**From river to river** 30/4/23 dkm

Read: 2Samuel 8, 1Timothy 3

Text: 2Samuel 8

Psalms: 24, 23, 60:5-12, 134a

‘We have no God-given right to this land. We must continue to fight in order to keep it’. These words were spoken by one of our leaders in his Anzac Day message; this man’s brother was a missionary in PNG and died as a prisoner of the Japanese. They are fine sounding words for Anzac Day but are they true. Do you think our parents or grandparents would have spoken such words? I know my grandmother gave thanks to God when we won the Second World War. Do you think King David would have spoken such words? We may not have a God-given ‘right’ to this land, but should we not see it as God given? We give thanks to the Lord for saving us from domination by a pagan power, although pagan influences and power are today arising from within our land. Recognising our land as God-given does not mean we do not have to fight to preserve our land and our freedom from enemies, be they foreign powers or attacks from within.

David fought many battles while defending and extending the borders of the land God first promised to Abraham. In the covenant God ‘cut’ with Abraham he promised to give his descendants the land from the River of Egypt to the River Euphrates; in fact he said, ‘I have given you this land’ (Gen 15:18). In doing this God would judge the ‘sin of the Amorites’, the present inhabitants. Joshua undertook the first ‘judgment’ upon the Amorites or Canaanites, but he did not establish the extended borders promised to Abraham. It was King David who ruled over the land from river to river, although he did not settle Jewish people in all places.

The Philistines attacked Israel soon after David was made king, and David, after inquiring of the Lord, and with the Lord’s help, defeated them (5:17-25). Chapter 8 seems to pick up from where he left off with the Philistines but the opening words , ‘After this it came to pass’ are not specific with regard to time (8:1). This chapter begins with David defeating other enemy nations, tells of him dedicating captured silver and gold to the Lord, and ends with him delegating positions in his expanding administration.

**1. Defeating enemies**

The Philistines kept attacking Israel all during the reign of Saul, and actually overcame Saul in the battle that led to Saul’s death. They came up to test David when he became king but he drove them back to Gath, as we have already seen (5:25). They attacked yet again, so it seems, and David again attacked and subdued them, taking what seems to be a city, or maybe some other object from them (‘Metheg Ammah’ 8:1, 1Chron 18:1).

We are then told of David defeating the Moabites, people who lived to the east of the Dead Sea. They were actually descendants of Lot through incest with his daughter. But Ruth, David’s grandmother, was from Moab and he sent his parents to Moab to keep them safe from Saul. Yet Saul had to fight the Moabites, and it seems David had to do the same. David defeated the Moabites and did something strange by way of retribution; strange to us to the extent that we understand what he did. What David did to the Moabite men was make them lie down and ‘measure them off with a line’ (8:2). It seems he spared every third man from being put to death; but it may be that the ‘line’ was the man’s height and that he spared boys who were one line rather than two lines in height, as in adults. Those spared by David became his servants and brought tribute to him. There is no mention of David setting up garrisons in Moab; it was close enough to move quickly against any uprising, as happened with the neighbouring Ammonites.

‘David also defeated Hadadezer… king of Zobah’ (8:3). Zobah was a region in the north, beyond Damascus and extending to the Euphrates. Details of this battle are not given, apart from the fact that David captured one thousand chariots, seven thousand cavalry and twenty thousand infantry. Another ‘strange’ thing David did was hamstring all but enough horses for one hundred chariots (8:4). A horse that was hamstrung could walk but not work or be used in warfare. David captured a lot of chariots but without horses these could not be used in any uprising against him. The captured foot-soldiers were either imprisoned or drafted into his own army over time. Whichever it was, the army of Hadadezer was wiped out.

Next among the subdued nations is ‘the Syrians of Damascus’ who came to help Hadadezer but suffered an even worse defeat. Some twenty-two thousand Syrians were killed by David’s men. David’s strategy with Syria was to set up garrisons around the country from which his men could keep watch over the Syrians. David made the Syrians his subjects and they paid tribute or taxes to him (8:6). So it was that countries to the north, all the way to the Euphrates, became subject to David, in addition to Moab to the south-east and the Philistines to west. The Ammonites to the east and the Edomites further to the south-east had previously been subdued by Israel.

David was a wise and strong leader, and a brilliant military strategist. But this is not what we are told with regard to all these victories over neighbouring nations who opposed. What we are told is that, ‘The Lord preserved David wherever he went’ (8:6, 14). It is not brilliant preachers or church growth experts that the Lord is looking for; He is looking for faithful believers, men and women who will look to him, listen to him, and serve him in the strength he gives them. He found such a person in David. Has he found such a person in you?

