

2 SAMUEL: THE STORY OF DAVID

by Ray C. Stedman

Second Samuel is really a continuation of 1 Samuel (in the Hebrew Bible they are not divided and this is the first book of Kings) and it all centers on one man -- David. The book falls into four simple divisions. Chapters 1 through 5 trace the road to dominion. David began his reign as king only over the tribe of Judah and it was not until seven years later that he was crowned king over all twelve tribes of Judah and Israel. The section in chapters 6 through 10 highlights worship and victory -- these two things also go together in the Christian life. Then in chapters 11 through 20 is the record of David's failure and God's forgiveness, and their results in his life. The closing section comprises an appendix which sets forth some important lessons learned by King David in the course of his reign.

There are two ways of looking at the life of David. You may look at him as a picture of Jesus Christ -- and it is perfectly proper to do so; the Lord Jesus himself used this analogy. David was not only the forerunner and ancestor according to the flesh of the Lord Jesus, but in his reign he was also a picture of Jesus Christ in the millennium. David went through a time when he was rejected, persecuted, hounded and harassed. But in the time of his exile he gathered men around him who became his leaders, his commanders and his generals when he did become king over the land. Thus David was a picture of Christ in his present rejection, forsaken by the world, gathering in secret those who will be his commanders, generals, and captains when he comes to reign in power and glory over the earth. Christ will come to establish his kingdom, to rule and to reign in righteousness as the scripture says, and David is a picture of that, too. As God develops this and brings it to pass we can also see in the present world scene that God is bringing Christ to his throne at last, where he shall reign in righteousness.

David is not only a picture of Christ, but he is also a picture of each individual believer. It is only as we read from that point of view that the book comes alive and glows with truth for us. If you look at these Old Testament books as if they were mirrors, you will always find yourself there. Psychologists tell us that in our dreams we are always present no matter what the dream is about; we are the central object. You may take the form of a donkey or a cow or some other object, but whatever you dream about, you are always in the center of your dreams. The amazing thing about scripture is that you are always in the center of that too. "These things were written," Paul says, "for our instruction" (1 Cor. 10:11), that we might understand ourselves as we see events worked out in the lives of these characters in the pages of scripture.

The story of David is a picture for us of what happens in a Christian's life as he gives it to God -- a place of dominion and reign. Every Christian is offered a kingdom, just as David was offered a kingdom. That kingdom is the kingdom of your own life and it is exactly like the kingdom of Israel. There are enemies threatening it from outside. There are enemies threatening from within to undermine it. The kings of Israel were never able to get rid of the Philistines, the Ammonites, the Jebusites, the Perizzites and all the other "-ites" of that day. They form a picture for us of those internal enemies that threaten to undermine and overthrow the dominion that God intends us to have as we learn to reign in life by Jesus Christ. What are those enemies for you? Well, you don't call them Jebusites and Perizzites. You call them jealousy, envy, lust, bitterness, resentment, worry, anxiety and all the other ites, isms, chasms, and spasms that afflict us in our daily walk.

As we see David being brought by God to the place of reigning over his kingdom, we will see how the Holy Spirit is working in our lives to bring us to the place of reigning in life by Christ Jesus. What an accurate picture this is! David is called in the Old Testament "the man after God's own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14), just as King Saul, the first king of Israel might be labeled "the king like the nations around." Saul, portrayed in 1 Samuel, represents the man of the flesh, the man who tries in his own right to please God by his good intentioned, highly sincere efforts to be religious. Yet everything falls apart. It never works. The Christian life is not just a shabby imitation of the life of Jesus Christ. It must be the real thing. It must be Christ himself living his life in you. As Saul is the picture of the flesh and its attempt to imitate, David is the picture of the man after God's own heart -- a believer in whom the spirit of God dwells and who is open to the instruction of

the Spirit, who is taught to walk in the Holy Spirit.

