

2ND SAMUEL

Week 34, chapter 22

As we continue in this well-known Song of Thanksgiving of 2nd Samuel chapter 22, I'll start by reminding you that this same Song appears in Psalms as the 18th. We'll still not finish chapter 22 today, so rich and deep are its lessons for us.

This Song is David's soaring and majestic offer of gratitude to the Lord for all the goodness David has been shown. The divine inspiration presented in the Psalm is especially obvious when he talks about future kings and the future kingdom. But there are other elements of this work that reminds us that David was all too human and so we'll find this anointed King of Israel at times presenting an inflated view of himself that conflicts with what we've already read and learned about him. Some of what we'll read is generalities; some is actually harking back to specific events.

So this is a complex poem that offers prayer, praise, wisdom and prophecy. Trying to discover which is which is not always easy but it is certainly doable. So let's get started.

We ended with verse 13 last time, and the stanza of the poem that began at verse 8 describes an event whereby the Lord God decided to act in a violent way against those who were His anointed King's enemies. It is self-evident that this is describing something that did not happen in David's day for we never hear of, nor read of, such a cosmic display of divine wrath in order to deliver David from some enemy.

But especially in verses 10 through 12, when we peel away the veil of the English language and peer into the original Hebrew, we see what must be a future event to David's era, but when might that be? I'll not review the details of last week's discussion on the subject, however the connected use of the words **Sukkah** and **mayim** (booths and water) gives us a large hint that this event occurs on the Feast of Tabernacles (**Sukkot**) whose main features

are booths (**Sukkah**) and the water libation ceremony that asks God for rain (**mayim**). Thus my conclusion was that what we have here is a prophetic vision of the End Times when God pours out His wrath on the earth during the time of the coming (the return) of Messiah, God's anointed king and mediator between God and man.

So with this understanding let's read a little more of chapter 22.

RE-READ 2ND SAMUEL 22:14 -16

A thunderstorm is often used as a Biblical metaphor for the God of Israel expressing His displeasure with something and that is what is being imagined here. The ancients had no understanding of the source of thunder and since it came from the clouds (or from above the clouds) it was thought of as coming from the gods; the Hebrews more or less imagined it in the same way.

Thus when we read in numerous places in the Scriptures that God thundered from heaven, it is explaining that the intimidating claps of thunder are sure indicators that God is angry and that this anger in heaven is the precursor to His wrath soon being physically poured out on earth (usually upon God's enemies, at other times upon the unfaithful among God's own people). Thus thunder was often considered as God's voice. Here in the 2nd half of the couplet that forms verse 14 we see a word or title for God that bears a moment of explanation. Usually translated into English as Most High, a better translation would be THE Most High. The Hebrew is **Ha'Elyon**. **Ha** is Hebrew for "the", and **Elyon** is Hebrew for "most high". But "most high" is not actually literal; rather it is a dynamic translation that struggles to get a meaning across that can be comprehended by non-Hebrews and non-Hebrew speakers and the modern world in general. A bit more literal might be, "the highest El".

I have been quite repetitious and insistent for many years throughout our studies of the Torah and the Old Testament, that it is critical to understand the mindset of the people of that particular Biblical era and therefore what they mentally pictured as they wrote these words that we all hold so dear. And by no means was it yet fully ingrained in the Israelites that there was but one God in all existence, and that this one God was sovereign over all people, nations, and elements of nature. What they more or less accepted as of David's day was that **Israel** had only one God, and His name was YHWH. They also accepted that other nations had other gods (more gods than Israel had), and the names and works of these gods and goddesses was quite well known to the Israelites since they lived in Canaan, a place where many (if not

most) of the land's original residents still remained and still practiced their ancient Babylon Mystery religions.

EI was the standard Middle Eastern name for the chief god that sat at the top of each separate nation's particular pantheon of gods. Every Middle Eastern culture recognized an **EI**, even if they imagined him slightly differently from culture to culture. So David's mental picture, and the meaning that people of David's era ascribed to the term **Ha'Elyon**, is of YHWH being 1) Israel's **EI** (Israel's highest god, especially so since Yehoveh was Israel's only god), and also that YHWH was **EI** over the other EIs of all the other cultures (sort of the Chairman of the Board of EIs). **Ha'Elyon** was essentially a uniquely Hebrew concept of there being one God who is higher and more powerful than all other gods that exist (including all the other EIs that exist). So we must not think that David (or others in his day) had this neat, clean concept of monotheism as modern Judeo-Christianity holds. We know that there is but one God in the entire Universe (and beyond) and that any thought of another god whatsoever or in any capacity is but wicked human fantasy. David seems to have held that YHWH was the best and highest of all gods, perfect and without peer; but that indeed there were other gods and these other gods were in no way fanciful thoughts of men. We will see David's successor, Solomon, acknowledge this in a very tangible and visible way as he allows his many wives and concubines to erect idols, Asherah, and altars to scores of other gods right alongside Yehoveh's holiest places.

