

1 SAMUEL 1:1 — 2:11

GOD ANSWERS HANNAH'S PRAYER

Story Notes

File no. 50

At the beginning of 1 Samuel, we are taken to where Israel's national life was focused, the Ark of the Covenant and the throne of God, and see that the priesthood had descended into self-interest. The story tells how God caused his word to be heard again, and how he raised up a king who loved his word.

Perhaps the Lord's reticence for Israel to have a king was because they were so unable to understand what manner of king he had in mind for his people.

Samuel was the last of the judges and the first of the 'order' of prophets.

True godliness had survived in Israel, though much of the nation disregarded the Lord. Elkanah brought his offerings each year to the tabernacle where the ark was housed. Hannah, much loved by her husband, was childless and was taunted by a second wife. This brought her to cry out to God for a child. Her sufferings led her to God, and there, she discovered his loving kindness. The old high priest was not very discerning in all this but knew that God would grant the prayers of this distressed woman. When Samuel was born, she devoted him to the service of the Lord.

Hannah's worship, when she revisited the house of the Lord at Shiloh, shows that she had been opened up to far more than her own circumstances. Like Mary after her (Luke 2), she had discovered, through her own story, that Israel had no need to fear their enemies. Her weakened state had been the occasion of God's great mercy to her. It was so for all who called on the Lord in truth. The prayers of the hungry and the barren had been heard and now she asked that God would give strength to their king and take the whole nation forward.

In fact, Israel had no king at this time, so the song is prophetic—anticipating things still to come. Israel needed to know that the Lord was their God, and they needed to be a people who would call upon him. This faith was revealed to Hannah, an ordinary member of the community. Later, God would raise up a king who had a faith like this. His name would be David.

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1 SAMUEL 2:12 — 3:18
GOD CALLS SAMUEL
Story Notes
File no. 51

While young Samuel grew up and served God with all the heritage of his godly parents, Eli's sons, Hophni and Phineas, raged out of control, doing as they wished with the people's offerings and the female helpers. Eli spoke to them but would not restrain them. He honoured his sons more than God and shared in their sin through inaction. The family had become self-indulgent, effectively forsaking God (Deut. 32:15). God had promised the priesthood to Aaron and his sons forever (Exod. 29:9), but within that, if part of the priesthood showed itself to be untrue, their line would die out. This happened to Eli's part of the priestly family (1 Sam. 22:11–23; 1 Kings. 2:26–27). As the story of Israel reveals, the Aaronic family of Zadok came to have responsibility for the priesthood (1 Kings. 2:35). Survivors of Eli's family would beg for menial jobs to earn a living.

For Eli's sons not to know the Lord was an act of defiance (2:12), but young Samuel had not had the opportunity to know him. He was in the temple where the ark was kept, serving the Lord under Eli. No one there was accustomed to the Lord speaking to his people.

God began speaking to Samuel, and when Samuel realised who it was, God told him that Eli and his family would die.

Samuel soon became known as a truthful prophet. The Lord was with him and continued to speak to him and everything he prophesied happened. Though Eli had been unfaithful, he acknowledged that the word given to Samuel was the word of God. Israel could only live by every word from God's mouth (Deut. 8:3).

The lamp of God still flickering in the temple before daybreak suggests that in the prayer of Hannah and the word that came to her son, God had tended the lamps by which Israel was brought through this dark period of the judges.

1 SAMUEL 3:19 — 7:15

THE CAPTURE AND RETURN OF THE ARK

Story Notes

File No. 52

1 Samuel 3:19 — 4:42

Israel so disregarded God that they presumed to use the covenant box like an idol—to guarantee their success in battle. This had never happened in all the years when the judges ruled. Perhaps they thought they could revive the days of Joshua. However, they learned that God ruled by his word and that he could not be controlled by their use of his throne (the ark). The ark was intended to assure Israel of God's presence and his nature.

On the day of this battle, Eli and his sons died, together with thousands of Israelites, and the ark of the covenant was captured. His daughter in law believed the glory of God had departed from Israel. In fact, glory is never linked with the ark alone but with the tabernacle as a whole. God wanted Israel to see his glory, in the things that he did and in the worship he had given them and to be a witness to this in the world (Num. 14:21). What had really departed was the moral glory of people living by the word of God. However, the Lord himself, merciful and gracious (Exod. 33:18 – 34:9), had not departed from Israel. His word, through Samuel, was being heard across the land and all his words came true. The nation was being prepared for the days of David.

