

Dr. Robert Chisholm, 1 & 2 Samuel, Session 20, 2 Samuel 8-10

© 2024 Robert Chisholm and Ted Hildebrandt

This is Dr. Bob Chisholm in his teaching on 1 and 2 Samuel. This is session 20, 2 Samuel 8-10, Fighting Wars and Keeping a Promise. David Establishes an Ideal for Kingship.

In this lesson we're going to be looking at 2 Samuel chapters 8, 9, and 10. I have entitled this section, Fighting Wars and Keeping a Promise. David establishes an ideal of kingship.

So again, 2 Samuel 8 through 10, Fighting Wars and Keeping a Promise. David establishes an ideal of kingship. As chapter 8 begins, now the Lord has just made a covenant with David, 2 Samuel chapter 7, an irrevocable promise.

And now in chapter 8, David is going to be at war again. Remember that promise was made after the Lord had given David rest from all of his enemies, but that was just a lull in the fighting. Within the promise, the Lord looked forward to a time when he would give a more permanent rest to David and his dynasty and the nation.

But David is back at war, and in the course of time David defeats the Philistines and subdues them. And what we're going to see in this chapter is David is going to be defeating enemy peoples who threaten Israel on all borders. The Philistines, of course, are located to the west of Israel and Judah, along the Mediterranean coast.

So, he's defeated these Westerners. And then in verse 2, we're going to read about how David defeated the Moabites. The Moabites, of course, live across the Jordan on the east side.

So, David is defeating Israel's enemies to the west and to the east. And then a good part of the chapter talks about David's wars with the Arameans. And the Arameans are located more to the north than the northeast.

So, he's going to defeat them and secure Israel's borders up in that region. And then later in the chapter he's also going to defeat the Edomites. And the Edomites are located more to the south and east of Israel.

So, I think the chapter portrays David as a victorious king who is fighting the wars of Israel and of the Lord. And he's securing Israel's borders on the west, on the east, the north, and the south. He's successful in all of those directions.

Israel, then as now, was in a vulnerable position. And so, David is serving as the Lord's instrument in providing that security for the nation. These were difficult times, a rough and tumble world.

And in verse 2 we read of how David treated the Moabites after defeating them. He made them lie on the ground and measured them off with a length of cord. And every two lengths of them were put to death and the third length was allowed to live.

This sounds like a wartime atrocity. So, the Moabites became subject to David and brought him tribute. David doesn't want to wipe them out completely.

He wants to have the Moabite state there as kind of a buffer and also as tribute-paying subjects. But nevertheless, he has to do something with these Moabites who have been captured and he can't just send their army home to fight again another day. So these were difficult times, called for desperate measures.

There's no indication that the Lord commanded him to do this. And so we could debate whether it was right or wrong. Actually, if you look at the Old Testament law pertaining to wars with people other than the Canaanites who were to be exterminated, you're supposed to offer peace to these nations.

And then if they reject that offer, you are supposed to wipe them out. So David seems to be taking some kind of half-measure here. I'm going to be arguing that David is for the most part obedient to the Lord in this section of Scripture, but that doesn't mean that everything that he did was perfect.

So that's a little disturbing to read about how he handled this situation. It's not in line with what the law said about these kinds of situations and so a bit difficult to assess. In verse 3, David is going to defeat a Hadadezer who is an Aramean king.

And he captures the chariots and the charioteers of this king. And rather than make those chariots his own, David hamstringed all but a hundred of the chariot horses. When you hamstring a horse, it's no longer really able to run as these chariot horses would need to do, but the horses could still be used as draft animals for work.

But David is definitely in line with the program here, although we could ask, why did he keep a hundred of them? Did he keep a small chariot force? We're not really sure. But remember that in the Old Testament law of the king, the king is not supposed to multiply horses. And the reason for doing that would be to establish a chariot force.

And so, David is obedient here. He's following the command of the Lord. And this is a theme that runs through the Old Testament, that the Lord is superior to chariots and chariot horses.

