

David's victory & a new covenant in Jerusalem

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[0 : 00] Thank you.

As a friend say, the more it changes the more it's the same thing. See you seem to be doing very much the same things as we did 50 years ago and that's a good thing I think. Anyway let's turn to our passage.

Peace at last. Well okay, not peace exactly. But at least the civil war is over. Civil wars in many ways are the worst type of war aren't they?

Civil wars in many ways are the worst type of war aren't they? They set brother against brother, sister against sister, parent against child, friend against friend.

Defections, betrayals, assassinations. We've seen all those in the previous chapters haven't we? They're all part of the game when it comes to civil war.

[1 : 37] Now time to put those behind us. Time for a fresh start. But how? What will be the shape of the new order?

But it all starts with the covenant. We'll look at that in a minute.

Go on to the next slide. Then in the rest of chapter 5 we meet a new capital and a threat defeated. Then chapter 6 describes the religious settlement and the moving of the ark to Jerusalem. In chapter 7 we get God's verdict on all this.

Chapter 7 is essentially the high point of David's reign. A palace and a promise. So today in this chapter 5 we're going to look at the covenant and two contrasting military operations.

[2 : 48] So how does it start? Well the Israelites are reviewing their options in verses 1 and 2. They conveniently remember now what they'd seem to have forgotten before.

That in Saul's day David had led the Israelite army and that the Lord had said that David would shepherd the people. And they remembered now that they were all children of their ancestor Jacob. It's not as if David was a foreign power taking them over. So the Israelites decide reunification under David is the way to go.

Of course that's not as easy as it seems. Civil wars cause all kinds of feuds and betrayals as we've seen. They can't just pick up where Saul had left off.

The nation must be created anew. As we sometimes say it needed to be reborn. And how to do that?

[3 : 56] Well the tool to do that was a covenant. As the new translations correctly read verse 3. Some earlier translations use softer words like compact.

But no this isn't a compact. It's a covenant. And the full meaning of that. So what is a covenant exactly? And the first thing to say is that a covenant is not the same thing as a contract.

What is a covenant? It's not the same thing as a contract. A contract is a deal in which two or more individuals agree to work together on some project.

Contracts are useful things. So if I want an extension built on my house I would hire a builder. I want an extension. The builder wants to feed their family and perhaps display their prowess as a craftsperson.

I have the cash. The builder has the skill and resources to do the work. Our aims are compatible. We reach an agreement and write it down in the contract.

[5 : 16] And hopefully the project is a success as we're both clear about what is expected. But what I don't expect is the builder is going to move into the extension. Neither does the builder think that I'm going to join them in their building business.

The contract has very limited aims. The covenant is something much more profound. In fact the best word I could think of to describe a covenant is an incorporation.

Bringing into one body. Covenant creates a new thing. A new identity. In 2 Samuel 5 it creates a new nation.

And it's worth looking a little bit about how this works. Because it's not that the individuals surrender their rights and needs to the state or organisation.

That's not what the Israelites are doing, is it? They're saying we remember that you were on our side once. Clearly the Israelites are not doing that.

[6 : 36] But what they are doing is bringing together their hopes and goals and creating a new identity. It asserts in fact that in the long view the best interests of the individual are the best interests of the group and vice versa.

Any nation, any organisation really has to exist on the basis of shared goals and shared ambitions. And that's what a covenant sets up.

It's a formal pledge to this understanding. Because in our Western civilisation we're so obsessed with individualism and self-fulfillment that we really find it difficult to get our heads around this idea. To the post-modern mind it simply makes no sense. In which everything is individual fulfilment and the destruction of meaning.

So we get that horrible when it comes to marriage we get that horrible invention the prenup. The prenup effectively undermines the marriage vows before the marriage has even started.

[7 : 52] The vows create a new entity a new thing. They become as Jesus said one flesh. They have a joint bank account hopefully.

The covenant is a radical change. An alignment of goals sometimes described as a new birth. In 2 Samuel 5.3 the nation is reborn but not without some birth pains.

So let's look at the military bits. David fought a lot of battles. You've seen that already. In this crucial point in the narrative these two campaigns are described.

Why? Because they're critical to the emerging nation. Jerusalem is established as the capital and the second campaign effectively enumerates the Philistine threat.

Then in verses 9 to 15 we get a summary of the history to follow. So from this time on the history of the kingdom is very largely the history of Jerusalem.

