

Week Two

The Joy of David

We cannot fully appreciate David's character apart from understanding a bit more about the history of the Israelites and the times in which he lived. Remember from our study of Joshua that the Amalekites had attacked Israel at Rephidim when they were in the wilderness (Exodus 17:8). This was immediately following the Lord bringing forth the water at the place Moses named Massah and Meribah. Some biblical scholars believe that Amalek wanted to drive Israel away in order to take possession of this water source.

The battle of Rephidim began a pattern of Amalek attacking the Israelites. We read in 1 Samuel 14:48 that King Saul fought against the Amalekites, who continued to plunder the Israelites. We can also better understand Israel's regional circumstances during this era through referencing Judges 6:1-10, which explains that the Midianites and Amalekites would come against Israel regularly, plundering until there was 'no produce, nor sheep, nor oxen, nor donkey.'

After Saul refused to obey the Lord regarding the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15), the Lord sent Samuel the prophet to anoint David as Israel's new king. Just as Joshua was anointed by the priest Eleazar, and then began a process of incrementally increasing in authority and in his leadership of the people, so David's anointing marked the beginning of a journey toward assuming full responsibility for leading God's people.

We learn of David's journey from shepherd to king beginning in 1 Samuel 16. At the Lord's command the prophet Samuel traveled to Bethlehem to meet with Jesse, the grandson of Boaz and Ruth, and David's father (Ruth 4:17). Samuel's 'surprise visit' to Bethlehem caused alarm among the elders because of his status as Israel's prophet, but Samuel calmed the situation by confirming he came in peace for the purpose of offering a sacrifice to the Lord. Jesse submitted to being sanctified by Samuel for the sacrifice and allowed his sons to be as well; however, not all of Jesse's sons were present (1 Samuel 16)

David was Jesse's youngest son. We're not told at what point Samuel shared the true nature of his visit with the prophet Samuel, but 1 Samuel 16:8 says Jesse had his son Abinadab pass before Samuel, and then Shammah, and finally all seven of his sons who were present. But none of these were the Lord's choice for Israel's next king. To his credit, Samuel was clear on the Lord's choice of one of Jesse's sons. When the Lord did not reveal any of these sons as his choice, Samuel questioned Jesse, rather than doubting himself or questioning the Lord. Samuel instead asked, "Are all your sons here?" (1 Samuel 16:11).

David was such an unlikely choice that Jesse had not even called him in from the field. The youngest among eight brothers, David was relegated to staying out in the field to tend his father's sheep and guard them against predators. We can well imagine David's practice of pouring his heart out to God through prose and music during the time he spent alone in the field.

We hear of David's reliance on God for strength and protection when serving as a shepherd in his testimony to Saul, "The Lord who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, will save me from this Philistine" (1 Samuel 17:37). David trusted in the Lord's love for

him, and he trusted that the Lord desired shalom for his life. This belief that the Lord desired success and goodness for him encouraged David in reaching for the Lord always and in every circumstance. Even while David lamented of momentary circumstances or troubles, he held fast to his trust that God was for him and desired his good. David believed the Lord was working all things for good long before the Apostle Paul declared this truth in his letter to the Romans.

In Psalms like Psalm 108 we hear of David's love and reverence for the Lord and of his valuing his relationship with the Lord above all else:

- ¹ My heart, O God, is steadfast;
I will sing and make music with all my soul.
- ² Awake, harp and lyre!
I will awaken the dawn.
- ³ I will praise you, LORD, among the nations;
I will sing of you among the peoples.
- ⁴ For great is your love, higher than the heavens;
your faithfulness reaches to the skies.
- ⁵ Be exalted, O God, above the heavens;
let your glory be over all the earth.
- ⁶ Save us and help us with your right hand,
that those you love may be delivered.

After Samuel departed, David's anointing soon became eclipsed by a series of challenging and difficult circumstances in his life. Saul became jealous of David's popularity and sought to kill David. After loyally serving his king, David was relegated to living in caves and subsisting on what he and the men who traveled with him could earn by providing their protection to land owners in the region.

These circumstances might have driven one with less devotion to Yahweh to quarrel with the Lord in the way that Israel had done, but David remained steadfastly devoted to the Lord. His beliefs about the attributes of the Lord and his beliefs regarding the intimate relationship the Lord desires with his people secured David's joy when he was a shepherd alone in the field and when he was the King of Israel. In his journey from youth to old age, neither status nor circumstance changed David's deep love and desire for relationship with the Lord. This was the anchoring of David's joy.