would accomplish victory through what appeared to be defeat.
- Ask the Lord to soften your heart so that you can see what He is trying to say to you through the circumstances of your life.
- Ask God to help you to show Him the respect and honour He deserves as a holy God.
- Thank the Lord that He will be victorious over our enemies. Commit your ways to Him afresh today.

# 7

## VICTORY OVER THE PHILISTINES

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Read 1 Samuel 7:1-17

In the previous chapters we saw how the ark of the Lord was moved from one place to another in Philistia. Everywhere the ark went it brought devastation to the Philistines. Realizing what was happening, the Philistines decided to return it to Israel. While there was great joy in Beth Shemesh at the return of the ark, the joy did not last. Seventy men died when they looked into the ark, showing their disrespect to God. When they saw this, the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh decided they did not want the ark in their region. Things have not changed much over the years. People are quite willing to accept a God who wants to bless, but find it much more difficult to accept a God who is holy and demands respect and obedience.

In 1 Samuel 7:1, the men of Kiriath Jearim came to Beth Shemesh and brought the Ark of the Covenant to their town. They put it on a hill near the home of a man by the name of Abinadab, the son of the priest Eleazar. They commissioned Abinadab to guard it. Verse 2 tells us that



the ark would remain in Kiriath Jearim for about twenty years.

Notice in verse 2 that during the time that the ark of the Lord was in Kiriath Jearim the people mourned and sought after the Lord. The blessing of God was on the land drawing men and women to Himself.

God seemed to be doing a work of grace in the land of Kiriath Jearim through His presence there. Samuel noticed this work of God and spoke to the people as their spiritual leader. In verse 3, he challenged them that if they were truly returning to the Lord with all their hearts they would need to get rid of their foreign gods and Ashtoreths to serve the God of Israel alone.

Ashtoreth was a pagan female god of love and fertility. She was worshiped by the nations of the day and her worship involved temple prostitution.

The people of Kiriath Jearim were aware of the Lord's presence and recognized His power and holiness, but there was still much in the land that needed to be cleansed. The inhabitants of Kiriath Jearim believed in the holy and powerful God of Israel. Samuel was now asking them to take what they believed a step further. He challenged them to get rid of every foreign idol and god and live only for the Lord God of Israel. Every evil practice was to be removed from the land. Every god was to be destroyed and every idol cast down.

Notice what Samuel told the people in verse 3. He told them that if they were willing to do this, then the Lord would deliver them from the hands of the Philistines. God's people were still being oppressed by the Philistines. Their victory depended not on what they believed about God but on

how they lived before this God in whom they believed. Only by turning themselves over completely to God, could they have true victory. This makes us wonder if the reason why we are not experiencing the complete victory God desires for us is because we, too, need to cast down our idols, sinful habits and attitudes. Verse 4 tells us that the Israelites listened to Samuel and got rid of their Baals and Ashtoreths

There is an interesting spiritual work being done in the land of Kiriath Jearim. God's presence had come to their city by means of the ark of the Lord. That presence was having a quiet effect on the city. People's hearts were being softened and prepared for a greater work. Notice, however, that this softening of the hearts required a decision on the part of God's people. Would they surrender to the work of God or would they harden their hearts? For full victory, these people needed to surrender to God.

When Samuel saw that the people were willing to turn from their false gods, he called for an assembly at Mizpah. All Israel was summoned to Mizpah. Here in Mizpah, Samuel would cry out to the Lord on behalf of the nation.

When Israel assembled at Mizpah, the power of what God was doing became even more evident. Verse 6 tells us that the people drew water and poured it out before the Lord. It is not completely clear what the pouring out of water represented but we can assume that it related to the work that God was doing among them. By pouring out this water, they may have been symbolically pouring out their lives to the Lord and offering themselves to Him and His service. The pouring out of water was accompanied by fasting and confession of their sins. God was doing a powerful work that day at Mizpah. The land was being cleansed of its evil and sinfulness and God's people were being restored to a

right relationship with Him. What a wonderful day that must have been.

When the Philistines heard that Israel had gathered in Mizpah, they were suspicious. This gathering brought people from all over Israel. The Philistines may have felt that they were preparing for battle and decided to attack Israel in Mizpah. This brought great fear to the hearts of the Israelites. We can be sure that when God begins a good work, the enemy will do his best to destroy it. While Israel was aware that God was doing a work in their midst they did not realize how great that work was going to be. God would reveal His presence to His people in an incredible way.

Turning to Samuel their leader, the Israelites asked him to cry out to the Lord for them so that they would be rescued from the Philistines. Notice that their attention is not on to their own strength here. They were afraid of the Philistines and feared for their lives. They did not rush to get the ark for protection as their fathers had done. They did not gather up their army to defend themselves in their own strength. They did not seek help from their false gods. Instead they turned to the Lord and sought Him. This again is evidence of the work of God in their midst.

From verse 9 we learn that Samuel took a young lamb and offered it to the Lord as a burnt offering. He also cried out to the Lord on behalf of the people. The Lord answered Samuel's prayer. While he was praying and offering his sacrifice to the Lord, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle. That day, the Lord thundered from heaven. This thunder threw the Philistines into a panic. They were so disoriented by this loud thunder that the Israelites routed, pursued and slaughtered them (verses 10, 11).

There could be no doubt as to the source of Israel's victory. The Lord spoke from heaven and gave His people victory. The victory did not come because God's people were strong and prepared for battle. It came because God's people were obedient and seeking Him. What Israel saw that day was an extension of what their God was doing with them spiritually. As they cast away their gods and confessed their sins, the Lord moved in power among them. Victory does not come as a result of greater education or greater gifts, it comes from greater obedience. What a powerful lesson this was for the people of Israel in Samuel's day. What a powerful reminder it is to us today.

Seeing the wonderful victory of the Lord that day, Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He called the stone "Ebenezer" which meant "stone of help." The stone was to be a reminder to the people that the Lord had helped them. It was a reminder not only of the victory but the means by which God had given them victory.

Notice in verse 13 the extent of this victory. The Philistines were subdued and did not invade Israel. During the life of Samuel, God's hand was against the Philistines. They would live under the curse of God as long as Samuel lived. Verse 14 tells us that the towns the Philistines had captured were restored. Israel's surrender to what God was doing in their midst resulted in total victory over their enemy.

Israel believed in God and His power, but it was not until they took Him seriously and cleansed their land that they experienced the victory of the Lord in such a powerful way. By cleansing their land, God's people paved the way for Him to work powerfully in their midst.

Samuel was judge in Israel until his death. Verse 16 tells us that he went on a circuit from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah judging and leading Israel in the ways of the Lord. While he obviously spent much time on the road, Samuel would always return to his home in Ramah where he also served as priest. There he built an altar to the Lord.

For Consideration:

- What evidence is there in this chapter of Israel's respect for the ark and the presence of God in their midst?
- Was respect and belief enough? What else needed to take place in the land for God's power to be revealed?
- What brought victory for the people of God according to this chapter?
- How was Israel stretched in her new commitment to the Lord and to obedience? Will serving God and living in obedience always be easy?

For Prayer:

- Is there evidence of respect for God in your land? Ask God to help you to see Him as a holy and powerful God. Pray that even the unbelievers in your land would learn to respect our great God.

- Ask God to search you and reveal any sin that would hinder you from experiencing His complete victory in your life.
- In what area of your life do you need victory? Ask the Lord to give you that victory.
- Ask God to give you courage to live in obedience even when things are difficult.
- Thank the Lord for the wonderful victory that comes through obedience to His Word and His ways.

## 8

### ISRAEL SEEKS A KING

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Read 1 Samuel 8:1-22

Until this point in the history of God's people, Israel had no king. They were led by their priests and prophets as they heard from the Lord God. Samuel was one such leader in Israel. He represented God before the people. When they needed to make a decision, the people of Israel would go to Samuel. He would pray and listen to the Lord. When the Lord answered him, Samuel would take the decision of the Lord to the people. In this sense, God was their Leader and King.

Samuel was now becoming old. 1 Samuel 7:16 tells us that Samuel travelled from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah and back to his home in Ramah. He would judge cases in these towns and bring them the word of the Lord. We can imagine that this traveling would have become more difficult for him as he grew older. Possibly in light of his age, Samuel appointed his sons Joel and Abijah as judges in Beersheba (verse 2).

While Samuel was particularly anointed by God to serve as prophet and judge, his sons do not share that anointing or love for God. Verse 3 tells us that they did not walk in the ways of Samuel. Samuel's sons perverted justice and

accepted bribes. We can imagine that this would have been a burden for Samuel who had experienced this same thing in his childhood with the sons of Eli (Hophni and Phinehas).

The elders of Israel understood that this was a problem for the nation of Israel. Their concern was so great that they came to Samuel in Ramah. They reminded him that he was getting older and that his sons were not walking in his ways. The elders suggested that Samuel appoint a king to rule over them, just like the nations around them (verse 5).

The concern of the leaders was legitimate. They saw that Samuel's sons would not be good spiritual leaders for their nation. While their concern was legitimate, their methods were not. We have already seen that decisions were made by going to the prophet who would seek the will of the Lord. While the elders came to Samuel the prophet, they did not come with minds that were seeking the will of the Lord. Notice in verse 5 that they came with their minds already made up. They simply wanted Samuel to approve their plans. They looked at the nations around them and saw how they were governed and decided that this would work for them as well. Their inspiration for this idea was the nations around them; not God and His purposes.

How often have we found ourselves in a similar situation? We take it upon ourselves to make decisions that really are God's to make. We come to God for approval of our plans, but not to listen to His plans.

When Samuel heard what the elders were asking, his heart was grieved. The plan did not please him, but notice that he took the matter to the Lord. To his surprise, the Lord told Samuel to give them a king (verse 7).



The Lord made it clear to Samuel in verse 7 that by choosing an earthly king, the people were not rejecting him as a prophet but the Lord God as their king. The selection of a king would mark a turning point for the nation of Israel. No longer would they be led by prophets and priests who heard from God. Instead, they would be led by kings and political leaders.

God knew the pain Samuel felt about the request of the people. To a certain extent, Samuel felt rejected. The people no longer wanted prophets to lead them. Understanding Samuel's burden, the Lord reminded him that the people had forsaken Him, too, as their God when they came out of Egypt. The people's rejection of the prophets as leaders was not a result of Samuel's ministry. It was a reflection of their rebellious hearts against God.

What is particularly striking in this passage is that God allowed His people to do what was in their hearts. He did not stop them from going down this path of rebellion. This is not to say that God had abandoned them as a people. God would watch over them even on this path of rebellion. God would bless their kings. While there would still be evidence of God's blessing on the lives the kings of Israel, His people would not experience the fullness He desired for them. No earthly king could replace God as king. God told Samuel to warn His people of what would happen if they chose an earthly king over the Lord God (verse 9).

Samuel told the people in verses 11-18 what their earthly kings would require of them. These kings would take their sons and daughters and force them into service. A portion of what they owned would belong to the king. Life would become difficult for them under many of these kings.

Samuel prophesied that the day would come when they would cry out for relief from the kings they had chosen over the Lord but the Lord would not answer them in that day (verse 18).

Making this decision to reject the Lord as their king was not something to take lightly. There would be serious changes for the people. An earthly king would strip them of their possessions and their dignity. They would be reduced to slavery and cry out in despair. God would not stand in their way if they insisted on making this decision, but He warned them of the dangers of turning from Him as their true King.

The leaders were not moved by what Samuel said to them that day. They had made up their minds and would not be turned. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles" (verses 19, 20).

Samuel took the words of the people back to the Lord. "Listen to them and give them a king." the Lord said in verse 21. With that, Samuel sent the people home.

Before concluding this chapter, permit me to offer three warnings to the reader. First realize the danger of coming to God with our minds already made up. This was the sin of the elders of Samuel's day. They knew what they wanted and came to God for a blessing on their own idea. They were not ready to listen to what God had to say.

Second, recognize that God did not stop His people when they insisted on their own way. Instead, He let them follow the path they chose. Don't be deceived into thinking that because God does not stop you, this means that He approves of your actions. While He did warn His people of

the danger on the path they were choosing, God gave them freedom to disobey.

Finally, be assured that the decisions we make will have consequences. God's people were warned of the devastating consequences of their actions but they ignored those consequences. In the end, they would see the foolishness of their decision but it would be too late.

How easy it is to be blinded by our own desires. We fight for our ideas and visions, not realizing that sometimes those visions and ideas are not the will and purpose of God for us or our ministries. How important it is to be willing to die to our own plans and seek the Lord instead. May God give us grace to accept Him as our only King.

For Consideration:

- How was Israel governed prior to the kings?
- What was the problem with the request of the elders here in this chapter? Have you ever come to God with your mind made up? What does this passage have to say about this?
- Will God always keep us from making the wrong decision?
- What is the result of walking in our own way? Can we expect the fullness of God's blessing if we are not seeking Him and living in His purposes?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you a mind that is willing to listen to Him and His purposes for your life.
- Ask God's forgiveness for the times you have wandered from His will for your life. Ask Him to restore you to that purpose.
- Thank the Lord that even though we wander from the path, He does not abandon us.
- Take a moment to pray for someone who has wandered from God's purpose. Ask God to restore them to Himself.

## 9

### SAUL CHOSEN AS KING

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Read 1 Samuel 9:1-10:16

Israel had chosen to reject the Lord God as her King. What is surprising in this chapter, however, is that God allows them to have an earthly king in His place. Here in this chapter, we see that the Lord chose an earthly king for His people. The first king of Israel would be a man by the name of Saul. We are introduced to Saul in verses 1 and 2. He was from the tribe of Benjamin, one of the smaller tribes of Israel. His father's name was Kish. Saul is described personally as "an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites—a head taller than any of the others" (verse 2). We should not understand from this statement that this was the reason he was chosen. God does not select His servants on the basis of physical strength or looks (see 1 Samuel 16:7). We are not told why God chose Saul among all the other men of Israel to be the first king.

The story of Saul's anointing begins with some lost donkeys. Saul's father had lost his donkeys. He told Saul to take some servants with him and go look for the donkeys (verse 3). Saul took his servants and went out. He did not realize that this search would change his life forever.

Saul and his servants passed through the hill country of Ephraim and Shalisha but they could not find the donkeys. Traveling from there they reached the district of Shaalim. He passed through the territory of Benjamin but still there was no sign of the donkeys. His search for his father's donkeys brought him as far as the district of Zuph, in the general area where Samuel lived. Here Saul decided to abandon his search. He and his men had been gone so long that he felt his father would now be worried about them more than the donkeys. He decided to return home to settle his father's concerns about his well-being (verse 5). Saul did not realize that the Lord had been leading him to this region for a purpose.

One of Saul's servants told Saul that there was a highly respected prophet in the town nearby. The servant suggested that they consult him about their problem. The servant believed that the prophet could tell them where they needed to go to look for the donkeys.

Saul and his servant searched for something they could give to the prophet in return for his services. Their food was gone but the servant had a quarter of a shekel of silver. They decided, therefore, to go to Samuel and seek his advice.

As they approached the town, they met some girls coming out to draw some water. They asked them if there was a "seer" or prophet in the region. One of the girls told them that Samuel the prophet had just come to make a sacrifice. God's timing is perfect here. The girl told Saul and his servant that they could find him in the town and if they hurried, they could catch him before he went to offer the sacrifice. As Saul and his servant entered the town they met Samuel coming toward them on his way to the high place for the sacrifice.

We can see the leading of the Lord behind the scenes here. Saul and his servant are drawn to the town in search of their donkeys. They arrived in the town the day that Samuel was there to offer a sacrifice. They met Samuel coming toward them just as they entered the town. All these events are not mere coincidences. This is the timing and leading of the Lord.

God was not only leading Saul and his servant; He was also preparing Samuel to receive them. As God was leading Saul, He spoke to Samuel about him. The day before Saul came to the town, the Lord told Samuel that, at that time the next day, He would send some men from the land of Benjamin to him. Saul was not aware that God was sending him to Samuel. In Saul's mind, he was just looking for donkeys. God was overruling those plans to accomplish something greater in Saul's life. God also told Samuel in verse 16 that he was to anoint this man to be leader over Israel. God promised Samuel that Saul would deliver his people from the hand of the Philistines. Everything happened exactly as the Lord told Samuel, and when he saw Saul and his servant coming toward him, God told Samuel that this was the man He had spoken to him about (verse 17).

Saul approached Samuel not knowing that he was the prophet. He asked him to tell him where the prophet lived (verse 18). Samuel told Saul that he was the prophet he had come to see and invited him to go with him to the high place for the sacrifice. He was to be his special guest. Saul and his servant were to stay with him and leave in the morning (verse 19). In verse 20 Samuel added:

As for the donkeys you lost three days ago, do not worry about them; they have been found. And to

whom is all the desire of Israel turned, if not to you and all your father's family?

This statement eased the burden of Saul and confused him at the same time. His burden was eased in regards to the lost donkeys but he was confused about what Samuel said concerning his family being the desire of Israel. He reminded Samuel that he was a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel and his clan was the least of all the clans of Benjamin. Saul had no social standing in Israel. Confused about what Samuel had told him about his family, Saul asked the prophet to explain himself (verse 21).

By this time, however, they had arrived at a hall where the feast was to take place. Samuel brought Saul and his servant into a hall and seated them at the head of the table. There were about thirty invited guests. Giving Saul the place of honour would have been quite strange. Saul was just a simple man in Israel. This action on Samuel's part would have added to Saul's confusion.

Samuel told the cook to bring a special piece of meat that he had asked him to cook. The cook brought a leg and set it in front of Saul. Samuel told Saul that this piece of meat had been kept for him and set aside for this special occasion. According to the Law of Moses, the thigh was reserved for the priest (see Leviticus 7:32-33). By offering Saul this piece of meat Samuel was honouring him. We can only imagine the confusion of Saul by this time.

After the sacrifice, Samuel took Saul aside and went up to the roof of his house to speak with him. The next morning, Samuel called Saul again to the roof, telling him that he would send them on their way. When they were ready, Samuel walked them to the edge of the town. Samuel told Saul to send his servant ahead. He told him that he had a



special message for him from the Lord. When the servant had left, Samuel took a flask of oil, poured it over Saul's head, kissed him and told him that God had anointed him to be leader over his people (10:1).

As evidence of that anointing, Samuel told Saul that when he arrived near Rachel's tomb in Zelzah, two men would meet him and say:

The donkeys you set out to look for have been found. And now your father has stopped thinking about them and is worried about you. He is asking, "What shall I do about my son?" (10:2)

After meeting these two men, Saul would travel to the great tree of Tabor where, this time, he would meet three men going to Bethel. Samuel told him that one would be carrying three young goats, the second would be carrying three loaves of bread and the third a skin of wine. These men would greet him and offer him two loaves, which he was to accept. The prophecy of Samuel is very specific and does not give any room for error. All this would be a confirmation from the Lord of the truth of Samuel's words. God knew Saul needed this assurance.

As Saul continued his journey toward Gibeah, where there was a Philistine outpost, he would meet a procession of prophets coming down from the high place with lyres, tambourines, flutes and harps. They would be playing before the Lord and prophesying. When Saul saw these prophets, the Spirit of the Lord would come on him and he would be changed into a different person. Samuel told Saul that, when the Spirit of the Lord came on him, he was to do whatever his hand found to do because God was with him. The Spirit of the Lord would empower and lead him into the purposes of God. It is important for us to realize that

even in the Old Testament the work of God was done by those who were being led and empowered by the Spirit of God.

Samuel told Saul that he was to go to Gilgal and wait for him. There in Gilgal, Samuel would offer a burnt offering and fellowship offering. Saul was to wait there seven days before he would come to him and tell him what he was to do (10:8)

As Saul left Samuel that day, God changed his heart. The journey unfolded exactly as Samuel had prophesied. When Saul arrived in Gibeah he met the company of prophets. The Spirit of God fell on him as Samuel had prophesied. Saul joined in them and prophesied. This was to the surprise of those who had known him. They wondered what had happened to the son of Kish. They asked if he had also become a prophet.

When Saul's uncle asked him where he had been, Saul simply told him that he had been looking for the donkeys. He told his uncle that when they could not find the donkeys they went to see Samuel. When asked what Samuel told him, Saul simply responded: "He assured us that the donkeys had been found." He made no mention of what Samuel had told him about being king.

The events of those last few days had confirmed to Saul that he was the man of God's choosing. Obviously, Saul was still uncomfortable with this task. He did not see himself to be worthy of such an honour. He did not have the courage to tell others what had happened to him or about the call of God on his life. This is not a ministry that Saul would have sought for himself. It is not a ministry that Saul really even wanted. God's hand was obviously on him

however. There was no question that God had chosen him.

#### For Consideration:

- What evidence do we have of Saul's insecurity? What comfort do you find in the fact that God can use us just as we are?
- How does God lead Saul to Samuel? Was Saul aware of that leading? Could God be leading you right now through the circumstances you are facing?
- What evidence do we have in this passage of God's timing as Saul went to see Samuel and as he returned home?
- What evidence did God give Saul of his anointing? Why was it important that Saul understand that he was anointed by God for this ministry?
- We learn here that when the Spirit of God came upon Saul he was changed. What change has the Holy Spirit made in your life?

#### For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is not limited by our weakness?
- Thank the Lord that He leads us even when we are not aware of that leading. As you look back on your

life do you see times that God used what appeared to be tragedy to lead you in His way?

- Ask God to show you the nature of His call on your life.
- Thank the Lord for the ministry of the Holy Spirit in your life. Ask the Holy Spirit to empower you even more to do the will of the Father.

# 10

## SAUL'S KINGSHIP

### ESTABLISHED

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Read 1 Samuel 10:17-11:15

As he had promised, Samuel came to Mizpah to offer sacrifices to the Lord. When the people had gathered in his presence, Samuel spoke to them about choosing a king.

He began by reminding them of the faithfulness of the Lord God, their heavenly King. Under His reign, Israel had been miraculously delivered from the hand of the Egyptians and the power of the nations around them. Now by choosing an earthly king, God's people had turned their back on the Lord God and rejected Him as their only King.

Despite their rejection of Him, the Lord was willing to give His people an earthly king. He would show the nation the man He had chosen to be their earthly king. Samuel called the people to present themselves before him by tribe and clan. As each tribe presented themselves, Samuel would likely have asked the Lord whether the king He had chosen was from that tribe or clan. Samuel already knew the man the Lord had chosen, so this procedure was not for his benefit but for the benefit of the people present.

What we need to see here is that the decision about who should be king was to be the Lord's. He would put the man of His choosing in place. How easy it is for us to choose our spiritual leaders on the basis of what we want. God has a person for each task. It is up to us to seek His purpose in every situation.

The tribe of Benjamin approached Samuel clan by clan. The Lord revealed to Samuel that the new king was from the clan of Matri. The families of the clan of Matri approached Samuel and the family of Kish was chosen. Finally, God revealed that Saul, the son of Kish, was to be the next king.

When the people looked for Saul, however, he was nowhere to be seen (verse 21). Samuel asked the Lord where he was. The Lord told him that he was hiding among the baggage. The people found him and brought him before the people.

Saul seemed to be quite timid. The position of king was something he accepted reluctantly. He would not likely have been the people's choice of king, but he was the one God had chosen. Again we see that God's ways are not our ways. For this reason, we need to be careful not to trust in our own reasoning when it comes to the work of the Kingdom of God. We must learn to trust Him and His leading if we are to see His Kingdom expand.

That day, as Saul stood among them, the people declared him to be their king. Saul was not chosen on the basis of his experience or ability for he had never proven himself before the people. He was declared king because God had chosen him and the people accepted God's decision.

As the people stood before Samuel that day, he explained to them the regulations regarding kingship. Those regulations were written down on a scroll and deposited before the Lord (verses 25). The reference to depositing the scroll before the Lord likely refers to the fact that the scroll was kept with the holy things in the tabernacle.

After these events, Saul and the rest of the people went home. Notice, however, in verse 26, that Saul was not alone. He went home with valiant men whose hearts God had touched. In other words, God gave him helpers and soldiers who would assist him in his role as king.

While God's presence was obvious in this whole procedure, there were some people who refused to accept what God had determined. They did not support Saul. They insulted him by refusing to offer him any gifts or respect. While Saul could have disciplined them, he chose to remain silent.

As we have already noted, Saul had been chosen by God, but he had not yet proven himself before the people. The Lord would now give Saul an opportunity to prove his calling; not only to himself but to all of Israel.

In chapter 11, Nahash the Ammonite captured the city of Jabesh Gilead in Israel. The inhabitants of that city, feeling that Nahash was too powerful for them, asked Nahash to make a treaty with them and they would remain his subjects. Nahash told them that he would make a treaty with them only on one condition. He demanded that he be given permission to gouge out the right eye of every one of them.

This demand was something the elders needed time to consider. Would they give into the demand and be humiliated and handicapped for life or would they fight Nahash

and risk losing their lives? The elders asked for seven days before making their decision (verse 3).

During those seven days, the inhabitants of Jabesh Gibeah sent word to Saul concerning their situation. The news of these terms caused the people great grief. When Saul learned of the demands of Nahash, he was moved deeply in his spirit. Verse 6 tells us that the Spirit of God came on him in power and he became angry. In his anger, he took his oxen and cut them to pieces and sent the pieces by messengers throughout the nation declaring that this is what would happen to anyone who did not follow him and Samuel into battle to deal with the Ammonites.

That day, "the terror of the LORD fell on the people, and they turned out as one man" (verse 7). The Spirit of God fell on the nation as a whole and drew them together in unity over this matter.

Saul gathered his army at Bezek. Three hundred thousand men gathered from Israel and another thirty thousand from the tribe of Judah. With this army of three hundred and thirty thousand men on his side, Saul sent word to the people of Jabesh Gilead that before the sun was hot the next day, they would be delivered from the hands of the Ammonites. This news delighted Jabesh Gilead.

In verse 10, the elders returned word to Nahash telling him that they would surrender to him the next day and he could do to them whatever he liked. They made no mention of Saul's approaching army. Nahash would be taken by surprise.

The next day, Saul separated his men into three divisions. They broke into the Ammonite camp at the last watch of the night. The Ammonites were slaughtered until the heat



of the day. The slaughter was so great that there were not two people who escaped the fury of Saul's army together.

The people were so enthused by Saul's victory over the Ammonites that they immediately wanted to deal with the troublemakers of 1 Samuel 10:27 who had refused Saul's leadership. They wanted to put them to death for opposing Saul's reign as king. Saul refused to kill those who had opposed him, however. This was not a time for more killing. God had given victory over the Ammonites. This would be a day of celebration and thanksgiving.

Samuel encouraged the people, however, to go up to Gilgal and reaffirm Saul as king (verse 14). There in Gilgal the people confirmed Saul as their king in the presence of the Lord with sacrifices and offerings.

What we need to understand from this passage is that God's people needed to accept and affirm Saul as their king. Saul needed to experience the reality of God's Spirit working in him. It is one thing to be called and equipped for ministry; it is another to step out in the power of the Spirit and walk in the authority God has given. God's people needed to see a practical demonstration of the power and authority that God had given Saul. As a very timid man, Saul needed to learn how to step out in that authority for the glory of God. This incident in Jabesh Gilead, which seemed so tragic, proved to be the means by which God would confirm Saul's leadership to the people.

## For Consideration:

- What evidence is there in this passage of Saul's timidity or feelings of unworthiness for the task he had been called of God to perform?
- How many of the decisions we make in churches today are based on human preferences and ideas rather than on seeking the will of the Lord?
- How did God use Nabash of the Ammonites to accomplish His purposes for Israel? Can God use what appears to be tragedy to accomplish His plans in our lives?
- How do you think Jabesh Gilead felt about the support they received from the nation as a whole? Are there people like Jabesh Gilead in your society today who need such support?
- What has God called you to do? Have you stepped out in the authority the Lord has given you in that calling?

## For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He can use all kinds of people to accomplish His purpose. Thank Him that even when we do not feel worthy of His calling, He can still use us.
- Thank the Lord that He wants to lead us in very specific ways and it is His desire to make His will clear.

- Ask God to forgive you for times that you have not stood behind His chosen servants. Ask Him to give you grace to respect them and be a blessing to them.
- Ask God to show you what He has called you to do. Ask Him to give you courage to step out in the authority He has given you in that calling.

# 11

## GOD'S GRACE IN SIN

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Read 1 Samuel 12:1-25

One of the most wonderful things about the Lord our God is that He is a loving and compassionate God who does not abandon us even when we fall short of His standard. He is a God of tremendous patience with His people. Here in chapter 12, the prophet Samuel reminded Israel of the wonderful patience and compassion of God toward them throughout their history as a nation. He challenged them not to take that compassion for granted.

Samuel began by telling the people of his calling and his proven character as a prophet. In verse 1, Samuel reminded Israel of how he had listened to them and appointed an earthly king over them. This set the tone for what Samuel wanted to tell the people. He wanted them to realize that, although the Lord had given them what their hearts desired, this was not His perfect plan for them. In choosing a king, they had turned their backs on the Lord God.

Before he addressed this issue of choosing a king, Samuel turned the attention of the people to his ministry and credibility as a prophet from God. He had lived among the people for a long time. He was now old and grey. He had been

their leader from the days of his youth. The people had seen him in different situations. He asked them to examine his life and ministry among them. He opened himself to them for their examination. He gave them his personal permission to testify against him in the presence of the Lord if he had not demonstrated honesty and integrity throughout his lifetime.

Samuel placed his whole ministry before the people to examine. Would you be willing to do this today? Samuel had a clear conscience before the Lord God with regard to his work. He had nothing to be ashamed of on that day. He was willing to do whatever it took to make anything right if anyone could show him that he had offended them. How important it is for those of us who minister before the Lord to live with a clear conscience. Samuel is an example for us all.

Notice the response of the people in verse 4: "You have not cheated or oppressed us," they replied. "You have not taken anything from anyone's hand." The people, with one accord, proclaimed Samuel's integrity.

In taking the time to submit himself to their examination, Samuel reaffirmed his credibility before the people. He wanted them to see that he was not only called to be God's prophet in their midst, but he had been a faithful and true prophet whose integrity had passed the test of time. It was important for Samuel to re-establish this in the minds of the people so that they would understand that what he was about to tell them was from God.

Having established his credibility as a prophet, Samuel then went on to tell the people of the compassion and patience of the Lord God, despite their sin and rebellion against Him as a people (verse 7).

Samuel reminded the people of their history as a nation. He spoke of how God had appointed Moses and Aaron to deliver them from the land of Egypt where they had been held as slaves (verse 6). In their bondage, God's people cried out to the Lord for help. Through Moses and Aaron, God delivered them from the hand of Pharaoh and gave them their own nation (verse 8).

It was not long, however, before Israel forgot their God and turned from Him to serve the pagan gods of the nations around them (verse 10). This resulted in the Lord sending Sisera, the commander of Hazor, the Philistines and the Moabites against them (verse 9). Their rebellion and sin caused the Lord to remove His blessing from them as a nation.

In their despair, the people called out to God. They prayed that God would deliver them from the hands of their enemies, promising to serve Him (verse 10). God heard their cry and sent his judges Jerub-Baal (Gideon), Barak, Jephthah and Samuel to deliver them from their enemies. Under these judges, God's people again lived in security and peace in the land He had given them (verse 11).

When the people saw that Nahash the king of the Ammonites was moving against them, they determined in their heart that they needed an earthly king to protect them. Even though God had proven Himself to them and cared for them, they were unwilling to trust Him with their lives. They chose to abandon the Lord as their king and protector and chose instead to trust an earthly king. We can only imagine how this must have grieved the heart of God.

As we have seen, God was very patient with His people and did give them an earthly king. God has given His people a free will. This freedom includes freedom to turn our

backs on Him and walk away in rebellion. He does not force obedience nor will He always keep us from disobedience. His delight is to see His people surrender to Him in willing obedience out of a heart of love. When Israel desired an earthly king, they chose to reject God as their king, and He allowed them to do so.

As Samuel stood before the people, he offered them a king in the person of Saul. Notice that Samuel made it quite clear that God had set Saul up as king in their midst. God allowed His people to have a king, even though their motives were wrong. There is a very powerful lesson for us. There are times when God will give what we insist on having. I am particularly challenged by this because I know how often I have come to the Lord with my own ideas and refused to let God go until He gave me what I wanted. How important it is, however, that we seek the Lord's purpose and will in our prayers and requests.

Samuel told his people that if they and their king feared the Lord and served Him faithfully, then God would be with them and they could be assured of His blessing. If, on the other hand, they rebelled like their ancestors, God's hand would be against them just like He was against their fathers.

To show the people that what he was saying that day was from God, Samuel offered them a sign. Samuel reminded them that it was the time for harvesting wheat. This would place the time of the year somewhere between April to June, which was not the season for rain. Samuel told the people, however, that the Lord would send thunder and rain to confirm His word to them. God would do this to show the people that they had done an evil thing by asking for an earthly king (verse 17). Samuel then called on the name of the Lord and that very same day the Lord sent

thunder and rain from heaven. There could be no doubt that God was speaking to His people, reminding them that they had rebelled against Him by asking for an earthly king. The people stood in awe of the Lord that day. He had spoken and confirmed His word through this miraculous sign. They knew that they were not right with God. The people were so touched by God that they cried out to Samuel to pray for them so that they would not die (verse 19).

Samuel reassured these broken people that though they had done wrong in turning from the Lord, there was still hope for them if they would learn to live for God with all their hearts. If they did this and turned from their idols, the Lord would remember them. He would not reject them as His people. What patience and forgiveness we see in the Lord God here. His people had turned from Him but it was His delight to love and make them His own.

Samuel promised that he would pray to the Lord for the people as they had asked. Notice that he told them that it would be a sin for him not to do so. It should be remembered here that Samuel felt a certain rejection as well when the people chose a king (see 1 Samuel 8:6, 7). Samuel was angry with the people for turning away from the Lord and rejecting Him as their king. Samuel's prayer was a prayer for God's forgiveness and mercy toward His people. While Samuel felt a certain rejection and anger himself, he knew he had no right to hold back the forgiveness and mercy of God from his people. To refuse to pray for God's forgiveness would have been to sin against God; who wanted to offer that forgiveness.

Samuel promised to pray for his people. He also told them in verse 23 that he would continue to be their prophet and teach them the way that was good and right. In saying this,



he was re-affirming his commitment to being God's spokesman for them.

Samuel concluded his challenge in verses 24 and 25. Here he reminded them that they were to be sure to fear the Lord and serve Him with all their heart. He challenged them not to forget the wonderful things the Lord had done for them. The idea here is that these wonderful things would stir the people to have thankful hearts and to honour God by giving themselves fully to Him. Samuel warned the people that if they persisted in doing evil, both they and the king they had chosen would be swept away. Ultimately, their victory would not come from their new king but from their relationship of obedience to God.

While the people had turned their back on God as their king, He had not given up His rule over them. The people would still be subject to Him. Even the king that had been chosen to rule over them was to be subject to the higher authority of their Heavenly King. God showed the people by thunder and lightning that He was still their true King. They were accountable to Him and would suffer His wrath if they turned from Him. As powerful as their king would be, if he did not bow the knee in fearful reverence before the great God of Israel, even he would be swept away.

God allowed His people to have an earthly king. He did not stand in their way when they turned their backs on Him and chose to follow the ways of the nations. Although they were not living as they should, God would not leave them. God would honour the kings who served Him and bless those kings who sought to lead the people in His ways.

Not one of us is perfect. There are things in our lives that do not please and honour the Lord God. Some of us have bowed the knee to another king. Some have allowed sinful

habits and attitudes to set up their thrones in our lives. God is not threatened by these false gods. He will not reject us. God loves imperfect people and He still remains our God. Samuel warns us, however, that God demands respect and honour. The thunder that roared from heaven in Samuel's day was a reminder to the people of God's justice and holiness. He will not be disrespected and dishonoured. His patience is great but so is His wrath and vengeance. We are not wise to test either.

#### For Consideration:

- What do we learn in this chapter about Samuel's proven character? Has your character as a servant of the Lord been proven?
- Samuel was ready to make things right if anyone in the assembly could prove that he had offended them in any way. Do you have that same attitude toward anyone you may have offended?
- What evidence do we have in the history of God's people that He is a forgiving God? What do we learn in this passage about the patience of God? Do you have the same patience with others?
- What do we learn about the free will God has given to each of us? Can we choose to walk away from God's purposes for our lives?
- Is the fact that God allows us to do something always an indication that He approves of what we do? Is it possible for us to pray for something and

see God grant that request even though it is not His best for us?

- How important is it that we seek to know and follow the will of God?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that even when we turn from Him, He continues to be King. Thank Him that He is Lord whether or not we accept Him as such.
- Do you have people in your life that are hard to forgive? Has the Lord forgiven those people? Ask the Lord to give you His heart of patience and forgiveness toward those individuals.
- Ask God to forgive you for the times you have insisted on your own way rather than seeking Him and His purposes for your life.
- Ask the Lord to help you to minister before Him with a clear conscience.

# 12

## JONATHAN'S VICTORY, SAUL'S DEFEAT

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Read 1 Samuel 13:1-14:23

In the previous meditation we were reminded of the great patience of God with us even when we sin and fall short of His standard. Here in chapters 13 and 14, we read of Saul's failure to honour the Lord. This is contrasted sharply with the faith of Saul's son Jonathan.

At a certain point in his reign, Saul chose three thousand men from Israel to go to battle. Of the three thousand men prepared for battle, two thousand were with Saul in the region of Micmash. The other thousand were with Saul's son Jonathan at Gibeah. The rest of Saul's army was sent home (verse 2).

Jonathan took his men and attacked a Philistine outpost in the region of Geba (verse 3). This caused immediate friction between Israel and the Philistines (verse 4). The incident forced Saul to summon his army to join him at Gilgal to face the Philistines.

The Philistines came with three thousand chariots, six thousand charioteers and soldiers "as numerous as the sand on the seashore" (verse 5). They camped at Mic-mash.

When Israel saw the Philistine army and realized that their situation was critical, they were overcome with fear. Verse 6 tells us that they hid in caves, thickets, among the rocks and in pits and cisterns. Others abandoned their posts and crossed the Jordan River' hiding in the towns of Gad and Gilead. Saul stayed in Gilgal to fight. Notice from verse 7, however, that all the troops with him were "quaking with fear." This was a very difficult time for Saul's army.

It was the practice of the day for the king to wait for a priest to offer a sacrifice to the Lord and seek His blessing before going into battle. Seven days went by and Samuel had not arrived to offer this sacrifice. This caused Saul's men to wonder if this was not a sign from God that they were doomed. Samuel's delay caused even more men to desert their post (verse 8).

Seeing his men deserting him, Saul decided to take matters into his own hands. In verse 9, he asked for the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings to be brought to him. Saul was growing impatient. The word from the Lord was that he was to wait until Samuel had offered the sacrifice, but Saul was afraid of what was happening around him so he disregarded the word from the Lord and did things in his way. He was willing to obey as long as it was convenient, but when things began to get complicated, Saul compromised.

Samuel arrived just as Saul finished making the offering. He asked Saul what he had done. Saul explained that the Philistines were gathering strength, his men were

deserting him and the prophet had not arrived for the sacrifice. Saul felt compelled to seek the Lord's blessing before the Philistines attacked (verse 12).

Saul did not set out to blaspheme the name of the Lord by his actions. He simply wanted the blessing of the Lord on his battle. The problem was that in doing so, he disobeyed the command of the Lord to wait. In his impatience, he disregarded what God had said. How easy it is for us to compromise when things get difficult. We begin to worry and wonder where God is or if He will be true to His Word. We take matters into our own hands and don't wait for God. We have all been guilty of Saul's sin.

Samuel reminded Saul that he had broken the command of the Lord. That day, Samuel told King Saul that had he waited on the Lord, his reign would have been established over Israel for all time. Because he had not trusted the Lord, however, his kingdom would not endure. God was even now seeking out a man "after his own heart" to reign in Saul's place. God was looking for a king who would make it his priority to obey the Lord in everything.

Saul was being tested by God. The future of his kingdom depended on how he responded to God in this situation. This causes us to wonder how often God tests the condition of our hearts. Each situation that comes our way can be a test of our hearts. Will we be faithful and true to God or will we compromise and fall into disobedience like Saul?

After this incident with Saul, Samuel left Gilgal and went on to Gibeah. Saul counted his men and discovered that he had only six hundred left (verse 15). About 2400 soldiers had abandoned their post. Compared to the thousands of soldiers in the Philistine camp, Israel's army was

very small and insignificant. Humanly speaking, they had no chance against the much greater Philistine army.

We discover from verse 17 that the Philistines sent raiding parties out against Israel. There were three such parties. They did not attack the army of Saul but went to different parts of the land causing trouble wherever they went. The land was being demoralized by these raiding parties.

Notice in verse 19 that there was another problem for Israel. There were no blacksmiths in the land. These particular tradesmen seemed to be the focus of the Philistines oppression of Israel in those days. They chose to target the blacksmiths so that the Israelites could not make weapons. Israel was forced to go to the Philistines to have their tools sharpened (verse 20). The Philistines charged a very high price for sharpening these tools (verse 21).

This problem was so severe that in verse 22 we are told that when the people of Israel went to battle against the Philistines, not one soldier had a sword or spear in his hand. They had to do battle with their tools. Only Jonathan and Saul were equipped with a sword and a spear. We can only imagine how discouraged and frightened the weak Israelite army was as they faced the Philistines without proper weapons.

