

From Promise to Action: *Height of Faithful Success*
2 Samuel 8

“And the LORD gave victory to David wherever he went...”

Introduction: Even a non-basketball fan knows the name **LeBron James**. Touted as a future Hall of Famer while he was still in high-school, LeBron played in front of a national audience who gave him the moniker “King James”. He was tall, fast, strong, and unlike many prep players, enjoyed passing the ball and getting his teammates involved. Possessing all of the physical tools to be a star, James had to overcome living without a father in a poor part of Akron, Ohio to become arguably one of the greatest basketball players to ever live. This December he will turn 40 years old, but he is competing and beating out players his sons age due to his God given talent and exceptional drive, rigidly taking care of his body and diet to maintain a competitive edge. He has won every conceivable award, including **three gold medals, four NBA championships, and 4 MVP awards**. Currently he is worth right around **\$1.2 billion**, with more earning potential in the future. He is a study on the fulfillment of athletic promise, one who maximized the gift of athletic talent.

Contrast this with the name **Lenny Cooke**, a name even the most die-hard basketball fan would be hard pressed to identify. During his high school career, Lenny was ranked nationally at the level of future NBA greats, just behind a man name Carmelo Anthony and ahead of a young man from Akron named LeBron James. Lenny had similar hardships in his family life, but also struggled with a learning disorder, which caused him to have poor grades and be branded as having ‘lack of focus’. After high school he had college offers to play basketball at North Carolina, Seton Hall, St John’s, Miami, and Ohio State. Instead of going to college (where he knew he would flunk out), he decided he would declare for the NBA draft. Believing that he would be drafted somewhere in the first round (along with its guaranteed payday), the draft came and went without Lenny’s name being called. He instead bounced around powerhouses such as the Philippine Basketball Association for the Purefoods TJ Hotdogs (it’s a real team), the Shanghai Dongfang Sharks, before returning to Purefoods and blowing out his Achilles tendon. All in all, he never won any awards, did not go to college, and made a total of \$100,000 in his whole career. He is a sad example of wasted talent, the inability to deliver on potential, and the reminder that even promised resources must be exercised.

As we come to the next section in **2 Samuel** which some have said is the high point of David’s power and military might, we see that David was **obedient to trust the Lord in the promises he had received**. Chapter 8 is unique since it is set up *thematically more than chronologically*, with some of the battles recalled being before chapter 7 and some after. This is consequential since the point the author is making is all of it was a fulfillment of the **Davidic Covenant, the pinnacle promise of the OT**. But promise still needs to be played and lived out, and this chapter shows the steps David took to do just that. What we’ll see is not only the fact that this all points to **Jesus ultimately fulfilling what David started, but also the reality that we’ve been given similar promises with the goal to live in light of them, and not squander them by inactivity or laziness**.

Kingly Conquests that Brought Peace and Rest

It has been said in sports *“the best offense is a good defense”*, which makes sense in football and basketball, but not always in geo-political conflict between warring nations. The land and people of Israel has ALWAYS had enemies surrounding it. In fact, it is one of the reasons God planted His people in this small strip of land that while beautiful and valuable, is also hedged in by enemies, forcing those who

dwell there to **trust the Lord for protection**. Throughout 1 & 2 Samuel we've seen perpetual battles between Israel and outside nations, often finding God's people on the losing end. Now, equipped with a united nation and assuring promises, David was ready to take hold of all the land that was promised (see Genesis 15:18)

There were **four major campaigns** covered here, each pushing the boundaries out to bring peace, rest, and security within the land. We won't spend too much time on each since the point is clear:

1. **Philistines – WEST** (8:1)

*After this David defeated the **Philistines** and **subdued them**, and David took Metheg-ammah out of the hand of the Philistines.*

The Philistines have been one of the main burrs in the saddle for Israel so far in their history in the OT story arch. They were situated to the west and were always there, lurking, and seemingly ready to attack when Israel's leadership and faith were weak. In **2 Samuel 5:17-25**, David was able to drive them OUT OF the land Israel occupied, but now he took the battle to them, ending the threat once and for all. In **1 Chron. 18:1** it says he took the chief fortress in the city of **Gath**, which would have crippled the Philistines ability to mount a counter offensive. In fact, *"so complete was David's conquest that while the Philistines occasionally appear in Israel's history, they never again pose a serious threat to the Davidic Kingdom."*¹

2. **Moab – EAST** (8:2)

*And he defeated **Moab** and he measured them with a line, making them lie down on the ground. Two lines he measured to be put to death, and one full line to be spared. And the **Moabites became servants** to David and brought tribute.*

If you ever wanted to know if you're family wins the prize for most unique or complicated families, Moab would tell you to get behind them in line. Moab was a son of Lot, Abraham's nephew, except it was through incest with Lot's oldest daughter (Gen. 19:30-38). The Moabites possessed the land to the East, on the far side of the Dead Sea and Jordan River, in part because God gave them this land because of their connection with Abraham (Deut. 2:9). However, they were perpetually a thorn in Israel's side, and were a participant in playing out adultery before the righteous action of Phineas (Num. 25:1-9). **Isaiah 16:6** described them this way: *We have heard of the **pride** of Moab— how proud he is!— of his **arrogance**, his **pride**, and his **insolence**; in his idle **boasting** he is not right."*

David dealt and uncharacteristically heavy blow to this nation, killing 2/3 of them. Some have wanted to see this as measuring out the older or taller from the younger, but nothing in the text demands that. Whether this was retribution for some slight or another reason, David secured the Eastern front with a resounding defeat and putting the nation that was left under tribute.