1 Samuel 5 – 6

The ark could not protect Israel from the Philistines, but it brought Dagon to the ground and its host cities to their knees. The ark was not a charm Israel could use to make things happen, but the throne of God. Israel refused to be a light of revelation to Philistia, but the Lord caused his own light to shine among them so that they would fear him.

The Philistines thought they must give a guilt offering to the Lord: they were in breach of his law and needed to make amends. Belief that does not arise from the revelation of God's grace is likely to be confused and fearful, but God was showing them that they were responsible to him. Diviners advised Philistia to beware of being like Pharaoh in Egypt who stubbornly refused to acknowledge Israel's God. 'Give him glory' they said, 'and gifts representing all the lords and cities of the land.' They also prescribed a test to ensure that their sufferings were the result of having the ark among them. Graciously, God met their requirements and relieved them of any doubt that they had acted appropriately in releasing the ark.

In remembering this story, Israel's prophets drew attention to the purpose of the Lord to set his people free from all slavery so that they may truly worship.

The Levites of Beth-shemesh (Josh. 21:16) honoured God in their offering (although offerings were supposed to be of male beasts). Some residents (probably seventy) did not join in the celebration, and took the liberty to look inside the ark and paid dearly for their irreverence. Fear gripped them and they no longer wanted the Lord among them and they asked a Jebusite (foreigners assigned to menial tasks) city to take up the task.

There may also have been political or cultic reasons why Kiriath-jearim was chosen. Philistines still controlled Israel until David's time and they may have preferred this somewhat neutral territory with a cultic history.

God had brought his ark back to Israel, but Israel was far from ready to receive it and spent a further twenty years in this state.

1 Samuel 7

The return of the ark was God's doing but it did not lessen the power of the Philistines. It may have encouraged Israel, because, after 20 more years of Philistine oppression, they began to cry out to God. Samuel then assumed a more public function as judge. He was not a military leader, as in the book of *Judges*, but a spiritual leader. He reminds us of the ministry of Moses as prophet, priest and judge.

THE CAPTURE AND RETURN OF THE ARK con't

The intercession of Samuel and his offering (a whole burnt offering signified total dedication to the Lord) led to a total victory over their enemies. Israel had every reason to believe that their national life was safe in the hands of their covenant Lord.

Samuel signalled further victories by his memorial stone. The place where Israel previously lost to the Philistines and lost the ark of God (4:1; 5:1) was now the place of victory. Samuel travelled around Israel and dealt with the personal life of his people, just as he had dealt with their national life. Israel had no reason to complain that God was not their King.

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1 SAMUEL 7:15 — 10:9

‘GIVE US A KING’ / HOW SAMUEL FOUND A KING

Story Notes

File no. 53

1 Samuel 7:15 — 8:22

When Samuel's sons proved unworthy, Israel's request for a king seemed reasonable. However, it was not just the sons Israel wished to replace. They craved to have the security other nations appeared to have with a visible monarch. The Lord was not near enough!

Samuel approached the Lord with the request of the people. The Lord explained that he had always been dealing with a rebellious people; Samuel was just discovering what God knew all along. He must take notice of what the people said, but warn them of the increased demands to cover the cost of human glory and power that a king would find necessary. How gentler they would find the yoke that God put on them! However, 'So let it be' the people said. 'So let it be' said the Lord.

1 Samuel 9 – 10

Saul came from a noble family and had a noble appearance, although he was aware of the smallness of his family and his tribe (brought about by a slaughter— Judg. 21:6). He did not appear to know the prophet Samuel or the possibility of seeking help from him. However, God had heard the cry of Israel for release from their oppressors. He had not ceased to care for them because they had rejected him and would give Israel the deliverer they needed. He prepared Samuel for a meeting with Saul. Then he led Saul to Samuel and to his destiny through a helpful servant.

Samuel showed Saul that he truly was a prophet. 'On the next day' he said, 'I will tell you all that is on your mind. 'For now', Samuel said, 'your father's donkeys are found'. Then he added, 'You and your family will have the riches of the land.' Samuel had already shown the nation the riches which a king would demand from them.

Saul thought himself and his family unworthy of honour but was tutored by Samuel in the greatness he should now wear. He was honoured as favoured guest at the town's sacrificial feast. On the next day, Samuel would proclaim to him the word of God. The welfare of the nation, and of Saul, would depend on this word (cf. 3:1, 7, 21; 4:1; 15:10, 23, 26). There would be no greater honour than to be the servant of the word and Saul needed to learn to wear it as a servant's coat.

