

2 Samuel-2 Kings: The Difference Leaders Make - Lesson 1.

2 Samuel: David's Great Reign.

I. Triumph of David (1:1-10:19).

A. The Defeat of Saul on Mt. Gilboa (1:1-27).

Second Samuel opens with David hearing the news of Saul's death. The Israelites have been defeated in battle at Mount Gilboa by the Philistines. Things looked bleak. There was now no king as far as most of the people knew. But David understood that God had called him to be king. Indeed David had been anointed some years prior by Samuel to be the successor to Saul when Saul had been rejected as king. But David still had a keen appreciation for Saul, whom he had served as a military leader, and Saul's son Jonathan, who had been for a long time David's best friend.

In 2 Samuel 1, we read a beautiful musical lament that David wrote for Saul. This may have been one of his earliest writings; at least this may have been one of the earliest popular writings that David wrote among the songs and other things that he composed. He says in it, "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. From the blood of the slain, from the flesh of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, the sword of Saul did not return unsatisfied. Saul and Jonathan, in life they were loved and gracious, and in death they were not parted."

David was saying this about Saul, the person who had pursued him for years and tried to kill him. David shows himself to have a deep sense of where respect should be given, and that respect is a very important thing to appreciate. Later David will commit quite a number of serious sins; he is hardly an example of good personal moral behavior. But on the other hand, David never forgets who he is to respect and how that respect is to be given to God in all situations. He never forgets the importance of his loyalty to God. He showed that kind of loyalty as well to Saul.

B. King over All of Israel (2:1-14:33).

But now it is time for a new king and David is the obvious choice, at least for the people of his own tribe; that is, the tribe of Judah. They come to him at Hebron, which is the largest city in the southern part of the tribal territory of Judah. They ask him to be king, he agrees, and they formally anoint him there. This is now a public anointing, which recognizes David is to be the king of all the people of Judah. However, there were many northerners still loyal to Saul.

The tribes did not always have a sense of unity with one another; and there was a tendency for the northern tribes to think differently than the southern tribes, a tendency for them to look to different political leaders, a regionalism that separated north from south. The northern tribes thought that it might be appropriate to try to continue with Saul's family in the monarchy. They continued to look to Saul's children as potential successors to him. The Bible tells us in 2 Samuel

that there really was a long war between the house of David and the house of Saul. A lot of the time it was a kind of cold war; but there was a rivalry. David knew that God wanted him to be king over all Israel. And many of his family and supporters and the vast majority of Judeans wanted that to happen, whereas large numbers of people in the north did not want a southerner as king over them. It would take seven years before, finally, David would be chosen as king over both the north and south. But eventually, he was.

C. City of David.

The story describes for us how he was, indeed, made king over the entire nation, north and south, in chapter 5. Then after accepting the united monarchy of the entire nation, David proceeded to do something very interesting. Though the Israelites were scattered all around the Promised Land and had some places more under their control than others, and were on the run in some places and firmly entrenched in others, one city, indeed, the biggest city in the whole territory, had never been taken. This was the city of Jerusalem. The suburbs had been taken. Israelites had been living there for centuries since Joshua, but the central city itself, called in those days by the name Jebus because the Jebusites lived there, was still in the hands of the local Canaanite population.

David determined to capture it; he and Joab, who was his cousin and chief military advisor and leader, set out with the men of Israel to capture the city. David, of course, had grown up near it, just a few miles south in Bethlehem, and he knew how to get into the city. They did, they captured it against the defiance of the Jebusites who said, "You will never take our city," because the Jebusites had been successful in keeping Israelites out for centuries. Once David captured the city, he made it his capital. Jerusalem then became a kind of a special territory, a little bit like the way the Vatican is a special territory in Italy, kind of its own state, the way that Washington, D.C. is not part of any of the other 50 states, but a separate district. That is what Jerusalem became under David.

It became the headquarter's city for the monarchy, for the royal family. Since it was right on the border between Judah to the south and Benjamin, the southern-most tribal district in the north, Jerusalem was an ideal location, a border city in the king's hands, not really part of the territory of any other tribe; and from there David could rule. What is significant about this is that Jerusalem turns out to be the place that God had chosen to set His name. Jerusalem, in other words, as we see the story unfold, is the fulfillment of the predictions made way back in Deuteronomy 12 that God would eventually place His name, His authority, His presence, in a certain location within Israel. David made that happen.

Jerusalem becomes an important topic in Scripture; more and more it comes to symbolize the presence of God. It is, of course, the place where the Lord Himself in the New Testament was crucified and where He was resurrected. But Jerusalem comes to have the metaphorical significance of the place where we are with God, since it indicates His presence on earth. Eventually, Jerusalem even comes to indicate heaven in the book of Revelation.

