

2ND SAMUEL

Week 12, chapter 8

The Book of 2nd Samuel gives us a good illustration of the various kinds of literature and their purposes that the several anonymous writers and editors wove together in order to reach a coherent story especially concerning the period of Israel's history when they were ruled by kings. Of course the overriding reality that God inspired and invisibly directed the minds and hands of these authors is why some matters were only briefly discussed while others were given more time and detail.

What always mattered more than gory battle accounts and precise chronology were the God-principles that were being elucidated and taught. This unorthodox method (that we find in the Hebrew Bible) of briefly and matter-of-factly recording wars and dynasties and the accomplishments of kings and potentates was totally unlike that of Israel's neighbors who tended to glorify and even deify human leaders and to eulogize military victories in expansive sagas of heroism, bravery, and warfare skill. And while only a precious few Hebrews in that era recognized the sure and steady hand of the God of Israel in the events that guided and described Israel's progress, and fewer still comprehended the deeper spiritual element of God's pronouncements and His predetermined unfolding of redemptive history, we worshippers of Yehoveh of the 21st century have the benefit of hindsight and the coming of Messiah Yeshua to aid us. This advantage of hindsight gives us a more complete and comprehensive view of the amazing divine path and the many milestones that marked the way and how they all interconnected to bring us to these, the Latter Days, as we near the finish line of God's redemptive program.

Thus after the first 6 chapters of 2nd Samuel that used a great deal of dialogue among Biblical characters to chronicle and explain David's rise to the throne upon Saul's death, chapter 7 paused to impart the REASON that Yehoveh was doing what He was doing especially as it concerned making David great in the eyes of his people and feared and admired by the surrounding nations. But Chapter 7 was also future oriented; it was prophetic. God determined that this was the moment that He would lift a corner of the veil (ever so slightly) that lay over His plan of redemption, and reveal it to David since the cornerstone of that plan would involve an unnamed and unknown descendant of the king. Neither David nor his subjects could have known what we know with a certainty: that mysterious descendant was Yeshua of Nazareth, God's Messiah.

It is fitting that the issue of the Temple is what the lesson of 2nd Samuel chapter 7 was built around because the point for David (in wanting to build a Temple) was how to ensure God's presence with him at all times. So while God was essentially responding to David's request by explaining that He had no need or want for a fancy earthly dwelling place, and that His natural mode was to travel with His people, David was still thinking in terms of building a necessarily immobile stone and cedar wood edifice for the Lord. In fact (and I have little doubt that David did not get this point) God made it clear that even though He would allow a son of David to build a Temple, that God would NOT be dwelling there (as a sort of bird in a cage or a genie in a bottle). However His NAME would dwell there.

Thus in retrospect we can see all the parameters being laid out for a whole series of realities that would come a long time into the future from David's day. The most important parameters being that God dwells in Heaven, not on earth; and that He cannot be housed in a building made by men but rather He will be constantly present among and within His people. In times far beyond David's time God will make His presence available not only to priests and royalty but to all people who trust in Him. And they will not have to go to a specific place to visit Him and worship Him, but He will travel with them wherever they go and be with them wherever they are.

I'm not sure a modern day Believer can comprehend what a radical notion that was. What the Israelites thought regarding where gods live and how gods interact with the nations in their charge was generally the same thoughts that their idol worshipping neighbors harbored. Whatever David pictured as how God accomplished His plan to always be present with His people on earth is certainly not what we now know to be the case.

^{CJB} **2 Corinthians 6:16** What agreement can there be between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God- as God said, "I will house myself in them,... and I will walk among you. I will be their God, and they will be my people."

Thus we see that just as the Lord said in 2nd Samuel Chapter 7, He has determined to be in a tabernacle, a **portable** dwelling place, so that He can travel with His people. While the New Testament commonly refers to us (God's worshippers) as His Temples, that is really just a reflection of the common speech of the times. More correctly we are NOT God's Temples, we are His tabernacles.

Not only that but because the Lord will house Himself **in** His people, no separation from Him can occur. In other words if the Lord permitted Himself to be housed inside a Temple building, then He was by definition separated from His people unless they journeyed to that Temple.