The first section opens with the death of Saul, the man of the flesh. When Saul died, David was free to be king over the land. In our lives this is the picture of the time when we come at last to the full truth of the cross and what the cross means to us. It is the cross of Jesus Christ that puts the old man to death and brings to an end the reign of the flesh pictured here by King Saul. When at last it breaks upon our astonished intellect that God really means it when he says that he has utterly separated us from the life of Adam and linked us to the life of Jesus Christ -- the old man has been crucified with Christ, has been nailed to a cross, has no longer any right to live -- then we are standing right in the same place as David was in the book of 2 Samuel and we are free to reign. King Saul is dead.

At first David was king only over his own tribe, Judah. For seven years he dwelt in the city of Hebron. But while he was king only over Judah, there was a fierce struggle going on between the rights of David and the house of Saul. In other words, the flesh dies hard. It doesn't give up its reign easily. There is a fierce battle. At last we are told that David comes to the place where he is acknowledged king over all twelve tribes. He is free now to assume his God -- given royal prerogatives over the whole of the land.

Chapter six begins the second movement in this book. Here are the results in David's life when he comes to his full authority within the kingdom. His first concern is to bring back the ark of God. In 1 Samuel we read that the ark had been captured by the Philistine tribes. They had taken it and tried to set it up in their temple. But when the ark of God stood opposite the staring-eyed, ugly, grotesque fish god of the Philistines, the fish god could not stand it. He fell flat on his face and ended up with a broken neck. The Philistines realized that they couldn't get away with trying to keep the ark of God in their own temple and they sent it to another city. It remained there until David became king. When he became king over all twelve tribes, his first concern was to bring the ark of God back from the Philistines into the central life of the nation of Israel. What does this signify? When you first came to the realization that Jesus Christ had the right to be Lord over every area of your life, was it not your desire to put him squarely in the center of your life? That is what is pictured here in David's desire to bring back the ark.

David built a brand new ox cart and set the ark in the middle of it and started back with all the people singing and rejoicing around the ark. It was a time of enthusiastic, utterly sincere, complete dedication and devotion to God. But then a terrible thing happened. As the ark was going down the road, the cart hit a rut in the road. It trembled and shook so much that it looked as if the ark was going to fall off. A man named Uzzah, standing by the cart, reached out his hand to steady the ark. The moment his hand touched it, the lightning of God struck him and he fell dead. David was nonplused. He didn't know what to do. Of course it cast a pall of tragedy over the whole scene, and all the rejoicing and the merrymaking was abruptly stopped. David was so sick at heart that he turned the ox cart aside, put the ark of God in the first house that was handy, and went back to Jerusalem -- bitter and resentful against the Lord for doing a thing like this.

This was the first lesson David had to learn. It is recorded for us that David was very much afraid of the Lord when this happened and he became very bitter. But the truth was that it was David's fault that Uzzah had died. In the book of Leviticus there were very specific and detailed instructions on how to move the ark of God. Only the Levites were to do this. It was David's fault that the Levites had not been asked to move the ark. He was presumptuous enough to assume that God was so much on his side that he could get away with anything. He just put the ark on an ox cart and started to move it himself. Therefore, it was really David's fault that this all happened. David had to learn the very bitter lesson that sincerity in serving God is never enough. Things must be done God's way in accomplishing God's will.

Have you discovered that yet? Have you ever had some favorite project you felt, in the earnestness of your heart, would be a wonderful thing to glorify God? Perhaps you could even justify what you wanted by something in the scriptures. You felt it was the will of God, so you determined to bring it to pass. But God blew upon that activity and the whole thing crumbled to pieces. Everything went wrong. You had to face the fact that all your cherished plans for doing something for God were utterly disintegrated. I talked with a young man recently who was going through a time of resentment and bitterness for this very reason. He felt sure that he knew what God wanted him to do in a certain matter and he had determined that it was the will of God. He felt that he could foresee exactly how God was going to work, and had even announced to some of his friends

that God would do a certain thing. But it all fell apart. He told me, "I confess to you that I feel God is unfair. He doesn't back up what he says." As we talked together, it became very apparent that he was going through just this kind of a trial. David had to learn that too, and the death of Uzzah stands as a constant testimony that God never will compromise on this score. It is not his job to do our program. It is our job to be in such a relationship to him that he leads us in his program.