Verse 15 continues the thunderstorm motif as lightning bolts are imagined as God's arrows being shot from heaven. The meaning is that Yehoveh sent His blows earthward like arrows raining down upon David's enemies. I said at the outset of today's lesson that some of these actions are general in nature while some are meant to be taken as more specific; this one about the lightning is a generality. But in verse 16 we have an obvious reference to the parting of the Red Sea, when the waters piled up into liquid walls as the Hebrews fleeing from Pharaoh marched across the now-exposed sea bottom. Recall that in Exodus were told that a wind blew across the muddy seabed and dried it to make it easier and quicker for Israel to escape over it. Thus we have David remember this event by using the imagery of the channels of the sea appearing (the uneven floor of sea), the foundations of the world being exposed (what lay below the mysterious and deadly ocean), and then that is followed with a blast of breath from the Lord's fiery nostrils. And such a recollection as the parting of the Red Sea for Moses is most appropriate as the theme of this song is gratitude to God for divine deliverance from certain death and destruction at the hand of an enemy. So here we have in this Song an example of a specific, as opposed to a general, action of God as He saves His people from calamity.

But I also see something else; immediately preceding this section (verses 14-16) was a prophetic vision that concerned God's king and Mediator, the Messiah, in the End Times as God pours out his wrath on the occasion of the Feast of Tabernacles (the Sukkot timing being my opinion based on elements of this and other passages). Thus verses 8-13 deal with God's 2nd Mediator Yeshua (future to David), while verses 14-16 deal with God's 1st Mediator Moses (past to David).

RE-READ 2ND SAMUEL 22:17 - 19

In verse 17 David continues to recognize that it is God alone who saves, and who can save under any circumstance. But if we look closer we see that again a specific event or specific circumstance is probably what David has in mind. Notice in verse 18 that David says he was saved from his powerful enemy; and that the word enemy (**oyeb**) is singular. The Rabbis take note of this and say (correctly I think) that David has in mind such times as when he faced a single adversary (like as against Goliath); but then the next part of the verse adds that God also rescued him from “those who hated me”, and “they who are stronger than I”. These are armies and groups of adversaries acting collectively against David. So whether the danger comes from a single source or an assembly, God still saves.

RE-READ 2ND SAMUEL 22: 20 – 28

Here we enter a section of this Psalm that presents some real difficulties because, frankly, it challenges credibility. David says that God brought him out into an open place. This is referring to times when he was trapped but still escaped. David is thinking militarily as when Saul was chasing him, and David became caught in a pincers movement by Saul and his soldiers, but David miraculously wiggled out of trouble. So the thought is of being hemmed into a tight spot with little room for movement, but then being rescued and placed into a wide-open space where David could maneuver (either to flee or to regroup and take advantage of the terrain). That is all rather straightforward.

But the trouble for us begins when David goes on to explain **why** it is that God did this for him; it is that “Adonai rewarded me for my uprightness; He repaid me because my hands were clean”. Then in the next couple of verses King David goes on to explain that he has kept all the ways of Yehoveh, NOT done evil by leaving God, abiding by all of God's rulings, and not

departing from God's regulations. Further that David was pure-hearted and kept himself from sin.

Verse 25 sums this up by the Psalmist (who is David) explaining that God repaid him with great deliverances for his uprightness and this in accordance to David's purity before God. Wow. Where do we start? I can tell you that as I pursued a way to explain David's thought process in a manner that was considerably less negative than what seemed evident to me, I examined a number of reliable and venerated Jewish and Christian scholars' viewpoints on this passage. And to my surprise, Christian scholars tended to merely skip over and somewhat ignore these statements, apparently taking them at face value without comment or serious examination. And not at all surprisingly, the Jewish Scholars completely agreed with David that he indeed was without fault or sin of any kind and thus Yehoveh responded to David accordingly.

Somehow the damning passage (that emanates from the Prophet Nathan's mouth) that occurs earlier in 2nd Samuel, and obviously refutes David's words of chapter 22, is set on the shelf and ignored; let's go back and re-read a portion of 2nd Samuel chapter 12.

RE-READ 2ND SAMUEL 12: 1 – 14

I'm not sure how to reconcile this passage with what we just read in chapter 22. How can David speak of his own faithfulness to God's laws, how he has kept himself from sin, and yet by his own mouth admitted his fault in chapter 12 verse 13: "I have sinned against Adonai"? How can we have witnessed David's unconscionable behavior with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriyah, and then read of God's curses upon David and seriously accept David's claim in chapter 22 that he is totally upright and innocent? Like so much of what we've seen from David, there seems to be present here a mixture of truth and deception, reserve and exaggeration, humility and braggadocio.

