

## DAVID PRAISES GOD

2 Samuel 21:1-24:25

Key Verse: 23:3,4

"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, 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.'"

Today's passage, chapters 21-24, is an epilogue of events and songs that reveals David's deep reverence for God. This part of Samuel is also David's confession of faith and epic of life. David loved God, and God loved David. But David's life was not always simple and happy; his life was very colorful. From the beginning he was a shepherd. He shepherded his father's sheep, following the flocks. He shepherded God's people, the people of Israel. His life as a shepherd was not easy. There were many ups and downs. He met many trials and hardships. He fought many battles. Often he was in unutterable distress and sorrows. But David always won victories within and without and rendered them to God. Last time we studied how David was defeated by the power of sin, and how he won the victory through repentance. In short, David was a man of God who always trusted God the Almighty and rendered victories to God. David's life was a life of victory. Today we want to study how David looked back on his entire life and praised God.

I. David's song of praises (21:1-22:51)

**First**, a broken promise ransomed. (21:1-14) God chose the Israelites as his own people and gave them his promises. Therefore, the people of Israel were a covenant people. As covenant people, they had to honor God's promises; they also had to honor whatever oaths they had made to others. In General Joshua's time, the Israelites had promised to spare the Gibeonites. When the Israelites were conquering the promised land, the Gibeonites were doomed to be destroyed. But they tricked General Joshua into making an oath to spare them. (Jos 9:1-27) But King Saul had not honored that oath. Once there was a famine for three successive years. So David sought the face of the Lord. The Lord said, "It is on account of Saul and his blood-stained house; it is because he put the Gibeonites to death." Then King David summoned the Gibeonites and spoke to them. Now the Gibeonites were not a part of Israel, but were survivors of the Amorites. The Israelites had sworn to spare them. But Saul, in his zeal for Israel and Judah, had tried to annihilate them. When the Gibeonites came to David they demanded, "Let seven of Saul's male descendants be given to us to be killed and exposed before the Lord at Gibeah of Saul--the Lord's chosen one--for he has decimated us so that we have no place to stay anywhere in Israel." On hearing this, King David handed seven sons of Saul over to the Gibeonites to be killed and exposed on the hill before the Lord. But the king spared Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, because of the oath before the Lord between David and Jonathan. (21:1-9)

One of the victims of this event was Rizpah. Her two sons were executed and exposed. This mother saw what had happened and remained around the dead bodies of her sons. We can imagine how painful this mother's heart was. Her sons were victimized because of their father's sin. David heard about it and respected her motherly love. So he gave permission for the proper burial of Saul's

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sons and grandsons. In this way David ransomed the broken oath of Israel. When David did so, God abated the famine from the land of Israel. (21:10-14)

**Second**, Abishai rescues David. (21:15-22) Once again there was a battle between the Philistines and Israel. This time David went down with his men to fight against the Philistines. But he was already too old to fight. During the time of fighting he was exhausted. Ishbi-Benob, a big man, said he would kill David. In the duel, David was almost killed. Once, David was a great warrior. But he was no more a young man. Then General Abishai came to David's rescue; he killed the Philistine with one blow. Then David's men swore to him, saying, "Never again will you go out with us to battle, so that the lamp of Israel will not be extinguished." Although David was old and no more a great warrior, his people acknowledged that David was the lamp of Israel and that he should not be extinguished. It was because David obeyed God's word and respected his people.

**Third**, "The Lord is my salvation." (22:1-4) When the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul, David sang to the Lord. Look at 22:2-4. In these verses David described God's mighty hand in many ways. He believed God the Almighty. In verses 2-4 he said, "The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation. He is my stronghold, my refuge and my savior--from violent men you save me. I call to the Lord, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies." King David's life was the life of battles and wars. Sometimes he needed a hiding place; sometimes he needed a fortress; sometimes he had to run for a refuge. But God was always his rock, fortress and refuge. David was a warrior who never lost a battle. But sometimes he felt very weak and that his enemies were like a bull with ferocious horns. But God was the

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horn of his salvation. God was his source of power and source of strength to fight against his enemies. So he praised God as God Almighty and the horn of salvation.

**Fourth,** David, a warrior of prayer. (22:5-20) Outwardly, David's life looked glorious. When we think of David, we think, first of all, of his glorious and highly exalted throne and his scepter. But that was not all. He also had times of distress which he could not overcome at all by himself. 22:5,6 says, "The waves of death swirled about me; the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me. The cords of the grave coiled around me; the snares of death confronted me." When the waves of death swirled around him, David could have despaired or gotten sick. But he never despaired. He was never enslaved by the fearful situation. What did he do in such a time of distress? He prayed to God. He cried out to God. 22:7 reads, "In my distress, I called to the Lord; I called out to my God." "I called out to my God" means that he prayed to God with a loud voice.

