

2 Samuel 8: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 00] 2 Samuel chapter 8. After this David defeated the Philistines and subdued them, and David took Methagamah out of the hand of the Philistines. And he defeated Moab, and he measured them with a line, making them lie down on the ground. Two lines he measured to be put to death, and one full line to be spared. And the Moabites became servants to David and brought tribute. David also defeated Hadadiza, the son of Rehob, king of Zobah, as he went to restore his power at the river Euphrates.

And David took from him 1,700 horsemen and 20,000 foot soldiers. And David hamstringed all the chariot horses, but left enough for 100 chariots. And when the Syrians of Damascus came to help Hadadiza, king of Zobah, David struck down 22,000 men of the Syrians. Then David put garrisons in Aram of Damascus, and the Syrians became servants to David and brought tribute. And the Lord gave victory to David wherever he went. And David took the shields of gold that were carried by the servants of Hadadiza, and brought them to Jerusalem. And from Beta and from Berethi, cities of Hadadiza, king David took very much bronze. When Toai, king of Hamath, heard that David had defeated the whole army of Hadadiza, Toai sent his son Joram to king David, to ask about his health and to bless him because he had fought against Hadadiza and defeated him. For Hadadiza had often been at war with Toai. And Joram brought with him articles of silver, of gold, and of bronze. These also king David dedicated to the Lord, together with the silver and gold that he dedicated from all the nations he subdued, from Edom, Moab, the Ammonites, the Philistines, Amalek, and from the spoil of Hadadiza, the son of Rehob, king of Zobah. And David made a name for himself when he returned from striking down 18,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt. Then he put garrisons in Edom. Throughout all Edom he put garrisons, and all the Edomites became David's servants. And the Lord gave victory to David wherever he went. So David reigned over all Israel, and David administered justice and equity to all his people.

Joab, the son of Zeruah, was over the army, and Jehoshaphat, the son of Ahilod, was recorder. And Zadok, the son of Ahitab, and Himalek, the son of Abiathar, were priests. And Saraiah was secretary. And Benaniah, the son of Jehoiada, was over the Cherethites and the Pelethites. And David's sons were priests. In 2 Samuel chapter 8, after centuries of territorial insecurity, the territory of Israel expands under David, and their enemies on various sides are subdued.

[2 : 35] In verse 10 of the preceding chapter, the Lord had promised to David, And I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, so that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more. Now the Lord is bringing his word to pass.

As Peter Lighthouse notes, the chapter is ordered geographically. David's conquests move from the Philistines in the west, to the Moabites in the east, to Hadadiza of Zobah in the north, and then to the Edomites in the south. The kingdom is stretching out on all sides. The Lord had promised an expansive territory to Abram back in Genesis chapter 15, verses 18 to 21.

On that day, the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, To your offspring I give this land, from the river of Egypt, the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, the Kenizzites, the Kadmonites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Rephaim, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Gogeshites, and the Jebusites.

Under David, many centuries later, Israel is finally entering into possession of the promise. David begins by defeating the Philistines. David, of course, first rose to prominence with his defeat of Goliath of Gath, the Philistine champion. Later, fleeing from Saul, he sought refuge in the land of the Philistines in Gath, and at a later point became a mercenary for Abimelech, living in Ziklag with his men. The Philistines had struck against David when they saw the threat of him uniting Israel and Judah into one kingdom. They had failed in that assault. On two separate occasions, they had been

defeated by David. The Philistines had been the dominant force in the region for quite some time. Back in the story of Samson, they clearly dominated Judah, the Judahites being prepared to sell Samson into their hands to protect themselves from reprisals. The Philistines had delivered a crushing blow to Israel in the battle of Aphek, with judgment falling upon the house of Eli, his two sons Hophni and Phinehas dying on the same day, and he dying when he heard the news, and then the Ark of the Covenant being captured. When it was returned after it had plagued the land, the unity of Israel's worship was not restored until a century later. Saul fought against the Philistines with his son Jonathan on a number of occasions, and won important victories, thanks especially to the courageous faith of Jonathan and David. However, at the battle of Gilboa, the Philistines struck down Saul and his sons, leaving Israel in a state of such insecurity that they could only regroup in the land of the Transjordan. It is possible that in his early years as the king of Judah, David would have been a vassal kingdom of the Philistines. The Philistines in scripture are associated with Egypt, from chapter 10 of Genesis onwards. Some have suggested that the Philistines were established as a vassal kingdom of Egypt to bolster its power and its dominance over the land of Canaan. However, as Egyptian dominance crumbled, the Philistines themselves filled the vacuum.

