

## **CROOK AND CROWN.**

It was a hot Sunday morning in a little country town, yet the parish church was a-buzz as it waited for a visit from no less a personage than the Bishop himself. Mother was especially excited because, as a girl, she had been confirmed by that very same reverent gentleman: she was looking forward to seeing him again, though he wouldn't recognize her now – middle-aged and with three young children in tow. The family was running late, thanks to the baby deciding to fill her nappy just as she had been dressed in her very best outfit, so that by the time they arrived at the church the Bishop was already there, along with two other dignitaries, and they had to stand outside the vestibule with some other curious bystanders while the procession made its entrance.

“Mummy! Which one's the bishop?” Six-year-old son's voice came clearly on the still, reverential air. “Shhh!” Mother whispered. “The one that's got the crook.” Whereupon son's eyes widened with excitement as once again his voice pierced the silent air. “Oooh! Mummy! Which one's the crook?”

Of course, a shepherd's crook is a very fitting insignia of office for a bishop, one who has been appointed to care for the flock. A crook was handy for hitching stray sheep back to the path as well as warding off predators. Peter put it aptly when referring to Christ, in 1 Peter 2:25, “You were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer (Bishop) of your souls.”

The forty years that Moses spent as a shepherd was God's way of equipping him for his task of leading the flock of Israel into nationhood. Moses never lost that sense of responsibility over his charges, and even as he faced his departure from life, his prayer to God was that He would appoint a man over the community who would be a good and wise leader, “so the Lord's people will not be like sheep without a shepherd.” (Numbers 27:15-17.)

***Read Numbers 27:18-23. Moses was a very humble man, but how much humility would it have taken for him to appoint his successor? Have you encountered problems where someone has held onto power long after they should have handed over the reins? What is God's answer?***

### **A new day – a new leader.**

God answered Moses' prayer immediately. He understood far better than Moses, that Israel needed a shepherd! As a successor to Moses, He chose Moses's aide, Joshua, “a man in whom is the Spirit”, whom Moses appointed as leader and whom Eleazar the priest duly anointed in front of the whole assembly.

***Read Joshua 1:1-9, then Deuteronomy 34:1-4 and Genesis 15:18-21.***

The new young leader had some big shoes to fill, and in Joshua chapter 1 we see that, by way of encouragement, God reminded Joshua of His promise to Moses in Deuteronomy 34:1-4, which in turn had been His reminder to Moses of His promise to Abraham in Genesis 15:18-21, of the extent of the territory Israel would eventually possess – a promise that was to be fulfilled in the reign of King Solomon. We see so often in the story of the covenants, that God referred to one covenant from the point of view of another: no covenant stood on its own, but was wonderfully interwoven with covenants either preceding or succeeding it.

***Can you remember times of distress when God has reminded you of past promises He has kept? How has that encouraged you?***

As the new leader, Joshua urged them to keep faithful to the Lord and the covenant He had made with them at Sinai, and while ever Joshua was alive they did serve the Lord faithfully. As a warrior, Joshua was able to break the power of the nations occupying the Promised Land, but as a

nation Israel failed to follow through God's commandment and banish those nations completely as they claimed the occupancy for themselves. The inevitable result was that pagan culture and worship began to infiltrate the nation of God's chosen people. An angel of the Lord was sent to rebuke them for breaking their covenant with God and making a covenant with the people of the land, whereupon Israel repented with loud weeping and sacrifices to God.

But with Joshua and his whole generation dead, a new generation grew up who "knew neither the Lord nor what He had done for Israel." (Judges 2:10) The Book of Judges is a sad history of the nation forsaking God, being defeated by her enemies, being led to repentance by a judge raised up by God to lead them to victory, then repeating the whole process again, *ad nauseum*. The book ends on a grim note – Judges 21:25 "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit."

***Why did God lead the Israelites through such a long period with judges over them? Why didn't He immediately appoint a king to succeed Joshua?***

### **Prophet, priest and king-maker.**

Into this scene steps Samuel, chosen by God, dedicated to God by his godly mother, trained in temple worship and the laws of God from early childhood. Samuel was the last, and the greatest, of Israel's judges: he was also a prophet and a priest. His importance in the history of Israel ranks close to that of Moses, as he, more than any other person, provided for covenant continuity and stability in the transition of the nation from the rule of judges to that of monarchy.

