

BIBLE SERIES: **"EXPLORING OUR AWESOME BIBLE"**

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OT-63 10-13-2007

2 SAMUEL 1-6 DAVID'S REIGN – THE START OF ISRAEL'S GOLDEN AGE



We ended the last study with Israel suffering a stunning defeat by the Philistines. They have killed Saul, his sons, and a great part of the Israelite army. Some of the Israelite territory is now occupied by the Philistines, and the nation is in panic and disarray.

Why did God allow it? The answer is found in the parallel account of Saul's death in 1 Chronicles 10:13, "So Saul died for his *unfaithfulness* which he had committed against the Lord, because he did *not* keep the word of the Lord and also because he *consulted* a medium for guidance. But he did *not* inquire of the Lord; therefore He killed him, and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse."

We now begin the book of 2 Samuel which covers David's reign. Remember, in the original Hebrew canon, 1 and 2 Samuel are only *one* book.

About David's reign, Werner Keller says, "From the depths of despair, from the helpless situation under the yoke of the Philistines, Israel climbed within a few decades to a position of power, esteem and greatness. All of this was the work of David" (*The Bible as History*, p. 192).

Three days after Saul's defeat, when David arrives from defeating the Amalekites and rescuing his wives, a soldier appears from Saul's defeated army. He was hoping to be rewarded by notifying David that he had finished off king Saul, David's supposed enemy, and bringing the king's crown and armlet as proof. But to his surprise, David is not pleased, but is greatly grieved by the news.

We read, "Therefore David took hold of his own clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him. And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son, for the people of the Lord and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword" (2 Sam. 1:11-12). Instead of rewarding this Amalekite mercenary for having killed Saul, David sentences him to death. "So David said to him, 'Your blood is on your own head, for your own mouth has testified against you, saying, 'I have killed the Lord's anointed'" (1:16).

Then, as a tribute to Saul and Jonathan, David composed an elegy called, "*The Song of the Bow*" where he praises them, and in particular, Jonathan and his enduring and loyal friendship with David.

The JFB Commentary notes, "It has always been customary for Eastern people, on the death of great kings and warriors, to celebrate their qualities and

deeds in funeral songs. This inimitable pathetic elegy is supposed by many writers to have become a national war song, and to have been taught to the young Israelites under the name of "The Bow," in conformity with the practice of Hebrew and many classical writers in giving titles to their songs from the principal theme...David took immediate measures for instructing the people in the knowledge and practice of archery, their great inferiority to the enemy in this military arm having been the main cause of the late national disaster."

This song was placed in the book of Jasher, mentioned in Joshua 10:13 and other places. It was used by this inspired author as a historical source, but it is not part of the Bible since it was not inspired by God, and eventually, as most other books, disappeared from history.

Now that Saul is dead, David can begin his reign, somewhere around 1000 B.C. He would rule for 40 years, 7 over Judah from Hebron and then 33 from Jerusalem over all of Israel. Keller writes, "The new king was so versatile that it is difficult to decide which of his qualities deserves most admiration. It would be just as difficult to find as gifted and rounded a personality within the last few centuries of our own times. Where is the man who could claim equal fame as soldier, statesman, poet and musician?" (p. 191)

How does he begin his reign? As Saul eventually did, doing according to his own will? No, he constantly sought God for direction. "It happened after this that David inquired of the Lord, saying, 'Shall I go up to any of the cities of Judah?' And the Lord said to him, 'Go up.' David said, 'Where shall I go up?' And He said, 'To Hebron.' 'So David went up there, and his wives...Then the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king *over the house of Judah* (2:1-3).

Another thing David did was to thank the men of Jabesh Gilead for having risked their lives and taken the bodies of Saul and his sons and buried them. He also let them know he had been anointed king and wanted to protect them in the future.

Yet, in the first few years, David had opposition to his rule from the Benjamites. Abner, Saul's general and first cousin, a mighty warrior, did not want to be under David's rule and names Saul's surviving son,

Ishbosheth, which means, “man of shame,” as king over the rest of Israel. He unfortunately would live up to his name of being a fool.

The first battle between the two bands was at Gibeon, where there was a large cistern to gather water—probably the same enormous one that still exists today! The two generals, Abner and Joab, chose 12 men to fight from each side, and therefore to spare general bloodshed. But all 24 clashed with such ferocity that they killed each other. The place would thenceforth be called, “the place of daggers.”

A battle ensues and David’s men prevail, routing Abner and his men. Yet Joab’s youngest brother, Asahel, being fleet-footed, relentlessly pursues Abner. Abner warns this young man to desist or he will kill him, but Asahel refuses and is killed.

The Expositor’s Commentary adds, “Asahel, though dead because of his headlong pursuit of Abner, would be long remembered in Israel. He is listed first among the ‘Thirty,’ David’s military elite (2 Sam. 23:24). Commander of the fourth of David’s army divisions, Asahel’s untimely death early in David’s reign made it necessary for his son to succeed him in that post (1 Chronicles 27:7). It would only be a matter of time, however, before Asahel’s brother Joab would avenge his great loss.”

Abner finally makes it to Benjamite territory and a large force comes to his rescue. Joab still wants to avenge his brother, but finally desists when faced by Abner’s larger army. The war would continue for several years, and David’s side becoming stronger.

Then, Ishbosheth makes a fatal mistake. Abner was the real power behind the throne and was propping up Ishbosheth. But Abner took one of Saul’s concubines, a sign that he was over Ishbosheth.