One of the most difficult things for God's worshippers who undertake our duty and obligation to study God's Word diligently in order to ascertain His Will and His character is to discern when some of the Bible's greatest heroes are doing right versus doing wrong. The issue is whether the viewpoints and claims they are making in their recorded conversations are proper representations of God's ways, or whether they have got it wrong and are merely behaving according to ancient custom or they are reacting to their own evil inclinations.

I am **not** speaking of Biblical error or situations whereby we have to decide over which of the stated attributes of God, or which of His laws, are true and pure and others not. I am also **not** speaking of perhaps a Biblical character's words or actions being falsely reported in the Bible. Rather it is that we are often put into a position of having to take all that we have learned by studying God's Word from the beginning, and building upon His laws and principles step by step so that we are equipped to detect when a Biblical character is making a right or a wrong decision; taking a good or an evil action. Because so very often these characters' words or actions receive no negative or positive reinforcement or affirmation in the Bible; they are not commented up but rather merely left to stand as reported as accurate historical fact.

So by all that seems possible, without doing some major doctrinal gymnastics, I can only conclude that most of David's statements in verses 20 – 25 amount to his boasting. Perhaps they are David making some broad assumptions and speculating on why it could only be that the Lord would do such marvelous things on David's behalf (and the reason is his pure and upright behavior and nature). We must remember that David is a king; he has sufficiently demonstrated to us that he enjoys the privileges of royalty, and often sees himself as special and above it all. And this is partly to do with cultural norms and the common thinking of the times. He sees himself as the anointed of God (which is certainly true), but being a flawed man he also assumes that this means that the standards that he insists upon for his citizenry don't necessarily apply to him.

I can see little other way for David to seriously claim such perfect purity and innocence than to take him at his word (as clearly stated in this passage) that essentially what God has done for him in defeating David's enemies is a like-for-like repayment of David's faithful works towards God and towards God's laws and regulations. And I think that theory is proven when we look are verses 26 – 28. These verses are precisely the Torah principle of what most Christians call An Eye for an Eye, and that scholars dub Lex Talionis. Thus David says that with those who behave correctly according to God's standards God shows favor in return. To those who are merciful, God shows mercy; with those who love purity, God is pure. With those who are honest, God displays honesty.

But with those who trespass against God's laws, God deals harshly (in like kind) with them. With the crooked, God is cunning (He is not forthright). People who are haughty, God humbles. But people who are afflicted, God saves. Let's talk about that for a moment. In Hebrew the afflicted people are the "afflicted **am**". And remember, for some time now in the Bible (since shortly after Abraham), the term **am** is referring to God's chosen people. Generally it is referring to Israel, but in the broader scope it is referring to all who worship the God of Israel. So the meaning of verse 28 is a sobering one: God saves His afflicted worshippers. However

to those of His worshippers whose eyes become haughty (those who see themselves as great or above others, presumably due to their own merits), then to those of His people who have such a wrong attitude God will humble them.

Let that sink in. So far we've seen that God utterly destroys His enemies without hope and without mercy. But for those who He sees as His people, He will save them. Yet even among the saved are those who become arrogant, see themselves as holier-than-thou, and who believe themselves to stand above the rules (God's rules) and so live their lives in that way. And to those, God will humble, bring low (sounds like a pretty good description of David to me); but God doesn't abandon them.

Here is a principle that has been abandoned in too many of our modern Churches. The principle is that God will punish those whom He has saved for doing what is wrong. He will not leave them for wrong behavior, but He will cause them great harm on this earth as a consequence for wrong behavior.

On the other hand God **will** abandon those who claim to be His (and we'll not debate whether they actually at one time were His or were really only pretenders) but whose behavior is an outward reflection of who and what it is that they identify with. David and Saul are excellent examples of this principle. Saul and David each committed the most horrible, ungodly behaviors; and did so over an extended period of time in a number of settings and circumstances (so the bad behaviors certainly weren't flukes or exceptions to the rule). Yet Saul was permanently expelled from God's presence and from God's Kingdom, while David was chastised and severely punished but allowed to remain within God's presence and within God's Kingdom. Saul was vomited out of God's mouth for his wrong behavior; David was harshly disciplined but remained loved by God. Why the different treatment? In a nutshell it came down to two factors: identification and zeal.

Saul quit identifying with God, lost any zeal for God, and instead kept trying to find ways around God. Saul eventually saw God as an adversary and so he tried to defeat God's will at every turn (especially when He was directly told by Samuel that David was God's new anointed king and so Saul tried to kill David to stop it). David never quit identifying himself with God, nor lost his zeal for God, nor lost his love and respect for God, and he never tried to usurp God's sovereignty. However David did run very hot (meaning he was determined to act in the most pious faithful manner possible, as when he refused to kill Saul even though Saul was often in his clutches), and he also ran very cold (meaning that although he didn't renounce God's laws, and fully expected others to obey them, he allowed his own evil inclination to rule his life, saw himself as above it all, and thus greatly sinned at times).

