

Notes on II Samuel 1–12

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Chapter 1–2

Saul was killed in battle. An Amalekite who claimed to have killed Saul at the latter's request, sought to gain David's favour (Note that Saul's bodyguard was not bold enough to do this and that, in fact, Saul had fallen on his own sword; I Sam. 31:4). The Amalekite had misread David altogether. David had called on God to avenge him (I Sam. 26:23–24) but he did not hate his enemy. Saul had been God's anointed and any action of God was sacred to David.

David had been sustained through terrible trials by the covenant of God with Israel. Now there came a lament for his king and for the son who had been his closest friend. Love rather than victory had been in his heart. Though Jonathan had been the chief example of bravery and honour during Saul's reign, he praised them together and called on the women to honour Saul as they had once honoured him. The nation had fared well through his victories. However, David's special pleasure in Saul's family was Jonathan (vv. 23, 26). This man had loved David as himself (I Sam. 18:1, 3) and David held no earthly love more dear.

In the past, the prophet Samuel had been present to show that God appointed Saul as king. He had anointed and encouraged David, but now, was no longer present to oversee his passage to power. However, David knew his kingship was God's doing and sought the Lord for his starting point. He may still have been seen by some as a Philistine collaborator, and he could still encounter people like Nabal (I Sam. 25). David had gone about his shepherding of Israel from his Philistine city, and Hebron was one city that had received gifts when he defeated the Amalekites (I Sam. 30:31). Now, he returned to the town with 600 fighting men and their families. Judah as a tribe came forward willingly and anointed him as their king.

David's rise to the throne illustrates how, in this egoistic and defensive world, the authority of the Lord's Anointed will always be contested. But God himself has declared that his Son is Lord and Christ by raising him from the dead (Acts 2:36) and those who receive him do so because they see that God has sent him to bless them (Acts 3:26).

Judah's elders showed more understanding of David than the Amalekite had. They told him which township had cared for Saul's body. David was quick to honour and bless these men, even though they were across the Jordan, and well North of his own power base.

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A little further East from there, at Mahanaim, Abner had sought to maintain the unity of the nation, and his own power base, by making Saul's remaining son king. He had not anointed him and had not sought the Lord about his actions. Ishbosheth lasted two years and Abner's action became the focus of inevitable rivalry. It was at Gibeon that matters came to a head. Perhaps David's men happened to be there. Abner seems to have contested their rights to be in Northern tribal territory. What began as a tragic and inconclusive 12-a-side contest, developed into full-scale battle and David's men proved superior.

In all of this, Abner had taken the lead and appealed to Joab and his men not to take things too far. David's three nephews were zealous men. Earlier, Abishai had stolen inside Saul's camp with David (I Sam. 26:6), and still had the same vengeful spirit that he manifested then. He paid with his life. Then Joab heard Abner's appeal to acknowledge that all their soldiers were brothers. Did Joab take God's name in vain when he said, 'as the Lord lives'? We cannot tell, but, for the moment, he let the victory stand. Both sides returned to their home towns. It would be some time before David could take his place over all Israel.

Jesus had similar difficulty to David in subduing the passions of his disciples. There was no question that their enemies would be scattered, but they did not quickly understand the patience of Jesus in gathering his brothers and sisters under his reign.

Prayer

Dear Father, you have ordained victories for your people, in the name of your Son. Help us to recognise when our own need to succeed drives us. By your Son, lead us in the way we should walk. Fill us with his mind and his love. Broaden our affections to encompass those whom your Son has longed to have as brothers and sisters. In his name we pray. Amen.

Chapter 3–4

At Hebron, David grew stronger, and also gathered wives and children. He may not have thought that having a few wives was prohibited by Deuteronomy 17:17. Taking foreign wives was accepted practice for securing foreign alliances. In other ways, David had shown that the law was very much in his thinking.

Among Northerners, Abner positioned himself to retain power. He had little time for the ineffective Ishbosheth but, for the moment, supported him out of loyalty to Saul. Even so, the Northern alliance weakened. When frustrated over what he considered a trivial matter, Abner despised Ishbosheth and determined to tip the kingdom into David's lap.

Abner acknowledged the word of God that David would be the means of defeating their enemies (I Sam. 9:16). Ishbosheth could do little about this and complied with David's demand to have Michal returned to him. This was a political statement affirming David's rightful continuity with Saul's reign. At a personal level, Michal had loved David and saved his life.

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But all was not well in David's camp. Abner's overtures of peace and David's receiving of them aroused Joab to avenge the loss of his brother. Abner's actions had been those of a professional soldier, but Joab, though a supporter of God's anointed, was a man of vengeance. David took great care to show that he honoured all who deserved honour and that he despised injustice, and then committed Joab to God's vengeance. He had learned clearly that vengeance belongs to God and that the kingship of God over his people could not be built by feuding. David's position was weakened by Joab's folly, but the grief he showed commended him to his people.

