

THE MAJESTY OF THE MONARCHY

Studies in II Samuel

Lesson 1

INTRODUCTION TO II SAMUEL

I. BIBLICAL BACKGROUND

From the death of Joshua onwards, the Bible records a complete change in the political and social structure of the nation of Israel. When last seen in the Book of Joshua, the twelve tribes were gathered in unity at Shechem renewing their covenant and unity before Yahweh. They were bound together by common loyalty to God, the Tabernacle, and their leader. In the book of Judges, however, not half of the tribes were able to work together and the basic values tended to be individualistic rather than national. The Tabernacle is never mentioned; the ark only once. In spite of the charismatic leadership of nine political and military leaders called "Judges", the moral, political and religious climate continued to deteriorate.

The intermixing of various religious and moral values had taken the heart out of the worship of Jehovah. Even the Tabernacle worship seems to have been contaminated with religious profiteering and prostitution (1 Sam. 2:12-17, 22-25). Victories of this time cannot in any way be ascribed to the leadership of the men involved. Weak, vengeful, and caught up with the world's value system, they are evidences that the purposes of God cannot be stopped by the wiles of Satan or the weaknesses of the men God chooses to use. The stage was being set for the entrance of the monarchs.

In fact, Judges seems to be a tract produced to promote the acceptance of a king and the institution of the monarchy. Israel was supposed to have been a model for all nations of a Theocracy (a rule by God), but her disobedience resulted in personal and national chaos. The request for a king in 1 Samuel 8:5 looks both backward and forward. Judges was written at about this time or in the early days of the monarchy to give portraits of typical judges (Judges chapters 3-16), and to show how in spite of these great charismatic leaders there was a steady decline in the religious (chapters 17 & 18), moral (chap. 19), and social (chap. 20-21) life of the nation. All of this was attributed by the writer to the absence of kingship when "everyone did that which was right in his own eyes" (Jud. 18:1; 19:1; 21:25).

But God never deserted them. Neither did He just let them go their own way. He actively punished them until they would in repentance turn back to Him. So it is with God's people in every age. In the shadows of that darkness stood our God. He interwove international, national and personal events to bring about His purposes of teaching them the devastation that comes with unfaithfulness and His gracious rescue that comes with repentance. God is truly the hero of the book. Man's weakness and sin is incurable. The last chapters review the religious, moral, and political degeneration of the people and leave us longing for a righteous judge, a flawless hero and a stable government. Enter Samuel and the monarchy.

II. THE WRITERS OF I AND II SAMUEL

After the Pentateuch (the first five books of Moses in the Old Testament), it is impossible to dogmatically assign an author or a date to the historical books. In the Hebrew text, 1 and 2 Samuel are simply 'Samuel'. They are part of three sets of "double books": 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles. In the Greek translation of the Old Testament (called the Septuagint and completed before the time of Christ), 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings are entitled the book of the "Kingdoms".

The title "Samuel" cannot indicate authorship, since Samuel's death is recorded before the end of the first book. Although he is a major figure in the first book, the title probably does not refer to him as subject because David plays by far an even greater part. The events recorded cover over a century and many accounts read like eye-witness reports or contemporary documents. The work seems to be not so much a history composed from a study of sources as a series of biographies written by compiling the sources themselves. Because of references to "Israel" and "Judah" as separate (11:8; 17:52; and 8:16) and the expression "kings of Judah"(27:6) we know that the writer(s) must have lived after Solomon's death (930 B.C.) and the division of the kingdom. But if Samuel

was not the writer, the name still is fitting because it was Samuel who brought the nation out of the shadows and into the dawning of an entirely new era. He was at the same time the last of the judges (Acts 13:20), the first of the (official) prophets (Acts 3:24; Heb. 11:32), and the crowner of both Israel's first king and of her greatest king.