In the Near Eastern world, major powers had chariot forces. This is just what they had. The Hittites, the Egyptians, later the Assyrians, and Babylonians, had chariot forces.

But the Lord basically told Israel, you're going to have to fight infantry with infantry, and you're going to have to rely on me for the victory. And so David's actions are consistent herewith that policy that the Lord laid down. And going all the way back to the Red Sea, the Lord demonstrated his superiority to chariots and chariot horses.

Remember Pharaoh's army was destroyed in the sea. And later Joshua defeated the Canaanites in their chariots, and he actually hamstringed the chariot horses. And so it's almost as if David is following in the footsteps of Joshua here, and maybe being portrayed as a new Joshua, as it were, extending the conquests of the Lord back to the proportions that Joshua had achieved, and maybe even beyond.

So, I think David is being obedient for the most part here to the Lord's policy. The Arameans of Damascus came to help Hadad Ezra according to verse 5, and David struck them down and put garrisons in the Aramean kingdom of Damascus. And the Arameans became subject to him and brought tribute.

And then we're reminded that the real key to David's victories was not some kind of special military prowess that he may have had. He didn't have any chariots, but he defeated an enemy that did. And we are reminded the Lord gave David victory wherever he went.

And the same thing is going to be stated down in verse 14 after he defeats the Edomites, and they become subject to David. More on the southern border, the Lord gave victory wherever he went. So, the author is being very careful to remind us that these victories of David are not because of some special greatness in David, but it's the Lord who is blessing him and allowing him to win these victories.

We read in verse 7 that David took the gold shields that belonged to the officers of Hadad Ezra and brought them to Jerusalem. And then he brings a great deal of bronze to the city. At first, this is a bit disturbing because remember Deuteronomy in the Law of the King, he's not supposed to accumulate horses for purposes of building a chariot force.

He's not supposed to accumulate wealth, gold, and silver either. He's not supposed to do that. And it appears that David may be doing that, but not really.

We read about more gold and silver that is coming to him in verses 9 and 10. But then notice what David does in verse 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, Edom and Moab, the Ammonites, the Philistines, and Amalek.

He also dedicated the plunder taken from Hadad Ezra, son of Rehov, king of Zobah. So, David takes all this gold and silver and dedicates it to the Lord. And I'm sure it was used later by Solomon in the building of the temple.

And so, David becomes famous in verse 13. Remember, the Lord had said in 2 Samuel 7, verse 9, that he would make David's name great. And we see that happening.

His name is becoming famous and great. David made a name for himself. And so the Lord is fulfilling his promise to David in this context.

And David is putting garrisons in these locations and the Lord is giving him victory. And so, David is basically establishing a kingdom here. David reigned over all of Israel in verse 15.

And notice what it says, doing what was just and right for all his people. And of course, in the ancient Near Eastern world, it is the responsibility of kings to make sure that justice prevails in their kingdoms. And David is doing that.

So, look at what David is doing. He's making Israel secure. He's securing its borders, defeating enemies to the West and the East and the North and the South.

He's refusing to build a large chariot force. He's obeying the Deuteronomic policy in that regard. Even though a lot of gold and silver and bronze is coming to him, he's not putting that in his bank account, as it were.

He is dedicating that to the Lord and the service of the Lord. And once again, I think following the Deuteronomic policy, not trying to stockpile a bunch of wealth that he can use for informing alliances and that sort of thing. So David is doing well here.

The Lord is giving him great victories. And then we come to chapter nine. And David asks a question.

Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness or loyalty for Jonathan's sake? David remembers that he had made promises to Saul and also to Jonathan that he would show kindness and favor to Jonathan's offspring. But in the providence of God, Saul's descendants have been decimated. And Jonathan himself was killed in battle.

