

10. David's Reign and the Davidic Covenant

After more than a decade of running for his life, David was finally liberated from Saul's persecution by a decisive battle with the Philistines. As a fitting epitaph to Saul's reign in rebellion against Yahweh, he died at his own hand, demoralized and powerless against the enemies of the kingdom. Saul could not prevail because Yahweh had forsaken him; Saul's kingdom was not the kingdom promised to Abraham and initiated at Sinai.

Saul's death was David's indication that the time had come for him to inherit what the Lord's anointing had granted to him years earlier (cf. 1 Samuel 26:8-10 with 2 Samuel 2:1-4). David would assume the kingship over the covenant household, but not all at once. In symbolic testimony to what lay ahead, the Lord instructed David to establish his throne at Hebron – a city of refuge within Judah (Joshua 20:1-7) – with his rule extending only to the tribe of Judah. The rest of Israel continued its subjection to the house of Saul under the reign of his son Ish-bosheth (“man of shame”) (2 Samuel 2:8-10).

- a. The first thing to note about David's ascent to the throne is his response to the deaths of Saul and Jonathan. Rather than rejoicing that his longtime enemy was dead – not to mention that this event facilitated his own long-awaited reign – David mourned the loss of Saul and Jonathan. More than that, he made his personal sorrow a matter of national mourning by composing a lament celebrating their greatness and demanding that this song be taught to the sons of Judah – *the very tribe that would now serve David as king* (1:17-27). David's desire was to see Saul – the man who had mercilessly oppressed him for many years – commemorated as a great man throughout future generations of his own subjects.

As he had refused to seize the kingdom from Saul by political or military strategy, so David sincerely mourned the passing of Saul's house and dynasty. The reason David responded this way was that he viewed the demise of Saul's house *theocratically* rather than *politically*: He didn't view it as a favorable development that enabled his own ascent to the throne (ref. 2:12-3:1); he regarded it as a lamentable thing in that it gave occasion for Yahweh's enemies to gloat over what they regarded to be the desolation of His kingdom (1:17-20). Consistent with the divine assessment of him (ref. again 1 Samuel 13:14, 16:6-7), David's concern was solely for God's honor and the integrity of His kingdom, not his own rule.

- b. For the next two years David ruled over Judah while Ish-bosheth ruled over Israel. David had taken the throne, but only in part; Israel was yet “two camps” (ref. 2:8). Even so, Yahweh was continuing to prepare David – as well as the sons of Israel – to fulfill his appointed destiny as undershepherd over the covenant kingdom.
 - 1) In Ish-bosheth, Saul's house continued to grasp the throne of Israel in defiance of Yahweh, and even then David didn't seek to extend his own reign. During that period there was ongoing hostility between David's house and the house of Saul, but this tension between Israelite factions didn't involve formal warfare between the two sub-kingdoms.

That David didn't pursue Ish-bosheth's overthrow is clearly established by his response to his death (4:1-12). Though David's dominion continued to grow stronger while Ish-bosheth's weakened (3:2), he refused to take action against Saul's house. And when two of Ish-bosheth's commanders took his life, believing that David would rejoice in the news and exalt them within his own kingdom, he instead condemned them as murderers of a righteous man and had them slain, mutilated, and publicly disgraced.

- 2) God had ordained that the two years of Ish-bosheth's reign would complete David's preparation for the kingship, but also that they would prepare those who were to be his subjects. David's remarkable response to the deaths of those associated with Saul's house and reign powerfully impressed upon the sons of Israel the fact that he wasn't just another ruler who sought to secure and promote his kingdom according to the "procedure of the king" (ref. 3:26-37). That public response providentially enabled all Israel to see in David what Yahweh saw. David was truly a different sort of man – one uniquely suited to rule over the theocratic kingdom as a devoted servant-shepherd of the great Shepherd of Israel.
- c. The result was that David won the hearts of all Israel. For the first time since the death of Joshua, the tribes of Israel were reunited in firm solidarity – not through manipulation or coercion, but through sincere devotion to their king. Whereas Saul built and maintained his rule *politically* through deception, conspiracy and fear, David gained the kingdom *spiritually* through single-minded devotion to the true King. He had no agenda except integrity and faithfulness, and the sons of Israel saw that authenticity in him and it attracted them to him. In contrast to the procedure of the king, David was a genuine shepherd of Israel (5:1-3).
- d. Notably, David's first recorded act subsequent to his unification of all Israel under his rule was his conquest of Jerusalem (5:6-10). This ancient city, traditionally believed to be the Salem of Genesis 14:18, was a Jebusite stronghold at the time of the invasion of Canaan under Joshua. Though Israel later besieged Jerusalem, the city had never come under Israelite occupation (cf. Judges 1:8, 21, 19:10-11). By God's design, that awaited the emergence of His chosen servant-king.

The significance of Jerusalem's conquest is evident in the role it was to play in the development of the Israelite kingdom, particularly as that kingdom predicted and portrayed Yahweh's final kingdom. Beginning with Moses, the Lord had promised a future day in which He would appoint a permanent dwelling place for Himself – a place to "put His name" (cf. Deuteronomy 12:1ff, 16:1ff, etc.), and David believed Jerusalem was to be this place (ref. 6:1ff). Moreover, by calling Jerusalem by his own name – the *City of David* (5:9), David was indicating his conviction that Yahweh's dwelling place is also properly the inhabitation of His regal son. As first portrayed in the creational kingdom and reiterated in the promise to Abraham, sacred space – the kingdom of God – is realized in the intimate communion between the Creator-Father and His image-son.