Taking his armour bearer with him, Jonathan, Saul's son, decided to go to the Philistine outpost. He did not speak to his father about this decision. No one was aware that Jonathan had left (verse 3).

The Philistines had carefully chosen the location of their outpost. In order for Jonathan and his armour-bearer to reach the outpost, they needed to climb a steep cliff. Jonathan knew that he and his armour-bearer were no match

against the entire Philistine army. At the same time, however, he also knew that God did not need a great army to defeat the Philistines. Listen to what he told his armour-bearer in verse 6:

Come, let's go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised fellows. Perhaps the LORD will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few.

Jonathan did not know what God would do. He did not even know if God would act on their behalf. All he knew was that God was bigger than the entire Philistine army. He knew that something needed to be done. He was ready to be used of God or to perish in the attempt.

Jonathan's armour-bearer agreed to follow his master. "Go ahead; I am with you, heart and soul," he told him in verse 7. He would follow his master to the death.

With the support of his armour-bearer, Jonathan came up with a plan. In verse 8, placing the matter in the hands of the Lord, he decided that they would make no attempt to surprise the Philistines. They would climb the cliff to the Philistine camp. When the Philistines saw them, if they asked them to stay where they were, they would not go up into the outpost. If, on the other hand, the Philistines invited them into the outpost they would take this as a sign from the Lord that He was going to give them victory.

The two men started on their way to the Philistine outpost making themselves visible to the enemy. When the Philistines saw them, they said: "Come up to us and we'll teach you a lesson." This was the sign Jonathan and his armour-bearer were looking for. Taking courage, they climbed the



rest of the way to the top and attacked the Philistines. That day twenty Philistines were killed (verse 13).

The presence of the Lord was with Jonathan and his armour-bearer. His act of faith and trust in the Lord God opened the door for God to move in a powerful way that day. Verse 15 tells us that panic struck the whole Philistine army. The panic seemed to spread from where Jonathan and his armour-bearer had entered the outpost to the entire army. Verse 15 tells us that the ground shook that day as God revealed His presence and sent the nation into panic.

In the Israelite camp, one of Saul's lookouts saw the Philistine army "melting away in all directions." This perplexed Saul, who wondered what was happening. He called for his forces to see if anyone was missing. It was quickly discovered that Jonathan and his armour-bearer were no longer in the camp.

In verse 18, Saul called Ahijah the priest to bring the ark of God. Obviously, his intention was to hear from the Lord about what he needed to do. As Saul was speaking to the priest and seeking the Lord about the matter, the noise in the Philistine camp increased. There was no clear word, however, from the Lord. Saul decided he needed to respond quickly. In verse 19, he told the priest to withdraw his hand. In other words, he sent the priest away. Saul didn't have time to wait for the Lord on this matter. He felt he needed to do something. We are left to wonder if this was yet another test from the Lord. Would he wait on the Lord or take matters into his own hands again? Once again Saul had failed the test.

Saul gathered his men and went to battle. They found the Philistines in total confusion. Verse 20 tells us that they

were fighting each other, striking each other with their swords.

From verse 21 we learn that there were Hebrews among the Philistines that day. These were likely slaves, servants or captives who had been forced to serve the Philistines. When these individuals saw that Saul's army had come, they revolted against their Philistine masters and went over to the Israelites. Even the Israelites hidden in the hills and caves throughout the region, seeing the Philistines retreating, took courage. They left their hiding places and joined the battle. That day, the Lord rescued Israel from the hands of the Philistines.

Jonathan's act of faith opened the door for great victory. Jonathan knew that he was no match for the Philistine army, but he was willing to let God work on his behalf. He took a risk. He was willing to sacrifice everything. He placed his life on the line. His trust and confidence was in the God who could deliver His people through two simple men. Jonathan did not depend on his human strength and logic. He trusted in the Lord.

Saul, on the other hand, was motivated by human reason. He did not trust the Lord's timing. As Israel's king, he felt he needed to make the decisions. He could not wait for God. He had to take matters in his own hands.

Jonathan's faith stirred up the whole nation. It gave boldness to those who had been held prisoners of the Philistines and released the cowards from their hiding places in the caves and hills. It inspired all Israel to trust the Lord and to claim the victory He desired to give them. Were it not for the faith of Jonathan that day, we are left to wonder what would have happened to Saul and his 600 unarmed soldiers.

For Consideration:

- What was the state of Saul's army in this passage? Could this be a picture of some believers today? Explain.
- Compare the faith of Jonathan with the careful reasoning of Saul. What is the difference?
- Have you ever felt the tension between faith and human reason? What is the challenge of this passage for us today?
- How does Jonathan's faith open the door for God's people to experience victory? How did Jonathan's faith inspire the whole nation?
- Can we demonstrate true faith without a certain amount of risk? What did Jonathan risk in this passage? What challenge does this bring us?
- Notice that Jonathan's faith does not tell God what to do. He really did not know if God was going to give him victory or not. He was willing to trust God regardless of the result. Does faith always understand the outcome? What is the difference between demanding that God do something and trusting Him by faith to do what He desires to do?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to forgive you for the times when you took matters into your own hands and compromised your obedience.
- Ask the Lord give you the faith of Jonathan that will willingly risk everything for the sake of His name.
- Thank God that He is greater than our enemies.

# 13

## A BROKEN OATH

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Read 1 Samuel 14:24-52

In the previous meditation, we discovered how God used Jonathan to bring Israel victory over the Philistines. Saul was so intent on gaining victory over the Philistines that day that he bound all his people under an oath saying:

Cursed be any man who eats food before evening comes, before I have avenged myself on my enemies! (verse 24).

Oaths and curses were taken very seriously in the Scriptures. The result was that none of Saul's troops dared to eat anything (verse 24). On this occasion, as they entered a wooded region they found some honey on the ground. Because of their oath, however, as tempting as this honey was, not one of Saul's soldiers tasted it. They feared what would happen to them if they broke the oath Saul had made them take.

Jonathan was not aware of the oath. When he came to the wooded region and saw the honey on the ground he reached out his staff and dipped it in the honeycomb. Raising the staff to his mouth he ate the honey. Verse 27 tells

us that his eyes brightened. In other words he was strengthened by the honey.

It was not until he had eaten the honey that Jonathan was made aware of the oath. Jonathan's response is important. First, when he heard about the oath he openly expressed his disagreement. In verse 29, he called his father a trouble maker. In saying this, Jonathan is not showing the respect Saul deserved as his father and leader of the nation. Admittedly, the decision to bind the people to this oath may not have been the best decision. Jonathan, however, should not have openly condemned his father and king.

Notice second, that Jonathan justified what he did rather than accept his guilt. Some people might assume that because Jonathan did not know about the oath, he was not responsible for breaking it. This is not the case. The whole army was bound before God to the oath that Saul had made. Jonathan was part of that army and accountable for his actions.

Imagine that you did something to offend a friend. Imagine also that you were not aware that your actions had deeply hurt him. What should your response be when you discover what you have done? Would you not go to that friend and apologize? Are you not guilty even though you did not know your actions were offensive? Ignorance is not an excuse. Jonathan did not know about the oath but he was still guilty. His response should have been to repent of his sin. Instead, he was critical and judgmental of the oath. I'm sure we have all fallen into this error.

We read in verse 31, that after the Israelites had struck down the Philistines they were exhausted. They pounced on the plunder of sheep, cattle and calves, butchered and

ate them with the blood (verse 32). Eating blood was a violation of the Law of Moses (see Leviticus 17:10).

When Saul heard what the people had done and how they had sinned against the Lord by eating blood, he told his servants to find a large stone and roll it into their midst. When the stone was placed in their midst, he then told his men to bring cattle and sheep and slaughter them on the stone, draining the blood from the animals so that they would not be guilty before the Lord.

Verse 35 tells us that Saul also built an altar there in the presence of the Lord. It is unclear what Saul's intent was for this offering. Some commentators believe that he built the altar to offer up a thanksgiving offering to the Lord for the victory He had given them over the Philistines. It may also be to offer a sacrifice for the sins of His people.

Having eaten and renewed their strength, Saul decided to go down to the Philistines in the night to plunder and slaughter them. He wanted to be sure that his victory over them was complete. The people accepted his decision (verse 36). The priests however, asked Saul to inquire first of the Lord to seek his will. Saul had not done this. Again we see that Saul often took matters into his own hands without seeking the Lord. He depended on his human reason and not on the word of the Lord.

When Saul asked the Lord if he was to go after the Philistines and whether God would give him victory, the Lord did not answer. In verse 37, we read "But God did not answer him that day." We are not told how long Saul waited for the response of the Lord but he knew that if God was not answering, something was wrong.

Saul believed the reason the Lord was not answering him was because there was sin in his camp. He called his leaders together to speak to them about this sin, telling them that whoever was guilty of the sin that kept God from speaking to them would die, even if it was his own son Jonathan. The leaders appeared to be aware of the sin but said nothing (verse 39). This was likely out of respect for Jonathan and the victory he had given them that day.

Saul called for an assembly of the Israelites (verse 40). He then prayed to the Lord and asked him to reveal the guilty person. Lots were cast and the lot fell on Jonathan and Saul. When the lot was cast to determine if Saul or Jonathan was guilty, the lot fell on Jonathan. Saul demanded that Jonathan tell him what he had done. In verse 43, Jonathan told his father that he had tasted a little honey with his staff.

Jonathan seemed to express his disapproval of the whole process in verse 43 when he said: "I merely tasted a little honey with the end of my staff. And now must I die?" It is quite easy to see Jonathan's frustration with his father and his oath.

Saul was true to his word. "May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if you do not die, Jonathan," he told his son.

The men present that day were grieved by this decision of Saul's. They reminded Saul of the great victory Jonathan had given them that day. They pleaded for his life, reminding the king that God had powerfully used his son that day. Saul relented and let Jonathan live.

Verse 46 tells us that Saul stopped pursuing the Philistines and returned home. As king, Saul fought against the



Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites Amalekites and the kings of Zobah and the Philistia he had a measure of success. He delivered Israel from their oppression (verse 48).

Saul had three sons. Their names were Jonathan, Ishvi and Malki-Shua. His oldest daughter was Merab and the younger was Michal (verse 49). His wife was Ahinoam. His military commander was Abner, the son of his uncle Ner.

While Saul was experiencing a measure of blessing in his battles and family life, verse 52 tells us that all through his life there was bitter war with the Philistines. He was never able to completely defeat them and they were a constant thorn in his side. Whenever Saul saw a brave man he would take him into his army.

For Consideration:

- What does this passage teach us about the importance of taking our promises and oaths seriously?
- What do we learn here about using ignorance as an excuse? In other words, are we still guilty even if we don't know we have sinned?
- Have you ever found yourself becoming judgmental or critical when you should be accepting your guilt and recognizing your sin?
- How does the forgiveness of Jonathan help us appreciate more fully what the Lord Jesus did for us

in forgiving our sin and pleading our case before His Father?

- What warning do you see in this passage about respecting authority?
- What does this passage teach us about how sin can keep us from hearing God?
- Saul never seemed to have complete peace in his life. His reign seemed to be always plagued by war and struggle. To what extent was this the result of a poor walk with God.

For Prayer:

- Ask God to help you to accept and recognize your guilt.
- Thank the Lord that He pleads our case before His father so that we are forgiven our debt.
- Ask the Lord to give you total victory over your enemies. Ask Him to cleanse you from any sin that would keep that victory from you.
- Ask the Lord to help you to respect those He has put in authority over you. Take a moment to pray for them.

## FURTHER DISOBEDIENCE

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Read 1 Samuel 15:1-35

In this study of the life of Saul we see one reoccurring theme. Saul's greatest weakness as king was that he depended on his own reason and did not listen to the Lord. It was this weakness that would eventually bring about his downfall. Here in chapter 15, we again see how Saul chose to follow his own reasoning rather than following the clear command of the Lord given through Samuel.

On this occasion, the prophet Samuel came to Saul with a word from the Lord. God told Saul, through Samuel, that he wanted to punish the Amalekites for what they had done to Israel when he had delivered them from the bondage of Egypt. When the Israelites left Egypt, the Amalekites attacked them (see Exodus 17:8-15). This angered the Lord God because the Amalekites showed no fear of God in attacking His people even though they had heard about how He had delivered them from the Egyptians (Deuteronomy 25:17-19). God commanded Saul to attack the Amalekites. Notice that God told Saul that he was to totally destroy them and everything that belonged to them. Samuel made it very clear to Saul that the Lord wanted him to destroy men, women, infants, cattle, sheep, camels and donkeys. Nothing was to be taken.

In obedience to the will of the Lord, Saul gathered his army at Telaim. A large army of two hundred thousand foot soldiers were joined by another ten thousand men from Judah. With this large army, Saul went to the city in preparation for an attack (verse 5).

Notice in verse 6 that before attacking the Amalekites, Saul spoke to the Kenites. The Kenites were a nomadic people who lived in this region. Saul told them what he had come to do to the Amalekites and encouraged them to leave the region lest they get caught up in the middle of the battle. The Kenites had shown kindness to the Israelites when they left Egypt. From Judges 1:16, we understand that Moses' father-in-law was a Kenite. These people had enjoyed a good relationship with the Israelites. Saul wanted to respect this relationship. Hearing of Saul's plans, the Kenites moved from the region (verse 6).

When the Kenites had successfully moved out, Saul and his army attacked the Amalekites pursuing them as far as Shur, east of Egypt. God gave His people victory that day.

Notice in verse 8 that Saul took the Amalekite king alive but killed all his people. It is unclear why Saul kept king Agag alive. What we do know, however, is that Saul disregarded the clear command of the Lord by letting him live. Notice also in verse 9, that Saul decided to keep the best sheep, cattle, fat calves and lambs. He was unwilling to kill these animals. Verse 9 tells us that "everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed." Clearly this was a direct violation of the command of the Lord to destroy everything. There are times when we do not like the will of the Lord. This was one of those times for Saul.

Seeing what Saul had done, the Lord approached Samuel the prophet with a word. "I am grieved that I have made

Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions" (verse 11). Saul's disobedience broke the heart of God. God was looking for a man who would listen to Him and obey Him completely. Saul was not that man. Saul trusted too much in his own reason and logic. When Saul did not agree or could not understand the will of the Lord, he would do things in his own way. If God took too long to answer, Saul did what he thought best. This grieved the heart of God.

When Samuel heard that Saul had disregarded the command of the Lord and that God's heart was grieved with him, he was troubled (verse 12). That night he could not sleep but stayed awake crying out to the Lord for Saul.

Early the next morning, Samuel went out to meet Saul. Samuel was told that Saul had gone up to Carmel to set up a monument to his own honour and then he was going down to Gilgal. The fact that he had set up a monument to his own glory gives us a better understanding of where Saul was at spiritually. As we have already seen, Saul tended to do things his own way. The fact that he chose to listen to his own reason rather than God is an indication of the pride in Saul's heart. When we read in verse 12 that Saul built an altar to himself we see that Saul was becoming very proud. Saul was beginning to believe that he was responsible for the victories Israel was experiencing. God was being pushed out of his life.

When Samuel found him, Saul blessed the prophet and told him that he had carried out the Lord's instructions (verse 13). When challenged by Samuel about the sound of the cattle in the camp, Saul told the prophet that the soldiers brought them from the Amalekites because they wanted to give them as a sacrifice to the Lord (verse 15).

He assured Samuel that they had destroyed the rest of the cattle.

What we need to understand here is that Saul does not really take the blame for this himself. He is quick to tell Samuel what the soldiers did. He justified their actions by giving a spiritual reason for what they did. "Stop!" Samuel told Saul in verse 16. We get the impression that Samuel was frustrated with Saul's attempt to justify his sinful actions.

Samuel told Saul that the Lord had a word for him (verse 16). Samuel reminded Saul that even though Saul felt small and insignificant in his own eyes the Lord had made him to be the head over all the tribes of Israel (verse 17). This statement is in sharp contrast to the action of Saul in building a memorial to his own glory.

Samuel went on to tell Saul that the Lord had given him a mission with very particular instructions. God had told him to destroy all the Amalekites and take no plunder from them. In taking the sheep, cattle and leaving their king alive, Saul had disobeyed the Lord.

Notice Saul's response to the prophet in verse 20:

But I did obey the LORD," Saul said. "I went on the mission the LORD assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the LORD your God at Gilgal.

Saul really does not understand what he has done. He felt he had done what the Lord had required. Admittedly, he had left their king alive and allowed his soldiers to take the sheep but this was all for a good reason. He was going to offer these animals as a sacrifice to the Lord his God. He did not see anything wrong with what he had done.

Saul may have had a spiritual reason for what he had done, but he was living in rebellion against God. He was being governed by his human reason. He wanted to do something for God but this was not what God wanted from him. It is possible for us to deceive ourselves into believing that we are serving God because we are doing something spiritual. We only truly serve God when we are living in His will and walking in obedience to Him. You can be doing good things and not be living in obedience to God.

Samuel reminded Saul that the Lord delighted more in obedience than burnt offerings and sacrifices (verse 22). This is a lesson we all need to learn. You can do all kinds of things for the Lord and not be right with him. You can sacrifice your time and money for the Lord and still not be doing what God wants you to do. God had a specific purpose for Saul, but Saul walked away from that purpose to do what he thought was best. This did not serve God's purposes.

How important it is for us to seek the Lord and His will for our lives and ministries. There are those who believe that we can do whatever we want for the kingdom of God and God will bless those efforts. The reality of the matter is that God wants to use us in very specific ways. God has trained and equipped us for specific ministries. When we ignore His leading and do things in our own way, we fall into the same trap as Saul. God is not looking for sacrifices as much as He is looking for obedience.

Notice what Samuel told Saul in verse 23. He told the king that "rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry." Saul was guilty of two sins here. He was guilty of rebellion against God. Samuel compared this to divination. Divination related to consulting other gods and seeking their direction and guidance. This is what Saul was doing. He was turning his back on God to seek direction elsewhere. In this case, Saul consulted his own reason.

Not only was Saul guilty of divination but he was also guilty of idolatry. Samuel compares idolatry here to arrogance. Saul felt he knew better than God. He chose to listen to his own reason rather than the clear command of the Lord. In his pride Saul placed himself in God's place. He even built a memorial to his own glory. Samuel told Saul that day that because he had rejected the word of the Lord and set himself up against God, God had rejected him as king (verse 24).

This news grieved the heart of Saul. Listen to his plea in verses 24, 25:

I have sinned. I violated the LORD's command and your instructions. I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them. Now I beg you, forgive my sin and come back with me, so that I may worship the LORD.

Here Saul admits that he had not followed the instructions of the Lord. He told Samuel, however, that it was because the people had pressed him so much. He gave into their pleading. Saul still seems to excuse his sin. Listen to what Adam said in Genesis 3:12 when confronted by his sin:



The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

Adam is quick to place the blame on Eve. This seems to be the case with Saul. He admitted his guilt but justified it by saying that if the people had not pressured him so much he would not have given in to the temptation.

Saul pleaded with Samuel to come back to Gilgal with him to worship the Lord there. Samuel told him in verse 26 that he would not go back with him because he had rejected the Lord and the Lord had rejected him as king. As Samuel turned to leave Saul, the king reached out and caught him by the robe in an attempt to keep him from leaving. Samuel's robe tore. Samuel used this incident to tell Saul that God had torn the kingdom of Israel from him that day. He would give it to someone who was better than him (verse 28). This matter was settled in the mind of God and nothing would change His mind.

When Saul pleaded more with Samuel about coming to worship the Lord, Samuel finally agreed. Notice, however, in verse 30 the reason Saul wanted Samuel to go up with him to worship. He wanted Samuel to honour him before the elders and before the people. Saul seemed to be concerned for his reputation. It is possible that this is again an evidence of the growing pride of Saul's heart.

When he went to worship with Saul, Samuel called for Agag the king of the Amalekites to be brought to him. Agag felt that he was going to be spared (verse 32). This was not to be the case. That day, Samuel put Agag to death before the Lord at Gilgal. To this point, Saul had still not killed him in obedience to the Lord. Samuel had to do this himself.

After these events, Samuel left for Ramah and Saul returned to his home in Gibeah. Even though he grieved and mourned for Saul, Samuel would no longer see Saul.

For Consideration:

- How does Saul disobey the command of the Lord?
- Is it possible to do good things and still be living in disobedience to the Lord?
- What is God's purpose for your life? Are you walking in that purpose?
- What is the difference between human reason and divine guidance? On which of these is your ministry and life based?
- What evidence do we have here of growing pride in Saul's life?
- Saul was only partially obedient to the Lord. What does this passage teach us about the importance of total obedience?
- How does Saul justify his sinful actions? Ask the Lord to give you grace to accept your guilt without excuses.

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to show you His purpose for your life.

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have listened to human reason and not to His clear leading and direction.
- Thank the Lord that He has a specific purpose for your life.
- Ask the Lord to keep you from justifying your sinful actions.
- Ask the Lord to search your life and show you if there are any areas where you are not seeking to walk fully with Him.

# 15

## DAVID IS ANOINTED

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Read 1 Samuel 16:1-23

We have seen in the last few meditations how the Lord was displeased with Saul because of his disobedience. God decided that He would choose another person to be king in Saul's place. In this chapter, we meet God's replacement for Saul.

Samuel and Saul had, for a long time, enjoyed a good relationship. Samuel had anointed Saul to be the first king over Israel. It deeply grieved Samuel that Saul had turned his back on the Lord. From verse 1, it seems that Samuel had grieved for some time over God's decision to reject Saul as king. Notice that the Lord asked him how long he would be grieving over Saul since He had rejected him. This may say something about how Samuel felt toward Saul and the relationship he enjoyed with him.

While there was a time to grieve over the sin of Saul, it was not God's desire that Samuel remain in this place of mourning. God's intention for Samuel was that he move beyond the grief to doing something about it. There is an important lesson for us all in this. We need to see more people who will grieve over sin and rebellion against God, however, God does not want us to remain in this place. He

wants us to move on to the victory He wants to give. Maybe some of you have experienced deep failure in your life. Maybe you are having a hard time forgiving yourself. God is calling you now to move beyond those failures to victory. This is what God is calling Samuel to do in verse 1.

God spoke to Samuel in verse 1 telling him that it was now time for him to stop mourning for Saul and go to Bethlehem to anoint someone to take his place. God specifically told Samuel to look for Jesse in Bethlehem because He had chosen one of his sons to be the next king.

Samuel was initially afraid to go to Bethlehem. He feared that if Saul heard that he had anointed another person as king in his place, he would seek to kill him. God told the prophet not to fear for his life. He was to bring a heifer as a sacrifice. If Saul asked what he was doing, he was to say that he was going to offer a sacrifice to the Lord. It was not time for the new king to be revealed to the nation.

God told Samuel to invite Jesse and his family to the sacrifice. He would show Samuel the person he was to anoint as the next king over Israel (verse 3).

Samuel obeyed the Lord and went to Bethlehem. His presence caused a stir in the community. Bethlehem was a small city of no particular significance. When the elders heard that the great prophet Samuel had come to town, they came out to meet him with much fear (verse 4). His visit was unexpected. They could not see any reason why the prophet would come to their small town. They feared that he had a message of judgment for them. They asked him if he came in peace (verse 4). Samuel eased their fear by telling them that he had. He invited them to a sacrifice to the Lord. He also invited Jesse and his sons to come as the Lord had told him.

When Jesse and his family arrived, Samuel saw his son Eliab and thought: "Surely the LORD's anointed stands here before the LORD." Samuel looked at Eliab's appearance and was deceived. It should be remembered that when Saul was chosen he was taller than everyone else. We read in 1 Samuel 10:23-24:

They ran and brought him out, and as he stood among the people he was a head taller than any of the others. Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see the man the LORD has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people." Then the people shouted, "Long live the king!"

Saul looked like a king. He stood above everyone else. Samuel found himself looking for someone just like Saul. This was a mistake. God had not chosen Eliab. God was not looking at the outward appearance but at the heart (verse 7). This is where Saul had failed. Saul looked like a king but his heart was not obedient to the Lord. God wanted a king whose heart was in tune with Him.

Jesse called his other sons to come before Samuel. One by one they passed before Samuel. Abinadab came before the prophet but God told him he was not the man. Sham-mah then approached but God rejected him. Each of Jesse's seven sons passed before Samuel with the same result. God had not chosen any of these men. This perplexed Samuel, who had clearly heard God say that he was going to anoint one of Jesse's sons. He asked Jesse if he had any more sons, and Jesse told him of his youngest son who was watching sheep. Samuel sent for him.

When the youngest son, David came before Samuel, God spoke to Samuel telling him to rise and anoint him, for he was the one chosen to be the next king over Israel (verse

12). Samuel took his horn of oil and anointed David in the presence of his brothers. That day the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power. We are not told what the evidence of that power was or even if there was any immediate evidence of the power of God. What is clear is that David was empowered to accomplish the work God had given him to do. God will always equip those He calls. After these events, Samuel returned to Ramah (verse 13).

What is particularly interesting in this passage is what happened to Saul the moment David was anointed. Verse 14 tells us that the Spirit of God departed from Saul and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him. This merits some consideration.

Notice first that the Spirit of the Lord left Saul. We need to understand this in the context of the Old Testament. Believers were not indwelt by the Holy Spirit as believers after the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Jesus' death on the cross, and the forgiveness of sin, allowed the Spirit of God to take up residence in the hearts and lives of His children. In the Old Testament, the Spirit of God would fall on an individual to empower them for acts of service but He did not live in them as we understand in our day. When the Spirit of God left Saul, so did the empowering and anointing for ministry.

We need to make a distinction between the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit and the way in which the Holy Spirit falls on an individual, church or a nation to empower or convict at a given time. While the Holy Spirit always dwells in my heart, I have known His empowering to fall on me from time to time to accomplish particular tasks. I remember particularly a time when I was feeling very depressed. I had been asked to speak to a group in a neighbouring town. I had never felt so helpless as I drove

to that preaching engagement. Humanly speaking, I had nothing to offer these people. I know that the Holy Spirit would never leave me and was working in my life but I did not have any strength to stand up and preach. It was not until I stood up in front of those people that day that I knew the presence of the Spirit of God to fall on me. I spoke with a power and authority that came from God. We have all experienced the Spirit of God coming in power in our churches for a time. While He is always with us, there are times when He seems to move in special ways bringing conviction of sin and empowering His people in service. While God's indwelling presence does not leave the believer, this empowering presence of the Spirit comes and goes as God pleases.

Notice second, in verse 14, that when the empowering presence of the Lord left Saul, an evil spirit came and tormented him. It would seem that the only thing that kept the evil spirit from Saul was the presence of the Spirit of God. God's Spirit was protecting and keeping Saul from evil.

Notice third, that the evil spirit was "from the Lord" (verse 14). We should not assume that God sends evil spirits to torment people. This spirit was from the Lord in that God withdrew His hand from Saul and handed him over to the enemy and these evil spirits were the result. Saul had opened his heart to the enemy by his disobedience and unfaithfulness. He drove the Spirit of God away and the result was that God turned from him. When God turned from him, the enemy came in full force.

Saul's attendants became aware of the change in Saul. Seeing how he was tormented by this evil spirit, his servants suggested that he find someone to play the harp to soothe him when he was being tormented (verse 16).



Likely the sound of hymns of praise quieted Saul's spirit and gave him some relief.

The idea of finding a musician pleased Saul. He asked his attendants to find someone to play the harp for him. It happened that one of Saul's servants had seen David play the harp. He recommended that they bring David to play for Saul (verse 18). Saul sent his messengers to bring David. It was by this means that David came into the service of Saul. Saul liked David and made him one of his armour-bearers. Whenever the evil spirit came upon Saul, David would play his harp and the evil spirit would leave (verse 23).

Before concluding this meditation of chapter 16, I want to underline two important details in this passage. First, notice that while David was anointed by God to be king, he would not become king immediately. This is important. While David was called and gifted of God, he was still not ready to become king. He had much to learn. He needed to wait for God's timing. This is an important lesson for us all. God's calling, anointing and gifting do not remove the need for us to learn and mature through experience and study. God expects us to wait for His leading and timing for ministry. He will show us when we are ready and move us forward in His time.

Notice second, how God placed David in a position to learn. David is called into the presence of the king. He would spend time with Saul and learn from him. He would become acquainted with the affairs of the nation. As armour-bearer, David would learn from Saul about battles. He would be in a position to meet the right people and gain the support of those who surrounded the king.

Finally, notice that David was initially called to the king's side as a musician. Little did David know that his harp would be the means by which he would eventually become king. David had to learn to be faithful in small things. By pleasing Saul with his harp, he would eventually be led to even greater things. Don't despise small things. Do whatever God puts on your heart to do. Let Him train you through those things and use them to accomplish His purposes. You will be surprised to see what God will accomplish through your faithfulness.

#### For Consideration:

- What does this passage have to teach us about our need to move beyond grief and mourning to victory? Does God want us to remain in our grief?
- Have you ever found yourself judging someone's value on the basis of their outward appearance? What does this passage teach us about this?
- How important is the attitude of our heart? Compare Saul and David.
- What does this passage teach us about the ministry of the Holy Spirit?
- Is it enough to be called and gifted? How important is God's timing? What does David's experience teach us?
- How important is it for us to be faithful in small things? How did David's faithfulness as a harp player lead to greater things for him?

## For Prayer:

- Thank God that He has called us to move beyond mourning to victory.
- Thank the Lord that He equips those He calls. Thank Him for the gifts and calling He has given you.
- Ask God to give you a heart that seeks Him and His purposes.
- Ask God to help you to be faithful in small things.
- Thank the Lord for the ministry of His Holy Spirit in your life.
- Ask God to help you to be more sensitive to the lessons He wants to teach you. Ask Him to give you patience as you wait for Him to train and prepare you for the particular ministry He has for you to do.
- Thank the Lord for how He prepares the details of life so that they bring about His purposes.

# 16

## DAVID AND GOLIATH

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Read 1 Samuel 17:1-58

In the last meditation we saw how Samuel had anointed David to be king over Israel. The Spirit of God fell on David that day. The demonstration of God's anointing on David would come through an encounter with a Philistine giant by the name of Goliath.

The Philistines were a thorn in Israel's side during the reign of Saul. In verse 1, we read that the Philistines had gathered for war against Israel in Socoh of Judah. The battle line was drawn in the Valley of Elah. On either side of the valley was a hill. The Israelites were on one hill and the Philistines were on the other with the valley separating them.

Among the Philistines was a warrior named Goliath, a very impressive man. He was over nine feet (three meters) tall. He had proven himself in battle and was called a "champion" in verse 4. His armour was equally impressive. He wore a bronze helmet and a coat of scale armour weighing five thousand shekels. Five thousand shekels is equal to 127 pounds (57 kilograms). He wore bronze leg protection and carried a bronze javelin slung on his back. The iron point on his spear weighed six hundred shekels (15

pounds or 7 kilograms). We can only imagine the strength of this massive giant. His coat alone would be more than the average person would want to carry.

Goliath stood daily in front of the Israelites and offered them a challenge. He defied the Israelites to choose a man from among them to fight him. If that man could kill him then the Philistines would surrender to them and become their subjects. If, on the other hand, he killed the Israelite, then they would become servants of the Philistines. The Israelites were afraid of Goliath. No one was willing to take on his challenge.

Verses 12 to 15 remind us that Jesse, David's father, was "well advanced in years." Jesse's three oldest sons, Eliab, Abinadab and Shammah served as soldiers in Saul's army. They were present when Goliath was making his challenge. David divided his time between serving Saul and helping his father with the sheep in Bethlehem (verse 15).

Morning and evening for forty days, Goliath called out his challenge to Israel, defying them to fight him (verse 16). During those forty days no one took up the challenge.

One day Jesse told his son David to take some grain and loaves of bread to his brothers at the military camp (verse 17). He also sent ten cheeses to the commander of their unit (verse 18). Jesse told David to see how his brothers were doing and bring back some assurance of their well-being. As a father, he was concerned for them.

David went early in the morning to the camp where his brothers were stationed. As he arrived, both armies were taking up positions to face each other. Leaving his gifts with the keeper of the supplies, David ran out to meet his

brothers. As he was speaking with them, Goliath stepped out and brought his usual challenge to the Israelites. And, as usual, when the Israelites saw Goliath they ran from him in fear (verse 24).

David heard the challenge of Goliath and was disturbed in his heart. He asked the men standing beside him what would be done for the man who killed Goliath and removed the disgrace from Israel (verse 26). Notice particularly that David felt that Israel was being disgraced by the Philistine giant. What David heard that day grieved his heart. What grieved him most was that a Philistine should defy the entire army of God. If the God of Israel was the all-powerful Creator of the universe, who was this giant to defy Him? Surely God was bigger than Goliath.

The men standing beside David told him that Saul had offered great wealth to the man who killed Goliath. Saul would also give his daughter in marriage to the victor, and promised that his family would be exempt from taxes in Israel (verse 25).

When David's brother Eliab heard what David was saying to the men around him, he became angry with him. He criticized him for his arrogance. Obviously, Eliab was frustrated with the whole situation and resented David's interference. He didn't feel that David really understood the situation and told him to go home and care for his sheep (verse 28).

Frustrated that no one was doing anything about Goliath, David went to other soldiers to speak to them about this challenge (verse 30). Each soldier said the same thing. No one was willing to stand up against Goliath. The whole army was paralyzed. David obviously was stirring things

up in the camp. His words were reported to Saul, who sent for him (verse 31).

David knew that something needed to be done. He was ashamed that no one in Israel could stand up against Goliath. David told Saul that he would fight Goliath himself. God was stirring David to action. David could not sit by and watch his people be defied and mocked by the Philistines. It did not make sense from a human perspective that David be the one to fight Goliath. The Spirit of God, however, had put a great burden on David's heart that he could not ignore.

Being the logical person he was, Saul reminded David that he was merely a youth. He was no match for this great Philistine warrior (verse 33).

It was true that Goliath had been a warrior from his youth. He was bigger than David and, humanly speaking, David was no match for him. David was not discouraged by Saul's reasoning. He reminded Saul that when a lion or bear came and carried off one of his father's sheep, he pursued it to rescue the sheep. He would strike the lion or bear and take the sheep from its mouth. David assured Saul that the God who had delivered him from the hands of the bear and lion would also deliver him from the hands of this Philistine who defied the God of Israel (verse 37).

It is unclear what it was that changed Saul's mind; but in verse 37, he gave David permission to fight Goliath. There was obviously a faith in David that struck Saul. He admired David's commitment and courage.

Saul dressed David in his own tunic and put a coat of armour and bronze helmet on his head (verse 38). David took a sword and fastened it to his belt. Verse 39 tells us

that David tried to walk around in the armour but was not comfortable. He told Saul that he could not wear his armour and went out in his own clothes with a shepherd's staff and a sling shot.

The battle with Goliath was not to be fought with the weapons of Israel's warfare. David was not to wrap himself in human armour. He was to trust the Lord and Him alone. While to all human eyes, David stood naked and exposed to Goliath's attack, unseen to the human eye was the hand of God surrounding and empowering him. It was in this unseen presence that David had put his confidence.

Stooping down by a stream David took five smooth stones and put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag. He held his sling in his hand as he approached the giant. As David approached from the one side, Goliath and his armour-bearer approached from the other. As they drew closer, Goliath saw David and despised him (verse 42). He took David's presence as an insult. Seeing that David did not even come with a sword but with a shepherd's staff Goliath yelled to David: "Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?" David was not even giving Goliath the honour of fighting with swords and spears. Goliath cursed David by his pagan gods and challenged him to come to him so that he could kill him and feed his flesh to the birds and the beasts of the field (verse 44). Goliath had no fear of David.

David looked at Goliath and rebuked him in verses 45-47 saying:

You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and



cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD's, and he will give all of you into our hands.

There are several things we need to see in this powerful statement of David's. First, notice that David stood against Goliath in the name of the Lord. It was Saul who had given him permission to fight, but David was not trusting in Saul's authority. David stood before Goliath under a much higher authority than Saul's. He stood under the authority of the God of Israel.

Second, notice the assurance of David in this statement. David knew that God was able to deliver him. He was confident in the call of God on his life to defeat Goliath. God would not fail him. Even this great giant could not stand against the call and anointing of the Lord God in David's life.

Third, notice that David was aware that what he was doing had a much bigger purpose than simply defeating Goliath and the Philistines. God wanted to use this incident to teach His people to trust Him. He wanted them to realize that it was not their human strength that would give them victory. He wanted them to look beyond their limited resources to the power and authority of God. God could use the simplest shepherd to defeat an entire army.

This was a lesson Israel needed to learn. They stood paralyzed by their human strength and wisdom. In God and His strength, however, they were more than able to overcome their enemy.

As Goliath moved closer, David ran to meet him. As he ran, he reached into his bag and took out a stone and slung it. The stone hit Goliath on the forehead and the giant fell face down on the ground. Running over to him David took the Philistine's own sword from its sheath, killed him and cut off his head. Seeing this, the Philistine army turned and ran.

Israel pursued the Philistines and defeated them. Philistine bodies were strewn along the road from Gath to Ekron (verse 52). When they had defeated the Philistines, the Israelites returned to plunder their camp.

David brought Goliath's head to Saul. It would eventually be kept in Jerusalem (verse 54) likely as a remembrance of what God had done. David would keep the giant's weapons for himself.

The story of David and Goliath is one of tremendous courage and faith. It reminds us that often we are held in bondage by enemies that can be defeated in Christ's name. We are challenged in this passage to turn from our frail human strength and wisdom to God, His leading and empowering. In Him we are strong. In Him we are able to overcome whatever the enemy throws at us.

For Consideration:

- What are the "Goliaths" in your life today?
- Israel was paralyzed by fear and lack of courage. Could this picture be a picture of your life or the life of the church in our day?

- What burden has the Lord put on your heart? Are you willing to stand against every obstacle to accomplish His purpose for your life?
- What does this passage teach us about the limited resources of human wisdom and strength?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that His strength is greater than our enemies. Thank Him that we can have victory in His name.
- Ask the Lord to help you to trust in Him and not in your human wisdom and strength.
- Ask God to open your heart to the purpose He has for you. Ask Him to give you courage to stand, like David.
- Ask God to show you any way in which you have been trusting in your own wisdom and strength.

# 17

## SAUL'S JEALOUSY

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Read 1 Samuel 18:1-30

God's anointing of David was becoming evident to the nation of Israel. In the last chapter we saw how God gave David victory over Goliath. In this way he distinguished himself as a mighty and anointed warrior. David also gained the support and approval of King Saul and his son Jonathan.

In verse 1 we see that David would soon become a close companion with Jonathan. In some ways, the two men had a similar personality. Jonathan had distinguished himself as a mighty man of faith when he attacked the Philistine outpost in chapter 14. Verse 1 tells us that Jonathan loved David as himself. In fact, the two men made a covenant together. As a token of that covenant, Jonathan gave David his robe, tunic, sword, bow and belt (verse 4). While it is not clear why Jonathan made a covenant with David, the items he gave David may be a clue to understanding what is happening in this passage.

In Genesis 41:42 we read that Pharaoh, wanting to honour Joseph, made him second in command and dressed him in a rich robe. When king Xerxes asked Haman what he could do for a man he wanted to honour, Haman told him

to dress him in a robe the king had worn and parade him through the streets (see Esther 6:6-11). When Jonathan gave David his robe, tunic, sword and belt he was very likely doing so to honour him. Jonathan knew that David was anointed by God. He knew that even though he was the king's son, he would not be given the honour of becoming king. This is quite clear from 1 Samuel 23:17 when Jonathan told David:

"Don't be afraid," he said. "My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this."

In giving David his robe, Jonathan is likely surrendering his position as the future king to the one God had anointed.

David would remain with Saul from the time he conquered Goliath. He would no longer return to his father's house (verse 2). David's victory over Goliath was a doorway to even greater opportunities in Saul's service. He was successful in everything Saul gave him to do (verse 5). As a result of this success, Saul gave him a rank in his army. Everyone seemed to like David. Verse 5 tells us that the officers in Saul's army as well as the people were all pleased with David. God gave him favour in the eyes of the people.

Years had passed since David had been anointed by Samuel. God's purpose for David is slowly being revealed to the nation. The victories God gave him gave him a reputation as a warrior and leader. The favour God gave him with the people and the military commanders was all part of God revealing His purposes to the nation. It was becoming more obvious to the nation that David was anointed by God as leader of their nation.

We catch a glimpse of the tremendous popularity of David in Israel in verses 6-7. These verses seem to return us to David's defeat of Goliath. When David and Saul came back from defeat of Goliath and the Philistines, women came out from the towns to meet King Saul with dancing and singing. Verse 7 tells us that as they danced they sang: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands."

This song shows us that David's popularity was greater than Saul's. The song displeased Saul, who did not like taking second place to David. He noted that the women gave him credit for killing thousands but they credited David with killing tens of thousands. From that point on Saul began to "keep a jealous eye on David."

Saul did not deal with the jealousy in his heart. Nor was he willing to submit to the purpose of the Lord for David. Samuel had told him that God had rejected him as king and was looking for a better man (see 1 Samuel 13:14; 15:26). Saul obviously was wondering if David was that man. His jealousy shows us that he was not willing to release his reign to David even though he was becoming the obvious choice. In part, Saul's unwillingness to submit to the Lord and the entertaining of jealousy in his heart led to his downfall.