What happened? God heard his prayer and rescued him. When God was with him, the earth trembled and quaked, the foundations of the heavens shook. When God heard David's prayer and was with him, the heavens were parted and came down. Out of the brightness of his presence, bolts of lightning blazed forth. When David prayed, God was with him and he thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded. God gave David victory when he could not but be defeated. Of course, David's men shot arrows and scattered enemies, but David thought it was the Lord who shot arrows and scattered enemies. He said in 22:15, "He shot arrows and scattered the enemies, bolts of lightning and routed them." David felt God's salvation moment by moment and day by day through his prayer. 22:17-20 says, "He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he

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drew me out of deep waters. He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me. They confronted me in the day of my disaster, but the Lord was my support. He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me." Probably this part of his rhyme refers to Abishai's coming to his rescue.

**Fifth**, David's good fighting in faith. (22:21-29) To a physical man, "dog-eat-dog" fighting is everything. But to a spiritual man there is another battle, that is, spiritual fighting. Spiritual men must fight many intensive battles to keep their faith in God Almighty. The spiritual battle is ten times harder than the physical battle, for there are many who win the physical battle but lose the spiritual battle tragically. King David was a man of God and a spiritual man. His physical battles were unbearably hard in the course of uniting Israel and establishing the kingdom of David, defeating many surrounding enemies.

His spiritual battle was even harder. But he won the spiritual battle when he depended on God's righteousness. As we studied last time, David sinned against God and repented, and his sins were forgiven by God. So he could not say that he was a righteous man. But he believed that he was a righteous man because he was clothed with God's righteousness by faith. 22:21-25 reads, "The Lord has dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me. For I have kept the ways of the Lord; I have not done evil by turning from my God. All his laws are before me; I have not turned away from his decrees. I have been blameless before him and have kept myself from sin. The Lord has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to my cleanness in his sight." In these verses David says, "According to my righteousness," two times. He sounds great. (21,25) He also says, "According to my cleanness." But what he said didn't mean that he was righteous. It meant

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that he had great faith in God's righteousness, and that, in spite of himself, he was clothed with God's righteousness; so he was righteous. We can understand this better when we remember Romans 1:17, "The righteous will live by faith...from first to last." God's children are righteous when we have faith in the righteousness of God through his Son Jesus Christ.

David explains what he said in verses 21-25 more plainly in verses 26-29, which reads, "To the faithful you show your-self faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless, to the pure you show yourself pure, but to the crooked you show yourself shrewd. You save the humble, but your eyes are on the haughty to bring them low. You are my lamp, O Lord; the Lord turns my darkness into light." In these verses we learn that David had faithfully showed himself to be faithful to God by keeping his faith in God Almighty. It was a great spiritual battle for David to do so. David also knew that God saves the humble and brings the haughty down low. His spiritual battle was to humble himself before God Almighty. His faith battle was to fear God as God. His faith battle was to believe that God was his Rock and the horn of salvation.

Sixth, God gives victories to David. (22:30-46) Until David's time, Israel belonged to the third world nations, inferior to world powers. But under David, Israel became a super world power, defeating the surrounding enemies and establishing the kingdom of David. But David did not think that he himself had won the victories. He believed that God had given him all the victories. He believed that God had saved him in many critical moments. "With your help I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall." (30) "For who is God besides the Lord? And who is the Rock except our God? It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect." (32,33) To help him win many battles,

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God gave David strength in his feet and enabled him to stand on higher ground on which he could strafe the enemies. Thus God enabled him to defeat any kind of well-equipped enemy soldiers. 22:34,35 reads, "He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to stand on the heights. He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze." In this vivid expression David ascertained that God had given him victory, victory that is complete. 22:38-43 reads, "I pursued my enemies and crushed them; I did not turn back till they were destroyed. I crushed them completely, and they could not rise; they fell beneath my feet. You armed me with strength for battle; you made my adversaries bow at my feet. You made my enemies turn their backs in flight, and I destroyed my foes. They cried for help, but there was no one to save them--to the Lord, but he did not answer. I beat them as fine as the dust of the earth; I pounded and trampled them like mud in the streets."