Samuel took over the reins at Israel's lowest ebb, when the Ark of the Covenant had been captured by their aggressive neighbours the Philistines. But in response to God's hand heavy in judgement upon them, the Philistines returned the Ark and for many long years it remained, not as the centre of Israel's worship, but in relative obscurity in the house of a man of Kiriath Jearim, Abinadab, whose son Eleazar was consecrated to the sacred task of guarding it.

***Read 1 Samuel chapter 7*** Here we see that the godly Samuel led Israel to repentance, ordering them to put away their idols and get back to a right relationship with God, with the resulting victory over their enemies including the Philistines, and for a time all was well.

***Read 1 Samuel 8:1-5*** But as Samuel grew too old to carry out all his duties, he appointed as judges his sons who had neither his own integrity nor his care for the flock of Israel. To the nation that was the last straw. Forgotten was the covenant God had made with them as His special people: forgotten, all the promises for blessing in return for their faithfulness to His leadership: forgotten was their unique mission as God's own light to the rest of the world. The elders came to Samuel and demanded that, like all the nations around them, they should have a king.

***How was it possible that a godly man like Samuel should have such ungodly sons? Were the Israelites justified in their case against Samuel?***

**"We want a king!"**

### ***Read 1 Samuel 8:6-9.***

Samuel was distressed at this evident rejection of God and took the matter straight to Him. God's answer was that, even though they had rejected Him, Samuel should do as they ask and give them a king. The irony of it all was that God had actually planned to give them a king - a king of His choice, and all in His good time: Israel's undoing was that they were not content to fall in with God's timing. Deuteronomy 17:14 ff sets out plainly the word God had given Moses - "When you enter the land the Lord your God is giving you ...and you say, 'Let us set a king over us' ....

Be sure to appoint over you *the king the Lord your God chooses*. . . . . He is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law . . . so that he may learn to revere the Lord his God and follow carefully all the words of this law . . . and not consider himself better than his brothers . . .” In other words, a very different type of king from the dictator/gods of the surrounding nations – a king close to his people, humbly aware of his own accountability to God, and acknowledging God as the supreme King over himself as well as the nation.

***Israel brought on herself a lot of trouble through not waiting for God’s timing. How can we be sure of what is God’s timing and what is our own natural impatience? When we do run ahead of God, does disaster inevitably follow in our life? Read Psalm 99:8 as a guide.***

In 1 Samuel chapters 9 and 10 we read how God directed Samuel to a young man who seemed eminently suitable to be a king – Saul, head and shoulders above other men, humble, unassuming, able to rise to the occasion when called upon. It is interesting, though, to note that not once did God ever say He had chosen Saul: in fact, Samuel introduced Saul to Israel as “Now here is the king *you* have chosen.” God indeed did instruct Samuel to anoint Saul, signifying that he was set aside to accomplish freedom for Israel from the rekindled hostility of the Philistines, and at the beginning Saul showed great promise of fulfilling that commission. It was only later that his true character came to light, with an inferiority complex that gave rise to insecurity, jealousy, arrogance, impulsiveness and deceit. He was never whole-heartedly committed to God.

Saul’s deliberate disobedience to the will of God is recorded on two occasions, in chapters 13 and 15; this marked the beginning of his inevitable downfall. “Because you have rejected the word of the Lord,” Samuel declared in 1 Samuel 15:23, “He has rejected you as king.” And in chapter 13:13,14, Samuel gave the first intimation that God had someone else waiting in the wings – ““You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you. If you had He would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure: the Lord has sought out a man after His own heart and appointed him leader of His people.”

***God knew what sort of a man was Saul. Why did He allow him to be Israel’s king?***

**The king God wanted.**

And so we come to the story of David. Samuel the aged might have thought his work was done, but now he was to carry out the most significant duty of his entire life – that of anointing the man who would become the greatest king Israel would ever have on the throne, a man who would begin the royal line that was to culminate in Christ, the King of kings. The Lord was quite specific about it. 1 Samuel 16:1 says, “I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.”

