

SESSION SEVEN

DAVID'S SIN AND TROUBLED HOUSE

2 Samuel 8:1—24:25

I. THE EXPANSION OF DAVID'S RULE (2 Sam 8–10)

A. Introduction

In the previous session, we discovered that God made a covenant with David which would contribute to the outworking of the Abrahamic covenant. This Davidic covenant was composed of two divisions: promises for David's lifetime and promises to be fulfilled after David's lifetime. The promises for David's lifetime included a great name for David (fame), a place for the nation in the land (occupation of the land promised), and rest from all the enemy-nations that bordered Israel. In chapters 8–10 of 2 Samuel, God will begin to fulfill these promises. David will lead the covenant nation in subduing the surrounding territories so that the nation can taste of the original land promise that was given to Abraham in Gen 15:18-21.

B. The Nature of 2 Samuel 8

There are a number of passages that must be reconciled to obtain an accurate account of the military expansion of the kingdom under David. Before discussing the chronological difficulties of these chapters, a few comments are needed in regard to the nature of chapter eight.

2 Samuel 8 is not an exhaustive list of all the episodes or events that transpired during the expansion phase. The chapter is more in keeping with an official court annal that was likely to have been kept for official records. Someone wrote 2 Samuel and probably drew upon a number of existing records to compose the accounts we have about David's life. The court chronicler loves and respects David, but does not overlook the king's weaknesses. Dr. Waltke draws the following conclusion about 2 Sam 8:

If this analysis of the sources is correct, then it seems best to follow chapter 8 as an annalistic compilation of David's exploits in chronological order and harmonize the other accounts with it.¹

C. Israel's Neighbors

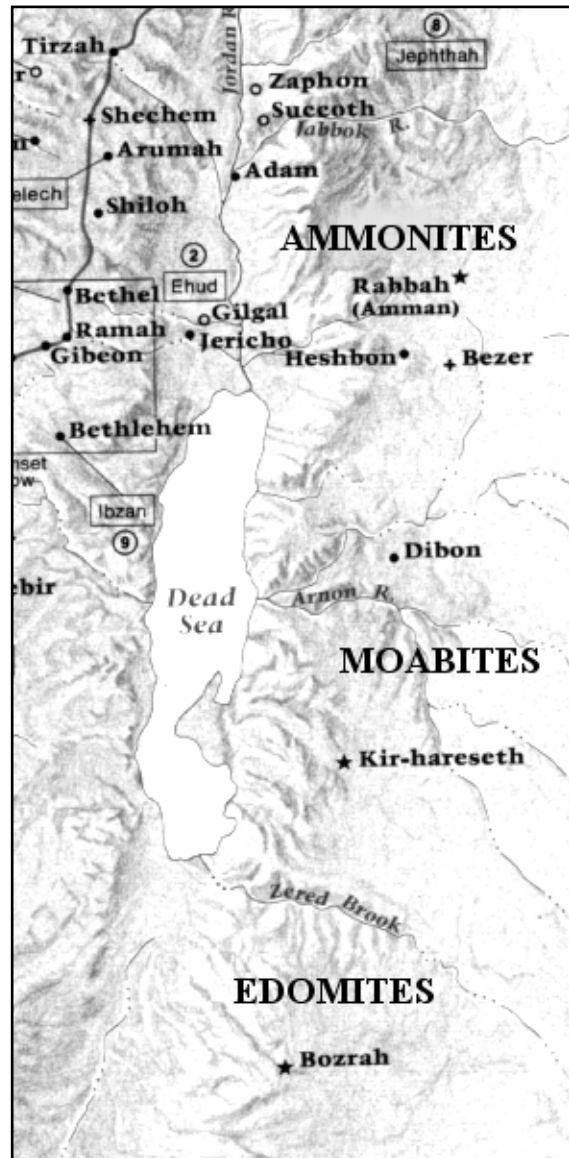
Before discussing the chronological difficulties, perhaps some clarification of the various parties involved would help. In discussing Israel's neighbors to the east, however, keep in mind that boundaries would change over the course of time. At an early stage (note Deut 3:1-11), an Amorite people-group inhabited the area around Heshbon, but they were displaced. Control of the area between the Arnon and the Jabbok shifted hands several times. The following descriptions (presented from south to north) represent general settlements at the time of David.

