

After God's Own Heart - The Eternal Hope

David's Final Years

After Absalom's rebellion, David returns to the throne in Jerusalem, but restoring his reign is no easy thing. Tribal jealousies are aroused and before long the kingdom is convulsed again as Sheba, a "troublemaker" from the tribe of Benjamin leads another revolt against David. That revolt is put down and peace restored for a time. But peace is illusive during the closing years of David's kingship. During these years he will have struggles with the Gibeonites who were victims of ethnic cleansing under the reign of Saul. The Philistines will continue to be a thorn. Finally, after David is nearly slain in battle, his soldiers tell him, "Never again will you go out with us into battle, so the lamp of Israel will not be extinguished." (2 Samuel 21:17)

Confined to Jerusalem, David has time on his hands and once again angers the Lord. 1 Chronicles 21 tells of David being tempted by Satan to take a census of his armies. God has not asked David to do this and there is no battle which requires David to undertake this census. It appears to be driven by his pride and deemed evil by the Lord.

Yet good is also accomplished. In David's final years, he devotes great time and energy to planning for the construction of the Temple and to sourcing the various materials that will be needed in the building.

Finally, the time comes for the mantle to be passed. Absalom's brother Adonijah puts himself forward to be King of Israel and gathers a small army under David's commander Joab to defend his claim to the throne. However, the majority of David's leaders including Nathan the Prophet and Zadok the Priest remain loyal to David and he quickly confirms Solomon to be the next king. Then in about the year 970 BC David dies and is buried.

David's Song of Praise - 2 Samuel 22/Psalm 18

The author of 2 Samuel includes a psalm composed by David (most likely at an earlier point in his life) as a summation of David's reign. With a few very minor variations, this lengthy song of praise appears as Psalm 18.

Here are a few of the key thoughts from Psalm 18:

¹I love you, O Lord, my strength.

²The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer,
my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

³I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised,
and I am saved from my enemies.

⁴The cords of death encompassed me;
the torrents of destruction assailed me;

⁵ the cords of Sheol entangled me;
the snares of death confronted me.
⁶ In my distress I called upon the Lord;
to my God I cried for help.
From his temple he heard my voice,
and my cry to him reached his ears.

²⁵ With the merciful you show yourself merciful;
with the blameless man you show yourself blameless;
²⁶ with the purified you show yourself pure;
and with the crooked you make yourself seem tortuous....
³⁰ This God—his way is perfect;
the word of the Lord proves true;
he is a shield for all those who take refuge in him.
³¹ For who is God, but the Lord?
And who is a rock, except our God?—
³² the God who equipped me with strength
and made my way blameless.

⁴⁶ The Lord lives, and blessed be my rock,
and exalted be the God of my salvation—
⁴⁷ the God who gave me vengeance
and subdued peoples under me,
⁴⁸ who rescued me from my enemies;
yes, you exalted me above those who rose against me;
you delivered me from the man of violence.
⁴⁹ For this I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations,
and sing to your name.
⁵⁰ Great salvation he brings to his king,
and shows steadfast love to his anointed,
to David and his offspring forever.

The captivating poetry of Psalm 18 crafts a stunning confession of faith in the living God. As creator of the universe, God hears the cry of a person hard-pressed by enemies and intervenes with a powerful display of divine presence. He reaches down into the very depths of death to rescue the ruler, who faces defeat. The Lord fulfills the royal promise of rule over the nations. God relates to the faithful and the oppressed as the one who comes to deliver. The focus of the psalm is on the Lord as the one who fulfills the promise of salvation for David and his descendants as well as the faithful who cry to the Lord for help. This God is in the fray. The king is representative of the person journeying in faith, and the petition calls readers of the psalm to faith in this God who delivers, perhaps even to join this God in the fray on behalf of those in need.

To David and His Offspring Forever

Solomon's reign led to ever greater expansion of the territory of Israel and for a time the country was a world power. However, following Solomon the country split in 2 and its kings were, more often than not, unfaithful to Lord. Even David's descendants, who ruled the smaller, southern kingdom of Judah were more concerned with their own agendas than with remaining true to the promises of God.

Israel, the northern kingdom, would fall to the Assyrians in 722 BC (about 250 years after David's death) and Judah would fall to the Babylonians 135 years later in 587 BC. God had promised David an eternal dynasty enthroned in Jerusalem, but humanly speaking it was a short eternity! This presented many problems for the people. Many began to doubt the promise of God. Others sought various ways of imposing their will upon the situation to bring about a return of a Davidic king to the throne after the remnant returned from exile in Babylon. However, God always keeps to himself a faithful people, who look to God to restore the kingdom in his way and according to his schedule.

One such person is known as Ethan the Ezrahite, author of Psalm 89.

89 I will sing of the steadfast love of the Lord, forever;
with my mouth I will make known your faithfulness to all generations.

² For I said, "Steadfast love will be built up forever;
in the heavens you will establish your faithfulness."

³ You have said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one;
I have sworn to David my servant:

⁴ "I will establish your offspring forever,
and build your throne for all generations.'" *Selah*

²⁰ I have found David, my servant;

with my holy oil I have anointed him, ...

²⁸ My steadfast love I will keep for him forever,
and my covenant will stand firm for him.

²⁹ I will establish his offspring forever
and his throne as the days of the heavens.

³⁰ If his children forsake my law

and do not walk according to my rules, ...

³² then I will punish their transgression with the rod
and their iniquity with stripes,

³³ but I will not remove from him my steadfast love
or be false to my faithfulness....

³⁸ But now you have cast off and rejected;
you are full of wrath against your anointed.

³⁹ You have renounced the covenant with your servant;
you have defiled his crown in the dust.

⁴⁰ You have breached all his walls;
you have laid his strongholds in ruins.

⁴⁶ How long, O Lord? Will you hide yourself forever?...

⁴⁹ Lord, where is your steadfast love of old,
which by your faithfulness you swore to David?

⁵⁰ Remember, O Lord, how your servants are mocked,
and how I bear in my heart the insults of all the many nations,

⁵¹ with which your enemies mock, O Lord,
with which they mock the footsteps of your anointed.

This Psalm honestly presents the situation of God's people long ago and God's people today. Like the people of God in the later years of the Old Testament we do not yet fully live in the victory of our Lord. There is often a contradiction between God's promise and the actual situation. We can not resolve that mystery and like the psalmist we lift our hands to God in prayer and bring our problems before him.

As Christians we know the answer to the ending prayer of the Psalm. God did not wait forever to restore a king to David's throne. In Christ, the Son of David, the promise is fulfilled! In Christ God has worked in a manner contrary to all human expectations and beyond all human comprehension. Like Paul we can really only sit back and marvel at God's fulfillment of his promise to David and to you and me.

"Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable his judgments,
and his paths beyond tracing out!" – Romans 11:33