(Rom 8:38-39 CJB)

³⁸ For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor other heavenly rulers, neither what exists nor what is coming,

³⁹ neither powers above nor powers below, nor any other created thing will be able to separate us from the love of God which comes to us through the Messiah Yeshua, our Lord.

David did not comprehend all this, nor did he comprehend how it could be that his descendant would rule over God's people **ad'olam** (forever) because in its simplest sense this means that his mysterious descendant would LIVE forever! But David did understand that what God was proposing was beyond anything that a man could imagine or bring about, and David believed God. My brothers and sisters in Christ, that is all that the Lord asks of us; He asks us to believe Him and to trust Him even though we are not equipped to grasp all the depth of His promises or to understand how it is possible for them to come about or precisely when they will be manifested. That is the essence of walking by faith and not by sight.

Let's move on to chapter 8 where the form and nature of what is written makes a dramatic shift.

READ 2ND SAMUEL CHAPTER 8 all

The record of God's promises to establish His "forever" Kingdom through David's lineage (in chapter 7) is now followed by an account of the wars that David fought to expand and establish the earthly boundaries of that Kingdom. We need to note that this chapter is not in strict chronological order with the other chapters of 2nd Samuel, nor are the events depicted in the chapter in perfect order since that is not the point. The idea was to produce a summary; a brief

catalogue of military victories under David. The opening phrase in verse 1, “sometime afterward”, probably ought to be considered as referring to a time not too long after chapter 6 that tells of the arrival of the Ark of the Covenant to the City of David.

Not surprisingly the first war was with the Philistines who had for scores of years tried to lord over Canaan in order to protect their all-important trade routes that criss-crossed the region and connected to their sea ports on the Mediterranean. And we are told that “Meteg-Amah was taken out of the hands of the Philistines”. This problematic phrase appears differently in practically every Bible version created but some of that is because of a failure by Bible scholars to connect it to the parallel account as recorded 1Chronicles 18.

(1Ch 18:1 CJB)

CJB 1 Chronicles 18:1 Some time afterwards, David attacked the P'lishtim and subdued them; David took Gat and its villages out of the hands of the P'lishtim.

Meteg-Amah can be literally translated as “the bridle of the mother”. This is a figure of speech that in some ways is still common in the Middle East today. Who can forget Saddam Hussein promising America the “mother of all wars” if our armed forces were to attack? In Middle Eastern thought the “mother” is often seen as the chief or the originator of something. Thus in Philistia the city of Gath was seen as the chief city (the mother city) and the other 4 cities that formed the Pentapolis of the Philistines as the daughter cities. The bridle controls the beast and so in whomever’s hand the bridle rests has power over beast. Gath was the most powerful of the 5 Philistine cities, a sort of capital city (even though the 5 cities were generally independent of one another), and so the Lord or King of Gath held sway over the other 4. What is being explained here (in such typical oriental fashion) is that Gath and its king (who, interestingly, was still Achish who had harbored David from the murderous King Saul) was captured by David. By capturing Gath (the mother city of the Pentapolis) the Philistines were greatly weakened and their influence over the region was effectively neutered.

So while Meteg-Amah is referring to Gath, it’s no more an official or alternate formal name for Gath than the Big Apple is an official or alternate formal name for New York City. But it is indicative of that city’s importance and status and it acknowledges that it is that nation’s overall power center.

The next victory is briefly described in verse 2 and it is over the Moabites. It is surprising that

David ordered such harsh treatment of the Moabite population so that apparently 2/3rds of the troops of Moab were executed. The passage says that David used a length of cord to measure the people (the troops) of Moab and for every two lengths he killed 2 soldiers and for every 1 length he allowed the soldier to live. There is no other record of any conquering nation that used such a strange method to determine who lived and who died among the enemy, therefore I highly suspect that this is merely a figure of speech and there wasn't actually a measuring ceremony. Rather there was (I'm sure) some summary means of lining up the defeated combatants and killing 2 out of 3 and it was as if someone used a cord to measure out those who would die.

What surprises me more than the mass execution is that this involved Moab. Moab had been a friend of sorts to David and his family in years past. The King of Moab agreed to let David's parents and family live there, protected, while David was on the run from King Saul. Even more, David's famous ancestor Ruth was from Moab so there was an ancient family connection. Although it is not recorded it must have been that Moab seriously offended David and the repercussions were very severe; or David concluded that unless Moab was greatly weakened they would not be controllable and the most expedient way to weaken a nation has always been to diminish their military.