¹Bruce K. Waltke, Class notes, Dallas Seminary.

1. Edomites – The Edomites occupied the territory to the SE of the Dead Sea, just below the Moabites (i.e., below the Zered valley—*Wâdi el-ḥesā*). They apparently attacked Israel while Israel was engaged in the Syrian war in the north (2 Sam 8:3-8; Ps 60). As a result, David sent troops to defeat the Edomites in the Valley of Salt (at the lower end of the Dead Sea).

2. Moabites – The Moabites lived on the east side of the Dead sea above the Edomites (between the valleys of the Zered [*Wâdi el-ḥesā*] and the Arnon [*Wâdi el-Môjib*]).² David had previously enjoyed friendly relations with Moab, and had even taken his parents there during his flight from Saul.

3. Ammonites – The Ammonites dwelt to the east of the Jordan just above the Moabites. Their northern boundary was the Jabbok River, though their eastern and southern boundaries often fluctuated in contention with the Amorites, Moabites and Israelites. They established Rabbath-ammon (or Rabbah) as their capital [modern-day Amman]. They established military alliances with several other nations (including the Syrians to the far north) in an attempt to defeat Israel. It was in a battle against Rabbah that Uriah was killed.



4. Syrians (Arameans) – The area of Syria generally refers to the large area of land north of Galilee extending all the way to the Euphrates. This area was also referred to as Aram, and the people as Arameans. However, this was not one great empire in the time of David but a number of small, independent states. As the Assyrian empire to the east declined during the 11th and 10th centuries BC, the Arameans attained their highest degree of political importance. Thus, during the time of David, they were one of the most significant forces on the earth at the time. The Aramean kingdoms of Syria were made up of several sub-groups:

- a. Maacah - a small group just north of the sea of Galilee
- b. Aram-Damascus - a powerful group of Syrians centered at Damascus (2 Sam 8:5)

²At an earlier point in history, the northern boundary of the Moabites extended north of the Arnon.

- c. Beth-Rehob - a Syrian group to the west of Damascus
- d. Aram-Zobah - a significant Syrian group dwelling above Aram-Damascus [sometimes referred to as Zobah]. Hadadezer (son of Zobah) was the king of this Syrian group (8:3-8).
- e. Hamath - This was the Syrian group dwelling to the far north (above Aram-Zobah), extending to the Euphrates. They were ruled by a king named Toi (8:9).

Aram-Zobah was the most significant Syrian group at the time of David:

Aram-zobah at this time stood at the head of the Aramean kingdoms in Syria, its center being in the valley of Lebanon. Its influence reached as far as the region of the Euphrates; Aram-zobah was David's strongest rival for the rule of Trans-jordan and Syria. His brilliant victories led to the conquest of Damascus and the subjection of Aram-zobah. David became thus ruler of all its vassals.³

Thus, when Aram-Zobah was finally subdued, Israel became the major power in Syria and Palestine.

D. Chronological Difficulties

In 2 Samuel 8, both the Ammonites and the Syrians of Damascus and Zobah are seen to be decisively defeated. In 2 Samuel 10–12 there are recorded battles with both the Syrians and the Ammonites. Furthermore, Psalm 60 reveals that the Israelites experienced some setbacks and infers that the Edomites attacked Israel from the south while David's forces were engaged with the Syrians to the north. There are further details in 1 Chron 18–19.