[9 : 18] Zion. I think this is the first time that Zion is named Zion is used. There's an interesting thing here that we are immediately introduced to the citadel's fatal weakness.

the city does not have a secure water supply. It seems an odd thing to focus on and yet this thread runs through the history of the kingdom.

We find it in the history books and in the Psalms the importance of the water in the city. It runs through Jesus' own teaching on living water and runs right through to the book of Revelation where we're told that the Revelation 21 that the new Jerusalem has a river that comes from the throne of God.

It's a fascinating study that we could another time maybe go into in detail but unfortunately we don't have time now. So back to the plot. Now we notice that in many ways the two campaigns here are contrasted.

The first one is instigated by David himself the second by the Philistines first takes place on a mountain the second in a valley verse 18 in the first in verse 8 the enemy is overconfident.

[10 : 57] In the second the enemy is motivated by caution and fear. Verse 17 the Philistines knew David of old.

They were well aware of David as a threat to them. Perhaps the most striking contrast in these narratives is in the tactical analysis in the way it's described.

In the first battle the emphasis is all on David himself. The presence of God is not even mentioned at all in the battle although it is acknowledged in verse 12.

In the later battle the tactical decision is explicitly attributed to the Lord verse 23. The wind in the trees in verse 24 presumably acknowledging the presence of the Holy Spirit.

And I think this contrast is given to us for a good reason and it's worth unpacking it a little. people. And the first thing to note is that God uses real people.

[12 : 22] Even if you just consider the military leaders of Israel we find contrast don't we? God can use the caution of Gideon even the berserker courage of Samson.

And here God uses the tactical insight of David. It's worth making the point it's not spiritual to be foolhardy or stupid. Do you remember the old Puritan military motto trust in God and keep your powder dry?

When God anointed David he chose the right person for the job. David never lost a campaign. He came near to it on numerous occasions but he was never finally defeated.

In fact David had a quite extraordinary ability to do the unexpected and his particular strength was to find the enemy's weakness. Do you remember when he fought Goliath?

God would have argued David you've never used sword and armor before but the Lord will strengthen you. You'll be all right. But that's not what David did.

[13:42] God used David's tactical sense here. The world just doesn't work that way.

David turned the enemy's apparent strength against him. Goliath was a big target. He certainly wasn't as agile or mobile as the mountain lions and bears that David had fought before.

David used the weapon he was familiar with and achieved victory on his own terms. Whatever the odds it seems David could always find a way to win.

And it was just the same here in Jerusalem. the frontal assault on the Jebusite fortress was doomed to failure.

But David could find a way in. The path to victory is not to engage the enemy's apparent strength but to find the weak point. So what about the second campaign?

[14:57] I say campaign because if you read it closely it's actually two battles in the same place. This description on the other hand reminds us that all wisdom comes from God.

This is 19 and 23. We're not told are we exactly how God answered David's inquiry in verse 23. there's no talk of prophetic intervention. Presumably David was praying and the solution came into his mind.

Attack from the trees. David attributed this to God though. This wisdom comes from God. We don't know exactly how the battle went on.

Maybe the noise of the trees covered David's manoeuvring and he was able to achieve surprise. Or maybe the movement in the trees was simply a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit.

[16:03] We're not given more information than that. But it's all attributed to God. Yet of course David and the army still carried out the attack themselves.

It wasn't like Pharaoh's army that got drowned in the Red Sea. David listened to what God said and attacked the enemy in the best way.

In the presence of God, the wind of course is a common metaphor for the Holy Spirit, as I'm sure you're all aware. this is interesting stuff.

But it's ancient history, isn't it? Other than pure historical curiosity, what is to be learned from these events?

Well, the first thing I think we should learn is that David, of course, is a picture of his promised descendant, Jesus. Jesus started his new nation with a covenant.

[17:20] Luke 22 verse 20 said, in the same way, after the supper, Jesus took the cup, saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

just as David's covenant rebooted the kingdom of Israel, so Jesus here reboots the kingdom of God.

A new thing is created, a new identity and purpose that supersedes the old in one sense, yet it does not so much invalidate the old as fulfil it.

This covenant achieved what even David's covenant failed to achieve. the bit of 17.11 says that the life is in the blood. Jesus brings us new life through his death and resurrection.

