

David—King, Prophet, Psalmist

“David the son of Jesse reigned over all Israel. And the time that he reigned over Israel was forty years; seven years reigned he in Hebron, and thirty and three years reigned he in Jerusalem. And he died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour.”

*—I Chronicles
29:26-28*

AT THE DIRECTION OF the Lord, David, the shepherd boy and youngest son of Jesse, of Bethlehem, was anointed by Samuel to be king of Israel in place of Saul, the first king over God’s chosen people. (I Sam. 16:1-13) Though Saul’s kingship would continue for a time, God had rejected him because of his disobedience to divine instructions. Thus, David was anointed to replace Saul as king upon his death.

Following the death of Saul, David began to reign as Israel’s king. His kingship was first recognized only by the tribe of Judah, over which the initial part of his reign lasted seven years and six months. During this time he lived at Hebron, and here he was formally anointed by the people of Judah.—II Sam. 2:1-5; 5:4,5

Gradually David's power increased, and finally the united voice of all Israel called him to be king. Then, and for the third time, he was anointed king, and in Hebron there was a festival of three days to celebrate the happy event. (I Chron. 12:38-40) One of David's first acts after becoming king was to secure Jerusalem, which he seized from the Jebusites, and there he established his royal residence. Thenceforth Jerusalem became known as the "city of David."—II Sam. 5:6-9; I Chron. 11:4-7

The establishing of Jerusalem as the capital of the nation introduced a new era in David's life and in the history of the kingdom of Israel. He became a king on the scale of the great sovereigns of Egypt and Persia, with a regular ministration and organization of court and camp. He also founded a dominion which for the first time embraced the entire prophetic bounds of the "seed of Abraham."—Gen. 15:18-21

During the succeeding ten years, the Gentile nations surrounding Israel caused David considerable trouble. For the most part, however, he was victorious in his battles with them and reduced to a state of permanent subjection the Philistines on the west, the Moabites on the east, the Syrians on the northeast as far as the Euphrates River, the Edomites on the southeast, and finally the Ammonites.—II Sam. 8:1-6,14; 10:1-19; 12:26-31

David's reign was marked not only by conflicts with outside nations, but also by rebellion within his own household. The revolt of his beloved son, Absalom, brought on a crisis which sent David forth a wanderer as in the days when he fled from the jealous Saul. The final battle of Absalom's

rebellion was fought in the forest of Ephraim and terminated in the accident which led to the rebellious son's death. After this David reigned for a time in comparative peace.—II Sam. 18:1-17

THE "SURE MERCIES OF DAVID"

God spoke of David as being a man after his own heart. (I Sam. 13:13,14; Acts 13:21,22) This was not because he never yielded to the weaknesses of his flesh, but because at heart he was loyal to God and desired above everything else to please the Lord. Saul's great sin was his flagrant and willful disobedience of God's commands, while David's was simply a failure to control his passions. Therefore, the two men were judged differently by the Lord.

Because of Saul's sin the kingdom was removed from his family, the tribe of Benjamin, and David, a member of the tribe of Judah, was anointed in his stead. Because of David's tender heart condition, God made a covenant with him that under no circumstances would the kingdom be wrested even from his descendants. This covenant is referred to as the "sure mercies of David," because mercy would need to be extended in order to carry it out.—Isa. 55:3

The original statement of this covenant is recorded in II Samuel chapter 7. When finally gaining a measure of peace, David decided that he would like to build a "house" for the Lord. He said to Nathan, a prophet of the Lord, "See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains." Nathan said to David, "Go, do all that is in thine heart; for the LORD is with thee." (vss. 2,3) Nathan encouraged David in his laudable ambition without seeking divine approval. That

night the Lord spoke to Nathan and instructed him to inform David that he would not have the privilege of building him a house. Doubtless the king was greatly disappointed over this, but the Lord gave him a compensating portion, for it was in this connection that he made a special covenant with him, which we quote below in part.

