

1 Chronicles 9:35-11:9

“The Kingdom of God”

Our text today falls into two parallel structures

Saul and the fall of the kingdom of God at Mount Gilboa (ch 10)

David and the greatness of the kingdom of God in Jerusalem (ch 11).

Chapter 10 moves from the disintegration of Israel in the death of Saul
to the honor of the valiant men of Jabesh-Gilead,
to the reason for Saul’s death – found in his breach of faith.

Chapter 11 moves from the reintegration of Israel in the anointing of David,
to the honor of Joab in his service to David,
to the reason for David’s greatness: “the LORD of hosts was with him.”

The message is clear:

if your king breaks faith with the LORD, then you are doomed;

if the LORD of hosts is with your king, then you will live.

This is why you need king Jesus –

because he is the king who lives forever at the right hand of God!

Introduction: from Genealogy to Narrative (9:35-41)

But the genealogy of Saul at the end of chapter 9 is a curious way to set up the story.

If the Chronicler merely wished to explain where Saul came from,
he would have stopped in the middle of verse 39 with Saul,
or perhaps at the end of verse 39 with Saul’s sons –
three of whom die in the following chapter.

But the genealogy keeps going.

It keeps going for another 12 generations.

Reference is made to Zimri – perhaps the Zimri who ruled for 7 days over Israel.

But for Saul’s house to continue for another 12 generations

indicates that the house of Saul was not entirely wiped out.

The Lord had mercy on the house of Saul –

and while they were no longer worthy of being the center of the story,
they were not eradicated from the story!

I suggested last time that this is part of the role of Benjamin in the story of Israel.

Benjamin has a pretty awful history –

they were the one tribe that sinned so bad

that they were nearly obliterated!

And they were the tribe of Israel’s failed king.

And if the Zimri of verse 42 is the Zimri of 1 Kings 16,

then they are also the tribe with the shortest reigning king ever!

But Benjamin went with the house of David.

Twelve generations later – the house of Saul continues to flourish.

Why?

Because Benjamin was content *not* to be first.

The house of Saul imitated Jonathan – Saul’s son –
in yielding to David.

You may have been a complete catastrophe the first time around –
but if you yield to the Son of David,
and acknowledge *him* as Lord and King of your life,
you may yet have a future!

Or to quote that immortal VeggieTales line:

“Our God is a God of second chances!”

1. The Fall of the Kingdom of God at Mount Gilboa (10:1-14)

But first we need to see the catastrophe clearly in chapter 10!

The verb “to fall” is used four times in the first eight verses of chapter 10

“the men of Israel...fell slain on Mount Gilboa” (v1)

“Saul took his own sword and fell upon it” (v4)

“his armor-bearer...also fell upon his sword” (v5)

“the Philistines...found Saul and his sons fallen on Mount Gilboa” (v8).

Not surprisingly, the other key word is the verb “fled” –

“the men of Israel fled before the Philistines” (v1)

“when all the men of Israel who were in the valley saw that the army had fled...,
they abandoned their cities and fled” (v7).

In the days of Saul, Israel fell and Israel fled.

As goes the king, so goes the people!

a. When the King Falls on His Sword: the Disintegration of Israel (1-7)

¹ Now the Philistines fought against Israel, and the men of Israel fled before the Philistines and fell slain on Mount Gilboa. ² And the Philistines overtook Saul and his sons, and the Philistines struck down Jonathan and Abinadab and Malchi-shua, the sons of Saul. ³ The battle pressed hard against Saul, and the archers found him, and he was wounded by the archers. ⁴ Then Saul said to his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword and thrust me through with it, lest these uncircumcised come and mistreat me." But his armor-bearer would not, for he feared greatly. Therefore Saul took his own sword and fell upon it. ⁵ And when his armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he also fell upon his sword and died. ⁶ Thus Saul died; he and his three sons and all his house died together. ⁷ And when all the men of Israel who were in the valley saw that the army had fled and that Saul and his sons were dead, they abandoned their cities and fled, and the Philistines came and lived in them.

We don't hear much about Saul in Chronicles.
What we do hear is all bad.

At first, we do not hear *why* Saul is bad.
At first we hear simply of the death of Saul and the defeat of Israel.

The location is important.
Mt. Gilboa is in the northern part of the land –
quite a ways from Gibeah, Saul's home town.