Ishbosheth was now powerless. Two of his commanders presumed that power would be used under David's reign as it was among other nations and killed their king to ensure their position in the new regime. How wrong they were! David's heart had been well tutored against meeting anger with anger. The wrath of man would not work the righteousness of God (James 1:20). He had made this clear to his own people. Now he had made it plain to the Northern tribes. The scene was set for his kingship over all Israel.

Prayer

Father, in the midst of human rivalry, you established David as king among your people. Now, in the midst of this world's hatred, and your church's angers, you have made Christ Lord. He did not seek his own advantage but ours, and was obedient even to death. May his spirit be formed in us, and may the strong and gracious reign of Christ be established in the earth, since this is to your glory. In his name we pray. Amen.

Chapter 5–6

It had taken more than seven years for God's anointing of David, and David's faithful exercising of that responsibility, to be acknowledged in the North. Now, it was clear to all that God was king maker in Israel. David was anointed as king for a second time (cf. 2:4).

The widened kingdom required a new base, and David selected the unconquered city, Jerusalem. The Jebusite inhabitants scornfully said blind and lame people could defend the city but David despised them and their scorn and defeated the city, perhaps by gaining entry through an aqueduct. The stronghold was called Zion. From here, his kingdom was steadily strengthened. Israel knew once more that God was with their king, and with them.

Because this victory was symbolically pivotal for David's reign and for the demonstration of God's victory among the nations, Zion became the name given to the whole city and especially the temple site, the place from which the Lord revealed his presence and power (Ps. 48:2; Matt. 5:35). It is the name taken over by the church because she is the people and the 'city' secured by the victories of Christ (Heb. 12:22; I Peter 2:6; Rev. 14:1).

It is perhaps appropriate to see a parable in this ancient Jebusite jibe. The world regards its fortifications as so secure that no strength is required to keep the servants of the word of God at a distance. Well may we scorn their scorn. The place of their bravado may soon become a centre for the proclamation of the kingdom. However, Jesus has shown us that his love reaches out to embrace and heal the lame and the blind (Matt. 21:5, 9,14). Israel's exclusion of lame or blind

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priests from the house of God would have no place in the kingdom of Christ. Being lame or blind would cease being a taunt.

Tribute began to flow from a northern neighbour. It was this, rather than victory over all Israel, or even victory over local nations, that settled it in David's mind that his kingship was established. A later prophet would say that it was too light a thing for the Lord's Servant to raise up the tribes of Israel; he would be a light to the nations (Isa. 49:6). Here, already, there was a display of the Lord's glory among the nations, in fulfilment of his promises to Israel (Deut. 15:6; 28:12, 44), and in readiness for Christ who would fulfil the prophecy.

The date of Hiram of Tyre's power suggests that this building activity happened further in David's reign, but its significance is noted here.

It was when Jesus saw certain Greeks seeking him that he knew his 'hour' had come (John 12:23).

David's true loyalty was now clear to the Philistines. He retreated to his stronghold (at Jerusalem or Adullam?) but, under God's direct leading, defeated them twice. David knew that idols could not protect their people; nor could the idols be protected by their people from the Lord who cared for Israel.

King David knew his authority came from the Lord. He knew the Ark of the Covenant represented God's presence and his name could be invoked there. Saul had done nothing to make the ark central to Israel's national life, however David desired that it be with him at his capital. Carrying the ark in a cart may have been all right for the Philistines when they returned it (I Sam. 6:7), but Israel had been taught how to carry it. David had a lesson in reverence when God 'broke out' against Uzzah's 'breaking out' in touching the ark. But this severity of God was with a view to blessing Israel, as he showed by blessing the home where the ark rested. As soon as David realised this, he was again eager to have the ark and came now with 'bearers' (as required in Exod. 37:5).

David's joy was that God was king among his people. He dressed in priestly dress, like those who bore the ark, and unashamedly confessed his delight in the goodness of God to the nation. (Cf. Psalms 47; 68; 98.) He worshipped with burnt offerings and peace offerings. Being assured of God's favour, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord (as represented by the ark) and celebrated the fellowship they enjoyed before the Lord by distributing food for all to eat. Here was true worship, a model for Israel to follow. However, David's wife, Michal, though she had loved him, could not accept the source of his greatness in God. She had saved David's life when her father tried to kill him, but now, she needed to understand the difference between these two kings: David did not care to preserve his own reputation with earthly grandeur. The humble in the land, those who praised God with him, would honour him. She would die childless.