D. Other Conquests.

After conquering Jerusalem, David sets out to defeat the Israelites' most serious enemy, that is the Philistines. David was always a good military leader and his skills certainly do not fail him now, especially because God is with him. It is David who actually completes the conquest. Joshua certainly had faithfully gotten it underway, but the limitations of sin on the part of the people had kept them from being entirely successful. And the way that the Israelites had turned away from God during the days of the judges and parts of 1 Samuel also were tragic factors in limiting the conquest and causing the Israelites to have only a tenuous hold on the Promised Land. Under David the conquest gets finished.

David sets out systematically to take town after town, and city after city, and region after region, to eliminate all foreign influences therein. He has tremendous success in driving away oppressors, to free the people, to liberate the land. From north to south, he has tremendous success. There is not a battle that David enters into in which he is not successful. The ark is recaptured from the Philistines and brought back into Jerusalem.

E. Davidic Covenant.

We see in chapter 7, David wants to build a temple. He says to God, "I want to build You a house." Why would he want to do that? Well, it is because the people in ancient times in general were aware of the fact that it seemed appropriate to have a place where a god could manifest His presence; that is the general sense that ancient people had about a temple. But in particular, David really did love God and loved Him with his whole heart and cared about God's purposes. He wanted to honor God more than what was the case, in his mind at least, in the way that the tabernacle did so. The tabernacle, after all, was a portable tent shrine, and now Israel was settled. David had finished settling the people of God; and so, as he had captured Jerusalem, he wanted a place right there in the center of the people, a visible presence of God's abiding with them. The temple would do that. God said, "No, I do not want you to build a temple. Part of your job for Me has been war, and you are associated with war. I want My house to be a house of peace."

In addition, God actually wanted to do something first, something more important than getting a building built. He wanted to make a promise, to David and through David, of importance to the whole world. That is what we find in 2 Samuel 7. This chapter contains what is called the Messianic Covenant, the Davidic Messianic Covenant. It is the chapter in which God says to David, "You will not build a house for Me, but I will build a house for you", trading on the fact that the word in Hebrew for house can also mean "family" just as it can in English. "I am going to make it so that there will never fail to be a successor of yours over My people." Now, on the one hand, this could be interpreted in a rather trivial way as a promise that there would be many kings descended from David, that his family would be a dynasty of kings. But on the other hand, the grandness of the language clearly leads us to expect, as it led ancient Israelites long before the time of Jesus, that God was also predicting something greater than just a dynasty.

He was predicting an eternal kingship, a kingship that would never end. Somehow, out of this chapter, we know that a son of David was to come, and he would rule forever over God's people. Of course, the fulfillment of that is Jesus of Nazareth. It was He, just like David, born in

circumstances that would not lead one to expect him to be king and not recognize him early on as king. But indeed with the approbation of God and representing God in the flesh, He was, in fact, the great king in fulfillment of this promise. Once David becomes king and receives this promise, we know that David will stand as a kind of archetype for the kingship of Christ. Thus David's life is a harbinger of the life of Christ, not, however, from a moral point of view. It is from the point of view of the office he holds and of the favor of God upon him, but his moral life sadly is far from exemplary.

II. David's Transgression (11:1-27).

Though David has victory after victory, and though David is magnanimous and effective in victory, there comes a time when we read these words from chapter 11 : "In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. . . . But David remained in Jerusalem." In other words, there comes a time when arrogance begins to characterize David as a king. "Yes, I am supposed to go. Yes, that is what kings do (it is the theory that the king leads the troops into battle, always at the forefront). But I am going to stay home this time and let Joab do it."

What David does, in lust, is eventually takes a married woman and sleeps with her, gets her pregnant, and then he schemes to cover it up by getting her husband killed. It is Bathsheba that he lusted after; her husband is Uriah. He commands Joab to have Uriah, who was a soldier, placed in the forefront of battle against what we would call today the area of Jordan, the ancient capital of Amman. There, fighting against the Ammonites, Uriah is in fact killed.

David then takes Bathsheba to be his wife, but the problem is he cannot do anything without God knowing it. So Nathan, the prophet, comes on behalf of God and says to David, "What you have done is a horrible sin and here is the consequence for you: The sword will never depart from your house." There is another use of the word house in the sense that David's family in general would now be subject to internal warfare. Much of the rest of the book of 2 Samuel describes events in which David's family, and thus David himself, suffer the consequences of that sin.

