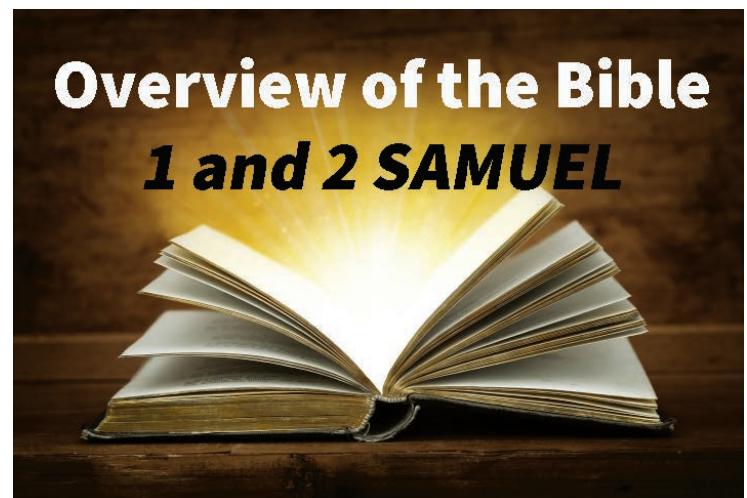


FIGHTING WARS AND KEEPING A PROMISE: DAVID ESTABLISHES AN IDEAL OF KINGSHIP

2 Samuel 8–10

Lesson 79

Wednesday, March 23, 2022



Big Idea: *The Lord blesses his chosen servants when they rely on his protection and seek to reflect his character in their dealings with others.*

The Text in Context

The narrator's positive portrayal of King David continues in these chapters. Once David became king over all Israel, he conquered the Jebusite stronghold of Jerusalem and then turned the tables on the Philistines. He brought the ark to Jerusalem and intended to build a house (temple) for it. But then the Lord surprised David by announcing that he intended to build a house (dynasty) for David. He promised to establish David's throne and assured him that, even if his descendants are disobedient, this will not nullify the promise. Armed with the Lord's assuring promise to make the nation secure (2 Sam. 7:10–12), David now embarks on more military campaigns, and the Lord demonstrates his commitment to David by giving him still more victories. David in turn demonstrates his loyalty to the Lord by adhering to some Deuteronomic regulations pertaining to kingship, ruling in a just manner over Israel, and acting with goodwill toward Jonathan's son Mephibosheth and Nahash's son Hanun. Still more military successes follow, but the conflict with Ammon sets the stage for a shocking turn of events in chapter 11.

Historical and Cultural Background

The Ammonite king Hanun's treatment of David's servants (10:4) is particularly humiliating in a culture where beards are a source of male identity and public nudity is considered shameful (Isa. 20:4). But what makes the action particularly insulting is the fact that messengers represent the one who sends them and are to be treated with the same respect as their master. This is why the angel of the Lord at times speaks as God (Gen. 31:11–13; Judg. 2:1–3), while humans who encounter the angel sometimes react as if they have seen God himself (Gen. 16:13; Judg. 6:22; 13:22). When Hanun humiliates David's messengers, he insults David himself and the nation he rules. This explains why David regards the insult as an act of aggression and responds militarily.

Interpretive Insights

8:1 *David defeated the Philistines and subdued them.* The appearance of both the verbs "defeat" (*nakah*) and "subdue" (*kana'*) is significant. The only other passage in 1-2 Samuel in which they both appear is 1 Samuel 7:11, 13, where they describe Samuel's victory over the Philistines. Several times Israel is said to "defeat" the Philistines (1 Sam. 14:31; 18:27; 19:8; 23:5; 2 Sam. 5:20, 24–25), but the addition of "subdue" suggests that this is a victory that exceeds others and casts David in the role of one who duplicates the great accomplishment of Samuel.

Key Themes of 2 Samuel 8–10

- As the Lord gives David military success, David demonstrates his trust in the Lord in accordance with the regulations of kingship.
- David promotes justice and demonstrates faithfulness.

