

CHAPTER 10: REWARD

THE BIG PICTURE

We have followed the life of David from childhood until its close; from total obscurity to complete notoriety. He began as a humble shepherd and has risen to claim the throne of Israel, leading the kingdom into an era of prosperity and security. He has endured so many challenges and taken part in so many adventures. All future kings of Israel will be evaluated against David. For a thousand years, people will look back on his life for hope as they struggle through difficulty and long for something better. David has received a covenant promise from God like few others, and the “messianic hope” of Israel is directly tied to the lineage of David. There are more pages in scripture devoted to the story of David than anyone else in the Bible with the exception of Jesus. David’s story is truly remarkable. In this chapter we will explore the choices David made in the twilight of his reign. **As David approached the end of his life, he began to consider the legacy he would leave behind.** David has walked an epic journey but as his story comes to a close he is concerned about finishing well. ***For David, this issue is tied to the choice of an heir.*** He has accomplished so many things, yet he has neglected the important task he was given as a father. God has hinted to David that his reward is a dynasty that will change history, and David knows he needs to protect it. **Who will reign in David’s place?** For this episode, read through the end of **2 Samuel** and the first two chapters of **1 Kings**.

ENTER THE STORY:

- I. The bible provides two stories that help the reader put David’s advanced age in perspective. The first is in 2 Samuel 21:15-17. Here, the once mighty warrior almost falls in battle due to exhaustion. The result is that David’s career as a battle field commander is over. His men will not risk “the lamp of Israel” being extinguished. The second story opens the book of 1 Kings and includes the first four verses. In this story, David is of an age that he is struggling to stay warm at night. These two stories paint the picture that a once strong man has diminished physical capacity.
 - Think about how David’s age impacts his perspective. Is the king frustrated by his feeble physical condition? What are the advantages that come with age and experience?
 - Homebound and aging, David has ample time to reflect on his life and legacy. Knowing his story, what do you think are his biggest regrets? What do you think are his most cherished memories? What goals did David leave unaccomplished?
 - Think for a moment about how you want to face growing older. Have you ever considered life from this perspective? Think about some people that have “aged

well,” and some others that have not. What is the difference? Have you ever considered what you want to be remembered for when you are gone?

- II. 2 Samuel 22 records a psalm written by David. The author of 2 Samuel includes the song in this place because it embodies poetically many of the themes of David’s life and story. This song is also recorded in Psalm 18 in a slightly variant form. By the standards of Hebrew poetry, this is a long song. It might be a collection of several different psalms that have been compiled together as a ballad. The psalm is written from several perspectives, including that of a warrior, a worshipper and a king. As a collection, it has the effect of expressing the themes of David’s life: warfare and morality, human and divine agency, the responsibilities of the king and the people.
- The author of this psalm has clearly endured many challenges, yet his trust in God is strong. Think about David’s story as you explore the metaphors in the psalm. What does David mean when he claims God is his rock, fortress, shield, and lamp? How has God been present for you in times of trouble? What metaphor would you suggest to describe the protection, help, and strength you have received from God?
 - The stanza in 2 Samuel 22:21-25 is a declaration of the psalmist’s integrity. Do these claims match with David’s story? Knowing that he was a great sinner, what David mean when he said: “The Lord has dealt with me according to my righteousness?” In Acts 13:22, Paul calls David a “man after God’s heart.” What does this mean? How is David’s legacy one of righteousness instead of iniquity? How do David’s claims match up to the Gospel of the New Testament, where God deals with us according to the righteousness of Christ instead of our own righteousness?
 - The concluding verses of the psalm, 44-51, are a fitting tribute to God’s role in the story of David. With this psalm in mind, reflect on whether it is a person’s integrity and skills or the activity of God that impact their success in life. Is it one or the other, or is it a combination of both?
- III. David’s legacy as a father is again put into question when another of his sons tries to claim his throne. Adonijah’s uprising is similar to Absalom’s, yet less dramatic. Adonijah is the next oldest son, and his presumption on the throne is evidence that some in Israel were expecting their newly founded monarchy to follow the succession traditions of the surrounding cultures: the oldest son will inherit the throne. In God’s kingdom, God often chooses the younger over the older: Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Joseph over his 10 brothers, and even David over his brothers. In truth, Israel does not yet have any tradition for succession. The only precedent is when David was chosen for the throne after Saul’s rejection, breaking the assumption about dynastic leadership and favoring a model of charismatic leadership. Leadership in God’s kingdom is conferred by

God's anointing, not necessarily family lineage. Still, God has promised to David an enduring dynasty. It is possible that David delays naming an heir because he is waiting for God to choose the appropriate successor from among his children. There are many forces at work politically as David's wives, children, and other members of his court jockey for position. In this climate of uncertainty, Adonijah gathers supporters and presses his claim for the throne. You can read the unfolding drama in 1 Kings 1.