[5 : 27] In this passage, David and Israel are rising to dominate a land that was often ruled by vassal kingdoms of Mesopotamian empires to the north and Egyptian empires to the south. Verse 1 says that David took Methagamah from the hand of the Philistines. A number of commentators suggest that this is a reference to Gath as the mother city. In 1 Chronicles chapter 18 verse 1, in the parallel passage, we read, After this, David defeated the Philistines and subdued them, and he took Gath and its villagers out of the hand of the Philistines. David had of course sojourned in Gath for a while, and 600 Gittites had followed him. This is a spectacular turnaround in just a few years.

In the days of Saul, the Philistines had a monopoly upon ironworking. They had garrisons based throughout Israel, and then in the final defeat of Saul, they had wiped out large areas of the land. David also defeats Moab. We're not told how the conflict started and who instigated it, but given David's treatment of the Moabite prisoners of war, even while it was likely considered lenient at the time, was possibly a judgment for a war that they had started. We should recall that back in chapter 22 of 1 Samuel, David had sent his parents to the king of Moab to protect them. David also has Moabite blood through Ruth, his great-grandmother. Much of the passage is given to the discussion of the war to the north, against Hadadiza and the kingdom of Zobah. Hadadiza and other Arameans are mentioned in the following chapters, so it seems likely that much of the material in this chapter is not in chronological order, but is in thematic order, just as we were told of Solomon's birth a few chapters ago.

The purpose is to underline the way that God is fulfilling his promises to Israel and to David, and the way in which he is giving them rest on all sides. David's victory leads to the winning of great spoil, and the spoil is dedicated to the Lord. He obeys the law not to accumulate a great army of chariots, preserving only 100 horses for that purpose. He also wins friends to the north.

Toai the king of Hamath sends his son Joram to King David, in thanks for David's defeat of Hadadiza, who had often been at war with his kingdom. In 1 Chronicles chapter 18, Joram's name is given as Hadorum. The difference between the names, Joram, the Lord is exalted, and Hadorum, Hadad is exalted, maybe suggests that there has been a name change and a conversion.

[7 : 50] Moving to the south, David dominates Edom. He places garrisons throughout the land, and the Edomites become David's servants. Jacob's twin Esau comes under his sway. We might see Isaac's blessing of Jacob in which he gave him lordship over Esau, as being fulfilled in these particular events. Later on, in 1 Kings chapter 11, we learn a bit more about the brutality with which Joab and David cut off the men of Edom, and the way in which an enemy is raised up from Edom to fight against Solomon. Along with pacifying the surrounding region, and allowing Israel to finally dwell in peace, David conducts the internal affairs of the land with justice and equity. The chapter ends by describing the court of David. Joab, the son of Zeruiah, over the army. Jehoshaphat, the son of Ahilad, as the recorder. Zadok, the son of Ahitab and Himalek, the son of Abiathar, the priests. And Saraiah, the secretary. Ben-Niah, the son of Jehoiada, is over the Kerithites and the Pelethites, who are David's bodyguard. And David's sons are described here as priests. This last identification has caused a lot of debate, since the kingly and the priestly line were quite clearly distinguished. In 1 Chronicles chapter 18 verse 17, they're described differently. David's sons were the chief officials in the service of the king. How are we to make sense of this? It seems to me that

the most promising explanation is found in the recognition that the temple is the palace of the Lord, and the priests are the household stewards or officials.

Consequently, it is appropriate to call the chief officials of the king in his palace, his priests. The term priest, then, does not have an exclusively religious meaning. And when we understand the analogy between the royal palace officials and the priests in the temple, we'll have a better understanding of the role of the priests more generally. Throughout this chapter, we're seeing God fulfill his promises. In verses 6 and 14, this is underlined by the expression, and the Lord gave victory to David wherever he went. Furthermore, just as the covenant made with David echoed the Abrahamic covenant in a number of details, so in this chapter we see the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise concerning the extent of the land. God is fulfilling promises to Abraham through David. A question to consider. Comparing this chapter with 1 Chronicles chapter 18, how can we see the victory house-building pattern continue to play out?