**Seventh**, David renders victories to God. (22:44-51) How easy it is for us to exalt ourselves after many victories. One general contributed to the USA's winning World War II. Then he exalted himself to the highest place and didn't listen to the President. Finally he was dismissed. But David was not so. He rendered all the victories to God, acknowledging that God gave him one victory after another. Even at the time of great victory, he acknowledged that God not only gave him victory, but also saved his life. "You have delivered me from the attacks of my people; you have preserved me as the head of nations. People I did not know are subject to me." (44) He also acknowledged that God exalted him over all other nations. "And foreigners come cringing to me; as soon as they hear me, they obey me. They all lose heart; they come trembling from their strongholds." (45,46)

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David was filled with a song of praises and thanksgiving to God. He was like a teenager who falls in love with a beautiful girl. He loved God as a man experiences his first love. He loved God with a pure heart. 22:47-50 reads, "The Lord lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be God, the Rock, my Savior! He is the God who avenges me, who puts the nations under me, who sets me free from my enemies. You exalted me above my foes; from violent men you rescued me. Therefore I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing praises to your name." He concludes his song of praises in 22:51, "He gives his king great victories; he shows unfailing kindness to his anointed, to David and his descendants for-ever." David sang a song of praises mainly because he deeply acknowledged the unfailing love of God for him and for his descendants. His faith in the love of God was the cause of victory in his personal life as well as over the nations.

### II. The last words of David (23:1-24:25)

**First**, David had the fear of God. (23:1-7) 23:1-7 tells us what was on David's mind in his last days. In his last days, he was not worried about his death, nor did he prepare his cave tomb like Joseph of Arimathea. He was not distracted by physical pain or by family affairs, or even by international relations. He was only filled with the grace of God. God's grace was indeed great. He knew who he was. He was just a shepherd boy following the flock of his father's sheep. He was the youngest son, who was not even invited to the interview when Samuel came to choose a king from among Jesse's eight sons. He was out keeping sheep in the field. At that time, the elder son had many privileges, but the youngest son was ignored.

But God chose David from following the flock of his father's sheep and



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exalted him to be ruler over his people. He knew God's grace--that he was nobody, but that God even made him king over God's chosen people. This he did not forget. So he said in 23:1b, "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." In this verse, the phrase, "the man exalted by the Most High," is very important. And the phrase, "the man anointed by the God of Jacob," is also important. He was just a shepherd boy, but God chose him to be king of Israel, God's chosen people. It was the one-sided grace of God. He could not forget God's grace even for a moment. When-ever he thought about God's grace, songs of praises sprang endlessly from his soul, one song after another. So he called himself "Israel's singer of songs." It sounds funny, but Da-vid called himself "singer of songs." It doesn't mean that his singing ability was equal to that of Luciano Pavarotti or Enrico Caruso, or that his harp skill was matchless. It meant that God's grace in his soul made him a singer of songs. Mostly, people in their last days are filled with sorrow and with separation anxiety. But David was different. He was filled with songs of praises. It was because he was with God and he loved God with all his heart. God's grace was so amazing to him, and it was growing unfathomably deeper and wider in his heart.

He sang a song of praises, experiencing that the fear of God had given him heavenly sunshine all his lifetime. When he had the fear of God, he ruled God's people with peace and love; he didn't have to rule with his king's authority and power and intimidation. When he ruled, having the fear of God in his heart, he experienced that his soul was like the light of the morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning, like the brightness after rain that brings the grass from the earth. When he had the fear of God and ruled his people, he experienced light and life. 23:4 reads, "...he is like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless

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morning, like the brightness after rain that brings the grass from the earth." When he had the fear of God, he felt so close to God, as if he were sitting with God on a sofa in front of the TV. "Is not my house right with God? Has he not made with me an ever-lasting covenant..." (5a)

But David knew that those who do not have the fear of God are living in thornbushes. "But evil men are all to be cast aside like thorns, which are not gathered with the hand. Whoever touches thorns uses a tool of iron or the shaft of a spear; they are burned up where they lie." (6,7) Read 23:3,4 again. "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, 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.'"

**Second**, God protected David with mighty men. (23:8-39) The author of Samuel emphasizes that David had loyal and mighty men around him. It was not because he was a spaceman with superpower, or a born leader in a third world country; it was because God protected him and exalted him in that way, by giving him mighty and loyal men. Without comrades no one can be a great man. There was his wife, Eleanor, for Franklin Roosevelt. There was Melancton for Martin Luther. There was Zwingli for John Calvin. There was Ambrose for St. Augustine. There is Kathy Vucekovich for Mark Vucekovich. In history, most great people had several, four or five, or at the maximum, seven. "The Cambridge Seven" is a famous story. God gave David three plus 37 mighty and loyal men who were ready to give their lives for him.

Their names are as follows: Josheb-Basshebeth was chief of the three; he

raised his spear against eight hundred men, whom he killed in one encounter. In martial arts, even fighting with one opponent needs six months of camp training to win the game. But Josheb-Basshebeth destroyed eight hundred men. Surely God gave him the Spirit of God and great loyalty to David in his heart; that was what empowered him to be a matchless warrior.