III. David's Trouble (12:1-24:25).

A. Family Discord.

David was not a very good father, not a very model parent. He did not intervene as he should have when his children needed guidance. He tended to let them sort of play off against one another. He didn't set a model for them and apparently did not pay too much attention to them at all. In consequence of that, this prediction came true in spades. For example, in chapter 13 we read of how David's oldest son, the crown prince Amnon, raped his half sister Tamar.

B. Absalom's Revolt.

Then we read of how Absalom, the third-born, furious that this had happened, assassinates Amnon. Absalom eventually, after fleeing for a while because he had killed the crown prince, returns to Jerusalem. Sensing that David has become more and more distant as a leader, more and more isolated, more and more selfish, more and more arrogant, Absalom begins to go

around to the people and suggest to them that perhaps he would make a better king than his father. He does favors for the people; he is there and available to render judgments, or give advice, or to try to solve problems. Soon he is very popular. David's ratings have slipped down near the bottom and Absalom's are skyrocketing. In chapter 15, we read of how he launches a conspiracy against his own father, in other words a revolt, a rebellion.

At first it is successful. David has with him only a few close advisors and Philistine mercenary troops who are his personal bodyguards. They have to flee, cross the Jordan River, head over into the land of Gilead; and Absalom flees after them, having gathered an army. One of David's advisors actually tricks Absalom into waiting longer than necessary to go after David. Here is David's third-born son chasing his dad to kill him because he hates his dad so much and he wants to be king. What a sad situation. Absalom does not succeed because the wary and wily Joab, David's chief military advisor and leader, ends up being able to catch Absalom and assassinates him when Absalom gets caught in a tree riding his mule around chasing David. With the leader of the conspiracy, revolution dead, the troops slink home and David also essentially slinks home as well.

C. More Rebellion.

He is not popular; he did not suddenly become popular just because his son got killed in battle. David does reign a number of more years. He even has some kinds of successes and benefits attend his way, but sadly it is not a happy ending to his career. Other rebellions come against David: one led by an influential Benjamite named Sheba who is chronicled for us in chapter 20. Then more wars come; the Philistines again seek power and influence and territory, and they fight against David. As of chapter 21 in 2 Samuel, things are kind of back to where they were in the days of Saul. God has taken seriously the great sin that David committed.

D. Census and Plague.

After a couple of chapters (chapters 22-23) we have some poems that David wrote, including his beautiful last words, and also a list of some of the men who fought with him who were his generals and colonels and majors, as it were, in the military. We find at the very end of the book of 2 Samuel David engaged, again, in a serious sin. This time it is not adultery and murder; this time it is imperialism. David decides to count all the fighting men in Israel, to have a military census. At first, he is opposed in this, but he insists on doing it. Why would David, who has people ready to fight for him anyway, want a complete count of every single person of fighting age? The answer is he wanted to go beyond the Promised Land.

The holy war that God allowed and sanctioned, the very special and limited war that God approved in the Old Testament, could be fought only for the taking and holding of the Promised Land, and David had already done that.

Now he is thinking of an empire, a bigger territory, of branching out, of capturing yet other nations, of becoming a great imperial king. God will not allow it, and so God brings a plague upon the people of Israel. David, brought short by this plague, aware that his sins have found him out once again, is immediately repentant. He pleads to God for mercy, and God is merciful.

The plague ends and it comes to a stop right at a threshing floor, a great sort of stone dome at the height of the city of Jerusalem. The threshing floor was owned by a local Jebusite named Araunah, and David buys it from him. He puts an altar there, and thus he has purchased land for what will be the site of the temple that his son Solomon will build.

E. Concluding Thoughts.

David actually dies a couple of chapters into the book that we call 1 Kings, though it is a continuation of the story. His life comes to a tragic end there, but we should not think of his story as being a story of tragedy. It was a story of sin. It was a story of immorality. It was a story of ups and downs, great potential, and the frittering away of that potential by personal sins, a story of a king who soon becomes so unpopular that his own son drives him from office, and gets the vast majority of people eager to kill David.

But because God is behind the events, it is also a story of wonderful victory. It is a story of the beginning of the hope for a Messiah. It is a story of the expectation for a son of David to reign over Israel; and David launches that. His victories remind us of the victory of Christ. And we notice that, even in his sin, he never forgets his position of respectfulness, dependence upon, and loyalty to God. He repents when his sin finds him out. He senses his guilt and asks God for mercy, and God used him mightily to establish the Israelites in their land in fulfillment of the promises to Abraham. That is where we see the situation at the end of 2 Samuel.