Verse 10 tells us that an evil spirit from God came forcefully on Saul. This happened when David was playing his harp. Saul was prophesying at the time. We are not told the nature of this prophecy or if the prophecy was even from the Lord. What is clear is that Saul had a spear in his hand, and when the evil spirit came on him, he hurled the spear at David in an attempt to pin him against the wall. Verse 11 tells us that David escaped unharmed. This spirit

was a violent spirit that used Saul's jealousy to manipulate and control his thoughts. Saul lashed out in violent anger.

The evil spirit that came on Saul is said to be from the Lord. We need to understand that even Satan and his evil spirits are under the authority of the Lord God. We catch a glimpse of this in the book of Job. Here Satan asked God permission to afflict Job. Satan and his angels can only do what God permits them to do. God permitted this evil spirit to afflict Saul. Notice, however, that God protected David from the attack of this evil spirit. God permits many things to happen in this world. He permits us to sin. That sin has caused tremendous harm in this world. Because He permits us to sin does not mean that he is the author of sin or even agrees with what we are doing. The older I get the more I understand this. There have been times as a father of three children that I have had to allow my children to make mistakes and learn lessons the hard way. One thing is clear here, God remained in control of the situation.

Saul became afraid of David because he knew that the Lord was with him (verse 12). He gave David the command of a thousand men and sent him away to battle. It may have been Saul's hope that David would be killed in the heat of battle. God was with David, however, and he was successful in everything he did. This only made Saul more jealous and afraid (verse 15).

Saul seems to be fighting against the will of the Lord. He fought a losing battle, but Saul kept fighting. He had failed to kill David with his spear. He had failed in his attempt to have David killed in battle. In verses 17-19, Saul tried another way of getting to him. He offered his daughter to David in marriage. He does this in an attempt to control David. In verse 17, Saul told David that all he would require from him in exchange for his daughter Merab was that he serve

him bravely in battle. Saul knew that he could not kill David himself. David was too popular in the nation. By giving him his daughter Merab, however, he would look good in the eyes of the people. The people would see this as a sign of Saul's love for David. Secretly, however, Saul was trying to control David. By taking his daughter, David would be obligated to fight for Saul. It was Saul's hope that the Philistines would kill David in one of his battles (verse 17).

David did not fall into this trap. David's humility is quite obvious when he told Saul that he was not worthy to marry his daughter and become son-in-law to the King of Israel (verse 18). Saul's daughter was, therefore, given to another man.

Saul had a second daughter by the name of Michal. She was in love with David and told her father about it. Saul was pleased when he heard that Michal loved David and thought that he would again try to ensnare David; this time with Michal. He was more cautious about approaching David this second time. He told his attendants to speak to David privately, telling him how pleased the king was with him. He told them to encourage David to become the king's son-in-law by marrying Michal. David did not feel that he was worthy to become the son-in-law of the king. "I'm only a poor man and little known," he told them. In other words, the daughter of a king should marry someone of high rank in society and one who could afford to pay the dowry a king would demand.

Saul's servants reported David's response to him. Saul told them to tell David that all he wanted for a dowry was one hundred Philistine foreskins. Saul's plan was to have David fall into the hands of the Philistines and be killed (verse 25).



David was pleased with the king's requirement. He accepted the price for Michal, took his men and killed two hundred Philistines. He brought their foreskins to the king. Saul was obligated to give his daughter Michal to David.

Nothing Saul did could defeat David. When he saw how much God was with David and how much Michal loved him, Saul became even more afraid. God was blessing everything David touched. Saul was helpless to fight him and God's purpose for his life. Despite Saul's efforts, David became more successful and well-known.

God had a purpose for David. King Saul, the Philistines, and even evil spirits did their utmost to keep David from that purpose but they were unsuccessful. God's hand was on David and the enemy could not penetrate the shield God had set up around his chosen servant. What an encouragement this is for us today. The enemy will do his utmost to destroy us, but in God we are protected and secure.

For Consideration:

- Compare Jonathan's acceptance of God's purpose for David with Saul's fighting against God's purpose. What does this teach us about the importance of accepting God's will and surrendering to Him?
- What evidence is there of God's anointing on David? What evidence is there in your life of God's anointing?

- David did not become king immediately after his anointing by Samuel. What do we learn here about God's timing? What was God doing in David's life at this time? How was he preparing David and the nation for that purpose?
- What do we learn about jealousy in this passage? What does jealousy cause Saul to do?
- What does this passage teach us about the powerlessness of our enemies to fight the purposes of God?

For Prayer:

- Consider the humility of David in this passage. Ask the Lord to give you some of this humility.
- Are you wrestling with God's purpose in a certain area of your life? Ask Him to help you to accept that purpose with the grace of Jonathan.
- Do you wrestle with jealousy? Ask God to set you free from this evil.
- Thank the Lord that He is sovereign over all our enemies. Thank Him for His protection.

# 18

## JONATHAN, MICHAL AND THE PROPHETS

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Read 1 Samuel 19:1-24

Up to now, Saul's attempts to kill David were relatively quiet and hidden. He sought to hide his desire to kill David by placing him in battles where he might be killed by the Philistines. None of his plans succeeded. As time went on, Saul's jealousy and hatred of David began to grow. Soon it was too much for him to hide. He would eventually become very open about his desire to kill David.

In verse 1, we see that Saul no longer tried to hide his jealousy and hatred of David. Here in this verse, he told his son Jonathan and all his attendants to kill David. David was a marked man. It should be noted that David had done nothing to deserve this treatment. He had served Saul and was faithful to him. David's sentence was unjust and undeserved.

It would have been easy for David to question God and what He was allowing to happen. Why was David, who did no wrong, being condemned to die? Why was he being forced to flee for his life when all he sought was to serve

the king and honour God? These are not easy questions to answer. God was testing David at this time. His character was being refined and he was being prepared to be the leader God called him to be. It would be wonderful if we could become the people God wanted us to become without ever having to face trials and suffering in life. This is not how things work, however.

In Hebrews 5:8-9 we read about the Lord Jesus:

Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.

This is a very important verse for us to understand in this context. Jesus learned obedience through the things He suffered. As a man, Jesus had to learn how to grow in trust and confidence in His heavenly Father. We often think of Jesus as one who never had to learn anything because He was God. This is not the case. He grew up as a man and had to learn to resist evil and walk in faithful obedience to His father. How did He learn that obedience? The writer to the Hebrews tells us that He learned it through the things He suffered. This is God's way of training us in righteousness. Not many of us will become what God wants us to become without suffering. Suffering and trials in life refine us and strengthen us. An athlete knows that if he or she is going to improve in their particular sport, they will need to stretch themselves beyond what they feel they can presently handle. This is the same in our spiritual walk. God will take us beyond our present abilities. He trains us by stretching us. The end result is a stronger spiritual life and more intimate fellowship with our Lord.

David was being trained in this time of trial. God was stretching him and preparing him for the difficulties that he would have to face as king. God never left him in this time. God's hand would surround and protect him. David would emerge from this testing a different person, better prepared for the task God had in store for him. God does the same thing for us. Instead of complaining and fretting over our trials, we should welcome them and trust in what God is doing through them.

While Saul wanted to kill David, Jonathan was unwilling to do so. His love for David was such that he would protect him from his father's evil intents. In verse 2, Jonathan warned David about Saul's plot. Jonathan told him that he would try to get information from his father and pass it on to him so that he could be warned. He did not want Saul to see them together so he asked David to meet him the next day. David was to hide until Jonathan came to him and was sure that it was safe to speak with him.

Jonathan went to Saul and spoke highly of David. He pleaded with his father not to harm David because he had never done any wrong to Saul or the nation. He reminded his father how all that David had done had benefited him greatly (verse 4). David had taken his life in his hands when he killed Goliath and delivered the entire nation from his tyranny (verse 5). Jonathan asked Saul in verse 5 why he sought to kill David for no reason.

Saul seemed to repent of his evil intentions. In verse 6, he promised Jonathan that David would not be put to death. This opened the door for David to be restored to his former position with Saul (verse 7). For a time, Jonathan's intervention restored a relationship between David and Saul.

The renewed relationship between David and Saul would not last. War broke out again with the Philistines. David fought them and the Lord gave him victory. Verse 8 tells us that David "struck them with such force that they fled before him." The very next verse recounts the story of how an evil spirit from the Lord came on Saul again, renewing the old jealousy and hatred of David. There seemed to be a connection between the coming of the evil spirit and the battle David had won against the Philistines.

Saul's issue with David was not settled. It was merely quieted for a time. The victory of David over the Philistines stirred up old jealousy in Saul. While Saul had agreed to be kind to David, he had not dealt with the root of jealousy and hatred in his heart. This was fertile territory for the evil spirit.

On this occasion David was playing the harp in Saul's presence. Saul was listening to David with a spear in his hand. When the evil spirit came on him, Saul again tried to pin David to the wall with his spear. God protected David and he escaped.

We need to understand the importance of dealing with the roots of sin in our lives. Imagine you want to get rid of a bush in your garden. You can cut off the branches and for a time the bush is no longer a problem. In time, however, the root will push up new branches. If you want to get rid of that bush, you will need to pull it out by the roots. It will do no good to cut sin's branches. We need to get to the root of our sin and pull it out. Saul had not repented and pulled out the root of jealousy for David. That root had now pushed out new branches.

Saul's hatred and jealousy of David was renewed after his victory over the Philistines. In verse 11, he sent his men to

David's house to kill him. This time God would use Saul's daughter Michal to protect David. Michal loved David very much. She heard of Saul's plot to kill him and warned him. She helped David down through a window and he fled (verse 12).

Michal took an idol, laid it in the bed and covered it with a garment (verse 13). She also put some goat's hair at the head. She was obviously hoping that the soldiers would think that David was in bed sleeping.

It is striking that Michal has an idol in her house. While we have no record of David ever worshiping this idol, it is surprising to find that there is one in his house. It is an indication of the spiritual condition of the land in those days.

When Saul's men arrived to capture David, Michal told them that he was ill (verse 14). The men reported this to Saul. Saul commanded them to bring David to him in his bed so that he could kill him. We see how openly Saul expressed his hatred for David. He was now willing to kill him in his sickbed. He had no compassion for David or even for his daughter who was now David's wife. When the soldiers went to bring David, they discovered the idol in the bed.

Saul reprimanded his daughter Michal saying: "Why did you deceive me like this and send my enemy away so that he escaped?" He spoke openly to his own daughter about his hatred of David. He does not consider his daughter's love for her husband. To protect herself, Michal told her father that David had threatened her life if she did not let him go (verse 17). Saul's jealousy did not only affect his relationship with David. It was now causing a barrier between himself and his daughter.

David fled that night to Ramah, where the prophet Samuel lived (verse 18). He told Samuel about the things Saul had done. We can only imagine how much this grieved Samuel. Samuel and David decided to move to Naioth in the region of Ramah. Some believe that a community of prophets lived in Naioth. This move was obviously to hide from Saul.

Saul searched for David. Word finally came that David was living in Naioth (verse 19). Saul sent his men to Naioth to capture David. When his men arrived they met Samuel and a group of prophets. They were prophesying.

It is difficult to understand the nature of this prophesying. Prophecy may include a revelation of the future but is not limited to this in Scriptures. God also inspired his prophets to exhort and correct the people of their day. Sometimes prophecy was intended to uplift and encourage God's people in their trials. At other times, prophets spoke or sang words of praise and adoration to the Lord their God. These prophets seem to be praising the Lord. This may have been taking place through words or in songs of praise and thanksgiving. When Saul's men met these prophets, the Spirit of God fell on them and they too began to prophesy and praise the Lord.

When Saul heard what had happened to his men, he sent more men to capture David. This group also began to prophesy. When he sent a third group, they too began to prophesy (verse 21). Finally, Saul decided to go himself. When he arrived in Naioth at Ramah, the Spirit of God fell on him as He did on the men he had sent before him. Instead of capturing David, Saul was overcome by the Spirit of God and prophesied.



Notice the intensity of the work of God's Spirit in Saul (verse 24). He stripped off his robes and lay on the ground all that day and night prophesying. Saul was so overcome by the Spirit of God that he could not get up from the ground.

God had a purpose for David. While David would have to be prepared for that purpose through suffering and trial, God would protect and keep him until he had accomplished that purpose. He surrounded David with men and women who would protect him. Jonathan, Michal and the prophets were instruments of God's protection in David's life. When God calls, He also protects and keeps us so that we can accomplish His purpose. While we should not expect that things will be easy, we can be confident in God's protection and guidance through the trials and difficulties that come our way.

For Consideration:

- Why did David have to face trials in life? What do you think God was teaching him through those trials?
- What lessons has God taught you through trials? What good has He accomplished in you through times of suffering?
- What does this passage teach us about the importance of dealing with the root of sin and not just cutting off the branches? Do you have an ongoing battle with a particular sin? Have you been merely cutting off branches?

- God used men and women in David's life to protect and help him in his time of trouble. Who has God used to protect and encourage you in your trials?
- Saul was not in a right relationship with God and yet he was overcome by the Spirit of God and prophesied all day and night. What does this teach us about those who claim to have experienced supernatural encounters with God? Is it possible for us to have a powerful spiritual encounter with God and still not be in a right relationship with Him?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the times you have grumbled and complained about your trials. Thank Him that He is able to use your trials to accomplish great things in you.
- Ask the Lord to reveal to you any root of sin that remains in your life. Ask Him to give you grace to pull that root up.
- Thank the Lord for the people He has sent into your life who have been a blessing to you in your trials. Ask the Lord to help you to be a blessing for others who are facing trials today.
- Thank the Lord for His wonderful protection on your life. Ask Him to give you confidence to live in obedience, knowing that He will protect and keep you.

# 19

## DAVID AND JONATHAN

### PART COMPANY

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Read 1 Samuel 20:1-42

Saul had attempted to capture and kill David at Naioth in Ramah. God had different plans for David and when Saul and his men were overcome by the Spirit their attempts failed.

David knew, however, that he needed to leave Naioth. He was confused about the attempt by Saul on his life. Saul's bitter attitude toward him had settled when Jonathan spoke to him and, for a time, David was able to eat at the table with Saul. But Saul's attitude had changed, and David again had to flee for his life. Leaving Naioth, David went to see Jonathan.

When they met, David asked Jonathan what he had done to anger his father so much that he again sought his life. Obviously, Saul had not spoken to Jonathan about his plans to kill David. David's words took Jonathan by surprise. "You are not going to die! Look, my father doesn't do

anything, great or small, without confiding in me. Why would he hide this from me? It's not so!" Jonathan replied in verse 2.

David reminded Jonathan that his father knew of the special friendship they shared, and because of that, he would not likely tell him of his intention to kill him. He knew, however, that Saul was ready to kill him. Jonathan was not sure what to do about this situation. He told David: "Whatever you want me to do, I'll do for you" (verse 4). Jonathan would do everything in his power to help David.

Together David and Jonathan came up with a plan to confirm Saul's intent. David reminded Jonathan that the next day was the New Moon festival. David was supposed to dine with the king on that day. David decided to hide in the field instead of going to the festival. Jonathan would go to the festival. If Saul missed David and asked Jonathan where he was, Jonathan was to tell him that he had given David permission to go to Bethlehem, for an annual sacrifice that was being made for his clan (verse 6). If Saul said: "Very well," then they would know that Saul was not trying to kill David. If, on the other hand, Saul lost his temper, they would know that he had determined in his heart to harm him (verse 7).

David wanted Jonathan to know his feelings toward him. He reminded Jonathan of the covenant of friendship they had made with each other (verse 8). In verse 8, David asked Jonathan, as his friend, to kill him if he had done anything wrong. He pleaded with him, however, not to hand him over to Saul.

Jonathan assured David that if he found that his father wanted to kill him, he would let him know. Because it would not be good for them to be seen together if Saul wanted to

kill David, they decided on a plan to communicate Saul's intent. Jonathan told David that he would question his father and let David know Saul's intentions. He promised David that if he discovered his father had hostile intents toward him, he would do everything in his power to warn him so he could escape (verse 13). He asked David, however, to show unfailing kindness to him and his family (verse 14-15). In asking this, Jonathan is showing David that he believed the time would come when he would be king over Israel.

That day Jonathan and David made a covenant with each other. Jonathan reaffirmed his oath of support and loyalty to David because he loved him. The men knew that they would not see each other any longer if Saul's intent was to kill David. David would have to go into hiding.

Jonathan told David to meet him in two days by the stone of Ezel. He would bring a boy with him as if he were doing some target practice. Jonathan would shoot some arrows and speak to the boy. If he said: "Look, the arrows are on this side of you; bring them here," (verse 21) then David could be sure that he was out of danger. If, on the other hand, Jonathan told the boy: "Look, the arrows are beyond you," (verse 22) then David was to flee for Saul's wrath was against him.

Having agreed on the plan, Jonathan went to the New Moon festival while David hid in the field. At the festival, the king sat down at his customary place opposite Jonathan. Abner, his military commander, was also present. Saul noticed David's absence but said nothing. He felt that something must have happened to make him ceremonially unclean so he could not eat the meal. When David was not present the second day, however, Saul asked Jonathan about his absence. As agreed, Jonathan told his father that

he had let David go to Bethlehem for a family sacrifice (verse 29). It likely would have been an insult to Saul for David to choose his family over his king. Saul may have seen some disrespect in this decision.

When he heard Jonathan's response, Saul flared up in anger calling Jonathan a "son of a perverse and rebellious woman!" He accused him of siding with David to his own shame. He told Jonathan that as long as David lived, his (Jonathan) reign would never be established. He commanded Jonathan to bring David to him immediately so he could kill him (verse 31). There could be no doubt as to the intention of Saul for David.

When Jonathan questioned his father's intent by asking him what David had done to deserve to die, Saul hurled his spear at him (verse 33). This made it very clear to Jonathan that his father would not listen to reason. He knew that David was no longer safe and needed to flee.

In fierce anger, Jonathan left the table. He did not eat for the rest of that day and the next day because he was so upset with his father and his shameful treatment of David. Then on the day agreed on by David and himself, Jonathan took his bow and arrows along with a young boy out to the field. He shot an arrow and told the boy: "Run and find the arrows I shoot." As the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him and said "Isn't the arrow beyond you?" This was the signal David had been waiting for. By this he knew that Saul wanted to kill him and he needed to escape.

The young boy picked up the arrow and returned it to Jonathan but knew nothing of the significance of what had just happened. Jonathan gave him his bow and told the boy to take it back to the town (verse 40).

When the boy left, David got up from his hiding place and bowed down to the ground before Jonathan three times. In doing so, David demonstrated his respect and reverence for Jonathan as the son of the king. Both men wept and kissed each other. David in, particular, was sorrowful on this occasion (verse 41). Jonathan blessed David and told him to go in peace, reminding him of their covenant of friendship. After this they parted company.

This would be the end of David's time with Saul. God had another purpose for David. God was now releasing him into the next stage of his life. This was not an easy time for David. God was asking him to leave his closest and dearest friend. He was asking him to leave the safety of the town in which he had lived for some time. He was to leave his job as a successful commander of Saul's army. He who had won the admiration and support of the entire nation, now fled like a criminal, fearful for his life. David was forced to leave his own family. He could not return to Bethlehem for Saul would find him and kill him. David had to make a big sacrifice. God was asking him to leave everything. We need to understand here, however, that there is no sacrifice God asks us to make that He will not repay many times over in His time. David did not see this now but, in time, God would restore him and his blessing.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn here about the bond of friendship that existed between Jonathan and David? Do you have a close friend like this?

- What do we see in this chapter about the unreasonableness of Saul's jealousy? Is all jealousy unreasonable?
- What sacrifices was God asking David to make as he left Jonathan and Saul? Was there a purpose for all this? Would you be willing to leave everything like David did that day?

For Prayer:

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the close friends He has given you.
- Ask God to protect you from jealousy and its bitter fruit in your life.
- Ask God to give you the grace to be willing to leave anything He would call you to leave for His glory.
- Thank the Lord that when He calls us to leave all for Him, He will honour us for our obedience.



## DOEG, THE EDMITE

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Read 1 Samuel 21:1-22:23

David was forced to flee his home and family because of Saul's plot to kill him. This period of David's life would have been somewhat confusing for David. He moved from place to place, with no home.

After leaving Jonathan, David went to Nob. There in that town he met with Ahimelech the priest. Verse 1 tells us that Ahimelech trembled when he met David. We are not given the reason for this. He does, however, ask David why he was alone and why no one was with him. Could it be that Ahimelech was afraid for David? Saul had made no secret of the fact that he wanted David dead.

David did not want his presence in Nob to be discovered. He told Ahimelech that the king had given him charge of a certain matter and that no one was to know anything about the mission. To explain why his men were not with him, David told the priest that they were to meet him at a certain location (verse 2). What David said was not true. We should not take from this that it is acceptable to lie in certain circumstances. The Bible presents David with all his faults.

Because David had to leave with nothing, he was now very hungry. He asked Ahimelech for five loaves of bread. The fact that David asked for five loaves of bread is an indication that he was not going to stay in Nob. His intention was to continue his journey.

Ahimelech told David that he did not have ordinary bread. The only bread he had was consecrated bread. According to Leviticus 24:9, this bread was only to be eaten by the priests. Ahimelech agreed to give the bread to David on one condition. He would only give it to David if he and his men had kept themselves from women (verse 4). We read in Leviticus 15:18:

When a man lies with a woman and there is an emission of semen, both must bathe with water, and they will be unclean till evening.

Abimelech's concern is that David's men be ceremonially pure before God. He did not want to defile the bread and dishonour the Lord by giving what was consecrated to the Lord to those who were ceremonially impure.

David reassured him that he and his men were ceremonially pure. According to verse 5, it was David's practice to keep his men from women whenever he set out on a mission. Having received this assurance, the priest gave David the consecrated bread (verse 6).

It is important that we see Ahimelech's willingness to give the consecrated bread to David. While this bread was reserved for the use of the priest, Ahimelech is acting out of compassion in giving it to David. In this particular case, mercy and compassion outweighed the letter of the law. We need to apply this to our own lives. By *not* giving David the consecrated bread, Ahimelech would have committed

a greater sin. We will often have to face decisions like Ahimelech. Maybe it is your practice to attend church every Sunday. Suppose one Sunday morning you receive a call from a friend in serious need. He or she has come to the end of themselves and you are their last hope. What do you do? Do you stay home from church to meet your friend's desperate need?

Imagine that you have a family member who is sick and dying. They need to be driven to the hospital to see the doctor. You put him in your car and begin your journey to the hospital. As you look up, you see a road sign telling you the speed limit. You know if you don't get to the hospital on time your friend could die? You also understand that God wants you to obey the laws of the land. What do you do? Do you obey the law and risk the life of your friend? Do you disobey the law and choose, out of mercy, to speed to the hospital in an attempt to save the life of your friend? Abimelech chose mercy and compassion over the letter of the law. There are times when compassion and love is our only legitimate choice.

While David was at Nob, one of Saul's servants was there as well. Doeg was Saul's head shepherd. Doeg saw David and would prove to be a real problem for both David and the priests of Nob.

While at Nob, David also asked Ahimelech if he had a spear or sword he could have (verse 8). Obviously, David had not brought any weapons with him as he fled. This is an indication of how quickly David had to flee. He did not dare return to his home or the king's palace lest he be discovered. Every move David made, at this point, was calculated. He had to watch every step he took. Saul or one of his servants could be anywhere.

Ahimelech told David that the only sword he had with him was the sword of Goliath. He offered it to David.

David did not stay long in Nob. The next day, he fled and went to Achish the king of Gath (verse 10). Here in Gath, he met with resistance on the part of King Achish's servants. They had heard about David and his great conquests. They had heard the saying that had been going through the land: "Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands" (verse 11). They approached King Achish and spoke to him about their concern. They were suspicious of David's motives in coming to their region and feared that he might turn against them.

When David heard what was being said about him, he was afraid and wondered what the response of King Achish would be. Would he put David to death? Would he return him to Saul? In order to protect himself, David pretended to be insane. Whenever the king or the king's servants were around, he acted like a madman, scratching the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard (verse 13). Seeing David in this condition, the king's concerns about him were relieved (verses 14-15).

This time in David's life is hard to understand. He has been called by God to be the next king over Israel but here he stands pretending to be a fool in order to save his life. He flees from one place to another with no home or family. This would have been very humbling for David. God was building David's humility. If he was going to be the leader that God wanted, he needed to be prepared for that task. God took the time to train David through suffering. God still does this today. Many of us are trained in the same way. God builds His character in us by the circumstances he puts us through each day.

David could not find a permanent home in Gath. From Gath he would escape to a cave in the region of Adullam. It was here in the cave of Adullam that God would begin to gather people around David. When David's brothers and household heard where David was staying, they came to him. Over time, all those who were in distress, debt or discontent, came to David. He would become their leader. Eventually four hundred men gathered around David.

God meets us in strange circumstances. David had retreated to this cave because there was nowhere else he could go. He likely came wondering what God was doing and why he was alone. God met him in this unlikely place. The cave would be a place where David's hopes would be restored. In time, he saw God surrounding him with men who would lay down their lives for him. He restored his family to him. God had not forgotten David. As we wait on God in our trials, He will come to us as well.

From the cave of Adullam, David moved to Mizpah in Moab. He spoke to the king of Moab and asked if he would let his father and mother stay with him until he had learned what God wanted (verse 3). This statement shows us that David is unclear about God's purpose. David wanted to be sure that his family would be protected. The cave of Adullam could not give them protection. David and his family would stay for a time in the region of Mizpah in Moab.

It was not the purpose of God for David to remain in the stronghold of Mizpah. In time, God sent Gad the prophet to speak to David. Gad told him that God was calling him to leave the stronghold and return to the land of Judah. David listened to the prophet and went to live in the forest of Hereth (22:5).

It would have been easy for David to become comfortable in the stronghold in Moab. Here there was security and comfort, but this was not God's plan for David. God was calling him back to his own people. This was bringing David closer to Saul. David left the security of Moab for the forests of Judah. David had been searching for God's purpose. He willingly left the security of the stronghold to go where God was leading him. God's purpose for David required that he be willing to take a risk. It would mean trusting God and not the stronghold of Moab. David took that risk.

It was not long before Saul discovered David's location. In verse 6, he went to Gibeah with all his officials and spoke to the men of Benjamin. Notice that as Saul spoke, he had his spear in hand (verse 6). This gives us the impression that he was making a declaration of war against David.

Saul expressed his anger and frustration with the people of that region in verses 7-8. He asked them if they really believed David would give them fields and vineyards or positions of honour as commanders of hundreds and thousands (verse 7). He charged the people with conspiracy because they did not tell him that his son had made a covenant with David. He went as far as to say that Jonathan encouraged David to lie in wait for him. In other words, he accused Jonathan of conspiring to overthrow his own father.

It was Doeg the Edomite who spoke up. He told Saul that he had seen David speaking with Ahimelech at Nob. He also told him that Ahimelech had given David provisions and the sword of Goliath (verses 9-10).

When Saul heard that David had been to see Ahimelech the priest he sent for him along with all the members of his

family. In obedience to the command of the king, Ahimelech and the other priests of his family came to see Saul (verse 11).

Saul accused Ahimelech of conspiracy because he gave bread and a sword to David his enemy. Notice again in verse 13 that Saul was convinced that David was lying in wait for him, seeking an opportunity to kill him.

Surprised at the accusation, Ahimelech explained to Saul that David was more loyal to the king than any of his servants (verse 14). He had no reason to mistrust David; the king's son-in-law and captain of his bodyguard. David had been highly respected in Saul's household. It surprised Ahimelech that David would be accused of rebellion against Saul. The priest went on to explain that he had often inquired of the Lord for David. He reassured the king that he knew nothing about any rebellion (verse 15).

Saul cared nothing for Ahimelech's defence. He told the priest that he and his father's family would die. We catch a glimpse of Saul's intense hatred for David in this. He is no longer governed by reason. His jealousy and hatred of David have taken over his life.

Saul ordered his guards to kill the priests because they had helped David. They knew that David was fleeing but had not informed him. In ordering the killing of the priests, Saul is clearly telling his people that if anyone helped David or knew anything about him and did not tell him they would find themselves in a similar situation. Saul's wrath would fall on them as well.

The guards heard the king's command but refused to strike the priests. These guards had more sense than Saul. They would not touch the Lord's anointed servants. They were

ready to die at Saul hands rather than face the wrath of God by killing His servants, the priests.

Saul turned to Doeg the Edomite and commanded him to kill the priests. Doeg obeyed and killed eighty-five priests. He also attacked Nob and killed the town priest, the men, women and children, cattle, donkeys and sheep. The whole town was wiped out because of the intense hatred of Saul for David.

In verse 20, we read about one of Ahimelech's sons who escaped. Abiathar escaped and joined David. He told David how Saul had killed the priests of the Lord. This was very difficult news for David. He knew that Doeg the Edomite had been present when he was in Nob. He felt responsible for what had happened because he had not been more careful. David promised Abiathar that he would protect him from Saul.

It would have been hard for the people of Saul's day to imagine the type of king he would eventually become. The Saul who hid himself among the luggage because he felt so unworthy of being king, now stands boldly against the Lord and kills these priests. As we examine the story of Saul, we see a man who didn't seem to have the patience to wait on God. He jumped into things without seeking the will of God. He obeyed only in those things that pleased him. He allowed bitterness, jealousy and hatred to enter his life. His path is a path of spiritual decline. He began as one anointed by God and ended his life as one fighting against God, consumed by hatred, jealousy and bitterness. This did not happen overnight. It was a slow and steady decline. Saul consistently turned from God to his own way. The result is clear in this passage. His life is a warning to us. Sin will slowly consume us like a disease. It will not be content until it overcomes us completely.



## For Consideration:

- The Bible paints a portrait of David with all his faults. What evidence do we see here that points to the fact that David was willing to lie to protect himself?
- What does this passage have to teach us about the importance of compassion and mercy? Do compassion and mercy outweigh the legalistic application of the law? Have you ever found yourself in a situation where you had to choose compassion over law?
- How was God teaching David humility? How is God teaching you humility?
- God seemed to ease David's loneliness at the cave of Adullam by sending his family and friends to him. Has God ever met you in your loneliness? Explain.
- The prophet Gad told David to leave the security of the fortress of Moab. David obeyed and chose to live in the forests of Judah. Would you be willing to leave your security if God called you to do so?
- What events do you feel led up to Saul killing the prophets? How do you think the humble young man of his earlier years became such a cruel leader? What warning does this give to us?

## For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He uses us despite our sins and shortcomings.
- Ask the Lord to set you free from a legalism that sacrifices mercy and compassion for law.
- Thank the Lord for the trials He has allowed you to face in life. Ask Him to help you to learn the lessons He wants you to learn through those trials.
- Thank the Lord for how He has surrounded you with friends and family who can support you in your time of need.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you and give you victory over sins in your life so that they do not overcome you like they did in the life of Saul.
- Ask the Lord to protect you and keep you in your relationship with Him. Ask God to help you to deal immediately with any sin that would keep you from being everything He wants you to be.
- Do you know someone who is wandering away from the Lord today? Ask the Lord to stop them in their tracks before it is too late.

## 21

### SELA HAMMAHLEKOTH:

### THE ROCK OF PARTING

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Read 1 Samuel 23:1-29

David and his men had moved from the fortress of Moab to the forests of Judah. Word came to David that the Philistines were fighting against Keilah and looting the threshing floors. This town was located close to where David and his men had set up camp. It was obviously the time of the harvest and the inhabitants were threshing their grain. To lose the efforts of their hard work at this time would have had devastating consequences for the city and its inhabitants. David felt a burden in his heart for the city. He asked the Lord if he should help the city by attacking the Philistines. The Lord told him to attack and save the city (verse 2).

While David was ready to do battle against the Philistines, his men were not so sure. They reminded David that if they were afraid living in Judah they would be even more so if they attacked the Philistines. David and his men were trying to protect themselves from Saul. They felt they had enough to do just trying to keep hidden. They did not feel they had the strength to take on the Philistines. These men

were already up to their necks in problems, they did not feel like they could take on anything else.

Not knowing what to do, David again went to the Lord (verse 4). His response was clear – God told him to go to Keilah and fight the Philistines and He would give him victory. While these men felt that their own problems were more than they could handle, God was calling them to step out and deal with the problems of an entire town. To do this, God would give them an extra measure of strength. I have experienced this strength countless times in my own life. There have been many times when I did not feel like I had the strength to minister. The weight of my own problems seemed to be so heavy on me that I did not think I could handle anyone else's. I have seen the Lord equip me to do what I did not think I could do. God will give us strength for what He calls us to do.

David and his men took God at His word. They went down to Keilah, fought the Philistines and carried off their livestock. That day the Philistines suffered heavy losses. David and his men saved the people of the town. God was faithful to His word.

Verse 6 tells us that Abiathar the son of Ahimelech, who had escaped when Saul killed the priests, came to be with David. It would have been an exciting time to be a spiritual leader. The fearful men in David's army had just been stretched in their faith. They had seen the Lord God strengthen them in battle. Their hearts were encouraged and strengthened in the Lord their God.

Word of David's conquest at Keilah came to Saul, who saw this as an opportunity to attack David. David and his men were now in the town of Keilah. Saul felt that if he acted quickly, he could trap them in the town. Saul could

surround the town and outnumber them. Saul was almost guaranteed victory. He summoned his army to attack David and his men at Keilah (verse 8). From verse 10, we understand that Saul was quite willing to destroy the entire town if they refused to hand David over to them.

News of Saul's plot came to David. When he heard what Saul was planning, he called Abiathar the priest. He told him to bring the ephod and ask the Lord if the people of the town would hand him over to Saul to save their town. The Lord told David that they would indeed hand him over (verse 11-12).

It may be helpful to comment on the ephod that David had asked Abiathar to bring to him. The ephod was a garment the priest wore in the exercise of his duties. Of particular significance here is the fact that part of this garment was the breastplate which contained two stones called the Urim and Thummim (see Exodus 28:30). These two stones were used by the priest to determine the will of the Lord for the people. It is unclear how they worked. In calling for the priestly garment to be brought, David may have been asking Abiathar to bring these two stones so that the will of the Lord could be known.

When he heard that the city would deliver them over to Saul, David and his men (about six hundred in number) left the city before Saul arrived. Saul heard that David had escaped, so he did not attack (verse 13). In this way, both David and the inhabitants of Keilah were saved.

It is worth noting that God was increasing the number of David's soldiers. In 1 Samuel 22:2, we read that David had four hundred soldiers. Here in verse 13, we see that this number has increased by two hundred.

David and his men moved from one place to another. They realized that their presence in any one area would cause serious problems for the inhabitants of that town or region. They were in hiding. They needed to keep moving so Saul would not find them and attack. While their numbers were growing, Saul's army was much bigger and stronger. It is true that God could have given them victory over Saul, but this was not His purpose at this time.

David and his men were staying in the strongholds in the hills of the Desert of Ziph. Verse 14 tells us that Saul searched for him "day after day," but God did not give David into his hands. While David was in the Desert of Ziph, Jonathan came to see him. Verse 16 tells us that Jonathan helped David to "find strength in God." This may help us to understand what David was feeling at this time in his life. It is likely that David was feeling discouraged and downcast. His life seemed to consist of running from Saul. He had done nothing to deserve this lifestyle. He had always sought to honour and serve Saul as king. David was feeling the weight of this difficult life.

God not only took care of David physically, but He also ministered to his emotional and spiritual needs. God knew that David needed encouragement in this time of trial and testing. He sent Jonathan to minister to him in his need. Jonathan was just the person David needed to lift his spirits. Jonathan pointed David to the Lord God and was a tremendous encouragement to his emotional and spiritual needs.

Jonathan told David that Saul would not be able to lay hands on him. Jonathan was confident that David would be king of Israel (verse 17). He told David that even Saul knew David would be king. This seemed to be what David needed to hear. These words gave him courage. He knew

that God had not forsaken him and that there was a purpose for all the trouble he was experiencing.

In verse 19, the Ziphites went to see Saul in Gibeah and told him that David was hiding in their territory in the strongholds at Horesh. They invited the king to come and they would support him by handing David over to him. While God protected David, this did not mean that he did not have many enemies. Wherever he went David had enemies.

This word from the Ziphites was a real encouragement to Saul. He blessed them for their concern. He told them to make their preparations and find out David's hiding places. They were to bring him back a report so that when he came to them he would be able to track David down (verse 23).

The Ziphites spied on David and learned about his hiding places. When Saul came with his army, David and his men were in the Desert of Maon. Saul and his men began to search for him. David learned of their presence and hid among the rocks. Saul learned where David was hiding (possibly by means of the Ziphites). He set out to capture him.

Verse 26 tells us that Saul was closing in on David. He was coming along one side of the mountain and David and his men were on the other side hurrying to get away from Saul's much larger army. Just as Saul was closing in on David, a messenger came to tell him that the Philistines were raiding his land (verse 27). Saul was forced to break off his pursuit of David to meet the Philistines (verse 28). God's hand was obviously with David and his men that day.

Sometimes God will give us strength to face the battle and other times he will take the battle from us. In this case, God removed the battle from David. God seemed to wait until the last moment to deliver David and his army. Again He was stretching David in his faith and confidence.

The place where God gave this victory to David and his men was called Sela Hammahlekoth which means "rock of parting." It would become a memorial rock reminding the generations to come that God was faithful to deliver His servants in their time of need.

Sometimes the Lord uses trials to lead us. David and his men knew from this encounter with Saul that it was time for them to move from the Desert of Maon. They moved from there to the region of En Gedi (verse 29).

David and his men were being stretched in their faith and confidence at this time. They were put in a place where they could not trust any other human being. The inhabitants of Keilah, the town they delivered from the Philistines turned them away. The Ziphites also betrayed them. They were brought to the place of emotional, spiritual and physical exhaustion, but God kept encouraging them and strengthening them. They were stretched to the limit. In all this, however, God was equipping them for greater things. Though surrounded with problems and trials, David and his men were very much aware of the wonderful presence of God. We, too, can know that presence in our trials.



## For Consideration:

- Have you ever experienced God's clear enabling and strengthening when you had none of your own? Explain.
- David and his men were in a place in their lives where they knew they could not count on anyone around them. What do you think God was teaching them at that time? In whom did they place their confidence?
- How were David and his army being strengthened through their trials?
- How does God demonstrate that He cared for David's emotional and spiritual needs through the visit of Jonathan? Have you ever experienced God's encouragement through people He sent your way?
- In the Desert of Maon, God seemed to wait for the last moment before delivering David. This seemed to be His way of strengthening their faith and confidence in Him. How is God stretching you today? What encouragement do you take from this passage to face that trial?

## For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is our strength. Thank Him that even when we have no strength of our own He is able to equip and enable us.
- Ask the Lord to help you to put your trust and confidence in Him.

- Thank the Lord for His protection on your life.
- Thank the Lord that He knows your emotional and spiritual needs and will minister to you in your time of need.
- Ask the Lord to give you courage to persevere when He is stretching you beyond what you feel you can endure. Thank Him that He is in the process of making you stronger through the trials you face each day.

## 22

### DAVID SPARES SAUL'S LIFE

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Read 1 Samuel 24:1-22

In the last chapter, we saw how Saul was called away from pursuing David because of an attack by the Philistines. God's timing was perfect. This gave David and his men the opportunity to escape Saul's army.

Saul did not give up his pursuit of David. He saw David as a threat to his reign and the reign of his family. He knew that David was God's choice of king, but he refused to accept this. In fighting against David, Saul was also fighting against what he knew to be the will of God for His people.

In verse 1, we read that after returning from his pursuit of the Philistines, Saul was told that David was in the Desert of En-Gedi. Hearing this, Saul decided to look for David and his men (verse 2).

As Saul and his men were passing a cave, Saul went into the privacy of the cave to relieve himself. Unknown to himself, David and his men were hiding in the back of the cave. Saul had walked into a trap.

David's men saw this as an opportunity from the Lord to kill Saul. "This is the day the LORD spoke of when he said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish,'" they told him (verse 4).

Let's take a moment to examine what is happening here in more detail. First, here was an opportunity to finally end years of running and hiding. David and his men were tired and weary from running. Second, David had been anointed king by Samuel. Many people knew this and respected David and his anointing. Only Saul stood in the way of this. Surely this seemed to be the perfect opportunity for David to take up his God-given role. Third, who could have imagined that such an opportunity would present itself? What were the chances of David's men hiding in that location at the precise moment that Saul entered the cave? Fourth, David's men all seemed to agree that this situation was from the Lord and encouraged him to take action.

The situation seemed too perfect not to be from the Lord. Practically, here was a wide open door for David to end years of running and hiding. The counsel of his men was to take advantage of the circumstances. His men believed that this was from the Lord.

Notice David's response, however, in verse 4. He crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe. It should be understood that the king's robe was very symbolic. When a king dressed someone in his robe he was honouring him by transferring authority to him. David's act is not an innocent act. By cutting a piece of Saul's robe he was declaring that he was going to take his place. He was symbolically showing his men that the day was coming when he would strip Saul of his authority as king. Having said this,

however, it should be noticed that David does not take Saul's life as his men would have wanted.

Despite the circumstances, the counsel of his men, and the logic of killing Saul, David had to listen to his conscience and do what God was showing him personally. While it is important that we listen to counsel, logic and circumstances, these things are not always clear indicators of the direction of the Lord in our lives. We still need to seek God personally for His direction.