3. **Arameans – NORTH** (8:3-8)

*David also defeated **Hadadezer** the son of Rehob, king of Zobah, as he went to restore his power at the river Euphrates. 4 And David took from him 1,700 horsemen, and 20,000 foot soldiers. And David hamstrung all the chariot horses but left enough for 100 chariots. 5 And when the Syrians of Damascus came to help Hadadezer king of Zobah, David struck down 22,000 men of the Syrians. 6 Then David put garrisons in **Aram** of Damascus, and the Syrians became servants to David and brought tribute. And the*

¹ Richard Phillips, "Reformed Expository Commentary: 2 Samuel" p. 166-7.

*Lord gave victory to David wherever he went. 7 And David took the shields of gold that were carried by the servants of Hadadezer and brought them to Jerusalem. 8 And from Betah and from Berothai, **cities of Hadadezer**, King David took very much bronze.*

This was a significant victory, not only because it put down a serious and strong enemy, but David decisively secured the North for a long time. Note four main things in this section: 1) This was most likely a long and protracted war, since this is a mountainous area and the force against was strong 2) David hamstringed the horses, meaning cutting the tendon in the back of the leg, so they could not use the armor of chariots as an advantage. 3) David set up a **garrison** in Aram, which would have given them a defensive stronghold to snuff out future rebellion; 4) David took spoils of war for future use

4. Edom – SOUTH (8:13-14)

*And David made a name for himself when he returned from striking down 18,000 **Edomites** in the Valley of Salt. 14 Then he put **garrisons in Edom**; throughout all **Edom** he put **garrisons**, and all the **Edomites** became David's servants. **And the Lord gave victory to David wherever he went.***

When you think Edom, you should immediately remember **Esau**, Jacob's brother who had his birthright taken. According to **1 Chron. 18:12**, Abishai was responsible for killing 18,000 Edomites in the Valley of Salt, and **Psalms 60** gives its subscript that Joab struck down 12,000 on his return from defeating the Arameans. On their flank, David set up several garrisons for security, and the Edomites became servants under David's rule



Now, if you look once again at these maps you will see the expansion of the land under David's rule which set up Solomon to extend even further to the Promised borders. The **key phrase through all of this conquest** (8:6, 14):

And the Lord gave victory to David wherever he went

God secured the victory because He upheld His promise. He gave David **peace, rest**, and a **name**, just like He said in 7:9-11. This was not intended to be a short-term change but a long-term venture, which is why David hamstringed horses, wiped out forces, and set up defensive garrisons. But David had to **act** on the promises, which meant long, arduous, and hard fought battles. God's promises did not just appear

overnight, but had to be faithfully lived out. But David could fight courageously knowing that God had already promised the victory, which changed everything.

Kingly Oversight brought Righteous Rule

And David administered justice and equity to all the people...

As king, David did not just lead as a warrior, but he led as a shepherd, one by whom people could follow by example. There are several distinctive characteristics of his leadership that are prevalent and that stand out here:

1) Returned praise back to God in light of victory (8:9-12)

*When **Toi king of Hamath** heard that David had defeated the whole army of Hadadezer, 10 Toi sent his son Joram to King David, to ask about his health and to bless him because he had fought against Hadadezer and defeated him, for Hadadezer had often been at war with Toi. And Joram brought with him **articles of silver, of gold, and of bronze**. 11 These also **King David dedicated to the Lord**, together with the **silver and gold that he dedicated from all the nations he subdued**, 12 from Edom, Moab, the Ammonites, the Philistines, Amalek, and from the spoil of Hadadezer the son of Rehob, king of Zobah*

After David defeated the Arameans, he was visited by the king of Hamath. In this **Toi Story** (probably a prequel), the king was delighted since Hadadezer had inflicted so much pain and damage on his country throughout the years that he sent his son Joram to David to bring gifts. They brought silver, gold, and bronze in large quantities. This was added to the spoil already won in the form of **shields of gold** (decorative, not weapons), and a **large amount of bronze**. Now David remembered that in **Deut. 17:17** a king of Israel was NOT supposed to take to himself excessive wealth. So instead, according to 1 Chron. 18:8, David took this treasure back to Jerusalem and it was used for the future Temple that Solomon would build.

What David demonstrated is that thanksgiving and reflecting on God's grace should turn our hearts to **sacrificial worship, giving our lives as LIVING SACRIFICES** (Rom. 12:1). David did not hoard what was won, but turned it back to God to reflect His glory. He saw every good and perfect gift from God as an opportunity to praise, and that praise would be a driving motivation for obedience. The same is true today. When our minds and hearts are tuned to "*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you*" (1 Thess. 5:17-18), and in so doing, we are primed to put promises into action.

