

## **BIBLE SURVEY: JOSHUA TO 2 SAMUEL**

### **PREFACE**

This is the second volume of a series of Serving Today booklets under the title of Biblical Survey. We have had the invaluable help of Philip Parsons who is guiding us through the books of the Old Testament in the Serving Today radio programme. This volume is the fruit of his studies on this part of the Bible and I am again indebted to him for his ability to survey large sections of Scripture and summarise the content and main lessons of each book.

The sermon suggestions at the end of each chapter will be a good basis for several series of sermons, and there is a helpful introductory paragraph to these at the beginning of section 7 of the first chapter.

It is our prayer and desire that the Lord will use this book to help all who read it to have a better grasp of the Old Testament, and in particular that it will help all involved in preaching and teaching the Word of God to be more effective in their ministries.

Derek French  
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### **Chapter 1 Survey of Joshua**

Having completed our studies in the 5 books of Moses, the Pentateuch, we now turn to the 6th book of the Bible, Joshua. The book begins where Deuteronomy ends, with the tribes of Israel still camped on the east bank of the Jordan, waiting to enter the land which had been promised to Abraham almost 700 years earlier. In the intervening period, Israel had experienced the slavery in Egypt and the wanderings in the wilderness. But now, under God, Joshua was about to turn the promise into a reality.

#### **1. Author and date of writing**

Some liberal scholars give a date for the writing of this book as being some 800 years after the events took place. This, however, does not give due weight to a number of statements in the book which show that part of it was written by Joshua or at his command at the time the events occurred (18:8; 24:25). In chapter 5 the writer was clearly present, because he uses the words 'we' and 'us'. Another proof of contemporary writing is the accurate details of the survey carried out at Joshua's command. Also, the use of old place-names indicates that the book was written at the time the events occurred. There are, however, some phrases which point to later contributions: the use of the words 'until this day' which occurs 12 times, and the account of the miracle of the sun standing still, which quotes from another book. The explanation which best fits all these factors is that the book was written at the direction of Joshua, but that there are later editorial additions and changes, possibly carried out under Samuel at the beginning of the monarchy. Whoever the writer was, since

the book is part of the inspired word of God, all the events recorded are true, however remarkable some of them seem to be.

## **2. A brief sketch of Joshua's life**

As a young man, Joshua had experienced the hardship of slavery in Egypt. At a relatively young age, he had also seen the mighty miracles worked through Moses in Egypt and when God divided the Red Sea to let the Israelites pass, but drowned Pharaoh and all his army. Before reaching Mount Sinai, it was Joshua who led the army of Israel to victory against the Amalekites. He was the only one allowed to accompany Moses up the holy mountain, where the tablets of the law were received. Joshua was the representative of the tribe of Ephraim who took part in the initial spying out of the land. Only Joshua and his companion Caleb were prepared to follow God's will and take immediate possession of the land. The rest who refused were condemned to die in the desert. Even Moses died short of the goal and had to hand the leadership of the nation over to Joshua. Joshua was clearly a man after God's own heart; he was one who was faithful to his God and zealous to carry out all his commands. He was thus given the great honour of the conquest of the land and its subsequent apportionment among the tribes.

There cannot be a better role model for young men to follow than Joshua. They may never have his gifts but they can seek to have the same approach that he had. He was never hanging back on the fringe. Even from an early age

he was right there where the activity was. He was the kind of person who would always be present at the services of worship and prayer, was not easily distracted from the path of duty, eager to be involved in evangelism, always ready to assist in God's work.

## **3. The name Joshua**

Joshua was originally called Hoshea, which means 'salvation'. Moses changed his name to Joshua (Numbers 13:16), which means 'the Lord saves' or 'the Lord gives victory'. And it is the Greek form of this name that has become the best-known and the best-loved of all names - the name Jesus. As victorious leader of God's people, Joshua foreshadows the Lord Jesus Christ, who has conquered and will conquer his enemies and subdue everyone and everything which sets itself against him.

