

STUDIES IN SAMUEL A DIGEST OF CHAPTER 23

- Vv. 1-7 *David's last song.* David described himself as a "sweet psalmist of Israel" (v. 1). He was just that. He gave Israel many of her outstanding spiritual songs and found expression for many thoughts of his mind in poetic structure which could be set to music.
- Vv. 8-39 *David's mighty men.* What David accomplished was not done by his own power alone. Men of great ability had joined themselves to him. They had fought many campaigns together. It is fitting that their names should be mentioned as the final days of David are described.

LESSONS FOR LEARNING

1. *God spake by men.* David said, "The spirit of the Lord spake by me" (v. 2). This is one of the clearest claims for inspiration made anywhere in these books. David did not speak by his own will alone. God's spirit guided him. He was inspired.
2. *Many hands make light tasks.* A careful reading of the epistles of Paul will reveal that he had a galaxy of helpers to assist him in his preaching of the gospel. Some of them are well known—Timothy, Titus, Silas, Barnabas, and John Mark. Others are mentioned only briefly—Epaphras, Epaphroditus, Tertius, Tychicus, and Urbane. These helpers of Paul's number into scores. David had his helpers, too. A long list of them impresses us with the fact that God's work is accomplished largely by cooperative efforts. Men of like precious faith should bind themselves together to go forward for Christ.

4. David's Last Words and His Mighty Men, 23:1-39.

David's Last Song. 23:1-7

Now these *be* the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man *who was* raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said,

2 The Spirit of the Lord spake by me,
and his word *was* in my tongue.

3 The God of Israel said,
the Rock of Israel spake to me,
He that ruleth over men *must* be just,
ruling in the fear of God.

4 And *he shall be* as the light of the morning, *when* the
sun riseth,
even a morning without clouds;
as the tender grass *springing* out of the earth
by clear shining after rain.

5 Although my house *be* not so with God;
yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant,
ordered in all *things*, and sure:
for *this is* all my salvation, and all *my* desire,
although he make *it* not to grow.

6 But *the sons* of Belial *shall be* all of them as thorns
thrust away,
because they cannot be taken with hands:

7 but the man *that* shall touch them
must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear;
and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the *same*
place.

1. *What titles did David ascribe to himself? 23:1*

David stood in a long line of great men such as Jacob, Moses, Joshua, and Samuel. When Jacob came to the end of his life, he called his sons before him and blessed each of them. This was his last testament (Genesis 49:1-33).

As Moses laid down the reins of leadership of Israel, he gave a blessing to each of the tribes (Deuteronomy 33:1-29). He had already composed a song (Deuteronomy 32:1-52). Joshua called the tribes of Israel to him as he was nearing his death and made a covenant with them (Joshua 24:1-28). Samuel had also uttered a valedictory when he was about to die (I Samuel 12:1-15). David not only composed a song, but he uttered a few last words in summary of his career. He called himself by titles which must have meant the most to him—"the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel."

2. *Was David inspired of God? 23:2*

The great hymn of triumph in chapter twenty-two composed when David was at the zenith of his prosperity was followed by his "last words." They were delivered as a parting testimony to the world of his confidence in the fulfillment of the promise concerning the everlasting dominion of his posterity, and it was all given as an oracle of God. He claims for his words the special divine inspiration which was granted to the spokesmen of God. Christ, Himself bore witness of the fact that David was inspired (Matthew 22:43).

3. *What was David's view of a ruler? 23:3*

David knew that a king should be just. He had learned this through his experiences, but most of all through the revelation God had given him. A ruler was one who should lead his people in the fear of God. He was to be "as the light of the morning when the sun riseth; even a morning without clouds" (verse 4 a). God's people depended on the king for life-giving provisions as the earth depends upon the life-giving sunshine of a cloudless morning. David went on to say that the king was to be like the tender grass, springing out of the earth after a rain shower (verse 4 b). To appreciate this latter figure, the reader must remember that Palestine is not per-

petually clothed in verdure. At times, the land was only a brown, hard-baked, gaping plain. At intervals there would be only withered stems of thistles and other hardy plants to tell that life had ever existed there. When the rains came, there was the deep, solid growth of clover, and grasses. David had been familiar with such yearly transformations of the dry and dusty landscape around Bethlehem into a lovely garden of brilliant flowers. These annual transformations were an emblem of the gracious influences of the righteous government guided by the ideal king. David here arose to a height of inspired utterance which should be compared with the lofty utterances of Isaiah, who spoke of the wilderness and the desert rejoicing and blossoming "as the rose" (Isaiah 35:1). David's utterance finds its fullest fruition in the Lord Jesus Christ and His righteous rule over all nations. The prophecy in David's last words is the companion and the complement of the prophecy in II Samuel 7. There the promise of an eternal dominion was given to the house of David and found a partial fulfillment in his immediate descendants, but the complete fulfillment could only be in Christ. In David's last words he drew by inspiration a portrait of an ideal ruler, some features of which were realized partially in Solomon and the better kings of Judah, but the complete picture finds its perfect realization only in Jesus Christ. David could hope for little more; and he closed his oracle concerning the king with a statement that this was all his salvation and his desire, even though he had not seen the full enlargement of the picture (verse 5).

