
The King's Final Words

2 Samuel 23²⁴

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Have you ever thought what you want your final words to be? Or how you want to be remembered? What would you want your memorial service to focus on? What would be remembered? What would be celebrated?

We have here the testimony of the king David's final words...

I want to remind you of the structure of this very large piece of text that runs 2 Samuel 21:15 - 23:39. This would be 99 verses as we have it in our English Bibles. Why do I say this is a single unit? Look at its structure:

The Triumphs of David's Mighty Men (21:15-22)

Rejoice: A Song of Gratitude for Deliverance (22:1-51)

Requiem: A Song of Praise in Death (23:1-7)

The Testimony to David's Mighty Men (23:8-39)

The two books of Samuel are interesting in their structure

Narrative: Barren - 2 Samuel 1

Poem: Hannah's Song - 1 Samuel 2

.... The story...

Poem: David's Songs - 2 Samuel 22-23

Narrative - 2 Samuel 24

The opening and closing songs provide thematic bookends to the history.

The words of the song of Hannah, the mother of Samuel open the book's poetry with these words about the king and the Lord's Anointed.

1 Samuel 2:9-10

⁹ "He will guard the feet of his faithful ones,
but the wicked shall be cut off in darkness,
for not by might shall a man prevail.

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¹⁰ The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken to pieces;
against them he will thunder in heaven.
The LORD will judge the ends of the earth;
he will give strength to his king
and exalt the horn of his anointed.”

Now the words of the closing song of David.

2 Samuel 22:50-51

⁵⁰ “For this I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations,
and sing praises to your name.
⁵¹ Great salvation he brings to his king,
and shows steadfast love to his anointed,
to David and his offspring forever.”

God had promised great strength to the King. God had brought great salvation to the king. Because of God’s love and covenant with David, God will exalt His Anointed One even among all the nations. Just as the Bible often does, it moves from promise to foreshadow to fulfillment in Christ.

The Commendation of David (23:1-2)

¹ Now 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.

Its Place

The chronicler has given us the last words and testimony of David. They are his farewell song. The prior song in chapter 22 appears in the Psalms in Psalm 18. But this one only appears here. It almost seems to be written to be intentionally placed at the end of this book. It is as though the historian went to David and said, “David, let’s have a final word from you to finish the book.” And David gave him this song.

Its Person

The chronicler also writes what is almost an inscription. This is David. He is writing not just as a king. He is writing an oracle. Here is why the New Testament calls David a prophet. That he is a prophet is not just an implication of his writing about the future. It was a publicly attested fact.

David was a man who was “raised on high”. He was highly respected and honored. He was honored by his people, by the nations and by God. He was the true king, the one anointed by God and thus established the line of David as the true royal house.

He was the “sweet psalmist of Israel.” In this inscription, in these words, I hear the affection that was given to David. His poems and songs and prayers were deeply woven into the lives of Israel. He spoke so clearly of both his own struggles and triumphs, his own griefs and joys, so that the people could use the Psalms as a way of saying the same things to God. In this way, their hearts were knit together with each other and with the God they worshipped.

Its Purpose

They were penned and preserved under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. These final words are not just David’s words, but the words of God. God spoke them to David. God spoke for David. And through the Scriptures they are spoken to and for us.

This chapter then is a celebration of David’s God and his men. In honoring them we are meant to worship God. IT is right to honor people for what God has done through them. The words of David’s song tell us why David’s men were the mighty warriors they became. So listen for that as work through each section.

The Song of Worship (23:3-7)

David’s last words are a poem. The King speaks a song...

Of God and the King (v. 3-5)

³ The 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,
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.
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?

The Lord is speaking His Word through the King. This is not just for these words, but for all that David wrote in the Psalms. He speaks to David. HE speaks through David.

God's message to the King is a commendation of a just and righteous rule. A just and righteous rule comes when the king fears God. Though the king is over his people, he must know his place under God. The fear of God will keep him from tyranny and will cause him to When the king does what is right, the people flourish.

Is not this the way David has ruled? His own house has flourished under God’s rule. That is because of God's covenant with king David. David’s house and throne stand secured, not because of what David has done, but because of God’s covenant promises. Because of God’s promises, the Lord is David’s help and desire. And so his rule

has reflected God's rule. HE has feared God. He has ruled on behalf of the Lord over the Lord's people. And he and his people have prospered under God's righteous rule.

Of God and the Godless (v. 6-7)

In contrast to the righteous king and his blessed people are the godless.

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."

The worthless are described in contrast to the godly of the prior stanza. The godly fear God, rule well, are a blessed, prosperous and useful people. But the "worthless" are godless. We don't like to talk like this about people. But this is God speaking through David. It is His evaluation. The worthless people are also dangerous. They are like thorn bushes. They are not useful. In fact, they are dangerous. A person entering a thicket of thorns arms himself to deal with it.

The godless will be destroyed. They will be gathered up and are only good for burning. David is anticipating the judgment of God. This imagery was often used by David in the Psalms. It is picked up often in the prophetic writings. Jesus used similar images and descriptions of the final judgment of the godless.

This is God's evaluation of those who reject and oppose Him. This is God's judgment which often He hands out in this world in time and history. Think of the final end and destruction of Hitler and the third Reich. And He will render this judgment in the last day.

The Praise of Warriors (23:8-39)

"Let another man's mouth praise you and not your own." A Proverb says. Give honor to whom honor is due. The writer now gives praise to God for the warriors who served David well. This is the band of three-hundred. These were the King's elite soldiers and body guards. Many were not Jews; they were foreigners who worship Yahweh and served the Lord's king.