## **4. Israel's holy war**

Under God and through Joshua, Israel was commanded to invade the land of the Canaanites, the Amorites and all those other national groups who inhabited the territory that had been promised to Abraham more almost 700 years earlier. One reason God had given for the delay in possessing the land was that at the time of Abraham, the iniquity of the Canaanites was 'not yet full'. The clear implication is that now they had filled up their cup of iniquity and the judgement of God was to fall upon those evil nations through the instrumentality of his own people. In case we should think that God was being unjust, we

need to understand something of what the Canaanites were like.

(i) As with most pagan peoples before and since, their religion was polytheistic and idolatrous. The two most notable deities were the goddess Ashtoreth and the god Baal, which means master or possessor. At first, Baal was the name for the deity of a particular locality or even a city (Baal-Zephon - lord of the north). Later, the name referred to the great fertility god of the Canaanites. The name Ashtoreth is also associated with, among other things, fertility.

(ii) The practices that were part of these pagan religions were particularly immoral and cruel. There were cult prostitutes, both male and female, and the worship involved adulterous and homosexual practices. Babies were also often burned to death as a sacrifice to the idol Moloch.

The Canaanite civilization, though highly cultured and technologically advanced, had become so evil that God would no longer tolerate them upon his earth, and thus they were devoted to destruction. This was partly brought about by the inhabitants resisting the invasion with as much force as they could muster, whereas those who sought peace were not destroyed - e.g. Rahab and the Gibeonites.

In answer to those who raise objections to Israel's invasion on supposed moral grounds, we would answer by reminding them that the whole of mankind in sin are rebels

against the sovereignty and authority of God, and that he only permits us even to live upon this earth because of his patience and longsuffering. The book of Joshua, however, reminds us that God's patience will not last forever and that not just a small tract of land but the whole earth will be purged of everything that presently defiles it. This will occur when our Joshua (Jesus) returns in power and great glory, accompanied by not only all the myriad armies of heaven, but with all his redeemed people.

In the dealings of Joshua with the Canaanites, God has given notice to this world that he will not withhold his anger for ever, but will finally judge it and institute a new order where only righteousness dwells.

## **5. The conquest of Canaan**

(i) Crossing the Jordan chapters 3-4.

The whole nation was encamped on the east bank of the Jordan, so it was no mean feat for them to cross to the other side. God intervened for them with a miracle, by stopping the flow of water some 20 miles upstream so that they were all able to cross. The timing of the miracle was when the feet of the priests carrying the ark touched the water's edge. They then stood in the middle of the river on dry ground until everyone had crossed over. Twelve stones were then taken from the middle of the river and set up as a memorial on the west bank. Just as he had been with Moses, so God was now with Joshua. When all this had been done, and the priests bearing the ark stepped onto the west bank, the Jordan resumed its flow - in full flood!

## (ii) Renewing the Covenant chapter 5:1-12

Before Israel were in a position to carry out the Lord's work and take possession of the land, there were two things which God required of them. First of all they were to be circumcised. This covenant sign had been largely neglected during the period in the desert, so God commanded Joshua that the deficiency be put right. As it was also the time of Passover, following the circumcising the whole nation kept the Passover feast. Indeed, according to the instructions to Moses, only the circumcised could take part in the Passover. (The same is true today; only those who have received the new covenant sign of baptism should partake of the new covenant meal, the Lord's supper.) Israel was now ready to carry out the Lord's holy war against his enemies, and as if to mark a point of transition, it was at this juncture that the manna stopped.

## (iii) Jericho and Ai chapter 5:13 - 8:35.

The first battle of the campaign was to establish a bridgehead by taking the large city of Jericho. Joshua had already sent spies into Jericho and they had been protected by Rahab, who was then given the guarantee that she and her family would be spared when the city was taken.

