

2ND SAMUEL

Week 36, chapter 23

Chapter 23 of 2nd Samuel is divided into two parts: David's final oracle (some call it his last will and testament) and a listing of David's special war heroes. The first part is filled with prophetic utterances whereby David is more or less playing the role of a prophet, and the 2nd part is mostly historical and speaks of a number of warriors who played key roles in David's military exploits and how they fit into a chain of command.

We only read the first 7 verses last week; however I also mentioned that one of the intriguing aspects of this section is how it is an extension of another divine oracle that had been given hundreds of years earlier, and through a gentile seer named Balaam.

Let's begin this week by reading the entirety of 2nd Samuel 23 before we connect part of it with Numbers 24.

READ 2ND SAMUEL 23 all

As we worked our way through the previous chapter (chapter 22) I pointed out that in a couple of places in particular David's assessment of why it was that God so graciously delivered him could be nothing else than as a divine reward for David's consistent uprightness and lack of sin. That is David saw himself as meriting God's favor, therefore I label those thoughts of David's as boasting if not a tad delusional considering his well known affair with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriyah her husband. Many modern Bible critics (who would agree with my view of chapter 22) say that this speech of David's in chapter 23 is more of the same; David is merely once again elevating himself using lofty language.

I take issue with the idea that verses 1 -7 form a run-of-the-mill Psalm written by David, and to be compared with the scores of others that he authored. Jewish sages rightly note that this passage has David acknowledging that this is not a mere poem but rather an oracle from Yehoveh. It is not logical that David would speak of these words in verse 2 as: ***"The Spirit of ADONAI spoke through me, his word was on my tongue....."*** if he was merely continuing the thought pattern of chapter 22 where he was seeking the reason for Yehoveh blessing him so greatly and then assuming it was due to his own innocence.

The Bible uses a formula (so to speak) when introducing a divine oracle or a divine prophecy, and we see that formula in use here. It says something to the effect that the person speaking the words are not speaking his own words, but rather is repeating (usually word for word) something that God told them. The words themselves openly and unambiguously claim that these are God's direct words thus these words are not divinely inspired; they are divine. Let me take a moment to explain the difference. The bulk of the recorded Bible (that we all carry about) is NOT full of direct statements made by the Lord; rather most are statements made by humans but whose words have been inspired by the Holy Spirit. They are words that come from these men's minds (they are their own words) but these humans have been enlightened in some area of understanding and so are being led by God to say them. A divine oracle is different. When a prophet says, "this is a message from God", then what he is saying is NOT his own words coming from his own mind. Rather he was given a speech directly from God and it is that prophet's duty to pass it along without modification, interpretation, or corruption. A Biblical scholar might say that a divine oracle as pronounced by a prophet is of a higher level of inspiration than words spoken by even the greatest Bible heroes. And I think that is a pretty good way to think about it.

Don't let the idea of various levels of divine inspiration trouble you. It was that kind of determination that led to ecumenical councils of humans determining which of many religious letters and writings and historical accounts and gospels that were in existence were worthy of being counted as Holy Scripture and the remainder not. That is precisely how the New Testament was formed, and to a lesser degree how the Old Testament was formed.

That something is of lesser inspiration does not make it less accurate or reliable. Thus when we read the Bible, even though we are to especially pay attention when it is God directly speaking, that doesn't mean that in the remaining 98% of the Bible we ought to question the authenticity or reliability of the content. Such reasoning was used by the ancient Hebrews to put the place of the Apocrypha (books such as Maccabees, Sirach, Tobit, and others) as a notch lower in inspiration than the other writings that formed the Tanach (the Hebrew Bible), yet they were still considered inspired. And similar reasoning was also used by the Christian Bishops in the Councils of Nicea and Laodicea of the 4th and 5th centuries A.D. who also determined which writings would form the Christian Bible (the New Testament) and which

others would continue to be seen as merely authoritative, good for teaching and instruction and godly wisdom, but not holy.

Thus while we were free to read David's words in chapter 22 and at once understand that the while the words are accurately recorded that indeed David held some incorrect views about himself, we are to view the first 7 verses of Chapter 23 as on a higher level of divine inspiration since they are not David's words at all but God's spoken through David's mouth. Thus we are NOT free to question the voracity of what is spoken; instead we are to take it as unassailable, perfect divine truth.

In verse 1 we are told that "this is the speech of David". The Hebrew used for speech in this case is **ne'um** and it more means utterance or oracle in a prophetic sense rather than merely speaking or humanly contrived speech. Further, despite all the boasting we saw in the previous chapter, here David begins by humbly stating that he was not born to the kingship nor did he merit it by his deeds; he became a king only because God (for His own good reasons) elevated David into that position.