So Saul was anointed as ruler over God's inheritance. Samuel emphasised God's ownership of Israel, suggesting that Saul should seek God's kingship above his own. He would meet two people who would confirm the safety of the donkeys and tell him that his father wanted him home. Then he would meet three men from whom he would receive bread which was intended for presentation to God. After that he would encounter a troop of prophets and the Spirit would come on him so that he would praise God in an ecstasy and be changed in his goals and affections, at least for a time. These would be signs showing that God was with him to enable him to do whatever was needed in his new role. The place where the prophets met him was near a Philistine garrison, emphasising the pressing need Israel had for deliverance. However, there was a limitation on his powers: only Samuel could offer the sacrifices necessary before battle.

All these things occurred and Saul's prophesying became known. It had happened near to his home, and his neighbours knew the family. They could understand a son of Kish, but whose son was he now? Who was 'father' to the prophets? Was Saul now one of them? Something new was afoot. Saul, however, kept the matter of the anointing from his family.

Israel was fragmented and only Samuel could bring them together. The time was ripe to give them the king they demanded and so Samuel summoned the nation. Through him, God reminded Israel that he had always taken care of them, and, that they had rejected him. However, God gave them the king they asked for and by drawing lots God's chosen one was

'GIVE US A KING' / HOW SAMUEL FOUND A KING con't

publicly identified. God's choice of Saul, made known and confirmed privately had now been declared publicly. Saul should have had no doubts about his place in Israel. However, the man chosen by God and so attractive to the people as a leader, was hiding and had to be located, by God, among some baggage.

Samuel wrote the constitution for the newly formed monarchy. There was no structure for the exercise of kingly rule but the new leadership was clearly enough defined to attract godly men to support him and for evil men to resent him.

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1 SAMUEL 13:1 — 14:23

SAUL DISOBEYS THE LORD / JONATHAN'S DARING DEED

Story Notes

File no. 54

Saul now had a standing army of 3000 rather than the citizen militia that had sufficed before. However, his own tribal area remained under Philistine control and his kingship could not be affirmed without decisive action. This action came from his son rather than himself. As we see later, Jonathan was a man of faith, and so, of action. Saul seemed more ruled by his uncertainties than by God's call. The dilemma caused by mounting opposition and timid troops could be likened to the situation King Ahaz experienced later. Isaiah said to him: 'If you will not believe, surely you shall not be established' (Isa. 7:9).

The terms of God's call to Saul included waiting for Samuel to offer sacrifice before battle. The point was critical because a kingship with a life of its own, not tied to the word of the Lord, would undermine Israel as a theocracy. Saul's reasoning about waiting seven days seems reasonable but he admitted that he 'forced' himself. Offering sacrifice does not seem to have been the problem (cf. 14:34–35; 2 Sam. 24:25; 1 Kings 3:15) so much as disregarding the prophet. His thinking had become clouded with self-reliance. God made it clear that no dynasty would arise from this man.

Later on, David (2 Sam. 24:10) and Asa (2 Chron. 16:9) also acted foolishly (the word implies mental incapacity and self-reliance) in disregarding a prophetic command and they suffered severely.

When Saul was chosen by God he was chosen for the people (8:18), but God would appoint another king 'for himself' (13:14). The appointment would arise from God's own heart rather than out of the heart of the people. In this way, we are introduced to David who will occupy much of the latter part of the book. Saul would now have to live in the shadow of the one the Lord had in mind as his replacement.

Even still, Saul could have been like his father, a mighty man of valour (9:1), and remember Gideon whom God called a mighty man of valour (Jud. 6:12). Though the country was almost stripped of weapons and Saul had only 600 of his earlier 3000 men, victory could have been his. But it was his son Jonathan who showed what it meant to live under the kingship of God. 'Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few', he said.

Saul was informed that the Philistines had retreated, found that his son was missing (did Saul guess that he had caused the retreat?) but lacked confidence to act and called for the ark to get a further word from the Lord. Then he dispensed with this when he saw that the confusion among the Philistines was increasing. With troops regathered from defectors and the frightened, God gave Israel a great victory that day.

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1 SAMUEL 16:1–13
SAMUEL ANOINTS DAVID
Story Notes
File no. 55

Samuel must have longed for good leadership in Israel again. Perhaps he hoped that Saul would be spared. However, Saul was glorying in himself, preening himself on his 'obedience' to God, and putting a religious twist on his own ambition. Littleness in his own eyes had now turned to bigness in his own eyes with the need to humour the people so they would continue to follow him. Sacrifice, even though commanded by God could not replace simple obedience. David and the prophets, and Jesus also, would never forget what was learned here (Ps. 51:16–17; Isa. 1:11–15; Micah. 6:6–8; Heb. 10:6–9). Finally, nothing could remove all the sins of rebellion and insubordination other than the body of Jesus offered up in simple obedience to his Father.

