

Cities of Our God

2 Sam 8:1-10:19

KV 10:12

“Be strong and let us fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God. The Lord will do what is good in his sight.”

After about 3 weeks studying Easter passages, we return to our study of 2 Samuel. Just to review – we just finished up to ch. 7 – God’s promise to David and David’s prayer to God. This passage was the main point of 2nd Samuel, and we learned how God would bring the Messiah – Jesus Christ, through the line of David and establish his kingdom forever. We also learned to find courage to pray through trusting in the promises of God. Today we will look at how God fulfilled his promises to David, and the results of that prayer. The title of this message is called “Cities of Our God,” with the key verse 2 Sam 10:12: “Be strong and let us fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God. The Lord will do what is good in his sight.”

In America, each city has something distinctive about it. We call Chicago the “City of Big Shoulders,” because of the skyscrapers. The football team in Pittsburgh is called the “Steelers,” because it was once the heart of the steel industry. In the same way, the “cities of our God” are made up of people who belong to God. They are His people, and He is their God. The difference is, this city does not have geographical boundaries, but it exists in the hearts of all those who believe. These cities make up God’s kingdom, and it is growing, but so is opposition to it. We will look at 3 aspects of these cities; this is not a step-by-step guide, but three different aspects of the cities of our God, based on today’s passage. First, we will look at how God laid the foundation for the cities through David. Then, we will learn about the gracious King over the cities. And finally, we will see how Joab and his men fought bravely, and learn why it is necessary, but also a very good cause to be fighting for the cities of God.

Part I: Foundations for His Cities

Chapter 8 begins with David finally subduing the Philistines. They had been a constant source of trouble for the Israelites and Saul was unable to subdue them. David had taken control of Metheg Ammah, which is also Gath, the chief city of the Philistines, and now Israel controlled the Philistine territory to the west. After this David headed east to Moab. The Moabites had been enemies with the Israelites for generations, and had now become a threat to the establishment of the kingdom, so David slaughtered 2/3 of the population. To the north there was a prince named Hadadezer who was attempting to regain control of the region along the Euphrates River. While he was making war with other cities, David took this opportunity to battle with him. David won the battle and captured 20,000 soldiers. Hadadezer would not give up easily, so he called for backup from the Arameans from Damascus, and David killed 22,000 of those men. King David then put garrisons in the Aramean kingdom of Damascus, and the Arameans became subject to him and paid him tribute. The Lord gave David victory wherever he went (2 Sam 8:6-7) – from the Philistines in the west, to the Moabites in the east, and now he has extended Israelite territory an extra 80 miles north!

Notice that the Lord gave David victory wherever he went. He found success in everything he did, because he was doing the Lord's will. He could do the Lord's will, because he was living in a right relationship with God. The most important truth for you to understand is that to do the will of God, you need to have the right relationship with God. You must become less, he must become greater. The aim of your life must not be for your glory, but for God's glory. It seems counter-intuitive, but the greatest joy comes when we live to please God, and to know when he is pleased with us. That's how David lived.

David prospered greatly from his campaigns. He took the gold shields that belonged to Hadadezer's soldiers, and massive quantities of bronze from other cities controlled by Hadadezer, and brought them to Jerusalem. When Tou, king of Hamath, which is a city to the north, heard that David defeated Hadadezer, he sent his son Joram to greet and congratulate David on his victory. Joram brought with him articles of gold, silver and bronze. Now what did David do with all these treasures? Let's all please read ch.8, v.11 "King David dedicated these articles to the Lord, as he had done with the silver and gold from all the nations he had subdued." David dedicated everything to the Lord. The Bible mentioned that Saul set up a monument in his own honor (1 Sam 15:12), but David with all of his riches did not do this.

1 Chron 22:14 says, "I have taken great pains to provide for the temple of the Lord a hundred thousand talents of gold, a million talents of silver, quantities of bronze and iron too great to be weighed, and wood and stone." That's where all the treasure went: to be stored up and used for God's house, for the glory of God! After all those battles, after all those victories, after all the tributes from other cities, David's primary concern was still for the house of God. 1 Chron also says that David did well to have this in his heart, and he still had it in his heart.