Later in this verse David is called "the sweet singer" of Israel, or in Hebrew: **naim zamir**. The idea is that David is a pleasant sounding song writer who does so in the context of being loyal to the God of Israel. And this ability to pen inspirational praises and prayer to the God of Israel (that really is almost unmatched in history) that moves our souls to this very day is to be considered as a special gift from God to David (what in modern times we'd call a Spiritual Gift). In fact there are 3 attributes of David that are all seen as direct actions or gifts of God: David was raised up (made a monarch in men's eyes), he was anointed of God (he was God's chosen king from a spiritual point of view), and he is an inspirational song writer and musician.

It is in verse 2 that we get the critical information that what is to follow is a direct oracle from God. David says that the **Ruach HaKodesh**, the Holy Spirit, spoke **in** him (or **through** him depending on your translation) meaning that David did NOT receive audible communication from the Lord (as did Moses) but rather received the words by internal divine revelation. Thus David can say truthfully that it is God's Word that is on his tongue, as opposed to his own. Actually in Hebrew the verse says something even more powerful; it says that the **ruach** of **Yehoveh dabbar** in David; the Lord's **millah** was placed upon David's tongue. **Millah** has a similar meaning to **ne'um** (oracle) except that it can be used more generically. The idea is that a **millah** is a complete message as opposed to a saying or a brief instruction. So it is a

complete and important message from God that David is going to utter.

But it is the word **dabbar** that gets the Rabbis' attention. Rashi says that in Holy Scripture **dabbar** is an important term and it is not used to characterize any other of David's songs or Psalms. Let me remind you that back in Exodus we learned that although Christians label what Moses received on Mt. Sinai as the 10 Commandments, in fact the word "commandments" is a complete misnomer. In Hebrew there is a common word for commandments and it is **mitzvot** but that is not the word used in the Bible for the 10 Commandments. Rather that word is **dabbar**, which means "word". So what Moses received were the 10 **dabarim** and not the 10 **mitzvot**, the 10 Words and not the 10 Commandments.

In ancient times a word from the gods was seen as an awesome thing. The Hebrews especially understood words and speech as mysterious and powerful. The Bible says that YHWH **spoke** the universe into existence. Sometimes modern day Believers (commentators especially) think that this is only a cop-out; that is, saying that God "spoke" everything into existence is a way around the problem of explaining how God did it. But that is not so. We are told in Scripture that Messiah is the Word (the **dabbar**) of God. So when used in the divine context (as here in verse 2 and as it pertains to this entire speech of David) the word "word" (**dabbar**) is meant to evoke the idea of the very essence or embodiment of God, just as we think of the Father, the Holy Spirit, and the Son as essences of the One God.

It's at this point that we need to pause and turn to a different book of the Bible so as to make a fascinating connection between what God is saying here and what He said through another person several hundred years earlier. Turn your Bibles to Numbers 24.

READ NUMBERS 24:1-19

Balaam was speaking of the time in the future when Israel was in the land and David would be raised up as God's anointed; but he was also speaking of a time even further into the future when Yeshua HaMashiach would appear. As we know with the benefit of hindsight, Biblical prophecies (especially concerning the Messiah) often happen, and then happen again a long time later in a different context. The term that Balaam used for this special person who would appear was a star; he says that a star out of Jacob would arise (a star was an ancient and common Middle Eastern term for referring to a king). Remember; this is at a time before Israel had even crossed-over the Jordan and entered into the Promised Land. Israel was in no way looking to have a king; they were tribal and being led by Moses and such a thing as a king was

foreign to their minds. But Balaam prophesies Israel WILL have a king in time and so essentially David was the prophetic fulfillment of Balaam's oracle. This is a good time to remind you that the standard Christian doctrine is that God did not want Israel to have a king; but that is simply not so and the Scriptures tell us the opposite. In fact the entire Book of Judges demonstrates to Israel their need for king and it records the preparation for a king. And here as early as Numbers we find a gentile seer being used by Yehoveh to pronounce a blessing (NOT a curse) that Israel WILL have a king and that the Lord will use him to crush God's enemies.

But whereas Balaam was the recipient of a divine revelation as a gentile pagan with a closed eye (but by means of a vision his eye was now opened to the truth), David the Jew was the man who had been raised up on high by the Lord, anointed, and now given the next step of progressive revelation that builds upon Balaam's oracle.

