

David's Rise, Saul's Demise IV

Relating to my little book called *The Art of Biblical History*, let me rehearse very briefly what the big questions in the chapters are.

In chapter one, the question is “Is the Bible a history book? Is it a history textbook? How are we to regard it?” In other words, when we pick up the Bible, what kind of literature are we reading? Most scholars, liberals, and conservatives, of all stripes, will say, “No, the Bible is not a history book per se.” I think they are right. It is far more than that. It is also not a theology book, a philosophy book, a book of linguistics, or a book of economics. It is not a book of all these different things, but it is of interest in many of those areas. And it does have a very, very definite historical interest. So we answer the question negatively: no, it is not an history book. It is really a library of different literary genres, different literary forms. You have got poetry, prose, wisdom writings, Gospels, and epistles. The Bible is a library of texts, which, if you wanted to describe very generally, you would have to describe as religious literature. If you are a believer you would say, “It is God’s Word.” That is the simple way of putting it. So the first chapter deals with the nature of the genre of the Bible. It is a library of works. The first question is, “Is the Bible a history book?”

The second question, which is addressed in chapter two, is “What is history anyway?” Is history a simple video recording of what happened or is history something more creative, compressed, selective, and perspectival than that? That is the second question, and it is addressed in chapter two.

The third question is “Is the historicity of the Bible even important?” Is it important whether or not the things that are recounted in the Bible as having happened really happened? Could we not simply learn from the stories? Do the stories have to be true stories, historical stories? That question is addressed in chapter three.

In chapter four the question is “Why do scholars disagree?” If historicity is or is not important, why do scholars disagree about the historical import and accuracy of the Bible? There I do a sweeping look at different perspectives that are brought to bear by different students of the Bible. Students bring different approaches, and the methods they employ are a reflection of the models of reality that form their background beliefs. It is a look at the way in which the worldview that we embrace influences the way we look at things and the way we approach the Bible. You will be introduced to traditional historical criticism, sociological approaches to the Bible, new archeological approaches, literary approaches, and even terms like deconstruction. It is a sweeping survey of scholarship. That is a reason that it is a scary chapter, but even if you have not heard of these terms before, I try to explain them as best as I can in summarizing them. Do not get bogged down and frustrated by the details, rather try to get the big point and keep moving. Do not expect to understand everything the first time around if you have not read in this area at all.

The fifth chapter is, with all this background and issues that we have discussed, “How do we go about reading the Bible asking the question, ‘what are its historical claims?’” When I read an account in the Bible, how do I know if it is historical or not? I read about the ax head that the prophet in Kings calls to float to the surface. Is that just a fabulous tale, or am I to envisage an ax head actually floating to the surface of the water? What would help me decide that question? Is this prophetic legend, or is this prophetic historiography? Chapter five is where I try to hammer out a method and approach that will help us find answers to those questions. It does not mean that we can find answers to absolutely every

question and be absolutely certain at every turn as to whether we are to take something as historical or not. It does provide a general framework and a general approach.

The sixth chapter will seem very familiar to you because it is an extended example applying the reading strategy from chapter five to the Saul material that we have talked about at length. Chapter six should be a nice review to you. I encourage you to read it, in particular because there are some nice charts in there that chart out the structure of arguments. You can see it visually how you go through.

We were in 2 Samuel 6. We were talking about David's reign blessed by God. Sometimes people call this "David Under the Blessing" as contrasted with 2 Samuel 11 and following, "David Under the Curse." I used to use that as a title, and it really bothered a student, so I backed away from that. David is not really under the curse; it is really David's sin and its consequences that we discover as we move into chapter 11 and following. Let me very quickly run through what happens up to and including chapter 10.