Verse 3 explains that part of David's aim was to extend Israel's dominion to the Euphrates River. No doubt this was seen in David's eyes as a given since it was promised to Abraham in Genesis 15.

^{CJB} **Genesis 15:18** *That day ADONAI made a covenant with Avram: "I have given this land to your descendants- from the Vadi of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates River-*

Thus David led an expeditionary force to the north and east and so confronted the nations of that region who had no intention of becoming part of a Greater Israel if they could help it. A fellow named **Hadad'ezer** was the General of the Army from the nation of **Tzovah**, a nation located near Damascus, Syria. **Hadad** was the name of the supreme Sun God of that culture and so this fellow's name meant, "Hadad is my help". This army of Hadad had many horses and chariots and they were all captured by David's forces. But David, who was aware of God's instructions from Deuteronomy 17, kept only sufficient horses to operate 100 chariot teams and he hobbled the remainder.

(Deut 17:15-16 CJB)

¹⁵ In that event, you must appoint as king the one whom ADONAI your God will choose. He must be one of your kinsmen, this king you appoint over you- you are forbidden to appoint a foreigner over you who is not your kinsman.

¹⁶ However, he is not to acquire many horses for himself or have the people return to Egypt to obtain more horses, inasmuch as ADONAI told you never to go back that way again.

Aram and **Tzovah** were part of a large coalition that included the nation of **Ammon**, and apparently they acted to help one another when attacked. So next we read that some Arameans came to the aid of Hadad and they, too, were slaughtered by David's army. Here we see the time when the area around Damascus came under Israel's influence and control as David didn't merely conquer them he left substantial garrisons of troops to secure the region. Thus from here forward we'll see a connection between Syria (usually called Damascus) and Israel that continued all throughout Biblical times, much of the time as friends and other times as enemies. A substantial Jewish community even sprang up there and so we find the Apostle Paul on his way to Damascus to try to expose or arrest some Jesus sympathizers.

Verses 7 through 12 explain that David confiscated gold and bronze from the conquered peoples and took it back to Yerushalayim, no doubt to be stored away for later use to construct the Temple, its furnishings and ritual implements. Then we find out that he also attacked another army killing 18,000 of its troops and this gained David an even greater level of fame than he was already enjoying.

Verse 13 speaks of his battle with Aram in the Salt Valley; Aram is a copyist error. The Valley of Salt was in Edom, not Aram. This of course comports with the next verse that states that David garrisoned troops in Edom and that all of Edom became subject to King David. But it also shifts the scene from the north to the south and records how David expanded Israel towards the southeast as well as to the northeast. And then the key to all of David's successes ends verse 14: "Adonai (YHWH actually) gave victory to David wherever he went." The phrase "wherever he went" brings us full circle back to the point of the previous chapter, 2nd Samuel chapter 7: God travels with His people; He is not left behind in a golden box. He is present with David wherever David is, and this is at God's doing and not David's. A Temple is not needed and in fact no ritual article of furniture is needed for Yehoveh's presence. Further God is not limited by national boundaries. All people of all known cultures in that era believed as

unassailable fact that their gods' sphere of authority went no further than their own national boundaries but that they could transport that god with them to foreign conflicts and hopefully that god could do them some good (such as intimidating the enemy).

Verse 15 explains a couple of important premises about David's reign: 1st it is that he ruled over **all Israel**. The term "all Israel" is one we've discussed on a number of occasions because except for brief periods of time Israel was always divided into two main camps: Judah and Israel or (as it was called a few years after King Solomon's death) Judah and Ephraim. So while on the surface the term "all Israel" might seem superfluous to the average Bible student in fact it is a critical piece of information that the ancient Hebrews would have instantly grabbed hold of. David ruled over all the tribes of Israel that are now formed into a single sovereign nation. This had not been so since the days of Joshua. Sadly although David's son Solomon would inherit this arrangement and even improve upon it, within a matter of 3 or 4 years after Solomon's death Israel would fall into civil war and dissolve back into its age-old tribal coalitions that primarily consisted of the 10 to the north (Ephraim) and the 2 to the south (Judah).