Saul regarded loss of kingship as the worst thing that could happen to him, and he longed for the prophetic approval that was essential to his standing. Samuel, grieved yet lovingly, provided this last concession to Saul's failed kingship. Samuel discharged the task omitted by Saul, and then, the focus of our story moves to David. Samuel must leave Saul behind him.

The story moves to the king that the Lord would choose for himself, rather than for the people. Bethlehem's elders were not sure they stood in God's favour, but they need not have feared. From them would come Israel's next king. From them also would come the Messiah (Micah. 5:2). Then, Samuel and the elders of Bethlehem, with Jesse, witnessed God's selection process. Those thought most suitable were bypassed. However, the youngest son, David, was handsome, which seems to be acknowledged as a sign of God's favour (Exod. 2:2 with Acts 7:20). All present, including the brothers, witnessed David's anointing.

We are not told how the Spirit came on David, but he was soon known as a mighty man of valour. This, together with his skill on the harp, and especially his faith in God, placed him appropriately in the king's court. There, he assisted the man who had aspired to something in his own right and who was now left to achieve it by his own power. For the moment, Saul was comforted by God's gift of David.

1 SAMUEL 17:1–53
DAVID AND GOLIATH
Story Notes
File no. 56

The Spirit of the Lord had come powerfully on David. Now we see the result of this and the way David came to public attention. Goliath had terrorised Israel's troops because they had no practical knowledge of the fact that the Lord was with them. David had learned in his shepherding that he could rely on God to protect his flock.

David asking questions about the Philistine giant annoyed his brothers. His purpose was not to avoid other duties, or to play the role of hero, but to stir the troops to see what this Philistine was doing. God's ownership and protection of Israel and her armies had been questioned. The Spirit of God in David was provoked. So, Saul and Israel again had the benefit of prophetic confidence and Saul gave David his blessing: 'May the Lord be with you!'

David dealt with Goliath with the simplicity of what he knew—a sling shot. More importantly, he was jealous for the name of the Lord. His ambition was that the world would know there was a God in Israel. His conviction was that God would demonstrate his care for Israel by working without the use of superior power. So Israel gained a victory, and Saul made closer enquiry as to whom he would have to reward.

We have been told that Saul already loved David and benefited from his music. This story implies that he knew nothing of David. This may be because he had given little attention to the details of those who served him.

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1 SAMUEL 18:1 — 20:42

1 Samuel 17:58

SAUL TRIES TO KILL DAVID / GOD KEEPS DAVID SAFE

Story Notes

File no. 57

Saul made sure that David stayed with him. His kingdom depended on such men. His son Jonathan stood to gain nothing politically from a rival, however he took David into his heart. They enjoyed the fellowship that arises from a shared trust in God (cf. 14:6–15).

Saul used David because of his wisdom and success, but then he had to deal with David's popularity from grateful women and the troops he led. His need for David turned to suspicion, rage, dread, and then to cunning. Perhaps the evil spirit from the Lord was meant to awaken him to what his life had become. However, knowing God had left him and was with David only focused his resolve to remove this new servant of the Lord. He thought promotion would leave David exposed to the Philistines.

Anger and fear must have blinded Saul to the significance of the Goliath incident. The king's pleasure was to bring David's life into danger (18:20). However, when David realised he could have the king's daughter as his wife by destroying a number of Philistines, he was glad to do this. Then, Saul's pleasure turned to even deeper bitterness and fear. Nothing could halt the ascent of David.

1 Samuel 19 – 20

Saul had now fallen into the sin of Cain against which the elder John warns us (1 John 3:11–12). His murderous wishes were temporarily averted by his son's diplomacy but David's further successes drove him back to murder. (David may have written Psalm 59 on this occasion.) Murder was avoided again by his daughter's cunning. Saul saw these members of his family as enemies but they were true friends. In acting out their delight in David, or love for him, Saul had another opportunity to look at what was really happening. The occasion when Saul sat with spear in hand, and David with a harp, was a parable. David could fight, better than Saul could, but he could also stop and sing with a heart that was glad in God.

