

GOD WITH US

Part 3: A King in place of THE KING.

1st and 2nd Samuel

Message 10 – David King of Judah

1Samuel 31 - 2Samuel 4

(1Chronicles 12:23-40)

Introduction

No one likes to wait . . . especially when the goal seems to be within reach. It was a long, arduous journey for David from the time he was anointed to be Israel's 2nd king and his actual rise to power (roughly 15 years). Most of that time was spent as a fugitive trying to escape the murderous hand of Saul. Now, however, the life of Saul comes to a sad ending and David's pathway to the kingship seems to be clear. Yet, the transition will not be smooth; rather, it will involve another long, 7-1/2 year struggle between the remaining loyalists to "the house of Saul" and those of "the house of David." The path toward our divine assignments is rarely quick and easy. God invites us to learn patient trust as we wait for the next stage of His plan for our lives.

Saul's bitter end: 31:1-13

The final chapter of 1 Samuel narrates Saul's sad ending in the battle against the Philistines (the same battle that God spared David from fighting in). Every line of the narrative is tinged with tragedy:

- The men of Israel fled and fell slain (v.1).
- The Philistines killed 3 of Saul's 4 sons, including Jonathan (v.2).
- The battle went heavily against Saul; he was badly wounded (v3).
- Saul committed suicide, falling upon his own sword (v.4).
- Saul's armor bearer also fell upon his own sword (v.5).
- Saul died with his sons, his armor bearer, and all his men (v.6).
- Israel fled and the Philistines took over their cities (v.7).
- The Philistines found Saul and his sons dead on Mt. Gilboa (v.8).
- They cut off his head and sent the good news to their idols (v.9).
- His weapons were sent to the temple of their idol (v.10).
- His body was hung on the wall of their city (v.10).

This may be the saddest ‘final chapter’ of any life recorded in Scripture. Yet, this was the consequence of Saul’s continual rebellion against the Lord.

“Saul died because he was unfaithful to the Lord; he did not keep the word of the Lord and even consulted a medium for guidance, and did not inquire of the Lord” (1Chronicles 10:13).

Sadly, even Jonathan, who was a great man of God, had his life cut short as a result of his father’s sins. The *sovereign hand of God* decrees that some truly great ones die, seemingly, before their time: Jonathan, Stephen the disciple (Acts 7), James (Acts 12). The only positive note in the chapter is that the valiant men of Jabesh-Gilead, who previously had been saved by Saul (many years before), honored him by traveling through the night to courageously retrieve his and his 3 sons’ bodies to give them a proper burial.

It is wise to live ‘with the end in view.’ How do you want the final chapter of your story to read? What would you like to be remembered for? Many people just drift toward their life’s end, with no real goals or priorities – other than a ‘bucket list’ of crazy things to do. Here’s an exercise based on 1Samuel 31. After praying for God’s impressions to guide you, write in 100 words or less how you want your ‘final chapter’ to read. What do you want to accomplish before you reach the end of your God-given journey?

David honors Saul and Jonathan: 1:1-27

The Bible teaches us *not* to celebrate the fall of our opponent. “*Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles*” (*Proverbs 24:17; also 17:5*). “*Do not gloat over the day of your brother’s misfortune*” (*Obadiah 12*).

When David heard of Saul’s death, he did *not* gloat; he mourned.

“Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and so also did all the men who were with him. They mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and his son Jonathan and for the people of the Lord and the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword” (2Sam.1:11,12).

David then wrote *The Song of the Bow*, in which he speaks of Saul as a national hero, not a lifelong opponent. Following are key lines in which David praises both Saul and Jonathan. As you read these lines, note the underlined phrases, recalling that this was the same Saul who created untold trouble for David for more than a decade.

“Your beauty, O Israel, is slain on your high places! How the mighty have fallen . . . The bow of Jonathan did not turn back, and the sword of Saul did not return empty . . . Saul and Jonathan, beloved and pleasant in their life, and in their death they were not parted; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you luxuriously in scarlet, who put ornaments of gold on your apparel. How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan is slain on your high places. I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; you have been very pleasant to me. Your love to me was more wonderful than the love of women. How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!”

