

## Kingdom Conquered

It has become popular to classify people who were born in a certain era as Generation such-and-such. People born from the 2010s to the present year called Generation Alpha. Generation Z are those born from about 1997 to around 2012. Generation Y, also known as Millennials, are those born from the early eighties to about 1996. Before them is Generation X, born from about 1965 to 1980. Before them, the so-called babyboomers, those born after World War 2 from 1946 to the early 1960s. Before them, what they call the Silent Generation, born from 1928 to 1945, who lived through the Depression. And that brings us 100 years back to what some have called the Greatest Generation, the people born between 1901 and 1928, who lived through and fought in World War 2. Why is that generation called “The Greatest Generation”? Mostly because they lived through the hardships of the Great Depression, and then became the backbone of discipline and self-denial that defeated Nazism at great cost. They rebuilt much of the world after the devastation of WW2 through more self-denial and discipline. In fact, if any of you had a grandparent or great-grandparent from this generation, they were likely to still be rationing food and goods and saving pennies, even when living in times of peace and prosperity.

And many have remarked on the fact that the further we get from the Greatest Generation, the more an intense selfishness has grown. The further we get from the generation that lived on sacrifice and going without, the more we seem to self-indulge and refuse to go without. And it is one of the saddest ironies of history that those who live in peacetime, and sleep under the blanket that their military ancestors provided, feel the luxury to criticise war, and speak of how peace is always possible to those who hate war. Those who must fight come to value what they fought for; those who grow up in those things take them for granted and imagine they were free and cheap.

But history is a tale of battle: freedom, peace, and stability are not natural to the human condition. Good men with swords, and later with guns, willing to use them against evil men with swords or guns, are the reason why anarchy and chaos and uncontrolled violent crime do not overtake any society. People who don't understand this truth live in a sentimental reality where people are all good by nature, and that if we offer all men peace, then all men will be peaceful. People who have not truly understood the evil of human nature have the luxury to be theoretical pacifists: “war will go away if we throw away our guns. Crime will disappear if we removed our walls and security systems. If we defund the police, bad guys won't be bad. It's the use of force that makes them bad!”

People from the Greatest Generation knew better. Winston Churchill took over from Neville Chamberlain, who famously kept trying to appease Adolph Hitler. Churchill said of trying to appease violent aggressors, “An appeaser is one who feeds a crocodile, hoping it will eat him last.” He said to Neville Chamberlain, “You were given the choice between war and dishonour. You chose dishonour and you will have war.” The West found out that the only way to deal with bullies with guns and planes is with your own guns and planes.

That's true of societies, but on a different and deeper level, it's true of the Christian life, and of the advance of Christianity. Many Christians are just like today's armchair pacifists. They think life is peace, and peace is a birthright. They think there is something wrong with too much struggle, and sacrifice, and pain, and self-denial when it comes to their own Christian lives, and they think there is something wrong if missions and church-planting and pastoring requires pain and sweat, and toil, and tears, and yes, in frontier missions and persecuted countries, sometimes even blood. Like modern Boomers and Xers and Millennials and Zers and Alphas who have slept soundly under the blanket that the Greatest Generation provided and come to look down their noses at war itself, so many Christians look down their noses at too much talk of spiritual battle, and fighting the good

fight, and waging war on sin and self, and casting down strongholds of unbelief, and taking the gospel into enemy territory. But just as soft generations are ripe to be conquered by 21st century tyrants, so soft Christians are ripe to be conquered by their own sin, conquered by their culture, conquered by complacency. The saying goes, first generation Christians discover and fight for the truth, second generation Christians receive and assume the truth, and third generation Christians abandon the truth. The Christian life is war. A truce is never declared, and victory is never final until Prince Emmanuel sits on His throne ruling in the New Jerusalem.