Even David appeared to be slightly side-tracked by the circumstances and counsel of his friends. When he began to think about what he had done, David's conscience began to disturb him (verse 5). He realized that it was not his place to take Saul's authority. His symbolic act of cutting his robe was an act of defiance, disrespect and pride. God convicted him about his act and David felt that conviction.

He was so convicted by what he had done that in verse 6 he told his men:

The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the LORD."

It was not David's place to take Saul's authority. He confessed before his men that day that he had done wrong in taking this symbolic action. He recognized that Saul was still the Lord's anointed king and committed himself afresh to honour and respect him as such.

David also rebuked his men for their evil thoughts and intentions (verse 7) and forbade them to attack Saul. Saul

eventually left the cave and went his way without knowing what had happened.

What took place that day in the cave was very significant and has much to teach us. First, it teaches us to respect those whom God has put in authority over us even when we don't like what they are doing. Second, it teaches us to wait on the Lord and His timing. David could have taken matters into his own hands that day but he didn't. Instead, he chose to wait on the Lord. God would give him his place of authority in time. David would not take that place before its time or by his own effort. Third, this story teaches us the importance of our attitude. David had allowed disrespect to enter his heart when he chose to cut off a piece of Saul's garment. God convicted him of his sinful attitude, and David repented.

David was so convicted of his wrong attitude toward Saul that when the king left the cave he went out and called after him. In doing this, David was taking his life in his hands. When Saul looked behind him, he found David prostrated on the ground. David was making it very clear to Saul that he honoured him as king. By bowing before Saul, David was also reaffirming in his own heart his commitment to Saul as his king.

In verse 9, David asked Saul: "Why do you listen when men say, 'David is bent on harming you'?" He went on to explain to Saul that he could have killed him in the cave. He told him how his men urged him to kill him but he refused their counsel telling them that he would not lift up his hand against the Lord's anointed (verse 10).

In verse 11, David showed Saul the piece of Saul's robe in his hand. He told him how he had cut it off but spared his

life. He asked Saul to accept that he was no threat to his life, nor was he guilty of rebellion.

David did not deny that Saul had done much wrong to him. Saul was trying to kill him. David committed these matters into the hands of the Lord. He would not judge Saul. He left all such judgment to the Lord. "May the LORD judge between you and me. And may the LORD avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you," he told Saul in verse 12. How easy it is for us to take matters into our own hands. Again David is a powerful example to us. He placed all judgment into the hands of the Lord.

David asked Saul in verse 13 to consider a proverb of his day: "From evildoers come evil deeds." What David seems to be saying is that if he was an evil doer he would have done evil by killing Saul. This was not the case. When David had opportunity to do evil to Saul, he refused to do it.

In verse 14, David asked Saul who he thought he was pursuing: "Against whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog? A flea?" It is hard to know exactly what David is asking Saul here. There may be several possible interpretations. First, David may be telling Saul that he and his army were as incapable of resisting him as a dead dog or a flea. In other words, David was no match against Saul's powerful army. Second, David may be comparing himself and his men to a dead dog or flea and wondering why Saul would waste his time chasing after something that was of no threat to him. Third, this reference may be in regards to the contempt in which Saul was treating David and his men. Saul had been treating David like a dead dog or a flea.

Whatever David's intent was in verse 14, he made it quite clear that the Lord would judge between them. He prayed that God would consider his cause and uphold him in the end by delivering him from Saul's hand (verse 15). Saul's greatest threat was not David but God who would take up David's defence.

When Saul heard what David had to say and saw the piece he had cut off his robe, he wept aloud (verse 16). Saul was a tormented man. He recognized that David was more righteous than he was. He admitted that David had honoured him and confessed to him that he had treated him badly (verse 17). In saying this, Saul recognized his sin. Realizing that David had spared his life, Saul blessed him saying: "May the LORD reward you well for the way you treated me today."

That day Saul admitted to David that he knew God would one day make him king and that the kingdom would be established in his hands (verse 20). He asked David to swear to him that when the Lord did give him the throne, he would not wipe out his family and his descendants (verse 21). David gave Saul his promise that day to honour his family.

After these events, Saul took his army and returned home. David went to his stronghold. While there is a sense here that the two men have made peace with each other, David is not restored to his position. Each man went his separate ways. The rift between them was too great at this point for complete reconciliation.



## For Consideration:

- Are circumstances and the counsel of others always the right way to determine God's will at any given time? What do we learn from David in this passage?
- What was David saying by cutting off the piece of Saul's robe? What was his attitude in this act?
- What do we learn about the importance of our attitude? Are there any attitudes that God has been convicting you about today?
- What does David teach us about the importance of waiting on God's timing and not taking matters into our own hands? Have you ever been guilty of taking matters into your own hand?
- What does this passage teach us about respecting those in authority over us even if we don't always agree with them?
- David left all judgment in the hands of the Lord. Have you ever been guilty of judging people or "making them pay" for their evil deeds? What is the challenge of this passage for you?

## For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to know His leading and follow it even when counsel and circumstances seem to point you in another direction.
- Ask God to search you and reveal to you any attitude that does not please Him.

- Ask God to give you patience to wait for His timing in your life. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you were not willing to wait on Him.
- Ask God to give you the sensitivity to His Holy Spirit that David had. Thank the Lord that He does convict us of sin when we stray from the path.
- Are there people who have wronged you? Take a moment to surrender these wrongs to the Lord. Commit yourself to leaving all judgment to the Lord and ask God to set you free from any judgment of the person who has offended you.

## 23

### ABIGAIL'S

### COUNSEL TO DAVID

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Read 1 Samuel 25:1-44

In chapter 25, we learn of the death of Samuel. His later years appear to be quite uneventful. He was buried in his home town of Ramah.

David and his men came to the Desert of Maon. They had been forced to live in hiding in remote and desert regions. This was a difficult time for them. As can be imagined, it would not have been easy for David and his men to find the food they needed to survive. In some cases, they depended on the generosity of local people to provide for them.

In the region of Maon, there lived a rich man by the name of Nabal. This man is described in verse 2 as being "very wealthy." He had a thousand goats and three thousand sheep. Verse 3 tells us that Nabal was mean in his business dealings. Nabal had a wife by the name of Abigail. She was a very beautiful and intelligent woman.

David heard that Nabal was shearing his sheep. This would have been a joyous occasion, celebrated with feasting and drinking. When David heard that Nabal and his men were shearing their sheep, he told his men to ask Nabal for provisions. He reminded Nabal in verse 7, that while he and his men were in the desert they never mistreated him or his sheep. In fact, verse 16 leads us to believe that the presence of David's men in that area kept intruders from the sheep and greatly facilitated the work of the shepherds. David's men went to Nabal and asked him to give them whatever he could (verse 9).

Nabal's response reveals something of his character:

"Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days. Why should I take my bread and water, and the meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows where?" (verses 10-11).

In saying this, Nabal insulted David and his kindness toward him. He accused David of being a rebellious servant who broke away from his master. Nabal insulted David further by refusing to give him anything.

David's men reported back what Nabal had said. Nabal's response angered David. He called for four hundred men to put on their swords and attack Nabal for his insult (verse 13). It should be noted that David did not seek the Lord on this matter. His reaction is sinful and came from anger over Nabal's insult. We need to see this incident in the context of what happened in the last chapter. David just had a tremendous victory in the affair of cutting Saul's robe. He refused to give into his men's advice by killing his greatest enemy. Here, however, he falls into sin as a result of the

insult of a man he did not even know. This is a powerful reminder that we can never let down our guard. Even the strongest saints can fall in an unguarded moment.

How thankful we need to be that God watches over those who are His and keeps them from falling. In verse 14, a servant came to Nabal's wife, Abigail, and told her how her husband had "hurled insults" at David when he sent messengers to him in the desert. The servant went on to tell Abigail that David and his men had been "very good" to them. They had not mistreated them or taken anything from Nabal all the time they were in the desert (verse 15). "Night and day they were a wall around us all the time we were herding our sheep near them," he told her in verse 16. The servant encouraged Abigail to consider what she needed to do because Nabal's actions had stirred up the anger of David and disaster was hanging over her husband (verse 17). He reminded Abigail that her husband was so set in his wicked ways that no one could reason with him.

Abigail lost no time in responding. In verse 18, she took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep along with some roasted grain, raisin cakes and cakes of pressed figs (verse 18). She loaded these provisions on donkeys and told her servants to go ahead with the provisions and she would follow. She did not tell her husband what she was doing (verse 19). Her fear was likely that Nabal would try to stop her, causing even more problems.

As these things were taking place, David told his men:

"It's been useless—all my watching over this fellow's property in the desert so that nothing of his was missing. He has paid me back evil for good.

May God deal with David, be it ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive one male of all who belong to him!" (verses 18-19).

David's intentions are clear. He was going to destroy everything that belonged to Nabal and leave no man alive.

David and his men left camp to carry out their evil plan. As they were descending a ravine on their way to Nabal, Abigail came toward him with donkeys loaded down with provisions (verse 20). When she saw David she got off her donkey and bowed down before him, her face to the ground (verse 23).

Abigail explained to David that her husband was a wicked man who lived up to his name. Nabal's name meant "fool." Her husband was acting like a fool in what he had done. She had not seen the men David had sent to them asking for provisions. She now offered David her gifts, asking him to forgive the offense of her husband (verse 28). She reminded him that the Lord had so far kept him from avenging himself with his own hands (verse 26). In saying this, she reminded David that it was not his place to take vengeance.

Abigail reminded David that God had a clear purpose for him to be king and He would fight the Lord's battles. In saying this, however, she may have been gently reminding him that this particular battle was the Lord's battle not David's. She pleaded with him that no wrongdoing be found in this matter.

She went on to tell David that the day was coming when the Lord would give him victory over Saul, who was pursuing him to take his life (verse 29). God was going to preserve David and keep him from Saul. God would wrap him

up like a precious treasure and keep him safely until it was time for him to become king. David's enemies, however, would be hurled away like a stone from a sling (verse 29).

Abigail went on to tell David that when he became king, he would not want to bear the guilt of any sinful action toward Nabal on his conscience. She reminded him that his intentions were sinful on two accounts. First, the bloodshed was needless and second, he was avenging himself.

Abigail's words were powerful and to the point. She was bold but very gentle. She openly challenged David and the actions he was planning to take. She agreed that Nabal was foolish and insulting but warned David about taking matters into his own hands. It was especially important that David honour the Lord because God had chosen him for a high and honourable position as king.

David listened intently to Abigail and was convicted of his sin. "Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands," he told her in verses 32-33.

David told Abigail that had she not come to him, nothing would have kept him from destroying every male belonging to Nabal (verse 34). David accepted her gift and told her to go home in peace. He would grant her request (verse 35).

When Abigail returned home, Nabal was holding a great banquet. He was drunk. In the morning when Nabal was sober, Abigail told him what she had done and how she had kept David from destroying him and his men. The shock of this news was so great that Nabal's heart failed

him. Ten days later, the Lord struck Nabal and he died (verse 38).

The whole incident reminds us that God is able to defend our cause. God was aware of what Nabal had said about David and how he had insulted him. This grieved the heart of God. It was not David's place to exercise judgment or to seek vengeance. This belonged to God who alone is judge. In Deuteronomy 32:35-36 we read:

It is mine to avenge; I will repay.  
In due time their foot will slip;  
their day of disaster is near  
and their doom rushes upon them."  
The LORD will judge his people  
and have compassion on his servants  
when he sees their strength is gone  
and no one is left, slave or free.

This was a very important lesson that David needed to learn. Imagine what our society would be like if everyone took it on themselves to seek justice and vengeance. David was learning to commit the insults and offenses of others against him to the Lord.

After the death of Nabal, David sent word to Abigail asking her to become his wife. David was impressed not only by the beauty of Abigail but also by her wisdom. He owed her a great deal. She had kept him from a grievous sin. Abigail agreed to David's request and "quickly" got on a donkey and returned with David's messengers to David and became his wife (verse 42).

Abigail was a second wife for David. David was also married to Ahinoam from Jezreel. Saul had taken David's first



wife, Mical away from David and given her to a man by the name of Paltiel from Gallim (verse 44).

#### For Consideration:

- Why was it such a serious matter for Nabal to insult David? Have you ever been guilty of insulting someone who is the Lord's anointed?
- Was David's response to Nabal legitimate? How do you respond to insults?
- How is Abigail used to keep David from sin? Why do you suppose none of David's men corrected him?
- David rejected the counsel of his men to kill Saul in the last chapter but falls headlong into sin regarding Nabal. What warning is there for us in this?
- What does this passage teach us about avenging ourselves? Have you ever found yourself judging those who have offended you? What should our response be in these situations?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to keep you from speaking evil of other people.
- Do you have an issue you are wrestling with right now? Commit this matter to the Lord and ask Him to deal with it.

- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the people He has put in your path to keep you from evil by their godly counsel.
- Ask God to keep you always watchful, realizing that you could fall at any time.

## 24

# DAVID AMONG THE PHILISTINES

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Read 1 Samuel 26:1-27:12

In chapter 23:19-20, we read how the Ziphites told Saul of David's location in the strongholds of Horesh. They invited Saul to come to their territory and they would hand David over to him. Saul sent his army but David escaped from him. The Ziphites again approached Saul in Gibeah and invited him again to come to their territory to capture David. Obviously, the Ziphites did not want David in their territory and preferred to maintain a good relationship with Saul.

With three thousand men, Saul set out in search of David. All this happened after the events of chapter 24 where David cut off a piece of Saul's robe. Saul recognized that at that time David spared his life, but this did not stop him from continuing to pursue David.

Saul made his camp beside the road on the hill of Hakilah. David, on the other hand, stayed in the desert (verse 3). When David learned of Saul's decision to come out after him he sent scouts to see if what he had heard was true. Maybe in part David thought that the incident of chapter 24

had settled this matter between him and Saul. When his scouts informed him that Saul and his men had definitely arrived, David understood that Saul had not given up his pursuit.

In verse 5, David decided to set out for Saul's camp. When he arrived, he discovered where Saul and his military commander Abner were staying. Saul was inside the camp with the entire army surrounding him. He was well protected.

David decided to go into the camp, and Abishai went with him (verse 6). At night David and Abishai crept up to where Saul and Abner, his commander, were sleeping. They found Saul fast asleep with his spear stuck in the ground by his head. Abner and his soldiers were lying around him (verse 7). It would not have been easy for David and Abishai to sneak past the army to where Saul was sleeping without being noticed. Obviously, the Lord God had given them success.

Abishai felt this opportunity was from the Lord. He asked David for permission to kill Saul. He reminded him that one single thrust of his spear would be enough to kill his enemy (verse 8).

David was unwilling to kill Saul. Despite the fact that Saul had caused him much trouble, David respected him as the anointed of the Lord and would not harm him. He committed the situation into the hands of the Lord. In verse 10, David told Abishai that the Lord would strike Saul in His own way and time. God alone would be Saul's judge. David took Saul's spear and water jug and left. No one knew that David had been there.

Verse 12 makes it very clear that God had put the whole army into a deep sleep so that David could sneak into their midst. God had a very particular purpose for David here. It would have been quite easy for David to assume that God was giving him victory over Saul. How easy it would have been for him to interpret the circumstances as Abiahai had interpreted them. He was tired of running from Saul. The opportunity was there before him to kill Saul. It would have been easy for David to have gone beyond God's call for him that day. There have been many times in my life when I have misinterpreted open doors.

God had put the army to sleep so that David could take Saul's spear and water jug. That was all God wanted him to do. To go beyond this would have been to sin and miss the purpose of God. We must learn not only to recognize open doors from the Lord but also to accept God's purpose in opening those doors. We must learn not to go beyond what God wants to do in a given situation. David had the discernment to recognize what Abishai did not. David knew what God had called him to do and would not step beyond that purpose. We would all do well to follow this example.

Leaving the camp, David crossed to the other side and stood some distance away (verse 13). He called out to the army and to Abner in particular. In verse 15, David asked Abner why he did not guard the king. He told him that someone had come into the camp that night. He asked him to look for the king's spear and water jug that had been near his head (verse 16).

Saul heard the voice and recognized that it was David. Again, before the entire army, David asked Saul what he had done to him that he would pursue him (verse 18). If God had incited Saul against him, David was willing to

surrender to the Lord's will, but if it was from an evil heart that Saul pursued him, then those who incited such a pursuit were to be cursed for they were not following the will of God by driving David from his inheritance in Israel. Notice in verse 19 that, according to David, the individuals who were inciting Saul against him were saying: "Go, serve other gods." In other words, they were encouraging Saul to follow something other than the will of God and needed to be punished severely for this.

David pleaded with Saul in verse 20: "Now do not let my blood fall to the ground far from the presence of the LORD." In saying this he was telling Saul that if he was to come after him and kill him, the Lord would see his innocent blood and judge. Saul's battle was not just against David but also against God whom David served faithfully. Saul's pursuit of David is compared in verse 20 to a hunter hunting partridge on the mountain. David was no threat to Saul and yet Saul hunted after him.

Saul recognized his sin in verse 21. He recognized again that David could have killed him but considered his life to be precious. This conversation between David and Saul before the army gave the entire army an opportunity to judge for themselves between the two men.

In verse 22, David asked for one of Saul's young men to come and get his spear. He reminded Saul that the Lord rewarded every person for their righteousness and faithfulness. He told Saul that he could have killed him that day but chose to honour God by sparing Saul's life. Just as David had honoured God, God would also honour him for his obedience and respect of Saul. It was David's prayer that God would honour him by removing the trouble Saul had been causing.

David did not enjoy the trouble Saul had been causing him. For the second time now, David could have killed Saul and removed that trouble, but he chose to let God do that in his proper time. Saul blessed David and confessed before his men that David would do great things and triumph. He recognized him as an honourable man of God. Saul then sent David on his way and returned home (verse 25).

David knew that Saul's hatred of him was so intense that he would not give up his pursuit. He trusted God, but decided to go where Saul would no longer pursue him. He decided to go to the land of the Philistines and live with them. Saul would hesitate to invade the territory of the Philistines in pursuit of David.

David took his six hundred men and went to Achish the son of King Maoch of Gath in the region of the Philistines. David settled in Gath and stayed there with his family (verse 3). This would provide his family a certain amount of stability for a time. When Saul heard that David had settled in Gath he gave up his pursuit (27:4). Obviously, he did not want to risk war with the Philistines.

In time David approached Achish and asked him to assign him and his men to a town of their own. He was uncomfortable living in the royal city with Achish. It is unclear why David felt he needed to move from Gath. Obviously, not everyone would have accepted the presence of these Israelites in their town. Israel and the Philistines were enemies. Moving from Gath would give David and his family more independence and enable them to live a quiet life on their own. Achish gave them the town of Ziglag. This town would belong to the kings of Judah from that moment on (verse 6). Altogether David would live in the region of the Philistines for a year and four months (verse 7).

During his stay with the Philistines, David and his men raided the territories of the surrounding people (verse 8). According to verse 8, they raided the territory of the Geshurites, the Girzites and the Amalekites. When they attacked a territory they killed everyone in it but took sheep, cattle, donkeys, camels and clothes. By means of these raiding parties, David and his men were enriching themselves and ridding the region of pagan nations.

While Achish asked David about his campaigns, David did not give him all the details. He would tell him that he had raided a town but did not tell him how he had taken all the animals and killed all the inhabitants of the region (verses 10-11). If Achish knew the full extent of David's battles and victories, he may have felt threatened.

Achish grew to trust David. He believed that he had become a thorn in Israel's side. He felt that by treating David well, David would remain with him and be his servant forever.

God's ways are often very different from our ways. David lived with the enemies of Israel, protected by the Philistines and enjoying freedom from Saul's pursuit. During this time, God was enriching David. This was all part of God's preparation for David to become king.

For Consideration:

- In chapter 24, we saw how Saul withdrew from his pursuit of David only to renew it in chapter 26. While his actions said one thing his attitude toward



David never changed. Why is it important for us to deal with our attitudes as well as our actions?

- In chapter 26, God opened a door for David to take Saul's spear and water jug. This would also have been an ideal moment to kill Saul. David had discernment to know God's will and did not go beyond that. Have you ever found yourselves stepping through open doors but going beyond where God had called you to go?
- What do we learn in this passage about God's protection over David's life?
- David does not seek an easy way out of his trouble with Saul, but waits on God's timing. How easy it is for us to do everything in our power to get out from under our trials and troubles. Why do you suppose David refused to do this?
- What was God accomplishing during David's stay in Philistine territory? How has God used your past to prepare you for His purpose?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to examine your attitudes. Ask Him to change any attitude that does not line up with His purposes for your life.
- Ask God to help you to be content in His will. Ask Him to give you discernment not to go beyond what He has called you to do.
- Thank God that He uses trials and tribulations in our lives to accomplish His purpose. Ask Him to

give you grace and strength to learn from your trials.

## 25

### SAUL AND THE MEDIUM

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Read 1 Samuel 28:1-25

Saul was a tormented man. We have already seen his jealousy and how it caused him to expend large amounts of resources and energy in pursuit of David. We have also seen his outbursts of anger. On at least two occasions, he tried to pin David to the wall with his spear. He was tormented by evil spirits. David's music helped him to a degree but the evil spirits still seemed to be a constant problem for him. He feared for his throne and the future of his family. In this chapter, we catch a further glimpse of this fear when the Philistines decided to attack Israel.

The Philistines and the Israelites were enemies. The clash between these two nations existed throughout the reign of Saul. On this occasion, the Philistines gathered their forces to fight Israel. Because David was living in the region of the Philistines, Achish told him that he was to accompany his army in their attack of Israel.

In verse 2, David agreed to accompany the Philistine army in battle. King Achish promised David he would make him his bodyguard. This is an indication of the trust that had been built between Achish and David. It is somewhat astonishing that David would agree to join Achish in his

battle against Israel. We should not read too much into this, however. There is no evidence that David intended harm to his own people.

When Saul saw the army of the Philistines, verse 5 tells us that "terror filled his heart." Obviously, Saul sensed that he was in serious trouble and feared for his kingdom and his life.

Not knowing what was ahead for him, Saul inquired of the Lord to see what he should do. Notice in verse 6 that he inquired by various means. God did not answer him in dreams, prophets or by the Urim. The Urim was part of a set of stones known as the Urim and Thummim. We read about these stones in Exodus 28:30. They were used by the priests of the Old Testament to determine the will of the Lord in a particular situation. While Saul wanted to hear from the Lord about his situation, the Lord refused to answer him.

For many years now Saul had been resisting the will of the Lord. From very early on in his reign, Saul had chosen not to listen to all that God had told him. He often did what he wanted to do. He did what he felt was right and not what he knew the Lord wanted him to do. Even in this matter of his pursuit of David, Saul was fighting against the purpose of the Lord. Saul had pushed the Lord aside throughout his life. Now when he wanted the Lord to speak to him about this battle, the Lord would no longer speak to him. God had withdrawn his Spirit from Saul because of his persistent hardness. This is a very powerful warning to us in our day. We dare not resist the call and promptings of the Lord God. The day may come when God will no longer speak to us.

Realizing that the Lord would not answer him, Saul decided to find a medium to inquire about his future (verse

7). When Samuel was alive, he had expelled all mediums and fortune-tellers from the land (verse 3). This meant that they were very scarce. Those who were in the land were in hiding.

It is important that we note that this response of Saul's is an indication of the hardness of his heart. The fact that the Lord did not answer him could have caused Saul to repent, but it didn't. If God wouldn't answer him, he would turn to a fortune-teller. Saul had for so long hardened his heart to God and his purposes that now he could not repent of his sins.

Saul sent his attendants to find a medium who could consult the spirits on his behalf. They told him that there was such a woman in the region of Endor.

Saul disguised himself and went with two men to this medium. There may be a number of reasons why Saul disguised himself that day. First, the practice of consulting mediums was forbidden by the Lord in Leviticus 19:31. A sorceress was to be killed (Exodus 22:18) and those who consulted mediums were to be cut off from the people of God (Leviticus 20:6). Saul knew what the Lord thought of such a practice. He may have disguised himself because he did not want people to see him disobey the direct commandment of the Lord. Second, Saul may have disguised himself so as not to scare the medium. If the medium saw that it was the king, she might not consult the spirits on his behalf fearing that he was setting a trap for her.

When Saul and his men arrived in Endor, they asked the woman to consult a spirit for them. In particular, they wanted to consult the spirit of Samuel.

The woman was quite suspicious of these men. She reminded them that Saul had cut off the mediums and spirits from the land (verse 9). While it appears that it was Samuel who had decided to expel these mediums and fortune-tellers, it would likely have been Saul's men who carried out this action. The woman felt that these men were from Saul and had come to trap her. She believed that as soon as she engaged in her craft, they would take her out and kill her. Only when Saul reassured her that she would not be punished for consulting a spirit for him, did she agreed to his request.

In verse 11, the woman asked Saul: "Whom shall I bring up for you?" Saul told her to bring up Samuel. We are not told what procedure she used to speak to the spirit of Samuel, but she was successful in opening the communication between Samuel's spirit and Saul.

It is difficult to understand just what is happening in this passage. Some believe that the spirit this woman was able to call up was not Samuel but an evil spirit impersonating Samuel. The problem with this is that the passage does not give any indication that Saul was speaking to an evil spirit and not to Samuel. The remainder of the passage clearly refers to the spirit as the spirit of Samuel. What is clear is that this woman was communicating with the spirit of Samuel against the will of God. God will not always stop us from doing things that are contrary to His will.

When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out at the top of her voice: "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!" (verse 12). At that moment, it was revealed to her that the man before her was the one she feared the most.

Again Saul told her not to be afraid. He asked her what she saw. She told him she saw a spirit coming up out of the

ground (verse 13). That spirit was wearing a robe. Saul knew that this was the spirit of Samuel and bowed down with his face to the ground (verse 14).

The spirit of Samuel spoke to Saul and asked him why he had disturbed him (verse 15). Saul told him that he was in great distress. He explained that the Philistines were fighting him. He had asked the Lord for direction but the Lord refused to answer so he was calling on Samuel's spirit for counsel (verse 15).

Samuel's spirit told Saul that the Lord had turned away from him and had now become his enemy (verse 16). The spirit went on to say that things were unfolding just as he had prophesied when he was alive. God was tearing Saul's kingdom from him and giving it to David (verse 17). He was doing this because Saul had refused to obey the Lord by destroying the Amalekites and all they owned (see 1 Samuel 15). Samuel's spirit told Saul that by the next day the Lord would hand both Israel and himself over to the Philistines. Saul and his sons would be killed and join him in the world of the spirits (verse 19).

The words of Samuel's spirit filled Saul with fear. He was so overwhelmed that he fell on the ground (verse 20). He had not eaten that day and he was weak.

The woman saw how shaken he was. She reminded him how she had taken her life in her hands by obeying his command. She pleaded with him to allow her to give him something to eat so that he would have strength to leave her house. Obviously she did not want Saul and his men to remain with her, especially in light of the news from Samuel's spirit.

Saul initially refused to eat. He was so overwhelmed with fear. His men, however, joined the woman in urging him to eat. Eventually he agreed. The woman butchered a calf and baked some bread (verse 24). After Saul and his men had eaten they left the medium's house.

Saul had persistently hardened his heart to the point where he was no longer able to hear the Lord. God had given him every opportunity to hear and obey but Saul refused. He had sealed his fate by his rebellion. Now the end had come. By the next day, his kingdom would be stripped from him and his family.

This passage shows us that the spirits of those who have died are very much alive outside of their physical body. These spirits are able to reason, think and communicate. It is quite clear from this passage that there is a life after death. While it is against God's purpose that there be communication between this world and the world of these spirits, the glimpse we have in this passage of this spirit world ought to encourage us. What we know in this life is not all there is. There is a whole world beyond this world. For those of us who know the Lord Jesus, we will enter this world and know the joy of His presence forever.

For Consideration:

- From what you have learned about the life of Saul, how did he harden his heart to the things of the Lord?
- What is the difference between falling into sin and persistently hardening one's heart like Saul?



- What do we learn in this passage about the practice of consulting mediums? What does God say about this practice?
- What do we learn in this passage about the spirits of those who have died?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to keep your heart in tune with Him and His purposes. Ask Him to keep your heart softened toward Him.
- Have you ever had any dealing with the occult practice of consulting the spirits of the dead? Repent of this practice and ask God to cleanse and forgive you for this sin.
- Thank the Lord for His patience with you. Ask Him to help you to live your life realizing that a day is coming when you will have to give an account of your life on earth.
- Thank the Lord that there is a life after death. Ask Him to give you the assurance that when you die, you will be in His presence.

## 26

# ZIKLAG CAPTURED AND RESTORED

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Read 1 Samuel 29:1-30:31

In the last chapter, we learned that Achish wanted David to fight with him in the battle against Israel. David joined the Philistines for battle. Again it is unclear what David's intentions were and whether he would actually have fought against his own people.

The Philistines gathered their forces and prepared to do battle with Israel. David was with the Philistines as they marched in their units. Verse 2 tells us that they were marching in the rear with the forces of Achish. David's presence did not go unnoticed by the other Philistine commanders. They questioned Achish about David (verse 3). They had heard of his reputation and were afraid to go to war with him. They did not have the confidence that Achish had in David.

Achish told his fellow commanders that David had been with him for over a year and he had found no fault in him. He trusted him completely. He was not able to convince them, however, that David should go with them into battle.

The other Philistine commanders told Achish to send David and his men home (verse 4). They made it clear that they feared David would turn against them in the midst of the battle. This way he would regain Saul's favour. They had also heard of his reputation as a military leader quoting what the people of Israel said about him: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands?" (verse 5). While David's intentions were not clear, God was making sure that he did not have to engage in this battle.

Achish was forced to give David the news. In verse 6, he reminded David that he had confidence in him, but that the other commanders did not share that confidence. He asked David to go home and begged him not to do anything that would displease the other commanders (verse 7). Achish may have believed that these commanders would not have hesitated to turn against David if he did not return home.

While David questioned the decision of the other commanders in verse 8, he submitted to their wishes, got up early in the morning with his men and returned home. Obviously, this battle was not his to fight.

As David's men returned home feeling somewhat rejected, they found that their home town had been raided by Amalekites (30:1). The Amalekites had attacked Ziklag and burned it, taking the women and children captive.

The reality of what had happened was very bitter for David and his men. Verse 4 tells us that they "wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep." Both of David's wives were taken captive. David's men were so overwhelmed by what had happened that they spoke of stoning David (verse 6). Perhaps they were blaming him, feeling that had

they not joined the Philistines they would have been present in the town to defend their families.

These things greatly distressed David. He had been rejected by the Philistine commanders, his town had been burned, his wives were taken captive and now his own men wanted to kill him. Things were not going well for David. At this point in his life, it seemed that God had stripped him of everything he valued. Maybe you have been in a situation like this. What is important for us to note is a small phrase in verse 6. Here the writer tells us that David found strength in the Lord his God. When everything seemed to be going wrong, David turned to the Lord his God and found strength to face the obstacles. That strength is still available for us today.

Encouraged in the Lord, David called for Abiathar the priest. When Abiathar arrived, David asked him to inquire of the Lord to see if he should pursue the raiding party. Abiathar consulted the Lord and returned with the answer: "Pursue them," he answered. "You will certainly overtake them and succeed in the rescue" (verse 8).

David gathered his six hundred men together. From verse 10, we understand that two hundred of those men were too tired to join David in battle and would only have been a hindrance to him. David told these men to remain behind, and with the four hundred that remained, he pursued the Amalekites.

On their way, they met an Egyptian in a field. This man appeared to be sick. They gave him water and food to eat (verse 11). These provisions revived the Egyptian who had not eaten for three days (verse 12). When the man was sufficiently revived, David questioned him. He discovered that the man was a slave to an Amalekite master. His

Amalekite master had abandoned him when he became ill and left him to die (verse 13).

The Egyptian told David that the Amalekites had raided the Kerethites, the territory of Judah and Caleb and had burned the city of Ziklag (verse 14). David asked the Egyptian if he could lead them to the raiding party (verse 15). He promised that he would do so if David promised not kill him or hand him over to his master. David agreed and so the Egyptian led them to the place where the Amalekites were camped (verse 16).

When they arrived at the camp, David and his men found them in the midst of a wild party. They were eating, drinking and celebrating. They were celebrating the great plunder they had taken from the Philistines and Judah (verse 16).

David did not waste time in attacking the Amalekites. He fought them from dusk to the evening of the next day. The slaughter was very great and the Amalekites had many casualties. Only four hundred young men escaped, fleeing on camels (verse 17). David and his men recovered everything the Amalekites had taken from them, including his wives (verse 18). Not a single person was missing. God protected David's family and the families of every man in his army. David also took livestock as plunder and drove them ahead of him on his way home (verse 20).

When David and his army returned, they faced another problem. There were men among David's army who did not want to share the plunder with the two hundred soldiers who had been too tired to fight and remained behind (verse 21). David was quick to settle this conflict.

No, my brothers, you must not do that with what the LORD has given us. He has protected us and handed over to us the forces that came against us. Who will listen to what you say? The share of the man who stayed with the supplies is to be the same as that of him who went down to the battle. All will share alike (verses 23-24).

Let me underline two important principles in these verses.

First, David told his men that the plunder had been given to them by the Lord; it was not theirs to do with as they pleased. They had no ultimate claim over the distribution of the plunder because it was not theirs, but the Lord's. It is important that we keep this in mind. Our possessions ultimately belong to God and He has the right to do with them what He pleases.

Second, David recognized the importance of every man in his army. It is true that the two hundred men who stayed behind did not have to endure the heat and intensity of the battle. They did, however, have an important role to play. They guarded the supplies that remained in the city. How easy it is for us to think that one ministry is more important than another. Sometimes we elevate certain gifts and callings above others. God does not do this. He will reward the person who works faithfully behind the scenes as well as the one who is up front. We dare not make the same mistake David's men made. They were not seeing things from God's perspective. From that day forward, it was made an ordinance that those who guarded the supplies were to share the plunder with those who fought the battle (verse 25). Each person was to be honoured for his or her role. Every person was to share in the reward.

Not only did David share the plunder with the two hundred men who guarded the supplies but he also sent it to the elders of Judah who themselves had been plundered and were suffering from the Amalekite raid. This was an act of compassion on David's part toward his brothers and sisters in Judah. Instead of raiding his people with the Philistines, God used David to bless them.

Plunder went to many cities and towns in the region who had been raided by the Amalekites (verses 27-31). The blessing God had given David and his men was shared with the inhabitants of the places where David and his men roamed. They were generous with what God had given. David's personal tragedy became a source of tremendous blessing for many.

It would have been hard for David to imagine how his rejection by the Philistines and the Amalekite raid could have blessed so many people. God, however, took what appeared to be a tragedy and turned it into a wonderful blessing for many people. He can do the same with your tragedies.

For Consideration:

- How did God protect David from fighting his own people?
- Have you ever felt God leading you away from a particular position or ministry you had chosen?

- David found strength in the Lord in a time when everything seemed to be going wrong. Have you ever experienced this strength? Explain.
- What does David teach us about the value of every person with their different roles? How easy it is for us to believe that some roles are more important than others.
- What do we learn about the blessings God gives? Are they ours to do as we please? What does God want us to do with the blessing He gives us?
- How did God change David's tragedy into blessing? Has God ever done this for you? Explain.

#### For Prayer:

- Thank God for a time when He protected you from falling into sin.
- Ask God to give you courage to obey in whatever He calls you to do.
- Thank the Lord that His strength is greater than the problems we face in this life.
- Commit all you have to the Lord. Tell Him that He can do what He wants with whatever He has given you.
- Are you facing a personal difficulty or trial right now? Thank the Lord that He is able to use what appears to be tragedy to accomplish great good.



## 27

### SAUL'S DEATH

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Read 1 Samuel 31:1-2 Samuel 1:27

The Philistines had been preparing to fight the Israelites. On this occasion, the Philistines were too strong for Israel. The Israelites suffered heavy casualties and fled from the Philistine army (31:1). Both Saul and Jonathan were among the casualties that day (31:2). Jonathan was killed and Saul mortally wounded. Seeing the seriousness of his situation, Saul called his armour-bearer and asked him to kill him. From 1 Samuel 31:4, we understand that the reason for this was that he did not want to fall into the hands of the Philistines lest they torture him. Saul's armour-bearer, respecting his master, refused to kill him, so Saul fell on his own sword in an attempt to kill himself.

When Saul's armour-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he too fell on his sword and killed himself (31:5). On that one day, Saul, his three sons and his armour bearer all died (31:6).

When the Israelites heard that Saul and his sons had died, they abandoned their towns and fled. The Philistines occupied those towns.

The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the dead of their possessions, they found Saul and his three sons (31:8). Seeing Saul's body, they cut off his head and took his armour. They sent word throughout the land that Saul had been killed. This news was proclaimed in the temples of the Philistine gods throughout the land. Saul's armour was put in one of these temples. His headless body was fastened to the wall of the city of Geth Shan (31:10).

When the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul they travelled through the night to Beth Shan and removed the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall, taking them to Jabesh, where they cremated them (31:12). While cremation was not the custom of the Israelites, the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead likely chose to burn the bodies so that no further abuse could be done to them. They then took the cremated remains, buried them in Jabesh and fasted for seven days as a sign of mourning.

It is important that we mention that the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead had a special connection with Saul. In 1 Samuel 11, Saul had delivered them from the hands of the Ammonites. Were it not for Saul's intervention; they would have become slaves to the Ammonites. This particular battle against the Ammonites was Saul's first battle and established him in the minds of the people as king. The people of Jabesh Gilead never forgot the help Saul had been to them and chose to honour him in his death.

When David returned from defeating the Amalekites, who had burned his city, he remained in Ziklag. On the third day of his stay in Ziklag, a man arrived from Saul's camp. This man was dirty and dressed in torn clothes. When he saw David, he fell on the ground in a sign of respect (1:2).

David asked him where he had come from. He told him that he had escaped from the Israelites camp. David was curious to hear news of the battle. The man told David that the Israelites had fled from the battle. Many had died and among them were both Saul and Jonathan (1:4).

David questioned the man about how he knew Saul and Jonathan were dead (1:5). The man told him that he was on Mount Gilboa and found Saul leaning on his spear. The Philistine chariots and riders were almost upon him. As he approached, Saul called out to him and asked who he was. The man told Saul that he was an Amalekite and asked him if there was anything he could do for him (1:7). Saul pleaded with the Amalekite to kill him. Likely Saul was suffering and did not want to be found alive by the Philistines.

The Amalekite told David that he killed Saul because he knew that he would not be able to survive. In other words, the killing of Saul was an act of mercy to ease his suffering and prevent him from being captured by the Philistines. He also took Saul's crown and the band that was on his hand and gave them to David (1:10).

When David and his men heard what had happened, they tore their clothes in a sign of mourning. They wept and fasted until evening for Saul, his son Jonathan and the fallen army of Israel (1:12).

In 2 Samuel 1:13, David asked the young men who had brought the news of Saul and Jonathan's death about his nationality. He told David that he was the son of an Amalekite. David then asked him why he was not afraid to kill the anointed of the Lord. He then called for one of his men to strike and kill the Amalekite, telling him that the blood of the Lord's anointed would be on his head.

David's musical background followed him throughout his life. Here in this time of crisis, David turned to his music for release. To deal with his grief, David wrote a lament and ordered that his men learn it in remembrance of Saul and Jonathan (1:18). This lament shows something of David's thoughts toward Saul and his son Jonathan. We will briefly examine it here.

In 2 Samuel 1:19, David began his lament by saying: "Your glory, O Israel, lies slain on your heights." The glory David is referring to here is Saul who was their king. In speaking of Saul as the glory of Israel, David is not comparing him to God. Saul was, however, God's anointed servant. Despite the fact that Saul was not always what he should have been, David still loved and respected him as God's servant.

Notice also that the glory of Israel lay fallen in the heights. This is obviously a reference to Mount Gilboa where Saul and his sons were defeated.

David had no desire that Saul's enemies learn of his defeat. In 2 Samuel 1:20, he asked in his lament that the news of Saul's death be kept from the inhabitants of the principle cities of the Philistines. He did not want to see the Philistines rejoice over the death of the Lord's anointed.

We need to remember that Saul had made David's life very difficult. David had spent many years running from Saul who sought to kill him. Saul was his enemy, but David still respected him. He did not rejoice in Saul's defeat nor did he want anyone else to rejoice in his defeat. How easy it is for us to rejoice in the defeat of our enemies. David's attitude toward Saul's death is an example for us to follow.

In 2 Samuel 1:21, David cursed the mountains that took the life of Saul and his son Jonathan.

O mountains of Gilboa, may you have neither dew  
nor rain,  
nor fields that yield offerings of grain.  
For there the shield of the mighty was defiled;  
the shield of Saul—no longer rubbed with oil.

David commends both Saul and his son Jonathan for their valiant efforts in battle. “Jonathan's bow did not turn back nor did Saul's sword return unsatisfied” (2 Samuel 1:22). These men fought valiantly and defended their people to the death. In life, Saul and Jonathan were loved and gracious and they were together in their death. They were swift and strong men who were respected as mighty warriors (1:23).

David called the women of Israel to weep for Saul (2 Samuel 1:24). Under his reign, they were clothed in scarlet and adorned with ornaments of gold. Now these great men had fallen in battle.