III. THE DATE OF EVENTS

The period covered by the two books of Samuel stretches for about 150 years. It begins around 1120 B.C. with Eli, who had already been judging Israel, and with the birth of Samuel, and it ends with the passing of the monarchy to Solomon at about 970 B.C. Except for the dates of David's birth and death (2 Sam.5:4-5), most other dates can only be approximated. A possible chronology would be as follows:

- 1225 ? Eli was already a priest (30 years old - see Nu.4:3) when Samuel was born. He lived 98 years and was a judge for 40 years (1 Sam.4:15-18)
- 1105 Birth of Samuel (1 Sam. 1:20) (Samuel is well up in years when Israel asks for a king (1 Sam. 8:14).
- 1080 Birth of Saul
- [1078-1072 - Jephthah]
- [1075-1055 - Samson]
- 1050 Saul anointed to be king (1 Sam. 10:1)
- 1040 Birth of David
- 1025 David anointed to be Saul's successor (1 Sam.16:1-13)
- 1010 Death of Saul and beginning of David's reign over Judah in Hebron (2 Sam 1:1; 2:1, 4, 11)
- 1003 Beginning of David's reign over all Israel and capture of Jerusalem (2 Sam.5)
- 997-992 David's wars (2 Sam. 8:1-14)
- 991 Birth of Solomon (2 Sam. 12:24; 1 Ki.3:7; 11:42)
- 980 David's census (2 Sam. 24:1)
- 970 End of David's reign (2 Sam.5:4-5; 1 Ki. 2:10-11)

IV. THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

A. The Purpose in Interpretation

We have recorded in these books the change in the governments of Israel from a theocracy to a kingdom with a monarchy. Samuel is to the kingdom what Moses was to the Theocracy (rule by God) and sets the monarchy in the greater context of that Theocracy by calling the people to repentance and a renewed covenant with Jehovah (1 Sam. 10:25; 11:15-12:25).

The purpose is not simply to tell us about Samuel's virtues, Saul's defects and David's successes, but about God's activities during an important phase of Israel's history. The books of Samuel are not just history but theology too. Above all, they provide a study in ideal leadership.

B. The Purpose in Application

For dramatic power, colorful characters, and sheer interest, 1 and 2 Samuel are unsurpassed. Where else can you find a religious leader the equal to Moses, a prince-hero as dashing as he is dedicated, and a dark lord, himself bigger than life? Everywhere is the evidence of God's providential Hand. Ultimately the books are about the great questions of life:

How does God deal with men? What is the nature of His purpose and what is the required human response?

Some of the lessons we will learn:

- 1. God overrules in human affairs and plays an active role in them.**
- 2. God always acts in the best interests of His people.**
- 3. God has designed appropriate leadership for His people.**

4. God is present with His people and frequently reveals His presence in a variety of ways – in the sanctuary, through the prophets, in the actions of history for their benefit.

(Last 4 points adapted from Payne's Daily Study Bible Series)

*Lives of great men all remind us
We can make our lives sublime,
And departing leave behind us
Footprints in the sands of time.*
Longfellow, "A Psalm of Life"

V. SAUL: THE DARK LORD

A. His Role Development

The people of Israel were dissatisfied, and desired to be governed like the nations around them. Their demand was rooted in unbelief. They distrusted the Invisible King, and craved for an earthly and visible one, one on whom they could rely. God condescended to this badly motivated desire in order to let them learn some much needed lessons. The earthly kingship served not only for their correction, but for a type of the kingship of the Messiah. Thus God made His grace to abound toward them.

B. His Real Potential

Saul had all the natural abilities to be a truly great man: looks, personality, physique, skill -- he had it all. Nor did God withhold from him the spiritual help that could make him great. He gave him His Spirit, another heart and made him a new man (1 Sam. 10:9, 10; 11:6).

C. His Refusal to Obey

Saul at least showed what a good king might achieve. He gave the people new goals and a new purpose. He gave them a glimpse of the possibilities when they were united and obedient. But he himself failed, not militarily, nor in lack of political skill, nor in lack of ability on his part or the peoples. He failed because of his own refusal to be obedient to the will of God. "However talented and courageous a man may be, he will fail the test of history unless he recognizes and acknowledges the Lord of history. This principle applies as much to the ordinary citizen as it does to men in prominent positions." -- Deane and Kirk, First Samuel

D. His Ruined Life

The sad figure of the first king came to a tragic end. As a heroic figure he is overshadowed first by his son Jonathan and then by David, but his own abilities and the affection he could inspire still show through the narratives. Saul was a complex assortment of religious zeal, great ability and tragic flaws. Jealousy, hatred, paranoia, and depression marred his character and cancelled his virtues. Yet Saul wins our sympathy. He was a hero who unified and strengthened the entire nation. Unfortunately, he could not be called a great king, but we must feel for him as David did in his exquisite elegy recorded in 2 Samuel 1.

