

The Life of David

David's Last Words

2 Samuel 23:1-7

Rev. Freddy Fritz

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David's Last Words

Scripture

Chapters 21-24 of Second Samuel form an epilogue to “The Life of David.” There are six sections in these chapters that give us important information about David. The center two sections of these chapters contain two poems, both of which were written by David, and tell us about the hope of David’s kingdom.

The author of Second Samuel tells us that 2 Samuel 23:1-7 are “the last words of David” (23:1). I do not think that these are literally the last words of David. More likely, these words are David’s testimony about the coming kingdom.

Let’s read David’s last words in 2 Samuel 23:1-7:

¹Now these are the last words of David:

**The oracle of David, the son of Jesse,
the oracle of the man who was raised on high,
the anointed of the God of Jacob,
the sweet psalmist of Israel:**

**²“The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me;
his word is on my tongue.**

**³The God of Israel has spoken;
the Rock of Israel has said to me:**

**When one rules justly over men,
ruling in the fear of God,**

**⁴he dawns on them like the morning light,
like the sun shining forth on
a cloudless morning,
like rain that makes grass to sprout
from the earth.**

⁵“For does not my house stand so with God?

For he has made with me an
everlasting covenant,
ordered in all things and secure.
For will he not cause to prosper
all my help and my desire?
⁶ But worthless men are all like thorns that
are thrown away,
for they cannot be taken with the hand;
⁷ but the man who touches them
arms himself with iron and the shaft of a spear,
and they are utterly consumed with fire.” (2 Samuel 22:1-51)

Introduction

In his commentary on Second Samuel, commentator Dale Ralph Davis tells the following story:

Before Thomas Hog died in 1692, the Scot charged his congregation at Kiltarn to dig his grave at the threshold of the church building where he might act as a silent sentinel against any unworthy minister coming into the charge. The inscription on Hog's tombstone read:

This stone shall bear witness
against the parishioners of Kiltarn
if they bring ane [sic] ungodly minister
in here.¹

We could say that these are the last words of Thomas Hog. His words were meant to be a warning to future generations to remain faithful to the word of God.

King David's last words bear testimony to future generations as well. With greater nuance and absolute certainty, David's last

¹ Dale Ralph Davis, *2 Samuel: Out of Every Adversity*, Focus on the Bible Commentary (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 2002), 295.

words speak to future generations about the coming kingdom.

Lesson

Second Samuel 23:1-7 teaches us about the coming kingdom.

Let's use the following outline:

1. The King's Identity (23:1)
2. The King's Inspiration (23:2-3b)
3. The King's Instructions (23:3c-7)

I. The King's Identity (23:1)

First, let's look at the king's identity.

The author of Second Samuel begins with these words, **“Now these are the last words of David”** (23:1a). As I mentioned, I do not think that these are literally the last words of David. Commentator Gordon Keddie notes that “The record of David's last days is spread over no fewer than twelve chapters in 2 Samuel (23:24), 1 Kings (1–2) and 1 Chronicles (22–29).”² Most commentators suggest that David's “last words” were spoken in his charge to his son Solomon as he succeeded David to the throne of Israel in 1 Kings 2:1-12. That does not mean that there is a discrepancy in God's word. I take the words here in 2 Samuel 23:1a to be David's testimony about the coming kingdom.

David went on to make four statements about his identity in the third person.

First, David said that these words are **“the oracle of David, the son of Jesse”** (23:1b). The Hebrew word for **“oracle”** (*neum*) means “declaration” and it is a statement that is emphatic and explicit. It is used 376 times in the Old Testament, 365 of which refer to a declaration by God himself. David's point is that his statement

² Gordon J. Keddie, *Triumph of the King: The Message of 2 Samuel*, Welwyn Commentary Series (Darlington, England: Evangelical Press, 1990), 229.

is a declaration that comes from God himself.

David identifies himself as **“the son of Jesse.”** David was identifying his humble origin. David was the youngest of Jesse’s seven sons. He lived in Bethlehem. When he was young, no-one knew of him or his family.

Second, David said that these words are **“the oracle of the man who was raised on high”** (23:1c). This is a very important statement. David did not say that he achieved the high office of king because of his own ability or personality or skill. No, he said that he **“was raised on high.”** In other words, something was done to David. The *New International Version* of the Bible captures the idea of David’s statement well when it states, “the utterance of the man exalted by the Most High.” It was God who raised David on high.