***Read 1 Samuel 16:1-13.*** We can enjoy the drama of the scene. Tiny Bethlehem was agog at the arrival of the great prophet Samuel as he summoned Jesse and all his family to a ritual sacrifice. Something was afoot and there may have been some tense rivalry among those seven sons of Jesse as they sought to present themselves all spruced up and eminently suitable for whatever post was to be offered to them. Yet Samuel was puzzled. As each son, a fine upstanding example of manhood, passed before him, God failed to give him the green light – only a reassuring word in verse 7, “The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”

***Imagine Samuel’s feelings as seven of Jesse’s sons were “passed over” by God. How much would this have tested Samuel’s faith? Are we ever too old to take new steps in our trust in God?***

Meanwhile, out in the fields, the young shepherd boy was tending his father’s sheep. In that rugged, lonely existence, David had time to learn so much about God. “The Lord is my

shepherd” is only one of the images of God to take hold of his keen mind: in caring for his sheep he learnt much about the love of God to the individual as well as to the nation. With muscles toughened enough to vanquish both a lion and a bear, he was becoming fit for his later leadership as a soldier, a fugitive and a king.

But David was Jesse’s youngest son, of no special consequence, considered not even important enough to be included in the family’s religious feast - one might say, the runt of the litter. Not even his own father seemed to appreciate his talents. Perhaps, missing some element of love within his family circle, David appreciated and clung to what he had discovered of the love of God. This love of God would stay with him as a guiding light throughout the rest of his life. Indeed, God had already told Samuel that the man He had chosen would be “a man after His own heart” – a striking contrast to Saul.

So now Samuel probed until he discovered that Jesse indeed had another son, and David was summoned forthwith. Fresh-faced, handsome and rippling with health, David stood before Samuel – and immediately Samuel knew that this was the one! “Rise and anoint him;” came God’s assurance, “he is the one.” It is an interesting comparison – Saul a donkey-wrangler, and David a shepherd! The crook he brandished as an aid to guiding his flock, would be exchanged one day for a crown. David was indeed to become Israel’s “shepherd-king.” Verse 13 of chapter 16 says significantly, “From that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power.”

***Imagine David’s feelings as he was anointed in front of the brothers who had been rejected by Samuel! How much self-control would he have needed, not to gloat? And how long did he have to wait until God’s choice of him was vindicated? What is the most important thing in our service for God, in relation to those around us?***

**The shepherd-hero.**

***Read 1 Samuel chapter 17.***

I guess there is no story more loved than this account of David and Goliath. To save expense and bloodshed, nations at war would sometimes put forward a champion each to do the fighting for them, the victorious champion signifying victory to the respective nation. But with a giant such as the terrible Goliath, the Israelites’ hearts melted: gone was their trust in God, and with only human resources to rely on, they feared that defeat for them was inevitable.

And here we get our first glimpse of the character of David. Sent by his father with some food for his brothers, his adventurous spirit was naturally excited to survey the battleground, to hear the ranting of Goliath, and to learn that there was a reward dangling invitingly for the one brave enough to vanquish him. Great wealth and a princess’s hand in marriage was, after all, not to be sneezed at! But there was something deeper than that; David loved his God, and he was angry that a pagan should insult the army of the Captain they followed.

We marvel at the bravery of this lad, in spite of the scorn of his brothers and the incredulity of Saul. His was the unshakeable faith that could say, “The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.” (verse 37). It was his faith, not bravado, that declared to the taunting Goliath, (verses 45-47), “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the Lord will hand you over to me, and I’ll strike you down and cut off your head..... the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel ... for the battle is the Lord’s.”

And God honoured his faith. David’s aim with a sling was brilliant, the stone hitting the one small spot in the forehead of Goliath that was unprotected. In triumph David finished off the job ,

beheading the giant with Goliath's own sword. That was the signal, of course, for the Philistine army to flee, with the Israelite army in hot pursuit. A great battle was won by Israel that day.