APPLICATION: Saul is a striking illustration of the danger of worldly elevation and success. He is the man much influenced by the Spirit of God, and yet not radically changed in heart. He is the epitome of a man becoming incorrigibly self-willed. He is the tragic picture of a man being finally deserted by God, and becoming practically unsalvable in the present life.

VI. DAVID: THE SHEPHERD PRINCE

A. His Preparation

In the life of David we have an excellent example of God's providential preparation of a man. Widespread popularity and permanent security were not often the lot of godly people in the Old Testament era. This was

especially true with David. The stories of Saul give insight into what happens to a man whose programs and agendas are determined only by his own will and interest. In contrast, David's attitudes reflect a heart which is controlled by the Spirit of God. His conduct generally exemplifies the highest ideals of a spiritual life. He showed patience, love, discretion, and spiritual insight -- the very qualities that bring success.

He really was a man after God's own heart (1 Sam. 13:14). David's difficulties were parallel to Joseph's days in Egypt. While Saul's pursuit of David was fully intended for evil, God meant it for good (cf. Gen.50:20). David's experiences among the Philistines also prepared him to be the great military leader that he became. He gained considerable knowledge of Philistine geography and military tactics, which would be a decided advantage in planning attacks and conquering their territory. Even during times of crushing defeat, although men could not see the process, the Lord was building David's future kingdom. He became a symbol of hope to a group of outcast malcontents who, under the leadership of David, became the nucleus of his kingdom. They were men who reached their potential under the influence of a godly, gifted leader. In fact, they are later described as "mighty men of valor, men trained for war, who could handle shield and spear, and whose faces were like the faces of lions and they were as swift as the gazelles on the mountains" (1 Chron.12:8).

B. His Life

David was a man of many talents. He was a musician, writer, leader and man of valor. Because of such capabilities, he was eminently qualified for the monarchy of Israel. In a powerful and eloquent book, David: Shepherd and King, Charles Gulston describes him best:

We see the shepherd lad who became Israel's greatest king as vividly, or more so, than any other person in Scripture. He emerges clear-cut from the shadows of the centuries. And he is relevant today because he wrote of things that never change. Because in his cries of despair and songs of triumph he echoed humanity's griefs and its joys. In the anguish of his own soul David revealed the depths to which mankind can sink. Nothing in three thousand years has altered the basic problems he faced. They are still the same, and their solutions are still the same, although we have explored the moon. John Oxenham summed it up in his haunting lines from his poem "The Way":

*"To every man there openeth
A way, and ways, and a way,
And the high soul climbs the High Way,
And the low soul gropes the Low,
And in between on the misty flats,
The rest drift to and fro.
But to every man there openeth
A High Way and a Low,
And every man decideth
The way his soul should go."*

Ever since Eden, people have been choosing one of two ways - the one that leads to God, and the other that leads away from God. The lives of the first two kings of Israel reflect the reaction of all mankind to an immutable law.

David strove to climb the High Way while in sharp and terrible contrast, the tragic Saul who "rejected the word of the LORD" (1 Sam. 15:23) lost himself "on the misty flats."

He was a man of all dimensions, born to be a king in the middle of recorded time. He was a man of war, yet he knew the peace of "still waters and green pastures." He touched the peaks of the sublime and almost lost himself in the depths. He matched the hour that was his own, but he was a man for all time. He was a man called David.

Like a majestic sculpture by Michelangelo, the striking character of David towers over us. No other life in the Old Testament unfolds in more detail than David's. No one else's words save Shakespeare's come so readily to mind in poignant phrases. No one else captures so fully the

heights and depths of Israel's special character, the ironies of Israel's history. He was indeed a man for all time. We trod the hazardous path of David's early years as a young shepherd, once in favor with the king and then relentlessly pursued with a price on his head.

"Our greatest glory consists not in never falling, but in rising every time we may fall." - Goldsmith

We see David as we see the mood and temper of today's weather, because he was a man for all time. He not only ran the gamut of human emotions to the full; he left for the world a record of what he felt and suffered. Like Saul he rose and fell, but unlike his predecessor, he chose the right way out of his dire calamities. It is not because of what he achieved for his own people; it is not because of his victories and the splendor of his reign that David emerges clear-cut from the shadows of the centuries. It is because the magnitude of his fall sears the mind and evokes response. It is because he fell from so great a height, but did not remain at the bottom of the pit. It is because of the way he "decided his soul should go the High Way," the way that was possible not in his own strength, but in God's.

