

## 11. The End of David's Reign – Judgment and Promise

The Bathsheba episode initiated the beginning of the end of David's kingdom. More importantly, Yahweh's judgment against David appeared to negate His previous covenant with him. For, in the covenant Yahweh promised to build and establish David's house, but now He had declared His intention to tear it apart. The sword first came upon David's house in the death of his baby son, and from there it extended its reach to others among his children. Soon Absalom murdered his brother Amnon, only to meet his own death at the hand of Joab, David's nephew and loyal commander of his army (18:1-15).

The sword had come heavily upon David's household, but soon began to move against David's *theocratic* house. Even as the covenant implicated both David's kingdom and his royal line of descent, so it was with Yahweh's judgment. Absalom's rebellion became a cancer that spread throughout the whole Israelite kingdom; before long all the elders of Israel had rallied to his side and were conspiring with him to take David's life (17:1-4).

The narrative leaves no doubt that David's house and kingdom were coming apart, and yet it is careful to show that Yahweh had not rejected His covenant with David. The first indication was David's restoration to his throne after the death of Absalom (19:1ff), but more significant is the record of David's final words in which he celebrates the Lord's covenant with him and rejoices in faith that He will fulfill it (23:1-5, cf. 22:50-51). That poem of exultation and faith is then immediately reinforced by an event that follows in the narrative, namely David's decision to take a census of his kingdom (24:1ff).

- a. Though this action was according to divine purpose, it amounted to faithlessness on David's part. The reason was that his intent in the census was to take account of his military strength (vv. 4-9). Whether out of pride or to bolster his confidence in his nation's power and security, David's census betrayed a crisis of faith and misplaced confidence: Yahweh was Israel's King and commander of its hosts; David well knew that Israel's power and triumph in every circumstance were insured because the Lord fought for His people.

*The man who had begun his career as Israel's leader standing toe-to-toe with the Philistine giant (who epitomized the enemies of Yahweh and His kingdom), confident and unafraid because he came in the name of the God of Israel (ref. 1 Samuel 17:41-47) was now, in the twilight of his reign, sadly moved to place his trust in sword and spear.*

- b. God's response to David's faithless action was to present him with three punishments from which he was to make a choice (24:10-13). Notably, this time David acted in faith, entrusting himself to the Lord's goodness and mercy (v. 14). Yahweh responded by choosing the latter of the three, sending a plague upon Israel that resulted in seventy thousand deaths from Dan in the north to Beersheba at the southern border of the land (24:15; cf. with v. 1). But when the smiting angel stretched out his hand to destroy the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Lord restrained him and pronounced the end of His judgment (v. 16).

- c. As indicated above, the episode that follows in the narrative (24:17-25; cf. also 1 Chronicles 21:15-27) powerfully reinforces David's confident words in 23:1-5, but it's important for another reason as well. Viewed within the broader context, it clearly affirmed the Lord's ongoing commitment to His covenant, but it also *contributed* to it. That is, it provided a crucial revelatory contribution to the meaning of the covenant and the way it was ultimately to be fulfilled.
- After noting Yahweh's decision to stay His hand, the narrative immediately turns its attention to David and what was transpiring in his thoughts during the time the plague was running its course. When David saw the sons of Israel dying he cried out to God to lift His judgment from the people and instead let him and his house bear the full punishment.
  - God's response to David's plea was to direct him to construct an altar there at Araunah's threshing floor where He had stopped His angel's destroying hand. Toward that end, David sought to purchase the threshing floor but Araunah was unwilling to sell it. He desired to give it to his king – along with the oxen and implements to build the sacrificial fire, but David insisted upon paying him in full. After securing the site David proceeded to construct an altar and thereby fulfill the Lord's command.

What immediately comes to mind regarding this episode is its connection with the promised central sanctuary. By purchasing Araunah's threshing floor David had secured the site upon which his son Solomon would construct the house indicated in the covenant (2 Chronicles 3:1; cf. 1 Chronicles 21:28-22:5). Thus the Lord's plague providentially served the goal of the Jerusalem temple. In itself this shows that, at least to the extent of near-term, temporal fulfillment, the Lord had not forsaken His covenant, and many look no further than this in their understanding of this passage. But when considered within the context of the Davidic Covenant and the entire David narrative, this episode and its particulars are seen to make a profound contribution to God's revelation of His coming redemption.

- 1) The first thing to observe in this regard is that the text attributes God's decision to withdraw His hand to David's intercession and sacrifice (v. 25). It's true that the narrative records the Lord's relenting from His punishment in advance of David's intercessory plea, but a careful reading reveals that it does so, not as a matter of chronology, but of *emphasis*.

The writer constructed his narrative in such a way that it would highlight both concerns: Yahweh's determination to stop the plague on the one hand and David's intercession as the crucial context for that decision on the other (ref. 24:17). He intentionally addressed each issue separately and then conspicuously waited until the final verse of the book to disclose the relationship between them. Only then did he reveal that David's petition – framed by his priestly ministrations – moved the Lord to end His punishment of His land and His people.