Verse 3 of 2nd Samuel 23 is quite an interesting one, and it has been rather rudely treated I think in an attempt to translate it into English. Our CJB for instance says ***The God of Isra'el spoke; the Rock of Isra'el said to me, 'A ruler over people must be upright, ruling in the fear of God.*** The King James says, ***The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God.*** The New American Standard says, ***"The God of Israel said, The Rock of Israel spoke to me, 'He who rules over men righteously, Who rules in the fear of God."***

Now these are all attempts at a dynamic translation because the more literal translation is a little odd sounding until we add in modern punctuation, and explain the setting, which solves the problem. Here is the better sense of this verse: ***"The God of Israel says, the Rock of Israel speaks to me; a Ruler over men, just, a Ruler in the fear of God"***. What we have here is a coronation speech. David is being told that at some future time a new king (that by definition will come from David's dynasty) will be introduced and presented to God's people. To a person of ancient times, such a scene with this kind of speech would be well understood. But to modern Westerners, this is unfamiliar to us.

So imagine that you are among multitudes of worshippers in the courtyard of the coming 3rd Temple of Israel, and it has been prepared as the palace of the coming King of Israel, the one we know of as the Christ. There stands Yeshua before the adoring crowds and the ceremony gets underway with a booming voice out of the heavens (God's voice thundering like at Mt. Sinai) as the Father presents Israel with His Son who is their forever king by saying, "Here

before you stands the Ruler over men; He is just; He is a Ruler in the fear of God". That is the sense of this scene (and it just gives me the shivers!)

Notice that the Lord pronounces the Ruler as a Ruler over men (**adam** in Hebrew). **Adam** means mankind in general but over the past several centuries the Rabbis have struggled with that concept because they understand that whether it is a resurrected David or another man, this is obviously speaking of the Messiah. And in Rabbinic Judaism the Messiah is NOT for the world, he is for Israel. So they say that we should take the word **adam** in this instance to mean ONLY Israelites; but that is not intellectually honest. This is not unlike what I have spoken about to you in earlier lessons that Christian leaders and teachers have developed a bad habit of reading denominational doctrines backwards into the Scriptures, trying to make the Scriptures fit their predetermined ideas in order to uphold their religious notions. The Rabbis have done similarly in relation to Messiah in order to bring about their predetermined ideas about him and to make the Scriptures seem to fit with their teachings and rulings.

So simply taking this passage in its plainest sense (as it would have been when it was written down) we have God the Father pronouncing that His Anointed (His Mashiach) is first and foremost a Ruler over all mankind (and not just Israel). Second the Father pronounces His king as just; the Hebrew word is **tzadek** and it is either a noun or an adjective. So **tzadek** (righteously just) it is NOT what this forever king is doing, it is what He IS. He is just; perfectly just and this is due to his divine nature. And the third part of the coronation announcement is that this king is a Ruler in the fear of God. That is, this Ruler is not coming in His own name or with a new divine law or entirely on His own accord; rather He is coming in the name of God the Father, He is being SENT on the command of God the Father, and His justice is entirely based on the regulations of God the Father. Thus the future Kingdom of God will encompass all Creation and all Creation will be ruled over by one person: the Messiah.

Verse 4 speaks about how everything is going to change upon the coronation of this new king. The effects of this salvation are described as the light of the morning, when the sun rises and bursts through the darkness of the clouds. The Rabbis say that before David, when Saul ruled, Israel was clouded over and truth and righteousness was obscured. But now with the anointed ruler the sun of righteousness is as bright as a cloudless sky as the sun steadily rises from horizon to zenith.

A second metaphor for the dramatic change in circumstances is presented as green grass that thrives and sparkles after the rains. The grass is also a metaphor for God's people and as we'll see in a moment, it stands as a stark contrast to the thorns of evil men in verses 6 and 7.

Verse 5 speaks of what was promised to David back in 2nd Samuel 7:10 – 17. Let's read this. Open your Bibles to this chapter and read along with me.

READ 2ND SAMUEL 7:10-17

Again Rabbinic Judaism takes great liberties and says that this covenant that is being spoken of is the Torah and that view does not follow the plain sense or the context of this passage. Rather this “everlasting covenant” is speaking of this passage we just read in 2nd Samuel chapter 7. In fact this promise of God to David is so important to Christianity (and so central to our understanding of Messiah) that it has been dubbed the Covenant of David and added to the list of Biblical Covenants. I'm not entirely sure that it should be because many promises are made between God and men, but not all rise to the level of a Biblical Covenant such as the Lord made with Noah, Abraham, and Moses. I can also see the other side of this however, and no doubt the promise that God made to David helps to pin down the lineage of the coming Messiah. So you can decide for yourself what status you'd like to give to this so-called Covenant of David.

Note that this promise (or covenant) made to David is unconditional. We derive this by the words of chapter 23 verse 5: **he made an everlasting covenant with me. It is in order, fully assured, that he will bring to full growth all my salvation and every desire.** And indeed the promise of 2nd Samuel chapter 7 makes it clear that even if David's descendants trespass against God, He will punish them. However, unlike what happened with Saul, God's grace and promise will stand for David's dynasty (and especially as concerns Messiah). The idea is that all eventualities have been accounted for and planned for by God. No amount of falling away will cause the privilege of David's line producing the Messiah to be terminated. Now THAT is grace! So please don't tell me that the concept of grace only started with the Book of Matthew as a so-called New Testament dispensation.