In the previous chapter God promised to make David's name great, like the greatest men on the earth, and this was fulfilled in ch.8 v.13 – "And David became famous after he returned from striking down eighteen thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt." This actually accomplished 3 purposes of God: to fulfill his promise to David, to fulfill Isaac's prophecy that Esau (Edomites) will be Jacob's (Israelites) servant (Gen 27:40), and third, to finally secure peace to Israel in the west, east, north and now south. This would allow for David's son Solomon to construct the temple when he became king. Again we are reminded in v.14 that the Lord gave David victory wherever he went.

Here is further evidence that David had a right relationship with God: Look at v.15, "David reigned over all Israel, doing what was just and right for all his people." We see here again that David continues to be a shepherd for God's people. Very few rulers in history have that kind of reputation. David administered with wisdom and fairness, when all you hear about today is the corruption of the leaders at all levels of society. The rest of the chapter lists prominent men in his administration, given great responsibility. God had established the nation of Israel, and built a strong and prosperous kingdom. Today, God continues to build his kingdom – with people like you and me. 2 Pet 2:9 says, "But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light." You have an even greater responsibility, because you were not chosen by men, but by God.

The temple David aimed to build was a physical temple in Jerusalem, and God used David to secure a foundation for his house: by providing peace on every side and materials for building God's house. As glorious as this was, it could only be a foreshadowing of what has already come. Now I tell you a revelation that was not known to David, but has been made absolutely clear to you: that God has provided the foundation for his everlasting and spiritual temple. This foundation is Jesus Christ, the cornerstone. Through his death and resurrection, He has provided you peace on every side, and by the pouring out of his Holy Spirit, he has given you materials for building God's house. Just as David used treasures from the Gentile nations to build the Lord's temple, God's spiritual kingdom will be built with people of all nations upon Jesus Christ.

God has blessed each of us with gifts, each one of us has different gifts – and these gifts are magnified by the Holy Spirit. David dedicated these gifts to the building of the Lord's house, now what will you do with your gifts? Is your gift teaching? Is it singing? Is it encouragement? Is it generosity? Is it speaking? Is it math? And when it comes down to it, the greatest gift we have is life. What have you done with yours? Will you dedicate your gifts to the Lord, or will you hoard them for yourself? Dedicate your gifts to the Lord, and he will use them to build his kingdom.

Part II: The Gracious King of His Cities

David was a man after God's own heart, a man who sought after the glory of God, and God made him a ruler who is right and just. But not only was David right and just, he was also extremely gracious and very generous. Let's all please read ch. 9, v.1: "David asked, 'Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?'" This is rare, and very uncommon. Usually, a king would ask, "Is there anyone still left in my enemy's family so I can eliminate them?" Didn't David remember how Saul's uncle Abner used Saul's son Ish-Bosheth to rebel against him? Why would he want to show kindness to a member of the enemy's family? It was because he wanted to keep his promise before God for Jonathan's sake. In 1 Sam 20:15, David promised Jonathan that he would never cut off kindness from Jonathan's family, even if God cut off all of David's enemies from the earth. Because he made this promise before God, he wanted to keep it, because God had kept his promises to him.

David also had a desire to do what was good, and he sought out opportunities to do good. Keeping this promise was a perfect opportunity to do something good. Is your mind tuned to the desire to look for opportunities to do good for the Lord? The Lord himself did not wait for us to ask before doing good for us, but plans in advance good things for us. David did not wait for someone to ask him to do something good, but pursued this opportunity, bringing Ziba, who was a servant of Saul, into his court.

In verse 3 he Jonathan asks Ziba, "Is there no one still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show God's kindness?" David wanted to show God's kindness, the kindness he had experienced when God made those promises to him in the previous chapter. God showed an overwhelming, unmerited kindness to David, which caused him to pray before the Lord, "Is this your usual way of dealing with man?" This is called grace. David had a desire to show kindness because he experienced God's kindness. Remember the time of God's kindness to you, whether it was an answer to prayer or the lifting of a burden,

and even the forgiveness of your sins, and seek out opportunities to show that kindness to others.