And so, David is thinking, I really want to keep that promise that I made to Jonathan. Is there someone left of the house of Saul to whom I can show favor for Jonathan's

sake? And we're told in verse two, there was a servant of Saul's household named Ziba. And they summoned him to appear before David.

And the king said to him, are you Ziba? And he says, at your service. And so, David is going to ask this individual, he figures he'll know. And the king asked, is there no one still alive from the house of Saul to whom I can show God's kindness? And it's interesting that Jonathan, back in 1 Samuel 20, asked David to show him unfailing kindness like that of the Lord or Lord-like kindness.

And David is using that kind of terminology here. He says I want to show some descendant of Saul God-like kindness. Doesn't use the word Yahweh or Lord, but uses the word God, but it's along the same lines.

And so David wants to show Jonathan's descendants this kind of loyalty. And Ziba answered, there is still a son of Jonathan. He is lame on both feet.

And remember earlier, he was referred to. There was a little brief parenthetical comment about him that he was dropped by his nurse when he was just a child and he became lame in both feet. Where is he? The king asked.

Ziba answered, he is at the house of Machir, son of Amiel in Lodabar. And so, King David had him brought from there. And this individual whom we were introduced to briefly before, Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan, son of Saul, comes to David and he bows down to pay him honor.

And David said, Mephibosheth, at your service, he replied. And you wonder what he's thinking. But David says, don't be afraid, for I will surely show you kindness or loyalty for the sake of your father, Jonathan.

I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather, Saul, and you will always eat at my table. So, David is going to give to Mephibosheth the land that Saul had owned. And he's also going to provide for Mephibosheth.

And he is going to be a regular guest in the royal court, dining with David. And so, Mephibosheth bowed down and said, what is your servant that you should notice a dead dog like me? Mephibosheth doesn't have a real good self-image, and he's also being humble here. Then the king summons Ziba, Saul's steward, the individual who gave David this information.

And he said to him, I've given your master's grandson everything that belonged to Saul and his family. And then David is now going to assign Ziba and his family to take care of Mephibosheth. Because again, Mephibosheth is handicapped, and so there's not a whole lot he can do for himself.

You and your sons and your servants are to farm the land for him and bring in the crops so that your master's grandson may be provided for. And Mephibosheth, grandson of your master, will always eat at my table. Now Ziba had 15 sons and 20 servants.

So, he's got quite a staff here. He's got a good team. And so, they're going to be able to provide for Mephibosheth's needs as well.

And Ziba assures the king, your servant will do whatever my lord the king commands his servant to do. And so, Mephibosheth eats at David's table like one of the king's sons. And then we're told a little more about him and the fact that he was lame in both feet.

So, this is a positive. See, David has secured the borders of Israel. He has resisted the temptation to build a chariot force, to accumulate a lot of wealth.

He's resisted all of that. He is making sure that there is justice in the Israelite courts. He's concerned about that as a king.

And now we see him as faithful and loyal and reaching out to a descendant of Saul and Jonathan and showing him great favor. And again, if we're thinking in terms of the apology of David, for David, the defense of David, because later we're still going to have Benjaminites accusing David of committing atrocities against the house of Saul. No, we see David again, a faithful servant of Saul, actually, still showing favor towards Saul and certainly Jonathan and keeping his promise.

So, David is looking good here. This is all a positive. Then we come to chapter 10 and we read in the course of time, the king of the Ammonites died and his son Hanun succeeded him as king.

And so, David said, David thought, I will show kindness. I will show loyalty to Hanun, son of Nakash, just as his father showed kindness to me. I think what they had, they had a treaty of some kind, a treaty relationship, a mutual loyalty.

And so, David is going to reach out to this new king and show that he is a faithful treaty partner. And so, David sent a delegation to express his sympathy to Hanun concerning his father. Once again, I think David is portrayed here in a very positive light.