4. *With what psalm may this oracle be compared?*

23:6, 7

David shifts his attention from the righteous ruler to the base and shameless sons of Satan, who are described throughout the books of Samuel as the "sons of Belial." He makes this same kind of a shift in Psalm 1 where he

began by describing the man who did not stand in the council of the ungodly, or walk in the way of the sinner, or sit in the seat of the scoffer. After David described the righteous man who meditated day and night in the Law of the Lord and predicted he would bring forth his fruit in his season, he turned his attention to the unrighteous. They were not so, but were like chaff which the wind drove away (Psalm 1:4). Although the wording is not the same, the spirit of this last oracle is much like the thrust of the first Psalm.

David's Mighty Men. 23:8-39

8 These *be* the names of the mighty men whom David had: The Tachmonite that sat in the seat, chief among the captains; the same *was* Adino the Eznite: *he lifted up his spear* against eight hundred, whom he slew at one time.

9 And after him *was* Eleazar the son of Dodo the Ahohite, *one* of the three mighty men with David, when they defied the Philistines *that* were there gathered together to battle, and the men of Israel were gone away:

10 He arose, and smote the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand clave unto the sword: and the Lord wrought a great victory that day; and the people returned after him only to spoil.

11 And after him *was* Shammah the son of Agee the Hararite. And the Philistines were gathered together into a troop, where was a piece of ground full of lentils: and the people fled from the Philistines.

12 But he stood in the midst of the ground, and defended it, and slew the Philistines: and the Lord wrought a great victory.

13 And three of the thirty chief went down, and came to David in the harvest time unto the cave of Adullam: and the troop of the Philistines pitched in the valley of Rephaim.

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14 And David *was* then in a hold, and the garrison of the Philistines *was* then *in* Beth-lehem.

15 And David longed, and said, Oh, that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Beth-lehem, which *is* by the gate!

16 And the three mighty men brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Beth-lehem, that *was* by the gate, and took *it*, and brought *it* to David: nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the Lord.

17 And he said, Be it far from me, O Lord, that I should do this: *is not this* the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives? therefore he would not drink it. These things did these three mighty men.

18 And Abishai, the brother of Joab, the son of Zeruiah, was chief among three. And he lifted up his spear against three hundred, *and slew them*, and had the name among three.

19 Was he not most honorable of three? therefore he was their captain: howbeit he attained not unto the *first* three.

20 And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man, of Kabzeel, who had done many acts, he slew two lionlike men of Moab: he went down also and slew a lion in the midst of a pit in time of snow:

21 And he slew an Egyptian, a goodly man: and the Egyptian had a spear in his hand; but he went down to him with a staff, and plucked the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and slew him with his own spear.

22 These *things* did Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and had the name among three mighty men.

23 He was more honorable than the thirty, but he attained not to the *first* three. And David set him over his guard.

24 Asahel the brother of Joab *was* one of the thirty; Elhanan the son of Dodo of Beth-lehem,

- 25 Shammah the Harodite, Elikah the Harodite,
 26 Helez the Paltite, Ira the son of Ikkesh the Tekoite,
 27 Abiezer the Anethothite, Mebunnai the Hushathite,
 28 Zalmon the Ahohite, Maharai the Netophathite,
 29 Heleb the son of Baanah, a Netophathite, Ittai the
 son of Ribai out of Gibeah of the children of Benjamin,
 30 Benaiah the Pirathonite, Hiddai of the brooks of
 Gaash,
 31 Abi-albon the Arbathite, Azmaveth the Barhumite,
 32 Eliahba the Shaalbonite, of the sons of Jashen, Jonathan.
 33 Shammah the Hararite, Ahiam the son of Sharar the
 Hararite,
 34 Eliphelet the son of Ahasbai, the son of the Maacha-
 thite, Eliam the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite,
 35 Hezrai the Carmelite, Paarai the Abrite,
 36 Igal the son of Nathan of Zobah, Bani the Gadite,
 37 Zelek the Ammonite, Nahari the Beerothite, armor-
 bearer to Joab the son of Zeruiah,
 38 Ira an Ithrite, Gareb an Ithrite,
 39 Uriah the Hittite: thirty and seven in all.