- David is old and showing signs of frailty. It is easy to imagine the concern of others about whether or not David still has what it takes to rule. What kind of justification is going through Adonijah's mind when he makes his move for the throne? Are you guilty of grasping for power or position selfishly or of justifying actions you know to be wrong?
- Think about how David received the throne. If one of the qualifications for kingship in Israel is being chosen by God, what does it say about Adonijah's claim?
- The guest list for Adonijah's coronation party reveals the nature of the political climate in David's court. Why do you think Joab backed Adonijah's claim? Who is notably left off the guest list? What do you think it means to be excluded from this small event?
- How is Adonijah's behavior similar to Absalom's? How does this reflect on David's role as a father to these two men?

IV. God has asked something unique of the king of Israel. Kingship in Israel needs to be different than kingship in the surrounding nations. In Israel, the king is never elevated to divine status, something common in other ancient cultures. Instead, Israel views the human king as God's chosen representative charged with enforcing and embodying the covenant. This is not a traditional monarchy because God needs to sit enthroned on the heart of the human king. The king is not the supreme authority; he must be surrendered to God. David's story has asked the question again and again: who truly reigns in the heart of the king? Answering this question will determine the right choice for an heir. When David hears about Adonijah's selfish grasping for power, he moves quickly to counter it. He crowns Solomon king, ratifies it with Nathan the prophet and has him anointed by Zadok the priest. To make sure his choice is secure, David hands over the command of his private guard to Solomon.

- On the surface, it appears like David chose Solomon because he favored Solomon's mother Bathsheba over his other wives. Still, this is not necessarily the true reason for David's choice. Solomon is the only one of David's named sons that hasn't grasped for the throne. David has been watching his sons, waiting for one of them to show the depth of character required to be king. From what you know about David's story, what qualities is he looking for in Israel's next king?

- David's charge to Solomon in 1 Kings 2:1-12 reveals David's priorities for his heir. What does David ask of Solomon? David knows that Solomon's (and Israel's) future success is dependent on how well he embraces and embodies God's covenant. In what ways did David model faithfulness for his son? In what ways did David model unfaithfulness for his son?
 - Decades after the reign of Solomon, another historian told the story of David's charge to his son in greater specificity. The situation of the author of this passage (when the nation was rebuilding after ruin and decades in exile) makes it clear that this is one part history and another part evaluation from hindsight. Look at what the Chronicler reports in 1 Chronicles 28:9-10. How is this charge also an evaluation of David's own reign (or maybe even other kings of Israel throughout their history)? How does this charge to Solomon speak to us still today?
 - Solomon's name means "peace." He receives from his father a kingdom at peace and primed for prosperity. All the preparations have been made to start building the temple. Solomon has been set up for success. Have you ever received a great inheritance, or found yourself in one way or another standing on the shoulders of the people that went before you? Is there pressure on Solomon to rule well? How is Solomon's position similar to ours, as those who inherit the Kingdom of God that Jesus established?
- V. The story of David comes to a close in 1 Kings 2:10: "Then David rested with his fathers and was buried in the City of David. He had reigned forty years over Israel – seven years in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem." David was a man of triumph and tragedy, shining success and glaring failure. David's ultimate reward, the fullness of his legacy, was realized a thousand years after his death. The greatest son of David was born in a little town called Bethlehem, David's own hometown. Jesus is the one of David's sons to finally and perfectly establish "the throne of his Kingdom forever."
- Which episode in David's life encourages you most right now? Why?
 - What about the character of David is deserving of the honor to be called "a man after God's own heart?"
 - What do you think was David's greatest accomplishment?
 - Throughout these 10 chapters, this question has been raised often: who truly reigns on the throne of your heart? Spend a few minutes journaling about this question and evaluating the condition of your heart in relation to God the King of All.