In 2 Sam 8:3-8, the Arameans are seen to be fighting Israel alone. In 2 Samuel 10–12, the Arameans are not alone, but joined with the Ammonites. Since 2 Sam 8:3-8 seems to imply that the Arameans were cursed and brought into subjection, whereas they were only defeated in 2 Samuel 10, many have concluded that the events of 2 Sam 10–12 occurred before the events of 2 Samuel 8:3-8. In regard to the coalition of Ammon and Zobah (2 Sam 10–12), Leon Wood concludes: "Chronologically, this engagement probably preceded the northern struggle just noticed, though its record follows in the biblical account."⁴ John Bright comes to the same conclusion: "The Ammonite war (2 Sam, ch. 10) in which Zobah intervened, at least preceded the campaign of 2 Sam 8:3-8, in which Zobah was crushed."⁵

If the above conclusion is true, then one implication is that David's sin with Bathsheba took place before the conquering of Syria in the northern campaign.

E. A Suggested Chronology

Although we cannot be sure of the order of events, I propose the following scheme as a possibility:

1. David defeats the Philistines (2 Samuel 8:1)
2. David defeats the Moabites (2 Sam 8:2)
3. David extends respect and peace to Hanun, king of the Ammonites (2 Sam 10:1-2)

³MacMillan Bible Atlas, 67.

⁴Leon Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, 271.

⁵John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 197.

4. The Ammonites disgrace David's messengers (2 Sam 10:3:5)
5. The Ammonites prepare for battle with David and enlist the aid of four Syrian states (2 Sam 10:6)
 - Beth-rehob
 - Zoban
 - Maacah
 - Tob
6. David's forces, under Joab's command, attack the coalition outside "the city" (Medeba? 1 Chr 19:7) and overpower them (2 Sam 10:7-14)
7. The Syrians flee to the north and the Ammonites retreat to "the city" (2 Sam 10:14)
8. Joab returns with the Israelites to Jerusalem (2 Sam 10:14)
9. The Syrians attempt to save face, regroup and prepare for another encounter at Helam (35 miles to the east of the Sea of Galilee in the area of Tob). Hadadezer of Zobah sends for the support of other Syrian groups further north, close to the Euphrates (2 Sam 10:15-16)
10. David leads his forces against the Syrians and soundly defeats them so that they withdraw and refuse to help the Ammonites any more (2 Sam 10:17-19)
11. With David in Jerusalem, Joab is sent to attack the Ammonite capital of Rabbath-Ammon (2 Sam 11:1)
12. While Rabbath-Ammon is under siege, David commits adultery with Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:2-5)
13. David arranges Uriah's death (2 Sam 11:6-27)
14. The LORD sends Nathan the prophet to confront David about his sin (2 Sam 12:1-15)
15. Joab brings the siege against Rabbath-Ammon to near completion (2 Sam 12:26-28)
16. David goes to the Ammonite battle and completes the capture and defeat of Rabbath-Ammon (2 Sam 12:29-30)
17. David leads the destruction of other Ammonite cities (2 Sam 12:31) and returns to Jerusalem
18. David leads a northern invasion against Hadadezer of Aram-Zobah and defeats them (2 Sam 8:3-4)
19. While David is conducting the northern campaign against the Syrians, the Edomites attack Israel from the south. Israel experiences some discouraging setbacks, and Joab and his brother Abishai return to defeat the Edomites in the valley of Salt (2 Sam 8:13-14; 1 Chr 18:12-13; Ps 60)
20. In the north, the Syrians of Aram-Damascus rally to the aid of Hadadezer, but David is able to defeat them as well (2 Sam 8:5-8)
21. The king of Hamath (Toi) makes peace with David, thereby giving Israel sovereignty over all the Aramean regions.