8:3 when he went to restore his monument at the Euphrates River. The Hebrew text regarding Hadadezer (of Zobah, north of Damascus) reads, “when he went to return his hand along the River.” A traditional marginal reading has “the Euphrates River” (cf. 1 Chron. 18:3). It is not certain what the expression “return his hand” would mean in this context, though it might carry the sense “restore his power.” To further complicate matters, 1 Chronicles 18:3 reads, “when he went to set up his hand,” reading the verb *natsab*, “set up,” rather than *shub*, “return.” In this case “hand” would refer to a monument (see 1 Sam. 15:12, where the same expression occurs). As the text stands, it is not clear who is the subject of the verb “went” (or “set up”), David or Hadadezer. One option is that David invades Hadadezer’s territory while Hadadezer is conducting a campaign to Mesopotamia. Another option is that David, while conducting a campaign to the Euphrates, defeats Hadadezer along the way. In this case it is preferable to read the verb as “set up,” for, as far as we know, David has not established his authority in Mesopotamia, so it cannot be said that he is restoring it. If indeed David conducts a campaign to the Euphrates, then he is seeking to extend Israel’s authority to the ideal limits of the promised land (Gen. 15:18; Deut. 1:7; 11:24; Josh. 1:4).

8:4 He hamstrung all but a hundred of the chariot horses. David’s action is reminiscent of what Joshua did to the Canaanites’ chariot horses (Josh. 11:6, 9). Once more David is depicted as a new Joshua and as one who intends to finish what Joshua started (see comments on 2 Sam. 5:6 and 7:1 above). It is obvious that David does not appropriate Hadadezer’s chariot force. On the contrary, he is obedient to the Deuteronomic law that prohibits Israel’s king from accumulating horses, presumably for purposes of building a chariot force (Deut. 17:16).

8:6 The Lord gave David victory wherever he went. The focus of the first five verses has been on David and his victories. But now the narrator informs us that it is the Lord who is responsible for David’s success. To make sure the point is clear, he repeats this statement in verse 14. Since the account of David’s ascension to the throne of Israel, the narrator has emphasized the Lord’s enablement and protection of David (5:10, 19, 24; 7:1, 3, 9, 11).

8:11 King David dedicated these articles to the Lord, as he had done with the silver and gold from all the nations he had subdued. In accordance with the regulations of kingship (cf. Deut. 17:17), David does not keep the silver and gold he captures. Instead, he dedicates the plunder to the Lord.

8:13 David became famous. David’s fame is a fulfillment of the Lord’s promise: “Now I will make your name great” (2 Sam. 7:9).

8:15 David reigned over all Israel. Jonathan’s prediction regarding David’s destiny has come true (1 Sam. 23:17).

doing what was just and right for all his people. David has followed Moses’s exhortation to the judges and officials of Israel (Deut. 16:18–19).

9:1 to whom I can show kindness. Years before, David promised his comrade Jonathan that he would protect his children (1 Sam. 20:15–16, 42). He also promised Saul that he would not destroy his descendants (24:21–22). Circumstances beyond David’s control have decimated Saul’s and Jonathan’s offspring, but David hopes there is someone left to whom he might show favor. The word translated “kindness” (*hesed*) refers to faithfulness, often in a covenantal context. David used this word when he appealed to Jonathan for protection (20:8), and Jonathan also used it when he blessed David and asked him to show favor to him and his descendants (20:14–15).

9:3 to whom I can show God’s kindness. The wording is identical to verse 1, except that now David refers to “God’s kindness” (*hesed*). Perhaps recalling Jonathan’s appeal, he desires to mirror God’s faithful character in his treatment of Jonathan’s descendants (cf. 1 Sam. 20:14).

9:7 Don’t be afraid. David’s assuring word to Mephibosheth is ironic, for years before, when David was running from Saul, Jonathan encouraged David with these same words as he assured him that he would indeed someday rule over Israel (1 Sam. 23:17). Now David takes the opportunity to repay that favor by encouraging Jonathan’s son.

I will surely show you kindness. The expression “show kindness” (*‘asah hesed*) is used over forty times in the Old Testament, but only here is it stated emphatically by adding the infinitive absolute of the verb. David wants Mephibosheth to know that he is serious about fulfilling his promise to Jonathan.

10:2 *I will show kindness to Hanun son of Nahash, just as his father showed kindness to me.* The word “kindness” (*hesed* again) in this context probably refers to loyalty within the context of a treaty relationship between the two kings. Once again, the narrator portrays David as one who is committed to faithfulness in his relationships. David values this characteristic in others (2 Sam. 2:5–6) and seeks to demonstrate it in his dealings with others.

10:3 *Hasn’t David sent them to you only to explore the city and spy it out and overthrow it?* This is not the first time that David has been falsely accused of having deceptive motives (cf. 1 Sam. 22:13; 24:9; 25:10). In the past the Lord vindicated him and will do so again by giving David and his army victory over the Ammonites and their Aramaean allies.