The account of the taking of Jericho is well known. They marched round the city once per day for six days, with the priests carrying the ark and seven priests blowing the trumpets. This was followed on the seventh day, probably

the Sabbath, by them marching round the city seven times. When they heard a long blast on the trumpets, every man shouted, and the walls collapsed, and they took the city. Apart from Rahab and her family, everything living was to be destroyed and everything valuable was to be put in the Lord's treasury. One man, however, disobeyed this instruction and took some of the valuables for himself, with the result that the attack upon the much smaller town of Ai at the crest of the hill country was a disaster. Joshua had to punish the man who had been responsible for this defeat, by stoning him and his household. Having cleansed the sin from among them, they were able successfully to take Ai and thus form a base from which to conduct the remainder of the conquest.

Before proceeding with the campaign to conquer Canaan, there was one duty left for Joshua to carry out. It was the renewing of the covenant at mount Ebal and Gerizim. The altar was built on Mt. Ebal and sacrifices were offered, then the blessings and the curses were read out, with half the people standing before one mountain and the other half before the other. The words of the law were then written on the stones on top of Mt. Ebal. All this was according to the instructions given through Moses (Deuteronomy 27).

## (iv) Taking the Land chapters 10-12

The first phase of Joshua's campaign was the capturing of the high ground west of Ai and the defeat of the Amorite armies in the battle of the long day in the valley of Ajalon. Both sun and moon stood still for a day, indicating that the

earth stopped rotating for that time. With the central part of the country subdued, the Israelite army turned first to the south, taking the whole of the land as far as Kadesh Barnea. Then with the southern campaign completed, the northern region was attacked and conquered as far as Mt. Hermon. Only the Gibeonites made a peace treaty with the Israelites (11:19,20).

#### (v) Dividing the Land chapters 13-21.

First of all, a detailed survey of the land was made, then the tribes were allotted their various territories. Reuben, Gad and half of Manasseh had already requested the land east of the Jordan. Judah, the most important tribe, had a large section of the south, with Ephraim and the other half of Manasseh being assigned most of the central region. The other tribes were apportioned their inheritance in the remainder of the land. These allotted territories were in accordance with Jacob's prophecy in Genesis 49. Cities were also set aside for the Levites and as a place of refuge for the manslayer. Although the land had been conquered as a whole, each tribe was responsible for driving out the remaining Canaanites in their territory.

When the two and a half tribes had returned to their own portion on the east bank, they became concerned that they might become cut off from the rest of the nation, so they built an altar on the west bank of the Jordan. This landmark was at first misunderstood by the rest of the nation as a place of rival worship to that of the tabernacle. After consultation, the people as a whole agreed that it

should remain as a witness that the two and a half tribes were as much part of the nation as the others on the west bank.

#### **6. Joshua's last words to the nation chapters 23-24**

In chapter 23 Joshua speaks to the leaders. He urges them to obey and love the Lord their God and not to turn aside to idols (vv 6-11). Note the similarity between his words here and those used at his own appointment as leader (Deuteronomy 31:7,8).

In the final chapter of the book, Joshua addresses the people as a whole. He reminds them of all that God had done for them since he called Abraham from Ur. In view of God's faithfulness to them, Joshua exhorts them to be faithful to such a God. He urges them to renew their covenant with God and get rid of all their idols. Such an exhortation is always timely for the people of God!

#### **7. Suggested sermon outlines from Joshua**

You will find sermon suggestions at the end of each chapter of this book. By way of general introduction to all of these you will need to take note of the following remarks. These suggestions are designed to help you prepare sermons under the relevant headings, but most of them could also be considered as outlines for a series of messages under each heading. As you read through this book you will find similar suggestions for preaching at the close of each chapter. It is important to remember that these are only suggestions and a guide, not full sermon

notes. To have these you will need to study the relevant Scriptures yourself.