F. Relation to the Abrahamic Covenant

These great conquests which God graciously permitted David to have extended Israelite rule from the Gulf of Aqaba and the River of Egypt (Wadi el-'Arish) to the Euphrates River. Since this was the land promised to Abraham (Gen 13:15; 15:18ff), should we conclude that the land promise of the Abrahamic covenant was now fulfilled? J. Carl Laney answers "No":

The nations were David's vassals, but he did not personally possess the land. Although David exercised sovereignty over the land for some time, God promised Abraham's descendants permanent possession of the land (Gen 13:15). The land promises of the Abrahamic covenant have not yet been fulfilled.⁶

We might say that the covenant-nation "tasted" of what will be fully realized by an *eschatological generation* when Jesus returns to establish the millennial kingdom (cf. Ps 18:43-50).

G. Psalm 60

One of the psalms representative of this period is Psalm 60. According to the superscription, this psalm deals with the battle against the Arameans when Israel was apparently attacked by the Edomites in the south. The psalm reveals that David's battles were not altogether triumphant. There were setbacks which caused grief for David and brought him to his knees before YHWH. Ps 60 is a prayer for victory in the face of defeat.

Application: Reflect on the closing verses (9-12) of Ps 60. Edom was an almost impregnable fortress. God often brings us to the point where human solutions will not do . . . only God's provision will do (vs 11). Through experiences like this, we know and love Him more.

II. DAVID'S SIN AND THE CONSEQUENCES HE HAS TO LIVE WITH

(2 Sam 11–24)

A. Introduction

The last half of the book of 2 Samuel is a stark contrast to the first half. In chapters 1–10, almost everything seems to go David's way. In chapters 11–24, on the other hand, almost everything seems to go against David. The key and pivot of the book is chapter 11 involving David's sin with Bathsheba. It is related to the preceding chapters (8–10) in that the incident with Bathsheba occurs during the Ammonite battles of chapter 10. It is related to the following chapters (13–24) in that the sin is the responsible cause for the decline of David's house and kingdom. Therefore, the section 11–24 is designed to trace the effect of David's sin upon his house and kingdom.

In studying 2 Samuel, one can observe that some of the material in chapters 11–24 is not in chronological order. In fact, the sin with Bathsheba probably occurred before many of the events in chapter 8. Several of the events in chapters 21–24 occurred earlier in David's life. Rather than a strict chronological arrangement, the material is arranged topically in order to highlight and contrast the experience of blessing and the experience of curse. By doing so, the book leaves the reader with the impression that someone greater than David is needed for the nation's king.

⁶J. Carl Laney, *First and Second Samuel*, 102.

As we travel on through each of the successive kings, we are actually looking for that one who will sit on the throne of David and with whom God will establish the fulfillment of the Davidic covenant . . . that king who will be granted an enduring throne and kingdom. Hence, each of the kings will be compared to David, for it will have to be someone greater than David that the promise is fulfilled with. As each new king is born, the people could ask of the infant: will this be the one? Of course, each king turns out to be a disappointment in some degree, until we come to Jesus. He is in the line of David, and He does prove to be greater than David. He is the One that David anticipated as being greater than himself and hence David's Lord:

"The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at My right hand, until I make thine enemies a footstool for Thy feet'" (Ps 110:1).

B. David's Great Sin

Chapter 11 is indeed the crucial turning-point of the book, for it is the sin with Bathsheba that so drastically alters David's life and the course of his kingdom. "God warned David that while the ultimate fulfillment of the covenant was unconditional, the immediate blessings were conditioned on obedience."⁷ Following this major blunder, David will be plagued by troubles in the areas of morals, politics and family relationships (ch 11–20). One thing David can be commended for is his promptness to acknowledge his failure and seek God's forgiveness. Indeed God did forgive him, even allowing his continuance as king. Nevertheless, David had to learn that sin, even though forgiven, often bears serious consequences (cf. James 1:15). These chapters (11–20) that reflect David's experience vividly illustrate the devastating consequences of sin in the life of a believer.