If all you do is look at a flat map, it makes little sense.
The terrain is the key!
The hill country of Judah and of Ephraim is difficult terrain.
If you want to bring a large army against Israel,
the best place to attack is further north,
where the land opens up –
and the lowlands reach almost to the Jordan River.
Armies coming from the north would come down the Jezreel Valley to this spot.
Armies coming from the south also aim for this spot.

Mt Carmel to the northwest – Mt Tabor to the northeast –
Mt Ebal and Mt Gerizim to the south –

And for the Israelites,
this is the weakest spot for your defences.
If an enemy gets past Mt Gilboa,
the towns and cities of the valley will be helpless.

Mt Gilboa looks like a good place to take a stand!

But Saul does not stand.
He falls – and Israel flees.
The fall of Saul and his armor-bearer reminds us of the story in Judges
when Abimelech, the wicked son of Gideon, was besieging Thebez,
and a certain woman “threw an upper millstone on Abimelech's head
and crushed his skull.
Then he called quickly to the young man his armor-bearer and said to him,
'Draw your sword and kill me, lest they say of me,
'A woman killed him.'”
And his young man thrust him through, and he died.” (Jg 9:53-54)

Saul is portrayed here as another Abimelech –
another failed king of Israel, who dies an ignominious death.

Indeed, Saul's death is worse than Abimelech's

because with the death of Saul and all his house,
the men of Israel abandoned their cities in the valley,
“and the Philistines came and lived in them.”

Judges 1 says that the men of Judah captured Gaza, Ashkelon and Ekron –
three of the five cities of the Philistines.
But now the Philistines have come into the very heartland of Israel.

If there is no army to defend the valley,
then the people of Israel must flee to the hills – or perish.

The death of the king results in the disintegration of the people.

Perhaps it is not surprising
that when our Lord Jesus Christ died on the cross,
all his followers fled as well.

When the king falls, the people flee.

b. The Honor of Jabesh-Gilead: the Burial of Saul (8-12)

⁸The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, they found Saul and his sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. ⁹And they stripped him and took his head and his armor, and sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines to carry the good news to their idols and to the people. ¹⁰And they put his armor in the temple of their gods and fastened his head in the temple of Dagon.

Verses 8-12 are an important part of the story.

Verses 8-10 recount what the Philistines did:

they found Saul and his sons,
they stripped them and took Saul’s head and armor,
and they sent messengers to carry the good news
to their idols and to their people;
then they put Saul’s armor in the temple of their gods,
and fastened his head in the temple of Dagon.

In 1 Samuel 5, the ark of the LORD was captured by the Philistines,
and they put the ark of the LORD in the temple of Dagon.
Now the head and armor of the king of Israel is placed there.

(1 Samuel 31 adds that Saul’s body was fastened to the wall of Beth-shan,
an Israelite town just north of Mt Gilboa)

The public humiliation of the dead was a common practice in the ancient world.
The dead bodies or heads of your enemies were put on display
as a clear sign of your superiority over them!

But verses 11-12 recount the honor of the valiant men of Jabesh-Gilead:

¹¹But when all Jabesh-gilead heard all that the Philistines had done to Saul, ¹²all the valiant men arose and took away the body of Saul and the bodies of his sons, and brought them to Jabesh. And they buried their bones under the oak in Jabesh and fasted seven days.

Why did the men of Jabesh-Gilead do this?

Because of what Saul had done for them!

In 1 Samuel 11, we hear that Jabesh-Gilead had been attacked by the Ammonites, just after Saul had been anointed as king. And when Saul heard of the humiliation of Jabesh-Gilead, “the Spirit of God rushed upon Saul... and his anger was greatly kindled” (11:6) And Saul led the people of Israel forth against the Ammonites and delivered Jabesh-gilead.

There is another connection that we often miss.

Last week we talked about the rebellion of Benjamin – and how Saul’s home town (Gibeah) was the cause of the near-destruction of the whole tribe of Benjamin.

In Judges 21, we hear of how Israel provided wives for the remnant of Benjamin. When Israel had gone up against Benjamin, they swore that none of their daughters would be given as wives to Benjaminites. But Jabesh-gilead had failed to appear. Jabesh-gilead had failed to fight for the LORD’s cause. Therefore the people of Jabesh-gilead were executed, and their virgin daughters were given to Benjamin.

So it almost certain that Saul was descended from the daughters of Jabesh-gilead.

So on the one hand, the Chronicler reminds us of all these bad memories associated with the house of Saul.

But on the other hand, the Chronicler has an undoubtedly positive view of Jabesh-gilead!

Jabesh-gilead has restored their honor.