“When thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his [Solomon’s] kingdom. He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men. ... But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.”—vss. 12-16

God had not shown mercy to Saul due to willful disobedience, but he had to David. Despite David’s sins due to fleshly weaknesses, God exalted the kingdom of Israel in his hands and made him a great king. Now God covenanted to preserve the kingdom within David’s family forever, even though his descendants, including his son Solomon, who would succeed him on the throne, would transgress his laws. David was greatly impressed by this, and replied to the Lord: “Who am I, O Lord GOD? and what is my house, that thou hast brought me hitherto? And this was yet a small thing in thy sight, O Lord GOD; but thou hast spoken also of thy servant’s house for a great while to come.

And is this the manner of man, O Lord GOD?"—II Sam. 7:18,19

The full understanding of this covenant with David is possible only through recognition of the fact that David's throne pointed forward to the Messianic kingdom throne, on which Jesus sits with "all power." (Matt. 28:18; Phil. 2:9-11; Rev. 3:21) However, God's providences in protecting Israel's throne in the hands of David's natural descendants are remarkable, as is manifested by a study of the experiences of the Davidic kings down to the overthrow of the last one, Zedekiah, when the nation was taken captive to Babylon.

It was then that the Prophet Ezekiel wrote concerning Zedekiah: "Thou, profane wicked prince of Israel, whose day is come, when iniquity shall have an end, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Remove the diadem, and take off the crown: this shall not be the same: exalt him that is low, and abase him that is high. I will overturn, overturn, overturn, it; and it shall be no more, until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him."—Ezek. 21:25-27

ONE "WHOSE RIGHT IT IS"

Here the kingdom of David ceased, but God's promise was not broken. Ezekiel did not say merely that the kingdom should be "no more," for this would have implied a broken promise. Instead he explained that it would be no more "until he come whose right it is." In other words, the active operation of God's promise was merely suspended until the rightful king appeared.

Note the prophecy of the birth of this one "whose right it is" to occupy forever the throne of David:

“Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder. ... Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.”—Isa. 9:6,7

In the annunciation to Mary, the angel said concerning the child who would be miraculously conceived: “He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: And he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end.”—Luke 1:32,33

Thus we see that Jesus came as the rightful king to sit on the greater spiritual throne of David. However, Jesus’ enemies put him to death, and the ruling house of David seemed doomed, even as had Israel’s throne on many occasions. Just as in the past, however, God again intervened. He raised his Son—Israel’s rightful king—from the dead. Paul associates the miracle of Jesus’ resurrection with the “sure mercies of David.” In a synagogue in Antioch he said: “We declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. And as concerning that he hath raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David.”—Acts 13:32-34

Thus we see that David was very honorably used by God in being constituted a picture of Jesus, the future King of glory. It will be through this greater house of David that God's promised blessings will flow, not just to Israel, but to "all the families of the earth." (Gen. 22:15-18; Acts 3:25,26; Gal. 3:8,16) Concerning the purpose of Christ's second advent, James, when speaking at the council in Jerusalem, quoted God's words given by the Prophet Amos: "After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; ... That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord."—Acts 15:16,17; Amos 9:11,12

David recognized that as king of Israel he was merely a representative of God, who was the real Ruler. He, like all of Israel's kings, sat on the "throne of the LORD," not on his own throne. (I Chron. 29:23) Thus the kingdom of Israel pointed forward to the Messianic government, in which the representative of Jehovah will be his beloved Son, Christ Jesus, and associated with him his footstep followers of the present Gospel Age.—II Tim. 2:1,12; Rev. 20:6

David reigned, in all, forty years—seven years in Hebron, and thirty-three years in Jerusalem. "He died in a good old age, full of days, riches, and honour: and Solomon his son reigned in his stead." (I Chron. 29:27,28) His life had consisted of some failures, but many victories. To exalt the name of Jehovah, the God of Israel and the world, the Creator of heaven and earth, was his dominating ambition. Whether strumming sweet melodies on his harp, writing psalms of trust in God and praise

to his holy name, or driving back the enemies of his people in battle, the law of the Lord was his principal meditation and his greatest delight.