It's with those truths in mind that we study David's conquering of the kingdom in 2 Samuel 8. It fell to Solomon to enjoy the riches and wealth and stability of this kingdom. But it fell to his father David to fight for that kingdom, eliminate its enemies and secure its borders. We saw last time that in the Davidic covenant in chapter 7, God promised Israel rest from her enemies. God said, "I will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own and move no more; nor shall the sons of wickedness oppress them anymore, as previously, (2 Sam. 7:10)

This is the chapter where David makes that happen. And it is not through the smooth talking of diplomats, but through the painful and gruesome work of the sword. This chapter has just two parts: David Conquers the Kingdom and David Consolidates the Kingdom.

## **I. David's Conquers the Kingdom**

In these first fifteen verses, we learn of all the victories that David had. Some of the names of these tribes or peoples may not seem significant or easy to remember, so the simplest way to see what is happening here is to remember the four points of a compass: west, east, north, and south. David systematically conquered enemies on each side of Israel.

### **First, on the west, the Philistines.**

**2 Samuel 8:1** After this it came to pass that David attacked the Philistines and subdued them. And David took Gath from the hand of the Philistines.

The Philistines had been a sea-faring people who came to Israel like the much later Vikings would come to foreign lands. So the Philistines mostly occupied the coast of Israel to the west. David finally brings these people under his control, who had tormented Israel since the days of Samson the judge.

### **Second, on the east, the Moabites.**

<sup>2</sup> Then he defeated Moab. Forcing them down to the ground, he measured them off with a line. With two lines he measured off those to be put to death, and with one full line those to be kept alive. So the Moabites became David's servants, *and* brought tribute.

Moab sits where modern day Jordan is. Remember, it was the Moabites who had hired Balaam to curse Israel. God had declared war on Moab, and David was carrying that out. This action by David sounds cruel, but you have to understand something about Canaanite culture and aggression to put this in its historical context. Most conquerors, had they managed to subdue a whole army (which is a feat in itself) would have simply killed all of them. David settled for crippling Moabite aggression by destroying two thirds of them, and leaving a third with tribute.

### **Third, to the North, the Zobahites and Syrians.**

<sup>3</sup> David also defeated Hadadezer the son of Rehob, king of Zobah, as he went to recover his territory at the

River Euphrates. <sup>4</sup> David took from him one thousand *chariots*, seven hundred horsemen, and twenty thousand foot soldiers. Also David hamstrung all the chariot *horses*, except that he spared *enough* of them for one hundred chariots. <sup>5</sup> When the Syrians of Damascus came to help Hadadezer king of Zobah, David killed twenty-two thousand of the Syrians. <sup>6</sup> Then David put garrisons in Syria of Damascus; and the Syrians became David's servants, *and* brought tribute. The LORD preserved David wherever he went. <sup>7</sup> And David took the shields of gold that had belonged to the servants of Hadadezer, and brought them to Jerusalem. <sup>8</sup> Also from Betah and from Berothai, cities of Hadadezer, King David took a large amount of bronze.

Zobah was likely north of Syria, and were what are today called Arameans. There seems to have been a kind of confederacy between the Arameans and the Syrians.

David puts military installations in these foreign territories so that he can control the lucrative trade routes, and exact tolls and taxes on those who'll be passing through Israel. This will only further strengthen and enrich Israel.

Why did David hamstring the horses? First, the Hebrew word is *akar*, which is literally cut, so it may be that David actually gelded or neutered the male horses so that they would not procreate and then released them. If "hamstrung" is the accurate translation, then you have to see that in light of Israel, who dwelt in the mountains and hills, and had no use for chariots. They would basically have been destroying the engines of chariots, making sure they could never be used against Israel again. Hamstringing just one leg would mean they could no longer be used for battle, but for very basic things. It also prevented the land being filled with horse carcasses, or tempting nearby Israelites to use those dead horses for food, which would have been an unclean meat.

David's strength soon attracted the attention of nations who wanted to rather be allies than enemies.