David mentions Jonathan in particular in 2 Samuel 1:26. Notice how he called him his brother. There was a bond of brotherhood between David and Jonathan that was very strong. David went as far as to say that Jonathan's love for him was more wonderful than that of a woman. In other words, there was a bond of friendship David experienced with Jonathan that he had not experience with even his own wives.

This was a difficult time for David and his men. David grieved that day over the death of his closest friend and over Israel's defeat at the hand of the Philistines. As he grieved, he walked through the charred remains of the city

of Ziglag that had been burnt by the Amalekites. We will see, however, that as He had done before, God would take what appeared to be terrible tragedy and use it to accomplish His greater purpose in David's life.

For Consideration:

- Saul's judgment had finally come. He could not stand against this judgment. What warning does this bring us today?
- Do you feel that David was right in killing the Amalekite who brought him news of Saul's death? Why or why not?
- What does David's lament for Saul tell us about his deep respect for him as the anointed of the Lord? Do you have the same respect for God's servants?
- David is not able to rejoice over Saul's death even though Saul had been his greatest enemy for years. Have you ever rejoiced over the defeat of your enemy? What lesson do you learn here?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is a God of judgment and holiness. Thank Him that He will deal with sin.
- Ask God to help you to respect those He has put over you. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you did not show them the respect they deserved.

- Take a moment to pray for someone who has caused grief in your heart. Ask God to remove all bitterness and anger from your heart toward them. Ask God to teach them His ways and bring great blessing into their lives.

## DAVID AND ISH-BOSHETH

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Read 2 Samuel 2:1-32

After the death of Saul, David had no reason to remain in the territory of the Philistines. In verse 1, he asked the Lord if he should return to the towns of Judah. When the Lord told him that it was now time for him to return, David asked the Lord to show him the town where he wanted him and his family to settle. God told him that he was to settle in the town of Hebron.

Notice how David seeks the specific will of the Lord for his family. He believed that the Lord had a specific purpose, time and place for him and his family. David had been anointed king many years prior to this. For years he and his men were running from Saul. His patience was often severely tested but he chose to wait for the Lord and His timing.

When the Lord told David to return to Judah, David gathered his two wives and his men with their families and moved from Ziklag to Hebron as the Lord had told him. The men of Judah came to Hebron and anointed David king over the whole house of Judah. While this was in fulfillment of the promise of God many years earlier, it was only a partial fulfillment because Judah was only one of the tribes



in the nation of Israel. God seemed to lead David one step at a time, teaching and equipping him at each stage.

One of the very first things David did as the king of Judah was to send messengers to the men of Jabesh Gilead to express his gratitude to them for their kindness to Saul and his family. In 1 Samuel 31:11-13, these men had taken the bodies of Saul and Jonathan from the wall of Beth Shan and buried them. He sent the following message to the inhabitants of this city:

The LORD bless you for showing this kindness to Saul your master by burying him. May the LORD now show you kindness and faithfulness, and I too will show you the same favour because you have done this. Now then, be strong and brave, for Saul your master is dead, and the house of Judah has anointed me king over them (verses 5-7).

By means of this message, David promised to show kindness to the inhabitants of Jabesh Gilead for their respect for Saul, his enemy.

Not everyone was content to see David anointed king. One of the discontented people was Abner, Saul's former military commander. He was unwilling to accept David's reign. It should be noted that David had been anointed king only by the tribe of Judah. The rest of Israel had not yet accepted him as their king. In verse 8, Abner took Ish-bosheth, one of Saul's sons, and brought him to Mahanaim where he made him king over Gilead, Ashuri, Jezreel, Ephraim, Benjamin and the rest of Israel (verse 9). The people of God now had two kings. Bringing the people of God together as a single nation would not prove to be easy.

Ish-Bosheth, Saul's son, was forty years old when he became king. He would rule over Israel for two years (verse 10). The tribe of Judah did not accept Ish-Bosheth as king. David was their king. David would reign in Judah for seven and a half years. It is impossible to know what David felt during this time. He was not king over all of God's people. Only one tribe submitted to him. Again this was a test from the Lord. As we have already mentioned, God would lead David slowly one step at a time. We can only admire David for his patience as he waited for the Lord to accomplish His full purpose in his life.

During the seven and a half years David reigned in Judah, there was tension between Judah and the rest of Israel. In verses 12 and 13, we have an example of the tension between the two kingdoms in those early days. Abner, Ish-Bosheth's military commander gathered his men to fight David's army under the leadership of Joab. The two armies met at the pool of Gibeon.

Abner suggested that they have some of their young men fight hand to hand in front of them (verse 14). Joab agreed to the challenge and the men were chosen for the fight. According to verse 15, twelve men were chosen from the tribe of Benjamin and twelve from David's men to face each other. Verse 16 tells us that the men grabbed their opponents by the head and thrust a dagger into their sides. All twenty-four men died. In memory of this event, the place was named Halkath Hazzurim meaning "field of daggers" or "field of hostilities."

The events of that day precipitated a very fierce battle. Both armies faced each other in battle. David's men were stronger and Ish-Bosheth's forces were defeated (verse 17).

Among David's men were three sons of a man by the name of Zeruiah. Their names were Joab, Abishai and Asahel. We have already met Joab. He was the commander of David's army (see verse 13). Asahel, his brother, was a very fast runner. He is described in verse 18 to be "as fleet-footed as a wild gazelle."

Asahel was also a very determined young man. When he saw that Abner had escaped, he decided to pursue him. Verse 19 tells us that he did not turn to the right or the left as he pursued him. Nothing would distract him. He had his mind made up and was going to capture or kill Abner; no matter the cost.

As Asahel pursued him, Abner looked behind and recognized him. "Is that you, Asahel?" he asked in verse 20. Asahel answered, "It is." Abner then advised him to stop pursuing him (verse 21). Asahel refused and continued to chase him.

Abner repeated what he told him but this time warned Asahel that he would strike him down if he did not stop chasing him. "Stop chasing me! Why should I strike you down? How could I look your brother Joab in the face?" Abner told him in verse 22.

Despite these warnings, Asahel refused to give up the pursuit. Abner, therefore, thrust the butt of his spear into Asahel's stomach so that it went right through him and came out his back. Asahel fell to the ground and died on the spot (verse 23). Seeing what had happened to Asahel, the men of David's army stopped their pursuit. Obviously, Asahel was well respected. His death would have been a discouragement to the men.

Asahel's two other brothers, Joab and Abishai continued their pursuit of Abner, possibly spurred on by the death of Asahel (verse 24). This pursuit lasted until the sun was setting. By this time, Abner had arrived at the hill of Ammah where the men of Benjamin rallied behind him.

Protected by the men of Benjamin, Abner called out to Joab:

Must the sword devour forever? Don't you realize that this will end in bitterness? How long before you order your men to stop pursuing their brothers? (verse 27).

Obviously Abner had suffered enough loss. He just wanted to see an end to the fighting.

Coming to his senses, Joab realized the truth of what Abner was saying. In verse 28, he blew the trumpet to stop the pursuit.

Abner and his men marched through the desert of Arabah, crossed the Jordan and arrived at Mahanaim (verse 29). Joab also returned from battle. When they counted their men, it was discovered that besides Asahel there were only nineteen of David's men missing (verse 30). David's men, however, had killed three hundred and sixty Benjamites. They buried Asahel in his father's tomb in Bethlehem. Joab and his men then marched all night and arrived at Hebron by daybreak.

This chapter gives us a better picture of the confusion that reigned in the early days of David's reign. Brother fought brother. God's people were divided. In some ways this

chapter is a picture of the church of our day. May God give us grace to deal with the differences that divide us.

For Consideration:

- We read in this section how David sought the specific will of the Lord for his life. Does God have a specific purpose for us? How important is it that we seek that purpose?
- What do we learn in this chapter about how God led David? What do we learn about David's patience as he waited on God?
- Was David always accepted? Should we expect that people will always accept us and our ministry?
- What things divide God's people today?
- Asahel was very persistent in his pursuit of Abner. This persistence ultimately was the cause of his death. Is it possible for us to persevere in the wrong things? Why is it important that we seek God's specific will in each matter?
- Asahel rejected Abner's counsel. Joab his brother took Abner's counsel and sounded the trumpet to end the battle. Can God lead us through the counsel of our enemies?

## For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to be more willing to seek His direction and will for your life and ministry.
- Ask God to give you more patience and trust in Him and His timing. Ask Him to forgive you for the times you have tried to take matters into your own hands.
- Ask God to break down the barriers that exist between brothers and sisters in Christ.
- Ask God to show you if you are persevering in the wrong things. If you are, ask Him for grace to surrender these things to Him before it is too late.
- Ask God to give you humility to listen and consider the counsel of even those you consider to be your enemies. Thank God that he can even use your enemies to teach you.

## 29

### ABNER'S ALLIANCE

### AND DEATH

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Read 2 Samuel 3:1-39

David had been chosen to be king over the tribe of Judah. Ish-Bosheth, Saul's son, ruled over the rest of the nation. There was civil war between Israel and Judah in those days. Verse 1 reminds us that this war lasted a long time. As time progressed, however, David grew stronger while those faithful to Saul's descendants grew weaker (verse 1).

God's blessing of David was evident in the fact that he had given him many sons. Ammon was his first son through Ahinoam of Jezreel (verse 2). David's second son Kileab was the son of Abigail. Absalom, his third son's mother was Maacah the daughter of the king of Geshur (verse 3). Adonijah was his fourth son through Haggith (verse 4). His fifth son was Shaphatiah the son of Abital. David's wife Eglah gave him his sixth son Ithream (verse 5). All these sons were born to him when he was in Hebron.

It is of significance to the context that we note that David has at least six wives here. We will examine the significance of this fact later in this chapter.

We return now to Abner, Ish-Bosheth's military commander. Verse 6 tells us that during this time of war between David and Ish-Bosheth, Abner was strengthening his position in Saul's house. The war between Israel and Judah gave him opportunity to increase his authority and power.

Evidence of Abner's boldness in increasing authority is seen in the fact that he took one of Saul's concubines. This was a very bold statement on the part of Abner. The concubines of the king were his property. Abner had no problem claiming Saul's property as his own.

Ish-Bosheth confronted Abner about this in verse 7. It seems clear that Abner saw Ish-Bosheth's challenge as a question of his loyalty to him and the house of Saul. When Ish-Bosheth questioned Abner about taking his father's concubine, Abner responded:

Am I a dog's head—on Judah's side? This very day  
I am loyal to the house of your father Saul and to  
his family and friends.

Abner took great offense when Ish-Bosheth's questioned him. He saw this question as a question about his loyalty.

Abner was so angry about being confronted by the king that he decided to withdraw his support from Ish-Bosheth and side with David (verse 9). It is quite clear here that Abner's heart was not for the family of Saul. He seemed to be more interested in power and position. He was willing



to turn his back on Saul's household to advance his own cause. Abner realized that David would become king over all of Israel one day (verse 10). While Abner's intentions are unclear, his actions caused Ish-Bosheth to be very afraid. In losing Abner, he was losing his most gifted and experienced military commander. Ish-Bosheth feared not only because of losing his military commander but also because of the reminder of the promise of God to David to give him Saul's throne. Ish-Bosheth knew that he was in trouble and feared for his future and the future of his family.

Abner sent messengers to David asking him to make an agreement with him (verse 12). He promised David that he would bring all Israel under his kingship. The temptation for David was to trust in Abner and not in the Lord God. David was quite pleased to see that Abner was willing to side with him. David told him, however, that he would only accept his proposal on one condition. Abner was not to come into David's presence unless he came with Michal, Saul's daughter and David's former wife (1 Samuel 18:27).

Michal had been taken from David and given to another man as wife (1 Samuel 25:44). We are left to wonder if David was not saying something through this act. Michal was Saul's daughter. While at one time David did not feel worthy of being the son-in-law of Saul now he demanded Michal. Could it be that there was a political motivation behind this request? Did David want the nation of Israel to see that he had been Saul's son-in-law? Did he feel that by getting Michal back, he would strengthen his tie with Israel?

While the reason for this demand on David's part is uncertain, in verse 15, we see the result. Word of David's request was sent to King Ish-Bosheth who gave orders that Michal be taken from her husband and sent to David.

Verse 16 paints a very graphic picture of Michal's husband Paltiel following behind Michal as they took her away from him. He followed her weeping until Abner demanded that he return home. We are left to wonder what God felt about this scene. David had six wives and now he is taking Michal away from her husband to advance his own political cause.

As for Abner, he met with the elders of Israel and challenged them to side with David (verses 17-18). He reminded them that God had promised to make David king. Abner also spoke to the tribe of Benjamin about this. When he had done so, he travelled to Hebron to tell him that Israel and Benjamin were ready to side with him.

David welcomed Abner and his twenty men and prepared a feast for them (verse 20). At the end of this feast Abner asked permission to leave so that he could assemble all Israel to make David king. David sent Abner away in peace to do this. In all this, we have no record of David seeking the will of the Lord. Ultimately, this would be one of the means by which David would be given this authority, but the circumstances around this series of events make us wonder if these events were all in God's perfect plan. Deceit, human effort, confidence in human influence, and the breaking up of a family unit were all part of the scheme that unfolded that day. Were these things really from God or were they the efforts of human beings to accomplish God's purpose by their own means. God can use our sinful and impatient efforts to accomplish His purpose, but we will be accountable for what we have done. David and Abner would have to answer to God for their actions that day.

After Abner left, Joab, David's military commander, returned from a raid with much plunder (verse 22). All this could have been seen by David as a sign that God was

pleased with his actions. We need to be careful, however, about seeing all blessing from God as a sign of his approval of our actions. In Matthew 5:45, Jesus reminds us his father "causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous."

When Joab learned that Abner had come to David and the king had sent him away in peace, he spoke to David about what he had done. He questioned David's willingness to let Abner go. Joab questioned Abner's intentions. He believed that Abner had come to spy on David (verse 25). Joab did not trust Abner.

Joab had a very personal reason not to like Abner. In 2 Samuel 2:22-23, Abner had killed Joab's brother. This may in part, explain something of Joab's anger with David for sending Abner off in peace.

When Joab left David that day, he sent messengers after Abner to have him brought back. Joab did this without David's knowledge. When Abner returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside as though to speak with him privately. When he was alone with him, he stabbed and killed him. Verse 27 makes it very clear that the reason for killing Abner was not motivated by concern for David and his throne so much as to avenge the blood of his brother Asahel whom Abner had killed.

This whole story is filled with deceit and selfish ambition. Sinful attitudes and actions are everywhere. In it, however, God is still accomplishing His purposes. Abner, in whom David had put his confidence, is now removed from the scene. All possibilities in this man being able to unite the two kingdoms are gone. David is now forced to put his confidence in God. There are times when God will strip us of the things in which we are putting our confidence. God has

his way of overruling us when we are going down the wrong path.

When David heard what Joab had done, he declared himself and his kingdom to be innocent before the Lord of Abner's blood (verse 28). He cursed Joab's family. "May Joab's house never be without someone who has a running sore or leprosy or who leans on a crutch or who falls by the sword or who lacks food," David said (verse 29).

That day, David called the people of Judah to tear their clothes and put on sackcloth as a sign of mourning for Abner. They held a funeral service for Abner with David walking behind his body (verse 31). Abner was buried in Hebron. This may have been to show the people that David had completely accepted Abner and was innocent of his blood.

David sang a lament in honour of Abner. In this lament David question why Abner should die like a criminal (verse 33). While Abner was not a prisoner or criminal, he died like a wicked man. David saw injustice in Abner's death.

The people were touched by David's lament. In his grief, David refused to eat. Even though the people urged him to eat something David refused to do so until the sun had set (verse 35). Seeing this, the people of Israel realized that David had no part in the death of Abner. In this way, the relationship between Israel and David's own territory of Judah was maintained. What could have been very harmful to the relationship between the two nations was salvaged and repaired by David's actions that day.

That day David declared before all that Abner was a great prince. He cursed Joab and his family for their terrible

deed; calling on God to repay them for what they did (verse 38-39).

What is important for us to see in this chapter is that God is able to take a terrible situation and use it for His glory and our good. The story we have considered here is filled with sin and evil. Mistrust of God, deceit, insensitivity and revenge all are key themes. God continues to work out His purposes despite the sinful attitudes and actions of human beings. God does not need to do this, but I am personally thankful that He does. I am thankful that God does not give up on me when I fail or wander from the path He has clearly laid out. What a comfort it is to know that His mercy and grace are bigger than my sin. This is not an excuse to do as I please. God's curse fell on Joab and his family for their actions. God will judge us for our sin and we will have to answer to Him for our actions, but His overall purpose will not be threatened by our sin. He is bigger than our sin and in His grace and mercy He will still accomplish His purpose. We see here how the relationship between Israel and Judah was being mended at a time when it could have been severely damaged by Joab's actions. Praise God that He is bigger than our sinfulness and can accomplish His purposes despite our rebellion and failures.

For Consideration:

- What evidence is there in this passage of Abner's desire for power and authority?
- Is there evidence in this chapter that David is trusting in Abner to help him to realize the promise of God to be king over both Israel and Judah? Have

you ever trusted in anyone or anything other than God to give you the victory you needed? Explain.

- Has God ever stripped you of the things in which you were putting your confidence? What was the result?
- What evidence do we have in this passage of sinful and wrong attitudes? Is God threatened by these things? What evidence do we have that God is still in control despite the sins of David, Abner and Joab?
- How does God work out the situation in this passage for good? What encouragement does this bring you in your situation?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is a sovereign God who is bigger than our sins. Thank Him that sin will not hinder or threaten His overall purpose.
- Thank the Lord that He will judge sin and call the sinner to account for his or her actions.
- Thank the Lord for the times when He has stripped you of those things in which you were putting your confidence. Thank Him that He alone is able to give us the confidence and assurance we need.
- Thank the Lord for the times when He has worked out situations despite your sin and short comings. Thank Him that He has protected you from your sin.

**DAVID'S REIGN****ESTABLISHED**

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Read 2 Samuel 4:1-5:25

In the previous chapter, we saw how David decided to ally himself with Abner in an attempt to unite Israel and Judah. This human effort to accomplish the purpose of God fell through when Joab killed Abner out of revenge for the death of his brother. We have seen the failure of human effort to accomplish the purpose of God. Now we will see how God works out His purpose for David.

From 2 Samuel 4:1, we understand that the news of Abner's death hit Ish-Bosheth hard. The verse tells us that he lost courage. This may be because he had depended so heavily on the skill and experience of Abner. It may also be because he feared that now that Abner was dead David or Joab, his military commander, would have reason to attack. Beyond this, David was gaining support and popularity even in Israel and Benjamin. Ish-Bosheth feared for his kingdom and possibly even his life.

David had made a promise to Saul that he would not kill his descendants (2 Samuel 24:20-22). Ish-Bosheth had no cause to fear David.

In verse 4, we meet Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan. He was lame in both feet due to an accident that happened when the news of the death of his father and grandfather reached him. Fearing the worst, his nurse picked him up and fled. As she fled with him, he fell and became crippled. We will discover later that David would do all he could to help Mephibosheth because of his love for Jonathan and respect for Saul.

Ish-Bosheth's greatest enemy was not David but his own men. We meet Baanah and Recab, two leaders of Ish-Bosheth's raiding bands in verse 2. These men were from the tribe of Benjamin. Verse 5 tells us that Recab and Baanah set out for the house of Ish-Bosheth one day, arriving in the heat of the noonday. Ish-Bosheth was resting in the inner part of the house at that time. Baanah and Recab went into the room where he was resting and fatally stabbed him in the stomach. After cutting off his head, they slipped away (verse 6-7). This incident shows us how much the tribes of Israel and Benjamin were beginning to side with David.

Thinking that they were doing David a great service by killing Ish-Bosheth, they took his head, travelled all night and arrived at Hebron where David was staying to present it to him. When they arrived, they told David:

Here is the head of Ish-Bosheth son of Saul, your enemy, who tried to take your life. This day the LORD has avenged my lord the king against Saul and his offspring (verse 8).



Baanah and Recab likely did not expect the response they received from David. In verse 10, he reminded them of how he had killed the man who brought news that Saul had died (2 Samuel 1:1-16). He told them that by killing an innocent man, they had sealed their own fate (verse 11). David gave orders to kill Baanah and Recab. Their hands and feet were cut off and their bodies hung by the pool of Hebron. In doing so, these men were put to shame. As for the head of Ish-Bosheth it was buried in Abner's tomb in Hebron. This was done out of respect for Ish-Bosheth.

What is important for us to see in this chapter is that God is working out all the details for David's eventual kingship over both Israel and Judah. David's alliance with Abner was not the answer. David may have felt that this human alliance would have secured his reign over both nations, but this was not in God's plan. David did not have to do anything here. God was working out His purposes in His own time and in His own way. Ish-Bosheth's death would pave the way for David to become king over the tribes of Israel and Benjamin. All David had to do was to wait on God.

After the death of Ish-Bosheth, the tribes of Israel came to David in Hebron. They reminded him that in the past, under the leadership of Saul, David had been the one to lead Israel to military success. They also knew that the Lord had made a promise to David to make him king over Israel. This verse makes it clear that the battle between Israel and Judah was politically motivated by Saul and Ish-Bosheth to preserve their family throne. The people of Israel tended to side with David. Even when Saul was king, David enjoyed greater popularity than Saul. Now that Saul and his descendants were out of the way, the people quickly turned to David to be their king. When all the elders of Israel had come to David at Hebron they made an alliance

with him and surrendered to his leadership as king. There in Hebron, they anointed David king over all of Israel. Again notice that David does not have to go looking for this position. In God's time, God brought that position to him. What a difference it makes when we wait on the Lord. Human effort leads to futility and failure. When God is in a matter everything falls perfectly into place.

Verses 4-5 tell us that David was thirty years old when he became king. He reigned for forty years. He reigned over Judah for seven and a half years and over both Israel and Judah for thirty-three years.

What we are seeing in this chapter is how God was unfolding His purposes for David. David had waited a long time to see the accomplishment of those purposes. He had wandered from place to place in the desert fleeing Saul. He reigned over Judah alone for seven years. During those seven years, he faced civil war among his own people. Through those years of wandering and fighting, God was preparing David to become king. David's role in this time was not to fight to become king but to be faithful and learn what God wanted him to learn so that, in God's time, he would be the king God wanted him to be.

It is never easy to wait. Sometimes we become impatient and want to force the hand of God. God calls us instead to learn the lessons He wants to teach us. All this waiting and struggle has a purpose.

One of David's first exploits as king of Israel was to conquer Jerusalem. At this point in history, Jerusalem belonged to the Jebusites. They were so confident in the fortifications of this city that they defied David to take it saying: "You will not get in here; even the blind and the lame can ward you off" (verse 6). They truly believed that

even David with all his military experience and victories was no match for them behind the walls of this great city. David proved them wrong and captured the fortress. From verse 8, we understand that the city had one weakness. David used the water shaft to gain access to the city and once inside he was able to defeat the Jebusites. David took up residence in Jerusalem and called it the City of David. He would fortify the city and it would become the centre of his activities. Verse 10 tells us that David would become more and more powerful because God was with him.

David hired carpenters and stonemasons from Tyre to build up the city of Jerusalem. These skilled workers came to Jerusalem bringing cedar logs for the construction (verse 11).

David would take more concubines and wives. God blessed him with an even greater family and more sons and daughters were born to him (see 5:14-16).

God would give him victory over the Philistines who had been a constant threat and thorn in the side of Israel and Judah (verse 17). When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over Israel, they gathered their army and attacked him at Jerusalem. When David saw the army of the Philistines, he asked the Lord if He would give them over to him. The Lord told David He would give him victory.

Taking courage from this word from the Lord, David attacked the Philistines at Baal Perazim and defeated them (verse 20). Baal Perazim literally means "the Lord who breaks out." David called the place Baal Perazim because of the way the Lord gave them victory over the Philistines. He compared this victory to flood breaking out and

overcoming everything in its way. The Philistines abandoned their posts leaving behind all their idols. David and his men carried off those idols showing the Philistines that their gods were no match for the God of Israel.

Though defeated at Baal Perazim, the Philistines were not ready to give up the battle. They regrouped and spread out in the Valley of Rephaim (verse 22). Again David asked the Lord what he needed to do. This is significant. The word David had received for the first battle was not sufficient for the second. David still needed to seek the Lord for the second battle. This shows us that it is important to seek the Lord in each battle or decision we need to make.

The Lord again told David that He would be with him and give him victory. God gave David specific instructions. In verse 23, God told him not to go straight up against the Philistines. He was to form a circle around them and attack them in front of the balsam trees. As soon as David heard the sound of marching in the tops of the trees, he was to move quickly because this was a sign that the Lord was moving before him to strike the Philistines (verse 24). This was God's battle; David was simply to follow the Lord into that battle. In doing so, he could be absolutely sure of victory. David obeyed the Lord and the Philistines were defeated (verse 25).

These were incredible days for David and his men. God was opening up a door that no one could shut. What is clear from these two chapters is that God is at work. David simply has to live in obedience and harvest the results of God's work. The chapter challenges us to realize how futile our human plans to accomplish God's work can be. These chapters are at the same time, however, a real encouragement to us to wait on the Lord and let him move ahead of

us. When God is in our efforts, the enemy is forced to surrender. He is no match for the will and purpose of God.

For Consideration:

- Compare David's attempt to make an alliance with Abner to unite the kingdom in chapter 3 with what has taken place in chapters 4 and 5. What is the difference between David's effort to ally himself with Abner and what God does for him in chapters 4 and 5? What is the difference between human effort and God working out His purpose through us?
- What evidence do we have in these chapters of God's workings? What role does David play in the unfolding of God's purposes in these chapters?
- What is the role of persevering and obedience as we wait on the Lord? What did David have to face as he waited for the Lord over a period of years?
- David sought the Lord personally for each of the battles he fought against the Philistines. How important is it that we seek the will of the Lord in each situation or decision we need to make in life?
- While David fought the battle with the Philistines, it was clear that it was the Lord who went before him. Is the Lord going before you in the battles you are facing or are you running ahead of Him?

## For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the way He opens doors and goes before us in the battles we face.
- Take a moment to consider the path you find yourself on today. Is this the path the Lord has set out for you? Ask the Lord to lead you and assure you that you are where He wants you to be.
- Ask God to forgive you for the times you have not waited on Him but chosen to run ahead of Him by doing things in your own human wisdom and strength.
- Ask the Lord to give you patience to wait on Him when you do not have clear direction.

# 31

## THE ARK OF GOD BROUGHT TO JERUSALEM

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Read 2 Samuel 6:1-23

David was now established as king over both Israel and Judah. God had delivered the city of Jerusalem to him and he chose to reign from this city.

As we begin this chapter, David decides to bring the ark of God to the city of Jerusalem. He had made this city his own home and was establishing it as the principle city of the combined nations of Israel and Judah. It seemed only appropriate that the ark of God have a place of importance in this new city. The cover of the ark of God had two carved golden cherubim. These angels stretched out their arms over the ark. It was between the wings of these cherubim that God would reveal His presence and speak to the priest. The ark was a symbol of God's earthly throne. It was fitting that this throne should be in Jerusalem. In bringing an even greater throne than his to the city of Jerusalem, David shows his desire to live in submission to God and His higher authority. God was their true king.

Notice in verses 1-2 that David brought together thirty thousand men from Israel. He and these thirty thousand men set out from Baalah of Judah. It is commonly agreed that Baalah is the town of Kiriath Jearim. In Joshua 18:14, Kiriath Jearim is referred to as Kiriath Baal of Judah. This is where the ark of God had remained during the reign of Saul. The fact that David brought so many men to bring the ark to Jerusalem is significant. This was a big event for David. The ark represented the presence of God. David could have simply sent some priests to bring the ark back but instead he chose to celebrate this event. He did this to honour the God he was serving and to show the people that this was a very important occasion.

The ark was placed on a new cart. This cart had not been used for anything else and had been consecrated for this particular use. They took the ark from the house of Abinadab, where it had been guarded by a priest by the name of Eleazar (see 1 Samuel 7:1). Two priests by the name of Uzzah and Ahio were guiding the new cart as it travelled over rough territory. Ahio was in the front, likely guiding the animals and we can assume that Uzzah was behind him watching over the ark.

This event was celebrated with songs and music all night. Notice the intensity of this worship and celebration in verse 5:

David and the whole house of Israel were celebrating with all their might before the LORD."

David was very excited about bringing the ark to Jerusalem where it would have a place of prominence in the city. This was a very joyous time for the people.



As Uzzah and Adio were guiding the cart, they came to the threshing floor of Nacon. As they were passing the threshold, the oxen stumbled and Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark. He was likely afraid that it might fall off the cart. His intention was honourable. The incident stirred up the anger of the Lord, however, and He struck Uzzah down so that he died beside the ark (verse 7). This may seem harsh, but there are several details we need to mention about this incident.

First, we need to realize that, according to the Law of Moses, this ark should never have been carried on a cart. God had designed the ark with long poles so that it could be carried by the priests who had been ordained for this purpose. The Philistines put the ark of God on a cart to return it to Israel in 1 Samuel 6:1-8. This was because there were no priests to carry it and they did not understand the requirements of God for its transportation from place to place. God's people seem to be imitating what the Philistines did instead of following the procedure God had laid out for them in His law. Had they been transporting the ark the way God had intended, this incident may never have happened. David was allowing a common animal to transport the ark of God when He had decreed that only ordained priests could do it. Allowing the ark to be carried by an animal was, in itself, an act of irreverence.

Uzzah's decision to reach out and touch the ark was considered to be an act of irreverence. This ark was a symbol of the presence of the holy God. The holiness of God is such that no human sinner could enter His presence without fear of death. This is the nature of sin and evil. God is demonstrating here that He is a holy God. He is showing us that we do not have the right to enter His presence or touch Him unless our sins have been completely forgiven and cleansed. This is why the Lord Jesus came. Apart

from Jesus, this would be the response of God to every sinner. We would have no access to God. God was reminding His people of the seriousness of sin and their separation from Him as a holy God.

It should be mentioned here, as well, that good intentions are not sufficient to give us access to God. Uzzah's intention was to serve God and honour Him by not letting the ark of God fall to the ground. As noble as his intentions were, they were not sufficient. He would perish with all his good intentions to honour God. There are many people counting on their good intentions to get to heaven. They serve God and sincerely want to honour Him, but they do so without ever having their sins forgiven by accepting the work of Christ on their behalf. Only the forgiveness and cleansing of Christ can give us access to God because only His work removes the barrier of sin. This whole event was a powerful reminder to God's people that they were sinners before a holy God.

David and his men were celebrating with joy and great happiness the wonderful blessing of God and His presence in their midst. God shows them, however, that inviting the presence of God into their city was also a very serious matter. They were inviting the presence of holiness into the city of Jerusalem. When we invite God into our presence there are a lot of things that need to go. Our sin and rebellion must be dealt with in all seriousness. God will not tolerate sin and rebellion.

When David heard what had happened he became angry with God. He named the place where Uzzah died, Perez Uzzah meaning "outbreak against Uzzah." That day was a turning point for David in his relationship with God. He became afraid of God. So great was his fear of God that he said in verse 9: "How can the ark of the LORD ever come

to me?" He decided, therefore, to send it to the house of Obed-Edom and not take it into Jerusalem.

God was stirring up a holy fear and reverence for His character. David enjoyed celebrating the goodness of the Lord. He was a great worship leader. He was skilled in leading his people into the presence of God through music. His people worshiped and celebrated the goodness, blessings and victories of the Lord. That day, however, God showed David another side of His character. He revealed to him His sternness and holiness. This was a side of God that David feared. God is merciful, compassionate and loving but He is also holy, just and jealous. We must worship Him not only for His blessings and mercy but also because He is holy and just. The holiness and justice of God is not always easy for us to accept. I have had conversations with people who were quite willing to accept a loving and gracious God but wanted nothing to do with a just and holy God who demanded obedience and punished sin. Whether we like it or not, God is both loving and holy.

The ark of God remained in the house of Obed-Edom for three months. During those three months the Lord richly blessed this household. God is a holy God but He is also generous and full of grace. The holy God David feared to bring to Jerusalem was a God of rich blessing to Obed-Edom. When David saw how God had blessed Obed-Edom, he decided that he would take the risk and bring the ark to Jerusalem (verse 12).

Verse 12 tells us that there was again great rejoicing as they brought the ark to Jerusalem, but this time, that joy was tempered with a holy fear of God and reverence for his name and character. Verse 13 tells us that when those who were carrying the ark took six steps, they sacrificed a bull and a fatted calf. Again this shows us that there was a

holy fear of God as they took up the ark to bring it back to Jerusalem. Notice also in verse 13, that the ark was now being carried by the priests as decreed by God and not by means of an ox cart.

As the ark was brought into the city of Jerusalem, David wore a linen ephod. This was the garment of the priest. At that particular moment, David was acting as a priest and leading his people into the worship and adoration of their God. David danced before the Lord with all his might (verse 14). There were shouts of joy and the sound of the trumpets as the ark entered the city of Jerusalem.

Michal, David's wife, watched him from her window when he came into the city with the ark of God. When she saw him leaping and dancing before the Lord, she despised him in her heart. We are left to wonder why this incident stirred her to despise David. Let me make one simple comment on this point.

While Michal had been David's wife, Saul her father, had given her to another man. In 2 Samuel 3:14-16, David demanded that she be returned to him. There is a very sad picture here of Michal's husband following after her; weeping as she was taken from him and brought back to David who had many wives and concubines. As Michal looked out her window, she saw David making a public show of his faith. He danced and celebrated with all his might before the Lord and all the people saw him. How easy it would have been for Michal to return in her mind to the day when David had her taken from her husband. Fresh in her mind was the pain this had caused her husband Paltiel. Could it be that Michal was seeing hypocrisy in David? Here was a man who worshiped God with such intensity but had no problem breaking up her happy marriage. One thing is certain, our actions in everyday life speak louder

than what happens in church on Sunday. People see beyond the good front we put on. We should not be too hard on Michal for her critical attitude of David's worship. She may be seeing his hypocrisy.

The ark of God was placed inside a tent that David had set up for that purpose. When it was set in place, sacrifices and offering were made in honour of God. When the offering and sacrifices were complete, David blessed the people and gave them each a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins and sent them on their way home (verse 19).

When David returned home he was met by Michal who could no longer contain her frustration and anger with him. "How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, disrobing in the sight of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!" she told him (verse 20). David does not listen to her concerns or dig into the matter to understand her real problem. He justifies his actions by telling her that God had chosen him rather than her father to be king over His people. He told her that he would worship the way he wanted to and if what he did seemed undignified to her, he really didn't care. He was willing to become even more undignified. David proceeded to tell Michal that he would not be held in dishonour. He appears to have taken offense at Michal's response.

Verse 23 tells us that Michal would have no children. This may be because David never had any more sexual relations with her. It may also be a judgment of the Lord. What is clear is that in this culture, for a woman not to have children was evidence of the curse of God on her life. While David does show disrespect and insensitivity to his wife and her need, God still held Michal accountable for her outburst and disrespect for David. Michal's curse may

have been bigger than this incident with David, however. It may also have been the result of God's curse on Saul and his entire family. Michal would not have a son through David nor would she continue Saul's line.

For Consideration:

- Why did David make such a big deal about bringing the ark of God to Jerusalem?
- How does David show disrespect for the ark of God by putting in on an ox cart? How should the ark have been carried?
- Are good intentions sufficient to bring us to God? What do we learn from Uzzah? What separates us from God? How does Jesus remove this barrier?
- What do we learn in this chapter about the holiness of God? Why is it often difficult for us to accept this attribute of God?
- What do we learn about the importance of our lifestyle and worship agreeing? Is it possible to be passionate in worship and sinful in lifestyle?
- Was David willing to listen to the concerns of Michal, his wife? How could he have responded differently?

## For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He is a God of both holiness and grace. Ask the Lord to help you to live with the awareness of these two different aspects of God.
- Thank the Lord that His work on the cross removed the barrier between us and God.
- Do you know people who believe that good intentions are sufficient to bring them to God? Ask God to show them that sin is the real barrier.
- Ask God to search your heart and show you any areas of hypocrisy. Ask Him to give you a life that is as sincere in daily living as it is in worship.
- Ask the Lord to give you grace to listen to the criticisms of others.

## 32

### DAVID'S PLAN TO BUILD A TEMPLE

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Read 2 Samuel 7:1-29

If there is one thing clear about David, it would be that, despite his shortcomings, he loved the Lord and he loved to worship the Lord. This is not to say that he was perfect. He was far from perfect. When it came to the worship of God, however, David seemed to come alive. This is where his heart was. He loved his God and wanted to worship and honour Him. This was obvious in the fact that David wanted to bring the ark of God to the city of Jerusalem; where it could have a prominent place in the city he was building.

When David was settled in his palace in Jerusalem and the Lord had given him a certain amount of rest from his enemies, he determined to build a temple for the Lord. Notice his reasoning in verse 2. Speaking to Nathan the prophet, he said, "Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent." He felt that the Lord was worthy of a great temple in His honour. Nathan the prophet told David to go ahead and do whatever came to



his heart. He knew David's heart and he knew that God was with him in all he did (verse 3).

That night, however, the Lord spoke to Nathan about David's desire to build Him a house. God has several things to say to David through Nathan in this chapter.

First, God reminded David through Nathan that He had not asked him to build a temple. This was David's desire but it was not something God had called him to do. God reminded David, that from the time the Israelites left Egypt until that day, He had dwelt in a tent (verse 6). Never once did God ask His people to build Him a temple of cedar. Again, while David's desire is legitimate, it was not God's particular plan for him.

There is an important lesson for us in this. It is possible to confuse a burden with a calling. Sometimes we feel a burden for something and assume that God must be calling us to do something about it. This is not always the case. There are people who have never been called to a particular ministry who are doing it with all their heart. They are not where God wants them to be. David had a burden on his heart to see a temple in Jerusalem, but it was not God's will that David be the one to build that temple.

There are many things in this life that will break our hearts. There are needs and ministries for which we will feel deep concern in our hearts. We need to realize, however, that God does not expect us to solve all the problems of the world ourselves. He has a particular purpose for our lives. We ought to seek Him particularly about the purpose He has for us.

In verses 8-11, there is a second thing God had to say to David through Nathan the prophet. In these verses, God

explained to David the purpose He had for him. In verse 8, God reminded David how He had taken him from tending sheep and made him a ruler over His people. This was where David was to focus his attention. God was calling him to be a faithful leader for His people.

God promised to bless David's leadership. He reminded him that wherever he went, he would cut off all his enemies. He promised in verse 9 that He would make his name great. God would make him one of the greatest leaders on the earth.

Under the capable and blessed leadership of David, God's people would be established in their land. They would have homes and live in peace. The wicked would no longer oppress them. David would lead his people into a time of rest and peace unlike anything they had ever experienced as a nation. This was God's heart for David.

God reminded David of His purpose for him so that he would not be distracted by other good things. There will always be ministry opportunities and good things for us to do, but we must be clear on God's purpose for us personally. The construction of a temple would only have distracted David from God's call to be a leader of His people. David had a great desire to see God honoured in the construction of a temple, but God was best honoured when David remained faithful to his calling to lead His people.

Having reminded David of his call, God then encouraged him through Nathan by telling him that he would raise up one of his own sons to build the temple David desired (verse 13).

God reminded David further in verse 14-16 that He would be a father to this son who would succeed him on the

throne. As a father, God would punish him when he wandered and bring him back to a right relationship with Himself (verse 14). Even though this son would wander, God's love would not be taken from him like it was for Saul and his household. David's kingdom would endure forever. God's blessing would rest on his family for all time.

When David heard these words of the Lord through Nathan, he found a place alone with God and poured out his heart to Him. "Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?" said David. He was humbled by the fact that God's blessing would rest on his family. He felt unworthy of such an honour.

His heart was delighted that God would grant that one of his offspring would fulfil his dream of building a temple. "Is this your usual way of dealing with man, O Sovereign LORD?" David asked in verse 19. David was overwhelmed by God's demonstration of kindness and compassion to his family. He felt especially privileged to be the recipient of such blessing. David recognized that God was treating him and his family with special favour. David praised the Lord for revealing these things to him (verses 20-21).

That day David worshiped the Lord saying:

How great you are, O Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears (verse 22).

God's mercy was clearly evident in the promises He had given David through Nathan. He rejoiced in those promises and lifted up the name of God.

David also praised the Lord for the relationship He had with His people. There was not a nation like the nation of Israel. This was the one nation in all the earth that God had chosen for Himself. He performed great wonders in their midst. He took His people out of Egypt and gave them victory over all their enemies (verse 24). The nation of Israel was a privileged nation. It was a nation chosen and blessed by God. David marvelled at this and praised the Lord for such demonstrations of mercy and grace.

In verse 25, David asked the Lord to be faithful to His promise for his household. Notice that it was not for himself and his family line that David was concerned. He wanted God to pour out His blessings so that the world would see the great mercy and grace of the God of Israel (verse 26).

The world sees our relationship with God. They see God and His character through us. They see His dealing with us. All of this is a testimony of God's grace and mercy. We are instruments revealing God to the world. This was David's heart in this passage. He wanted his family to be a demonstration of the greatness of His God. What does our life demonstrate to the world about God?

As David concluded this time with the Lord, he praised Him for revealing to him that a temple would be built by his son. David was greatly encouraged by this (verse 27). He accepted God's word and acknowledged God to be trustworthy in what He said (verse 28). David accepted the word given to him through Nathan the prophet and called on God to be faithful to His promises for his family (verse 29). In all this, David surrenders to the will of God for His life.