***What caused Goliath's defeat? The stone? David's skill with a sling? David's faith in God? Or God? Yet God expects us to do what we can ourselves. David picked up 5 stones - in case the first one missed - and God honoured his commonsense.***

**Apprenticeship for power.**

***Refer back to 1 Samuel 16:14-23, then read 1 Samuel 18:1-16.***

In God's good providence David was introduced into the court of Saul, where he could learn the ways of palace and politics, eventually to become no less than the king's son-in-law – the reward promised for the slaying of Goliath at last fulfilled! As a harpist and singer he provided therapy for Saul who, having rejected God's Spirit, was being driven towards insanity by an evil spirit. Saul commissioned him to lead an army of a thousand and so provided military training that would be essential for him in later years. And God provided him with a friend such as few have had the privilege of knowing - that of Jonathan, Saul's eldest son. In spite of being aware that David, not himself, would be the next king, Jonathan remained completely unselfish and faithful to David, and it was through Jonathan that David's life was saved in spite of Saul's jealous attempts to do away with him. We wonder that such an ungodly father could produce such a godly son!

***David was used mightily by God, but he would never have become king without the help of faithful Jonathan. How much importance can we attach to Jonathan's selflessness and lack of jealousy? Can we see our roles as important even though seemingly less "significant" than others?***

Eventually it was imperative that David escape from the constant threats of Saul, and he began a period as a fugitive, gathering to himself a band of some six hundred men disgruntled with the ruling regime, who would later form a strong support group for the new king. This period enabled David to hone his skills of diplomacy, wisdom, strength and compassion that would stand him in good stead as king. Even from the throne David was never out of touch with the needs of the common man.

For devotees of women's magazines, you will never find a more exquisite romance than is recorded in **1 Samuel chapter 25**, where the lovely, intelligent and virtuous Abigail is delivered from her boorish husband into the arms of the ever-gallant David. You could call it "Good girl gets her prince", perhaps. It is a delightful interlude in the midst of the rigours of David's fugitive existence, and sandwiched in between two temptations, (chapters 24 and 26) that came to David to take matters into his own hands and kill Saul off – temptations which he nobly resisted.

***Think back to Sarah, who did take matters into her own hand, and compare her with David. Who received the greater blessing?***

***Read 2 Samuel 5:1-12.***

Saul met his death, ingloriously, at his own hands, during yet another battle with the Philistines, and the second book of Samuel gives us the history of David's accession to the throne and his triumphant reign. In chapter 5 the people of Israel, already with a deep love and loyalty for this prince of leaders, reminded David that "the Lord said to you, 'You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler.'" Yet David knew himself to be but a steward in God's service. Verse 12 says, "David knew that the Lord had established him as king over Israel and had exalted his kingdom *for the sake of his people Israel.*" A brilliant strategist, David never engaged in military manoeuvres without first consulting the Lord for guidance, and he was blessed with victories on every hand so that he was able to extend his boundaries (strengthened later by his son

Solomon) from Egypt in the south right up to the Euphrates River in the north – the fulfilment of God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 15:18-21.

***Why was David so successful everywhere he went? Was it his own innate brilliance, or his reliance on God, or both? Does verse 12 give us the ultimate answer?***

***Read 2 Samuel 6:12-23***

The worship of God was always supreme in the heart of David, and 2 Samuel chapter 6 tells us the story of the return of the Ark to Jerusalem, to the tent which David had erected specially for it. It was a day of great rejoicing, dancing, singing and the triumphant sound of trumpets. Ecstatic at having the symbol of God’s presence back at the heart of the nation’s worship, David offered up burnt offerings and fellowship offerings to the Lord, and extended his largesse to all the people in giving to each a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins. Much more healthy than chocolates.

***People worship God in many different ways, from quiet dignified liturgy to noisy ecstasy. Have we any right to set rules for worship? What is necessary for worship to be acceptable to God?***

**God’s promise to David.**

So David settled into his palace, successful and victorious, prosperous and honoured. But to date we have not heard anything about a covenant. Why? Because David had not heard of any, either. If we look back over the previous covenants, we realise there is a pattern: in each case God demanded obedience from the person He called, and it was only when that person responded, that God offered him the covenant He had already planned. Noah built the ark, Abraham left Ur, and Moses led a nation out of slavery, before they had that special encounter with God and became privileged partners in His covenants.