In chapter 6 the Arc of the Covenant is brought to Israel. In chapter 7 we reach what has often been described as the Theological Summit of the Old Testament. That is, the Davidic Promise or the Dynastic Promise given by God through Nathan to David. David wanted to build a temple, a house for the Lord, and Nathan thought it sounded like a good idea and told David to go ahead. God soon reversed that and said, "Nathan, wait a minute, no, you did not ask me. That is not the plan. David is not to do it, his son will do it." The Lord then graciously through Nathan said that David was not to build Him a house, but He would build David an eternal house. David is not going to build the Lord a temple, but the Lord will give David a dynasty that will go on forever. David is, of course, astonished by this promise. He says, "To what other human being have you ever spoken thusly?" This is astonishing. In this Theological Summit of the Old Testament, we have gathered up and focused on David, the promise to the patriarchs. There are references there I will not take time to point out. But if you read back through it you will be reminded of a promise that was made to Abraham and now is being focused in on David. From that focus it then presses forward and becomes a Messianic hope. It is a hope for the future when God will bring the Messiah, who would be the greater Son of David, Christ Himself. So this becomes the seed bed for the Messianic consciousness that begins to develop and grow in the Old Testament. Second Samuel 7 is a very important chapter. I do not need to take time to discuss it at length because we are going to use this chapter later in this course as we compare Samuel and Chronicles. We will see something about the nature and flexibility of biblical historiography.

In chapter 8 we have a summary of David's victories. It resembles in many respects the summary of Saul's victories and Saul's reign in 1 Samuel 14:47. But there is one very significant difference. David and Saul fought many of the same enemies. Both of them won many victories, but in the summary of David's reign we read the Lord gave David victory wherever he went. This is not in the summary of Saul's reign. It says in 2 Samuel 8:14, "The Lord gave David victory where he went." This is an expression of the Lord's continual presence with David. It is something we never hear about Saul, but we hear it repeatedly in the life of David. The Lord gave David victory. The Lord was with David.

In chapter 9 we have the story of Mephibosheth, the surviving crippled son of Jonathan. David shows him kindness because of his covenant with Jonathan. He is seeking to fulfill what he can to his departed friend Jonathan, and he brings Mephibosheth into his household. The cynical readers say David wanted to keep the competition under his immediate oversight. David is a sinful individual, so maybe he did have that as an ulterior motive, but that is certainly not what the text says. It says that David wanted to show kindness to Jonathan, and he sought out a surviving son of Jonathan in order to do so. It happened to be Mephibosheth.

Chapter 10 recounts David's last major campaign against foreign powers. He secures the boundaries. He is set; he is successful.

I call chapter 11 "David's Sin and Its Consequences." We move from David under the blessing to, if you will, David under the curse. Perhaps it is better stated to say, David's sin and its consequences. This section is not the brightest period in David's life. It begins in 2 Samuel 11:1, "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." Now that is the kind of catch phrase that has been used in many, many sermons, "In the Spring when kings go off to war, David sent Joab." I think those sermons are on target. I think that is what the text is trying to say. David was king, it was spring. He should have been off to war, but he sent Joab. David was beginning to get a bit too comfortable. As if this is not clear enough, we go on to read in verse 2 that one evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. He got up from his bed one evening. He was beginning to simply lie around, it seems. When kings were off at war, David was getting too comfortable. I would entitle this chapter, "The High Cost of Getting Comfortable" or perhaps "The Hazards of Success Part II."

Notice in 2 Samuel 11:1-2 that you again have the narrative characteristic of showing rather than telling. David is not explicitly condemned, but we are shown that he is getting comfortable, maybe getting a little lazy, getting a little casual. He is not on his guard. He is not really where he should be, so he walks into temptation. He is on top of the roof of the palace, and from the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful. You know the story of his sin with Bathsheba. She does not appear as a fully developed character in this episode. We do not know really what her response was, what her actions were. We can only assume that she would have protested being taken by the king. We are simply not told. The focus is on David's actions. He saw what he wanted. He took it. He was king. Who can stop him?

In chapter 12, however, it becomes apparent that despite his best efforts, David is not to get away with things. Nathan comes to David and tells him a story. One thing you will find that I stress in the book is the importance of recognizing the genre or literary type of a story you read or hear. David made a genre mistake here. He did not really recognize the form of the story that Nathan was telling him. The story was of the rich man who had many sheep and the poor man who had but the one little lamb. When the rich man had a guest come to town, the rich man took the little lamb that belonged to the poor man. He had it prepared and fed his guests with the one little lamb of the poor man. David understood this to be a judicial case desiring judgment, and he rendered judgment. He said the man who did that shall surely die. It was a genre mistake because it was not a judicial case; it was a parable. Having pronounced judgment, Nathan then said, "You are the man, do you not see? This was a parable, you are guilty."

