

2 Samuel 23
May 19, 2024

Open with Prayer

HOOK:

Q: What questions do you think the Lord will ask us in the end? Will he define “success” differently than we typically do? [Let people engage]

Transition:

Chapter 23 is a presentation of David’s success at the end of his life, and it will force us to ponder the important question: What is true success? The answer to this question will become what motivates and guides us through our lives. Let’s begin.

BOOK:

The Last Words of David

23 These are the last words of David:

“The oracle of David, son of Jesse,
the oracle of the man exalted by the Most High,
the man anointed by the God of Jacob,
Israel’s singer of songs:

² “The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me;
his word was on my tongue.

³ The God of Israel spoke,
the Rock of Israel said to me:
‘When one rules over men in righteousness,
when he rules in the fear of God (not referencing David!),
⁴ he is like the light of morning at sunrise,
on a cloudless morning,
like the brightness after rain
that brings the grass from the earth.’

⁵ “Is not my house right with God?
Has he not made with me an everlasting covenant,
arranged and secured in every part?
Will he not bring to fruition my salvation
and grant me my every desire?

⁶ But evil men are all to be cast aside like thorns,
which are not gathered with the hand.

⁷ Whoever touches thorns
uses a tool of iron or the shaft of a spear;
they are burned up where they lie.”

David’s Mighty Men

⁸ These are the names of David’s mighty men:

Josheb-Basshebeth, a Tahkemonite, was chief of the Three; he raised his spear against eight hundred men, whom he killed in one encounter.

⁹ Next to him was Eleazar son of Dodai the Ahohite. As one of the three mighty men, he was with David when they taunted the Philistines gathered at Pas Dammim for battle. Then the men of Israel retreated, ¹⁰ but he stood his ground and struck down the Philistines till his hand grew tired and froze to the sword. The LORD brought about a great victory that day. The troops returned to Eleazar, but only to strip the dead.

¹¹ Next to him was Shammah son of Agee the Hararite. When the Philistines banded together at a place where there was a field full of lentils, Israel's troops fled from them. ¹² But Shammah took his stand in the middle of the field. He defended it and struck the Philistines down, and the LORD brought about a great victory.

¹³ During harvest time, three of the thirty chief men came down to David at the cave of Adullam, while a band of Philistines was encamped in the Valley of Rephaim. ¹⁴ At that time David was in the stronghold, and the Philistine garrison was at Bethlehem. ¹⁵ David longed for water and said, "Oh, that someone would get me a drink of water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem!" ¹⁶ So the three mighty men broke through the Philistine lines, drew water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem and carried it back to David. But he refused to drink it; instead, he poured it out before the LORD. ¹⁷ "Far be it from me, O LORD, to do this!" he said. "Is it not the blood of men who went at the risk of their lives?" And David would not drink it.

Such were the exploits of the three mighty men.

¹⁸ Abishai the brother of Joab son of Zeruah was chief of the Three. He raised his spear against three hundred men, whom he killed, and so he became as famous as the Three. ¹⁹ Was he not held in greater honor than the Three? He became their commander, even though he was not included among them.

²⁰ Benaiah, son of Jehoiada, was a valiant fighter from Kabzeel, who performed great exploits. He struck down two of Moab's best men. He also went down into a pit on a snowy day and killed a lion. ²¹ And he struck down a huge Egyptian. Although the Egyptian had a spear in his hand, Benaiah went against him with a club. He snatched the spear from the Egyptian's hand and killed him with his own spear. ²² Such were the exploits of Benaiah, son of Jehoiada; he too was as famous as the three mighty men. ²³ He was held in greater honor than any of the Thirty, but he was not included among the Three. And David put him in charge of his bodyguard.