Mephibosheth was a surviving son of Jonathan. When it was known that Saul and Jonathan were killed, a nurse picked him up and fled, but he fell and became crippled at 5 years old (2 Sam 4:4). He was staying in the house of Makir at Lo Debar, when David had him brought down to Jerusalem. Look at ch.9 v.6 “When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor.” Notice the humility of Mephibosheth. He was the son of a prince, and grandson of David’s enemy, but he acknowledged David’s kingship and bowed down to pay him honor. When he was brought to David, David exclaimed, “Mephibosheth!” I can imagine how happy David must have been to see the son of a man he held dear. He probably even saw a little bit of Jonathan in his face.

David said to him, “Don’t be afraid, for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table.” Mephibosheth had every reason to be afraid – here he was, lame and crippled, at the mercy of his grandfather’s enemy, who happens to be the greatest warrior and the most powerful man in all Israel. Should we not have the same attitude, when we come before the throne of the Creator and the Most High God? David then proceeded to show God’s kindness, giving him back all the land that belonged to Saul. This was quite a large estate, in fact it took a man with 15 sons and 20 servants to run the place. What’s more, he was treated as family, he was treated like a son to David, and invited to eat at the king’s table.

Mephibosheth responds with even greater humility than before, look at v.8, “Mephibosheth bowed down and said, ‘What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?’” This is similar to the response David had toward God, “Who am I, O Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far (2 Sam 7:18)?” This should be your response when you come face to face with the grace and kindness of God. We are dead dogs, we are lame, we are cripples, just like Mephibosheth. We are enslaved by the burden of sin, we seek after our own glory which fades away as the grass withers and the flowers fall. I heard the testimony of a former professional basketball player, Wayne Simeon. He was a rookie (1st year player) when the Miami Heat won the championship that year. At first, he did experience the glory, but in just 2 days later, the fans were shouting “Repeat, Repeat.” They forgot about the great accomplishment that was made 2 days ago and demanded more from these basketball players. The next year they were swept by the Chicago Bulls in the first round of the playoffs, and were booed off the court. Simeon later left the empty way of life (the NBA!) and entered into Christian ministry.

We were enslaved by the unsatisfying but demanding burden of sin, but the Lord had planned to show us kindness in advance. The Lord, who is the King over the heavens and the earth, the Creator God gives you his Word. He said, “In my father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. (John 14:2)” He said, “Friends, haven’t you any fish? (John 21:5)” He said, “Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father’s kingdom. (Matt 26:27-29).” He desires to restore to us a place in heaven, and invites us

to eat at his table. How do you respond to this? Do you have a king? What is he like? My King is righteous, he is just, and he is full of mercy and grace.

Part III: Fighting for His Cities

Doing one good deed encourages another one, so just after David has shown the kindness of God to Mephibosheth, he wanted to show kindness to Hanun, son of Nahash the Ammonite. You might remember Nahash from 1 Sam 11, where he said he would make a treaty on the condition he gets to gouge out the right eye of all the people in Jabesh Gilead. He was an enemy of the Israelites, but had shown kindness to David, most likely during the time he was fleeing from Saul, so perhaps Nahash's motives in being kind to David were not very pure. In this chapter (10), Nahash has died and his son Hanun succeeded him as king. David sent a delegation to Hanun to express his sympathy, and wanted to give comfort and cheer to him.

When David's men came to the land of the Ammonites, the Ammonite nobles planted doubt in their lord Hanun's mind. They use the same language as the serpent when he tempted Eve in Genesis. First they call to question David's motive to send men to express sympathy. Then they throw in a lie once the truth is questioned: That David wanted to spy out the city and overthrow it. Perhaps this evil was in the hearts of the Ammonites, and it was simply reflected outwardly by their words and deeds. Maybe they were planning to spy and overthrow Israel, so they brought their suspicions to Hanun.

Hanun himself went to an extreme when dealing with David's delegation. He could have sent them away, but instead he chose to shave half their beards and cut off their garments, so their buttocks would show. This was tantamount to a declaration of war. Hanun had repaid evil for good. These men had no weapons or bodyguards, they came in full trust of the Ammonites, but the Ammonites betrayed that trust and utterly humiliated them. These were men of peace, and not common men. They were representatives of David, dignitaries, foreign delegates, but they were treated scornfully. It was as if Hanun wanted to send a message, and was provoking David to war to try and overtake him to acquire his kingdom. David showed compassion to his delegation, advising them to stay in Jericho until their beards had grown back. He protected them from being humiliated in their home town, and would soon come out to avenge the injustice that had been done.