**2. Dedicating silver and gold to the Lord**

In ancient times kings went to war to gain territory and riches; is it any different today? David, as king, went to war for a different reasons. With the Philistines it was because they came against him, and it may have been the same with other nations. But it was also because the Lord told him to go and fight them, and defeat them. He went to war in obedience to the command of the Lord. When he defeated these enemies he brought home lots of plunder of course, but he did not use this to enrich himself or his family. David dedicated the treasures taken in war to the Lord (8:11). The silver, gold and bronze was put aside for use by Solomon in building the temple in Jerusalem.

The servants of Hadadezer had shields of gold, or shields covered with gold, which David took back to Jerusalem. From cities that belonged to Hadadezer David took lots of bronze back to Jerusalem with him (8:7, 8). Another king from this northern region, Toi, king of Hamath, actually sent articles of silver, gold, and bronze as gifts to David. He sent these treasures through his son, expressing gratitude that David had defeated Hadadezer, a mutual enemy (8:10). As with the treasures taken in plunder, David dedicated these gifts from King Toi to the Lord.

David amassed a huge amount of silver, gold, and bronze from the nations he subdued in extending the kingdom from river to river (8:11, 12). His son, Solomon, would later uses these precious metals in building the temple in Jerusalem. The nations of Ammon to the east and Amalek to the south had previously been conquered. The most southern nation of Edom, which belonged to the descendants of Esau, was subdued by David (8:13, 14), or by his army led by Joab (Ps 60), or Abishai (1Chron 18:12). In Edom he set up garrisons and made the Edomites his servants, no doubt demanding tribute from them.

David of course, made a name for himself through all his military conquests. Surrounding nations feared him and his own people praised him. But he did not take the glory to himself, and did not make himself inordinately rich. David would have agreed with the words of the narrator: ‘The Lord gave David victories wherever he went’ (8:6, 14).

**3. Delegating tasks to others**

Protecting the nation from enemies is only one part of being a good king. It make the king popular if they win wars of course, and some leaders provoke wars to make themselves popular. Another aspect of being a good king is administering justice within the kingdom. David was called to shepherd the flock of God. A shepherd is tasked with protecting the flock, but also with leading and feeding them. King David sat as judge for the people. People came to him with their disputes or problems and he gave them a ruling on the matter. Absalom began his rebellion by sitting at the palace gate judging cases for the people, after telling them that David could not see them; Absalom was being deceitful of course (15:2,3).

King David reigned over Israel with justice, with truth and with equity (8:15). He showed concern for the poor and needy, for widows and orphans, as demanded by God’s law. He was king, but a king anointed by God and responsible to God. As a man after God’s own heart, he would rule according to God’s heart. Moreover, David delegated tasks to carefully selected men. No doubt minor judicial cases were dealt with by his deputies, and there were many other jobs to do as he set up his administration.

The President to the USA is not called a king, but he has a lot of power, and he has what is called his ‘administration’. He selects people for various positions, like chief of the army and secretary of state. The secretary of state advises the President, and often represents him abroad. David had a chief of army in Joab, the son of his sister, who continued in his administration, for the present. Jehoshaphat was appointed what is called ‘recorder’, which was probably a position like secretary of state (8:16).

Next were two priests, Zadok and Ahimelech (8:17). The king of Israel was responsible for maintaining true and orderly worship in the land. Our king has a similar responsibility according to the Westminster Confession; we will listen carefully to the vows he takes at his coronation next week. David seems to have functioned as a priest when bringing the ark up to Jerusalem, but in his administration or later administrations, the king was not allowed into the holy place of the tabernacle or temple. Many scholars say that because, in the time of Saul, Abiathar was the son of Ahimelech that these names should be reversed here in verse 17, and in 1Chronicles 24:6. Abiathar had escaped Saul’s massacre at Nob and brought the ephod to David when he was on the run from Saul. But Abiathar may have had a son and called him Ahimelech.

David also appointed a scribe or secretary. People who could read and write were probably few and far between in those days, so this man, Seraiah, had an important job writing letters and keeping records. The last man appointed by David was Benaiah who was ‘over both the Cherethites and the Pelethites’ (8:18); these are thought to be of Philistine origin, originally ‘sea people’ from the west. Benaiah kept these foreigners ain an elite body guard for David. Benaiah would later be called upon by Solomon to dispatch and replace Joab. Today’s fighting in Sudan is between the regular army and an elite bodyguard, so we are told.

David’s sons were given positions in his administration when they were old enough. They were made ‘chief ministers’ or ‘chief officials’ (8:18). Growing up in the royal household, the king’s sons would naturally assist him in his administration. In time, of course, one of them would replace him as king. Which one will become a matter of contention and unrest within David’s administration? As we will see, David did not rule his own house with the same wisdom and justice as he did the nation. If in his later years David was nominated to become an elder in the church, he would hardly have passed the test of ‘a man who rules his own house well’ (1Tim 3:4).