Do not rejoice when your enemy falls . . . Have you done that? If so, it likely reveals that there is buried bitterness in your heart. That needs to be released and healed. Instead of celebrating the fall of one who has opposed or hurt you, consider these other more God-honoring options: 1) Mourn over the power of sin that has taken hold of that person. 2) Pray for their restoration to God's way of living. 3) Let them know that you have forgiven them for the impact they have had on you. 4) In future conversations, find something good to say about that person.

David made king over Judah: 2:1-7

After the death of Saul, it may have seemed obvious to David that he would be crowned king over *all* of Israel. This was not the case, however, as the country remained divided in its loyalties. David's *first move* was to seek the Lord in specific prayer as to when, where and how he should offer himself to Israel as king.

Then it came about afterwards that David inquired of the Lord, saying, “Shall I go up to one of the cities of Judah?” And the Lord said to him, “Go up.” So David said, “Where shall I go up?” And He said, “To Hebron” (2:1).

Prayer is one of the constant themes of David's life, when he was "on track" in his relationship with God. It is such an easy thing to "commit you ways to the Lord" so that "He will make your paths straight" (Proverbs 3:6). Why, then, do we fail to pray about our everyday decisions? Are we too busy? Too distracted? Too rushed? Too self-confident? Or, do we just forget to include God in the conversation? No matter what decision(s) you face, remember to "inquire of the Lord." In His own way, He WILL give you the direction you need to stay in line with His plan for your life.

The large, southern tribe of Judah immediately welcomed David as their king. Yet, the remaining northern tribes united under the leadership of Abner, Saul's former general (and cousin) who proclaimed Ish-bosheth (Saul's last son) to be the new king. This division between north and south lasted for the next 7-1/2 years.

David's first act as king was to bless the men of Jabesh-gilead for their honorable deed in giving Saul a proper burial (2:4-7). In doing so, he seemed to send a subtle 'hint' to this northern city that the south had proclaimed him king (v.7). Yet, the northerners ignored the hint and chose to remain loyal to the house of Saul.

Ish-bosheth made king in the north: 2:8-11

Abner, Saul's former general, was the power-broker in the north. Ish-bosheth, Saul's only surviving son, was a puppet-king who was completely controlled by Abner. It appears that Abner was trying to prolong his own position of authority in Israel, thus resisting David's rise to power.

Civil war between the north and the south: 2:12-3:1

David made his nephew, Joab, commander over his army. It was not long before Abner moved with his northern forces against Joab's southern army in an initial test of strength. A 12 versus 12 death match was held at the pool of Gibeon (2:12-16), after which Joab's forces soundly routed Abner's forces in a one-day battle.

"That day the battle was very severe, and Abner and the men of Israel were beaten before the servants of David" (2:17).

Yet, the David's army suffered one great loss. Joab's brother Asahel was killed as he tried to chase down Abner. Joab would avenge Abner of his brother's death in time. A summary is given that covers the 7-1/2 year power struggle between north and south.

"Now there was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David; and David grew steadily stronger, but the house of Saul grew weaker continually" (3:1).

David likely did not foresee this prolonged struggle against the house of Saul for an additional 7-1/2 years. Had he not struggled long enough against the hand of Saul himself? Yet, he did not take matters into his own hands in order to force his way into power. He learned to patiently wait for God's timing for his full appointment to kingship over Israel. At the same time, he learned

valuable lessons on how to manage a ‘smaller kingdom;’ lessons that would be useful once the scope of his leadership was multiplied many times over in the coming years.

It is always difficult to wait; but even more so when a difficult situation seems to be near the end . . . when the goal seems to be within our reach. This is when we are most tempted to jump ahead of God, to seize the prize by our own means. Yet, we should always be “inquiring of the Lord” as David did, so that we might move according to God’s pace, not our own. “I will instruct you and teach you in the way which you should go; I will counsel you with My eye upon you” (Psalm 32:8). Do you recall a time you resisted the urge to jump forward, and waited for God’s will just a little bit longer? Or, you didn’t wait and jumped ahead of God?