***What is the condition for our receiving the covenant that God has planned for us?***

***Read 2 Samuel 7:1-29.***

And so it was with David. As shepherd, fugitive, and king, David’s heart followed the dictates of his God, blessed with the assurance that God had chosen him to be the king of Israel. And so we come to 2 Samuel chapter 7, where David suddenly realises the inappropriate contrast of his grand abode with the tent which housed the holy Ark of the Covenant. Something must be done about it. He would build a temple worthy to accommodate that great symbol of the presence of God.

***Why didn’t God allow David to build a temple for Him? Would David have felt disappointed or rejected by God?***

God responded, not to the action, but to the intent of David’s faithful heart. The prophet Nathan came to him with a message that would ring out through the rest of Jewish history and beyond: God was about to institute a covenant with him! “I took you from the pasture ... to be ruler over My people Israel,” God reminded David, “I have been with you wherever you have gone. Now I will make your name great ... and I will provide a place for My people Israel.... The Lord declares to you that the Lord Himself will establish a house for you ... I will raise up your offspring ... and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for My Name. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before Me; your throne will be established forever.”

True to his nature, David was overcome and humbly praised his God. “Who am I, O Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that You have brought me this far? .... How great you are, O

Sovereign Lord! There is no one like you ... And now, Lord God, keep forever the promise you have made concerning your servant and his house ... *so that Your Name will be great forever.*"

***What was the ultimate purpose of God's covenant with David? David's desire was that God's name would be great: how has that been effected through this covenant?***

2 Samuel 8:15 tells us "David reigned over all Israel, doing what was just and right for all his people." Not that he was faultless: convicted by Nathan of his adultery and murder, he was humble enough for genuine repentance and knew the sweet reality of God's forgiveness, even while he had to bear the consequential disintegration of his own family and the disillusionment of his own people.

Through his many psalms we see the depth of his love for a faithful, trustworthy and compassionate God, and never once did he ever worship anyone but the one true God. To the end of his life, he acknowledged that it was God, not his own efforts, that had brought him the many blessings of his life. His last words, as recorded in 2 Samuel chapters 22 and 23, praised God again and again as his rock, his fortress, his deliverer, his refuge, his shield, his stronghold and his saviour .... "He reached down from on high and took hold of me ..... He rescued me because He delighted in me ... The Lord turns my darkness into light .... He shows unfailing kindness to his anointed .... Has He not made with me *an everlasting covenant*, arranged and secured in every part?"

History shows that God's covenant with David is in fact everlasting, just as are those given to Noah, to Abraham and to Israel through His servant Moses. Not even the much-married Henry VIII could produce a son who lived to succeed him, yet David's royal lineage continued unbroken, with son after son to sit on the throne of Judah, and even through the upheaval of the following years, right down the centuries until the birth of that greater Anointed One, Jesus Christ, Who indeed will reign forever.

Psalm 89, though not written by David, progresses from verse 20, "I have found David my servant; with My sacred oil I have anointed him .... My faithful love will be with him" to a prophetic word concerning David's greater Son, from verse 27, "I will also appoint him *My firstborn*, the most exalted of the kings of the earth. I will maintain My love to him forever, and My covenant with him will never fail. I will establish his line forever, his throne as long as the heavens endure."

David was not in fact the firstborn – he was the youngest, and least honoured, of his family. Yet through God's grace he came to inherit all the usual privileges of the firstborn of that culture, all the priority and authority of the firstborn prince in a king's household. But we can take that further. That word "firstborn" is used by Paul in Colossians 1:15 to describe the status and privileges belonging to Christ, who is "the firstborn over all creation". Far more than David, Christ has supreme rights in relation to all of creation, such as priority, pre-eminence and sovereignty. As David was anointed and appointed by God, so our Messiah, the Anointed One, was appointed by God as His firstborn, to be indeed the most exalted of the kings of the earth, the Mediator of the everlasting covenant that goes beyond the nation of Israel to the countless throng who have put their faith in Him. God does keep His promises!

***Prayer and Praise. Praise God for the heritage David has left us, not only in his psalms, but as the originator of the royal line that led to Christ. Pray for such faithfulness in worship, love and obedience to God.***