So, David fled, to Samuel. He needed to be with another man of the Spirit. This same Spirit protected them by coming upon the servants of Saul, and then, on Saul himself. He prophesied again, as he had done when he was changed into another man (10:6, 9–13). Perhaps this was his opportunity to begin again. However, the tragedy of Saul's life was that the same Spirit who had begun aiding him now frustrated him. The question remained; was Saul really among the prophets? He certainly had opportunity to be so. On the other hand, David was nurtured by the man who anointed him, and by the Spirit of God.

Jonathan had reason to be confident with his father. He had once reconciled his father to David (19:4–6). He said that his father consulted him on everything (20:1). David needed better assurance than this, but his reliance on Jonathan was total. His life was in his covenant partner's hands.

Cf. Psalm 55:12–14, 20.

Jonathan accepted the risk of being a friend to the Lord's anointed. He prayed that God would be with David as he had been with his father, virtually acknowledging the transfer of leadership to David (cf. Saul's reaction to this in 18:14–15; 20:31). He foresaw the time when he (if he survived the transfer of power), his family, and his successors would need the protection of David on the throne. Love can make great demands (cf. John 14:15), and so it happened now. Jonathan made a covenant with the new dynasty and required a vow from David that his family would be protected. Here was a foretaste of the Jesus who would lay down his life for his friends, and of the disciples who would gladly suffer for God's anointed, and of the rich fellowship Christians would have with one another (John 15:12–13).

Jonathan's word was put to the test. He acknowledged his friend before his perverse father and nearly paid for it with his life. Jonathan knew now that the split between his father and his friend

SAUL TRIES TO KILL DAVID / GOD KEEPS DAVID SAFE con't

was final and was grieved by the dishonour shown to his friend. So, he told David the news by the arranged signal. David's honour for his loyal friend was total, his tears copious. Jonathan, also with tears, sent him away safely, acknowledging that the Lord was arbiter over what happened from now on. The friendship between these two men had grown through the faith they shared. Both men knew God would favour his people and give them victory. Both had been captured by this grace and it showed in their lives.

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1 SAMUEL 22:1–5; 23:1 — 24:22

DAVID HIDES FROM SAUL

Story Notes

File no. 58

David now entered a part of his life where he seemed most distant from the work for which he was anointed. He remained faithful to his king and, apart from Samuel, did not know on whom he could rely.

David came to establish his first headquarters in Adullam. His family joined him, perhaps for safety, and because they saw the hand of God on him. (Psalms 57 and 142 have been attributed to this occasion.) However, David must have felt quite isolated because he needed to entrust the care of his parents to a neighbouring king. Others gathered for all manner of personal reasons, but captained by God's anointed, were disciplined to a new purpose.

We remember the many outcasts who gathered to Jesus in Galilee. We also are grateful, that we have been gathered, by our need for the grace of Christ, to be disciplined by him to the service of God's mercy.

1 Samuel 23 – 24

It is not clear how long Saul hounded David, but while he was on the run, he continued to care for Israel. He had begun his military career defeating the Philistines and Israel still needed relief. He was anointed and the Spirit must have stirred him constantly to be about his calling. So, he enquired of God concerning each aspect of the battle (and later occasions: 30:8; 2 Sam. 2:1; 5:19, 23; 21:1). How could a king function without the guidance of the Lord? By this, he knew which battles were his to fight, who were his reliable friends and when he should run.

The first anointed shepherd of Israel, King Saul, had become a wolf. His son recognised God's newly anointed king and, as one who also lived by God's promise and grace, 'encouraged him in God'. He gave him his allegiance and sought his favour. Not so the self seeking Ziphites. David fled further South, and there, was saved from Saul again, this time, because Saul was called to another battle. Then, David went east to Engedi, on the shores of the Dead Sea, an area well described as a wilderness. Still, his spirit sang, as is suggested by two psalms attributed to this period (54 and 63).

Saul was still thirsty for the defeat of his enemies, but particularly for the defeat of the one he saw as his rival. God showed him how unnecessary his action was by the incident in the cave. The same incident showed David's men how David feared God above men and would not harm the one God anointed. Then David, with honour, showed that Saul was doing wrong to a man who would do him no harm, and called on God to vindicate him. (Israel saw his thoughts reflected in Psalms 57 and 142 and attributed them to this period.) Saul was forced to acknowledge that his actions were indefensible, and confessed that David's dynasty would be established rather than his own. He blessed David and asked for favour on his family when this happened. His son had willingly done this earlier.

1 SAMUEL 25:1–42
DAVID AND NABAL
Story Notes
File no. 59

Samuel's leadership was such that his death warranted national mourning. He had brought stability to the nation. With his death, further attention focused on David. Was he ready for his task? He had avoided taking vengeance on Saul, but had cut something from his coat. Now, when peeved by Nabal's refusal to acknowledge indebtedness to him, he came close to avenging himself.