The Greatest of the Warriors (v. 8-17)

First the greatest of the warriors are celebrated.

⁸ These are the names of the mighty men whom David had: Josheb-basshebeth a Tahchemonite; he was chief of the three. He wielded his spear against eight hundred whom he killed at one time.

⁹ And next to him among the three mighty men was Eleazar the son of Dodo, son of Ahohi. He was with David when they defied the Philistines who were gathered there for battle, and the men of Israel withdrew. ¹⁰ He rose and struck down the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand clung to the sword. And the

Lord brought about a great victory that day, and the men returned after him only to strip the slain.

¹¹ And next to him was Shammah, the son of Agee the Hararite. The Philistines gathered together at Lehi, where there was a plot of ground full of lentils, and the men fled from the Philistines. ¹² But he took his stand in the midst of the plot and defended it and struck down the Philistines, and the Lord worked a great victory.

Josheb who with a spear killed 800 Philistines. And the Lord worked a great victory.

Eleazar who kept fighting when everyone else retreated. They only returned to strip the spoil from the dead he slew. And the Lord worked a great victory.

Shammah who defended a plot of land and destroyed the Philistine army. And the Lord worked a great victory

Our author gives an example of their fierce loyalty and love for David. (v. 13-17)

¹³ And three of the thirty chief men went down and came about harvest time to David at the cave of Adullam, when a band of Philistines was encamped in the Valley of Rephaim. ¹⁴ David was then in the stronghold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then at Bethlehem. ¹⁵ And David said longingly, "Oh, that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem that is by the gate!" ¹⁶ Then the three mighty men broke through the camp of the Philistines and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem that was by the gate and carried and brought it to David. But he would not drink of it. He poured it out to the Lord ¹⁷ and said, "Far be it from me, O Lord, that I should do this. Shall I drink the blood of the men who went at the risk of their lives?" Therefore he would not drink it. These things the three mighty men did.

The Leaders of the Warriors (v. 18-23)

The two who David made leaders are named and commended.

¹⁸ Now Abishai, the brother of Joab, the son of Zeruah, was chief of the thirty. And he wielded his spear against three hundred men and killed them and won a name beside the three. ¹⁹ He was the most renowned of the thirty and became their commander, but he did not attain to the three.

²⁰ And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was a valiant man of Kabzeel, a doer of great deeds. He struck down two ariels of Moab. He also went down and struck down a lion in a pit on a day when snow had fallen. ²¹ And he struck down an Egyptian, a handsome man. The Egyptian had a spear in his hand, but Benaiah went down to him with a staff and snatched the spear out of the Egyptian's hand and killed him with his own spear. ²² These things did Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and won a name beside the three mighty men. ²³ He was renowned among the thirty, but he did not attain to the three. And David set him over his bodyguard.

Abishai, was the greatest of the warriors and became their commander.

Benaiah, was a great fighter who won over great odds. But he never aspired to be one of the three. David recognized and rewarded him by making him commander of his bodyguards.

The Roster of the Warriors (v. 24-39)

A list of the men who made up the Thirty. There were actually thirty-seven of them including the three and the two leaders.

²⁴ Asahel the brother of Joab was one of the thirty; Elhanan the son of Dodo of Bethlehem, ²⁵ Shammah of Harod, Elikah of Harod, ²⁶ Helez the Paltite, Ira the son of Ikkesh of Tekoa, ²⁷ Abiezer of Anathoth, Mebunnai the Hushathite, ²⁸ Zalmon the Ahohite, Maharai of Netophah, ²⁹ Heleb the son of Baanah of Netophah, Ittai the son of Ribai of Gibeah of the people of Benjamin, ³⁰ Benaiah of Pirathon, Hid-dai of the brooks of Gaash, ³¹ Abi-albon the Arbathite, Azmaveth of Bahurim, ³² Eliahba the Shaalbonite, the sons of Jashen, Jonathan, ³³ Shammah the Hararite, Ahiam the son of Sharar the Hararite, ³⁴ Eliphelet the son of Ahasbai of Maacah, Eliam the son of Ahithophel of Gilo, ³⁵ Hezro of Carmel, Paarai the Arbite, ³⁶ Igal the son of Nathan of Zobah, Bani the Gadite, ³⁷ Zelek the Ammonite, Naharai of Beeroth, the armor-bearer of Joab the son of Zeruiah, ³⁸ Ira the Ithrite, Gareb the Ithrite, ³⁹ Uriah the Hittite: thirty-seven in all.

Some of these men we have met in the course of the stories. We met Asahel, Joab's brother. We met Naharai, Joab's armor-bearer though we did not know his name. Interesting that an armor bearer is also a mighty warrior. And sadly, we know Uriah the Hittite. He was a faithful husband, a stalwart and loyal warrior. But his name appears here last because he was not among the living. The king had taken his wife and then his life.

As we have before, I note all the members of this elite band who were foreigners. The men from Israel are marked by being "of ____". But there were a number of men who seem to be from outside Israel, their names marked by being an "ite". We recognize the Ammonite, the Gadite and the Hittite. Without question these men were not Jews, but had sworn their allegiance to Yahweh and joined to serve the king they loved.

Why is this here?

For the initial reader, it is like a stone of remembrance that has the names of the mighty men of valor on it.

For us it is a reminder that God works His victories through people. Those people must be skilled, strong and sacrificial. They will have a great love and loyalty to King Jesus.

It reminds us that our struggles and sacrifices are not empty nor vain.

Reflect and Respond

There is a wonderful truth that God will bless us and make us useful in His kingdom...

We are encouraged to continue to serve even when it seems hard and fruitless...

The godless and the wicked are warned that there is a coming judgment...