<sup>9</sup> When Toi king of Hamath heard that David had defeated all the army of Hadadezer, <sup>10</sup> then Toi sent Joram his son to King David, to greet him and bless him, because he had fought against Hadadezer and defeated him (for Hadadezer had been at war with Toi); and *Joram* brought with him articles of silver, articles of gold, and articles of bronze.

<sup>11</sup> King David also dedicated these to the LORD, along with the silver and gold that he had dedicated from all the nations which he had subdued-- <sup>12</sup> from Syria, from Moab, from the people of Ammon, from the Philistines, from Amalek, and from the spoil of Hadadezer the son of Rehob, king of Zobah. <sup>13</sup> And David made *himself* a name when he returned from killing eighteen thousand Syrians in the Valley of Salt.

In passing, we read here that David also defeated the Amalekites, a commission his predecessor Saul had failed in. David also deals with the Ammonites, which we'll return to in chapter 10.

#### **Fourth, to the south, the Edomites.**

<sup>14</sup> He also put garrisons in Edom; throughout all Edom he put garrisons, and all the Edomites became David's servants.

Edom was the nation descended from Esau, who had also been at war with Israel these many years.

So now, east, west, north, and south, Israel's borders are secure.

And the LORD preserved David wherever he went. <sup>15</sup> So David reigned over all Israel; and David administered judgment and justice to all his people.

Until now, Israel had been on the defensive, fighting battles on its own soil. Philistine raids, Ammonite raids, entire cities and areas owned and governed by Philistines. Now, not only does David conquer all the territory that was allotted to Israel during the time of Joshua, but he pushes enemies back, has military buffer zones, and puts enemy nations under taxation.

Now there's a lot of war here, a lot of bloodshed, a lot of violence. How do we understand this? We must look at David's military activities in the light of three facts.

First, God promised this land to Israel through Abraham in Genesis 12, and to Moses again in Deuteronomy 27 to 30, and again to David. God was explicit that Israel's birthright was from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates, and David fulfilled this. He mostly had to win it back, since huge chunks of Israel's land had been conquered by these nations, or never taken in the first place. So David is really finishing what Israel under Joshua never completed.

Second, we also have to remember that God dispossessed those nations because of their extreme wickedness. <sup>4</sup> "Do not think in your heart, after the LORD your God has cast them out before you, saying, 'Because of my righteousness the LORD has brought me in to possess this land'; but *it is* because of the wickedness of these nations *that* the LORD is driving them out from before you. (Deut. 9:4)

Canaanite culture was indeed wicked. Scholars believe the Canaanite religions were the most sexually depraved in history. Immorality and prostitution were part of their religions. We know from our own wicked day how quickly rampant pornography and immorality becomes the forced slavery of young boys and girls. Ritual child sacrifice was regular. Archaeologists have excavated Canaanite dwellings where newborn babies were placed in large jars and then built into the wall as a sacrifice of good luck to the gods. Sacrifice to Molech involved a metal image that was heated by fire and then the living child was placed in it. These nations were deeply embedded in witchcraft, necromancy, divination, and sorcery, bringing all the uncleanness of evil spirits upon the land.

This was a vicious, cruel, depraved culture that enslaved and brutalised humans. The book of Amos tells us that the Ammonites would deliberately attack pregnant women in deplorable ways. In 1 Samuel 11, Nahash the Ammonite offers a treaty with Israel on condition that every man gouge out his right eye. So when David deals with them in what looks like a severe manner, understand that these nations had already earned the death-penalty in God's eyes for their evil.

Third, not only were these cultures wicked and cruel, they were also aggressive. God repeatedly told the Israelites under Joshua to drive the Canaanites out completely. But by underestimating evil, and refusing the hardship of battle, the book of Judges shows us what happens. These people whom the Israelites thought they could just co-exist with, soon conquered them, put them under bondage and tribute, and brought great suffering upon them. Nations controlled by evil gods are not pacifist nations. Let them be, and they will simply re-conquer you. David is not a naïve pacifist. He is not going to win a battle, and then fondly hope that his enemies will peacefully disarm and leave him alone. He has to break the back of their militaries just to keep them from re-invading.