But sometimes when you reach out to people in kindness, they don't respond with kindness. And when David's men came to the land of the Ammonites, the Ammonite commanders said to Hanun, their Lord, do you think David is honoring your father by sending envoys to you to express sympathy? I think the question is intended to mean, are you really going to buy this? Do you think that David is sincere in all of

this? Hasn't David sent them to you only to explore the city and spy it out and overthrow it? You probably have noticed that in David's career, he gets falsely accused a lot. He gets falsely accused a lot as a leader and has to trust in the Lord.

So Hanun apparently believes what these advisors told him. David's not sincere. He's just trying to take advantage of the situation to spy out our city with the intent of overthrowing it.

So, what does Hanun do? He seizes David's envoys or messengers, and shaves off half of each man's beard. Now in this culture, a beard was a symbol. It indicated male identity.

And this culture, these ancient cultures, like many cultures today, were very much honor-shame cultures. And it was a horrible thing to be publicly shamed. And so, by shaving off half of the beard, you're shaming these men.

They're going to have to cut off their whole beard and grow it again. And this would be considered shameful. He didn't stop there.

He cut off their garments at the buttocks and sent them away. And once again, this is a culture where public nudity is considered shameful. And so, David's messengers are returning home with half a beard and their buttocks showing.

And so Hanun has really insulted them. What you need to understand in the ancient Near Eastern world, messengers played an important role. When you send the messenger out, the messenger goes with the full authority of the one who sent him.

So when you see the messenger, you in essence are dealing with the master. And the messenger needs to be treated with respect. When you see the messenger, it's as if you should think the master himself is here.

Whatever I do to the messenger, I will have done to the master. That's why many times in the Old Testament, the angel of the Lord, is the messenger of the Lord, Hebrew word malach gets translated as angel, but it just means messenger. And so, the messenger of the Lord sometimes speaks as if he's God.

And human beings who encounter him sometimes react as if they have seen God himself. There in the Ugaritic Baal myth, Ugar was a site located north of Israel on the Mediterranean coast that was destroyed in 1200 BC. But we've discovered tablets from there and texts from there that are very illuminating.

In this one mythological text, the god Yam, the god of the sea, is vying for kingship over the world under the authority of the high god El. And he is an enemy, an arch

enemy of the god Baal, the storm god. Yam sends messengers to the divine assembly.

And these messengers refuse to bow before the high god El and they report their lord's words, Yam. Here's what Yam said. And it's very interesting.

Yam, the god, the sea god, is not there. His messengers are. But the god El addresses them as if they were Yam.

He talks to them as if he is talking to their master and he speaks directly to their master through them. And so, this is serious business here. Hanun is, by treating David's messengers this way, really treating David this way.

He is dishonoring David and he is communicating to David what he thinks of him. So, in verse 5, in light of all that, in verse 5, when David was told about this, he sent messengers to meet the men for they were greatly humiliated. And the king said, stay at Jericho till your beards have grown, and then come back.

So, he doesn't tell them, shaves them all off, and starts over. Just wait till the other half comes back and we'll get you dressed up here. I think that's implied.

But David just kind of puts them on ice for a while. You fellas just stay by yourselves until your humiliating experience is over and we can get back to normal. When the Ammonites realized, verse 6, that they had become obnoxious to David, they were going to go out and they were going to hire some Arameans to fight for them.

And there's quite a force that is accumulated here. David hears about it and he sends Joab out with the entire army of fighting men. And so, this insult to David has precipitated a war.

And the Ammonites come out and they draw up in battle formation. Joab goes out and he kind of surveys the situation. He sees, in verse 9, that there were battle lines in front of him and behind him.

So, he selected some of the best troops in Israel and deployed them against the Arameans. He put the rest of the men under the command of Abishai, his brother, and deployed them against the Ammonites. As you can see, Joab and Abishai, for all their faults, and they're both murderers by this point.

Remember, Joab had murdered Abner. Abishai had collaborated in that. Abishai was ready to put a spear through Saul.

These are tough guys. These are accomplished warriors. And we've talked before about David's failure to bring justice against them.