The next thing we read in this section is about the desire that entered into the heart of David to build a temple for God. The ark had been in the tabernacle -- just a shoddy, rough old tent. So David reasoned with himself, "Here I live in a beautiful house of cedar and God's ark has to dwell in an old tent. Why don't I build a house for God?" (7:2) When Nathan the prophet heard of it he encouraged David in this, but God sent a message to Nathan and said, "No, this is not right." The reason was that David was a man of war. Only Jesus Christ or, in Old Testament terms, someone who pictures Christ as prince of peace, will ever build the temple of God among humanity. David had been the one chosen to represent him as the conquering king over all. And so God said, "No, it will not be David who builds the temple." God rejected David's plan to build the temple even though it was well intentioned, sincere and earnest. David was not able to learn the lesson of Uzzah. In this chapter is a beautiful example for us in the obedience in David's heart as he praises God and accepts this disappointment and the reversal of his own plans. He agrees that God is right and that the temple should be built by Solomon, his son.

The rest of this section is simply a report of David's victories over the enemies -- the Philistines and the Ammonites. In other words, when God is in the center of David's life and his heart is ready to walk out upon God's program -- not David's program, but God's program -- there is no hindrance to victory. All the internal enemies and the external enemies are in complete subjection to the man who walks in this relationship with God.

The next major section begins the story of failure in David's life -- the black and bitter picture of David's double sin. Notice how chapter 11 begins:

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go forth to battle, {2 Sam 11:1a RSV}

After the interruption of the winter season when proper and true battles were being fought for the Lord's cause, it was time for the king to go forth to battle.

David sent Joab, and his servant with him, and all Israel; and they ravaged the Ammonites, and besieged Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem. {2 Sam 11:1b RSV}

That is where the failure begins. He forsook the post of duty. It doesn't mean that it is wrong, necessarily, but to be absent from the place where you belong is to be exposed to temptation.

The next part of the story about David can be told in three simple sentences. He saw, he sent and inquired. And he took. Walking on the roof of his house he saw a beautiful woman taking a bath. He sent and inquired about her. And then he took. In those three sentences you have a graphic tracing of the processes of temptation. Any temptation in your life and mine will also follow this pattern. It starts first with simple desire. There is nothing wrong with the desire. It is awakened in us simply because of human nature. It may be along any avenue, but the desire is there, and it must be dealt with when it arises. Either it is put away at that point or it is formed into an intent. David saw the beautiful woman, desired her and then started to work out the way by which he could take her. He sent and inquired about her. This was followed immediately by the act, and David, the man after God's own heart, is thus involved in the deep and black sin of adultery.

When it was accomplished, he refused to face the music, like so many of us try to do. Instead of openly confessing and acknowledging the wrong, and trying to make it right, he committed another sin to cover up. This is always the process of sin. If you commit one sin, you commit another to cover that one up, and ten more to cover up the second one. And so it goes. David sent for Uriah, the husband of Bathsheba, and tried to trick him. But Uriah, in his simple faithfulness to God, confounded David, and ended finally in bloodshed. Joab, David's rugged and ruthless general, became a conspirator with David in this plot, and Uriah was slain in battle. Uriah was slain by the hands of the Ammonites, but David was the murderer.