## For Consideration:

- What do we learn in this chapter about David's heart for God?
- What is the difference between a burden and a calling? Can we have a burden for something and not be called to minister in that area?
- How important is it that we understand God's particular call on our life? How does this chapter help us to see this?
- What is God's particular call on your life? What is His purpose for you personally?
- Is it possible to be distracted from God's will by good things? Explain.
- How does David respond to God's refusal to allow him to build a temple? How do you respond when God does not allow you to do what you want?

## For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to give you some of David's passion for worship and the glory of God.
- Ask the Lord to make His call for you clear. Ask Him to forgive you if you have been distracted from that call.
- Thank God for His blessings on your life and the life of your family and church. List some of those blessings and thank Him for them particularly.

- Ask God to give you courage to step away from those things that He has not called you to do. Ask Him to raise up someone else to accomplish His purpose in that area.

# 33

## DAVID'S REIGN

### FURTHER ESTABLISHED

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Read 2 Samuel 8:1-9:13

Chapters 8 and 9 of 2 Samuel come in the context of God's refusal to allow David to build a temple. God told David, through Nathan the prophet, that He had called him to lead His people into a time of rest and peace. Chapter 8 shows us how this was fulfilled.

From verse 1 we see that, in the course of time, David defeated the Philistines. The phrase "in the course of time" would indicate that this was not an instant victory for David but one that was won over a period of time and a significant effort. When my son was young he used to play on a baseball team. Sometimes the other team would show up for the game but not have enough players. This meant that they had to forfeit the game. My son's team would win the game without even having to play. There are times when God will give us victory over something without us having to struggle with it. There are other times, however, when God wants us to play the game to win. In either case, we can be assured of victory, but victory that comes in the "course of time" requires perseverance and hard work.

In verse 2, we see that David also defeated the Moabites. David dealt with the Moabites very harshly. He made them lie down on the ground and measured out the bodies with a length of cord. Every two lengths of them were put to death and the third length was allowed to live. They were taxed and required to bring him a tribute.

David also had victory over the region of Zobah and the Arameans (verses 3-8). He fought Hadadezer the king of Zobah. Hadadezer literally means "Hadad my help." Hadad was an Aramean god and equivalent to the Canaanite god Baal. In this battle with Hadadezer, David captured 1,000 chariots, 7,000 charioteers and 20,000 foot soldiers. He also hamstringed all but 100 of the chariot horses, guaranteeing that they would never be a threat to him again. This was a significant victory for David.

When Arameans came to help Hadadezer, the king of Zobah in his battle against David, he struck down 20,000 soldiers and established a presence in their land, forcing them into submission and to pay him tribute (verse 6).

David took the gold shields that belonged to the officers of Hadadezer's army and brought them to Jerusalem. He looted the towns of Tebah and Berothai, belonging to Hadadezer and took a great quantity of bronze.

When King Tou of Hamath heard that David had defeated the entire army of Hadadezer, he sent his son Joram to greet David and congratulate him on his victory (verse 9). Joram brought articles of silver and gold as a peace offering to David. These silver and gold articles were dedicated to the Lord, as were all the articles taken from the nations he subdued (verse 11, 12).



Verses 13-14 record David's victory over the Edomites. He struck down 18,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt. This particular battle brought him great fame. David established a presence in Edom and forced the Edomites into submission and to pay a tribute. In this way God was enriching His people.

God's promise to David was being fulfilled. It was God's heart that David lead His people into a time of peace and rest from their enemies. God is giving David victory over his enemies; assuring that his nation would be given rest. Verse 15 tells us that David reigned doing what was just and right for all his people. Notice the word "all" in verse 15. This word tells us that everyone in the nation received justice. David did not serve the rich only. He did not serve a select few and give them justice. His reign was fair and just for all.

We catch a glimpse of the administrative staff that worked with David. Joab oversaw his army. Jehoshaphat was his recorder. Zadok and Ahimelech were priests. Seraiah was secretary. Benaiah oversaw the Kerethites and Pelethites, likely in some form of governorship. David's own sons were royal advisers. We have a sense from all this that David was a very capable leader with a staff of faithful workers under him.

When David was established as king and his kingdom was secure, he remembered his friendship with Jonathan and wondered if there were any descendants of Jonathan and Saul left in the country. It was his desire to honour these descendants. David had made a promise to Jonathan to show kindness to his descendants (see 1 Samuel 20:14-17).

It happened that there was a servant from Saul's household named Ziba. Ziba was summoned to appear before King David. David asked him if there were any descendants of Saul left to whom he could show kindness (9:3). Ziba told the king that one of Jonathan's sons was still alive but was crippled in both feet. From 2 Samuel 4:4 we understand that this son was 5 years old when the news of Saul and Jonathan's death came. His nurse, likely fearing for his life, took him speedily away. As they fled, he fell and this resulted in him being crippled for life.

Hearing that Jonathan's son was still alive, David asked Ziba where he was. He was told that Mephibosheth was at the house of Makir in Lo Debar (verse 4). David commanded that he be brought from Lo Debar to appear before him.

When Mephibosheth appeared before David, he bowed down to show him honour. There was likely a certain fear in Mephibosheth's heart, but David told him that he had no cause for fear. That day, David told Mephibosheth that he would show him kindness for the sake of his father Jonathan. He promised that he would restore all the land that belonged to his grandfather Saul to him, and that he would always eat at his table as an honoured guest.

Mephibosheth was touched by David's kindness. He felt unworthy of such honour saying, "What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?" (verse 8).

David also gave Ziba, Saul's servant, to Mephibosheth. Ziba, his fifteen sons and twenty servants would work the land that David had given to Mephibosheth (verse 10). Ziba accepted this responsibility. Mephibosheth would move to Jerusalem with his young son Mica and eat at

David's table like one of his sons. Ziba, his servant, would take care of his land.

David was not only a mighty warrior and capable administrator but he was also a man of his word. God had called him to be a leader of His people. He truly was a great leader.

#### For Consideration:

- In the last section, we saw how David wanted to build a temple for the Lord. God refused to give him permission, telling him that He had called him to be a leader of His people. How is this call to be a leader confirmed in David's life in these two chapters of 2 Samuel?
- Does God always give us instant victory? Why do you suppose we sometimes have to struggle to have victory in the Christian life?
- What evidence do we have here that David was a man of his word? What challenge does this bring us today?

#### For Prayer:

- Take a moment to consider God's calling on your life. Ask God to help you to be faithful to that calling. Thank Him for the privilege of serving in this way. Ask Him to forgive you for times you have wandered from that calling.

- Thank the Lord for the victories He has given. Ask Him to give you patience and courage to wait on Him for the victories that are yet to come.
- Thank God for the example of David, who dedicated the proceeds of victories to the Lord. Ask God to forgive you for the times you have failed to give Him the glory and honour due Him in your victories.

## 34

# DAVID DEFEATS THE AMMONITES AND THE ARAMEANS

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Read 2 Samuel 10:1-19

The Lord God has been fulfilling His promise through David as king of Israel. God had promised to use him to lead Israel into a time of peace and rest from their enemies (see 2 Samuel 7:10). In chapter 8, we saw how the Lord gave David victory over Moab, Zobah, Edom and the Philistines. Here in chapter 10, we read about his victory over the Ammonites and the Arameans.

David's victory over the Ammonites began by an act of kindness. When the king of the Ammonites died, David decided to show kindness to his son. He did this because the Ammonite king had showed kindness to David. While Scripture does not speak clearly of this particular kindness, it is generally believed that it was shown to David during the time of his hiding from Saul. In response to the kindness of his father, David sent a delegation to Hanun, the new Ammonite king to express his sympathy concerning the death of his father (verse 2).

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When David's men arrived, the Ammonite nobles were very suspicious. They did not trust David and questioned his motives in sending the delegation. Speaking to Hanun, they suggested that David had used this occasion to send spies into the land with the purpose of overtaking them (verse 3).

When Hanun heard what the nobles had to say; he acted quickly. He seized David's men, shaved off half their beards, cut their garments up to the buttocks and sent them away exposed and humiliated.

When David heard what Hanun had done to his messengers, he sent men to meet them. His men had been humiliated (verse 5). This was an insult not only to David's men but also to David who had desired to express his sincere sympathy in the death of Hanun's father. David advised his men to stay in Jericho until their beards had grown back. This way they would not be humiliated before those they knew.

It wasn't long before the Ammonites realized that the act of their king had been a serious insult to David. They feared for their lives because they knew the power of David's army. The Ammonites decided therefore to hire twenty thousand Aramean foot soldiers from Beth Rehob and Zobah. These nations had already been defeated by David in 2 Samuel 8 and were likely quite willing to join forces with the Ammonites in an attempt to be freed from David's authority. Also joining this military coalition were one thousand soldiers under the control of king Maacah and twelve thousand more from the region of Tob.

When David heard about the gathering force under Hanun, he sent his entire army to meet them (verse 7). The Ammonites drew up their battle formation outside the entrance

of their city gate. The Arameans, Tob and Maacah remained in the open country (verse 8).

When Joab, David's military commander saw that the battle lines were drawn and the armies were ready to fight, he decided on his battle plan. He sent his best troops against the Arameans in the open country. The remainder of the troops, he placed under the command of his brother Abishai and sent them out against the Ammonites at the city gate. The plan was that if either army found their opponent too strong, they would come to the aid of the other (verse 11). With a word of encouragement to fight bravely for their people, they committed the battle into the hands of the Lord saying: "The Lord will do what is good in his sight" (verse 12).

Joab led his troops into battle against the Arameans in the open country. The Arameans fled before him (verse 13). When the Ammonites at the city gate saw what had happened to the Arameans, they too gave up fighting and fled from Abishai's forces.

The Arameans decided to regroup and face Israel again (verse 15). Hadadezer king of Zobah, who had formed an alliance with the Arameans, had the Aramean army brought to Helam and put them under the leadership of a man by the name of Shobach (verse 16).

When David heard how the Arameans had gathered in battle formation again, he crossed the Jordan and went to Helam to meet them. The two armies formed their battle lines. David's army struck with force, causing the Arameans to retreat (verse 18). David killed 700 of their chariot-eers and forty thousand foot soldiers. Shabach, their military commander, was also struck down and killed.

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Realizing that they were no match for David, the kings under Hadadezer of Zobah decided to make peace with him (verse 19). From that day onward, the Arameans were afraid to fight with the Ammonites.

There are two important lessons we need to understand from this passage. We will consider them very briefly in closing.

First, we need to realize how futile it is to fight against the Lord and His purposes. The Arameans regrouped to fight against the Israelites. Had they accepted their first loss, they would not have suffered such heavy casualties. Jonah, the prophet, learned that it was futile to flee from the Lord God. Countless men and women throughout the ages have also testified to the futility of trying to fight against the purposes of a sovereign God. If you are fighting against God today, let this be a lesson to you.

Second, we see the danger of jumping to conclusions and judging the intentions of the hearts of others. The defeat of the Ammonites and the Arameans was a result of an attempt to judge David's intentions. Many times problems have been caused because of prejudice or pre-conceived ideas about someone else. Had Hanun accepted the sympathy of David and his kindness with grace and thankfulness, the result would have been very different. It is possible to change an act of kindness into a curse by our response. What was meant to bless King Hanun, ultimately became his curse because of his response. May this too be a warning to us.



## For Consideration:

- What was David's intention in sending a delegation to Hanun? How did the nobles of Ammon interpret David's act of kindness.
- Have you ever been guilty of falsely judging the intentions of someone's action? What was the result?
- How important is our response to the kindness of others? How can our response turn an act of kindness into a curse?
- What do we learn about the futility of fighting against the purpose of God in our lives?

## For Prayer:

- Ask God to help you to surrender to His purpose for your life. Ask Him to show you if there is any area of your life you have not surrendered to Him.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for times you have judged the intentions of others and refused their gestures of kindness to you.
- Thank the Lord for His many acts of kindness shown toward you. Ask Him to help you to be thankful for those acts.

## DAVID AND BATHSHEBA: THE PROGRESS OF SIN

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Read 2 Samuel 11:1-27

One of the things I appreciate about the Bible is that it portrays men and women as they really were. David was not perfect. Even this man of God fell into deep sin and grieved the heart of God. In chapter 11, we read about one of the lowest points in the life of David. This chapter shows us that even great men and women of God, if they are not careful, can have great falls.

The chapter begins by telling us that it was the spring of the year. In the spring, kings would often go off to war. Commentators tell us that at this time of the year the roads and fields were dry and would not hinder their chariots or soldiers. It was the time of the year when ambitions were high. Kings had high hopes of obtaining more land for themselves and conquering their enemies.

Joab, David's military commander, took the Israelite army and went out to battle with the Ammonites. It is interesting to note that David did not go with him. While it was the time

for kings to go to war, David chose to stay at home in Jerusalem.

We are not told why David did not go to war with his army. We are told, however, what David was doing when his army was fighting. In verse 2, we find David in bed. We are not told how long he had been in bed but we do know from the verse that he got out of bed in the evening and went out walking on the roof of his palace. While David did not go to battle with his army, he faced an even greater battle on the rooftop that night. This enemy, he could not overcome.

From his rooftop David could see a woman bathing. David noticed that she was very beautiful. It is important for us to note that the passage tells us that David found the woman to be very beautiful. This is important because it says something about David's reaction to what he saw. David had one of two choices here. On seeing the woman, he could have turned his back and given her the privacy she deserved. Had he done this, he could have turned his head and walked away without taking the time to consider her beauty. However, David did not do this. He noticed her beauty and was attracted to her. He allowed himself the time to take in that beauty. This was his first mistake. While David was an expert in warfare on the battlefield, in this matter, he was quite blind and ignorant. David's first mistake was to allow his eyes to gaze longer than they should have.

David could have stopped at that point, but he didn't. He allowed his mind to focus on what he had seen that evening and took his sin to another level. Verse 3 tells us that David sent someone to inquire about this woman. He wanted to find out something more about her. Again, David should have sought the Lord's strength to deal with this

lust but he pursued it. The pull of lust is a very powerful. David was quickly losing the battle. Not only did he allow his eyes the privilege to gaze on what was not his to have, he also pursued the matter further by inquiring about this woman. How easy it is to justify our actions as intellectual curiosity. This curiosity, however, may actually draw us closer to sin and put us in a place where we can be more easily tempted.

News came back to David that the woman he saw was Bathsheba the wife of Uriah, one of David's soldiers. Learning that this woman was married should have stopped David. But he had already lost the battle with lust in his heart and he took the next step. He sent messengers to Bathsheba. The messengers likely did not know why David had called for her. Bathsheba came to David and he slept with her.

It is important that we take a moment to examine verses 4 and 5 more carefully. Verse 4 tells us that Bathsheba had purified herself from her uncleanness. This reference to her uncleanness is likely a reference to the fact that she had just completed her monthly period of menstruation. The Law of Moses required that a woman purify herself after her monthly period (see Leviticus 15:19-30). This is significant because it shows us very clearly that when she went to David, Bathsheba was not pregnant. When Bathsheba sent word to David in verse 5 that she was pregnant, there was no question in her mind that David was the father. Uriah her husband was away. She was not pregnant when her husband left and David was the only man with whom she had sexual relations during that time. David was clearly the father of this child.

David's sin was now at risk of becoming public knowledge. The battle did not end with his sexual encounter with

Bathsheba. What was David to do now that Bathsheba was pregnant and his sin was at risk of coming out in the open? The obvious answer to this was to confess his sin to God. But David was not willing to do this. Instead he did everything in his power to cover up what had happened.

David sent for Uriah. When he arrived, David asked him about the situation on the battlefield. He questioned him about Joab and how the soldiers were doing. All this had as its goal to get Uriah to spend the night with his wife who he hadn't seen for a long time. After questioning Uriah, David told him to go home to his wife. The intention was that Bathsheba would sleep with him and they could deceive Uriah into thinking that she had become pregnant that night. This way the adulterous affair would be hidden.

The problem, however, was that Uriah did not go to his house. He decided to sleep at the entrance of the palace with David's servants (verse 9). When David was told that Uriah had not gone home, he questioned him.

Uriah told David that he did not feel that it would be right for him, as a soldier, to return home, eat, drink and sleep with his wife when all his fellow soldiers were suffering. He saw himself as being on duty and would not give himself the privilege of relaxing on duty. We can only admire Uriah's dedication to his job and his sense of duty.

David decided to give Uriah one more day. In verse 13, he invited him to eat and drink with him that evening. The intention of David is very obvious. He wanted Uriah to know that it was okay for him to go home to his wife. He gave him lots to eat and drink in the hopes that he would change his mind. That evening, however, Uriah still refused to return to his wife, choosing rather to sleep with the servants at the palace.

David's attempt to deceive and cover up his sin with Bathsheba did not work. This meant that he had to make another plan. In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. In that letter, he told Joab to put Uriah in the front line of the battle where the fighting was the fiercest and then to withdraw so that Uriah would be killed. Uriah returned to Joab with his own death sentence in his hand. What began with a glance has now progressed into a deliberate murder plot.

When the city of Rabbah was under siege, Joab asked Uriah to go where he knew the strongest defenders were. When the men of the city came out to fight, some of David's men fell in that battle. Uriah died in that clash (verse 17).

Joab sent word to David, giving him an account of the battle. He knew that David's would be angry when he heard how he had placed his men so close to the city wall to fight. David was skilled in military tactics and knew that it was foolish to put an army close to a city wall where the enemy could shoot at them. In verse 21, reference is made to Abimelech who stormed a tower only to have a woman drop a millstone from the wall on him so that he died (see Judges 9:52-53). Joab knew that David would disapprove of the foolishness of what he did by sending his men to fight close to the city wall. It was for this reason that Joab told his messenger to tell David that Uriah was dead (verse 21). In other words, Joab made a decision to do what he knew would lead to the death of his men in order that Uriah would be killed.

When the messenger gave David a report, he told him how the men of the city overpowered them and came out against them. They drove them back to the entrance of the city and the archers shot arrows at them from the wall.

Some of David's soldiers were killed in this encounter. The messenger told David that Uriah was among those who had died.

Instead of getting angry at Joab for the foolishness of this attack, David told the messenger to return to Joab with the message, "Don't let this upset you; the sword devours one as well as another. Press the attack against the city and destroy it" (verse 25). In saying this, David shows no remorse for killing Uriah.

When Bathsheba heard that her husband had died, she mourned for him (verse 26). After the time of mourning was over, David brought her to his house and she became his wife. It is not clear if he ever told her that he had plotted to kill her husband. In verse 27 it is quite clear, however, that the matter greatly displeased the Lord.

David was a skilled military man. He knew that you never send your army too close to a wall where they are prey to the enemy's arrows. David was not so skilled in the battle over his lust. In this case, he went too close to the wall and gave the enemy an opportunity to shoot at him. His sin began with a look over the wall. It progressed, one step at a time until it overcame him. Uriah and the soldiers with him died to cover the sin of David. David's sin was the result of a series of errors. First, he did not keep himself occupied with the matters of the kingdom but chose to stay home, opening himself up to temptation. Second, he allowed himself to linger on what was forbidden for his eyes to see. Third, he refused to deal with his thoughts and pursued what he found himself lusting after. Fourth, he did not confess his sin before God but chose to hide it. Fifth, he took matters into his own hands in an attempt to get rid of all evidence of his crime. David's fall was very great. Many people suffered and died as a result of his sin. His failure

is a warning to us. We could so easily fall into the same trap.

For Consideration:

- Why is it important for us to be watchful in our moments of leisure? How can our moments of leisure become an instrument in the hands of the enemy to tempt us to sin?
- What should David have done when he saw Bathsheba? Have you ever found yourself lingering on sin? Why is this dangerous?
- How does one sin lead to another in this chapter? Have you experienced this in your own life?
- While confession is never easy, it is ultimately easier than covering up our sins. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
- How many people were affected by David's sin with Bathsheba? Do your sins affect you alone? Who else is affected by your sins?
- What in particular do you learn from this chapter that will help you to deal with the temptations you face in your life today?



## For Prayer:

- Ask God to protect you in your leisure moments so that you are not open to sin.
- Ask the Lord to give you grace to turn your back on those things that are forbidden for you to see or experience. Ask Him to give you grace to overcome temptation.
- What particular lesson do you learn from the life of David and his fall into sin? Take a moment to pray that God would teach you a lesson from David's failure.
- Have you ever tried to cover up a sin like David? What was the result? Ask the Lord to give you courage to confess this sin and make it right.
- Ask the Lord to forgive you for the people you have hurt because of sin in your life. Ask Him to cleanse you and enable you to be a better witness for Him.

## 36

# DAVID AND BATHSHEBA: GOD CONFRONTS DAVID

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Read 2 Samuel 12:1-31

In the last chapter, we saw how David had sinned by committing adultery with Bathsheba. In order to hide his sin, he had Uriah killed in battle. While David did his best to hide his adultery from people around him, he could not hide it from God.

God sent Nathan the prophet to speak to David about his sin. Nathan spoke to him through a parable. While we cannot be completely sure why Nathan used this form of communication, we can assume that it was intended to get David's attention, enable him to listen, and eventually to judge his own actions. It proved to be a very effective way of communicating to David the terrible nature of his sin.

Nathan began his conversation with David by telling him that there were two men in a certain town. One of the men was rich and the other one was poor (verse 1). The rich man had a large number of sheep and cattle but the poor man had only one lamb. This lamb grew up with his children as a pet. He raised it and shared his food with it. This

lamb drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. The poor man loved this little lamb like a daughter (verse 3).

A traveller came to visit the rich man one day. The rich man didn't want to kill one of his sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for his guest so he stole the poor man's lamb, killed it and served it to his guest (verse 4).

When David heard this story, anger burned inside him against the rich man saying to Nathan the prophet in verses 5-6:

As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.

When David had passed sentence on the rich man, Nathan explained the parable to him. He told David that he was the rich man of the parable. God had anointed him king over Israel. He had delivered him from the hand of Saul giving his house and his wives into his hands (verses 7-8). God also gave him the house of Israel and Judah. If that had been too little, God would not have hesitated to give David even more (verse 8). God's generosity to David was clearly evident. David was a rich man filled with the blessings of God.

David, however, despised the word of the Lord by doing evil in His sight. He had Uriah killed in battle and took his wife. Notice in verse 9 that God said to David: "You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites." This is an important phrase. David's sword did not kill Uriah. It was an Ammonite sword that ultimately killed Bathsheba's husband, but David was not free from guilt. It was by his word that Uriah was put in harm's way. It was the intention of David to put

Uriah in a place where he could be killed. From God's perspective, David killed Uriah.

How easy it would have been for David to justify his actions by putting distance between himself and what happened to Uriah. He could have said, "It wasn't my sword that killed him. He died in battle by an Ammonite sword. If the Lord wanted to save him; He could have. You can't blame me that Uriah died in battle. Someone had to face the Ammonites." Have you ever found yourself justifying your sinful actions? What we need to see here is that God is not fooled. He knew David's heart and his intent. Sometimes we even deceive ourselves into thinking that we are not guilty, but God knows better. Here in this passage He called David to accept his guilt. Maybe you have been deceiving yourself. Maybe it is time that you too faced your sin.

It is one thing to admit and face our sin; it is another to accept punishment for that sin. Notice David's punishment in verses 10-12. God told David through Nathan that the sword would never depart from his house because he despised God when he took Uriah's wife (verse 10).

We need to consider verse 10 in more detail. In 2 Samuel 7:10-11, we read God's promise to David:

I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth. And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed

leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.

God's desire for David was that he have rest from his enemies. That promise, however, was conditional on David living in obedience to the Lord God. The result of David's sin was that he would no longer be able to live a peaceful life. He would continually face oppression even within his own family. The fullness of God's blessing was stripped from David because of his sin.

Notice also in verse 10 that David's sin is described as "despising the Lord." David showed contempt for the Lord by choosing to disobey what he knew to be the will of God. He disregarded God's will to do what he wanted. By surrendering to sin we despise the purpose of God.

Because of his sin David household would be thrown into confusion (verse 11). God would bring calamity on his family. He would give David's wives to someone close to him. This person would sleep with his wives in broad daylight. While David committed adultery in secret, this sin against David would be done for all Israel to see.

The words of Nathan struck David in a powerful way. That day, David confessed his sin and God forgave him. In His mercy, God spared the lives of David and Bathsheba (verse 13). Remember that the penalty for adultery was death. God is showing great compassion on David and Bathsheba by sparing their lives. God does, however, punish them for their guilt. The child that would be born to them from this sinful union would be the one to die (verse 14). That child died on their behalf. This is what the Lord Jesus did for us. He took the punishment for our sins on himself and died the death we should have died.

After Nathan left, God struck the child that Bathsheba had given him so that he became ill (verse 15). David realized that it was his sin that was killing this child. He pleaded with God for his child's life. He spent nights lying on the ground seeking God's mercy and favour (verse 16). Even though the elders of his household tried to get him up, he refused. He would not eat food with them (verse 17).

It was on the seventh day that the child died. David's servants were afraid to tell him the child was dead, afraid that he might do something desperate (verse 18). David noticed his servants whispering and realized what had happened. "Is the child dead?" he asked. "Yes," they replied, "he is dead" (verse 19).

When David heard that his child was dead, he got up from the ground, washed, put on lotions and a change of clothes. He then went into the house of the Lord and worshiped. When he had finished, he went home and ate (verse 20). This perplexed his servants. They asked David to explain why, when his child was sick, he fasted and wept but when he died, he rose up to eat (verse 21). David explained that as long as the child was alive there was a chance that God would be merciful to him and save his life. Now that the child was dead, there was no more reason to fast. God had made His will known. All David could do now was to accept God's answer. David knew he could not bring his child back from the dead. One day, David would join his child in death but that child would not come back to him (verse 23).

The remaining verses of chapter 12 show us the mercy God had on David even after he had sinned. In verses 24-25, we see that God gave Bathsheba and David a son to replace the child who had died. This son was Solomon, who would take the throne after David. Solomon's reign

would be powerfully blessed by God. He was given more wisdom than any other king. He would bring Israel into unparalleled prosperity. God blessed the union of David and Bathsheba by giving them this special child. God told Nathan that David and Bathsheba were to give the name Jedidiah to Solomon. The name Jedidiah means "loved by the Lord." This name was an indication to David and Bathsheba of the mercy and compassion of the Lord on their lives.

Notice in this passage how punishment and justice walk hand in hand with mercy and compassion. David is punished by God. He would face conflict for the rest of his reign. He also lost the son of his union with Bathsheba. He experienced God's mercy, however, in that he and Bathsheba were spared from death for their sin. God also gave them a son who was loved and specially favoured.

Notice also that God also gave David that city of Rabbah (verse 26). Rabbah was the city where Uriah was killed. Joab took the citadel of Rabbah and took its water supply. He sent word to David to come with the rest of his troops to capture the city. He told David that if he didn't come, he would take the city and name it after himself.

It should be remembered that David had stayed home from the battle when Joab first went out. It was because he was home that he was walking on the roof of his house and saw Bathsheba. God is giving David a second chance. David determined in his heart that he would take up the challenge. He gathered the rest of his soldiers, attacked and captured the city of Rabbah. He took the crown from the head of the king of Rabbah and placed it on his own head. It weighed 75 pounds (35 kilograms). David also took a great quantity of plunder from Rabbah. He brought out a number of people from the city to serve him with saws,

picks and axes. They would make bricks for his construction projects. David returned to Jerusalem as a conquering king. This was clear evidence of God's grace and mercy in a life that had fallen short of God's standard.

For Consideration:

- It is easy to see the sins of others but more difficult to see our own. How is this evident in David's life?
- David's sin is described as "despising God." How does sin show we despise God and His purposes?
- God judges the intentions of our heart. While David did not actually kill Uriah, he was guilty. Have you ever found yourself covering over or minimizing your sin because you were only indirectly involved?
- What does David teach us about accepting the purpose and will of God? Consider the death of his son in your answer.
- Is God obliged to keep us from sinning? Can we be guilty of sin if God does not keep us from sinning? What is our role as believers to live as God requires?
- What do we learn about justice and compassion? How do these two walk hand in hand?



For Prayer:

- Ask God to make you aware of your sin. Ask Him to keep you from justifying that sin in your life. Ask Him to give you courage to admit you have sinned.
- Thank the Lord that while He is a God of justice, He is also a God of mercy and compassion. Thank Him that He judges sin but will show mercy on the sinner as well.
- Thank the Lord that He is free from sin of any kind. Thank Him that we can trust Him fully.
- Thank the Lord that He has not always given you the punishment your sins deserved.

## 37

### AMMON AND TAMAR

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Read 2 Samuel 13:1-39

David was no stranger to problems in his family. Here in chapter 13, we meet two of David's sons. The first of these sons is a young man by the name of Ammon.

David had a large family and children from many different wives. Ammon was David's firstborn from his wife Ahinoam (2 Samuel 3:2). David's third son was Absalom the son of his wife Maacah (2 Samuel 3:3). Absalom's sister was a young woman by the name of Tamar. Verse 1 tells us that she was beautiful. Ammon fell in love with Tamar.

From verse 2, we understand that Ammon's "love" for Tamar was more lust than love. We understand this from the fact that verse 2 tells us that Tamar was a virgin and it seemed impossible for Ammon to "do anything to her." The implication here is that he wanted to sleep with her. Ammon's lust for Tamar was so strong that he made himself sick thinking of her. His lust had taken control.

Ammon had a friend by the name of Jonadab. He was a very shrewd man. One day Jonadab noticed that Ammon

was not well. He asked him what was wrong. Ammon opened his heart and told him that he was "in love" with Tamar his brother's sister but he could not have any relations with her.

Jonadab decided on a plan. In verse 5, he told Ammon to pretend to be ill. When his father saw that he was ill, Ammon was to tell him that he would like his sister Tamar to prepare him something to eat in his presence.

Ammon pretended to be ill as Jonadab suggested. He asked his father if Tamar could make some special bread for him so he could eat from her hand (verse 6).

David agreed to the request and sent Tamar to prepare him some food. Tamar took the dough and kneaded it to make bread for Ammon and brought it to him to eat. Ammon refused to eat. He told everyone to leave the room. When everyone had left, Ammon asked Tamar to bring the bread to his bedroom where he would eat it from her hand. Tamar did as he requested (verse 10).

When Tamar came into the bedroom, Ammon grabbed her and asked her to sleep with him (verse 11). Tamar refused. She pleaded with him not to force her to do such a thing. "Such a thing should not be done in Israel! Don't do this wicked thing," she begged him (verse 12).

She told Ammon to consider her disgrace if such a thing should happen to her. "Where could I get rid of my disgrace?" she asked him in verse 13. "And what about you?" she continued. "You would be like one of the wicked fools in Israel."

Tamar was clear thinking in this matter. She looked at the long term. She was concerned to do what was right. She would even have accepted a marriage proposal from Ammon. In verse 13, she told him to ask the king for permission to marry her. She was confident that David would give them permission to be married.

Ammon was not concerned about the long term. His only concern was for the moment. His lust had taken control of him and his only concern was to satisfy its appetite. Lust had blinded him to the hurt he would cause Tamar. It hardened his heart to his sin. It stripped him of any conscience. He was willing to destroy his reputation and disgrace Tamar to satisfy his appetite. His lust for Tamar had overcome him. Since he was stronger than her, he raped her (verse 14).

Notice that once his lust was satisfied, his feelings toward Tamar changed. He found an intense hatred growing in his heart toward her. We are told in verse 15 that his hatred for her was more intense than the love he thought he had for her. Feeling no sympathy or remorse, he told her to get up and get out of his house. Lust is not concerned about people. Its only concern is for satisfaction. Lust will use people to find satisfaction and then quickly toss them away.

Tamar refused to leave; telling Ammon that sending her away would be an even greater wrong than what he had already done to her. It is important that we understand what Tamar is saying here. She was no longer a virgin. She could not be offered to any other man now that she had been defiled by Ammon. The least Ammon could do was to be responsible and take her as his wife. To send her away was to doom her to a life without a husband. She

would be disgraced in the community and live her life alone in isolation.

Ammon would not listen to Tamar. He did not care about her future. He called his personal servant and told him to get her out of his presence and bolt the door after her. In saying this, Ammon was renouncing any responsibility toward Tamar.

When Tamar went to Ammon, she was wearing a richly ornamented robe. This robe was the kind of robe a virgin daughter of the king would wear (verse 18). When she left Ammon, she tore that robe and put ashes on her head, weeping aloud as she went (verse 19). Her brother Absalom tried to comfort her. He offered to let her stay with him. Tamar agreed and lived with her brother Absalom, a desolate woman (verse 20).

When David heard about this, he was furious. We have no record, however, of David ever doing anything about the situation. In a sense, it was hard for David to say very much as he himself had fallen into a similar sin. He too had let his lust get the best of him. David's lust had meant the death of Uriah and a number of other soldiers. It also meant the death of the child Bathsheba bore from this union. When we, as parents, fall into sin it becomes more difficult for us to deal with the same sin in the lives of our children.

David's refusal to punish Ammon very likely contributed to Absalom's eventual hatred of his father and the action he planned in his heart against his brother. While Absalom never spoke to Ammon about what he had done to his sister, he hated him in his heart (verse 22). That hatred only grew over the years.

Two years after the affair between Ammon and Tamar, Absalom was shearing his sheep. The shearing of sheep was an occasion for celebration and feasting. Absalom invited David and his sons to join him in this celebration (verse 24). David refused the invitation feeling that there would be so many people that they would only be a burden to Absalom. David did, however, give his blessing on the celebration (verse 25).

Absalom asked David to let his brother Ammon come to be with them in this celebration (verse 26). It is unclear why Absalom would particularly ask David for Ammon's presence. Had he been somewhat isolated from the rest of the family because of his sin? David wondered why Absalom asked for Ammon to be part of the festivities but eventually consented to let him join the rest of his brothers.

What David did not know was that Absalom had ordered his men to kill Ammon when his spirits were high from drinking (verse 28). Absalom's men did as he had commanded. When the other brothers saw what had happened, they were afraid and fled on their mules fearing for their lives as well (verse 29).

A report came to David saying that Absalom had struck down all of his sons (verse 30). He tore his clothes and lay on the ground mourning (verse 31). Jonadab, Ammon's shrewd friend, however, set the report straight by telling David that only Ammon had been killed. He told him that this was because Absalom wanted to avenge the rape of his sister Tamar (verse 32).

We need to see here the fact that Absalom harboured bitterness in his heart for two years. That bitterness grew in him until it exploded in the murder of Ammon. We have seen the devastating consequences of lust in Ammon.

Now we see the fruit of bitterness and unwillingness to forgive. Both must be dealt with immediately. We dare not let either lust or bitterness take root in our lives lest they produce their evil fruit in us and destroy us and those around us.

As Jonadab was speaking to David, a watchman reported that he saw a group of people on the road west of them coming down the side of a hill (verse 34). Jonadab reassured David by telling him that these were his sons who were returning to him alive. As Jonadab finished speaking, the king's sons came to David weeping and wailing loudly. A terrible thing had been done in Israel. Their brother had been murdered.

As for Absalom, he fled from the presence of David and his brothers. He lived with a man by the name of Talmai, the son of Ammihud, the king of Geshur. Absalom would stay in the region of Geshur for three years. In time, when David was consoled over the death of Ammon, he longed to see his son Absalom. His fatherly love remained strong for his son despite his terrible sin.

For Consideration:

- What is the difference between lust and love? What was Ammon experiencing toward Tamar in this story?
- What do we learn about lust and its control over the individual it possesses?

- Lust's only concern is to use people to satisfy its sensual appetite. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? What evidence do we find here to prove this in the life of Ammon?
- How do our sins make it difficult for us to discipline our own children when they fall into the same trap? Why is it important for us, as parents, to set a good example for our children?
- What is the fruit of bitterness and unwillingness to forgive? Consider the example of Absalom.
- Could you forgive someone like Absalom?

For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to protect you from lust and its fruit in your life.
- Ask God to help you to be a godly example for your children.
- Do you have any bitterness in your heart? Do you find it difficult to forgive a brother or sister? Ask the Lord to strip this bitterness from your heart before it produces its ugly fruit in your life.
- Have you ever been hurt like Tamar? Can you forgive those who have hurt you? Ask the Lord to heal the hurt and cleanse you of any bitterness.



## 38

### JOAB'S PLAN TO UNITE

### DAVID AND ABSALOM

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Read 2 Samuel 14:1-33

Pride is a terrible thing. It can keep men and women apart and cause much heartache. When we refuse to humble ourselves and take the first steps toward reconciliation, we only hurt ourselves. How often have problems lingered far too long because we were not willing to humble ourselves and reach out to our brother and sister? This seems to be the case here between David and Absalom.

Joab, David's military commander, knew that the king longed for Absalom. In David's heart, he loved his son despite the fact that he had killed his brother. He longed to be with Absalom and see the relationship restored. Absalom, however, had fled to Geshur. 2 Samuel 13:38 tells us that he stayed in Geshur for three years. It is fairly safe to assume from this that David had not seen his son Absalom for three years.

It may be of significance for us to mention here that there was nothing stopping David from sending for his son or even going to see him during these three years. It is quite

clear that David did not take the initiative to see his son even though he longed for him during that time. To be fair, Absalom did not take that step of reconciliation either. He had done a great wrong to his father in killing Ammon. Absalom did not confess this sin and seek David's forgiveness. From the context of this chapter, however, we understand that Absalom wanted to see his father. Father and son were separated. A great wall had been set up between them but neither person wanted to take the first step toward reconciliation. Who among us has not found themselves in a similar situation?

Joab saw David's heart for his son and knew that he wasn't able to take the first step of reconciliation. He decided to take action to bring reconciliation between father and son.

Joab sent to Tekoa and had a wise woman brought to him (verse 2). He devised a plan and told her what she was to do. The woman was to go to David pretending to be in mourning. She was to dress in mourning clothes and not put on any lotions. She was to act like a woman who had spent many days grieving. Joab then told her what she was to say to David and sent her off to see him.

When the woman was invited into the presence of King David, she fell on her face to the ground to pay him respect and begged him to help her (verse 4). When David asked her about her problem, she told him she was a widow with two sons. These two sons got into a fight with each other and because there was no one to separate them, one killed the other.

As a result of this death, the whole family had risen up against the woman demanding that she hand over her only remaining son to be killed for what he had done to his brother. The woman of Tekoa told David that if they killed

her son she would have no heir to carry on her husband's name so her family name would be wiped out of Israel.

David told her to go home and that he would issue an order on her behalf (verse 8). Fearing, however, that David might not want to make a decision to pardon such a crime, the woman said to David in verse 9, "My lord the king, let the blame rest on me and on my father's family, and let the king and his throne be without guilt."

In saying this she is accepting the guilt for the pardoning of a crime punishable by death. Knowing that David might not want to be guilty before God for not dealing with this murder according to the Law of Moses, the woman offered to take any blame on herself and her family so David would not be guilty before God. This is not unlike what the Israelites did before Pilate at the trial of our Lord. We read in Matthew 27:24-25:

When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of this man's blood," he said. "It is your responsibility!" All the people answered, "Let his blood be on us and on our children!"

In verse 10, David reassured her of his support. "If anyone says anything to you, bring him to me, and he will not bother you again," David told her. When the woman asked David if he would prevent those who sought to kill her son from taking his life, David told responded: "As surely as the LORD lives not one hair of your son's head will fall to the ground" (verse 11).

Hearing David's decision, the woman asked if she could again speak. When given permission, she asked David

why he had devised a wicked plan against the people of God when he did not convict himself for banishing his own son. In saying this, she is comparing her situation to David's. She wanted her son to return to her but he could not return for fear that someone would kill him for the death of his brother. Israel too wanted Absalom to return to but Absalom could not return for fear that he would be killed for the death of Ammon. In verse 14 the woman of Tekoa reminded David that it was the heart of God to bring banished people back to himself.

Continuing with her story, the woman told David that she had come to him seeking his favour because she was afraid of the people who were seeking her son's life (verse 15). She told David that her hope was that he would deliver her from the hand of the person trying to kill her son so that her line and inheritance would not be cut off from Israel (verse 16). Her desire was that the decision of David would give her rest from her problems (verse 17).

When David heard the woman comparing his situation with Absalom to her own, he became suspicious. He asked her: "Isn't the hand of Joab with you in all this" (verse 18)?

The woman admitted that she had been sent by Joab with this story. She told David that Joab had told her exactly what to say to bring about a change in his relationship with Absalom (verse 20).

The result of this encounter with the woman was that David called for Joab. He told him to bring back Absalom from Geshur (verse 21). Joab fell on his face, honouring and blessing the king. He was very happy that David was willing to bring his son home (verse 22).

Joab went to Geshur and brought Absalom back to Jerusalem. David told Joab, however, that Absalom was to live in his own house. He refused to have Absalom live with him or see his face (verse 24). David is still not willing to offer forgiveness and reconciliation to his son. What is strange about this is that in 2 Samuel 13:39 we read, "And the spirit of the king longed to go to Absalom, for he was consoled concerning Amnon's death." We also read in 2 Samuel 14:1 that the "king's heart longed for Absalom." While there was a deep longing to be reconciled with his son, David was still unable to offer the forgiveness necessary for the reconciliation to take place.