VII. SUMMARY OF 2 SAMUEL

(Taken from Rubbing Elbows with Royalty - Pritchard)

The book of 2 Samuel was probably compiled by Nathan and Gad sometime after 931 B.C., the date marking the division of the kingdom. It covers approximately the forty and one-half years of David's reign (1011-971 B.C.). As 1 Samuel focused on the kingdom of Israel established, 2 Samuel focuses on the kingdom of Israel extended through the conquests of David.

A. The Successes of David - 2 Samuel 1-10

Israel's first king, Saul, had been slain on the slopes of Mount Gilboa by the Philistine armies. News of Saul's death traveled quickly to Ziklag, where David and his men were clearing up the ruins of their city (Chapter 1). Upon hearing the report, David eulogized the fallen king and his friend Jonathan. Since the kingdom was in disarray over the death of Saul and defeat by the Philistines, God brought David to Hebron to be crowned king over Judah (Chapter 2). In a rival move Abner, captain of Saul's armies, placed Ishbosheth, Saul's son, in power over the northern tribes. After a brief period of civil war, Abner defected to David, but was killed by the vengeful Joab (Chapter 3). Ishbosheth's assassination soon followed (Chapter 4), and David became king over all Israel (Chapter 5). In order to solidify the kingdom, the capital was moved north to Jerusalem. In placing the ark of the covenant in Jerusalem, the city was made the religious center as well (Chapter 6). The exaltation and extension of the kingdom continued through the Davidic Covenant (Chapter 7) and David's conquests (Chapters 8 and 10). But even in victory, the heart of the king was still tender as he remembered his covenant with Jonathan and cared for the ailing Mephibosheth (Chapter 9).

B. The Sins of David - 2 Samuel 11-12

In an unguarded moment the king spied a beautiful young Jewish woman taking a bath in the evening (Chapter 11). Overcome by his own lust, he sent for Bathsheba and committed adultery. When it was learned that she was with child, he sent for her husband, who had been away fighting a battle. Being more righteous than David, he refused to spend time with his wife while his comrades fought God's enemies. Frustration and futility set in as David sent Uriah to the front line with his own death sentence sealed in a note to Joab. David thought he had covered his sin, but God saw it and brought a message of Judgment through his prophet Nathan (Chapter 12). Although God forgave David and restored him to fellowship, the consequences of the sin were forthcoming.

C. The Sorrows of David - 2 Samuel 12-24

David's troubles began with the death of the Bathsheba's child (Chapter 12). Then came the incestuous act of his son Amnon with Tamar (Chapter 13). Amnon was murdered by Tamar's brother Absalom, who then had to flee from his father David's face. Absalom was permitted to return to Jerusalem (Chapter 14). An embittered Absalom began to conspire to take the kingdom from his father. David barely escaped from Jerusalem with a modest group of loyal followers (Chapter 15). Although David fled to the Transjordan area (Chapter 16), he had spies in Absalom's court. One was Husahi, who helped David by defeating the counsel of Ahithophel (Chapter 17). The confrontation between David and Absalom took place, with David being the victor (Chapter 18). Although David returned to Jerusalem (Chapter 19), his sorrow continued as Sheba of Benjamin led another revolt in the kingdom (Chapter 20). A three-year famine followed (Chapter 21). Chapters 22 and 23 record a song of praise by David and the acts of his mighty men. The final chapter concludes the book with the sin of David in numbering the people. This brought a plague on Israel that took the lives of 70,000 men (Chapter 24).

APPLICATION QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF:

1. Jealousy is the fear of being displaced. Is there someone or a group that you are jealous or envious of? (See 1 Cor.13:4)
2. Are you trying to meet your needs by a method that God does not approve?
3. Are you involved in any occult areas (fortune tellers, seances, astrology, Ouija boards? (See Dt. 18:10-11; Lev. 19:31; 20:6; 2 Kings 21:6.)
4. When you do wrong, do you repent quickly and completely?
5. Are you weaving a net of deception that eventually will be your own trap?
6. Is the basic tenor of your life one that evidences a heart for God?
7. Are you willing to see in your difficulties the hand of the One Who is the Blessed Controller of all things, and thus not fret, but give thanks? (See Rom.8:28; 1 Thess.5:18.)