So here suddenly, almost without warning, there breaks into David's life this double sin of adultery and murder. This is the man whom God had chosen to be the ancestor of the Lord Jesus. This sin is appalling to many of us and we wonder how a man like David could do this terrible deed. There have been many who have pointed the finger at David and said, "How could God ever pass over a thing like this?" -- But if you want to see what God means when he calls David "a man after his own heart," look at what happens in David's life when God sends Nathan the prophet to him. Nathan points his finger at David and tricks him with a little parable. When he comes to the punch line, Nathan says, "Thou art the man." Immediately David acknowledges and faces his sin. He no longer tries to justify it. He acknowledges his total wrong in this matter and it was at this point that David wrote Psalm 51. All of us have turned to this psalm at one time or another when we have been laden with guilt. Not too long ago a man came to me after having been involved in the same kind of a problem that David had, and together we went over this psalm. I saw the Holy Spirit wash away all the guilt, the stain and the ugliness of that thing in the man's life by using the words David wrote after his sin with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah had been discovered.

Now we see the results in David's life, beginning in chapter 12. We are told that when Nathan came with this announcement, "Thou art the man," he said to David:

"Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you have despised me, and have taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your wife." Thus says the Lord, "Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house; and I will take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this sun." {2 Sam 12:10-11 RSV}

That was literally fulfilled by Absalom, David's son. Nathan goes on:

"For you did it secretly [God says]; but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun." David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." And Nathan said to David, "The Lord also has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the Lord, the child that is born to you shall die." Then Nathan went to his house. {2 Sam 12:12-15a RSV}

This is a great lesson in forgiveness. There are a lot of people that ask God to forgive their sins and they think that therefore they should never have to suffer any results from their evil ways. But notice what God does with David. God forgives David after his confession. David's life is spared, even though under the law the penalty for this sin is death. God forgives David and thereby restores that inner personal relationship between them so that David has a sense of peace and freedom from guilt.

God deals with us not only in grace but also in government. In government he is concerned with the effect of our deeds upon others around us, and those effects go on regardless of whether or not we are forgiven. So David must face the results of his deeds and, as we learn in the New Testament, God chastens those whom he loves. (Rev. 3:19) The first result was that the baby born of this illegitimate union died, even though David pled with the Lord in a pathetic, poignant passage where he is torn with grief. Then the predicted results in David's home, in his family, and in his kingdom take place. The New Testament tells us, "Do not be deceived [don't kid yourself]; God is not mocked." Paul says, "For he who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption." (Gal. 6:7,8) Your personal relationship to God can be restored immediately. That is forgiveness. But the evil results of every misstep in the flesh affect those outside yourself, beginning with those closest to you. David was told that never again would his house know peace as a result of his sin.

In the rest of this section, from chapter 13 on, you can see how this was fulfilled. The next chapter tells the dark story of Amnon, David's son, as he sinned against his own sister, Tamar. This resulted in a black hatred born in Absalom, David's other son, against Amnon. So there in David's own family, among his own sons, was spread a bitter spirit of rebellion and evil and lust, created by David's own failure. In the story of Amnon and his quarrel with Absalom -- and finally in his murder at the hands of Absalom -- you find that King David is utterly helpless. David cannot rebuke even his own son because Amnon is simply following in David's footsteps. Amnon is only committing those sins of passion for which David himself had set the example by taking Bathsheba.

Next, we read of the uprising of Absalom. This handsome, brilliant, gifted young son of David fomented a rebellion throughout the whole kingdom and secretly worked against his own father in attempting to take the throne for himself. He finally was so successful that David, with all his court, had to flee the city again as an exile. Imagine that! The man whom God has set to be a king over Israel, the man who is to reign over all the twelve tribes, the man to whom God had given a throne, now has to flee like a common criminal because of failure in his own moral life.

Throughout all of this, David's heart is penitent and resting upon God. He is acknowledging the fact that these things are resulting from his own folly, and is trusting God to work it out. It is a beautiful picture of what the attitude of the heart should be when we fall into sin and failure, and evil results begin to come. There is never a word of complaint from David. There is never any attempt to blame God! There is no bitterness, but simply the recognition that God can still work this out, and he does. God restores David to the throne and Absalom is overtaken, conquered by his own vanity. His long hair (which he gloried in) is caught in the branches of a tree and Joab, David's ruthless general, finds him there and kills him.