Nabal had the means to help David, and now had an opportunity to do so on a feast day. He had reason to be grateful to him and men who encouraged him to be generous. However, Nabal had decided not to acknowledge David, even though he was so obviously blessed by the Lord. Nabal was somewhat like Saul but not protected from David's vengeance by an anointing. It was good for David that Nabal had a wife of more noble spirit than her husband. She could see that the living God was with David and that he was sure to be king. David had been angry, but he knew the Lord had spoken to him through Abigail's wisdom. She believed that God had given them David for their salvation and she expressed this in plain, humble words and in good deeds.

Nabal's glory was all for himself, and it punctured quickly. When he died, it must have been clear to David that he had no need to avenge himself, against Nabal, or Saul. He gained a wife of good spirit who would share with him the dangerous days ahead.

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1 SAMUEL 26:1–25
DAVID FINDS SAUL ASLEEP
Story Notes
File no. 60

Ziphites, for a second time, alerted Saul to where David was hiding. Again, Saul hounded David who he regarded as a rival to his throne and learned again that the Lord was with David. David pleaded his case once more, but now with more depth. Were these attempts on his life from God or man? Did Saul have the warrant to drive him from his inheritance and did they want him to worship another god? Why was Saul so concerned with a 'flea'? (See Psalm 54 which is attributed to this occasion.) Again, Saul confessed that he was a sinner and a fool. David may have reasoned with Saul, but he entrusted his future to the Lord. So, each man went his way.

In these days, David had dealings with two other men. Abishai shared David's daring and purpose, but had not yet learned to entrust himself to the God who avenged (or justified) his chosen people. Teaching the people of God to trust him was as important for Israel's king as defeating their enemies. The second man, Abner, was Saul's army chief. If David had a future in the country, he would have to deal with this man. David revealed, publicly, that this man had failed his duty and should die. Perhaps it was because Saul was temporarily humbled by David's words that Abner was spared. David was responsible for preserving the life of both Saul and Abner.

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2 SAMUEL 2:1–4; 5:1 — 6:19

1 Chronicles 15:1 – 16:3

DAVID KING OVER ISRAEL /

DAVID BRINGS THE COVENANT BOX TO JERUSALEM

Story Notes

File no. 61

Saul and his son Jonathan were killed in battle.

David knew his kingship was God's doing and sought the Lord for his starting point. He returned to Hebron with 600 fighting men and their families and 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).

Two of David's commanders presumed that power would be used under his 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.

For over seven years after his anointing as king, David exercised that responsibility in the South. Now the North was ready to acknowledge him. 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 an unconquered city—Jerusalem. The Jebusite inhabitants scornfully said blind and lame people could defend the city but David despised 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.

This victory was symbolically essential for David's reign and for the demonstration of God's victory among the nations. The name of the citadel was 'Zion' but this became the name for the whole city, and especially for the temple site where 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; 1 Peter 2:6; Rev. 14:1).

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.

David's true loyalty was now clear to the Philistines. He retreated to his stronghold (at Jerusalem or Adullam?) and, under God's direct leading, defeated them twice. David knew that idols could not protect a nation, and idols would fail and fall because of 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, but David desired that it should be with him at his capital.

Carrying the ark in a cart may have been all right for the Philistines when they returned it (1 Sam. 6:7), but Israel had been given precise instructions about how to carry it. David had a lesson in reverence when God 'broke out' against Uzzah's 'breaking out' in touching the ark. But

DAVID KING OVER ISRAEL / DAVID BRINGS THE COVENANT BOX TO JERUSALEM con't

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.

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2 SAMUEL 7:1–29

1 Chronicles 22:2–13; 28:1–8

GOD'S COVENANT WITH DAVID, HIS KINGDOM WILL BE FOREVER

Story Notes

File no. 62

David longed to provide a temple for God—just as other kings provided temples for their gods. However, God told him, through Nathan the prophet, that this was not his plan.

God had looked after David and made him great, and now, God would establish David's house, meaning that his sons would be kings after him, one after another. The first of these sons would be the one to build a temple for God.

God also said to David, 'Your son will be my son and he will build a house for me and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever; I will be a father to him and if he sins, I will discipline him but not destroy him. I will not take my steadfast love from him, like I took it from Saul. Your house and kingdom will be established forever.'