### 1. Life of Joshua

- Experienced Egyptian slavery
- Saw God's mighty acts
- Accompanied Moses up Mount Sinai
- Spied out the Promised Land
- Faithful and Zealous
- Given the privilege of the conquest
- An excellent role-model
- His name means – the LORD gives victory
- Foreshadows Jesus Christ

### 2. Israel's holy war

- The Canaanites - polytheistic and idolatrous
- Immoral fertility rites
- Cult male and female prostitutes
- Child sacrifices (burned to death)
- Ripe for judgement
- Their destruction a prefiguring of the final judgement
- Only the Sovereign Judge has the right to command genocide (Deuteronomy 7:1-6)

### 3. Lessons from Jericho and Ai chapters 6-8

- Obedience at Jericho led to victory
- Achan's unconfessed sin led to defeat at Ai
- One small sin can mar our usefulness

- Our besetting sins demand drastic action (Matt 5:29,30)
- The importance of doing the Lord's work in his way

### 4. Joshua's last words chapters 23-24

- Urges love to God
- Avoid idolatry at all costs
- Remember God's faithfulness
- Be faithful to God in return
- Exhorts continued reformation

## Chapter 2 Bible survey - Judges

The book of Judges, the seventh in the Old Testament, follows on chronologically from Joshua and covers the period of Israel's history from the death of Joshua (around 1370BC) to the beginning of the monarchy under Saul (1050BC).

### 1. Author and date of writing

The detailed events recorded in this book bear the marks of being recorded at the time they occurred, but there are also many introductory and explanatory statements, which indicate that the whole document was compiled later. Traditionally, the compiler and editor was thought to be Samuel, the last and greatest of the Judges, with possible contributions from Gad and Nathan, prophets in the time of David the king. There is no compelling reason to disagree

with this view, which puts the date of writing as the mid 11th century BC.

## 2. Themes

The main theme of the book is the life of Israel in the Promised Land following the death of Joshua. Under Joshua, many of the covenant promises given to the patriarchs hundreds of years earlier, and to the nation during their wanderings in the desert, had been fulfilled. The Promised Land now lay beneath their feet. It remained for them to displace the remaining Canaanites and fully cleanse the land of its paganism and idolatry. But Israel quickly forgot what God had already done for her and instead of driving out the inhabitants; they settled down and attached themselves to the customs, morals, gods and religious beliefs and practices of the Canaanite peoples. The book narrates, on the one hand, Israel's frequent apostasy, which provoked divine chastening in the form of foreign oppression. On the other hand, it tells of their urgent appeals to God in times of crisis, which always brought a rapid response from the Lord in the form of leaders (judges) through whom the foreign oppression was thrown off and the land restored to peace.

Through all the repeated cycles of disobedience, foreign oppression, cries of distress and divine deliverance, we see the covenant faithfulness of the Lord displayed in his amazing patience, longsuffering and compassion (chapter 10:15,16).

## 3. New Testament parallel

Surprisingly, the book of Judges is the Old Testament book of the acts of the Holy Spirit. Time and again we read how the Spirit of the Lord came upon these men and enabled them to do great exploits for God to bring the people deliverance. Judges also has a striking parallel in church history subsequent to Pentecost. After God's mighty acts of salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ (our Joshua) and the initial outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the people of God have always lapsed into idolatry, unbelief, worldliness and sheer paganism and God has had to chastise his people for their sins. But when they have turned to him and humbled themselves, then he has revived his work and sent a further effusion of his Spirit, which has driven the enemies of God back and given peace and prosperity to the church. If nothing else, the book of Judges tells us that we should cry to the Lord in our time of spiritual oppression, that he would look with compassion on us and raise up his champions to drive back the enemies of the gospel and revive his cause again.

## 4. Literary structure

For the best understanding of the book, an appreciation of its structure is important. It begins with two introductions:

(i) The first of these is from chapter. 1:1 to chapter. 2:5 and deals with Israel's initial success in the occupation of Canaan, followed by her large-scale failure to complete the task, with the resulting Divine rebuke at Bokim (weeping).

(ii) The second introduction, from chapter. 2:6 to chapter. 3:6, describes the condition of Israelite society throughout the whole period of the Judges. The writer summarizes and explains the Lord's dealings with his often-rebellious people and introduces some of the basic vocabulary and formulas he will use in the later narratives: "*did evil in the eyes of the Lord*", "*the Lord handed them over to*" or "*sold them*".