Maybe Saul was a bad king –

but it is still a disgrace for the bodies of Saul and his sons to rot away in the open air.

(God had said that a dead body polluted the land if it was not buried)

And so the once-timid men of Jabesh-gilead now well-deserve the word “valiant.” They do not fear the power of the Philistines –

but they are honor-bound to see to it
that the one who rescued them from death be honorably buried.

[You see a similar theme when Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea –
who had once been timid –
step forward and ask for the body of Jesus.
While he was alive, they may have been timid and afraid –
but now in his death, they find the courage that has fled
from those who followed him in life!]

Courage will find you, my friends,
at odd times and places!

Notice also that when they bury Saul, they fasted seven days.
Fasting has many uses in the scriptures.
Here, it is a sign of mourning.
The valiant men of Jabesh-gilead now humble themselves before the LORD,
acknowledging that with the death of their king,
they are helpless before their enemies.

They know that their help is in the name of the LORD – who made heaven and earth!

c. Saul's Sins of Commission and Omission: "He Broke Faith" (13-14)

Verses 13-14 then state very simply the reasons why Saul died,
and why the kingdom was taken from him.

¹³So Saul died for his breach of faith. He broke faith with the LORD in that he did not keep the command of the LORD, and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance. ¹⁴He did not seek guidance from the LORD. Therefore the LORD put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David the son of Jesse.

You can see clearly here that the Chronicler
assumes that you are familiar with the book of Samuel.
The Chronicler has not made mention of any of these things –
and yet he assumes that you know exactly what he is referring to,
and so does not bother to explain himself.

Saul died for his breach of faith.
He broke faith both passively and actively.
He was guilty both of sins of omission and commission.

We can get so focused on our sins of commission – doing the things we shouldn't –
that we can forget about sins of omission – neglecting to do the things we should.

"Breach of faith" is a serious charge.
The word is used for a variety of offenses in the scriptures:

in Leviticus 5-6 it is used of offenses that require restitution plus guilt offerings;
in Deuteronomy 32 it is used of Moses' failure to treat the LORD as holy;
in Joshua 7 it is used of Achan's theft of the holy things;
in Ezekiel 14-20 it is often used of Israel's treason against the LORD;
here in Chronicles it has been used of Achan (2:7) –
and of the sin that led to the exile of Israel (5:25).

And the Chronicler now applies it to two things about Saul:

He did not keep the command of the LORD.

There are several things in the book of Samuel that fit this:

Saul had offered sacrifices – contrary to the LORD's command

He had failed to kill Agag, king of the Amalekites –
contrary to the LORD's command.

He had omitted to do what God commanded.

And he had done what God forbade –

and he compounded it by seeking guidance from a medium!

The law had said that a medium should die for the sin of witchcraft,
but Saul sought one out!

He should have sought guidance from the LORD!

Christians have no business going to fortune tellers –

not because we think all that stuff is fake

(rationalists believe that it is fake!)

For us, the reason why we do not go to mediums and fortune tellers
is because we are supposed to inquire of the LORD.

And the LORD guides his people through his Word and Spirit –
through the wisdom that he gives to his people.

Seeking guidance from a medium is considered treason against God –
breach of faith.

And Saul's treason against the LORD results in the kingdom being taken from him
and given to David.

The reason why this is so important

is because Israel's future depends on Israel's king.

If the king is faithful, then Israel lives.

If the king is treacherous, then Israel dies.

You do know, of course, that this principle remains true!

Thanks be to God, that we have a king like Jesus, the Son of David!

And the beginning of chapter 11 intentionally contrasts

the beginning of David's reign with the end of Saul's reign.

2. The Greatness of the Kingdom of God at Jerusalem (11:1-9)
a. “We Are Your Bone and Flesh”: the Covenant between King and People (v1-3)

The author of Chronicles assumes that you know the story of Samuel/Kings.

So he leaves out a lot of details –

such as the whole conflict between the house of Saul and David.

In 2 Samuel we hear that only Judah followed David for the first 7 years,
and “all Israel” only gathered together to David 7 years later.

But all that is telescoped in the Chronicler’s presentation:

¹ Then all Israel gathered together to David at Hebron and said, "Behold, we are your bone and flesh. ²In times past, even when Saul was king, it was you who led out and brought in Israel. And the LORD your God said to you, 'You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over my people Israel.'" ³So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD. And they anointed David king over Israel, according to the word of the LORD by Samuel.

There are lots of important things here:

First, “we are your bone and flesh” –

of course, they were Saul’s bone and flesh as well!

