

2ND SAMUEL

Week 1, Intro and chapter 1

As is customary I begin each new book of the Tanach, the Old Testament, with an introduction so that we have a sense of what to expect. As we are entering the 2nd book of Samuel today, we'll have that introduction and even get into the 1st chapter. However the introduction will be of a little different flavor than usual. We are going to (necessarily) get very historical.

Because the Bible focuses so intensely on Israel, the Hebrew people and their land inheritance of Canaan, we can get a bit of tunnel vision and lose sight that there was much of significance occurring in the nations surrounding Israel that would at some point have a profound impact upon Israel's future. Only a meager bit of information concerning these nations outside of the Holy Land are reported in the Scriptures, and this is (at least partially) because the writers of the Biblical books were Hebrews and they were primarily concerned with what immediately affected them.

A rather isolated focus on our own nation and culture is typical for most of us. In the modern era it was WWII when the average American began to acknowledge that there was a world beyond our borders. For several decades we didn't see how what was going on elsewhere in places like Europe and Asia was bound to eventually affect us. In our day the issue has shifted so far towards an integration and interweaving of international affairs with American society that a great debate is underway about a steady erosion in our sovereignty and culture and national identity that seems to be hurtling us at light-speed towards a single unified world government and monetary system. One side of the debate finds such a global governmental and societal integration that virtually dissolves borders and ends nationalism as healthy and desirable (if not inevitable), and the other side sees it as abhorrent, of the Devil, and the prophetic means of ushering in that great world leader and deceiver that Christianity calls the Anti-Christ.

Ancient Israel's leaders and citizenry soon after David's time would (like modern America) face this same philosophical geopolitical dilemma with strong opinions on the matter. This wide divergence of desires among the Israelites ignited passions that quickly led to civil war and the

splitting of Israel into two separately governed kingdoms almost immediately following King Solomon's death. But the set of circumstances that caused this dissolution of God's earthly kingdom didn't develop overnight, and it didn't happen in a vacuum. The Lord was invisibly and undetected operating behind the scenes of human government (as only His unstoppable providential will can) to bring about a long term plan that while centering on Israel would also eventually incorporate the entire planet. Thus many nations outside of Israel became unwitting players in Yehoveh's plan.

We are all at least somewhat aware of the Assyrian and Babylonian Empires that would conquer parts of Israel and drive the Israelites into exile in a number of stages. But even in David's time Egypt was also re-emerging from its dark ages and there were also other serious players beginning to appear on the world stage (that consisted at this time of primarily the Middle East and Northern Africa) that would in one way or another play a role in redemption history.

So let's take a little time to see what was going on in the nations surrounding Israel at the same time that David was well on his way to becoming Israel's king because David would have been quite aware of these circumstances and this would have played a role in his many decisions that we see recorded in 2nd Samuel.

Let's approach this by dividing the known world up into 5 main geopolitical regions: Mesopotamia, Egypt, North Syria, the Phoenician Coast, and Canaan. Certainly this is not an exhaustive list and other regions were known and could be defined, but these 5 had the most direct effect upon Israel and Biblical matters so we'll stick to them.

The Israelites always had a sense of attachment to Mesopotamia because that's where the founder of their race, Abraham, came from. After migrating to Canaan at God's leading, and establishing the covenant of promise with Yehoveh (upon which all future covenants would depend), Abraham sent his servant back to Mesopotamia to find a wife for his son Isaac. Later Isaac's son Jacob fled to Mesopotamia to escape the wrath of his twin brother and there found his wife and started a family before moving back south to Canaan.

In reality Mesopotamia also represents a distant attachment to virtually all the world's races and tribes because the Ark that carried the few remnants of humanity through the Great Flood came to rest on Mount Ararat, in Mesopotamia. Thus all who are alive today (you, me, everybody) on planet Earth can count Mesopotamia as our earliest homeland and even

representative of our earliest common culture and language, dating back to when the earth was purged of its wickedness by YHWH.

During David's time, up in Mesopotamia, the nation of Assyria was already in existence. They were in a struggle for sovereignty (if not outright existence) with the powerful Arameans. Babylonia also existed at this time and Assyria hoped to demonstrate through its fierce resistance to the Arameans that Babylonia was an easier target for them; it succeeded to some degree. .

Even so the Arameans gained a foothold and established some settlements along the eastern side of the Tigris River, and they also overran some Assyrian territory and settled along the Euphrates River. We have unearthed extensive records of this long ongoing conflict between the Arameans and the Assyrians, and thus we find that all during the 10th and 11th centuries B.C.(Samuel's, Saul's and David's time) that this conflict was as central to the Assyrians' way of life as was the conflict between Israel and the Philistines. The issue dominated the attention of the governmental leadership (as one would expect) to the exclusion of almost all else; and naturally this long term war had a great deal to do with setting national policy and priorities.