The 2nd piece of important information in verse 15 is that David ruled in (what the CJB and other versions translate as) law and justice. That is a poor translation. The original Hebrew is ***mishpat tzedekah*** and it ought to be translated as justice and righteousness or probably most literally as righteous judgment. Here is the appearance of a pattern that was called for in the Torah; and we'll encounter several places in David's story where the narrator will point out an action of David that is actually a Torah command or pattern.

(Deut 16:18-20 CJB)

18 "You are to appoint judges and officers for all your gates [in the cities] ADONAI your God is giving you, tribe by tribe; and they are to judge the people with righteous judgment.

19 You are not to distort justice or show favoritism, and you are not to accept a bribe, for a gift blinds the eyes of the wise and twists the words of even the upright.

20 Justice, only justice, you must pursue; so that you will live and inherit the land ADONAI your God is giving you.

Here in Deuteronomy we see that phrase "righteous judgment", ***mishpat tzedek***, and it is in the form of a commandment that Israel's civil authorities are to rule by adhering to this

underlying premise. Deuteronomy 16 even goes so far as to define righteous judgment by saying that there is to be no favoritism or distortion of justice and no accepting a bribe to predetermine an outcome. And this is what is being ascribed to David's rule. Notice also the final words of verse 15 that says that David applied this *mishpat tzedek* to all the people. This is not referring to social-economic classes but rather to the ongoing reality that David did not show partiality to his own tribal coalition of Judah over Saul's old coalition of the northern tribes.

The chapter ends by listing David's senior cabinet members. Joab (**Yo'av**) who had several years earlier murdered Abner (the supreme military commander of the northern tribal coalition) and thus seemed on the verge of being tossed aside by David, has apparently survived and even cemented his position as David's right-hand man and general of the military. A fellow named **Y'hoshaphat** (Jehoshaphat) is sometimes called David's chief advisor, but that is misleading. He was David's **zakar**, his recorder or perhaps scribe. He was charged with recording the official history of David's administration including battle details, pacts and treaties with other nations, family genealogy and to a degree he was David's royal biographer.

Verse 17 throws out a tantalizing tidbit that is easy to overlook as it does so with no fanfare. It is that **Tzadok** became a chief priest or (better) High Priest and that he shared that duty with Abiathar. That's right: David had 2 High Priests. This was purely a political accommodation that set aside the Law of God on the matter. Abiathar was seen as the legitimate High Priest by the northern tribes, but was not seen so by the south. So David appointed **Tzadok**, which satisfied the people of Judah. Now in reality Abiathar was NOT a God-authorized High Priest because he came from the line of Ithamar; the High Priest was supposed to come from the line of Eleazar. But since the time of Eli (Samuel's mentor) the High Priest had come from the line of Ithamar and thus this was the line of High Priests that existed under King Saul. **Tzadok** on the other hand came from the proper God-ordained line of Eleazar. After Solomon took over from his father he deposed Abiathar and so Israel then finally only had 1 High Priest, the one from the correct lineage, **Tzadok**.

The final verse is a bit cryptic and difficult to understand what it is trying to communicate. First: a man named **B'nayahu** is said to have charge over the **Kreti** and **P'leti**. Some ancient manuscripts add that these were David's bodyguards. Assuming this is correct then what we have here are two groups of foreigners who were hired as mercenaries to be used to protect David at his palace. A personal bodyguard was typical for all kings, and it was also typical to use foreign mercenaries rather than the local nationality. The reason was that foreigners had no real axe to grind about who was king; they worked for money. But there were always disagreements and jealousies among local tribes and clans who felt that perhaps one of their own had the right to power; so to use guards taken from among them presented more of an opportunity for a coup attempt.

But we also see that essentially David divided the duty of the civilian police force (David's bodyguard) from the military and put them under separate commanders. In a later chapter we'll find out that this **B'nayahu** will eventually supplant **Yo'av** as Israel's military commander (King Solomon will make this change).

The 2nd piece of difficult information is that it seems to say that David's sons were given the job of priests. Considering that David saw it as no problem to appoint 2 High Priests one has to wonder if he felt free to assign as common priests anyone that he chose. Some Rabbis say that here the Hebrew word **cohanim** does not mean priests but rather means ministers or rulers (which, frankly, has no comparable use in the remainder of the Bible) and I doubt this is correct. Other Rabbis admit that we need to take this at face value and accept that for some reason David made his sons priests.