The last half of verse 5 sounds almost like something St. Paul would have said: **that he will bring to full growth all my salvation and every desire.** And of course David is saying that God will bring about salvation (deliverance) and that all the delightful things he desires are wrapped up in that God-provided deliverance. Let me point out that where in English we have the word “desires”, in Hebrew it is **chephets**. And **chephets** more means good things that are hope for; things that God wants His people to have. I think of it as God's **shalom**. It doesn't mean “desires” in the more modern Western sense of it that brings to mind a want of selfish, decadent or even erotic things. It doesn't mean wealth or materialism. It is nothing that those

who preach the Prosperity Doctrine would be familiar with. Rather it is what (from a spiritual viewpoint) automatically accompanies salvation and can only come from the Lord's hand.

But in verse 6 we get the antithesis of all that has been promised to this point. The previous verses dealt with God's faithful worshippers; verse 6 deals with the wicked and uses the metaphor of thorns (as contrasted with verse 4 where the faithful are compared to green grass). Thus the righteous will receive their savior (and their salvation) at the same time that the wicked receive God's wrath and destruction. Like our CJB most Bibles will say that these thorns are "godless men", but in reality it only says that the thorns are the **belial** (not even **sons of belial** as some translations use to at least get it a little closer to the original). Belial is more an expression than a word; and as more research is done to understand what it meant to the ancient mind, modern scholars such as Kyle McCarter say that a better translation would be something like "fiends of hell"; it is that strong of a statement. So "worthless" or "godless" only scratches the surface of just how horrible these people are in the Lord's eyes, and thus worthy only to (as it says in verse 7) ***To touch them one uses pitchfork or spear-shaft, and then only to burn them where they lie.***

That is they are so far gone, their condition is hopeless and decided, that one doesn't even want to come into contact with such a person except by means of an iron shaft or a spear lest we get dirtied or wounded. The only thing God has in store for them is destruction. This meshes awfully well with what we told in Revelation 19:11 – 16.

READ REVELATION 19:11 -16

Notice how Christ is going to rule the nations with an iron instrument. And that he is the One who is going to lead heaven's armies in carrying out God's wrath upon the unrighteous (the thorns).

Interestingly when 2nd Samuel 23:7 speaks of burning the thorns where they lie, the Hebrew word is **shebeth**, which means "dwelling place" not "where they lie". Thus there are many good Bible scholars who believe that if a wicked person is in his dwelling place it can only be referring to Hell. And that goes along with the idea of Hell being a place of eternal fire and burning.

Rashi chimes in with an interesting observation especially as it regards the burning up of the wicked. He says that the only benefit one gets from thorns is to burn them in order warm oneself by the fire it produces. Compare this to what is said in Ezekiel 39:6 -10.

READ EZEKIEL 39:6 -10

This of course is speaking to the great battle with Gog and Magog that we usually call the Battle of Armageddon. And here the abandoned weapons of the wicked (the thorns) will be gathered only to be burned to produce heat for warming God's people.

Rashi also points out that the wicked have no remedy for their sins as they pass from this world. Rather they will only pass through the fires of Gehinnom into the next world where their destiny is but to await God's final judgment upon them.

Let's move on now from the prophetic portion of this chapter in verses 1 -7 and into the more straightforward accounting of David's war heroes that begins in verse 8 and goes to the end of the chapter. We'll only spend a few minutes with this today and we'll finish up next time.

This same list can also be found in 1Chronicles 11, but there we'll find 16 more names added to the list. It is necessary to take many of the names with a grain of salt as the list has been greatly corrupted over the years (this is not disputed, by the way). So due to copyist errors and competing traditions some names are different between the two lists and some names are so jumbled that they are outright guesses. Only a few of the names are historically important anyway, so accuracy in this instance isn't required to get to the proper meaning.

What we see is that David's heroes are divided into 3 groups (or better, 3 ranks). They are NOT equals and that is the point; what we have is a hierarchy or chain of command. And the 1st and highest ranking consists of only 3 names: Yoshev-Bashevet, Eleazar, and Shammah. Right off the bat we have a problem with the name Yoshev-Bashevet because it doesn't make any sense. In 1Chronicles this same person is called Yashov'am and almost certainly that is correct (or at least closer to correct).

In the 2nd rank (as listed in verses 18 and 20) are Avishai (David's nephew) and B'nayah.

The 3rd rank consists of everybody else.

We'll go back next week and fill in the blanks concerning David's heroes.