The Ammonites realized they had picked on the wrong king, and knew they were no match for the Israelites, so they hired 33,000 fighting men from the region north of Israel. When David heard this he sent Joab to fight the battle. When Joab reached the city gates in Ammonite territory, he found himself trapped. At the city gates were the Ammonites, and out in the open country were all the other fighting men. If Joab gets close to the gate, the other army can come and get them from behind.

This trial brought out the best in Joab. He showed courage, wisdom and faith in God. He divided his army into 2 – the best of the fighters followed him and would attack the Arameans. The rest of the fighters went with Abishai to attack the Ammonites. The Arameans, since they were fighters for hire, were probably the more difficult opponent. Look at ch.10, v.11 “Joab said, ‘If the Arameans are too strong for me, then you are to come to my rescue; but if the Ammonites are too strong for you, then I will come to rescue you.’” Though they were divided, they were divided only to protect one another's

backs. They were instructed to support one another if one of the enemies proved too strong. This is a great example of how Christians are to treat one another – with love and support, covering over one another’s weaknesses. If we see that one of our brothers is struggling, we should come to their rescue. Jesus says this plainly in John 15:17: “This is my command: Love each other.” Let us look for opportunities to show God’s kindness to one another, let us love and support one another more, let us love one another as we would love ourselves. Employ your gifts to the service of the Lord to bless others, whether it’s serving or singing or encouraging or teaching. I don’t know how much value Mary and I add to the Bible club, but the reason we go is to support and encourage the club. Not everyone needs to do this, but find some opportunity to show love to one another.

Can we all read v.12: “Be strong and let us fight bravely for our people and the cities of God. The Lord will do what is good in his sight.” I can imagine that after Joab said this to his army, they sprang forth with inspired hearts and spirits. In David’s time, the enemies of God were other people – I can’t exactly say why, maybe it has to do with the fact that people had to kill for survival, or it may be related to the fact that Jesus had not died for sinners yet, but today, the battle is different. Paul describes this in Eph 6:12 “For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.” We battle daily with our sins, the lusts of the flesh. We battle daily with seeking our own glory and pleasure. We battle daily with the temptations in this world – on TV and the internet. We battle with those who persecute and shame Jesus Christ. How should we fight? Again, Ephesians 6:16-18 gives us a clue: we guard ourselves with the shield of faith. We protect our heads with the helmet of salvation and we fight our battles with the sword of the Spirit – the word of God. And we pray on all occasions. Pray that the devil’s strongholds may be taken down. Pray for the God’s will to be done, and for his kingdom to come.

Finally, we trust in the Lord. Joab said the Lord will do what is good in his sight. Although things might seem impossible, the most trying times will bring out our best when we fight the spiritual battle bravely and trust in the Lord. Let’s look at what happened with Joab in v.13: “Then Joab and the troops with him advanced to fight the Arameans, and they fled before him.” The Lord gave Joab success. Once the Ammonites saw the Arameans flee, they ran back into their gates. Who can stand against the Lord’s army? The Arameans regrouped, and called some more reinforcements in from beyond the Euphrates River, now only to be met by the king himself. Even as they fled, David killed 40,000 of their foot soldiers. Now, this might have been the same event as in ch.8, when David defeated Hadadezer, or it might not have been, but the point is the Lord gave David victory. From this point the Arameans no longer helped the Ammonites, because they knew it was useless to fight against the Lord.

The Lord has laid the foundation of his kingdom on Jesus Christ. Peace was established through him. Just as David dedicated treasures from every nation for the physical temple, so when we dedicate our gifts to the Lord, he will build his kingdom from people of all nations. We have a gracious King who is preparing a place for us in paradise, in heaven, and invites us to eat with Him. He sits at the right hand of God interceding for us every day, so that we may be able to fight the battles for God’s people

and God's cities. Fight bravely for God's kingdom, pray for His holy nation. Just as an Olympic athlete will work hard to glorify his country, so let us aim to bring glory the cities of our God.

Through all these things, it is the Lord who gives us victory – because it is the Lord's kingdom. May his kingdom come, and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Those who belong to God's city have a hope of a great inheritance, and I would like to close with verses from Heb 11:9-10: "By faith [Abraham] made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God."