²⁴ Among the Thirty were:

Asahel the brother of Joab,
Elhanan son of Dodo from Bethlehem,

²⁵ Shammah the Harodite,

Elika the Harodite,

²⁶ Helez the Paltite,

Ira son of Ikkesh from Tekoa,

²⁷ Abiezer from Anathoth,

Mebunnai the Hushathite,

²⁸ Zalmon the Ahohite,

Maharai the Netophathite,

²⁹ Heled son of Baanah the Netophathite,

Ithai son of Ribai from Gibeah in Benjamin,

³⁰ Benaiah the Pirathonite,

Hiddai from the ravines of Gaash,

31 Abi-Albon the Arbathite,
Azmaveth the Barhumite,
32 Eliahba the Shaalbonite,
the sons of Jashen,
Jonathan ³³ son of Shammah the Hararite,
Ahiam son of Sharar the Hararite,
34 Eliphelet son of Ahasbai the Maacathite,
Eliam son of Ahithophel the Gilonite,
35 Hezro the Carmelite,
Paarai the Arbite,
36 Igal son of Nathan from Zobah,
the son of Hagri,
37 Zelek the Ammonite,
Naharai the Beerothite, the armor-bearer of Joab son of Zeruah,
38 Ira the Ithrite, Gareb the Ithrite
39 and Uriah the Hittite.
There were thirty-seven in all.

Process Observations/Questions:

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

LOOK:

What is it that you treasure the most about your life? How much has God's grace shaped your thoughts and decisions? At the end of your life, what will be most significant to you and others? Your positions and gains, or your special times with the Lord? Our life success will be determined by how much we realize how indebted we are to God and by how much we focus on accomplishing what God has for us to do.

Close in Prayer

Commentaries for Today's Lesson:

Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). *Commentary on the Old Testament (Vol. 2, p. 694, p.698). Hendrickson.*

2 Sam. 23:1–7. The psalm of thanksgiving, in which David praised the Lord for all the deliverances and benefits that he had experienced throughout the whole of his life, is followed by the prophetic will and testament of the great king, unfolding the importance of his rule in relation to the sacred history of the future. And whilst the psalm may be regarded (2 Sam. 22) as a great hallelujah, with which David passed away from the stage of life, these “last words” contain the divine seal of all that he has sung and prophesied in several psalms concerning the eternal dominion of his seed, on the strength of the divine promise which he received through the prophet Nathan, that his throne should be established for ever (2 Sam. 7). These words are not merely a lyrical expansion of that promise, but a prophetic declaration uttered by David at the close of his life and by divine inspiration, concerning the true King of the kingdom of God. “The aged monarch, who was not generally endowed with the gift of prophecy, was moved by the Spirit of God at the close of his life, and beheld a *just Ruler in the fear of God*, under whose reign blessing and salvation sprang up for the righteous, and all the wicked were overcome. The pledge of this was the eternal covenant which God had concluded with him” (Tholuck: *die Propheten and ihre Weissagungen*, p. 166). The heading “*these are the last words of David*” serves to attach it to the preceding psalm of thanksgiving.

2 Sam. 23:8–39. The following list of David's heroes we also find in 1 Chron. 11:10–47, and expanded at the end by sixteen names (vv. 41–47), and attached in v. 10 to the account of the conquest of the fortress of Zion by the introduction of a special heading. According to this heading, the heroes named assisted David greatly in his kingdom, along with all Israel, to make him king, from which it is evident that the chronicler intended by this heading to justify his appending the list to the account of the election of David as king over all the tribes of Israel (1 Chron. 11:1), and of the conquest of Zion, which followed immediately afterwards. In every other respect the two lists agree with one another, except that there are a considerable number of errors of the text, more especially in the names, which are frequently corrupt in both texts, so that the true reading cannot be determined with certainty. The heroes enumerated are divided into three classes. The *first* class consists of three, viz., *Jashobeam*, *Eleazar*, and *Shammah*, of whom certain brave deeds are related, by which they reached the first rank among David's heroes (vv. 8–12). They were followed by *Abishai* and *Benaiah*, who were in the *second* class, and who had also distinguished themselves above the rest by their brave deeds, though they did not come up to the first three (vv. 18–23). The others all belonged to the *third* class, which consisted of thirty-two men, of whom no particular heroic deeds are mentioned (vv. 24–39). Twelve of these, viz., the five belonging to the first two classes and seven of the third, were appointed by David commanders of the twelve detachments into which he divided the army, each detachment to serve for one month in the year (1 Chron. 27). These heroes, among whom we do not find Joab the commander-in-chief of the whole of the forces, were the king's aides-de-camp, and are called in this respect הַשְּׁלִישִׁים (v. 8), though the term הַשְּׁלִישִׁים (the *thirty*, vv. 13, 23, 24) was also a very customary one, as their number amounted to thirty in a round sum. It is possible that at first they may have numbered exactly thirty; for, from the very nature of the case, we may be sure than in the many wars in which David was engaged, other heroes must have arisen at different times, who would be received into the corps already formed. This will explain the addition of sixteen