Third, David said that these words are **“the anointed of the God of Jacob”** (23:1d). David was referring to the time when he was anointed by Samuel as a teenager to become God’s king on earth (cf. 1 Samuel 16:13). You may recall that God sent Samuel to anoint the one whom God had chosen to be his future king on earth. God sent Samuel to Bethlehem to the house of Jesse. Six of Jesse’s sons were brought to Samuel but none of them was the one chosen by God. So, Jesse sent for David and when he came before Samuel, God said that David was his chosen one, his anointed one, his messiah. Commentator John Woodhouse notes that “David’s anointing therefore points us to David as the ‘man after [God’s] own heart’ (1 Samuel 13:14), that is, the man on whom God set his heart according to his own purpose (cf. 7:21). David’s greatness lay in God’s purpose for him.”³ David was chosen by God not because David’s heart attracted God to him but because God’s heart was set on David. If God had not set his heart on David, we would never have heard of David, the son of Jesse.

³ John Woodhouse, *2 Samuel: Your Kingdom Come*, ed. R. Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 521.

And fourth, David said that these words are **“the sweet psalmist of Israel”** (23:1e). David is often called **“the sweet psalmist of Israel”** by which is meant that David was the composer of so many beautiful psalms that were sung in Israel. However, it is possible to translate this phrase the way the *New International Version* translates it, and that is to say that David is “the hero of Israel’s songs.” This translations brings the identity of the king to a pinnacle: his identity is that of hero of all the psalms. David is pointing beyond himself to his Greater Son, Jesus, who is indeed the ultimate hero of all the psalms.

Well, so much for the king’s identity.

II. The King’s Inspiration (23:2-3b)

Second, let’s notice the king’s inspiration.

David now begins to speak in the first person. The “oracle” of which he spoke in verse 1 came to him from the Lord. David said in verse 2, **“The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me; his word is on my tongue.”**

When God spoke to his people, he did so through prophets. A prophet is someone who speaks on behalf of God. David was asserting that he was God’s prophet since he was speaking on behalf of God. But a biblical prophet is not like the White House Press Secretary who acts as a spokesperson for the executive branch of the federal government of the United States. However, David made it clear that he was not merely speaking *for* God. Rather, God was speaking *through* David. Listen to verse 2 again, **“The Spirit of the Lord speaks *by* me; his word is on my tongue.”**

Before David gave the word from God, he said something about the person of God. David said in verse 3a-b, **“The God of Israel has spoken; the Rock of Israel has said to me.”** Israel was God’s new name for Jacob. Jacob was the father of the nation

of Israel. God made promises to Jacob, as he did earlier to Isaac and to Abraham. God's promise included that "kings shall come from your own body" (Genesis 35:11). Thus, David saw himself as the fulfillment of God's promise to his ancestor Jacob.

The God of Israel was also **the Rock of Israel**. Though the people of God had stumbled through bogs and miry pits, God had always been a **rock** to them. He was solid and sturdy, unmovable and unshakable. This was the God who spoke through David.

The first eight lines of David's last song were preparatory for what was to follow. In these eight lines (in verses 1-3b), he noted the king's identity and the king's inspiration.

III. The King's Instructions (23:3c-7)

And third, let's examine the king's instructions.

The upcoming lines in the poem are not easy to translate. I am not going to spend time explaining the possible ways of translating some of these lines. I will simply try to express the main idea.

It seems to me that the king's instructions have to do with two aspects. First, they have to do with the king's instructions regarding the promise of future blessings. And, second, they have to do with the king's instructions regarding the warning of future destruction.

A. *Regarding the Promise of Future Blessings (23:3c-5)*

First, let's examine the king's instructions regarding the promise of future blessings.

David said in verse 3c-d, **"When one rules justly over men, ruling in the fear of God."** These words are very pithy in Hebrew. Perhaps we get a better sense of the Hebrew with this translation: "A ruler over humankind—a righteous one! A ruler in the fear of God!" God is promising through David that there will be

a ruler who is righteous and fears God. David's early reign as king showed promise as one who ruled in righteousness (2 Samuel 8:15). However, then came the affair with Bathsheba and Uriah, and David was shown to be a sinful man who did not consistently rule in the fear of God. Nevertheless, these words were a promise through David about a future ruler who would be a righteous ruler who ruled in the fear of God.

David went on to describe this righteous ruler in verse 4, **“he dawns on them like the morning light, like the sun shining forth on a cloudless morning, like rain that makes grass to sprout from the earth.”** The description is that of beauty and goodness and delight. Gordon Keddie notes, “The messianic implication is inescapable. The coming of Christ is in view. Ultimately, the fruit of the land *is* Jesus Christ, the ‘Branch of the Lord’ (Isaiah 4:2). He is the ultimate Davidic king, under whose scepter his believing people will enjoy the goodness of God both in time and in eternity.”⁴

Then David said in verse 5a, **“For does not my house stand so with God? For he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure.”** David was restating the covenant that God made with David. Early in his reign, David said that he wanted to build a “house”—that is, a temple—for God. However, God said that rather than David building a house for God, God would build a house—that is, a dynasty—for David. Through the Prophet Nathan, God said to David, “Moreover, the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.... And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever” (2 Samuel

⁴ Gordon J. Keddie, *Triumph of the King: The Message of 2 Samuel*, 233–234.