I've said it in earlier lessons and I'm sure I'll say it again numerous times: Israel was woefully ignorant of the Law of Moses and generally merely followed manmade customs and traditions and did what seemed right in their own eyes. That David would think that he could choose not only to maintain 2 High Priests but also to appoint his own sons as priests (who obviously were Judahites and NOT Levites) is just another indication of the willful ignorance of Torah that sent Israel into a long death spiral ending in disgrace and exile from their land inheritance.

With that particular thought in mind let's exit chapter 8 and move on to chapter 9; but before we do (which will happen next week) I'd like to set the stage by making a paraphrase and adding a bit to a comment made by the marvelous Jewish/Christian scholar and writer of the 19th century Alfred Edersheim. In his wonderful work entitled *Bible History of the Old Testament* he makes a general observance about Biblical characters (most of them referred to as Bible heroes) that we need to keep in mind especially in our study of David and then Solomon. It is this: there is a common if not alarming peculiarity about even the most prominent and highly praised Bible personalities, and it presents us with a rather humbling personal lesson if only we'll pay attention and allow it to sink deeply into our hearts.

As we watch these especially revered characters appear in the holy texts, and then as we see them progress, they seem at times to be far beyond our reach in their purity of thoughts and actions. It seems as though perhaps the evil inclinations and our propensity to give in to temptations and impulses that derails us mere mortals and at times sends us spiraling into guilt and defeat, didn't even exist in them at all (and I say that this is patently unfair!) It is almost that their awesome life of walking in faith and courage is no example for us at all because they

are so near-perfect in their selfless devotion to God and His will that we cannot envision ourselves ever approaching it. But then suddenly, without warning, almost to the last man or woman, these Bible heroes fall. A dark shadow passes upon them that (ironically) illuminates a hidden side of their character that we didn't see coming; one that seems incongruous with what we have otherwise seen them accomplish. On the one hand this demonstrates to us the terrible (and often unseemly) struggles that actually went on inside these great Bible heroes even as they went about the divine task assigned to them by the Lord; and on the other hand we are witness to how God's divine grace alone had given them the victory over those dark inner struggles, many of which we can easily imagine but were not necessarily detailed or even written down.

What is even more alarming is that we often find these great heroes of faith succumbing to this dark shadow of flawed character just as they are reaching the spiritual climax of their lives. **After** they've accomplished the greatest feats, **after** they've witnessed divine miracles and experienced deliverances in ways that have become legendary and are recounted countless times in sermons and Sunday School lessons, and **after** they have seemingly won out against fear and rebellion and are at the pinnacle of faith, that is when their decline begins.

We saw this dilemma appear with Moses and Aaron, we watched Abraham turn his own wife over to Pharaoh, and we've already had some glimpses of it (and will soon witness it at an even greater level) with David and later still with Elijah. What we need to take from this is that God didn't pick great men and women to do His work on earth, God picked ordinary men and women to use for great things that He would do. The same flaws that we fight, these admirable Bible characters had. We need not be intimidated by the Bible heroes, nor ought we to put them on a pedestal as untouchable. They merely did the one thing that many of us have not: they said "yes" when the Lord called, not knowing what that "yes" might entail or lead to because that is invariably the condition for serving Him.

But for those who have answered the Lord's call, and have participated in things of merit for the Kingdom that others stand back and admire or pray that they would be called to do, be forewarned: being at the pinnacle of faith and accomplishment often means that the fall to the valley floor below is longer and more jarring when you arrive there. So if we **have** answered the call and **have** been led to great victories we not only have to carefully maintain our humility before God, but we also need to maintain ourselves in His kindness in the same way as when we first ascended to the mountain top; by trusting in His sufficiency and not in our own knowledge or abilities. By recognizing that we are all humans and that failures and defeats will be part of our lives, and all the more so if we think that we have finally reached some point of nearness to God as to make us immune.

And in the coming chapters as we watch David succumb to his own humanness and to his own agendas (often woven together with God's for cover) we need to do so with understanding and sorrow as opposed to surprise and condemnation. After all, every single one of the greatest Bible heroes were mere humans as much in need of God's constant favor and grace and forgiveness as are we.