These three facts help us to understand why David was so swift and ruthless in his battles. This was re-taking God's land. This was long overdue judgement on wicked people who continued to pollute the land and Israelites with their evil, and had David left them alone, it would simply have been life as it was under Saul: continued attacks and raids by Philistines and Ammonites and Amalekites.

When we read later of the massive wealth and peace that Solomon enjoyed, we have to read it in light of what David fought for. Battles must be fought before spoils can be achieved.

In the New Testament, our battles are not physical violence against pagan nations. Paul tells us

<sup>12</sup> For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*. (Eph. 6:12)

Our battle is against highly organised evil spiritual forces that oppose the gospel.

<sup>4</sup> For the weapons of our warfare *are* not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, (2 Cor. 10:4)

We don't fight with guns and weapons, but with truth, and with Christlike character.

But it is a battle nonetheless, and no victory without struggle. When you see the stability and health of established churches, and functioning Christian schools or universities, Christian publishing houses or media houses, that peacetime prosperity was bought with struggle, pain and sacrifice by someone else. When you see churches established in foreign lands where Christ was not named, it's because someone took the sword of the Word, embraced the hardships of frontier missions, learnt a foreign language for years, embraced sacrificial living and risk of disease and death to plant those seeds.

We all want the beautiful buildings for our Christian institutions and cute Christian school uniforms on our kids, and the handsomely bound printed Christian books, and orchestras playing sacred music, and all the stabilities and securities of a healthy Christian culture. We want the Solomon experience of Christianity. But for that to be there, and for that to be maintained, we need to embrace the David experience.

Spiritual benefits in the form of established churches, Christianity with deep roots and strong foundations is done by those who get their hands dirty. It is not won by those in easy chairs with smooth hands. It is done by those who accept the burden of studying the Word, praying more, counseling others, mentoring younger believers, of starting ministries, of going to seminary, getting training, of standing up for your faith in the workplace, of doing evangelism, of disciplining and discipling your children, of being here more often not just to receive but to give.

Spiritual benefits in the form of inner peace, established Christian character, joy and gratitude despite the circumstances, insight and understanding of the Bible are the Solomonic rewards of a Davidic battle with your own flesh, with temptation, with worldliness.

You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> No one engaged in warfare entangles himself with the affairs of *this* life, that he may please him who enlisted him as a soldier. (2 Tim. 2:3-4)

You want to experience the freedom of a life without continual guilt, without being mastered by habits and addictions, without being polluted by pornography, and outbursts of anger, then you must fight. You must wage the good warfare, fight the good fight, as a hardened, disciplined soldier of Jesus Christ. You must take seriously the belt of truth, sword of the Word, and the shield of faith, and the breastplate of righteous living, and the shoes ready to share the gospel, wearing the helmet of being saved, in Christ.

David conquered the kingdom. But David was more than a war general. He was also a highly effective administrator, manager and leader. David made sure that these hard-fought battles were not squandered by poor, wasteful organisation.

## II. David Consolidates the Kingdom

<sup>16</sup> Joab the son of Zeruiah was over the army; Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder; <sup>17</sup> Zadok the son of Ahitub and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar were the priests; Seraiah was the scribe; <sup>18</sup> Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over both the Cherethites and the Pelethites; and David's sons were chief ministers. (2 Sam. 8:1-18)

Those three verses are just three among a huge plenitude in 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles that detail how David organised his kingdom. He consolidated and organised and strengthened his kingdom.

David set up a system where he was head of a new spiritual order. The general of the army, unfortunately, was Joab, David's murderous nephew, who had gotten the job when they conquered Jerusalem. First rank, just under Joab were what 2 Samuel 23 calls the Three Mighty men: David three bravest, mightiest, strongest men. Their names were Josheb-Basshebeth, Eleazar and Shammah.