Prayer

Father, we live in your presence, with Christ among us, and him reigning over all things until every tongue confesses that he is Lord. Let there be no dissident spirit in any of us, resenting his reign or desiring vainglory. Our Lord, we glory now in you and in your Son. We would not have learned to worship you unless we learned the severity of your love through our Lord's

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death. But you gave him to us, and for us, to bless us in turning every one away from their wickedness. Therefore, we give thanks and praise to you, Holy God, in the name of your Son. Amen.

Chapter 7–8

Gentile kings considered it their duty to provide grand housing for their gods. Nathan, however, heard a contrary word from the Lord: 'I appointed David, gave him victory and made him great; I will settle my people, just as I have been doing since the first of the judges; I will build David a house, meaning, a dynasty; your son will be my son and he will build me a house; as my son, if he errs, I will discipline him but not destroy him.'

In Chronicles, the denial is linked to David's many wars (I Chron. 22:8; 28:3).

As always, the God of grace had more in mind than David could have imagined. He had been thinking of what he could accomplish but was now confronted with the magnitude of what God would accomplish. God's grace to this point had amazed him, but now, he could be assured of it for years to come. What would this mean for the kingdom of Israel and for the glory of God's name in the earth? The permanence of his dynasty was now the law (RSV margin) for mankind.

W. C. Kaiser suggests that this means: 'this is the charter by which humanity will be directed' (in Dumbrell's *Covenant and Creation* p. 151f.). Someone has suggested that II Samuel 7 is the central chapter of the Old Testament because everything has led up to this moment and everything to come will flow from it.

David worshipped God, probably at the place where the ark was tented. Nowhere else in the Old Testament are we told that someone sat in God's presence. Did he sense already the truth of Psalm 110:1–2? (This Psalm would be fulfilled when Jesus sat at the right hand of God with all his enemies defeated.) All that he had heard concerning God delivering his people from Egypt (e.g. Deut. 3:24), and perhaps also, the greatness promised to Abraham (Gen. 15:2), was now coming to David personally. Israel had been redeemed from Egypt, and would be secured by the kingship of his successors (or Successor, Jesus Christ). This is how God would be the God of Israel.

Therefore, David prayed: 'May all this be so!'. The faithful word and promise of God had made him bold in God's presence. His reign was secured by this promise well before it actually happened. Here, and on many occasions afterwards, he would pray that there would be a performance of what God had promised (e.g. Psalm 69).

David ruthlessly subdued the Moabites (surprisingly so, because his grandmother was a Moabitess and they had assisted him in his fugitive days) and the Philistines. Then, he secured territories in the North that were strategically and commercially important, and subdued Israel's life long enemy, Edom. His kingdom was now secure, his name was established, he had been helped by the Lord and had dedicated to him the treasures gathered in his conquests.

Psalm 60 is reputed to be linked with the defeat of the Edomites in the Valley of Salt.

Prayer

Father, keep us always mindful of your promise and humbled by your grace. Who are we that you should have done such great things for us. Your promised Son has come and, through him, we have been delivered from our sins and from all who would prevent your blessing coming to the world. Your promised Spirit has been poured out. To us have been given all the mercies that you have promised. Now Lord, in the name of Christ whom you have raised from the dead, grant deliverance to us all. Amen.

Chapter 9–10

David was now in a position to fulfil the obligation Jonathan had laid on him and quickly acted to ensure that Mephibosheth was provided for under his reign. Generally, ancient monarchs were ruthless with those they displaced and survivors of Saul would have done well to hide. However, Jonathan had relied on the covenant love of God for Israel, and believed that David was anointed to fulfil God's covenant promises. He had trusted that the house of Saul would be cared for under the reign of David, and so it was. This personal covenant was a local expression of the faithful love of God for his people.

Discovering that Mephibosheth was lame did not deter David, even though his comment about the Jebusites (5:6–8) had helped to shape a popular proverb about lame people. His covenant with Jonathan and the kindness or grace (*hesed*) it expressed, surmounted this defect and Mephibosheth was given full honour and his inheritance was fully reinstated. Under the covenant made with David, Israel came to see that all nations would be blessed. When Jesus came as David's son, the lame and blind were not excluded. All that mattered was that they acknowledged the anointing of Jesus to be their Messiah.

David's rise in power had created new problems for his Eastern neighbours. The king of Ammon had been happy to befriend David when he was hated by Saul, but his son saw the new situation differently. He had no idea of the kind of rule David exercised (as illustrated by his faithfulness to Mephibosheth) and suspected foul play. The spite they showed in humiliating the ambassadors contrasts with David's caring for them when they returned.