Here we notice a striking difference between David and Saul. When caught red-handed, Saul had a number of excuses at his disposal. He played them to the hilt in 1 Samuel 15, and only when there was nothing more that he could possibly say did he confess. He admitted, "Okay, I have sinned, but honor me before the elders and before my people and I will bow before the Lord your God." In this instance in 2 Samuel 11, David attempted a cover-up. He had attempted to convince Uriah to come home and be with his wife and refresh himself. Uriah said he would not do that. It would be wrong for him to go home while the army of Israel was in the field. That must have pricked David's conscience a little bit. It is a very interesting little drama that you have going on between David and Uriah in chapter 11 because the question is who knows what, and who thinks the other one knows what? You really do not know what each person knows. You know that David knows everything, except he does not know what Uriah may or may not know. Were all of Uriah's comments purely innocent or not? It is a very interesting thing to try to explore. I think it is one of those gaps that a narrative sometimes opens up that is not

intended to be closed. The whole affair remains mysterious. We never know how much Uriah may have learned, may have guessed. At any rate, he resists David's attempt to make him help with the cover-up, so David is eventually caught. He is caught not by the circumstances but by the prophet of God as he comes and says, "You are the man." When Nathan does so, David responds by saying in 2 Samuel 12:13, "I have sinned against the LORD." He does not say, "So then return with me and honor me before the elders and my people," or anything else. David comes clean and realizes that what he did had to be uncovered. He was a sinful man, but he said, "I have sinned against the LORD." Nathan replies, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt, the son born to you will die." We should never think that because we are under grace and not under law sin has no consequences. All you have to do is sin for a day and you will discover that sin does have consequences. The point is we do not find our way to God by behaving and ceasing to sin. We are God's by virtue of His coming to us in grace and adopting us as His children. That is the point of grace that we like to stress. But do not be deceived into thinking that because we are under grace our behavior makes absolutely no difference in what we experience in this life. Our sin does have consequences. David's sin had grave consequences that not only involved the death of this young child who was conceived in an adulterous relationship, but also continuing consequences in the life of David and his children.

Immediately following chapter 12, we come to one of those chapters, which is not really children's bedside reading. We all think that we should read the Bible to the children. That is true, but remember this is a book for adults. The Gospel is for children. Parts of the Bible are for children; I do not think every part should be read to a child, at least not without some masking of the details. I do not quite know how you would read 2 Samuel 13 about the rape of Tamar by her half-brother Amnon to a child. It is interesting, in the aftermath of what David has done and the fact that he has been forgiven, the way in which David responds when he hears what Amnon has done. It says in 2 Samuel 13:21, "When King David heard all this, he was furious." That is all it says. David did not do anything about it. This is because David was guilty too. He had committed murder and adultery. He had taken another man's life. Those are every bit the equal to what Amnon did. This was not the right thing for David to do, though. Two wrongs do not make a right. That may seem highly simplistic in dealing with this kind of complex, moral, ethical issue and situation, but I think that is true. If we operate out of a sense of weakness and guilt in dealing with our children, where will that get us? What sin or disobedience could our children possibly do that we are not guilty of? They are probably never going to go beyond us in their sin where we can occupy the moral high ground. We cannot say, "I never would have done that, so you should not either." They are probably going to do the same things that we have done. But that does not mean that we should be overly permissive and not take responsibility as parents. We need to recognize that it is our responsibility as those in authority over them to bring discipline into their lives, to train them as God brings discipline into our lives. There is nothing hypocritical in that. It would be hypocritical if we have extricated ourselves from under the Lord's discipline. If we are living for ourselves and going our own way, that is hypocritical. We cannot simply disobey God, saying He is not our Father. If we are living that way it is hypocritical. If we recognize in the depth of our sin that God is disciplining us and we are submissive to that, then we should not be crippled by the guilt of our past. We should not be disabled in dealing rightly with our children. David was furious and he did nothing.

This will begin a chain of events that will continue. It begins with Absalom, who was Tamar's full brother. We will see how that works itself. We will also be discussing the art of biblical history in the next session.