In Absalom's death the rebellion is crushed. But that is not the whole story. In chapters 18 through 20 is recorded the final result of David's sin in the rebellion of Sheba against King David. All of this stems from that one double sin on David's part. There is no peace the rest of his reign. He has God's forgiveness, God's grace to him, God's restoration, and God's blessing in his personal life, but he still reaps the results of his own folly. There is a popular song that says "The Lord above has commanded that man should love his neighbor" but the song goes on to say "With a little bit of luck, with a little bit of luck, when your neighbor comes around, you won't be home." The Lord above has said that man should be faithful to his wife and never go out philandering, but "with a little bit of luck, with a little bit of luck, she will never find out." And so it goes, with an exquisite capturing of the world's philosophy about God's program: "You can get by. God's not going to bring these things to pass. If you eat of this tree, you will not die," Satan said to Eve. "And with a little bit of luck" things will work out. But, as God shows in the story of David, this philosophy is a lie.

Finally, we have the epilogue, or appendix, to this book, which gathers up some of the lessons that David learned through the forty years of his reign as king. The first is the story of the Gibeonites, which teaches that the past must be reckoned with. If there are things in our past that can still be corrected, we have a responsibility before God to go back and set these things straight. Many a man or woman, boy or girl, has learned that money he stole before he became a Christian weighs heavily upon his conscience. He must get the money together, perhaps that he can ill afford, and pay back a debt or theft that he was guilty of before he became a Christian -- because God desires truth in the inward parts. He is not content with mere outward formalities. He wants the whole of the life to be right. In the story of the Gibeonites, David went back and corrected something that happened under King Saul. As Saul's heir to the throne, he had to set it straight.

In chapter 22, you have the beautiful eighteenth Psalm. The key to this psalm begins in verse 26. David sings:

**"With the loyal thou dost show thyself loyal;
with the blameless man thou dost show thyself blameless;
with the pure thou dost show thyself pure,
and with the crooked thou dost show thyself perverse.
Thou dost deliver a humble people,
but thy eyes are upon the haughty to bring them down.
Yes, thou art my lamp, O Lord,
and my God lightens my darkness." {2 Sam 22:26-29 RSV}**

And then this figure which I always love. David sings:

**"Yea, by thee I can crush a troop,
and by my God I can leap over a wall.
This God -- his way is perfect;
the promise of the Lord proves true;
he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him." {2 Sam 22:30-31 RSV}**

What does he mean? Well, simply that what you are to God, that is what God will be to you. If you are open and honest and perfectly forthright with him, God will be open and honest and perfectly forthright with you. If you are crooked, perverse, deceitful, and lying to God, he will cause all your circumstances to deceive you and lie to you. If you are pure in heart and see everything in the proper light, you will discover that God is this way to you, and will bring more of this beauty and purity into your own heart and soul. This is what Paul cries out for in Philippians when he says, "Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own." (Phil. 3:12) "What I am to him, he will be to me," he is saying. This is exactly what David discovered.

The last chapter is the account of David's third sin recorded in this book -- his sin of numbering Israel. A plague came upon the people of Israel when David, in his pride, began to reckon on his own resources, and upon apparent military might, instead of relying upon the grace and power of God. What does this teach us? Well, one great truth: our old natures are always there, ready to spring into activity the minute we cease relying upon the Spirit of God. Sin never dies of old age. No matter how long you walk with God, it is still possible to fall. The only thing that maintains the spiritual life is the quiet, day-by-day, moment-by-moment walk in faith.

Prayer:

Our Father, thank you for this glimpse into our own lives and hearts. May the truth grip us. May we realize that these are not mere words to tickle our fancy or instruct our intellect for the moment, but these are revelations of what life is all about -- the secrets of living. May we take them seriously and heed them and love you and serve you and yield ourselves to you, day by day. In Christ's name, Amen.

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