1. David's Sin With Bathsheba (ch 11)

The temptation of observing Bathsheba while bathing perhaps caught David in an unguarded moment. She was guilty of at least being indiscrete and he with fantasizing a relationship with another man's wife. The process of David's sin is three-fold, reflecting James 1:14-15:

- a. he saw
- b. he inquired
- c. he yielded to temptation

Worthy of observation is the fact that this sin has its roots in the earlier days of David. He has revealed attitudes and actions prior to this that bear testimony to his weaknesses in the area of love and marriage. David has always had an uncommendable way with women. Rather than being a "one woman kind of man," David has relished having many wives and concubines (2 Sam 3:2-5; 5:13). This lifestyle does nothing but cultivate a lustful appetite. David wasn't satisfied with one wife, not even several. He added concubines but still that didn't satisfy. When Bathsheba caught his eye, he was a prime target for an adulterous affair. He had been living loose too long.

The resulting pregnancy created an opportunity for David to plunge further into sin, for now he had to try to cover up his sin with Bathsheba. Uriah was such a faithful man that David resorted to murder (in effect) as a means of keeping his sin "hidden" (11:14-16). The plan to have Uriah killed worked, but the news of his death brought David no joy,

⁷Homer Heater, Jr., "A Theology of Samuel and Kings," 144.

only some temporary relief from the prospect of his sin being discovered. But the sin did not escape the omniscience of the LORD:

"But the thing that David had done was evil in the sight of the LORD" (11:27).

2. David's Sin Revealed and Judged

The verse just quoted set the stage for the events of chapter 12. Ironically, despite all David's attempts to hide the sin, God reveals it publicly (cf. 12:12). The LORD summoned one of his choice servants to confront David. The sin would not be hidden . . . it would even be entered into the holy Scriptures for all mankind to ponder forever. Nathan's confrontation was classic! David is so taken by surprise that he reacts to the story by the exclamation, "As YHWH lives, surely the man who has done this deserves to die!" (12:5). The exclamation was ironic, for indeed David deserved to die: he was deserving of death for adultery (Lev 20:10) and murder (Lev 24:17). Psalm 51 must be studied along with this chapter. There was no sacrifice for this that David could offer. This was cold, calculated, premeditated murder, and David should have been stoned for this. Out of this situation, he writes Ps 51 in which he confesses, "I have sinned, and I deserve death." There was no law or sacrifice to help him . . . only the sheer grace of God. His only hope was to plead the mercy seat blood (Ps 51:7)! This is what marks David out from Saul so much. Saul never repents to God directly . . . David pours out his heart to the LORD.

Nevertheless, forgiveness did not come without a price to be paid. Nathan was also made the herald of God's judgment upon David (12:10-12):

The judgement pronounced on David and his family is twofold: (1) David's own family would bring evil against him, and (2) David's wives would be taken by another (12:11-12). The second judgement is a veiled reference to the fact that David would lose his throne to an usurper (cf. 3:7-8; 1 Kings 2:13-15). Those predictions of judgement were fulfilled in the violation of Tamar (13:11-14), the violent deaths of Amnon and Absalom (13:38-39; 18:15), and Absalom's public appropriation of David's royal concubines during his rebellion (16:22).⁸

The historical consequences of his sin followed David. From this point on, David is weak and indecisive. He is ineffective in judgment. He fails to properly render judgment on Amnon (who rapes Tamar), Absalom (who murders Amnon), and even Joab (who murders Absalom).

C. Absalom's Murder of Amnon (13–14)

The remainder of 2 Samuel (ch. 13–20) along with 1 Kings 1–2 will now direct us to the selection of Solomon. Heater notes,

There had never been a transfer of kingship from father to son in Israel's history. Consequently, the issue of succession is taken up in 2 Samuel 13–20 and 1 Kings 1–2. Clearly Solomon was to be the next king in spite of the seemingly inseparable odds against him.⁹

⁸J. Carl Laney, 108-9.

⁹Heater, 144.

In this lengthy section, God will discipline David while at the same time eliminating the contenders for the throne who would threaten Solomon.