They could have said this about any Israelite, right?

The point here is *not* merely, “we are related,”

but “we are one” –

and more pointedly – “we are *yours*”.

Remember Adam saying, “this is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”?

Now all Israel is saying *we* are your bone and flesh.

Israel will play Eve to David’s Adam.

You are the one who will work and guard the garden –

and we will flourish – we will be fruitful and multiply in the land.

Second, “you led out and brought in Israel” –

going out and coming in – this is the way that scripture speaks of a king;

they are saying that David was doing the *work* of a king

even before he was the king.

Third, “all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron,

and David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD.”

The elders did not *make* David king.

They *anointed* him as king –

according to the word of the LORD by Samuel –

but they did not make him king.

David is king by divine right and divine fiat.

And David is the one who makes a covenant with the elders.

This is important because only the greater has the right to *make* (or cut)

a covenant.

The king is the one who makes a covenant with his vassals.
This is not a treaty between equals (like Solomon and Hiram of Tyre,
where “they cut a covenant together” 1 Kgs 5:12).
Rather, David made a covenant with them,
sovereignly declaring, “before the LORD,”
the terms of their relationship.

And so, with the divinely appointed Shepherd of Israel on the throne,
the anointed king leads “all Israel” to Jerusalem
to establish the stronghold of Zion.

b. The Stronghold of Zion: the King and His Commander (v4-8)

⁴And David and all Israel went to Jerusalem, that is, Jebus, where the Jebusites were, the inhabitants of the land. ⁵The inhabitants of Jebus said to David, "You will not come in here." Nevertheless, David took the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David.

Really, the whole point of the narrative in 1 Chronicles is about David and Jerusalem.
Chapters 11-12 will tell of his mighty men – who established his dominion.
Chapters 13-16 focus on the ark of the covenant being brought to Jerusalem.
Chapters 17-20 return to David’s military exploits.
Chapter 21 tells the only “bad story” about David –
but that story is necessary for understanding the location of the temple,
which then becomes the focus of chapters 22-29,
finally concluding with the death of David.

In other words, all of the 19 chapters about David
are either about his military power,
or his liturgical preparations for the temple in Jerusalem.

Verses 6-8 emphasize the place of Joab:

⁶David said, "Whoever strikes the Jebusites first shall be chief and commander." And Joab the son of Zeruiah went up first, so he became chief. ⁷And David lived in the stronghold; therefore it was called the city of David. ⁸And he built the city all around from the Millo in complete circuit, and Joab repaired the rest of the city.

In 2 Samuel, Joab is a masterful commander, but he is also a pain in David’s side.
In Chronicles, Joab is brilliant and faultless!

Chronicles portrays Joab as the sort of general that every king wishes he had.
(Samuel shows us the darker side of Joab)

This is a point that we will return to many times in Chronicles:
sometimes it is a good thing to tell “hero stories” –
stories of the great heroes of the past,

stories designed to encourage and motivate people
to the imitation of these things;
(think of Hebrews 11 – which leaves out the “darker side” of many OT heroes!)

But other times it is important to tell the “warts and all” version.
When I preached through Samuel-Kings, you got the “warts and all” version.

As we go through Chronicles I will alert you from time to time
to the fact that there is a “darker side” –
but Chronicles demands that I preach more about heroes –
and less about warts!

And the reason is found in verse 9 – the conclusion of our passage:

c. The Greatness of David: “The LORD of Hosts Was with Him” (v9)

⁹And David became greater and greater, for the LORD of hosts was with him.

David’s greatness depended on the presence of Yahweh of Hosts with him.
Everything else hinges on this.

If the LORD is with you, then nothing can stop you!
If the LORD of hosts – the God of armies – is with you,
then no foe can hinder your path.

And when the LORD is present with his anointed King,
then the greatness of the kingdom is revealed in the greatness of the king.

We do not yet see all things under his feet.
We do not yet see the glory of the kingdom fully revealed.

But we see Jesus, crowned with glory and honor through the suffering of death.
Because in the resurrection of Jesus, the kingdom has begun to be established.
In the resurrection of Jesus, the king has begun to reign.
And because the LORD of Hosts *is* now our King,
as Jesus Christ is true God and true man,
therefore the LORD of Hosts is now *with us*.

And so we pray,
“thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”
“We pray that Satan's kingdom may be destroyed;
and that the kingdom of grace may be advanced,
ourselves and others brought into it, and kept in it;
and that the kingdom of glory may be hastened.” (SC 102)

Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus!