

OLD TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY
Lesson 22
THE RISING AND FALLING OF KING DAVID
II Samuel

I. BACKGROUND

Second Samuel was originally one book/scroll along with First Samuel. The division into two books came with the Septuagint (the translation of the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek roughly 200 years before Christ).

Like I Samuel, II Samuel covers the transition of Israel from a theocracy into a monarchy. I Samuel recorded the finding and anointing of King Saul, Israel's first King. Saul lost his anointing from God and his kingship because of disobedience that grew from a rebellious heart. In I Samuel, David is set apart by God and anointed by Samuel to be Israel's second king. David will not take the kingship into his own hands by killing Saul. Rather David lets God's timing take its course and Saul eventually takes his own life as I Samuel comes to a close.

In II Samuel, David's rule over Israel is presented in its glory as well as its darker side. The story of David is not found exclusively in the books of I and II Samuel, but is also a part of the Bible in I Chronicles and the Psalms. But more on that later....

II. THE STORY

After Saul died, an unnamed Amalekite decides to seize the opportunity to ingratiate himself to David by posing as the killer of Saul. Figuring David as the next King, this fellow's lie about killing Saul ("God's anointed") is not as smart as contemplated. David sees it as murder, not a gift of Kingship. Accordingly David has the Amalekite killed.

David genuinely laments the death of Saul and Jonathan, writing a song in their honor.

"In the course of time" (2:1) David is anointed as king over Judah. Even though David had previously been anointed king in private by Samuel, the anointing is repeated publicly in Judah (the southern part of the Israeli nation). While the south (Judah) sees David as king, not so the North!

Saul's general Abner found a surviving son of Saul named Ish-Bosheth. Ish-Bosheth was 40 years old. Abner has him anointed as king for the northern area (called "Israel" as opposed to the southern area called "Judah"). Ish-Bosheth reigns 2 years as king over the northern section.

Abner leads the northern troops in war with the troops of David led by the general Joab. The battles are bloody. Time sees the house of David growing stronger and the house of Saul growing weaker. Abner attempts to betray Ish-Bosheth and convey the northern kingdom to David. While working through this plan, David's general Joab fills a personal vendetta against Abner and murders him. David was unaware of the murder until afterwards. His lament and reaction makes it clear to all that David had nothing to do with the murder.

Two other leaders of Ish-Bosheth's army then take it upon themselves to deliver David his kingdom. They sneak into the bedroom of Ish-Bosheth and murder him taking his severed head to David as a gift. David is not pleased. He sees the murderers and traitors for what they are and sentences them both to death.

At this point in history, David is 30 years old. The leaders of all the tribes in the north come to David and proclaim him as their king. The time setting is around 1000 B.C.

As king, II Samuel sets out as one of David's first feats the capture of the Jebusite city of Jerusalem. It became known as "The City of David." Over his life, David will build up the city and make it his home. This selection of Jerusalem as a capital city was a clever military and political move. Militarily, the city was easy to defend with its own water source inside the walls. Politically the city was a neutral site situated between the fractious regions of the north and the south. David transfers the ark to this neutral city.

During the transfer of the ark, Uzzah is one of the fellows guiding the ark. In violation of God's decrees, Uzzah reaches out and takes hold of the ark when the oxen hauling it stumble. "Because of his irreverent act," (6:7) God strikes Uzzah dead on the spot. This serves as a clear reminder to David and the people that God's holiness is not just an afterthought with his commands as "advice" for living. Rather David and the people see, know and remember thenceforth that God is holy above all and to be honored in obedience.

David decides that it is not right for him to live in a nice home while God's ark (his earthly dwelling) has no fit home. The word comes through Nathan the prophet that David is not to build God's temple/home, but rather David's offspring will. The prophecy (chapter 7) is laden with prophetic references to the messianic house that will be God's dwelling place (the hearts of men) that will be built/made by an offspring of David (Jesus). This is a further prophetic

utterance of the redemption that God has foretold since the curses of the Garden of Eden. In response, David sits and writes out a beautiful prayer to the Lord (7:18-29). David speaks to God as if God were in the room.

Over his reign, David takes control of Canaan. He defeats the Philistines to the west, the Edomites to the south, the Moabites and Ammonites to the east, and the Syrians/Arameans to the north. He also makes peaceful alliances with the Phoenicians to the west and with Hamath to the north.

David sets up a well organized cabinet. His General/Commander is Joab. He also has an official recorder (Jehoshaphat), two high priests (Abiathar and Zadok), a secretary (Seraiah), two counselors (Ahithophel and Hushai) and court prophets (notably Nathan).

During his reign, David learns of a survivor of Saul's and Jonathan's. Jonathan had a 5 year old boy named Mephibosheth when Jonathan died. The boy was crippled in both feet. Mephibosheth grows into a man before David finds out of his existence. David treats him with honor and restores the possessions of Saul to the man.

Now David was not a perfect man. David succumbs to his lusts and commits adultery with Bathsheba. When she becomes pregnant, David schemes a way to cover up his paternity of the child. His schemes fail, at which point he has Bathsheba's husband murdered to secure his cover-up of his sin.

God was neither blind nor deaf to David's sin. God sends Nathan in to confront David. Nathan does so by offering a story about another man's sin. When David hears the story, David becomes righteously indignant over the "other" man's sin demanding justice be carried out. It is then that Nathan explains that the story was allegorical and that David was the sinner.

As a consequence of the sin, the Lord brings four punishments on David. (1) God decrees that the sword will not depart from David's house (12:10). Indeed it doesn't. We learn that David's son Absalom kills his half-brother Amnon. Also Joab eventually kills Absalom, and Solomon will kill his half-brother Adonijah. (2) God says that calamity will arise from David's household before David's very eyes. We see that in Amnon committing adultery with Tamar, Absalom leading a rebellion against his father David in an effort to usurp the throne, and Adonijah trying to stage his own coup de tat in David's old age. (3) David's wives would commit adultery on him in public view. This happened when Absalom went into David's concubine in his attempted usurpation. (4) The child that Bathsheba was pregnant with would die. He did in fact die the seventh day after his birth.

Of interest, David's sin with Bathsheba came at a time when David's army had gone out to fight, but for some reason David stayed behind. The Bible does not say "Idle hands are the Devil's workshop" but many biblical stories show such to often be the case. After the tragic death of Bathsheba's child, David leads his army the next time it goes out.

David repents mightily before the Lord. This seems to be the time he composes Psalm 51, a mighty verse of repentance and pleading to God. Contrary to Saul, whose sin led to further rebellion and lying, David seeks God and begs that God not take his Spirit from David. God honors David's repentance and Bathsheba gets pregnant a second time. This son lives. She names him Solomon.

In the fallout from the sin, Absalom's rebellion is a touching story that shows the incredible pain David sustained from his sin. Ultimately, the sin did not just cost the life of Bathsheba's first born, but of many others as well, including David's son Absalom.

II Samuel also recounts another sin of David. In apparent pride, David sits around and counts up his large number of fighting men that follow him. God gives David a choice of punishments for this sin. David takes the pestilence choice and a great number of Israelis die. The deaths cease at the threshing floor of Araunah. (This site will later become the location of the Temple).

III. POINTS FOR HOME

- God looks on the heart.
- Even the best can sin the worst.
- Still the sin is evil with evil consequences.
- We need to respond to our sin with repentance.
- God has mercy, but sin is not without its sting.