(iii) We now need to go to the end of the book, where from chapter. 17 onwards there are two appendices, which are case histories of aspects of life during the early part of the Judges period. The first of these appendices, chapter. 17-18, illustrates the drift away from the true worship of the living God and the beginnings of idolatry, while the second describes the morals of a collapsing society with its attendant violent crime of every description. This section of the book of Judges is not for the faint-hearted and might make some question why it is in the Bible at all. But it is not pornographic, which would give encouragement to sin, but is utterly realistic in its description of the depravity of God's people, without any more detail than necessary. This section of the book of Judges alone is a proof of the Bible's divine authorship and utter truthfulness, for no merely human agency would include such a section in their 'holy book'!

(iv) Between the introduction and the appendices we have the chronological record of the twelve Judges raised up by God to deliver his people from the oppression of their

enemies. These men were drawn from a variety of the tribes of Israel, although one of the Judges, Shamgar, appears to be of foreign descent. The choice of the Judges shows that God often uses men from the most unlikely backgrounds to do his work. Jephthah was the son of a prostitute, Samson was from the insignificant tribe of Dan, and Ehud from the decimated tribe of Benjamin. As a later prophet would say, "*it is not by might, nor by power*", but by God's Spirit that his kingdom is extended and defended. We need to remind ourselves constantly of that principle.

### **5. The Judges chapter. 3:7 to chapter 16:31**

In this section of the book, we have the chronological record of twelve leaders of Israel specially raised up by God to '*judge*' the foreign nations who had been allowed to oppress them. Eight of these leaders - Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar (chapter. 3), Tola, Jair (chapter. 10), Ibzan, Elon and Abdon (chapter. 12) - are only given a very brief mention. The accounts of the other four Judges - Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah and Samson - are much more detailed and well known.

(i) Deborah and Barak chapters 4-5.

The story is unfolded in two parts: first a plain narrative, followed by Deborah's song of victory. Taken together, the events are as follows:

The Israelites had not been able to dislodge Jabin king of Hazor in the north of the country. With the advantage of the superior technology of iron chariots, his commander

Sisera was able to oppress the surrounding Israelites. Barak, Israel's military leader, was told by divine direction through Deborah to raise an army of 10,000 and lure Sisera's forces to Mount Tabor. The river Kishon, which flows by the foot of the mountain, is normally a small stream, but a sudden deluge sent by the Lord produced a flash flood, and the Canaanite iron chariots were rendered useless. Thus Israel's lightweight infantry was able to completely overpower Sisera and his men. Sisera himself, however, met his death at the hand of a woman named Jael, a descendant of Moses' brother-in-law. The whole episode demonstrates the complete sovereignty of God over the affairs of men and the natural elements.

#### (ii) Gideon chapters 6-9

One of the best known of the Judges, Gideon, entered the service of God with some reluctance. He was, however, courageous enough to obey God's command and destroy the local shrine of Baal-worship, albeit at night. Gideon now turned his attention to the task of delivering Israel from Midianite and Amalekite invaders. Because he was still not sure that God would give him victory, Gideon asked for two further signs: a dew-covered fleece on dry ground and a dry fleece on dew-covered ground. God graciously granted both signs. As if to emphasise that it was the Lord who would defeat their enemies, Gideon's army was whittled down to a mere 300 men. This select band surrounded the vast camp of their enemies at night with trumpets and with torches concealed by large water-jars. At Gideon's signal they all broke the jars to expose

the torches, blew the trumpets and shouted, "*The sword of the Lord and of Gideon!*" The enemy troops began to fight one another and flee for their lives. Gideon called out the local tribes to take part in the battle. The result was that the Midianite and Amalekite armies were completely destroyed. Unfortunately, the end of Gideon's life was disappointing. With some of the plunder, a golden ephod was made which became an object of idolatry. After Gideon's death, the people once again turned to idols and were chastised by God with civil unrest, resulting in the death of many Israelites.