And I think maybe we see here a little bit, good to have you on your side. They're good to have on your side. And Joab said, if the Arameans are too strong for me, then you are to come to my rescue.

But if the Ammonites are too strong for you, then I will come to rescue you. So, he sets up a deal where we're going to have reinforcements if we need them. Be strong and let us fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God.

The Lord will do what is good in his sight. So even someone like Joab can sound very theological sometimes. And in an odd sort of way, I believe he was trusting in the Lord.

But his lifestyle didn't always match up to his creed. But these are good guys to have in charge of the army. And then Joab and the troops with him advanced to fight the Arameans, and they fled before him.

When the Ammonites realized the Arameans were fleeing, they fled before Abishai and went inside the city. So, Joab returned from fighting the Ammonites and came to Jerusalem. So, Joab and Abishai led the army of Israel in a great victory over this coalition that had formed against them with the Ammonites and the Arameans.

And they kind of reform. Verse 15, the Arameans saw they'd been routed by Israel. They regrouped.

And Hadad Ezra had Arameans brought from beyond the Euphrates River. So, they're bringing in reinforcements from far and wide. And there's a fellow, they went to Helom with Shobach, the commander of Hadad Ezra's army, leading them.

And when David was told this, he gathered all of Israel, crossed the Jordan, and went out to fight against this force. And they fled before Israel. And David killed 700 of their charioteers and 40,000 of their foot soldiers.

And he struck down Shobach. And when all the kings who were vassals of Hadad Ezra saw that they'd been routed by Israel, they made peace with the Israelites and became subject to them. And so, the Arameans were afraid to help the Ammonites anymore.

We've had enough of this coalition stuff. And so, this passage presents David in a very positive light. So, to summarize here, what has David been doing? Well, he has been winning great victories against enemies all around Israel.

He's been fighting the Lord's wars. He's been keeping a promise that he made long ago to the family of Saul and Jonathan in particular. He has established justice within the land.

He's doing what a king is supposed to do. He's resisting the temptation to build a chariot force and accumulate wealth. David is doing well as a king.

He's establishing an ideal of kingship. And that's why it's so surprising when you come to chapter 11 and we read, in the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah.

And then in the Hebrew text, there's what we call an offline clause. In Hebrew narrative, you have a main storyline and there's a certain type of verb form that is used to carry that main line along. They'll sometimes disrupt that main line.

One of the ways they do it, they put the subject first. Hebrew word order in a narrative is often verb first followed by subject. But they'll front the subject.

They'll put the subject first to grab your attention and that's called an offline clause. And it's those offline clauses that are often important. It's a way to kind of slow the story down and say, pay attention to this.

It's not just merely parenthetical information. And notice what the offline clause here is at the end of verse one. But David remained in Jerusalem.

So, I'm looking at this and having read the prior chapters where David leads the armies of Israel to victory. Yes, he sends Joab and Abishai out, but when push came to shove, he led the army out and he's won all these great victories. It looks to me it's the time when kings go off to war.

He sends Joab out and he stays in Jerusalem. It looks to me like we've got a situation where David is in the wrong place at the wrong time. And you know from life, when you're in the wrong place at the wrong time, bad things can happen.

Things don't always go well when that is true. And that's where David is. And so, we're wondering, there's something odd about this.

Something seems wrong with this. Is David going to get in trouble because of this? Where is this story heading? In our next lesson, we'll talk about 2 Samuel chapter 11 and then chapter 12, which is probably the second most famous story about David. David and Goliath, I think, is the most well-known story.

But David and Bathsheba is the account that is coming up here. So, we'll leave it right there for now. David seems to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

At the time when kings go off to war, he's back home, not with the army. And we'll pick it up in our next lesson.

This is Dr. Bob Chisholm in his teaching on 1 and 2 Samuel. This is session 20, 2 Samuel 8-10, Fighting Wars and Keeping a Promise. David Establishes an Ideal for Kingship.