7:11b-13, 16).

The offspring to whom God was referring was David's Greater Son, Jesus Christ. God will establish the kingdom of Christ that will endure for all eternity.

Assured of God's good purposes toward him, David said in verse 5b, **"For will he not cause to prosper all my help and my desire?"** Like the light of the morning at sunrise, like the brightness after rain (verse 4), so David's **help** and **desire** will prosper.

David's instruction regarding the promise of future blessings is that his—and our—hope and joy should be focused on God's covenant of grace. As Gordon Keddie states, "Living faith is covenant relationship." He then goes on to quote Charles Simeon, who wrote, "Study then the wonders of this covenant that they may be familiar to your minds in a time of health; and so shall they fill you with unutterable peace and joy, when every other refuge shall fail, and your soul be summoned into the presence of God."⁵

Friends, we experience the blessings of God as we grow in understanding of his covenant of grace. Let me encourage you to study God's word on your own. And let me also encourage you to study God's word with other believers. Join the Men's Bible Study, or the Women's Bible Study, or an Adult Bible Fellowship. As you grow in your understanding of God's word, you will experience the blessings of God in your life.

B. *Regarding the Warning of Future Destruction (23:6-7)*

And second, let's examine the king's instructions regarding the warning of future destruction.

David's last words end with a warning of future destruction for those who ignore God's truth. He writes in verses 6-7, **"But worthless men are all like thorns that are thrown away, for they cannot be taken with the hand; but the man who touches**

⁵ Gordon J. Keddie, *Triumph of the King: The Message of 2 Samuel*, 235.

them arms himself with iron and the shaft of a spear, and they are utterly consumed with fire.”

The Hebrew for **“worthless men”** (*beliyya al*) means “someone who is of no worth, especially in regards to righteous behavior.” The *New International Version* translates it as “evil men.” The term refers to unbelievers, to those who have no right relationship with God. Woodhouse says that “they are the opposite and the opponents of righteousness and the fear of God.”⁶ They have to be dealt with forcefully. They must be **“like thorns that are thrown away.”** In those days, thorns were thrown on to a large pile that was then burned.

David’s last words here remind us of Thomas Hog’s tombstone that warned the parishioners of Kiltarn not to bring any ungodly minister in to the church. David was warning all readers of future destruction that awaited all who did not embrace God’s covenant of grace.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the account of David’s last words in 2 Samuel 23:1-7, let us heed the warning and make sure that we are citizens of Christ’s kingdom.

In his book titled *Honest Evangelism*, Rico Tice says, “Loving people means warning people.” He illustrates with the following personal story:

I was once in Australia visiting a friend. He took me to a beach on Botany Bay, so I decided I had to go for a swim. I was just taking off my shirt when he said: “What are you doing?”

I said: “I’m going for a swim.”

He said: “What about those signs?”

And he pointed me to some signs I’d not really noticed—

Danger: Sharks!

⁶ John Woodhouse, *2 Samuel: Your Kingdom Come*, 526.

With all the confidence of an Englishman abroad, I said: “Don’t be ridiculous—I’ll be fine.”

He said: “Listen mate, 200 Australians have died in shark attacks—you’ve got to decide whether those shark signs are there to save you or to ruin your fun. You’re of age—you decide.”

I decided not to go for a swim.⁷

David’s last words conclude with a warning to all people who reject God’s covenant of grace.

David’s Greater Son, Jesus Christ, spoke more about hell than anyone else. And they are a loving warning to those who are not believers in him. The reason Jesus talked about hell is that he did not want anyone to go there. The way to get to hell is to reject the grace of God that is found in Jesus Christ.

So, let me urge you if you are not yet a believer in Jesus Christ to heed the warning of David and not be like a thorn that is thrown away. Repent of your sin. Ask Jesus to forgive you. And believe that he has paid the penalty for all your sin. And do it today. Amen.

⁷ Rico Tice, *Honest Evangelism* (The Good Book Company, 2015), n. p.

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and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church (PCA)

Answers for Life!

Address: 19911 Bruce B. Downs Blvd., Tampa, FL 33647

Telephone: (813) 973-2484

Fax: (813) 973-4673

Email: Office@TampaBayPresbyterian.org

Web site: www.TampaBayPresbyterian.org