#### (iii) Jephthah chapters 10-12.

After a further period of apostasy, Jephthah was raised up by God to deliver his people from a particularly distressing oppression. God acted when they had put away their false gods and then he could bear their misery no longer (10:16). Because earlier he had been driven away from his home and family, at first Jephthah was reluctant to come. After some considerable persuasion, he agreed to lead the nation in driving out the foreign invaders. Jephthah's lengthy appeal to the Ammonite invaders fell on deaf ears, so war was inevitable. Jephthah achieved a great victory for Israel, but had rashly made a vow that he would offer to the Lord as a sacrifice the first thing he saw on returning home. Alas! He found that on returning home, the sacrifice he had promised to offer to the Lord was his only daughter! As is so often the case, one foolish act leads to another.

#### (iv) Samson chapters 13-16.

As the last of the Judges, Samson's life overlaps Samuel's early years. In this period, right into the time of the monarchy, much of the southwest part of the country was under the heel of the Philistines. Samson's life and exploits are well known: his killing a lion with his bare hands, slaughtering 1000 Philistines with a donkey's jawbone, and carrying the gates of Gaza to the top of the hill. But Samson had a weakness for Philistine women, which was to lead to his downfall. Samson had been a Nazarite and as such had never had his head shaved. The Philistine woman Delilah eventually persuaded him to tell her that if this Nazarite vow were to be broken, then his strength would depart from him. So she had his head shaved and the Philistines overpowered him, put out his eyes and set him to work for them in prison. But though Samson had been unfaithful, God still had work for him to do. While he was being paraded as a spectacle before them as part of their celebration of victory over him, he was able to lean against the pillars of the temple and bring the building crashing down. This resulted in a greater slaughter of the Philistines in his death than throughout the whole of his life.

## 6. Appendices

(i) False Worship in the Lord's Name chapters 17-18.

This first case-history tells us of an enterprising man of Ephraim, named Micah. He stole a huge sum of money from his mother and when she cursed the unknown thief, he returned it to her. She consecrated the silver to the Lord, had some of it melted down and made into both a

carved and a cast idol. Micah thus had a house of idols, and then installed his son as priest. It seemed to have bothered him that his priest was not from the right tribe, because when a career-minded Levite came his way, looking to better himself, Micah offered him the job of being a priest for his shrine. What more could he now want? He had his own place of worship, his own idols and his own full-time chaplain. (17:13)

Unfortunately for Micah, others were also on the move, looking for a place to settle. Some scouts from the tribe of Dan came by one day. They should have settled on the coastal plain (the region around modern Tel Aviv), but had not been able to dislodge the Canaanites and had been squatters in Ephraimite territory. Micah's Levite sent them on their way with 'the Lord's blessing' and they found a suitable area in the extreme north of the country. And so it was that on their way to take up residence in their new territory, a sizeable contingent of Danites once more passed through Micah's area. But this time the visit was to steal his Levite and idols to set up their own shrine. When they had settled in their chosen territory, they then appointed Moses' grandson and his family as priests.

Apart from the obvious breaches of the Ten Commandments, in the form of lying, stealing and idolatry, this account shows the wholesale disregard for the word of God. Levites were not supposed to rove around looking for a more lucrative situation. The Danites should have settled in their allotted territory, and the worship of God

was to be at the Tabernacle, with only the sons of Aaron serving as priests. Yet these people still considered that they were serving the Lord. How similar this is to so many practices in the professing 'church' today.

(ii) A Collapsing Society chapters 19-21.

If the first case history speaks of ungodliness, then the second focuses on unrighteousness. The latter always follows the former. Again a Levite is involved. He had a concubine, a live-in girlfriend in today's language. But she did not wish to stay and went back to her father. After a while, the Levite decided to see if he could bring her back. After a few days spent with her father, both he and the woman set off for home. By sunset, they could only reach the town of Gibeah. None of the local Benjamites offered him hospitality, but an old man from Ephraim took him in. After dark, a gang of young men came to the house and demanded from the house owner that the Levite be sent out to them to gratify their homosexual desires. The Levite instead pushed his concubine out into the street, and the gang sexually abused her, leaving her dead on the doorstep next morning. In response to this, the Levite then cut the woman into twelve parts and sent them to each of the tribes of Israel. The whole nation was stirred to self-righteous indignation and demanded that the men responsible be put to death. But the Benjamites, in their pride, would not give the men up. No doubt they took the line that it was a private matter. So a civil war ensued, with heavy casualties on both sides and the near genocide of the tribe of Benjamin, with only 600 men surviving. To recover the

situation, more killings followed by kidnappings took place, to provide wives for the 600 Benjamites. This was largely because of two rash oaths (21:1 & 21:5), which the whole nation had entered into.