This episode is the beginning of the "sword which was never to depart from David's house." Amnon rapes his half-sister Tamar . . . Absalom murders Amnon. Out of this will arise the whole episode of Absalom's rebellion. It is noteworthy that these events all began with the same sins of which David had been guilty—sexual immorality leading to murder.

D. Absalom's Revolt (15–18)

Following the deceitful murder of Amnon, Absalom fled to Geshur for three years. With some help from Joab, Absalom is recalled by David. However, David fails to adequately deal with the problem, desiring to have Absalom stay away from him:

"However the king said, 'Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face.' So Absalom turned to his own house and did not see the king's face" (14:24).

After dwelling in Jerusalem for two full years (14:28), Absalom finally has to force the reconciliation himself (14:32, 33). No doubt, the two years of residence in Jerusalem without being allowed to see his father only caused Absalom to grow bitter. David does allow Absalom to see him, but there is no dealing with the sin involved. David receives him, but there is no extending of forgiveness. Consequently, the latent bitterness in Absalom eventuated in full rebellion against his father, the king. David then flees Jerusalem, submitting to the possibility that God is giving the kingdom to Absalom. He does not leave in cowardice, but with genuine uncertainty as to whether or not God still desires for him to be king. This is evidenced by Zadok's attempt to bring the ark with David (15:24). David refuses to have the ark go with him: it is not the presence of the ark that will enable David to gain the victory, only the will of God (which David is unsure of).

And the king said to Zadok, "Return the ark of God to the city. If I find favor in the sight of the LORD, then He will bring me back again, and show me both it and His habitation. But if He should say thus, 'I have no delight in you,' behold, here I am, let Him do to me as seems good to Him" (15:25-26).

So David has to go through the long ordeal of waiting to see what God will do with Him. The action becomes quite suspenseful as Absalom struggles to weigh the counsel of Ahithophel and Hushai. This is the whole setting for Ps 3., which looks at the time that David fled Jerusalem. He lays down that night, not knowing if he will ever live to see another day. When he awakes, he senses that God has not let Absalom slay him. Thus, he is encouraged, and realizes that Absalom is not going to be given the throne. Psalm 63 probably comes out of this period of Absalom's revolt.

E. David Reinstated as King (19–20)

Judah and Israel became reunited as David was brought back to Jerusalem as king. He had not been totally cut off, but he had been disciplined (in keeping with the Davidic covenant of 2 Samuel 7). Problems still abounded within the kingdom: a new revolt led by Sheba the Benjamite had to be put down, and Joab murders Amasa (the newly appointed commander of David's army).

F. Appendix to David's career (21–24)

As previously mentioned, some of these events occurred earlier in David's life. They are placed here to show the other kinds of problems that David had to face—famine and plague (21–24), and how David learned to praise God through his trials (22; cf. Ps 18).

Not a little discussion has arisen over David's sin of numbering the people (ch 24). Did the Lord incite David to number the people (2 Sam 24:1) or did Satan (1 Chron 21:1)? The two passages may reflect two aspects of the same incident. Laney comments (p 129), "Although Satan actually instigated the pride and rebellion that led to the numbering of the people, God permitted Satan to exercise that influence so that His divine plan might be carried out (cf. Gen 50:20)." The exact nature of the sin is also unclear, but may have involved an impure motive on David's part to know the strength of his kingdom, a sort of self-sufficiency in the fighting strength of the nation. Apparently, God had not requested this and David may have been boasting in human strength rather than the power of the LORD (comp. 1 Samuel 14:6; Judges 7:2).

The book closes with the preservation of Jerusalem (24:16) and the purchase of the Temple site (24:24), events which prepared the way for the advent of Solomon as David's successor.

A LESSON FOR OUR LIFE

Consider 2 Sam 24:14:

"Then David said to Gad, 'I am in great distress. Let us now fall into the hand of the LORD for His mercies are great, but do not let me fall into the hand of man.'"

David's attitude toward the LORD is one of understanding His grace and mercy, even under discipline. This is another evidence of David as a man after God's own heart.