names in the Chronicles, whether the chronicler made us of a different list from that employed by the author of the books before us, and one belonging to a later age, or whether the author of our books merely restricted himself to a description of the corps in its earlier condition.

Merrill, E. H. (1985). 2 Samuel. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures (Vol. 1, pp. 479-481) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books

B. David's heroes (chap. 23)

23:1–7. The list of David's mighty men is preceded by a short poem (vv. 1b–7) titled **the last words of David**. In the first stanza (v. 1) he identified himself as **son of Jesse ... the man exalted by the Most High, the man anointed by the God of Jacob, and Israel's singer of songs**. There is a noticeable progress from the humble son of a Bethlehemite commoner to the poetically gifted king of Israel, a development which David attributed to his having been chosen and anointed by the Lord.

His consciousness of being God's instrument is clear from the second stanza (vv. 2–4), in which he acknowledged that God had spoken **to him** (v. 3) and **through him** (v. 2) to the nation, enabling him to rule righteously **in the reverential fear of God**. A king who rules as an agent of God is, he said, like the brilliance of the sun **on a cloudless morning** and like a clear day **after rain**.

In the third stanza (vv. 5–7) David centered on the Davidic **Covenant**, by which **God** chose and blessed him. God had made **an everlasting** commitment with him and his dynasty (**my house**), a covenant that guaranteed his ultimate well-being (cf. 7:8–16). In contrast, **evil men**, like so many **thorns**, will be cast aside to be consumed by the judgment of God (cf. Matt. 13:30, 41).

23:8–39. David's gallery of heroes consisted of **37** men (v. 39) who distinguished themselves by mighty exploits of service to God and Israel and who evidently made up his elite troops. These consisted of three **chief men** (vv. 8–17), two others of a second rank (vv. 18–23), and 32 in the longest list (vv. 24–39). (See the chart "David's Mighty Men.") Significant by its omission is any reference to **Joab**. Two of his brothers—**Abishai** and **Asahel**—are listed (vv. 8, 24). Neither the author of Samuel nor that of the Chronicles felt it necessary, perhaps, to list Joab since he was the commander of the whole army throughout most of David's reign (20:23).

Though the spellings of several of the names differ in the corresponding list in 1 Chronicles 11:11–47, the names can usually be equated. The chronicler does, however, add names beyond the 37 in 2 Samuel. Perhaps they were men of lower ranks than those listed in Samuel or perhaps they replaced others (already listed) who had fallen in battle.

The first **three** were (a) **Josheb-Basshebeth, a Tahkemonite**, who slew **800 men ... in one encounter** (2 Sam. 23:8; on the "300" in 1 Chron. 11:11 see comments there); (b) **Eleazar, son of Dodai the Ahohite**, who **struck down the Philistines** (2 Sam. 23:9–10) **at Pas Dammim** (1 Chron. 11:13; cf. Ephes Dammim in 1 Sam. 17:1); and (c) **Shammah son of Agee the Hararite**, who brought **great victory over the Philistines** (2 Sam. 23:11–12).