David’s Treatment of the Moabites

David’s treatment of the Moabites is harsh and cruel, but it makes sense in the rough-and-tumble world in which he lives. He cannot let the Moabites return home en masse to fight again another day. But neither can he wipe them out completely, for the absence of an adult male population in Moab would weaken his eastern border and make it impossible for the Moabites to provide tribute. So, David acts in a pragmatic manner. He kills two-thirds of the Moabite soldiers, eliminating the possibility of a renewal of hostility anytime soon, and allows one-third to return home, ensuring that Moab will be able to produce and send tribute on a regular basis.

10:13 *they fled.* The narrator emphasizes the magnitude of Israel’s victory. Four times he describes the enemy as fleeing (*nus;* vv. 13–14, 18), and twice he speaks of them being routed/defeated (*nagap*; vv. 15, 19).

10:15 *routed by Israel.* There may be an echo of Samuel’s great victory over the Philistines (1 Sam. 7:10). The expression “routed by Israel” occurs in 1-2 Samuel in only these two passages (cf. also 10:19). See the comment on 8:1.

Theological Insights

David is at his best in these chapters: winning victories through the Lord’s enablement, acting in accordance with Deuteronomic regulations of kingship, promoting justice, and seeking to act faithfully in his dealings with others. Unfortunately, David’s story takes a tragic turn for the worse, but the prophets look forward to the coming of a new David, who will establish justice, restore the covenant community from exile, reunite the people, defeat Israel’s traditional enemies, and provide security for the nation (Isa. 9:7; 11:1–16; Jer. 23:5; Ezek. 34:23–24; 37:24–25; Mic. 5:2–6). The account of David’s successes, when correlated with the voice of the prophets, encourages the exiles, for it gives them a glimpse of what the future will be like when the Lord’s promises to David are fulfilled.

Teaching the Text

1. *The Lord blesses his chosen servants when they rely on his power to protect them.* When David defeats Hadadezer’s forces, he does not add the enemy’s chariots and horses to his army but hamstrings the horses, as Joshua did when he defeated the Canaanites. He accepts tribute of gold and silver from the king of Hamath but dedicates it to the Lord. His actions are in accordance with the Deuteronomic regulations of kingship (Deut. 17:16–17) that prohibit the king from accumulating horses (for chariots) and wealth. In the surrounding cultural model of kingship, both of these provide security, but the Lord wants his king to trust in him alone for security. David’s faith in the Lord’s power to deliver proves to be well founded (8:6, 14).

The Lord’s superiority to human armies, symbolized by the chariot horse, is a major theme in the Old Testament. The horse, though stronger and faster than men (Jer. 12:5), is made of flesh, susceptible to physical weakness (1 Kings 18:5), and unable to resist the Lord’s power (Isa. 31:3). One might prepare the horse for battle, but success comes from the Lord (Prov. 21:31). Men of faith trust in the Lord, not horses, for their security (Ps. 20:7; Hosea 14:3) because they realize that he bestows his favor on the obedient and faithful, not on the strong (Pss. 33:17–19; 147:10–11).

This faith in the Lord is wisely placed, for time and again he demonstrates his superiority to horses and chariots on the battlefield (Exod. 15:1, 19, 21 [cf. Deut. 11:4; Isa. 43:17]; Josh. 11:4–11; Judg. 4:3, 15; 5:4–5, 19–22). With a mere battle cry, he disposes of horses and chariots (Ps. 76:6) and then invites the scavengers to devour the flesh of the dead horses (Ezek. 39:20). Haggai and Zechariah picture a culminating battle as being highlighted by the Lord’s victory over horses and chariots (Hag. 2:22; Zech. 10:5; 12:4; 14:15).

2. The Lord blesses his chosen servants when they seek to reflect his just and faithful character in their relationships. David is committed to reflecting the Lord's just and faithful character in his reign. He does what is "just and right for all his people" (8:15), seeks to exhibit godlike faithfulness to Jonathan's offspring in fulfillment of an old promise (9:3), and tries to show goodwill to the son of a faithful ally (10:2). In this way he establishes an ideal that will be fully realized in the messianic king (Isa. 9:7; 32:1, 16–17; Jer. 23:5; 33:15). Living in a just and righteous manner is the Lord's ultimate goal for his covenant community (Gen. 18:19). The qualities of justice and righteousness are the essence of genuine religion (Prov. 21:3) and are the foundation of Israelite law (Deut. 16:18–20).¹

¹ Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *1 & 2 Samuel*, ed. Mark L. Strauss, John H. Walton, and Rosalie de Rosset, Teach the Text Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2013), 226–231.