The citizens of the kingdom whether Jew or non-Jew, as the psalm says, say our I was born in Zion.

[18:35] They share a common purpose, a common identity, a common destiny, all under the rule of one king. Not even David or Solomon could achieve that.

The covenant that Jesus set up is eternal. eternal. How did Jesus achieve this victory? I don't know whether you've looked at it this way, but actually he achieved it by out-thinking the enemy, didn't he?

He was challenged by Satan in the desert in Matthew 4, 1-10. He refuses to play by the devil's rules. When people tried to make him king by force, John 6, 15, he withdrew to a mountain by himself.

He knew he wasn't going to win that way. Instead he does the unexpected. He knew of course that the real enemy wasn't the Romans, wasn't the Jewish authorities and the King Herod, but the ancient dragon, the ancient father of lies himself.

as it's described in John 8, 44. You know the story of the Hobbit, Smorg, Smorg, the dragon, has a weak spot and the archer finds that weak spot and shoots him there.

[20 : 10] Like Smorg, this dragon, the ancient dragon, has a weak spot. Jesus hit him there. The life is in the blood.

Jesus achieved a victory against a foe far more cunning than the Jebusites. He assaulted the citadel called Death and Hades and found a way in.

Like David, Jesus found the way to win. King. But if we are identified with Christ the King in the new covenant, we can also learn from David about our own spiritual warfare.

Okay, we no longer fight with grappling hooks and cold steel, rather with the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. We're fighting an enemy far more dangerous than the Jebusites.

We forget sometimes that the battle is fierce, be on your guard. There's a hymn in praise which contains the lines, agents of your righteousness trained for unremitting war.

[21 : 45] God's people are in a state of unremitting war, unremitting conflict. The battle is fierce. We often forget that.

We're going to sing Onward Christian Soldiers later. I haven't sang that for years. I think we tend to forget that we are engaged in warfare.

We've already noted that it's not spiritual to be stupid. Proverbs 4, 6 tells us not to forsake wisdom. If you can, come along this evening and get into the book of Ecclesiastes as the best of opening lines.

Meaningless, meaningless, it's all meaningless, says the teacher. Utterly meaningless. What a start. What a start to attack the postmodern thinking of the West, which is all about the destruction of meaning.

See what Ecclesiastes has to say. But you don't have to go to the Old Testament. The Sermon on the Mount is one long discourse, on the need for spiritual understanding.

[23 : 13] Right at the beginning, the Beatitudes tell us not to be seduced by the apparently obvious, don't they? It's all oxymoron. The meek will inherit the earth.

And what's Jesus' constant refrain throughout the Sermon on the Mount? you have heard it said, but I tell you, all the way through is Jesus' theme.

He's always saying that you haven't understood, you haven't grasped the truth, you haven't figured out what's going on. just think of Matthew 6, 7 to 8, it says, for instance, and when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words.

Do not be like them, for your father knows what you need before you ask him. In other words, the pagans are like the Jebusites here. Jesus says, engage your brain before operating mouth.

Indeed, mostly Jesus berates his listeners for their lack of understanding. But there are a few occasions when he does commend a wise reply. Two of the most interesting are for people who are not Jews.

[24 : 41] One was a Roman centurion who said, I myself am a man under authority with soldiers under me. I tell this one, go and he goes, and that one come and he comes.

I say to my servant, do this and he does it. When Jesus heard this, he was astonished and said to those following him, I tell you the truth, I have not found anyone in Israel with such great faith.

The other one, of course, well-known one, is the Phoenician woman, woman from Tyre in other words, had a daughter possessed by an unclean spirit.

She came up with this gem. First, let the children eat all they want, Jesus told her, for it is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs.

Lord, she replied, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs. And he told her, for such a reply you may go, the demon has left your daughter.

[25 : 58] Both these encounters and many others show us that just as David overcame the fortress Jerusalem. Overcoming the world depends on understanding.

So James writes, what good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food.

If one of you says to him, go, I wish you well, keep warm and well fed, but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? In other words, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

What's James saying here? He says, you've misunderstood what faith is. You need to understand what true faith is about. Claimed faith without insight is a recipe for deceit.

In other words, think. What did John write in his epistle? Everyone born of God overcomes the world.

[27 : 15] This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

Be like David, seek wisdom from the Lord, and find the way to win. The king calls us to war. We'll be singing about that later.

We'll stop there. Thank you. Thank you.