DAVID THE PROPHET

In addition to being Israel's most outstanding king, David was also greatly used by God as one of his "holy prophets." (Acts 2:29,30) His prophecies are found in the Book of Psalms. They pertain largely to the sufferings and death of Jesus, his resurrection, the future glories of his kingdom, and the blessings which it will shower upon the people of all nations. The church's association with Jesus, in suffering and in glory, is also foretold by David.

Psalms 16 prophesies the death and resurrection of Jesus and the supreme confidence he would have in the promises of his God to deliver and exalt him to his own right hand, where there would be pleasures forevermore.—Ps. 16:5-11; Acts 2:31-36

In Psalm 22 is a prophecy by David foretelling Jesus' experience while hanging on the cross. Jesus is represented as saying, "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture." (vs. 18) Hanging on the cross, and watching the Roman soldiers divide his clothing among themselves and then cast lots for his costly outer garment, Jesus recognized the fulfillment of this entire prophecy, and, mustering what he could of his ebbing strength, he began to quote the psalm, saying, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"—vs. 1; Matt. 27:35,46

The second Psalm prophesies the triumphant victory of Jesus, as King, at his second advent, when he subdues the nations under him and rules

them “with a rod of iron.” (Ps. 2:1-9) In the 96th and 98th Psalms we have additional prophecies concerning the kingdom, showing that it will also be a time of righteous judgment: “Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof. Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall the trees of the wood rejoice before the LORD: for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth.”—Ps. 96:11-13

DAVID THE PSALMIST

As a writer David is referred to more often as a psalmist than a prophet, although he is only once thus described in the Bible. The text is II Samuel 23:1, and here he is referred to as “the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel.” It is in his psalms that the true and sterling character of David is revealed, and in reading them we understand better why the Lord referred to him as a man after his own heart.

Many of David’s psalms abound with praise to God. “I will bless the LORD at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul shall make her boast in the LORD: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad. O magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together.” “O God, my heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise, even with my glory. Awake, psaltery and harp: I myself will awake early. I will praise thee, O LORD, among the people: and I will sing praises unto thee among the nations. For thy mercy is great above the heavens: and thy truth reacheth unto the clouds. Be thou

exalted, O God, above the heavens: and thy glory above all the earth.”—Ps. 34:1-3; 108:1-5

David’s psalms also reflect the stormy periods of his reign as king and his struggles to hold his enemies at bay. The 9th Psalm reads: “I will praise thee, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will shew forth all thy marvellous works. I will be glad and rejoice in thee: I will sing praise to thy name, O thou most High. When mine enemies are turned back, they shall fall and perish at thy presence. For thou hast maintained my right and my cause; thou satest in the throne judging right. Thou hast rebuked the heathen, thou hast destroyed the wicked, thou hast put out their name for ever and ever.”—vss. 1-5

When victory over his enemies was delayed, David’s faith was tested. These heart-searching experiences he also reveals by psalm: “How long wilt thou forget me, O LORD? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?”—Ps. 13:1,2

David’s earlier experiences in life as a tender of his father’s sheep also lend richness and depth to his writings. How wonderfully his shepherd psalm has contributed to the comfort of God’s people through the centuries: “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil;

my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.”—Ps. 23:1-6

Because David’s heart was right in the Lord’s sight, goodness and mercy did “follow” him all the days of his life. His writings, expressive of his own deep meditations, and beautifully poetic, are also inspired by the Lord. As we have noted, many of them are prophetic. His shepherd psalm has a grand fulfillment in the lives of the spiritual David class throughout the present Gospel Age. These, even more than David, can say, “I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.”

Who but a godly king whose desire was to rule righteously that his subjects might be blessed, could have foretold so eloquently the rulership of the Messiah of Israel, as did David, when he wrote: “He shall judge thy people with righteousness, and thy poor with judgment. ... He shall judge the poor of the people, he shall save the children of the needy. ... In his days shall the righteous flourish; and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth.”—Ps. 72:2,4,7,8

The description of Messiah’s kingdom and its blessings, which the Holy Spirit inspired David to describe in this psalm, made him feel, seemingly, that there could be nothing more he needed to ask of God. Thus he wrote: “Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be his glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with his glory; Amen, and Amen. The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.”—vss. 18-20 ■