What an awful catalogue of evil behaviour from those who were the Lord's people! But perhaps the saddest part of the whole affair was the silence of the high priest Phinehas, Aaron's grandson (20:28), who had been so zealous for the glory of God in his earlier years (Numbers 25:7 & 31:6).

The parallel with today's situation in both church and state in many parts of the world is surely self-evident. In the church we have many doing what is right in their own eyes in terms of worship, with only the flimsiest of sanctions from the word of God, while in the world at large the moral landslide continues unchecked. There is, however, one ray of hope. It was in such days of moral and spiritual darkness that God sent his deliverers. Surely we must cry out to our God in this degenerate age, that it is time for him to act.

## 7. Suggested sermon outlines from Judges

### 1. Overall theme of the book of Judges

- Israel's repeated disobedience
- Divine chastening by foreign oppression
- Cry for help from God
- Divine deliverance by the Judges

### 2. New Testament parallel

- The Church's illustrious beginning (cf. Israel under Joshua)
- The Church's repeated lapses into unbelief, idolatry and worldliness
- Periods of spiritual barrenness and defeat
- God's mighty acts of reviving throughout Church history

### **3. The men and means God uses**

- Often chosen from an unlikely background
- God often uses natural means – the storm which rendered Canaanite chariots useless
- God often works by the few – e.g. Gideon's 300
- Illustrates the principle – “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord”

### **4. Deborah and Barak**

- Superior technology of the Canaanites used to oppress Israel
- Heavy rainstorm gives Israel the advantage
- Sisera meets an ignominious end by the hands of a woman
- The complete sovereignty of God over men and nature

### **5. Gideon**

- A reluctant deliverer

- Destroys the Baal shrine
- Asks for confirmatory signs
- His army reduced to a mere 300
- The sword of the Lord and of Gideon
- Disappointing finale – lapses into idolatry

### **6. Jephthah**

- False gods put away
- Jephthah's reluctance
- A great deliverance
- Jephthah's rash vow

### **7. Samson**

- Set apart as a Nazarite
- Samson's amazing exploits
- Samson's weakness
- Breaks his Nazarite vow
- Samson's restoration and final act

### **8. False worship in the Lord's name**

- Micah's idol and priest
- Disobedient Danites
- Seemingly authentic worship - contrary to God's commands

### **9. A collapsing society**

- Gross sexual immorality leading to murder
- A devastating civil war – divine chastisement
- Benjamin suffers near-genocide

- Phinehas's disappointing silence

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### Chapter 3 Bible survey - Ruth

The period of the Judges was one of the darkest, spiritually, in the whole of Israel's history. Set against this sombre background, the book of Ruth gives a contrasting delightful picture of the true faith and spirituality which was present in some communities even in those dark days.

The events in the book of Ruth probably occurred in the latter part of Gideon's life (died 1122 BC) and certainly before the birth of Samuel in 1105 BC. The details in the book would have been recorded at the time by those involved in the story, but written up and placed with the other Scriptures probably during the reign of King David.

One of the key lessons of the book is that it shows the possibility of living a godly life in an otherwise evil and godless society. We don't have to be conformed to the spirit of the age, whether that spirit exists inside or outside the Church.

#### 1. The story

This book is a Hebrew short story, which is told in such a way that it is compact, vivid, warm, beautiful and at times dramatic. One modern writer refers to it as a jewel of Hebrew narrative art.