2) Led with justice and righteousness (8:15-18)

*So David reigned over all Israel. And David **administered justice and equity to all his people**. 16 Joab the son of Zeruiah was over the army, and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder, 17 and Zadok the son of Ahitub and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar were priests, and Seraiah was secretary, 18 and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites and the Pelethites, and David's sons were priests.*

It does not take long to see the world is NOT a just or fair place. People play favorites, discriminate against those they do not like or understand, and marginalize those that are different. This is true of every culture, especially those that see themselves as *progressive*, which simply means they have allowed the sin that resides in their heart and mind to rule, cutting God out of the mix, and allowing secular humanism to flourish. That is the **bent of every heart and culture**. It's why God gave a safeguard of leadership, who should do so **selflessly** and uphold justice and righteousness. THAT is the proper role of government (Rom 13; 1 Peter. 2:13-17), to punish the evil doer and praise those who do

good, NOT be involved in every part of life. That is also why God left Godly leaders to oversee the church, knowing that there will always be savage wolves lurking outside and infiltrating inside (Acts 20:20-28). David established a **just and righteous rule**, where people can find equity. He also set up **leadership under him with qualified men whom he trusted** (including his sons) to oversee the important areas of the kingdom.

But we know the end of the story, and this righteous rule could not sustain and would not last, since mankind is broken. This calls out for and points to someone and something better to come:

Kingly Future brings Fulfilled Promises

Jeremiah 23:5 – *“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king and **deal wisely**, and shall **execute justice and righteousness** in the land.”*

When we study sections of the OT like this about David and his rule, we do so with one eye on the horizon. The events in David’s time were real, important, and have their own principles to understand. But they are also shadows of the things to come. That is why we find our better king in Jesus, in what He **has already done and what He will do**.

- 1) Jesus’ Victory and Righteous Rule** – If the key phrase for David is that *“God gave victory wherever he went”*, then that victory over enemies came into full fruition in Jesus’ earthly ministry, starting with **1 Corinthians 15:55-57**:

“When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.” “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”
⁵⁶ *The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. ⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”*

Because of this surety of victory, we have the promise of **Colossians 2:13-15**:

*And you, who were **dead in your trespasses** and the uncircumcision of your flesh, **God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses**, 14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. 15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, **by triumphing over them in him***

Christ’s triumph and victory over His enemies, particularly the greatest enemy of death, secured our life through the forgiveness of sin. His victory also means that He is given the name “LORD” (Phil. 2:11), to whom every knee will bow and tongue confess. He will one day rule with perfect justice, meaning He will give everyone according to what they deserve (Rev. 22:12), will rule with a rod of iron (Rev. 19:15), and will separate out those whose names are written in the book of life and those whose are not (Rev. 20:11-15). When Christ rules on the earth on David’s throne with His people, it will be with perfect, victorious, and righteous justice. And it will be a kingdom without end.

- 2) Our Response to the Secured Promises of God is Everything** – This is a vital takeaway from this passage. In some ways, we have MORE promises and fulfillments than David, since we know who the Messiah is and what He accomplished. But my concern in my own heart is that we DO NOT ACT on these promises the way we should. Think about just a handful:

- **“God will build His church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it”** (Matt. 16:18) – If that is true, what should our lives look like in and for the church?
 - **We have been given a “New Covenant” ministry** in which God has made us adequate/sufficient (2 Cor. 3:1-6), a message that brings life from death, and graciously extends to more and more (2 Cor. 4:15), and have been given the position of *Ambassador of Christ* (2 Cor. 5:20), imploring, begging, and urging people to be reconciled to Christ. In other words, because Christ has secured the victory, we should be active in calling people TO that victory! In a cancel culture world where disagreement is reason for separation and man at the center of every judgement, we must **believe completely in the power of the gospel to have the courage to stand up and call people to repentance.**
 - **We make disciples knowing that it is not based on our authority** – *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”* (Matt. 28:18), and *“I am with you always, to the end of the age”* (Matt. 28:20) are twin promises flowing from Christ’s victory and equipping us with all that we need to make disciples. The assurance is: we cannot fail, except if we do not engage. **God’s promises overcome every cultural obstacle, from fear to the feeling of inadequacy.**
- 3) **The Road is NOT Quick or Easy** – The problem with reading about four military conquests in a short chapter is that it seemed easy or quick. But each battle was filled with its own challenges, anxieties, and fears. **Believing the promises of God and acting on them does not mean these things are not present, but it means we can move through them by faith.**

Conclusion: Every one of us who believe in and know Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior have been given the SAME promises, so we have the SAME opportunities and responsibilities. The only differentiation is at what level are we willing to **act on what we know is true**. Are we maximizing our abilities like a finely tuned athlete, or squandering them like one who is entitled, lazy, and self-focused? Jesus has secured the victory, now we can engage with hope in the battle.