The God of grace had more in mind than David could have imagined. God's goodness 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? God's rule through David's throne would now be 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's son, Solomon, ruled after David died and his dynasty lasted for 400 years. But the promise of an everlasting kingdom remained and has been fulfilled in the coming of the Son of God. David's Son Jesus has established the kingdom of God in which all nations can find refuge.

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2 SAMUEL 4:4; 9:1–13

MEPHIBOSHETH, THE LAME PRINCE

Story Notes

File no. 63

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. 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.

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2 SAMUEL 11:1 — 12:14

Psalm 51: 1–19

DAVID'S GREAT SIN

Story Notes

File no. 64

Joab and the entire army of Israel were sent to deal with the Ammonites. They were 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 had shown great integrity in his kingship. However, with his power over the land and among his leaders secure, his usual fear of God was forgotten and he could not recognise what belonged to his neighbour.

He did not plan to have Bathsheba as his wife and sought to cover his adultery by Uriah's homecoming. When this plot failed, he sent Uriah and his fellow soldiers on a suicidal mission so he could marry the widowed Bathsheba and make her pregnancy look legitimate. The integrity shown by Uriah (a Hittite by background) and the recklessness of David are in stark contrast.

What court could condemn David? Probably, none. But he still feared God. The Lord sent Nathan to David and he carefully led David to condemn himself, of theft (12:6 with Exod. 22:1) and lack of compassion. In his one act of adultery he had been ungrateful and covetous, had ignored the word of the Lord and despised the Lord. God told him that the young child to be born to Bathsheba would die, that he would have constant warfare and rebellion among his sons. His wives would be publicly disgraced.

The 'court' had been convened and the sentence handed down. David could only confess his sin. He had abused man and God. But this 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. He did not want the Holy Spirit to be taken from him as it had been from Saul.

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.

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2 SAMUEL 15:1–30; 17:1 — 20:3

PROUD PRINCE ABSALOM / END OF THE PROUD PRINCE

Story Notes

File no. 65

David's natural affections were understandable enough, but they could not control the purpose of God. As always, the child of promise and of grace would be the successor (Rom. 9:6–16; Gal. 4:28–31). The wrath of an Absalom could not fulfil the purpose of God (James 1:20). The heir of David's throne would be a man of peace (1 Chron. 22:9), and he would be established by God.

2 Samuel 15

Under royal protection, Absalom played the generous prince, building up the idea that he, rather than his father, could administer the realm. After four years of this, he judged that the time was ripe for a coup d'etat.

David already had reason to be suspicious of Absalom (13:24–27), and now, why was he taking two hundred people to share the 'worship' with him? Did he want to leave the impression with his father that, even in Jerusalem, he had loyal supporters? Absalom had virtually signalled what he intended to do, especially by choosing David's former capital for his destination. Absalom had plenty of support, gaining people from disaffected parts of the realm, and particularly from Hebron, since they had been discarded as the capital when David conquered Jerusalem.

News that most of his subjects had joined Absalom's bid for the throne persuaded David that he should leave Zion. The city could not be easily defended in a civil war and he left in haste. (Psalm 3 could have been written at this time.) His personal bodyguard probably consisted largely of foreigners who were less affected by local politics, a common practice among ancient kings. These men had to trust David's judgement.

David left via the Kidron Valley, as Jesus did on his exit from Jerusalem (John 18:1). At various stops in his escape, David was met by loyal people offering assistance. He made his plans in the hope that he would again live in the favour of God. He received the pledged loyalty of a recent foreigner, Ittai (cf. Luke 7:9). He rejected the assumption that the ark had to travel with him; rather, he would wait for God to bring him back to Jerusalem; the loyal priests could act as his secret agents.

He wept, as Jesus, later, would weep, thinking how he would love to have gathered Israel to the true worship of God (Luke 13:34). How bitter it was to lose Ahithophel, supreme among military counsellors, but God would frustrate his advice. (Psalm 41:9 may be a reference to this incident, the same Psalm as is used to describe the treachery of Judas in John 13:18). Then, Hushai met David and he was asked to go back to Jerusalem to foil Ahithophel's counsel. All these plans were a movement of love, and done in faith and hope because David had no power to secure their outcome.

2 Samuel 17–18

Ahithophel knew the ways of politics and of battle, but not the ways of the kingdom of God. Humanly speaking, his advice could have secured Absalom as king and himself as the power behind the throne. Normally, Hushai could not outwit this man but David asked him to return as a spy, not a counsellor. However, it was God's purpose that his advice brought ruin to Absalom. The faithful friend triumphed over the astute counsellor (1 Chron. 27:33). As with Jonathan at an earlier time, the way of friendship or faithful love, was the way in which David's throne would be established.