The JFB Commentary says, “In the East, the wives and concubines of a king are the property of his successor to this extent, that for a private person to aspire to marry one of them would be considered a virtual advance of pretensions to the crown (see 1 K. 2:17). It is not clear whether the accusation against Abner was well or ill founded. But he resented the charge as an indignity, and, impelled by revenge, determined to transfer all the weight of his influence to the opposite party. He evidently set a full value on his services, and seems to have lorded it over his weak nephew in a haughty, overbearing manner.”

So Abner changes sides and backs David. He sends David a message of an alliance and David asks him if this is true, to bring his first wife, Michal, to him. Abner does so, and exhorts the elders of Israel to side with David. At Hebron, David has a banquet for Abner and they agree to an alliance. Then Abner leaves with his men to rally all Israel under David.

But when Joab returns from a battle, he finds out Abner had been to Hebron, and his thirst for revenge is still strong. He deceives Abner by sending a messenger pretending to be from David that asks him to return to Hebron. There, Joab assassinates him in cold blood. David is shocked, and grieves for Abner, but still, David dares not execute Joab, for he is his commanding general. So he publicly humiliated and cursed him for his crime.

Of course, many thought David was behind the assassination, and only after David fasted did they realize he didn’t have anything to do with it. We read, “And when all the people came to persuade David to eat food while it was still day, David took an oath, saying, ‘God do so to me, and more also, if I taste bread or anything else till the sun goes down!’ Now all the people took not of it, and it pleased them, since whatever the king did pleased all the people” (3:35-37).

When Ishbosheth hears Abner is dead, he realizes he doesn’t have a chance of keeping his kingdom intact and there is general panic. Others consider it’s best to kill him and make their peace with David. So two of his bodyguards kill Ishbosheth and take his head to David, thinking they would be rewarded.

But David again confounds them by telling them treachery would not be rewarded. He said, “When someone told me, saying, ‘Look, Saul is dead,’ thinking to have brought good news, I arrested him and had him executed in Ziklag...How much more, when wicked men have killed a righteous person in his own house on his bed? Therefore, shall I not now require his blood at your hand and remove you from the earth?” So David commanded his young men, and they executed them, cut off their hands and feet, and hanged them by the pool in Hebron. But they took the head of Ishbosheth and buried it in the tomb of Abner in Hebron” (4:10-12).

With Abner and Ishbosheth dead, David now consolidates his reign over all of Israel. We read, “Therefore all the elders came to Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before

the Lord. And they anointed David king over Israel. David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years” (5:3-4).

This begins Israel’s golden age, that would last 80 years—covering David’s and Solomon’s rule. It is a period of unusual peace in this part of the world, a consequence of obedience to God’s laws. As David himself would later say to Solomon, “Is not the Lord God with you? And has He not given you rest on every side? For He has given the inhabitants of the land into my hand, and the land is subdued before the Lord and before His people” (1 Chron. 22:17).

It is interesting that during those 80 years, all the major powers were weakened. Historian Werner Keller mentions, “As happened a few centuries earlier at the time of the conquest of Canaan, David’s efforts were assisted by favorable external circumstances. Just after the beginning of the last millennium (1000 B.C.) there was no state in Mesopotamia or Asia Minor, Syria or Egypt, which was in a position to stop an expansion of Cannanite (Israelite) territory” (p. 193).

Now David can concentrate on defeating Israel’s local enemies. The first target is the Canaanite stronghold of Jebus, later known as Jerusalem. It was so strongly guarded that the Jebusites mocked David for even attempting to take it over, saying, “You shall not come in here, but the blind and the lame will repel you” (5:6). It would only take the weakest among them on the walls to defeat their efforts.

David knew he could never breach the strong walls but was aware of the Achilles’ heel or weakness the fortress city had—the Gihon spring inside. So he said, “Whoever climbs up by way of the water shaft and defeats the Jebusites...he shall be chief and captain” (5:8). This watershaft can still be seen today.

The parallel account in 1 Chronicles explains more: “And Joab the son of Zeruiah went up first and became chief. Then David dwelt in the stronghold therefore they called it the City of David. And he built the city around it...So David went on and became great, and the Lord of hosts was with him.”

He then made a key alliance with the king of Lebanon, Hiram, with his capital city of Tyre. Hiram sent him wood from the famous cedars there, and his craftsmen built David his palace.

Then the Philistines attacked David, and David again sought advice from God. “So David inquired of

the Lord, saying, ‘Shall I go up against the Philistines? Will You deliver them into my hand?’ And the Lord said to David, ‘Go up, for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into your hand. So David went to Baal Perazim, and David defeated them there” (5:19-20).

The Philistines attacked again, and David, after consulting with God, was also victorious. “And he drove back the Philistines from Geba as far as Gezer” (5:25). Now the borders were secure.

Having repeatedly defeated the Philistines, David can now concentrate on making Jerusalem not only the capital of the kingdom, but also the holy place where God’s ark of the covenant would be.

He brought the ark, but on a cart, breaking God’s law which says that it should be carried on the priest’s shoulders. Here we see David failed to consult God on this and made a serious mistake. Uzzah, one of David’s men, “put out his hand to the ark of the God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. Then the anger of the Lord was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his error; and he died there by the ark of God” (6:6-7).

David initially was angered that his friend was killed by God, but then he reconsidered and realized it was he who had made the mistake. He left the ark for three months until he inquired the proper way to bring the ark. As 1 Chron. 15:2, 13 says, “Then David said, ‘No one may carry the ark of God but the Levites...the Lord God broke out against us because we did not consult him about the proper order.’”

So this time, David brings the ark in the proper way, and takes it to Jerusalem. While it was arriving, David danced and played music to praise God. But Michal was ashamed at the way David danced and let him know about it. He tells her he was dancing for God, not the people, and then said because of her actions, he would never sleep with her again. The Bible adds, “Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death” (6:23).