Second rank after this were the Thirty. These were incredibly brave and skilled fighters. Scripture lists 56 of them by name, probably because some of them were killed and replaced by others at certain times. But thirty men were in this office and in charge of Israel's entire military. One of the thirty is listed here: Benaiah, who was in charge of the Cherethites and Pelethites. These were foreign mercenaries employed as personal bodyguards to the king. It was quite common to hire foreigners as bodyguards, to avoid internal corruption and assassination attempts. Benaiah was unusual because he was a priest, but also one of the 30 might men, and an army officer.

Jehoshaphat was the recorder, which probably meant he was the one who kept the records and advised the king as would a secretary of state. He may have been the chairman of the king's council.

David also organised the priests. Here we have listed the two high priests who functioned together: Zadok and Abiathar, who apparently had a son named Ahimelech. We'll consider that in a future message, but we know from 1 Chronicles that David organised 24 units of 1000 in the temple service, 6000 as judges, 4000 as gatekeepers, and 4000 entirely given to music and singing, under the direction of Asaph, Heman and Ethan.

Seraiah was the scribe, probably the one who kept and updated the royal documents, and was something of a researcher.

David even appointed the ancient equivalent of ambassadors, according to 1 Chronicles 26, as well as thousands of homeland administrators. First Chronicles 27 describes the equivalent of an Department of Agriculture, with people assigned to food production, storage, safety, animal protection and so on. David appointed heads over each tribe of Israel.

Now why does the Bible list all this detail for us? Why should we want to know all these names? The principle that Scripture is driving home is that David's kingdom was highly organised, highly structured, highly disciplined. David did not simply conquer and then coast. He did not fight and depend on that momentum, until it ran out. He didn't push and then crash. David fought the battles, won the victories, but then protected his victories with structure and order and discipline.

Some people have absorbed the strange idea that in the Christian life, everything should be spontaneous and without structure. Too much structure that will quench the Spirit, they say. Of course they don't apply that standard to their work lives or to education or to health where they use planning and routines and habits and schedules, and supervision and evaluation. But when it comes to their walk with the Lord, to Bible reading, to prayer, to church attendance to evangelism to service, it must come upon them like Mozart receiving musical inspiration while walking alone in a field.

But in fact, Christians like this have become slaves to their feelings, and are forever waiting for the wind of their feelings to start blowing in the right direction. That's why any success they have in the Word or in parenting or in church ministry, or in being equipped, soon dies out because they refuse to sustain a disciplined, structured approach to their lives. They fight and then they sleep. They

push, and then crash. They come to church twice in a row and then stop. They begin reading their Bible for four days and then quit for a month. They express interest in getting involved, but then give up before it actually happens.

The victorious Christian life is not a bombing run or a drive-by shooting. It is a day-in, day-out orderly maintenance of spiritual discipline.

For God is not *the author* of confusion but of peace, as in all the churches of the saints. (1 Cor. 14:33)

Let all things be done decently and in order. (1 Cor. 14:40)

David conquered and David consolidated. That's a simple pattern not only for a stable, prosperous kingdom, but for a stable, growing Christian life. Like the men building Nehemiah's wall with a sword and a trowel: fighting and building, defence and discipline.

Fight the good fight of faith, fight your sin, the flesh, the devil, the world. And then whatever gains you make, protect them with good orderly, spiritual disciplines. Organise your spiritual life into routines and goals, and habits and structures. Plan your spiritual life, like you plan everything else.

One of the Christians who was born and belonged to the Greatest Generation was A.W. Tozer. His books all convey the sense of a generation that understood the world is a battleground, not a playground. He said this; "The nation whose soldiers were as soft and undisciplined as the soldiers of the churches would be conquered by the first enemy that attacked it. Triumphs are not won by men in easy chairs. Success is costly. If we would progress spiritually, we must separate ourselves unto the things of God and concentrate upon them to the exclusion of a thousand things the worldly man considers important. We must cultivate God in the solitudes and the silence; we must make the kingdom of God the sphere of our activity and labor in it like a farmer in his field, like a miner in the earth."