Friendship has to do with covenant (Ps. 25:14; 55:20). It was a bitter thing for David if ever a friend forsook his covenant (Psalm 55:12–14, 20–21).

In the kingdom of Christ, the apostles were called friends, not servants (John 15:7–17). They heard what the eternal Father revealed to his Son. They knew the way of the kingdom was love, love that would lay down its life for a friend, and that this was what Jesus was about to do. Only

PROUD PRINCE ABSALOM / END OF THE PROUD PRINCE con't

in such a manner would the reign of God be established.

Hushai's warnings reached David by other faithful friends and he managed a complete evacuation by morning. Back in Jerusalem, Ahithophel could no longer see any future for Absalom, or for himself. His vision was limited to the extent of his own wisdom. He saw that he would be implicated in the rebellion when Absalom inevitably failed, and chose suicide rather than execution.

The battle began and David's men, aided by the terrain, soon won.

The main story told here is David's care for and sorrow over Absalom. Joab, knowing David would always have problems while Absalom was alive, disobeyed an order and killed the rebel prince. Runners vied for the honour of bringing good news, completely misunderstanding the mind of the king. David was not concerned for vengeance but for Absalom, even to the risking of his own peace. David's behaviour is a mystery. He had failed in many respects to control his own family and had left many people disappointed and confused. His love had lacked wisdom, but still was love.

2 Samuel 19:1 — 20:3

Joab was disgusted with David's behaviour. The king's love for a rebel son outweighed his love those who had helped him. Joab put to him, that, potentially, he could have another rebellion on his hands if he did not act quickly. David took his place at the Mahanaim city gate, resuming his responsible public life, the place he seems to have abdicated in Jerusalem where his son's rebellion had begun (15:2).

Argument was heard across the whole land about bringing David back as king. Tensions between North and South were still alive. The South were defensive, saying David was their own tribesman. Then, the severity of Judean arguments over the returning David gave Sheba his opportunity to galvanise the loyalty of the North around himself. He denied that they had any inheritance in David. His reasoning arose from what is seen rather than from the promise of God and he did not know what he was doing. God had promised to bless all Israel, and the world, through the Davidic kingship. On the other hand, David had occasion to remember the word of Nathan that the sword would never depart from his house.

David returned to Jerusalem and settled into restoring his hold on the country.

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2 SAMUEL 24:1–25; 1 CHRONICLES 22:1

1 Chronicles 21:1–30

DAVID COUNTS HIS MEN

Story Notes

File no. 66

For the second time in the closing section of 2 Samuel (21–24), the Lord was angry with Israel. This time, the reason was not important to reveal, but God dealt with it by allowing David to be tempted by Satan (1 Chron. 21:1) to number and enrol his troops. Had David forgotten the word of his friend Jonathan that 'nothing can hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few' (1 Sam. 14:6)? Joab and the other commanders could see this would attract God's anger; there was no need for this action other than to satisfy some private ambition of David's. Their protests were overruled and a massive census was conducted.

The significance of taking a census is suggested by each person having to make an offering for atonement for themselves when they were acknowledged as part of Israel (Exod. 30:12). They were an assembly of forgiven people, not a political force.

David was still just as capable of foolishness as Saul had been (cf. 24:12 with 1 Sam. 13:13), but he loved God and, after the event, was horrified at what he had done, and sought peace with God. Would the country now fall into another three years of famine (as in 21:1), or three months of defeat, or three days of God's direct judgement. David preferred the anger of God to the anger of man because he had discovered the greatness of God's mercy.

God's anger had been against all Israel and now that judgement fell on men from one end of the country to the other. Only when Jerusalem was about to fall did he call on the angel to stop. At that moment, David saw the angel's poised sword and asked that he alone suffer for the sin he had committed. Here was a shepherd, again, offering himself so that the people could be saved (cf. Exod. 32:32). It was time for the mercy of God, and God sent a prophet to call the grieving David to make an offering. So, from David's own property, an offering was made. For a second time in these closing chapters, the Lord was moved by prayer for the land (24:25 with 21:14).

The account in 1 Chronicles 22:1 is fuller and includes David's declaration: 'Here shall be the house of the LORD God and here the altar of burnt offering for Israel.' He knew this was 'the place that the LORD' had chosen 'as a dwelling for his name' (Deut. 12:11), the place where mercy triumphed over judgement (cf. James 2:13).

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