Let me set that statement in context so that you can see what I'm getting at: since September 11th 2001 our American history has been largely defined by our fight against primarily Islamic enemies; conflicts with Iraq and Afghanistan, and our brinksmanship with Iran and the atheistic North Korea. This conflict has spilled over into serious border security issues with our friend and ally Mexico that vacillates between stopping the infiltration of terrorists, fighting the drug trade, and protecting our national economic security. It has even affected our relationship with modern Israel because their very existence is an irritant to those with whom we'd rather be friends, but who could also quickly become our enemies.

The realities of our war with Islamic nations and their desire to reassert Muslim dominance around the world has defined so much of our lives for this first decade of the new millennium, and there is no end in sight. Because of this new reality we even created a powerful new Federal Agency called Homeland Security that was given broad powers to penetrate our privacy for what is seen as the national good. We have millions of closed circuit TV cameras across our nation, with thousands more added each day, that record our every move. Immense chains of computers listen in to our phone conversations and read our emails, attuned to catch words like bomb, jihad, or assassination. We have our shoes x-rayed and our toothpaste confiscated as we wait in interminably long lines before we can board a commercial jet.

I don't say any of this with condemnation, judgment or political overtones. I say it to explain that although we at times stop noticing it, every era has that feature which dominates and dictates our decisions and direction, and this is especially so for all national leaders. To ignore this is to entirely miss the underlying reasons that history takes the course that it does. And it is very much so with Biblical history as well.

So in David's era, because Assyria had to fight off the Arameans for at least a century, each side was forced into putting the bulk of their national resources into developing a large and able military. But a military can be used for more than the national defense; it can be used to subjugate and control a nation's own citizens, or it can be deployed to conquer its neighbors and thus build an empire. It is rare in history that a military is built up and not used; or then used and voluntarily decommissioned. So any governmental world leader in David's day was acutely aware that while Assyria and the Arameans were currently pre-occupied with their never ending conflict against one another, it could end at any moment. And when it ended there was a clear danger that the winner would want to flex their muscles and seek to use their highly developed military capability to enlarge their territory and influence.

So as David was assuming the throne in Israel, the picture in Mesopotamia was one of the Arameans exerting pressure on both Assyria and Babylonia, and thus these 3 advanced Mesopotamian nations had built up substantial and experienced militaries, and each nation had developed an aggressive culture of war and a national policy that revolved around war.

In the region of North Syria the Arameans were the unquestioned dominant force. They established large areas where the various Aramean tribes grew into substantial populations and thus exported their Aramean culture and gods into the other tribes of that region. Now in reality, the Arameans probably held a position somewhat like the American Indians did when the Pilgrims first landed on North American soil. In other words similar to our American Indians the Arameans were viewed as the original and thus natural tribal landholders of the region and so from their perspective their wars were merely about trying to hold on to what had always been theirs: their ancient land heritage. In doing so they undoubtedly absorbed large numbers of survivors of the many tribal clashes that characterized the area in the 12th and 13th centuries B.C.

But also without doubt the Arameans were the overriding culture in the North Syria region, and the good fortune of highly improved climate conditions during the 10th century B.C. (as compared to the 2 or 3 centuries before that time) led to their ability to sustain a robust and

growing population. It has always been (and remains so) that the growth of any people group is directly proportional to its ability to grow food. It was that way for America as well. This is why the Bible makes such an issue of explaining that during Israel's entry into the Promised Land it was a land "flowing with milk and honey". In other words the combination of terrain, soil conditions, and climate (all of which was to be credited to the God of Israel) allowed for abundant food production, which in turn allowed for a population explosion of Israelites. This was not necessarily so for the earlier inhabitants of Canaan, nor was it necessarily so for other regions of Asia, the Middle and Far East, and Northern Africa. Thus various nations grew or declined in population and power usually with the chief factor as the ability to feed their people.

It had happened the same way for the Hebrews down in Egypt when, unwittingly, the Pharaoh of Egypt allowed Joseph to put Jacob's family of refugees into the fertile Delta region of Egypt just at a time in history when climate conditions changed and improved. In a place of naturally fertile soil, the Israelites increased from a population of about 200 when they entered Egypt, to around 3 million when they departed 4 centuries later. It is interesting that Assyrian records indicate that the same improved climate phenomenon was occurring in Mesopotamia in the very region that was largely held by the Assyrians. In fact the notable kings of that era (several of which are mentioned in the Bible) made it a point to mention that their ability to finally prevail against the Arameans had much connection to their ability to grow more food and thus feed and increase their population.