These **three** also displayed their courage by obtaining **water** from **Bethlehem** for **David** while he was besieged in the summer (**harvesttime**) by **the Philistines** at **Adullam** (vv. 13–15; cf. 1 Sam. 22:1). So touched was **David** by their valor that he refused to **drink** the **water** but **poured it out** as an offering to **the LORD** (2 Sam. 23:16–17). Most scholars deny that the three involved are those just named since the word "three" has no definite article in the Hebrew text in

verse 13. On the other hand verse 17 implies that all the foregoing had been done by these three and this time the definite article is used.

Included in the second rank were **Abishai ... son of Zeruiah** (and nephew of David, 1 Chron. 2:15–16) who **was chief of the second 3** (or “30,”) but not as exalted as the first 3 previously listed (2 Sam. 23:18–19; cf. 1 Sam. 26:6–11; 2 Sam. 10:14; 21:16–17), and **Benaiah**, who achieved notable victories over both men and **a lion** (23:20–23; cf. 8:18; 1 Kings 1:32, 36, 38; 2:35; 4:4).

The longest list consists of 32 men. Such a group normally consisted of 30 men but might have a few more or less and still be known as “the 30,” a technical term for a small military contingent known in Hebrew as *haššelošim* (“the 30”). Or perhaps two had died in battle (including **Uriah the Hittite**, 2 Sam. 11:14–17) and were replaced.

Mathews, K. A. (1998). *The Historical Books*. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), *Holman Concise Bible Commentary* (p. 131). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

Oracle (23:1–39). Although other words from David are recorded in the Old Testament books that follow (1 Kgs. 2:1–9; 1 Chr. 23:27), this oracle was David’s last formal reflection on the enduring state of his royal house under the covenant care of the Lord. The term “oracle” commonly introduces prophetic address (Num. 23:7; Isa. 14:28; Mal. 1:1). David declared by the Spirit that God had chosen him from all Israel and made an everlasting covenant with his lineage. Those who opposed him would be cast aside as thorns for the fire. This messianic description is fully realized in Jesus Christ, who as David’s son establishes the rule of God in the earth.

The catalog of mighty men and their exploits was another tribute to God’s enablement of David. Among David’s armies were two elite groups of champions who served as the king’s bodyguard and special fighting force (see 21:15–22; 1 Chr. 11:10–47). The first group consisted of the “Three” whose exploits against the Philistines were renown (see the cave of Adullam, 1 Sam. 22). Abishai and Benaiah were singled out, although they were not as great as the “Three,” because they held high honor in the annals of David’s wars. The second group, the “Thirty,” is also listed, giving a total count of thirty-seven heroes (including Joab, 23:24–39).

Tatum, S. L. (1972). *2 Samuel*. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), *The Teacher’s Bible Commentary* (p. 192). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.

The Loyalty of David’s Mighty Men (2 Sam. 23:8–39)

The passage—This section is something of a review of the exploits of some of those who were so dedicated to David. They loved him, protected him, and were willing to lay down their lives for him.

On one occasion the Philistines were encamped in the valley of Rephaim near Jerusalem and occupied David’s hometown of Bethlehem. David expressed a wish for a drink of water from the well at Bethlehem. Three of his loyal friends broke through the enemy lines and at the risk of their lives brought him some water from the well. Because they had risked so much because of their loyalty, David regarded the water as too sacred to drink selfishly. He poured it out before God as an act of worship.

Truth for today—The world needs more Christians whose loyalty to Jesus Christ is like the loyalty of David's men. God's leaders should be respected as David's followers respected and loved him.

Almost anything can be used as an act of divine worship. Even a drink of water reminded David of God's gift. He was grateful to God for his friends and the risk of their lives for him. Though he had only a cup of water, it was his most precious possession. He gave his best to God. It was too sacred to waste on himself.

The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (2 Samuel 23). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

© 2024 Lee Ann Penick