Next was Eleazar. One time he was with David for battle. The men of Israel retreated. But he did not retreat. He stood his ground and struck down the Philistines till his hand grew tired and froze to the sword. Through him the Lord brought about a great victory that day. Surely God gave him the Spirit of God; God also protected him to fight until his hand froze to the sword. Thus he could restore Israel's shame of retreat from the Philistines and uplift the morale of the army of Israel.

The third was Shammah. One time Israel's troops fled from the Philistines. But Shammah took his stand in the middle of the field, defended the field and struck the Philistines down. How easy it is for anybody to run away when others are running away. But this general determined to strike the Philistines down. God blessed his do or die spirit and that day God brought about a great victory. These are the stories of three outstanding mighty men of David.

Three out of thirty chief men came to David at the cave of Adullam. The place Adullam was the place of David's refuge. At that time, David was weary and thirsty and longed for the freedom of life. He said, "Oh, that someone would get me a drink of water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem!" (15b) "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

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it; instead, he poured it out before the Lord. '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." (16,17) How beautiful it is to see these mighty men's loyalty, and the fear of God in David's heart. When we have the fear of God, God gives us mighty warriors to protect us. Abi-shai is not included among the Three, but he raised his spear against 300 men and killed them. So he became very famous, as famous as the Three. Benaiah was a valiant fighter. He was so courageous, and a man of spirit. He went down into a pit on a snowy day and killed a lion with his bare hands. It is common sense that in a den or a pit a lion would overpower any man. But Benaiah killed a lion like a mountain dog. It was because God gave him the Spirit of God and loyalty to David. "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. Such were the exploits of Benaiah son of Jehoiada; he too was as famous as the three mighty men. 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 body-guard." (21-23) Probably David remembered his boyhood when he killed bears and lions with his bare hands to protect the sheep of his father's flock.

Among the Thirty were: (Josheb-Basshebeth), Asahel, Elhanan, Shammah, Elikah, Helez, Ira, Abiezer, Mebunnai, Zalmon, Maharai, Heled, Ithai, Benaiah, Hiddai, Abi-Albon, Azmaveth, Eliahba, Jonathan, Ahiam, Eliphelet, Eliam, Hezro, Paari, Igal, Zelek, Naharai, Ira, Gareb, and Uriah. They were all four-star generals in the kingdom of David. It is worthwhile to memorize their names so that we may name our children after them, instead of naming them only Paul or Peter.

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Third, David again sinned and repented. (24:1-25) David had had three opportunities to experience God's immeasurable grace. The first was when he was chosen to be king. The second was when his sin was forgiven. The third was when his kingdom was restored and was consolidated. It was time for David to remember God's grace throughout his lifetime. But to our surprise, he was fed up with human pride and mighty power; he wanted to know how many soldiers were under his rule. So he ordered Joab to take a census of Israel and Judah in order that he might know how many fighting men there were. Even Joab, a man of soldier mentality, talked back to the king. "May the Lord your God multiply the troops a hundred times over, and may the eyes of my lord the king see it. But why does my lord the king want to do such a thing?" (3) The king's word, however, overruled Joab the army commander, so he left the presence of the king to enroll the fighting men of Israel. After nine months and 20 days Joab reported the number of fighting men to the king. David was conscience-stricken because he did not depend on God but on his fighting men for his power and glory. He said to the Lord, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, O Lord, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing." (10)

The word of the Lord had come to Gad the prophet, David's seer, the next morning. "Go and tell David, 'This is what the Lord says: I am giving you three options. Choose one of them for me to carry out against you.' So Gad went to David and said to him, 'Shall there come upon you three years of famine in the land? Or three months of fleeing from your enemies while they pursue you? Or three days of plague in your land? Now then, think it over and decide how I should answer the one who sent me.'" (12,13) David said, "I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men." (14) Because of the plague, 70,000 of the people from

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Dan to Beersheba died. And the Lord was grieved because of the calamity and said to the angel who was afflicting the people, "Enough! Withdraw your hand." (16) David was also grieved because of the calamity and said in verse 17b, "I am the one who has sinned and done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? Let your hand fall upon me and my family."

Here we learn that David was a great man of God. Still, he was an imperfect human being. When he should have restored his first love for God, he became proud and inflicted damage on 70,000 people. But he is still great because he repented and sought the welfare of his people more than his own or his household. According to the instruction of Gad the prophet, he built an altar to the Lord and worshiped God. Then the Lord answered his prayer and stopped the plague on Israel.

When we review 1 and 2 Samuel, we wonder why these books are called "Samuel" instead of "David," because they mainly describe the life of King David. But the reason is clear: these books of Samuel contrast Saul with David. Saul was a handsome man. But he lived according to his human feelings. So he became useless to God. On the other hand, David lived according to the word of God. So God could use him as his servant and shepherd of his people.