Let's look at Egypt. Egypt had been devastated by the loss of the Israelites in the Exodus, and it produced their economic collapse. The Bible doesn't do justice to the underlying reason why the Pharaoh so stubbornly refused (from an earthly, political standpoint) to let God's people go despite the havoc that the Lord was wreaking on Egypt. In Moses' day the Hebrews formed easily one quarter of Egypt's total population. The Hebrews represented the core of the nation's craftsmen, laborers, and builders. Their loss virtually overnight, en masse, meant that Egypt lost its ability to build roads, buildings, monuments, dwellings, and so on. Even their military suffered because now men who were well-trained warriors would have to put down their spears and take up shovels and hammers.

Imagine if in a single 24 hour period the USA's population declined from our current 300 million to 225 million. Imagine if the population that went away consisted of the working class: carpenters, plumbers, electricians, mechanics, truck drivers, brick layers, highway workers, railroad engineers, dockworkers, communications technicians, steel workers and more. This is what happened to Egypt. And by the way, if Tim LaHaye's vision of The Rapture is correct this is what is going to happen to the world in general in the near future.

Economic collapse invariably produces an agitated population and that is usually accompanied with political upheaval. These circumstances at the time of the Exodus drove Egypt to become the equivalent of Russia at end of the 20th century. A one-time superpower suddenly could barely feed their own citizens, provide jobs, fend off invaders, or sustain military or civilian morale. Those who had the means to leave (those with education and money) did, further eroding the nation's ability to survive let alone prosper. Expansionary ideas of the national leaders had to be put on hold in favor of merely keeping the nation from disintegrating. That was Egypt at the time Joshua led the Israelites across the Jordan River.

But now at the time of David, some 350 years or so after the Exodus, Egypt had made a comeback. Pharaohs Merneptah and Ramesses III battled the Libyans and other North African nations that had allied themselves with Libya. Egypt prevailed and captured many of the enemy and, as the Pharaoh of Jacob's day had done, placed them in the Delta region of Egypt well away from the bulk of the Egyptian population. Once again the ability to grow food allowed that population of immigrants to rapidly increase; only this time Egypt assimilated these people rather than grow paranoid at their size and then subjugate them as they did with the Hebrews. Thus the captured Libyans and their allies became part of the Egyptian national fabric in the same way that migrant Italians, Chinese, Africans, Hispanics, and others came to America as foreigners but in time most blended in and became Americans.

During the time of David the Pharaoh of Egypt allowed a very able man of Libyan descent to begin his rise up the ranks of the Egyptian military command structure. By Solomon's time this Libyan became a general and went on to assume the throne as Pharaoh of Egypt! His name was **Shoshenk**, also called **Shishak**, and we find mention of him in the Bible in 1st Kings and in 2nd Chronicles.

By the time of the 2nd book of Samuel, Egypt was once again a powerful nation and had expansion in mind. The first step was to reunite Upper and Lower Egypt into a single nation under a single government. Once that was accomplished Egypt looked north to the area of Canaan to re-establish a presence that they had enjoyed for centuries before Jacob ever ventured to Egypt to be reunited with his son, Joseph. The first place **Shoshenk** looked was at Phoenicia as they were traders and merchants and seafarers and could give Egypt a wide market for their goods. At the same time **Shishak** attempted many forays into Judah to try and establish some forts as Egyptian outposts. He met with little success at least during David's and Solomon's time.

The Phoenicians were generally peaceful and established good relations with any who merely wanted access to trade. In some ways they were like the Philistines, in that they weren't so

interested in acquiring territory as they were in doing business. And since business in that era involved access and use of land and sea trade routes, then most of the Phoenician military action had to do with either acquiring or defending those trade routes in order that marauders and pirates didn't plunder them, and so that nations where those trade lanes traversed didn't extract exorbitant taxes and tolls that essentially took away all the profit. Egypt wanted a piece of the action and so there was great synergy by means of Egypt and Phoenicia establishing good diplomatic relations and co-operating on trade.

In any case, for economic reasons Phoenicia began expanding into the Mediterranean first with Cyprus, and then began to move eastward into North Syria with the weakening of the Arameans. Sidon and Byblos were allies of Phoenicia and together they extended their influence all the way to Greece. With Egypt's help, together they also dominated the North African coastal region on out into the Atlantic Ocean.