The Ammonites now needed help from their Northern neighbours, the Arameans. (We have already been told that David defeated them in chapter eight, but that may have been a summary statement recording the later victory.)

We are not told that David sought the Lord for guidance as he had done for previous battles. He sent Joab at first, but he, when caught in a pincer movement, trusted his fortunes to God and won. The Arameans were stung by defeat and escalated things further, requiring that David gather all Israel's forces and lead them into action. The Arameans learned that they would have to serve Israel peacefully and that it would do no good to oppose the Lord's anointed. Better to confess that the welfare of the nations would lie in making peace with him (cf. Psalm 2). What happened to the Ammonites occupies the next two chapters. How different the history of nations would be if the nature of God's reign through his anointed King was investigated before his servants were rejected! 'How blessed are all who take refuge in him!'

Prayer

Father, we bless you for the covenant of grace sealed with the blood of your Son. Your anointing of him to be our Saviour is plain, and under his reign we lack no good thing. Surely, goodness and mercy shall follow us all the days of our lives. Grant that we, servants of Christ, may give no cause to the nations to doubt your goodness. Rather, may they see the grace of Christ and come to his light and truth and know you as their Father. We ask this for your glory and in the name of your Son. Amen.

Chapter 11–12

With the Arameans dealt with, the semi nomadic Ammonites remained. Joab and the entire army of Israel were dispatched to deal with them. This action was successful, and their main city, Rabbah, was all that remained to be subdued. But all was not well in the palace.

Israel had been told not to dispossess them because they were descendants of Lot (Deut. 2:19–20).

David's moral sense had been sharpened well with regard to his kingship, However, for a moment, with his power over the land and among his leaders secure, his usual fear of God appears to have been suspended and he could not recognise what belonged to his neighbour.

It seems that, at first, he did not plan to have Bathsheba as his wife because he first sought to cover his deed by Uriah's homecoming. For the sake of a sexual gratification, he committed adultery, acted deceitfully to the husband and put a number of troops into a suicide mission so he could marry Bathsheba and make the pregnancy look legitimate. The integrity of Uriah (a Hittite by background) and the wantonness of David were in stark contrast.

What court could condemn David? Probably, none. But he still feared God. Nathan was dispatched and cleverly led David to condemn himself, of theft (12:6 with Exod. 22:1) and lack of compassion. There was more than this, as the Lord made clear to him by Nathan: in his one act of adultery he had revealed his ungratefulness, covetousness, ignoring of the word of the Lord and despising of the Lord. His penalty would be constant warfare, evil among his sons and public disgrace for his wives.

The 'court' had been convened and the sentence handed down. David could only confess his sin. He had abused not only man but also God. But the servant of God had more to do than condemn. The justice of God was not satisfied with penalties but with the removal of David's sin and the promise of life instead of death. Well may David have prayed the prayer of Psalm 51 at this time. He asked from God what he had not shown to Uriah: grace, steadfast love and compassion. He, like Saul, had sinned; but, unlike Saul, believed he could be cleansed of his sin, and sought that the Holy Spirit would not be taken from him.

God's work among the nations was not just to subdue them but to reveal the glory of his law among them (Deut. 4:8). If David's deed had brought him the lasting pleasure of the child he had conceived, the nations' scorn of Israel's law may have been justified. David longed for the child to live, but then, accepted the judgement of the Lord. Even his servants could not understand this quality in David. Then, we are

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given an example of what it meant that the Lord took away David's sin. The Lord sent his prophet to announce that the Lord loved Solomon. Later, he would succeed David as king.

Being loved by the Lord is parallel with being chosen by him in biblical thought (Deut. 7:7; 10:15; John 15:9; Eph. 1:4–5).

During this time, Joab's battle against the Ammonites had succeeded, and he was eager that David take the honour due to him. So David was right back in the flow of his work and came home richly rewarded. His harshness to the Ammonites seems strange because they had protected him before and would provide for him later (17:27–29). However, at various times, Ammonites had sought to extend their territory at Israel's expense and had been ruthless in their doing so (Jud. 3:13; 10:7–18; 11:4–36; I Sam. 11:1–2; 14:47; etc.). Amos prophesied against their brutality years later (Amos 1:13). It is also possible that David did not attack them with the equipment mentioned but made them use it as forced labourers, and perhaps, to demolish their own city. Whatever the details, the incident which began with the Ammonites humiliating David's ambassadors, concluded with their own humiliation.

Prayer

Lord, who of us can stand when temptation comes, especially when our life seems to be in order. As our Lord taught us to pray, do not lead us into temptation. Deliver us from evil. May your word of grace to us be our first love. If we fall, may the knowledge of your mercy sustain us, bring us again to the light and renew us in the service of Christ your Son, in whose name we pray. Amen.

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