I want to quote again a passage for you from Revelation in which this principle is forcefully stated by the End Times Messiah.

(Rev 3:14-16 CJB)

¹⁴ "To the angel of the Messianic Community in Laodicea, write: 'Here is the message from the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the Ruler of God's creation:

¹⁵ "I know what you are doing: you are neither cold nor hot. How I wish you were either one or the other!

¹⁶ So, because you are lukewarm, neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of my mouth!

CJB Revelation 3:19 As for me, I rebuke and discipline everyone I love; so exert yourselves, and turn from your sins!

I cringe every time I hear a well meaning Pastor tell his congregation that a) sinning has nothing to do with obedience to any written Biblical regulation of God and b) no amount of behavioral sins will bring the Believer any punishment from God. And although they don't state it, the reason for this doctrine is the incorrect belief that divine punishment equates to divine abandonment.

Folks, Christ couldn't be clearer that He rebukes and disciplines everyone He loves, but who commits wrong behavior (sin). So as it applies to Christ's followers, to avoid a rebuke and discipline that He would rather not have to do, turn from your sins. Turn from your disobedience to God's laws and commands (which is the ONLY Biblical definition of sin that exists).

Then who is it that God does abandon?

READ ROMANS 1:17 - 28

And Paul puts those who are abandoned by God into yet another context: identification as evidenced by a firm and unrelenting grip on a wrong and ungodly lifestyle.

(1Co 6:9-11 CJB)

⁹ Don't you know that unrighteous people will have no share in the Kingdom of God? Don't delude yourselves- people who engage in sex before marriage, who worship idols, who engage in sex after marriage with someone other than their spouse, who engage in active or passive homosexuality,

¹⁰ who steal, who are greedy, who get drunk, who assail people with contemptuous language, who rob- none of them will share in the Kingdom of God.

¹¹ Some of you used to do these things. But you have cleansed yourselves, you have been set apart for God, you have come to be counted righteous through the power of the Lord Yeshua the Messiah and the Spirit of our God.

Verse 11 is not well translated by the CJB. Let me give you a better one that makes an important distinction.

^{KJV} 1 Corinthians 6:11 And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

The CJB says “you used to DO these things”. The KJV (and almost all other translations) says, “You WERE these things”. And that is the point: identification. WHAT you **do** is your behavior; WHAT you **are** is your identity. As a good friend once said to me: going to church no more makes you a Christian than standing in a garage makes you a car. Those who ARE what

they do, versus those who are Christ's but DO some of these wrong things is the crux of the matter. Those who identify with greed, drunkenness, homosexuality, and idolatry versus those who identify with Christ but in their weakness have committed drunkenness, greed, idolatry, a homosexual act, etc.

I watched a portion of a TV series a few nights ago that I wish I would have recorded and saved to show you as it demonstrates this point so well. The pertinent part was when a man who had a good woman, a decent home, and a steady job worked with some other men to plan and commit a strong-armed robbery. After the robbery when he arrived home to face his wife, she was just flabbergasted that he did this terrible thing and that he was so cool and calm and forthcoming about it all. Not to mention that although he had been to prison in the past for doing such things that years had gone by and he seemed to have turned over a new leaf. His response was that he had no choice: he IS a thief by nature and so he just did what was natural for him. His whole being is wrapped up in thievery. So the years that went by that he committed no crime were out of character for him. The Scriptures tell us that such a man who identifies with his sinful behavior in so strong a manner IS that behavior and thus cannot identify with God; the two are mutually exclusive.

Fellow Believers, our daily behavior neither gets us into nor gets us ejected from heaven. But our daily behavior (as Believers) will merit us either God's mercy and blessings or God's severe discipline. Christ's death on the cross saved us from the curse of eternal death for our sinful behavior and our sinful nature; but it did NOT save us from God's curse of punishments and calamities on this earth, during our physical life span, in response to our bad behavior (our sins).

Equally so, even theoretically perfect behavior without identifying with Christ may bring us a well-merited life full of earthly blessings along with loving adoration from our friends and family; but at our passing from this life only the absolute certainty of a curse of eternal death awaits us.

King David is held up by Judaism as the example of Messianic perfection; however what he really is, is a perfect example of the life and journey, the highs and lows, the successes and failures, of a Believer. It is an example that demonstrates that our trust and zeal in the Lord God is God's only measure for our eternal salvation. Our daily behavior, our obedience to His commandments and principles, is what will merit us His earthly blessings or earthly punishments.

We'll continue chapter 22 next time.