We read in verse 25 that Absalom was a very handsome man. "From the top of his head to the sole of his foot there was no blemish in him." Absalom let his hair grow long. He would cut his hair when it became too heavy for him. On those occasions, he would weigh his hair and it weighed about 5 pounds (2.3 kilograms). Absalom had three sons and a daughter. He named his daughter Tamar after his sister who had been raped by Amnon. She was a very beautiful girl.

Absalom lived in Jerusalem for two years without seeing David's face. We can only imagine how much this grieved him. In frustration over this, Absalom sent for Joab but Joab refused to come to see him. It is unclear why Joab did not come to him. Possibly this might have been out of respect for David and his decision not to see his son. After Joab refused his second invitation, Absalom decided to do something to get his attention. In verse 30, he told his servants to set Joab's fields on fire.

That act of vandalism got Joab's attention. He came to see Absalom and asked him why he had burned his fields. Absalom told him that he had a message for his father. Joab

was to ask David why he had sent for him if he did not intend on seeing him. Absalom made it very clear that he wanted to see his father. If he was guilty of anything, he was willing to die but he could no longer tolerate this silence and separation. He preferred death to this separation from his father.

In an attempt to see his father, Absalom burned down Joab's field. There are many children today resorting to all kinds of behaviour in order to gain the attention of their parents or loved ones. The pain of separation between father and son was so great that Absalom preferred death than to continue in this separation. Only pride and an inability to forgive stood between him and his father. There are many situations like this in our day. Hearts are broken and pride separates loved ones from each other.

When Joab went to the king with Absalom's message, David was broken. He called for Absalom, who came to his father, bowing down in his presence in a sign of submission and respect. David reached out to his son, kissing him in a sign of forgiveness and reconciliation. Five years of pride was broken and father and son were united again.

For Consideration:

- What evidence do we have in this chapter that David loved his son and wanted to see him? What evidence do we have here that Absalom wanted to see his father?
- During their five year separation from each other, what was keeping father and son apart? What

efforts could have been made to bridge the gap between them during those five years?

- When the woman of Tekoa came to see David about her problem, David immediately saw what needed to happen, yet he was blind to his own situation. Why is it easier to see a solution to someone else's problem?
- How did pride keep David and Absalom apart? Could it be that pride is keeping you from a better relationship with someone you know?
- What would it take for you to be reconciled with your brother or sister today?

For Prayer:

- Ask God to search your heart to reveal any pride that keeps you from being reconciled with a brother or sister today. Ask Him to break that pride so that reconciliation will be possible.
- Ask God to forgive you for the pain your pride has caused other people in your life.
- Have you been hurt by someone. Ask the Lord to help you to forgive them. Give the pain of that hurt to the Lord and ask him to heal it.

## 39

### ABSALOM'S CONSPIRACY

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Read 2 Samuel 15:1-37

The relationship between David and Absalom had been strained since the time Absalom had killed his brother Ammon for raping his sister. For a period of about five years David refused to see his son. In the previous chapter, we saw a reconciliation of sorts between David and Absalom. From chapter 15, however, we understand that this reconciliation was not all that it should have been. Absalom had lost respect for his father during those years. In chapter 15, that lack of respect becomes quite obvious.

As time went on, Absalom found a chariot, horse and fifty men to run before him. While there was no particular need for these men, Absalom may have been trying to make an impression on the people. It may have been that he wanted people to see him as a very important person in Israel.

From verse 2 we understand that Absalom would also stand by the side of the road leading to the city gate. Whenever someone came to see the king, Absalom would speak to them. He would befriend them and seek to gain their support and friendship by deceit. He would tell the people that it was no use for them to go to his father



because there was no one to listen to their needs. He would then add, "If only I were appointed judge in the land! Then everyone who has a complaint or case could come to me and I would see that he gets justice" (verse 4).

Absalom tried to present himself to the people as a friend. Whenever someone would approach him and bow down, he would take hold of them and kiss them as if they were good friends. It was in this way that Absalom presented himself as a man for the people. He gained a following and won the hearts of the people of Israel.

To win the support of the people, Absalom had to corrupt their thinking about his father. He led them to believe that David did not have the time or interest to listen to them. This may have been a reflection of his bitterness toward his father for not listening to him for five years. It is possible that Absalom is acting out of a deep rooted anger against his father. Absalom had lost respect for his father and is not willing to forgive him.

After four years, Absalom moved to the next stage of his plan. Having gained the support of the people, he asked David for permission to go to Hebron to fulfil a vow he had made to the Lord (verse 7). He told his father that when he was living in Geshur, he had made a vow to the Lord saying, "If the LORD takes me back to Jerusalem, I will worship the LORD in Hebron." David gave his son permission.

From verse 10 we learn that the principle reason for going to Hebron was not to worship the Lord but to declare himself king in that city. He sent messengers ahead of him in secret throughout the various tribes of Israel. These messengers were to tell the people that as soon as they heard the sound of the trumpet they were to say, "Absalom is king in Hebron." Absalom also invited two hundred guests

from Jerusalem, but he did not tell them his plan (verse 11).

Absalom's plot was carefully planned. He had worked for four years to gain the approval of the people. As soon as he was declared king, news would travel throughout the nation and there would be very little David could do. The nation would be divided with Absalom having the popular support of the people. All this was done behind David's back. Absalom's intent was to take his father's throne from him. This shows us the bitterness of his heart toward his father.

In verse 12, Absalom's insult became even greater when he sent for Ahithophel, David's counsellor. Ahithophel would side with Absalom against his father. Not only did Absalom strip David of his counsellor but this move increased the strength of his conspiracy. The fact that David's own counsellor had joined with Absalom gave credibility to Absalom's plot and gave him even more supporters.

A messenger came to David to inform him of Absalom's plot and how the people were siding with him. When David heard about the plot and the support it had gained, he wasted no time in issuing a command to leave the city. He knew that Absalom would not waste time. The people were motivated to make him king. Absalom would strike before the enthusiasm died down and David could gather his troops to defend his throne (verse 14). While David was accustomed to fighting, this was a battle he did not want to fight. He was unwilling to fight his own son.

David gathered his family and fled from the city to get as much distance as possible between himself and Absalom. He left ten of his concubines to take care of the palace.

David's soldiers were with him. Also with him were the Kerethites and the Pelethites and six hundred Gittites (verse 18). These remained faithful to David.

Noticing the presence of Ittai, leader of the six hundred Gittites, David asked him why he had joined them. Ittai was not from Israel and this was not his battle. David did not know what his future held. He did not want Ittai and his men to feel obliged to follow him. He released him from any obligation (verse 20). He told him to go back to Absalom and serve him as their king (verse 19).

In verse 21, however, Ittai reaffirmed his loyalty to David by saying:

"As surely as the LORD lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king may be, whether it means life or death, there will your servant be."

Seeing this loyalty, David gave him permission to remain with him and his family (verse 22).

While it is true that Absalom had gained a following, David also had his supporters. Verse 23 tells us that the whole countryside wept aloud as the people passed by. It grieved their hearts to see their king in retreat from his own son. David and his family crossed the Kidron Valley and moved into the desert.

Among those who followed David in his retreat, were the Levites and the two priests Zadok and Abiathar. They followed David carrying the Ark of the Covenant. When they were a safe distance from Absalom, the priests and Levites set down the Ark of the Covenant and Abiathar

offered sacrifices to the Lord until all the people following David had finished leaving the city. In offering these sacrifices, the priests were committing their situation to the Lord for his protection and guidance.

When the sacrifices were over, David told Zadok to take the ark of God back to Jerusalem telling him that if the Lord had favour on him he would bring him back to see it again. If, however, it was not the will of the Lord to bring David back, he would accept whatever God had determined for his life. In this, David demonstrated his willingness to trust the will and purpose of God. He knew that he did not have to defend or fight for his position. God was his defence. God would reveal His purposes. David was willing to surrender his throne if this was the will and purpose of his heavenly Father.

What an example this is for us today. How often do we fight for our rights? We defend ourselves and our ministries, not realizing that the God who gave us our position can also take that position from us. How important it is for us to willingly surrender all we have to Him. We must give Him the right to take away as well as to give.

David also suggested to Zadok that he and Abiathar would be of better assistance to him in Jerusalem. He suggested that they could keep him informed of what was happening in Jerusalem, acting as spies. Zadok and Abiathar took the ark of God back to Jerusalem as David suggested, agreeing to be his informants (verse 29).

David continued to the Mount of Olives with a heavy heart, weeping as he went (verse 30). He covered his head and walked barefoot in a sign of mourning. The people who were with him followed his example and they too covered their heads, weeping as they went up to the Mount of

Olives. When David learned that his own counsellor had joined Absalom, he prayed that God would turn his counsel into foolishness (verse 31).

Arriving at the summit of the Mount of Olives, David met by Hushai the Arkite (verse 32). Hushai's robe was torn in a sign of mourning. He also had put dust on his head to reflect his grief. Hushai wanted to join David and his followers but David told him that he would only be a burden to him. Instead, David suggested that if Hushai returned to Absalom, he could help him in frustrating the plans of his former counsellor Ahithophel (verse 34). Hushai would be the answer to David's prayer to turn Ahithophel's counsel to foolishness. David told him that he had sent Zadok and Abiathar the priests ahead of him. They could work together to inform him of all that was happening in the palace (verse 35). David suggested he could send Ahimaaz and Jonhathan the sons of Zadok and Abiathar to him with news. Hushai agreed to David's plan and returned to the city.

The strained relationship between David and Absalom, because it was never completely healed, grew into deep bitterness and resentment. Absalom acts out of anger and frustration with his father. How important it is that we deal with strained relationships. The Lord God is fully able to heal. May we know this healing in the relationships around us.

For Consideration:

- What evidence do we have of the bitterness of Absalom toward his father? To what extent do you

think this bitterness was the result of what he had experienced in his five year separation from David?

- What lesson do we learn from this chapter about the importance of not letting bitterness take over our lives?
- Compare Absalom's desire to take David's position with David's trust in God. How is David's example of trusting God in this matter a challenge to you personally? How easy is it for us to defend our "rights" rather than trust God?
- Does David's trust in God take away his pain? Can we trust God and still feel the pain of loss or betrayal?
- What evidence do we have in this chapter of God's presence with David in his retreat? How easy is it for us to be blinded to what God is doing in the struggles we face?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask God to search you to see if there is anything you are unwilling to forgive. Ask God to take these things away before they cause you to fall into greater sin.
- Commit yourself, your possessions and your ministry to the Lord. Surrender to Him and His purposes for your life. Give God the right to take whatever He desires.
- Thank the Lord that He is in control of all that belongs to you.

- Are you facing a trial right now? Ask the Lord to open your eyes to the people He has given to stand with you. Ask Him to help you to see His provision and the small blessings He gives.

## 40

### HUMBLD

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Read 2 Samuel 16:1-22

Any farmer knows that in order to produce a good crop, at times it is necessary for vines and fruit trees to be pruned. The same is true in our spiritual lives. There will be times when God will prune us in order to make us more fruitful for Him and His kingdom. Pruning is never easy. Through this process of pruning, we are humbled. Sometimes the things we love most are stripped from us. We are stretched beyond our limits. All of this, though difficult, is for our good. David was a wonderful man of God, but to become all God wanted him to be was a long and difficult process. He wandered for years in the desert in fear of his life. At times he fell into sin and had to confess it to God and get back on his feet. His own son turned against him. He lost another son because of his own sin with Bath-Sheba. Still another was murdered by his brother. His daughter was raped by her brother. These were difficult trials in the life of David. God was using them, however, to shape him into the man He wanted him to be. Here in chapter 16, we see David facing yet another struggle.

David was running from his son Absalom, who wanted to take his throne. He was on the Mount of Olives (15:30). When he had gone a short distance beyond the summit of



the mountain, he met Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son whom David had taken under his care. Ziba greeted David when he met him and offered him a string of donkeys saddled and loaded with two hundred loaves of bread, a hundred raisin cakes, a hundred fig cakes and a skin of wine (verse 1). Ziba told David that these provisions were for his journey and refreshment (verse 2).

When David inquired about Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson, Ziba told him that he had decided to stay in Jerusalem because he felt that God would give him back his grandfather's kingdom (verse 3). What we need to understand here is that Ziba was lying to David. In 2 Samuel 19:25-27, we read that when David returned to Jerusalem, he spoke to Mephibosheth about his decision not to join him in the desert. Mephibosheth made it clear to David that Ziba had deceived him and slandered his name before David.

When David heard what Ziba said about Mephibosheth, he became angry and stripped Mephibosheth of all his property and possessions, giving them instead to Ziba his servant as a reward for his generous offer of provisions in this time of need. David did not verify the facts before making his decision. He believe Ziba's lie.

As David approached the region of Bahurim, a man from the same clan as Saul came out to meet him. This man's name was Shimei. As he came out to David, he cursed him (verse 5). As if the cursing was not enough, Shimei threw stones at David's officials. Though with one arrow David's guards could have killed him, Shimei does not fear for his life.

Shimei cursed David and his troops by calling out:

"Get out, get out, you man of blood, you scoundrel! The LORD has repaid you for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul, in whose place you have reigned. The LORD has handed the kingdom over to your son Absalom. You have come to ruin because you are a man of blood!" (verse 8)

There are a couple of points we should note here. First, notice that Shimei has his own opinion about what was happening to David. He told David that the reason he was fleeing for his life was because he was a man of blood. There was an element of truth to what Shimei was saying. David had fought many battles. Many people died in those battles. The problem, however, was that this was not the reason for David and his men being forced to flee. There will always be people who give us their opinion about why such and such a thing is happening in our ministry or why we are not experiencing the fullness of blessing we would like to know. If you have been in ministry for any length of time you have very likely experienced this level of attack. These attacks are designed to cause us to doubt what God has called us to do. They are designed to bring confusion and doubt into our lives and our relationship with God.

Notice second in the attack of Shimei, that David's calling is brought into question. Shimei accused David of taking a throne that was not his to take. Not only is Shimei's attack designed to cause David to question his relationship with God but it was also designed to cause him to question whether he was truly following the call of God for his life. Again, anyone who is in ministry will find the enemy challenging their calling. Not everyone will stand with us and confirm our calling. Some people will openly challenge what we feel God has asked us to do. We should not be surprised if we face people like Shimei in our lives. We

need courage and confidence in the Lord God at these times.

These constant curses and stones quickly became an irritation to Abishai, one of David's officials. He came to David and said:

Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king?  
Let me go over and cut off his head." (verse 9)

David refused to give permission saying: "If he is cursing because the LORD said to him, 'Curse David,' who can ask, 'Why do you do this?'" David's response is a real challenge to us. He does not stop Shimei. David's reaction could have been very different. He could have defended his call and God-given authority and demanded respect from Shimei. He could have lashed out at Shimei and killed him in an instant. David chose not to defend himself. He placed the matter in the hands of the Lord. God would reveal the truth in time.

David also opened his heart to listen to anything God might be telling him through Shimei. Shimei was his enemy in many ways but that did not stop David from listening to him. He realized that God can even use the curses of our enemies to teach us or direct us in the right path.

David reminded Abishai that if his own son was trying to take his life, it could be expected that this Benjamite would hate and curse him also. Notice in verse 11 that David believed that the Lord had told Shimei to curse David. We should not assume here that this is necessarily the case. This was simply what David believed at the time. What is clear is that God could have stopped Shimei had He chosen to do so. There are many illustrations of God standing up to defend the rights of those who oppress His children.

God did not stop Shimei. While God was not the author of these curses and insults, He allowed them to continue. We can be sure that when this happens, God will use the insults of those who hate us to accomplish His purposes. This is what he did in the death of the Lord Jesus. The insults of those who mocked Him proved to be the means of our salvation. When the enemy seeks to discourage us, we can still trust God to use the circumstances to bring about His purpose. David understood this when he told Abishai in verse 12: "It may be that the LORD will see my distress and repay me with good for the cursing I am receiving today."

David and his men continued along the road as Shimei, cursed them and showered them with stones and dirt. The whole experience was exhausting (verse 14) but when they arrived at their destination, God gave them refreshment.

The older I get the more I realize that life is often like this journey of David and his men. There are many obstacles on the road. Things don't always flow as smoothly as we would like. There beside us are those who throw dirt and stones at us. They question our calling and authority. They seem to wear us out. The enemy will not be content to leave us alone. God does not give us a trouble free path to follow, but He does give us strength to face the difficulties that come our way. He will also use our trials to accomplish His purpose. At the end of the day, He will bring us His wonderful refreshing. We need not fear the Shimei's along the way. They are God's means of refining and strengthening us.

David's troubles did not end with Shimei. His son Absalom came to Jerusalem and took up residence in the city. David's counsellor Ahithophel was with him (verse 15).

Hushai the Arkite, David's friend (though secretly in this case), went to Absalom and following David's advice cried out "Long live the king! Long live the king!" It was Hushai's intent to gain the favour of Absalom so he could pass on information necessary for David's safety and ultimate victory.

Absalom questioned Hushai's loyalty by asking him, "Is this the love you show your friend? Why didn't you go with your friend" (verse 17)? Hushai replied:

No, the one chosen by the LORD, by these people, and by all the men of Israel—his I will be, and I will remain with him. Furthermore, whom should I serve? Should I not serve the son? Just as I served your father, so I will serve you. (2 Samuel 16:18-19)

This seemed to settle Absalom's mind and there was no further discussion of the matter. Hushai was now in place to be of assistance to David.

Once Absalom had settled in Jerusalem he went to David's former counsellor Ahithophel to seek advice on what his next step should be. Ahithophel's counsel was somewhat shocking but was very intentional. Ahithophel told Absalom to sleep with his father's concubines who were left to care for the palace (verse 21).

There was a reason behind this unusual advice. It was the intention of Ahithophel to communicate a message to all of Israel. This shocking act of defiance and disrespect not only broke the Law of Moses (Leviticus 18:8; 20:11) but clearly showed Absalom's intense disrespect and hatred for his father. By sleeping with his father's concubines Absalom was taking a step of no return. Israel would see that

Absalom had made himself "to be a stench in his father's nostrils" (verse 21). The intended result of this act was that Israel would know that they had defiled David's honour and unite the city in defiance against David.

Absalom listened to the advice of Ahithophel and pitched a tent on the roof of the palace where everyone could see. There he lay with his father's concubines in a public demonstration of his hatred toward David. This act was also in fulfilment of the prophetic word of God spoken to David by Nathan the prophet after his sin with Bath-Sheba in 2 Samuel 12:11-12:

This is what the LORD says: 'Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.'

On the very roof where David conceived his sin with Bath-Sheba, his own son would defile his honour by sleeping with his concubines. There are consequences to pay for our sin.

For Consideration:

- David made a decision to strip Mephibosheth of his land and possessions because he believed the lie of Ziba. What does this teach us about the importance of confirming facts before making decisions?

- What has God called you to do for Him? Have you ever been challenged by others in this calling?
- How does David respond to the insults and accusations of Shimei? What does this teach us about what our response should be when we are insulted?
- Can God speak to us through the insults and curses of our enemies?
- Has God ever used the challenges, lies and insults of others to strengthen you? Explain.
- What do we learn here about the consequences of our sin?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask God to help you to know His particular calling on your life. Ask Him to give you grace to persevere when that calling is challenged.
- Ask the Lord to give you grace and patience with those who challenge you in ministry and life.
- Ask God to give you grace to be willing to listen to whatever He might be telling you even if it be through a perceived enemy.
- Thank God for the strength He provides in times of trial. Thank Him that He will also refresh us in these times.

# 41

## AHITHOPHEL'S DEATH

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Read 2 Samuel 16:23-17:29

While David had to flee from his son Absalom, God was watching over him. We have evidence of this in chapter 17. Life sometimes becomes very difficult and complicated but God will never leave us. In this chapter, we see how God watched over David in his time of trouble and dealt with one of his key enemies.

Ahithophel had been David's trusted advisor. When Absalom revolted against his father, Ahithophel chose to turn from David to support Absalom. 2 Samuel 16:23 tells us that in those days, "the advice Ahithophel gave was like that of one who inquires of God." In other words, his counsel was considered to be the next best thing to hearing directly from God. Ahithophel was a very wise and discerning person. He also had a good understanding of David and his ways. He was a great value to Absalom and a real problem for David.

Ahithophel devised a plan of attack to trap David and assure the reign of Absalom. He advised Absalom to choose twelve thousand men and send them in pursuit of David that night. Ahithophel knew that David and his men would be weary by their flight. They would also have been



disheartened by what had happened to them. Ahithophel's idea was that Absalom should strike David when he was at his weakest and had not yet had the opportunity to get his army organized.

Ahithophel told Absalom that if he could strike the people with terror they would flee, leaving David to defend himself. He further advised Absalom to strike down and kill his father alone and bring the people back alive to serve him as their new king (verse 2-3).

Ahithophel's plan pleased Absalom and the elders of Israel. This meant that their battle would be with one man alone and not an entire nation. Their objective was to find David and kill him. David's supporters were to be protected and eventually won over to Absalom.

Before acting on Ahithophel's advice, however, Absalom decided to seek a second opinion from Hushai. Hushai was another of David's counsellors. Unlike Ahithophel, however, Hushai was secretly a supporter of David. He wanted to follow David in his flight from Absalom but David told him that he would be of more use to him in Jerusalem where he could help frustrate the counsel of Ahithophel (2 Samuel 15:32-34).

The opportunity to frustrate the plans of Ahithophel came when Absalom summoned Hushai for his advice (verses 5-6). When Absalom asked him what he thought about Ahithophel's advice, Hushai told him that Ahithophel's advice was not good (verse 7). He explained to Absalom that David and his men were fighters. He told Absalom that at this time they would be as fierce as a wild bear robbed of her cubs (verse 8). He reminded him of his father's tremendous experience as a fighter. Hushai made it clear to Absalom that David's experience had taught him that he was

never to spend the night with his troops. Instead he would very likely be hidden away in a cave or some other secure location. Hushai did not believe that David would be as unorganized as Ahithophel had led him to believe. In fact, David was very likely even now organized and ready to do battle. If Absalom were to leave that night in pursuit of David he may even find David waiting for him. If David and his men should attack Absalom's troops first it would spell disaster for Absalom. Hushai reminded Absalom that even the bravest of his troops was aware of the experience and success of David's many military campaigns. If David attacked first, this would spread fear and terror among Absalom's bravest soldiers. His soldiers knew that there was no army as brave or as skilled as David's. Hushai cautioned Absalom against pursuing David without proper preparations.

Countering Ahithophel's counsel, Hushai told Absalom that his only chance of sure success was in accumulating a larger army. Absalom could not defeat David by skill and military tactics. David was too smart to be taken by surprise or outwitted in battle. His only sure chance of success against David was to outnumber him and by sheer force of numbers wear him and his men down. Hushai advised Absalom not to rush into this battle but to gather a large army. This way, Absalom could overwhelm David, who would have no chance of escape. If David withdrew to a city they could pull the city down and drag it away until not a single stone was left.

While Ahithophel's advice was to outwit David and take him by surprise, Hushai's advice was to overwhelm him and wear him down. When Absalom and his men heard the advice of Hushai, they liked it better than the advice of Ahithophel. Verse 14 tells us that part of the reason for this

was because the Lord had determined to frustrate the plan of Ahithophel in order to bring disaster to Absalom.

It may be worth noting that amassing a large army like Hushai suggested would take a lot of time and organization. This would give Hushai time to communicate with David so that he could make his escape.

After advising Absalom, Hushai went to speak with the priests Zadok and Abiathar. Both were David's supporters (2 Samuel 15:27). Hushai told them what he had advised Absalom and suggested they send word to David about the plan (verse 15-16). Hushai advised David not to spend the night in the desert but to cross over it lest he be swallowed up by Absalom's army.

A servant girl was sent to Abiathar and Zadok's sons in En Rogel. This servant girl was to inform Jonathan and Ahimaaz who were to go immediately to David with the message from Hushai. The whole thing was done in the utmost secret. Despite their efforts to keep the matter secret, a young man saw Jonathan and Ahimaaz and informed Absalom (verse 18).

Realizing that they had been seen, Jonathan and Ahimaaz left quickly and went to the home of a man by the name of Bahurim. He had a well in his courtyard and Jonathan and Ahimaaz climbed down into the well to hide from Absalom's soldiers who were pursuing them. To assure that they would not be discovered in the well, Bahurim's wife scattered grain over it to make it look like it had not been disturbed (verse 19).

When Absalom's men arrived and asked the woman of the house where Ahimaaz and Jonathan were, she told them that they had crossed over the brook. Absalom's men

searched for them but could not find them so they returned to Jerusalem (verse 20).

When the soldiers left, Jonathan and Ahimaaz climbed out of the well and went to inform David. That night David and his people crossed the Jordan. By daybreak all David's supporters were safely on the other side.

When Ahithophel saw that his advice had not been followed, he saddled his donkey, returned to his hometown, set his affairs in order and hung himself. He was not used to having his counsel dismissed and took serious offense at this. The man whose advice was considered to be next to God's is removed from the picture. Absalom lost an important counsellor. God had frustrated Ahithophel's advice.

Absalom pursued his father across the Jordan (verse 24). With Amasa as the new military commander, Israel's army camped in the region of Gilead. David was in Mahanaim.

While in the region of Mahanaim, Shobi the Ammonite, Makir from Lo Dabar and Barsillai the Gileadite came to David with provisions for his army. They brought bedding, bowls, pottery, wheat, barley, flour, roasted grain, beans and lentils. They also gave David and his people honey, curds, sheep, and cheese. They realized that David and his people would be hungry and thirsty from their traveling and wanted minister to them in their time of need.

Again, in this act of generosity, we see the wonderful hand of God in David's life. It is true that he had to flee from his own son and his life was not very easy right now, but God's blessing and protection was still evident. God was caring for him in this wandering. David and his people were being refreshed by their God. That can also be true for us in our

wilderness. If we open our eyes we will see that God has not abandoned us. As David said in Psalm 23:3-5:

He restores my soul.  
He guides me in paths of righteousness  
for his name's sake.  
Even though I walk  
through the valley of the shadow of death,  
I will fear no evil,  
for you are with me;  
your rod and your staff,  
they comfort me.  
You prepare a table before me  
in the presence of my enemies.  
You anoint my head with oil;  
my cup overflows.

May this be your experience in the trials you face in life.

For Consideration:

- Should we expect to be spared from difficulty and trial in this life? What do we see in this passage that would support your answer?
- What evidence do we have in this passage that God was with David, protecting him and giving victory over his enemies? What evidence of God's presence do you see in your struggle?
- How does God demonstrate to David that He is in control of the events of his life? What comfort do you receive from this?

- God restored David and his men in their time of need. How has God been restoring or refreshing you? Who has He been using in your life to bring blessing and encouragement in your time of need?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that while we may have to walk through the "valley of the shadow of death" He will never forsake us.
- Take a moment to consider the ways the Lord has encouraged you in your struggles this past while. Thank Him for His refreshing and encouraging presence.
- Thank the Lord that He is in control of the events and circumstances of our lives.
- Thank the Lord that He is bigger than all our enemies.

## ABSALOM'S DEATH

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Read 2 Samuel 18:1-33

The hand of the Lord has been on David and his people. It is true that they have been fleeing from Absalom but God has been revealing His presence. Absalom tried to overthrow his father, but he was fighting against God's anointed. In the last chapter, we saw how Ahithophel, David's former counsellor, committed suicide. In this chapter, we read about the sudden death of Absalom and the end of David's flight.

Absalom had crossed the Jordan with his army in search of David, his father. His intentions were clear. Absalom wanted to kill his father and take his throne. As long as David was alive, the country would be divided. Absalom wanted to unite the country under his leadership.

Realizing that a battle was unavoidable, David gathered his men and appointed commanders over them by dividing them into groups of thousands and groups of hundreds. This gives us an indication of the size of David's army at this time. David sent the troops out. One third of the troops were under the command of Joab. The second third was commanded by Joab's brother Abishai. The final third were given to Ittai the Gittite (verse 2).

It was David's intention to march out with his troops (verse 2), but his men refused to let him go. They knew that if David went out into battle, the focus would be on him. They knew that Absalom's fight was a personal one. Absalom had no fight with them. Absalom's sole intention was to kill his father. Once he had accomplished that task, he would have no more interest in the battle. The goal of David's men was to protect him with their lives. They suggested that David coordinate efforts from the city (verse 3). David listened to the advice of his men and remained in the city.

It is important for us to note that David was quite willing to take the advice of his commanders, and that his men felt free to make suggestions to him. David was willing to listen. Not all leaders have this ability. There are leaders today who will not listen to those under them. David gives us as leaders an example to follow.

Before the detachments left for battle, David spoke to Joab, Abishai and Ittai about Absalom. "Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake," he told them (verse 5). All the troops heard David giving this order to his three commanders. They knew that it was not the intention of David to kill his son. There is tenderness in the heart of David for his son. Even though Absalom had hurt him deeply and was seeking to kill him, David had the heart of a loving father toward him. Admittedly, he was not always able to show that heart to his son. For a period of five years David even refused to see Absalom. This obviously hurt his son deeply. Nevertheless, deep down inside, David loved his son. Nothing Absalom did would change the love he felt for him. The passage shows us however, that love must be expressed. Absalom hated his father in part because he did not experience his father's love for him in his time of need. We would do well to learn how to express the love we feel to our children and spouses. We may love



them deeply but if we do not express that love to them in ways they can understand, the love we have hidden in our heart will be of no use to them. Love must be demonstrated in practical ways.

The commanders led their armies out into battle. The battle took place in the forest of Ephraim. God gave David's men a great victory that day, and Absalom's army suffered heavy casualties. Verse 7 tells us that they lost twenty thousand men. This was a clear sign that God was with David. The battle spread out over the countryside. Verse 8 tells us that the forest claimed more lives than the sword.

We have an example of how the forest claimed the life of Absalom. Absalom was riding on his mule when he met David's men. As he was riding, his mule passed under a branch of a large oak tree. Absalom's hair, which he had let grow, got caught in the branches as the mule passed under it. The mule kept going but Absalom was left hanging from the tree by his hair. The whole incident would have been quite amusing to see had it not been so serious. King Absalom dangled helplessly from that oak tree unable to set himself free. He was humbled, helpless and obviously embarrassed.

One of David's men saw Absalom hanging from the tree and reported the incident to Joab (verse 10). When Joab heard this report he said:

What! You saw him? Why didn't you strike him to the ground right there? Then I would have had to give you ten shekels of silver and a warrior's belt (verse 11).

The man replied:

Even if a thousand shekels were weighed out into my hands, I would not lift my hand against the king's son. In our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, 'Protect the young man Absalom for my sake' (verse 12).

This soldier respected the wishes of David and refused to raise his sword against the king's son. He feared for his life, lest David should put him to death for disobeying his direct order. He knew that even Joab would not have defended him before David (verse 13).

Joab took three javelins in his hand, and finding Absalom, plunged them into his heart as he hung helplessly from the tree. Joab's armour-bearers then surrounded Absalom and finished off the job. Absalom was not given the opportunity to fight back like a soldier. He died unable to defend himself. Absalom's body was taken and thrown into a pit. A large heap of rocks was piled over him (verse 17). He died in dishonour and was buried in disrespect.

After Absalom's death, Joab sounded the trumpet and his troops stopped pursuing Israel. Israel suffered serious casualties and returned home to nurse their wounds.

Absalom was a proud person. Verse 18 tells us that because Absalom had no son to carry on the memory of his name, he had erected a pillar in the King's Valley as a monument to himself. It became known by the people in the region as "Absalom's Monument."

When Ahimaaz the son of Zadok the priest heard that Absalom had been killed, he wanted to run to David with the news (verse 19). Joab knew that David would not take this news well. He likely feared David's response and wanted to protect Ahimaaz from harm. Joab told him that he was

not the one to take this tragic news to David (verse 20). Instead Joab called a Cushite and told him to tell David what had happened to his son. The Cushite ran off with the news (verse 21).

Ahimaaz wanted very much to share the news of victory with David. He pleaded with Joab to let him run behind the Cushite. It is uncertain why Ahimaaz felt such a need to bring this news to David. Joab tried to persuade Ahimaaz that it was not in his best interest to tell David, but when he saw that he would not give up, he gave him permission to go. Ahimaaz was so intent on bringing David this report that he outran the Cushite messenger (verse 23).

A watchman on the roof saw a man running alone toward the city. He called out to David, reporting to him what he saw. David thought to himself, "If he is alone, he must have good news."

As the man drew closer to the city, the watchman called out to David again telling him that a second man was running toward the city. Again David thought that the man was bringing more good news.

As the first man drew closer to the city, the watchman was able to identify him. He told David that he ran like Ahimaaz the son of Zadok, the priest. Realizing that Ahimaaz was a good man, David took courage and thought to himself that he was coming with good news.

When Ahimaaz arrived he called out to the king, "All is well! Praise be to the LORD your God! He has delivered up the men who lifted their hands against my lord the king" (verse 28). Notice that Ahimaaz did not say that Absalom was dead.

When David asked about his son Absalom, Ahimaaz answered, "I saw great confusion just as Joab was about to send the king's servant and me, your servant, but I don't know what it was" (verse 29). In saying this Ahimaaz refused to be the bearer of the bad news of Absalom's death. The king told him to stand aside so he could hear what the second messenger had to say (verse 30).

When the Cushite arrived, he told David that the Lord had delivered him from those who had risen up against him (verse 31). When David asked if Absalom was safe, the Cushite said: "May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up to harm you be like that young man" (verse 32). David understood by this that his son Absalom had died.

The news of Absalom's death shook David. He went up to a room over the gateway and wept crying out, "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son" (verse 33)!

This is the cry of a broken heart. David's love for Absalom was such that he would have willingly died in his place. His love was very deep, but Absalom never really understood that love.

The story in this chapter is a story of God's control over the circumstances of life. God's hand was on David, protecting and keeping him. Absalom, in fighting David, was fighting against God's anointed. He could not win this battle.

## For Consideration:

- How would you describe Absalom's feelings toward his father David? What was the source of those feelings?
- What does David's willingness to listen to his men tell us about him? Are you a good listener?
- How did David feel toward his son Absalom? Would you feel this way toward someone who had insulted you and sought to kill you?
- Do you feel that Absalom understood the depth of love his father had for him? Explain.
- Are you able to express the love you feel toward your family and friends?
- How does the manner in which Absalom died show us that he was not in control of the events of his life?
- Have you ever fought against the purposes of God? What does this passage teach us about the futility of fighting God?

## For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to deal with any bitterness you may have toward someone who has hurt you.
- Ask God to help you to be a better listener.

- Are you able to express your love to those around you in ways they understand? Ask the Lord to help you to express the love you feel to them.
- Thank the Lord that He is in control of the events of your life.
- If you have been fighting the Lord in some area of your life, like Absalom, ask Him to give you grace to surrender to Him today.

## 43

### DAVID RETURNS HOME

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Read 2 Samuel 19:1-43

Absalom's rebellion against his father did not last. Absalom was killed in battle and buried in a forest pit. It was not the will of God that Absalom be king. David had been God's choice all along and nothing could take that position from him.

Even though Absalom had tried to kill his father, David still loved him deeply. When he heard about the death of his son, David wept and mourned. News of David's grief spread throughout the army. This was a difficult time for the soldiers. On the one hand, they understood David's grief over the death of his son. On the other hand, however, Absalom had been their enemy. He had tried to take the throne away from David. These men had risked their lives to defend David, but he was not happy with the victory they had risked their lives to achieve. Were they to rejoice or join David in mourning over the death of his son, their enemy? When the army returned home they did so in silence, out of respect for David. They did not return rejoicing over the victory. Instead they returned as men who had been defeated, with David crying out: "O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son" (verse 4).

Joab saw how the victory had been turned to mourning and approached David about it. He told David that he had humiliated his men who had just saved his life and the lives of his sons, daughters, wives and concubines (verse 6). He reminded him that he was showing love for those who hated him and hate for those who loved him. He showed disrespect for his family by grieving for the person who wanted to harm them. By grieving for his son, David had disregarded the valiant efforts of his soldiers to save his life and defend his throne. Joab went as far as to say, "I see that you would be pleased if Absalom were alive today and all of us were dead." Joab reminded David that day that if he did not go out to encourage his men, they would abandon him (verse 7). David listened to Joab's advice and went to see his men (verse 8).

There was confusion among the tribes of Israel who had sided with Absalom against David. They were not sure what they were to do now that they had been defeated and Absalom had been killed. In verse 9, they recognized that David had been a good king and delivered them from the hands of their enemies. They also recognized that they had sided with Absalom, David's enemy. They were in a very delicate situation. They needed to do something to restore their relationship with David. It was suggested by some that they go to meet David and bring him back to the land, declaring him to be king (verse 10).

David heard that the Israelites wanted to bring him back as king, even though they had rebelled against him in favour of Absalom. He had not heard from the people of Judah, however. In verse 11, he sent a message to Zadok and Abiathar the priests. In that message he told them to ask the elders of Judah why they should be last to bring him back. He reminded them that their brothers in the other tribes of Israel had already spoken to him about returning



as their king. He reminded the people of Judah that they were his own flesh and blood. In light of the events of recent days, David needed reassurance of loyalty from his own people. By sending this message to Judah, David was also assuring them that he wanted to be their king.

In this message, David also informed the people of his desire to relieve Joab, his military commander of his position and give it to Amasa (verse 13). This is likely because Joab had killed Absalom, ignoring David's wishes that he not be harmed.

By sending this message to Judah, David won their hearts. Their hearts were stirred by his commitment to them and his desire to see them re-establish him as king over their tribe. With one accord, they sent word to David to return with all his men to be their king (verse 14).

When David and his men reached the Jordan River the men of Judah came out to meet him and bring him across to be their king (verse 15). Among those who went to meet David was Shimei. As you may recall, Shimei had cursed David and pelted his officers with stones when they fled Jerusalem. He accused David of taking Saul's throne (see 2 Samuel 16:5-8). He was bold when he felt that Absalom was going to defeat David, but now that David had been victorious, Shimei knew that he needed to make things right. He likely feared for his life.

With Shimei were a thousand Benjamites, as well as Ziba, Saul's former servant, with his fifteen sons and twenty servants. All these people rushed to the Jordan to greet David and bring him back as king. When Shimei crossed the Jordan River to meet David, he bowed before him asking David to forgive him for his insults (verses 18-19). He confessed to David that he had sinned and that he wanted

to make things right with him by being the first to welcome him back as king. In saying this, Shimei is affirming his loyalty to David.

Abishai, one of David's commanders, had been present and heard all that Shimei had said against David when they were in flight (2 Samuel 16:9). He wanted David to kill Shimei for his insults (verse 21). David refused to harm Shimei as long as he lived, but on his deathbed he told his son Solomon to treat him as an enemy and kill him (2 Kings 2:8-9). He may have done this because he did not trust his loyalty and wanted Solomon's reign to be secure.

Among those who came to meet David and bring him over the Jordan to be king was Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson. It should be remembered that Ziba, Mephibosheth's servant had come to meet David when he was fleeing. When David asked Ziba why Mephibosheth, his master had not come with him, Ziba told David Mephibosheth's loyalties were for Absalom. This angered David and so he gave Ziba Mephibosheth's properties (2 Samuel 16:1-4).

On seeing Mephibosheth, David noticed that he had not taken care of himself. Mephibosheth was crippled but he had not looked after his feet, nor had he trimmed his moustache or washed his clothes since the day David had left. David asked him why he didn't go with him when he fled Jerusalem (verse 25). Mephibosheth told him that because he was lame, he had decided to have his donkey saddled and ride out with David. His servant Ziba, however, left without him and slandered his name by lying to David about him (verse 27).

Mephibosheth committed himself to David to do as he pleased. He recognized David's kindness and favour toward him even though he did not deserve it. He did not feel

that he had the right to make any more appeals to David for mercy as he had already done so much for him (verse 28). David pardoned Mephibosheth and returned half of his land to him (verse 29).

Another person who came to meet David at the Jordan was a man by the name of Barzillai the Gileadite. This man was among those who had come to David with provisions when he was fleeing from Absalom (see 2 Samuel 17:27-29). Barzillai was a man of eighty years of age and a very wealthy man (verse 32). David asked Barzillai to stay with him in Jerusalem where he would provide for his every need (verse 33). Barzillai told David, however, that he was too old to enjoy the privilege that David was offering him. He could no longer taste the difference between good food and bad. He was too deaf to appreciate the sound of male and female singers. He felt he would only be an unnecessary burden to David (verses 34-35). Barzillai would cross the Jordan with him as a symbol of his loyalty but he wanted to return to his hometown where he could live out the rest of his life and be buried with his forefathers (verse 36-37). He suggested, however, that David take his servant Kimham in his place.

David promised Barzillai that he could ask him for anything he wanted and it would be done (verse 38). When they crossed the Jordan, David kissed Barzillai and blessed him. Barzillai returned to his home (verse 39).

We see from the events that transpired by the Jordan that day that David appreciated what others had done for him in his time of need. He remembered their kindness and rewarded them.

The day that David crossed the Jordan into Gilgal, Barzillai's servant Kimham crossed over with him. Also present

to take him over the Jordan was the army of Judah and half of the troops of Israel (verse 40).

The crossing of the Jordan was not without its struggles. In verse 41, the men of Israel came to David asking him why Judah had stolen him away by bringing him and his household across the Jordan? In saying this, they appear to be misinterpreting the intentions of Judah. It may be that they were feeling that Judah was trying to gain David's special favour at their expense. They were trying to make the other tribes of Israel look bad before David. This caused a conflict between Judah and the rest of Israel.