The bottom line is that Egypt and Phoenicia were economic powerhouses, and they controlled the coastal ports that the Philistines would have liked at their own disposal and that David and Solomon coveted.

Back to Canaan, the Bible is still our best source. Very little is known about the Philistines except through the Bible, a few Egyptian records, and minor mention in Phoenician record. We know that the Philistines were eventually subdued but not eliminated by David, and that their power waned. David was on the verge of consolidating his power in Canaan to a degree that that land had probably never known.

So as we open the 2nd book of Samuel, this was the condition of the known world, and this is what would face David as he assumed the throne of Israel as God's anointed king. What we have is essentially a golden moment in history when the large regional powers (who could have been formidable foes against Israel) were instead busy elsewhere establishing trade, building strategic powerbases and creating alliances, coalescing the various political factions of their own nations into something more cohesive, and fighting their immediate neighbors. So Israel was more or less under the radar and left alone by these foreign powers to establish itself as a new nation. David's foe of any consequence was the Philistines, and after spending almost 2 years among them he knew them pretty well. David knew their strengths, vulnerabilities, and military tactics. He knew their kings, military leaders, and their weaponry. This would allow him to defeat the Philistines and turn his attention to finally claiming all the territory that Yehoveh had promised to Abraham and Moses, and to nation building. His son Solomon would take over a relatively stable Israel and build it into a wealthy and admired sovereign state. However from beginning to end, the ancient history of Israel as a unified

nation lasted less than one century.

Open your Bibles to 2nd Samuel chapter 1.

READ 2ND SAMUEL CHAPTER 1 all

David's rise to power can generally be seen as occurring in 3 distinct stages. First is his time in King Sha'ul's inner court as the king's musician, loyal armor bearer, and friend to Saul's son Jonathan. The second stage is David becoming Saul's enemy due to Saul's paranoia that stems from God abandoning the king. Then we see David's flight from the king with Jonathan's help, his forming a mercenary army of 600 disaffected Israelites, and then a long period of wandering and hiding to avoid Saul's murderous intentions. These first two stages take place in the last half of the book of 1st Samuel. The third stage is David's coronation as King over Judah (the southern portion of Canaan) and then his consolidation of power as he also becomes King over the northern portion of Canaan, the part that was most loyal to King Saul. This occurs in the first few chapters of 2nd Samuel.

Verse 1 opens with, "After the death of Saul". The Bible often uses the death of leaders and prominent characters to mark the end of one era and beginning of another. The first words of the book of Joshua are, "After the death of Moses". And then the first words of the book of Judges are, "After the death of Joshua". Thus we see why if one is going to divide the long Samuel Scroll into two, this is a logical place. So the essence of these few words is that a critical page in redemption history has turned; the era of Saul is over and the era of David has begun. It is only Saul's death that makes David free to turn away from his 2 year alliance with King Achish of the Philistines and turn back to re-establishing his connection first with his own tribe of Judah, and then next with Saul's kingdom.

It was the 3rd day after David and his men had returned to their devastated village of Ziklag. A bittersweet return it was because happily they had retrieved every last person that the Amalekites had kidnapped (wives, children, the elderly), recovered all the goods and food that had been taken, and even came home with a sizeable amount of loot they took from the Amalekites they had killed in the battle to free their families. However their homes lay in ruins and David and his men had been barred from participating with his hosts, the Philistines, in battle because the Philistine Lords didn't trust David; so he and his men were caught in a political no-man's land. As far as David knew Saul was still in charge of Israel and still determined to kill him. Where was home to be?

Even more, David and his men were in ever increasing anxiety over what had happened to their brethren in Israel at the hands of the Philistines. It seemed inevitable that the Philistines would be victorious in this great battle, but to what extent? At the moment, they had no idea of the outcome. One can only imagine the sick feeling in the pit of David's stomach as a messenger approaches him, breathless, clothing torn, dirt caked in his hair. All of these are the typical signs of mourning for a Hebrew, and for many Middle Eastern cultures.

The unnamed man falls at David's feet, prostrates himself in respect, and David begins to question him. Where has he come from asks David; from the battle camp of Israel the man reports. What was the outcome of the battle asks David; disaster says the young man, the **ammim**, God's people, have fled before the Philistines. Then the worst possible news for David: Jonathan and Saul are both dead.