- e. Jerusalem was now the seat of Israel's king, but David's vision was to dwell there with Israel's God. Toward that end he had a tabernacle ("tent") constructed in Jerusalem (6:17) and set about bringing the ark of Yahweh's presence from Abinadab's house in Kiriath-jearim to his new capital city.

As a side note, the new tabernacle at Jerusalem was not the same sanctuary first situated at Shiloh and later moved to Nob. Following Saul's murder of the priests of Nob and desolation of the city, that tabernacle was relocated once more to the sacred city of Gibeon, one of the designated cities of the Kohathite family of the Levites (Joshua 21:17; 1 Chronicles 16:37-40, 21:29). It remained there until the reign of Solomon and the construction of the temple (2 Chronicles 1:1-4).

The text provides no explanation for David's building a new tabernacle at Jerusalem rather than moving the existing one, but the greater question regards his decision to leave the one at Gibeon intact. This resulted in a situation in which Yahweh's symbolic presence was in Jerusalem while worship activities also continued at a duplicate sanctuary elsewhere. Whatever David's reason, this was a clear violation of God's instruction concerning the central sanctuary and so an early indication of David's ultimate failure in his calling as Yahweh's son-king.

The next indication came with the actual transport of the ark. Having prepared its dwelling place, David astonishingly mimicked the Philistines by moving the ark on an ox cart. When at one point it appeared the ark would topple to the ground, Abinadab's son Uzzah reached out to stabilize it and God responded to his irreverence by striking him dead on the spot. This terrified David and he decided to leave the ark in the nearby house of a man named Obed-Edom (6:1-10).

The ark remained with Obed-Edom for three months, but when David learned how the Lord had been blessing him and his house on account of the ark, he determined again to bring it to Jerusalem. This time, however, David followed God's prescription for transporting the ark (ref. Numbers 4:1-15) and had it carried into Jerusalem in a triumphal procession (cf. 6:13).

- 1) The focal point of this event was David's presence and participation, and the text is careful to portray him functioning in the priestly role. David wore the linen ephod and offered numerous sacrifices to Yahweh during the procession and after the ark's placement in its dwelling. He also blessed the people in Yahweh's name (6:13-18; cf. Numbers 6:22-27).

David's actions were remarkable given God's response to Saul's decision to offer sacrifices (ref. 1 Samuel 13:8ff). On the basis of genealogy alone, the Lord had made clear that Israel's covenant established an unbridgeable separation between the kingship and the priesthood. Saul had transgressed that separation and paid with the forfeiture of his kingdom. But what was forbidden to Saul was acceptable for David (ref. 6:20-21) – *not because of who David was personally but because of whom he prefigured.*

God's impending covenant with David would reveal that David's person, reign and kingdom were to find their fulfillment and true significance in a regal and priestly son to come from him (cf. Psalm 110; Luke 20:41ff). It was that connection that made his actions proper and pleasing to God.

By bringing the ark to Jerusalem David had symbolically enthroned Yahweh on Mount Zion, and he had done so through his labors as the Lord's chosen king-priest. Though David couldn't know it at that time, this action provided the foundational context for God's covenant with him, specifically as that covenant would contribute to the developing revelation of redemption in Christ. In ushering in the eschatological kingdom, David's promised Son would likewise establish Yahweh's unqualified rule by His work as king-priest (cf. Psalm 110; Isaiah 2:1-4, 52:1-10; Micah 3:1-4:7; Zechariah 2:1-3:10 with Revelation 11:15-12:10; etc.).

- 2) The text closes this context by noting Michal's reaction to David's actions in bringing the ark to Jerusalem (6:20-22). Michal was David's first wife, but more importantly here, she was Saul's daughter. It is this identity that establishes the relevance of her response and its outcome. The ark's settled presence in Jerusalem had immense importance to the Israelite kingdom – prophetically as well as historically, so that David's boundless exultation and celebration were fully warranted. By her embarrassment and sense of shame Michal was showing herself to be a true daughter of her father – a fact the text emphasizes explicitly by the way it designates her (ref. vv. 20a and 23). Like Saul, Michal conceived of the kingdom and kingship in personal and political terms rather than theocratic ones.

The divine response was to shut her womb for the duration of her life (6:23). In this way Yahweh brought reproach and shame upon the woman who had found shame in the jubilant, selfless worship of His servant-king. But the greater significance of Michal's barrenness is that it established an absolute separation between the houses of Saul and David. Saul's was a failed kingship, and God testified to this by severing his dynasty through the transference of the kingdom to a person outside of his line. Saul had been replaced by David and the absolute demarcation between them necessitated that Saul's lineage not be interwoven with David's.

Thus David's early reign was concerned with establishing the essential fullness of the Israelite kingdom. Under David, Yahweh's covenant "son" was internally reunified and the Father was reunited to His son by the restoration of the ark of His presence – not to a portable tabernacle, but to the place chosen to be His permanent dwelling within His sanctuary-land. The ark's presence in Jerusalem spoke of the end of the estrangement and unsettledness that had marked Saul's reign (and that would be fully resolved with the temple). More broadly, Yahweh's return to dwell in His son's midst testified of His approval of the transition in the covenant kingdom from a pure theocracy to a theocratic monarchy. Yahweh was still Father-King in Israel, but now ruling through a royal son.