Hearing this complaint, the men of Judah answered the men of Israel. They told them that it was because the king was so closely related to him that they had come out to meet him. They had taken nothing for themselves nor were they looking for any special favours from the king.

Israel reminded Judah that ten out of twelve tribes belonged to the nation of Israel. In saying this, they were saying that they had a greater claim on David than the tribes of Judah and Benjamin. They also reminded Judah that they were first to invite David back. They did not appreciate Judah trying to look better than them by being first to bring David across the Jordan. These comments only stirred up the anger of Judah even more (verse 43).

The whole incident with Absalom caused a great stir among the people of the entire nation. Satan had not been successful in defeating David but he had stirred up the nation and caused significant division. People's loyalties were divided. Many had been insulted. Lies had been told and people were slandered. Jealousy threatened to divide even further the fragile nation. David had significant work to do now to reunite the confused and divided nation. It all

began with the bitterness in the heart of one man. Absalom was the tool of Satan to bring much damage to the whole nation.

Perhaps you have been in churches where this same thing has happened. One person acting in bitterness and jealousy can become the vehicle of Satan to bring great division and disunity. Though David had done nothing wrong, he now has to do significant work to repair relationships that had been broken by lies, deceit, bitterness and jealousy.

For Consideration:

- What do we learn about fighting the will of the Lord? Could Absalom really succeed in his attempt to overthrow the man God had called to the throne?
- In the first part of this chapter, David is guilty of not appreciating the effort of his soldiers who risked their lives on his behalf. Have you ever failed to appreciate the efforts of others in your life? Who?
- What do we learn in this passage about the result of Absalom's bitter anger against his father? How did this attitude affect an entire nation? What is the warning for us here?
- We see in this passage that David is willing to forgive Shimei. Are there people who have insulted you that you have a hard time forgiving?

## For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to show more appreciation for those around you. Ask Him to help you to be an encouragement to them.
- Ask the Lord for grace to forgive those who have offended you.
- Take a moment to thank the Lord for the people He has sent your way to minister to you in your need.
- Ask the Lord to protect your church from divisions like those that were taking place in Israel at this time. Ask Him to give you more grace to walk in unity and harmony.

## SHEBA'S REVOLT

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Read 2 Samuel 20:1-26

David's leadership in Israel was not without struggles. Even David had many enemies. Some of these enemies refused to be reconciled with him when he returned to be king. Sheba was one such enemy.

Sheba was from the tribe of Benjamin. He is described in verse 1 as a troublemaker. As David was returning to Jerusalem, Sheba sounded a trumpet and shouted:

"We have no share in David, no part in Jesse's son!  
Every man to his tent, O Israel!" (verse 1)

The expression, "every man to his tent" seems to be a call for Israel to abandon their welcome of David and regroup under their leaders in order to plan out their rebellion.

Many in Israel heard the call of Sheba and revolted against David. At this time there was tension between Israel and Judah. Israel had accused Judah of trying to gain David's favour (see 2 Samuel 19:41-43). Israel's anger with Judah would have enabled Sheba to gain a greater following at

this time. Verse 2 tells us that all the men of Israel deserted David to follow Sheba, but Judah remained faithful.

When David returned to Jerusalem one of his first tasks was to deal with the ten concubines he had left to care for his palace. It was common knowledge that during his absence, these concubines had slept with Absalom (2 Samuel 16:22). David knew that this was in fulfillment of God's word to him about his own sin with Bathsheba (see 2 Samuel 12:11-12). The concubines had been defiled by this act. David decided that he would care for them until the day of their death but they would bear the shame of their actions for the rest of their lives.

It is significant that David dealt with his concubines before he dealt with the rebellion of Sheba. The concubines were part of his household. David knew that he needed to deal with the issues in his own life first before dealing with Sheba and the issues of the nation. Until David had dealt with his own family, it would only be a hindrance to his efforts to unite the kingdom. In this, David shows great wisdom.

Having dealt with his ten concubines, David then turned his attention to Sheba and his rebellion. He sent Amasa to summon the men of Judah to him within three days. In 2 Samuel 17:25, David gave Amasa the position of commander of his military in the place of Joab. Amasa summoned the army to gather before David ready for battle.

When Amasa took longer than the agreed time to return with Judah's men, David called for Abishai. Abishai was the brother of Joab, David's former military commander. David told Abishai that Sheba posed a more serious threat to the nation than Absalom. He commanded him to gather Joab's army and pursue Sheba. David did not want to give



Sheba time to find a fortified city to gather with his men where the fighting would be more difficult. Abishai took Joab's army as well as the Kerethites and Pelethites who were loyal to David and went out in pursuit of Sheba (verse 7). It appears that Joab, though no longer commander of the army, was fighting with his men.

While Abishai was in pursuit of Sheba, Amasa returned with his army and joined forces with him. While they were together, Joab, in a gesture of friendship, came to greet Amasa (who had been given his position). Joab was wearing a military tunic with a dagger strapped in a sheath. As they greeted each other, Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him and with his left hand plunged the dagger into Amasa, killing him (verses 9-10). By killing Amasa, Joab was refusing to accept David's decision to replace him.

Amasa's dead body was lying in the middle of the road at that time. One of Joab's men stood beside the dead body of Amasa as the soldiers passed by and cried out:

"Whoever favours Joab, and whoever is for David, let him follow Joab!" (verse 11)

The intention here was to reaffirm the command of Joab over Amasa. As the troops walked past the body of Amasa lying on the road in its blood, they were shocked by what they saw. Many would stop to look. What was supposed to motivate the troops to follow Joab was not having the desired effect. Instead, it was only causing confusion. Seeing that his plan wasn't working, the soldier decided to drag Amasa's body into the field. He threw a garment over his body so it would not be recognized. This way it would not be a hindrance to the soldiers passing by (verse 12). Once Amasa was removed from the road, the men went on to

pursue Sheba under the command of Joab (verse 13). Sheba passed through the tribes of Israel until he came to the town of Abel Beth Maacah where he would seek refuge.

When Joab's men discovered that Sheba had taken refuge in Abel Beth Maacah, they built a siege ramp up to the city and stood against it. Their intention was to break down the wall, attack the city and capture Sheba.

As Joab's men were trying to break down the wall of the city, a wise woman called out to them. She asked for permission to speak with Joab (verse 16). Joab went toward her to hear what she had to say. The woman told Joab that the city of Abel had been respected in Israel for its wisdom (verse 18). She told him that the city was also known to be a peaceful and faithful city. She asked him why he was trying to destroy it (verse 19).

Joab told her that he was not interested in destroying the city (verse 20). He told her about Sheba who had lifted up his hand in rebellion against David. He told her that if the city would hand Sheba over to them, they would withdraw from them and leave them in peace. The wise woman told Joab that Sheba's head would be thrown to him over the wall (verse 21).

The woman went to her people and told them what they were to do to save the city. The people listened to her advice, killed Sheba, cut off his head, and threw it to Joab over the wall (verse 22). Joab kept his word, ordered the retreat of his men and returned to Jerusalem.

Notice that verse 23 tells us that Joab was over Israel's entire army. That position had been taken from Joab and given to Amasa. Now that Joab had killed Amasa, the

position came back to him. We can assume that David did not appreciate Joab's rebellion. David allowed Joab to continue as commander, however. He had given David victory over his enemy Sheba. To discipline him at this time of victory would likely have caused great confusion in the nation. David knew that there would be a time to discipline Joab for his actions but this was not the time.

We need wisdom from God in making decisions. Legalism would have us do the "right thing" no matter what the result might be. In this sinful world, however, sometimes doing the "right thing" can result in even greater wrong. In this situation, David appeared to feel it necessary to let the matter rest for a time for the good of the entire nation.

Verses 23-26 give us an idea of David's administration at this time. Joab was his military commander. Benaiah was over the Kerethites and Pelethites (verse 23). Asoniram was in charge of forced labour, Jehoshaphat was the recorder. This likely involved keeping official records (verse 24). Sheva was secretary and Zadok and Abiathar were priests (verse 25). Ira was David's personal priest (verse 26).

For Consideration:

- David, though chosen by God, still had many enemies. The Lord Jesus also had many enemies. Should we assume that we can get through life without having enemies?
- David dealt with his concubines as a personal issue before trying to deal with the affairs of the

nation. What is significant about this? What does this tell us about the importance of getting rid of the obstacles in our own lives before trying to reach out to others? How can personal obstacles in our lives hinder us in ministry?

- The soldier in Joab's army exposed Amasa's body in an attempt to gain support for Joab. When this did not work, he hid the body and changed his plan. Are you willing to recognize when your plans are not working? Some people will stubbornly persist in a plan, unwilling to admit they were wrong. Can you admit when you are wrong?
- We see in this chapter that one wise woman was able to save the city of Abel Beth Macaah. The city could not have stood up against the army of Joab. What force and strength could not accomplish, one woman accomplished with wisdom. What does this teach us about wisdom?
- Is it possible to make the "right decision" at the wrong time? Consider how David dealt with Joab in this chapter.

#### For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to help you to persevere even when your enemies rise up against you.
- Ask the Lord to show you any personal issues that you need to make right before you can minister for Him.

- Ask the Lord to give you humility to recognize when you have made a bad decision. Ask Him to give you grace to make the changes necessary.
- Ask God to give you wisdom in making decisions. Ask Him to show you when you need to accept things and when you need to fight for change.

## 45

### A Famine and Giants

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Read 2 Samuel 21:1-22

We saw in the last meditation that David had many enemies. There were those in his own nation who did not accept him as king. Despite the opposition, God's purpose for David to be king remained. God gave him victory over his enemies and established him as His king over Israel and Judah. This was not the only opposition David experienced. We discover that for David's reign to prosper he needed to deal with the sins of his past.

As we begin verse 1, there is a famine in the land. What was strange about this famine was that it lasted for three successive years. David understood that God was a sovereign God. He believed that there was a cause for this famine and so he sought the Lord about it.

In verse 1, God showed David that the reason for the famine was because of what Saul had done to the Gibeonites. God told him that Saul's house had been stained with blood because he had put the Gibeonites to death. We do not have a record in the Bible of this act of Saul. What we do need to understand, however, is that it was a stench in the nostrils of God. Though Saul was dead, his actions still defiled the land. This act had never been confessed to

God. No effort had been made to be reconciled with the Gibeonites for this terrible deed.

I want to take a moment and examine this problem in Israel because it has implications in our own lives. What we learn is that sin can linger and defile our land and our lives. Even the sins of our ancestors can have a lasting effect on our land and our lives. In this case, the murder of the Gibeonites was Saul's sinful act. Even though Saul was dead, his sin rose up to God and brought a curse on the land. In this case, the curse came in the form of a famine. This ought to cause us to think deeply about our own spiritual history. Are their sins that still rise up before God and curse our land, our families or our churches? Though these may not be our sins, they are still present in our land or our church and nothing has been done to confess or make things right.

Have you ever asked your child to clean up a mess in your home and have them respond, "But I didn't make the mess?" The fact of the matter is that it really doesn't matter who made the mess, it still needs to be cleaned up. While it is important that the person who sins confess that sin, there are times when that person is no longer around. In this case, the sin still needs to be addressed. The blood of Christ is able to cleanse us of all sin. There is no sin that is not covered by the blood, but if we do not bring that sin to him and confess it; how can it be forgiven. 1 John 1:9 tells us:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

Notice here the words, "If we confess." This means that confession of sin needs to be made if we are to experience

the wonderful forgiveness of God. This is what is happening here. Saul's sin needed to be confessed and reconciliation needed to be made before the famine would end.

The Gibeonites were not a part of Israel. Verse 2 tells us that they were of Amorite roots. Under Joshua, Israel had made a covenant promise with the Gibeonites to let them live (see Joshua 9:3-15). Saul had broken that promise when he slaughtered them. God held Israel accountable for the breaking of that covenant promise with Gibeon. God takes the vows we make very seriously.

Realizing the cause of the famine, David summoned the Gibeonites to himself and asked them what he should do for them to make things right (verse 3). In verse 4, the Gibeonites told David that they had no right to ask for silver or gold from Saul nor did they have any right to put anyone in Israel to death. In order to make things right, however, they asked David for seven male descendants of Saul's family to be killed and exposed before the Lord at Gibeon where Saul had lived (see 1 Samuel 10:26). David agreed to the request in order to heal the land from the curse.

In verse 7, we are told that David spared Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son because of an oath he had made to Jonathan and Saul not to wipe out his descendants. However, he did hand seven descendants of Saul over to the Gibeonites. In verse 8, David handed over Armoni and Mephibosheth, sons of Rizpah, Saul's concubine (2 Samuel 3:7). He also handed over five of Saul's grandsons, born to his daughter Merab. The Gibeonites killed these seven descendants of Saul and exposed them on a hill for all to see (verse 9).

Rizpah, the concubine of Saul, whose two sons had been killed, went to the hill on which her two sons and Saul's five



grandsons were exposed. She spread out a piece of sackcloth for herself on a rock. She remained there from the beginning of the harvest until the rain poured down from heaven on the bodies. She refused to let the birds or the wild animals touch the bodies (verse 10). We are not told how long she stayed with the bodies but she did remain until the curse of God was broken on the land and the rain fell, ending the three year famine. The falling of the rain was an indication to her that the curse of God had been lifted.

When David was told what Rizpah had done, he took the bones of Saul and Jonathan from the citizens of Jabesh Gilead and buried them in the tomb of Saul's father Kish in the territory of Benjamin (verse 14). The bodies of Saul and Jonathan had been buried in Jabesh Gibeah after the Philistines publicly exposed them on the wall of Beth Shan (see 1 Samuel 31:8-13). By taking Saul and Jonathan's bones to their family plot, David is honouring them. When these things were done, God's blessing was restored to the land.

Famine was not the only concern for David at this time. He also had to fight the Philistines, who proved to be a constant thorn in his side. In verse 15, we read about one battle David had with the Philistines. This battle was so intense that David was exhausted. In his exhaustion, one of the Philistines by the name of Ishbi-Benob approached David. Ishbi-Benob had a bronze spearhead weighing three hundred shekels (seven and a half pounds or three and a half kilograms). Ishbi-Benob also had a new sword. His intention was to kill David. Were it not for Abishai, one of David's commanders, who came to his rescue and killed Ishbi-Benob, David may have lost his life that day (verse 17). After this close encounter, David's men swore that David would never again go out with them to battle, lest he be

killed. David's men were very protective of him. Remember that David was getting older and did not have the strength of his youth.

Ishbi-Benob was a descendant of Rapha. He was not the only descendant of Rapha who caused problems for David. In verse 18, we read of a second person by the name of Saph, also a descendant of Rapha who fought against Israel and was killed by Sibbecai the Hushathite (verse 18).

In verse 19, in yet another battle with the Philistines, Elhanan the Bethlehemite killed a man by the name of Goliath, the Gittite whose spear was as big as a weaver's rod. While he should not be confused with the Goliath that David killed as a youth, this Goliath was quite obviously a very big man as well.

Verse 20 tells us of a battle that took place in Gath where Israel faced a huge man with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot. This man was also a descendant of Rapha. He taunted Israel and Jonathan son of Shimeah (see 1 Samuel 16:9) killed him.

As mighty as these men were, they all fell into the hands of David and his men. The Goliath of David's youth was not the only giant he had to face. God would call David to face many giants in his life. He would also give him victory over every one of them. He will give us victory over our giants as well.

## For Consideration:

- Does God allow pain and suffering in our lives without reason? What was the cause of the famine in the land of Israel in this chapter?
- What affect does sin have on our land and churches? How important is it for us to deal with sin in our midst?
- Are we accountable to God to deal with the sins of our ancestors that still remains in our land today?
- Are there any sins in your past that you need to deal with today? What are they?
- What does this chapter have to teach us about the importance of keeping our vows?
- Notice the willingness of Rizpah, Saul's concubine, to protect the bodies of Saul's descendants until the blessing of God broke through. Are you willing to persevere until God's blessing breaks through in your life, in your church or nation?
- What giants do you have to face in life? What encouragement do you receive from this chapter?

## For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He uses pain and suffering to bring us closer to Him.
- Ask the Lord to reveal any sin in you that hinders you in your walk with Him.

- Ask God to give you victory over the particular giants you face in life.
- Ask God to give you strength to persevere until His victory and blessing breaks through.

## A SONG OF DAVID

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Read 2 Samuel 22:1-51

In the previous chapter we saw how the Lord delivered David from the hands of the enemies who wanted to kill him. These past years for David had been very trying. He had been chased by his own son who was killed by his top military commander. He had been forced to flee Jerusalem to save his life. He faced the insults and rebellion of those who did not want to see him as king. He had to deal with a long-time famine that ravaged the land. While there was tremendous struggle in David's life, God gave him victory each time. As David looked back on his life, he saw problems and difficulties, but he also saw the hand of the Lord guiding and directing him all the way. For this, he had cause to thank the Lord. Here in chapter 22, David wrote a song of praise to the Lord for His care and deliverance from his enemies (verse 1).

David began his song by declaring the Lord God to be his rock, fortress and deliverer (verse 2). Notice the word "my" in this verse. David makes this song very personal. God had proven to be a rock behind which he could hide and a solid foundation on which he could stand. David often hid among the rocks of the mountains from his enemies. He took refuge in God, who was like a rock to him (verse 2).

God was a strong fortress that the enemy could not penetrate. In Him, David was safe from those who sought his life.

In verse 3, David went on to describe the Lord as his shield and the horn of his salvation. As a shield deflected the arrows of the enemy, so the Lord deflected the insults and attempts on David's life. David could hide behind the Lord and although the enemy constantly shot their arrows at him, David was safe and secure.

God was also a horn of salvation. We should not see the salvation mentioned here as being only a spiritual salvation, but a salvation from his physical enemies. A horn is a weapon of defence for an animal and symbol of strength. What David is telling us here is that the Lord God gave him strength to overcome the enemies who attacked him. He could charge at his enemies with the horn of God's salvation and they would be scattered and overcome.

David also described his God as a stronghold and refuge. Like the fortress mentioned earlier, this stronghold and refuge was a place of retreat from the fierce battle. It was a place of safety, security and refreshment.

In his trouble, when David called out, the Lord came to his rescue. As powerful as David had become, he did not give himself the credit for his victories. David had a powerful and skilled army, but he did not trust in its strength and military skill. He trusted in the Lord. How easy it is for us to become confident in ourselves and our own skill and forget the Lord. David never lost sight of his need for God. He recognized that his strength and skill were insufficient for the battle. His confidence was in the Lord God. He was thrilled that God cared so deeply for him and came to his rescue.

There were times in David's life when he felt overwhelmed. God did not always keep him from experiencing problems and difficulties. David states that there were times when the waves of death swirled about him and the torrents of destruction overwhelmed him. He knew what it was like to have the cords of the grave coiled about him like a hungry snake. He often had to confront the snares of death that his enemies set before him. David knew what it was like to struggle and experience pain. God did not keep him from these experiences, but when he called out in his distress the Lord always heard his cry for help.

Notice God's response to David's cry for help. In verse 8, the earth trembled and quaked. The foundations of heaven shook with God's anger. That anger was directed toward David's enemies. Such was the love of God for His servant. Smoke rose from the nostrils of God and consuming fire came from His mouth (verse 9). God parted the heavens in response to the cry of David for help (verse 10). He mounted on the cherubim and soared on the wings of the wind like a mighty warrior descending on His enemy from above (verse 11).

Like a great storm, God hid himself in darkness as a rain-cloud filled with water. Lightning broke through those clouds as a demonstration of the brightness of His presence (verse 12-13). He roared from heaven in thunder. The sound of His voice caused fear (verse 14). He shot His arrows and scattered David's enemies (verse 15). At His rebuke, the valleys of the sea were exposed and the foundations of the earth laid bare. Nothing could hide from His watchful eye. Every enemy would be exposed and every action judged.

In verse 17, David says that the Lord reached down from on high and took hold of him, drawing him out of the waters

that were overcoming him. God rescued him out of the hand of a powerful enemy too strong from him. God was his support in the day of disaster (verse 19). He delivered him from his enemies and put him in a spacious place of rich blessing. Notice in verse 20 the reason why God did these things for David. He delivered him because He delighted in him. David knew the wonderful favour of the Lord in his life. He did not always deserve this, but God, in His grace, forgave him and continued to delight in him.

Notice in verses 21-28 that David believed that God had dealt with him because of his personal righteousness. While we cannot merit the salvation of God by our works, God does reward faithfulness. Those who love Him and are faithful to Him will know His blessing and protection. David loved the Lord and served Him with a pure heart. He turned his back on sin and kept his hands clean (verse 21). David delighted in the ways of the Lord and walked in those ways (verses 22-23). This is not to say that he did not fall into sin. David was not perfect. He did, however, return to the Lord with a sincere heart, seeking forgiveness. It was David's desire to keep himself blameless and free from sin (verse 24). God knew David's heart and rewarded him according to that heart of love and devotion.

David believed that God would be faithful to those who were faithful to Him. To those who lived blamelessly before Him, God would be blameless in His dealings with them. To the pure, God would reveal His purity. In other words, those who lived for God would know the fullness of His favour in their lives.

On the other hand, those who were crooked and turned from God's purpose would see the shrewdness of God. He would plot and plan their destruction (verse 27). God



saved the humble but the proud person, He would bring low (verse 28).

David declared in verse 29 that the Lord was his lamp. When things looked very dark and unpleasant, God brought His light into the situation. This gave David hope and confidence. With the help that God provided, David was strong and confident against his enemies. He knew that with God on his side, he could advance against a whole troop of soldiers. Nothing could stop him. He could scale any wall the enemy put before him (verse 30). There was no obstacle that he could not conquer in the strength of the Lord.

"God's ways are perfect," David told his readers in verse 31. "The word of the Lord is flawless." What He does and what He says can be completely trusted. Things around us are overwhelming and evil surrounds us, but God is holy. He is incapable of sin and error. He can always be trusted. He will do what is right. This holy and perfect God will be a shield and rock of refuge for all who turn to Him. There is no one like the Lord God in holiness. There is no refuge like the refuge we find in the Lord our God. There is no God like the Lord God of Israel. In fact there is no other God at all (verse 32).

The God of Israel armed David with strength and made his way perfect. In other words, God worked out everything for David. He made his feet as swift and stable as the feet of the deer. God would not let David fall, even though the path he walked was dangerous. God would enable David to stand on the heights.

God trained David's hands for battle. He gave him all the skill he needed to face the enemy. David did not believe his skill in battle was his own. It was God who gave him

the ability to handle the bow (verse 35). The shield David carried was a shield of victory, a blessing of God. As great as David had become, he gave all the glory to God. In verse 36 David said, "You stoop down to make me great." David recognizes God in his greatness and success.

It was God who kept him from stumbling on the path of life (verse 37). In the strength God provided, David pursued his enemies and crushed them. He did not turn back until they were destroyed. He crushed them completely so that they could never rise again (verses 38-39). God armed him with the strength he needed for the battle and made his enemies bow at his feet (verse 40). His enemies were no match for David. They turned their backs on him and fled. The power of God in David was too much for them to resist (verse 41). Though his enemies cried for help, they could find no one to save them. The Lord did not hear their cry for help because they had resisted Him and rebelled against His name (verse 42). In God's strength David beat them as the dust of the earth and trampled them like mud in the streets.

The God of David has never lost His power. He is still the same God today. He still offers those who love and honour Him the victory and strength they need to overcome any obstacle that stands in the way of His purpose for their lives. God proved to be a deliverer for David. He delivered him from all the attacks of his enemies. He preserved him as the head of the nation. God placed people he did not know in subjection to him. Foreigners feared his name and obeyed his command. His enemies lost heart and came out of their strongholds trembling in fear (verses 45-46). Such was the power of God in the life of David. Such was the favour God gave him. This same power and favour is available to all who will turn to the Lord, obey his Word and trust His purpose.

David concludes his song in praise and thanksgiving.

The LORD lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be God, the Rock, My Saviour (verse 47).

The God of Israel avenged David and put the nations under his feet. He set him free, exalted him above his foes, and rescued him from violent men (verse 49). For this reason David would praise the Lord among the nations. He would sing praises to the name of the Lord. The God of Israel gave David victories and showed unfailing kindness to him and his descendants (verse 51). David gives all the glory to God.

For Consideration:

- David experienced his share of problems in life. What did the Lord teach David through those problems? How is this reflected in this song of David?
- What victories has God given you in life?
- David attributed his success to the Lord God. How easy is it for us to believe that it is our own strength and wisdom that gives us victory?
- David describes, in great poetic detail, how the Lord spread the heavens and came to his rescue. Do you believe that the Lord God will come to your rescue?
- David had confidence in God's care because he walked with him and loved him. Can we live in

rebellion and disobedience and still expect that God will deliver us?

- How has God been a Rock and Refuge for you personally?
- David believed that, in the strength of the Lord, he could overcome any obstacle set before him. Do you believe this? What obstacle will you overcome in the strength of the Lord?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord for the things He has taught you in your trials.
- Thank the Lord for being a rock of refuge for you in your time of need.
- Thank the Lord for the strength He gives you over your enemies. Thank Him for always being there for you in your time of need.
- Ask the Lord to help you to walk in His truth. Thank Him that He rewards those who are faithful to Him.
- What obstacles are you facing today in your life? Ask the Lord for the strength to overcome those obstacles.

## DAVID'S MIGHTY MEN

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Read 2 Samuel 23:1-39

Chapter 23 is divided into two sections. The first section, verses 1-7, contains the last words of David. The second section, verses 8-39, gives a list of David's mighty men.

The chapter begins with a statement about David. He is described as the son of Jesse and a man exalted by the Most High. It is clear from this that the favour of the Lord God was on David. It was God who had given him his position and honour. God had chosen to make him a great king. Everything David had was from the Lord God, who had blessed him in abundance.

Notice also that he was a man anointed by God. Not only did his position and possessions come from the Lord but all David achieved was a result of the touch of God on his life. God empowered him and enabled him to have victory over his enemies. God gave him wisdom to be a capable administrator. God surrounded him with the people he needed to accomplish the work He had called him to do.

David is described as Israel's singer of song. He was known for his desire to praise and honour the Lord through

music. Not only did David personally worship the Lord through his songs, but he also had a desire to see the entire nation praise and adore God. David seemed to radically change the focus and shape of worship in his day. He loved to joyfully express his worship through music and dance.

David was aware of the blessing and anointing of God on his life. "The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; his word was on my tongue," David said (verse 2). In particular, David felt the presence of the Lord as he spoke these last words to the nation. Let's take a moment to examine the words the Lord spoke through his servant David.

The final words of David begin in verse 3. Here David tells us that when a person rules in righteousness and the fear of God, he is like the light of the morning at sunrise on a cloudless day (verse 4). The picture he paints is one of peace, security and blessing. He also compared the person ruling in righteousness to the brightness and freshness that comes after the rain, causing the fruit of the land to spring forth. In other words, the person who rules in righteousness brings refreshing and renewal to those under him. He is a pleasant leader; one that people respect and admire. The blessing of the Lord flows through such a leader.

David had confidence that his house was right with God. God had made an everlasting covenant with him that was secure and could not fail. God would bring salvation to him and his family. He would bless him with his every desire. This was because he was in a right relationship with his God (verse 5).

It was by living for the Lord God that a ruler and a nation could be assured of the blessing and favour of God in their

lives. Evil men were cast aside like thorns. These men are compared to thorns that no one wants to touch. They would not know the touch of God's blessing in their lives. The only way that thorns are touched is with a tool of iron or the shaft of a spear. They are only touched so that they can be gathered up to be burned (verse 7). This is the destiny of evil men. They will only be touched with the spear or sword of God's judgment and burned in the fire of his wrath.

As the final words of David, these words are significant. They show us that no nation or leadership can truly prosper if it is not in a right relationship with God. If we want to experience the blessing of the Lord in our land and our churches, we need to get right with God. The writer of 2 Chronicles 7:14 express it this way:

If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

Notice the connection between the healing of the land that turning from wicked ways and seeking the Lord. What David is telling us is that the Lord God blesses obedience and faithfulness to His Word. These verses are of the utmost importance for individuals, churches and nations. In them, we find the key to blessing.

In the remaining section of this chapter we meet David's mighty men. It would be easy to read this section and attribute David's success to his mighty men, but this is not the case. Verses 1-7 make it clear that the reason for David's success was his obedience to the Lord God and God's favour on his life. David's men were powerful

fighters and valiant men, but David does not attribute his victories and successes to them. His victories were the result of God's mercy and grace. It is in this context that we will now examine the men that served under David.

Verses 8-17 describe three men in particular. These were part of a group known as "The Three." They were set apart as David's most brave and mighty men. They were revered by the whole nation for their skill and bravery.

The first of the three was a man by the name of Josheb-Basshebeth. He was the "chief of the Three" (verse 8). He gained his reputation because he had killed eight hundred men with his spear in one encounter.

The second of "The Three" was Eleazar. One day when the rest of the Israelite army fled from the Philistines, Eleazar stood his ground and struck down one Philistine after another until his hand grew so tired it froze to his sword. The rest of the troops returned only to strip the dead (verse 10).

Shammah was the last of "The Three." Like Eleazar, Shammah stood his ground against the Philistines. When the Philistines banded together at a field of lentils, Shammah took his stand in the middle of the field, defending it by himself. Again the Lord gave him a great victory (verses 11-12).

These three men were completely dedicated to David. We have an example of this in verses 13-17. On this occasion, David was in hiding in a cave. The Philistines were encamped in the Valley of Rephaim. David was very thirsty and longed for some water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem. The problem was that the Philistine garrison was at Bethlehem (verse 14). When The Three heard that



David wanted water from this well in Bethlehem, they broke through the Philistine lines, drew water from the well and carried it back to David. They did so at the risk of their lives.

David, though obviously moved by the dedication and bravery of The Three, refused to drink the water. He poured it out on the ground saying, "Far be it from me, O LORD, to do this! Is it not the blood of men who went at the risk of their lives?" (verse 17). These three men would risk everything for David. They feared no man.

Besides The Three, there were other mighty men. Abishai, the brother of Joab, is said to be chief of the Three. This has caused some confusion for commentators. Josheb-Basshebeth was the chief of The Three in verse 8. Some manuscripts use the word "thirty" instead of "three." If this is the correct translation, Abishai was the chief of the thirty men mentioned in the verses that follow.

The solution, however, seems to be in verse 19 where we read concerning Abishai: "Was he not held in greater honour than the Three? He became their commander, even though he was not included among them." In other words, Abishai was given command of The Three at a later date after they had already established themselves and gained the respect of the nation. Though he was respected and held in honour above The Three, he was never considered to be part of this group that had worked together for some time.

Abishai was a brave and mighty man. Verse 18 describes how he killed three hundred men with his spear.

Another man worthy of special attention was Benaiah. He struck down two of Moab's best men. He also went down

into a pit on a snowy day and killed a lion (verse 20). He struck down a huge Egyptian even though the Egyptian had a spear in his hand and Benaiah only had a club. Benaiah snatched the spear from the giant and killed him with his own spear (verse 21). Benaiah was also as famous as the Three. He was not included in the elite group of three, but was held in greater honour than the Thirty (verse 23). David put him in charge of his bodyguard.

The second group mentioned in this passage is a group known as The Thirty. While these men were not as famous as The Three, they were considered to be among the elite of David's men and enjoyed a special reputation and honour. Verses 24-39 give the names of those included among the Thirty.

It is important that we note in verse 39 the name of Uriah the Hittite. This was Bathsheba's husband, who David had killed in battle. It is of interest to note that when David called Uriah home in order to hide his sin with Bathsheba, Uriah refused to sleep with his wife saying that as long as his men were on the battle field he did not want to sleep with his wife (2 Samuel 11:8-11). This is a further indication of the dedication of The Thirty to the cause of David. In killing Uriah, David was killing one of Israel's most valiant soldiers.

For Consideration:

- What was the reason for David's success as a king? How easy would it have been for him to look to his mighty men and attribute his success to them?

- Have you ever looked at your own strength and wisdom and believed that they have brought you success? What do we learn from David?
- What does David teach us about the importance of obedience and faithfulness to God if we want to experience His blessings?
- David's mighty men were willing to stand against all odds. They were powerfully used of God to bring great victories for David. What are you willing to risk for the cause of the kingdom of God?
- God brought great victory over foes bigger than David's men. What obstacles do you face in life? Can God give you victory over those obstacles like He did for David's men?

#### For Prayer:

- Ask the Lord to keep you from attributing your success to your own efforts. Take a moment to recognize that God alone is your source of strength and wisdom.
- Ask God to search your heart to see if there is anything that would keep the fullness of His blessing from being revealed in you.
- Thank the Lord for the faithfulness and bravery of David's mighty men. Ask Him to give you something of their heart. Ask God to give you grace to stand firm against your enemies.

- Thank the Lord that just as He gave David's mighty men great victories, He can also give us those same victories over the obstacles we face today.

## DAVID'S CENSUS

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Read 2 Samuel 24:1-25

There are times in our lives when we fail to realize just how dependent we are on the Lord God for everything. Sometimes we take our eyes off the Lord and focus on our own ability and strength. In those times, the Lord is able to bring us down so that we realize just how much we really need Him.

Verse 1 tells us that the Lord God was angry with His people and so He incited David against His people, telling him to take a census. In a parallel account of this event, the writer of 1 Chronicles 21:1 tells us that it was Satan who inspired David to take this census. We need to examine this briefly.

First, we need to understand that the taking of a census was not in itself wrong or sinful. There were times when the Lord commanded His people to count the number of people in the land (see Numbers 1:2).

From the context of this chapter, we understand that God was not pleased with the fact that David took a census. The sin was not in taking a census but very likely in David's

attitude at that time in his life. It may be that David took his eyes off the Lord God and placed them on his accumulated resources and wealth. He wanted to see how powerful he was. He may have felt proud and strong because he had such a large army. For a moment, he forgot that his strength had nothing to do with his army. His strength came from the Lord God.

Second, how are we to reconcile this passage with what 2 Chronicles 21:1 tells us? Who incited David to take the census? Was it God or was it Satan? The answer can likely be found in the fact that the Lord God is in control of all the events of history. In the book of Job, for example, Satan was not able to do anything against Job without the Lord's permission (see Job 1:7-12). While it was Satan who inflicted Job with physical pain and suffering, God allowed it to take place. In the same way, very likely the same thing is happening. God allowed Satan to inspire David to act in pride and take a census.

Third, we need to understand the preserving grace of God in our lives. God protects us from sin and temptation. If, for a moment, He withdraws His hand, the enemy is quick to take advantage of us. The enemy is looking for any opportunity to defeat us. Only God's protective hand keeps us in those times. From time to time, the Lord may withdraw His hand to show us how easy it is to fall without His protection. Maybe you have experienced this in your life. In an instant you fell into sin. You look back at that time and wonder how it could happen. You never thought that such a thing would have been possible. In an instant, you realize just how much you are dependent on the Lord God for His strength and protection.

Fourth, while God may at times permit Satan to push through, we can be sure that He will never take His hands

off us completely. In fact, as he did for Job, God will use whatever Satan does to us to strengthen us and accomplish His greater purposes in us. God remains in control. Though Satan may tempt and cause us to fall, he cannot win the battle.

In this case, God wanted to punish His people for their sin. He allowed Satan to tempt David and he allowed David to fall. Not only would the Lord use this incident to judge the people for their sin, but he would also use it to strengthen David in His walk with Him. David, tempted by Satan, commanded Joab to go through the tribes of Israel and take a census of all his people. He wanted to know how many fighting men he had at his disposal (verses 1-2).

Joab was not being incited by Satan like David and had a better perspective. He told David that what he was doing was not a good thing. He encouraged David to change his mind (verse 3). David refused to listen to the advice of his long-time military commander. David should have heeded the warning of Joab, but his heart was set on this census and he could not receive his good advice.

In verses 5-7, David's men crossed the Jordan and went through the region of Gad and on to Jazer. From there they passed on to Gilead and the region of Tahtim Hodshi, Dan Jaan and on to Sidon. From the fortress of Tyre, they went into all the towns of the Hivites and the Canaanites. Finally, they went to Beersheba in the Negev of Judah and returned home to Jerusalem. The whole journey took them nine months and twenty days (verse 8). At the end of that time, they reported to David that there were eight hundred thousand men who could fight for him in Israel and another five hundred thousand in Judah. In other words, David had a million, three hundred thousand fighting men at his

disposal. This was a phenomenal army. What nation at that time could resist such a number?

When the report was brought back to David, he realized what he had done. "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, O LORD, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing," David said to the Lord in verse 10. It appears that David realized that he had taken his eyes off the Lord and trusted the size of his army to win his battles. There are many things we can trust apart from the Lord. Sometimes we trust our natural abilities and strengths. Sometimes we trust other people. Sometimes we trust our God-given gifts. Without the blessing of God on these things, none of them are sufficient to accomplish God's purposes. David finally came to realize his foolishness in looking to the size of his army.

That night the Lord spoke to Gad the prophet (verse 11). He had a message for David. The Lord told Gad to speak to David and tell him that He was giving him three options. He was to choose one of them to be his punishment (verse 12). The first option was that there would be a three year famine on the land. The second option was that for three months David would have to flee from his enemies. Finally, the third option was that for three days God would strike the land with a plague. Gad, the prophet, told David to think this over and let him know what he was to answer the Lord on David's behalf (verse 13).

When David heard the words of Gad, his heart was in deep distress. He knew that he had sinned. He chose to fall into the hands of the Lord rather than suffer at the hands of men (verse 14). God might be merciful to him, but his enemies would know no such mercy and compassion. David chose the three day plague as his punishment. Remember



here that this punishment was not just against David but also against the nation.

The Lord sent a plague on Israel. The plague was so severe that seventy thousand people from Dan to Beersheba died (verse 15). When the angel of the Lord stretched out his hand to destroy Jerusalem, the Lord, called out, "Enough! Withdraw your hand" (verse 16). God took no delight in destroying His people. His heart was grieved. God is a God of love and compassion but He is also a God of holy justice. His justice demands punishment for sin, but He takes no particular pleasure in this.

The angel of the Lord was at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite when the Lord told him to stop (verse 16). David saw the angel who was striking down the people. Speaking to the angel, David said:

I am the one who has sinned and done wrong.  
These are but sheep. What have they done? Let  
your hand fall upon me and my family (verse 17).

David was willing to take the punishment on himself and his family in order to spare his people from further harm. This is the heart of a true leader. David did not seem to realize that God was angry with the nation and not just with himself.

That day, God sent his prophet Gad to David again. Gad told him to build an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite (verse 17). In obedience to the word of the Lord, David commanded that an altar be built. When Araunah saw the king and his men coming toward him, he went out and bowed down before him in respect and honour (verse 20). He asked David why they had come to see him. David told him that he had come to buy

his threshing floor so he could build an altar to stop the plague that had broken out on the people (verse 21). Araunah told David that he could have the floor as well as the oxen, the sledges and ox yokes for the wood. He offered to give all these things to David free of charge as a gift to stop the plague (verse 23).

David refused to accept these things as a gift from Araunah. Instead, he insisted in paying him for them. He made it clear to Araunah that he would not make a sacrifice to the Lord that did not cost him anything. David bought the threshing floor and the oxen, paying fifty shekels of silver for them.

David built an altar to the Lord and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. The Lord was pleased with this offering and answered David's prayer, stopping the plague.

There are several important details we need to mention before we conclude. We should note that there was a very particular reason why the Lord told David to build an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah. 1 Chronicles 21:27-22:2 tells us that the temple would be built on this very location. How fitting that the temple would be constructed on the very site where an altar had been built to save the entire nation from this devastating plague.

Notice also that David refused to offer a sacrifice that cost him nothing. How easy it is for us to offer such sacrifices to the Lord. We offer our excess and feel we are making a great sacrifice. Jesus watched a widow put two small coins into the offering box at the temple in Mark 12:42-43. Knowing that she had given all she had, Jesus commended her saying that she had given more than all the others. To give what we don't need is no sacrifice.

Notice finally here that in order for the plague to stop, a sacrifice had to be made. A right relationship between God and His people had to be restored by means of the blood shed on the altar. Without that blood, there could be no reconciliation between God and his people. This was part of the covenant agreement made with God. Forgiveness could only be obtained by means of shed blood and the death of a sacrifice. This was a constant reminder to God's people of the seriousness of sin. Jesus became the sacrifice that would ultimately set us free from the plague of sin that ravages this earth.

For Consideration:

- What was the sin behind the census of David?
- Have you ever found yourself taking your eyes off God and putting them on yourself, your strength and your wisdom? What lesson did David learn in this chapter?
- What do we learn about how God preserves us and protects us from sin? Where would we be today if God removed his protection from us?
- What comfort do you take from the fact that even Satan is subject to God?
- What things are you tempted to trust rather than God today?
- Have you ever made a "sacrifice" that cost you nothing? What does this chapter teach us about this?

- What is the importance of shed blood in reconciling God and man? How does the blood of Jesus provide this forgiveness and reconciliation with God?

For Prayer:

- Thank the Lord that He has kept and preserved you from sin.
- Ask the Lord to keep your eyes fixed on Him. Ask him to keep you from trusting anything other than His strength and wisdom.
- Thank the Lord that He offered His own body as a blood sacrifice for our sins.
- Ask God to help you to be willing to make a sacrifice for Him. Ask Him to forgive you for offering sacrifices that cost you nothing.



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