David multiplies wives at Hebron: 3:2-5

While David learned patient obedience in *some* aspects of life, there was one area in which he disobeyed, following custom instead of Scripture: he multiplied wives. As to the custom of polygamy by royals: *“In David’s time, political strength was increased through alliances that were sealed through marriage. Polygamy was the oriental way of establishing a royal house”* (Myrna Alexander, *With Him in the Struggle*, p.28). Yet, this practice was directly prohibited by God: *“He (the king) shall not multiply wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away; nor shall he greatly increase silver and gold for himself”* (*Deuteronomy 17:17*). In the long run, David’s family life would be marred by sibling rivalry and even murder, as the descendants of different wives vied for power.

There are often “customs” or “traditions” that we inherit that are not necessarily good for us. Just because something has been passed down through your family line does not make it right. Are there any customs or traditions that you have inherited that need to be reevaluated in light of God’s Word?

Abner abandons Ish-bosheth: 3:6-11

As noted earlier, Abner was the true powerbroker in the north, while Ish-bosheth was a puppet king. When Ish-bosheth accused Abner of having relations with one of Saul’s concubines (in effect, an accusation of trying to assume Saul’s throne) Abner became furious and vowed to hand the kingdom over to David.

Ish-bosheth said to Abner, “Why have you gone in to my father’s concubine?” Then Abner was very angry over the words of Ish-bosheth and said, “Am I a dog’s head that belongs to Judah? Today I show kindness to the house of Saul your father, to his brothers and to his friends, and have not delivered you into the hands of David; and yet today you charge me with a guilt concerning the woman. May God do so to Abner, and more also, if as the Lord has sworn to David, I do not accomplish this for him, to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and to establish the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan even to Beersheba.” And he could no longer answer Abner a word, because he was afraid of him (3:7-11).

From that day forward, Abner abandoned Ish-bosheth (making him a ‘lame-duck’ king) and moved to unite the country under David.

Abner acted in ways that remind us of Saul. He was very controlling, using anger and intimidation to bring people into submission. As long as Ish-bosheth suited his purposes, he allowed him to remain “in power.” Yet, the moment he opposed him, Abner threw him aside like a useless object. At times we can “objectify” people (use them as a means to your end) rather than respectfully treating them as truly and fully human. Pete Scazzero talks about this problem of treating people as objects toward our goals (I – It) rather than as fully human beings made in God’s image (I-Thou) Emotionally Healthy Spirituality, pp.181-83. This is a powerful concept worth our attention. It can truly change the way we treat other people.

Abner moves to bring all Israel under David: 3:12-21

Then Abner sent messengers to David in his place, saying, “Whose is the land? Make your covenant with me, and behold, my hand shall be with you to bring all Israel over to you” (3:12).

Abner had meetings with the key leaders in the north and persuaded them to accept David as their God-given king.

“In times past you were seeking for David to be king over you. Now then, do it! For the Lord has spoken of David, saying, ‘By the hand of My servant David I will save My people Israel from the hand of the Philistines and from the hand of all their enemies” (3:17,18).

As part of the unification deal, David demanded that his first wife, Michal (Saul’s daughter) be given back to him (3:13-16). After

all, he had fought hard to win her. She was taken away from Paltiel, her distraught husband, and given back to David. Now David had a total of 7 wives (and more were added later!).

It appears from Abner's own words (v.18) that he knew all along that the Lord would make David king over all Israel. Why, then, did he resist this process for 7-1/2 more bloody years? It is foolish to resist the will of God, once He has made it clear to us. Being strong-willed can be an asset in many situations. But the strong-willed must make sure they are listening to God's voice, yielding in spirit to His promptings, and checking with other wise people.

Joab kills Abner: 3:22-30

In many ways, Joab tried to control David like Abner had controlled Ish-bosheth. When Joab learned of David's pact with Abner, he essentially called his 'king' a fool for trusting Abner.

Then Joab came to the king and said, "What have you done? Behold, Abner came to you; why then have you sent him away and he is already gone? You know Abner the son of Ner, that he came to deceive you and to learn of your going out and coming in and to find out all that you are doing" (3:24,25).

Joab went a step further, however. Acting as his own authority, Joab tracked down Abner and killed him, *completely against David's will*, avenging his brother Asahel's death.