- 2) At the heart of the Davidic Covenant was its two-fold promise of a house: a house for David and a house for Yahweh. In both instances fulfillment was bound up in a promised seed; God was going to build David's house in and through that son and he, in turn, would build a house for Him. The initial fulfillment of this double promise came in David's son Solomon. In Solomon the Lord began the process of building David's royal dynasty (house) and he, after assuming David's throne, went on to build Yahweh's sanctuary on the site purchased by his father.
- 3) David bought Araunah's threshing floor in order to build the altar, but the Chronicles account is explicit that he didn't connect that situation with the future temple until after he had completed his offerings. At the moment his only intent was to fulfill the Lord's commandment in reference to the plague that was besieging Israel. *David had petitioned Yahweh to allow him to bear the stroke in the place of his people and the Lord granted his plea by directing him to intercede for them through a sacrifice at the place of judgment.* David turned away the Lord's fierce anger from Israel by his priestly ministrations in offering up an acceptable sacrifice.

At one level this action clearly prefigured the priestly work that would transpire in that place in connection with the future temple. But given the scope of the Davidic Covenant – which implicated the temple and its ministrations but also looked beyond it, David's actions had a profound prophetic significance transcending the near-term fulfillment. Observations thus far should make this evident, but it becomes more so when all the details of the passage are considered.

- First of all, the Samuel writer was careful to introduce into his narrative the *shepherd/sheep* motif (v. 17) and this makes an important contribution to its prophetic significance. By referring to the sons of Israel as sheep in his petition David was implying his own role as Israel's shepherd. "Shepherd" is a common leadership designation in the Scripture and, not surprisingly, its preeminent application is to God Himself (ref. Psalm 23:1, 28:8-9, 80:1; Ecclesiastes 12:11; Isaiah 40:10-11; etc.). But being closely associated with the idea of kingship, the Old Testament attaches this term particularly to David, both in relation to his own reign and the Davidic Covenant (cf. 2 Samuel 5:2, 7:8 with Psalm 78:70-72 and Ezekiel 34).

In this context, the writer's intention was two-fold:

- 1) First, he clearly wanted his readers to regard David's plea and intercession in pastoral terms. In other words, *it was as the faithful shepherd of Yahweh's flock that David sought to bear the rod in their place.* The Lord had called David from the sheepfold to shepherd His people Israel, and he was now putting his own life forward for theirs just as he had intervened for his father's flock when their lives were being threatened by predatory animals.

- 2) But the shepherd motif also connects this episode with the Davidic Covenant, and it is with that in view that the ultimate significance of David's intercession becomes evident. The covenant had its focal point in a Davidic seed such that David was to realize his own personal and regal significance in that seed. By means of God's covenant with him, David was established as a *type* of his promised son; thus, from the point of the making of the covenant, the Scripture explicitly refers to this son of David under the name *David* (Ezekiel 34:23-24, 37:24-25; Hosea 3:5; cf. Isaiah 11:1, 10).

The implication is that the text intends for David's intercession to be understood as prefiguring the same work in the promised covenant seed: David, the anointed and beloved shepherd of Yahweh's flock, was interceding on their behalf, pleading with the covenant Lord to strike him in the place of the sheep. So one day the Son of David would declare: "*I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep*" (John 10:11).

- Another important detail in the narrative is David's comment explaining his insistence upon paying the full price for Araunah's threshing floor and oxen. Araunah was eager to give everything to him, but David staunchly refused: "*I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing*" (ref. again vv. 19-24). David desired to take the blow for his sheep and the Lord prescribed a sacrifice to accomplish that end. The fact that the acceptable sacrifice came at the shepherd's *personal expense* is an important component in the typology of this event. But, whereas David gave over his earthly resource to provide the Lord's demanded offering and thereby secure deliverance for his people, the promised son would give *Himself* as the fulfillment of all sacrifice and offering.
- Finally, the location of the sacrifice is significant. The circumstances surrounding the Davidic Covenant – the conquest of Jerusalem and David's desire to erect a permanent sanctuary there – implied that Jerusalem was to be the site of the central sanctuary. Now, David's purchase connected Yahweh's sanctuary more narrowly with a threshing floor. The significance of this association is that threshing floors were *winnowing* places where grain and chaff were separated. This winnowing process, in turn, is used in the Scripture as a metaphor for God's judgment by which He distinguishes between those who are His people and those who aren't (ref. Exodus 15:7; Psalm 1:1-6; Jeremiah 15:1-9; etc.). This imagery takes on special significance in relation to the promised day when Yahweh would wield his winnowing fork and establish His everlasting kingdom (cf. Isaiah 41:1-20 and Malachi 4:1-3 with Matthew 3:1-12). So Araunah's threshing floor was a place of divine judgment – a place where Yahweh's wrath, justly arrayed against unfaithful men, was turned aside by the intervening self-sacrifice of the faithful shepherd of the sheep.