



Unlocking the Bible (16)



Lessons for Leadership: 2 Samuel

We now come to the second book of Samuel which, paradoxically, is really the second book of David. Samuel and when the rule of a Godly leader is long forgotten. Saul has reigned “like all nations” only to prove an abject failure. Alongside him, anointed but not acknowledged, David has provided leadership from the sidelines, as it were. Now, with Saul dead, David assumes his rightful position as sole and crowned king of Israel.

Enthroned and in power, David is involved in a number of achievements. He mourns and honours Saul and the remaining members of that family. He drives out the enemy nations, rids the land of its intruders and regains it for God. At last, God’s people – thanks mainly to the endeavours of David - dwell freely and fully in the Promised Land.

But, he is also vulnerable for, paradoxically, he is less safe and secure here than he was when a fugitive and shepherd lad. Position brings its pitfalls. These pitfalls come from two directions.

In the first place, all his achievements “with the help of his God” generate enmity and jealousy, a feature which he constantly has to face whether from his enemies or from within his family. Secondly, the lure of peace and home comforts bring him snares. Staying in Jerusalem instead of being with his troops is the occasion for his adultery with Bathsheba. His strengths become his weaknesses as, in fear, he flees from Absalom. Finally, he succumbs to the temptation to quantify his success by numbering the troops, an action for which he pays dearly.

What can we learn from the content of this book?

In the first place it is clear that position with its sense of achievement, albeit with the help of God, is dangerous. Paul talks in Philippians about not having achieved but pressing on. David was best when he was struggling, not when he was at ease in Zion. God often uses weakness, tension and difficulty to bring out the best in His people. Under pressure, the church is much healthier than when at ease. Yet, in these situations David displays what is in his heart, features that are redemptive. He displays a forgiving, repentant and humble attitude. His is a sweet spirit. He learns from his mistakes and makes amends gladly. It is the circumstances which serve to corrupt him: he himself displays a godliness inbred into him from years of struggle and proving God.

Christian service is not in status and position but in humble obedience and endurance, seeking to see the will of God being done on earth as it is in heaven; struggling to achieve rather than resting on accomplishments. The strength of God’s work is in the processes not the polished products.

It is interesting that this phase of David’s life is also recorded in 1 Chronicles. There, the spiritual significance of his actions and attitude are highlighted so that even in this mixed history, with its failings as well as its successes God was working out His purposes in a Sovereign way.