5. *Who were David's "mighty men?"* 23:8-39

David had a fine list of officers who were responsible for many of the affairs of state, and they were listed on two occasions (II Samuel 8:14-18; 20:23-26). In addition to these leaders, David had three chief officers, and thirty-four other mighty men. The officers are listed here and also in I Chronicles 11 and I Chronicles 27. A comparison of the listings of the names is as follows:

A listing is as follows:

<i>II Samuel xxiii</i>	<i>*I Chronicles xi</i>	<i>I Chronicles xxvii</i>
Adino	Jashobeam	Jashobeam
Eleazar	Eleazar	Dodai
Shammah		
Abishai	Abishai	

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Benaiah	Benaiah	Benaiah
Asahel	Asahel	Asahel
Elhanan	Elhanan	
Shammah	Shammoth	Shamhuth
Elika		
Helez	Helez	Helez
Ira	Ira	Ira
Abiezer	Abiezer	Abiezer
Mebunnai	Sibbecai	Sibbecai
Zalmon	Ilai	
Maharai	Maharai	Maharai
Heleb	Heled	Heldai
Ittai	Ithai	
Benaiah	Benaiah	Benaiah
Hiddai	Hurai	
Abi-albon	Abiel	
Azmaveth	Azmaveth	
Eliahba	Eliahba	
(The sons of)	(The sons of)	
Jashen	Hashem	
Jonathan	Jonathan	
Ahiam	Ahiam	
Eliphelet	Eliphai	
Shammah of	Hepher	
Harar		
Eliam	Abijah	
Hezro	Hezro	
Paarai	Naarai	
Igal	Joel	
Bani	Mibhar	
Zelek	Zelek	
Naharai	Naharai	
Ira	Ira	
Gareb	Gareb	
Uriah	Uriah	

*In I Chronicles xi sixteen additional names are given.

6. *How had these men attained to their rank?* 23:8

Adoni had won his rank as chief among the captains when he had slain 800 men on one occasion (verse 8). Eleazar, another of the three mighty men of David, had fought so valiantly that his hand had tensed; and when the battle was done, he could not unclasp his sword (verse 10). Shammah had stood his ground in the midst of a field and achieved a mighty victory against the Philistines (verses 11, 12). Others had performed similar feats of courage and valor which had earned them places of leadership in David's army.

7. *When had the three mighty men befriended David?*
23:13-17

Three of David's thirty chief men had gone down to the well at Bethlehem to get some of the water from the well in order to quench David's thirst. David must have longed for a taste of this water when he was fleeing from Saul and staying in Adullam (I Samuel 22:1). It was while David was there that his parents had come to him. He must have reminisced on the occasion and thought how good would be the taste of some water from the well from which he had drunk as a lad at home in Bethlehem. Three of his mighty men broke through the lines of the Philistines and got the water out of the well which was by the gate of Bethlehem and brought some of it to David. David refused to drink of it and poured it out before the Lord. David did not do this because he did not appreciate the sacrifice the men had made in getting it for him, but he felt unworthy to drink the water after they had risked their lives to get it. He poured it out as an offering to the Lord. These three mighty men had endeared themselves to David by putting their lives in jeopardy to do a service for him.

8. *What other feats had his mighty men performed?* 23:18

Abishai, Jacob's brother, who had led a third of David's army when they put down the revolt of Absalom's army, had slain 300 men at one time. This had built quite a reputation for him (verse 18). Benaiah had slain two lion-like men of Moab and had also gone down and killed a lion in the midst of a pit in the time of snow (verse 20). He had also killed an Egyptian who had a reputation as a fierce fighter (verse 21). The reference to his killing a lion in the midst of the snow is a unique reference to some of the circumstances of the land. Lions were not common and it must have been a mountain lion. It must have been killed in the heights where snow would be most likely to fall. Reference was made to Asahel in David's list of mighty men (verse 24), although he had died quite early at the hands of Abner (II Samuel 2:18). Uriah, the Hittite, the husband of Bathsheba, was also mentioned. He had indeed proved himself to be a valiant soldier, and his death arose out of the tragic circumstances of David's sin with Bathsheba (verse 39).

CHAPTER 23 IN REVIEW

1. What titles did David ascribe to himself? _____
2. Was David inspired of God? _____
3. By what figure did he refer to God? _____
4. To what did David compare a just ruler? _____
5. To what Psalm may these words be compared? _____
6. How many mighty men did David have? _____
7. Where was the well from which three of his men brought him water? _____
8. Which soldier killed a lion in a pit? _____
9. Who fought so long that his hand clung to his sword? _____
10. Was Uriah one of these "mighty men"? _____