"When Joab came out from David, he sent messengers after Abner, and they brought him back from the well of Sirah; but David did not know it. So when Abner returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside into the middle of the gate to speak with him privately, and there he struck him in the belly so that he died on account of the blood of Asahel his brother" (3:26,27).

David mourns Abner's death: 3:31-39

When he heard what Joab had done, David tore his clothes and went into mourning over the death of Abner (much like he had done for Saul and Jonathan).

So all the people and all Israel understood that day that it had not been the will of the king to put Abner the son of Ner to death. Then the king said to his servants, "Do you not know that a

prince and a great man has fallen this day in Israel? I am weak today, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah are too difficult for me. May the Lord repay the evildoer according to his evil” (3:37-39).

The “sons of Zeruiah” (Joab, Abishai and Asahel) were nephews of David. While Asahel died early on, at the hands of Abner, Joab and Abishai continued to serve as David’s key generals. Joab would prove to be a very capable general; yet, he was extremely strong willed and sometimes directly ‘went over David’s head’ and exerted his own will. We will later see this power struggle between David and Joab play out most tragically in the death of Absalom, David’s own son.

If you are a leader, it is a blessing to have high-level, capable co-workers who are loyal to you. Yet, some (like Joab) can twist loyalty into an excuse to decide independently what is best for their leader and take matters into their own hands. This can do great damage to your reputation as a leader and to your organization as a whole. Notice how David had to do public ‘damage control’ because of Joab’s murder of Abner. Make sure your key co-workers know 1) that you greatly appreciate their loyalty to you and your cause; but 2) that you really do want to be included in the key decisions that will impact your work together.

The murder of Ish-bosheth: 4:1-12

When Abner was killed, the northern tribes were left in a state of confusion as to what to do next. Even Ish-bosheth had no clue what to do.

“Now when Ish-bosheth, Saul’s son, heard that Abner had died in Hebron, he lost courage, and all Israel was disturbed” (4:1).

Rechab and Baanah, two northern army officers, decided to take matters into their own hands by killing Ish-bosheth and delivering the northern tribes over to David. They thought they were doing David a big favor; yet they were not aware of the extent to which David honored even the last remaining elements of the house of Saul, and refused to take such matters into his own hands. They came to David with their good news:

“Behold, the head of Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life; thus the Lord has given my lord the king vengeance this day on Saul and his descendants” (4:8).

David’s reply was not good news for them:

David answered Rechab and Baanah his brother . . . “As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life from all distress, when one told me, saying, ‘Behold, Saul is dead,’ and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and killed him in Ziklag, which was the reward I gave him for his news. How much more, when wicked men have killed a righteous man in his own house on his bed, shall I not now require his blood from your hand and destroy you from the earth?” (4:9-11).

Thus, through 7-1/2 confusing years, the way was finally paved for David to become king over *all* of Israel (chapter 5 onward). Yet, throughout this entire period, David refused to take matters into his own hands in order to extinguish the remaining flickers from the house of Saul. David was willing to let God pave the final steps to his installment as king over *all* of Israel.

The most important lesson from this period of the life of David is that he was able to resist the temptation to try to control events and maneuver his way forward. Others were maneuvering, controlling and manipulating all along the way (Abner, Joab, Rechab, Bannah, etc.) but David was able to maintain his hope in GOD, not in his own schemes or powers. He was faithful within the scope of what God had entrusted to him. He made good decisions and won the approval of the people. He honored even his opponents. He learned valuable lessons managing a portion of the kingdom. Thus, at the end of these difficult 7-1/2 years, he was able to give the glory to God for taking him through this transitional period: “As the LORD LIVES, who has redeemed by life from all distress” (4:9). I recall that in 1980 Shirley and I were ready to move overseas as missionaries. Yet, God took us on an unexpected 4-year detour, so that we did not actually get overseas until 1984. Everything in those ‘detour years’ was absolutely necessary for our preparation for the overseas years. Again, in 1994 we were taken unexpectedly into a 2-1/2 year transitional detour that eventually led to the launch of Oak Pointe Church. Everything we learned during those transitional years was, again, necessary for the roles we would occupy later.

Learn to trust God in the “in betweens,” when God unexpectedly invites you to learn a few more lessons before you “arrive” at the next chapter in your journey. There are no wasted seasons in God’s agenda for your life.