David of course knows that soldiers often mix fact with scuttlebutt so he asks the messenger how he knows for sure that Saul and Jonathan are dead. The man goes on to explain what he had seen with his own eyes. He says that as the battle raged on he found himself on Mount Gilboa and there was the King of Israel, badly wounded, leaning on his spear. Philistine chariots were swirling all around them and the Israelites had been overrun by cavalry. Saul called to this young soldier and asked him who he was; he responds that he's the son of an Amalekite foreigner who had settled in Israel. The king explained that he was in agony but certain to die and so wanted this Amalekite lad to kill him. He did. And so the young Amalekite took Saul's crown and bracelet and immediately ran here to present them to David along with his report. As they say, there are some days that it doesn't pay to get out of bed.

Even after one has some time to think this fellow's story over and see that such a thing as reported is highly improbable on a number of levels, this messenger was doomed the minute he presented himself before David. How could he have known that David had only just finished dispatching the souls of around 1000 Amalekites and that this audience was taking place in what was left of David's village thanks to this man's relatives. If ever there was a bad time to be an Amalekite it was at this moment, especially while bearing this kind of news.

David's emotions are running high and he seems to believe the Amalekite (which is the worst thing for this young soldier). Distraught David and all of his men began wailing and crying and tearing at their clothing in honest and deeply felt grief. They fasted and mourned on behalf of Saul and Jonathan, and for the catastrophe that had befallen the house of Israel. The bulk of Israeli territory was now under the control of gentiles.

Later, after several hours of mourning, David's grief turned to rage and he asks the same question of the young man that he says Saul had asked: who are you and where are you from? The man testified against himself yet again. He was the son of an Amalekite foreigner, living among Israel. In Hebrew the boy says he's an Amalekite **ger**. This is key; a **ger** means a resident alien. This is a person who lives peacefully among the Israelites, but retains his own tribal identity. A **ger** does have some obligations but is not bound to Israel's covenants with God. A **ger** is not a foreigner who has come to Israel to become a citizen of Israel; he is a foreigner who wishes to remain a foreigner. Yet a **ger** is bound enough that he is expected to know Israel's ways and to adhere to most of them.

Why is this so important? Because this helps us to understand the significance of a crucial passage in the book of Ephesians that explains our relationship, as Believers, to Israel.

(Eph 2:10-19 CJB)

¹⁰ For we are of God's making, created in union with the Messiah Yeshua for a life of good actions already prepared by God for us to do.

¹¹ Therefore, remember your former state: you Gentiles by birth- called the Uncircumcised by those who, merely because of an operation on their flesh, are called the Circumcised-

¹² at that time had no Messiah. You were estranged from the national life of Isra'el. You were foreigners to the covenants embodying God's promise. You were in this world without hope and without God.

¹³ But now, you who were once far off have been brought near through the shedding of the Messiah's blood.

¹⁴ For he himself is our shalom- he has made us both one and has broken down the m'chitzah which divided us

¹⁵ by destroying in his own body the enmity occasioned by the Torah, with its commands set forth in the form of ordinances. He did this in order to create in union with himself from the two groups a single new humanity and thus make shalom,

¹⁶ and in order to reconcile to God both in a single body by being executed on a stake as a criminal and thus in himself killing that enmity.

¹⁷ Also, when he came, he announced as Good News shalom to you far off and shalom

to those nearby,

¹⁸ news that through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father.

¹⁹ So then, you are no longer foreigners and strangers. On the contrary, you are fellow-citizens with God's people and members of God's family.

The Amalekite was permitted to live among Israel as a foreigner, a gentile stranger. But NOT as part of the family of God; NOT as a citizen along with God's people. Could he have become a citizen of Israel? Yes, if he wished to; but apparently neither he nor his father wanted to be counted as an Israelite (and notice that he does not identify himself as an Israelite but rather an Amalekite). As I explained in earlier lessons, all gentiles are born with the spirit of Amalek. We are born as enemies of God and of His Kingdom. The only remedy for us is to accept God's mercy in the form of His Son Yeshua.

And when gentiles by birth accept the Jewish Messiah by faith, we are no longer estranged from the national life of Israel. As verse 12 of Ephesians 2 says, "You were foreigners towhat?" We were foreigners to God's covenants. And with whom did God make those covenants? With Hebrews. A **ger** lives outside of Israel's covenants even though he may live as a foreigner alongside Israel. But one who accepts Messiah Yeshua, says the book of Ephesians, lives INSIDE of Israel's covenants, as a fellow citizen, as a member of God's family.

Can you be a Christian and at the same time reject Israel's covenants? Over and over the Old Testament and New say, "NO!" You cannot do such a thing because to accept Messiah IS to accept Israel's covenants. Outside of Israel's covenants a Messiah has no meaning. Or as Paul would say in Romans 11, a gentile is grafted INTO the covenants of Israel when we are saved by means of Christ.

We'll continue this next time.