The story opens with the migration of a family from Bethlehem in the land of Israel, to the neighbouring pagan country of Moab. The reason for their moving was primarily economic, without due consideration of spiritual consequences. This resulted in the two sons marrying pagan women, against the direct command of God (Deuteronomy 7:3). Doubtless the premature death of the two sons in the family was sent as a chastisement. When the famine in Bethlehem was over, Naomi decided to return to her hometown and rejoin the people of God in Israel. So she urged her daughters-in-law to remain in Moab, and Orpah agreed. By contrast, Ruth insisted on going with her mother-in-law and declared her intentions in those moving words of chapter 1:16-17. Verse 16 says, *“Ruth replied, ‘don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God my God.’”*

And so Naomi and Ruth returned to Bethlehem, where it was barley-harvest (early summer). Having no other means of support, Ruth went to glean after the reapers (this social security provision had been commanded in Leviticus 19:9,10). But Boaz went further than the law - he also commanded that his reapers allow extra grain-stalks to fall for Ruth, and he provided her with a free lunch and water to drink whenever she wanted.

Naomi was delighted with Ruth's success, but soon realized that the outcome could well be more far reaching

than a full stomach. In Israelite law, a widow was to be provided for by marriage to the nearest available relative of her dead husband. Such a man was called a kinsman-redeemer. And since Boaz was such a man, Naomi instructed Ruth to go to his threshing floor, and when he was asleep to secretly lie at Boaz's feet. This she did, and when later in the night Boaz woke up, he was startled to find Ruth there. She explained her reason, which in effect was an offer of marriage, with which he was delighted. Before daybreak, he sent her home laden with more grain and promised to negotiate the legal aspects of the marriage next day with another relative who had a greater claim than he did. The other man declined, so Ruth and Boaz were married, becoming great-grandparents of King David. The prophetic statements of chapter 4:11 were fulfilled beyond all expectations.

## 2. Theme

The main theme of the book is selflessness. It speaks of Ruth's selfless and costly devotion to her widowed mother-in-law Naomi, and of Boaz's kindness and compassion to two widows, one of whom was a foreigner from a country where little love was lost with Israel.

This book, then, has much to teach us in our pleasure-seeking and self-idolizing generation. We live in an age when people do things largely because they like doing them, so the duties which ought to be done are often neglected. Such sentiments are wholly absent from the lives of Ruth and Boaz. They acted upon a much higher

principle - that of living to please God. It was love for God and his people that had brought Ruth to Bethlehem. It was in obedience to the law of God concerning the treatment of the poor that Boaz first was able to show kindness to Ruth and eventually became the kinsman-redeemer of Naomi and Ruth. And Ruth and Boaz were rewarded not only in the gift of each other in marriage, but by becoming ancestors of David, the greatest king of Israel, and also by being included in the line of descent to the Lord Jesus Christ. Boaz too, is a 'type' of our kinsman-redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ, who as the hymn puts it so aptly:-

*“Jesus our Surety, our Kinsman-Redeemer,  
Round us the robe of his righteousness flings”*

## 3. Sermon outlines from Ruth

### 1. Backsliding, chastisement and homecoming

- The famine in Israel - a mark of Divine displeasure
- Elimelech leaves Canaan for economic reasons
- God's chastisement – Naomi loses husband and sons
- Naomi's return – like the prodigal
- God's grace overrules even our disobedience – Ruth brought among the people of God

### 2. Boaz – a godly life in spiritually dark days

- Provides for gleaners in his field
- Shows kindness to a foreigner
- More generous than the law required

- Rewarded with a godly wife
- Included in the direct line to Christ
- As kinsman-redeemer, Boaz a 'type' of Christ

### 3. Ruth – Moabite maiden becomes covenant mother

- Non-Israelite origin
- Wholehearted commitment to the Lord
- Dutiful daughter-in-law
- Example of godly feminine ingenuity (proposal to Boaz)
- Repairs the breach between Abraham and Lot (Genesis 13)

## Chapter 4 Bible survey – 1 Samuel

### 1. Introduction

1 and 2 Samuel are named after the person God used to establish Israel as a kingdom. The two books were originally one book but divided into two by those who translated the Hebrew Old Testament into Greek (called the Septuagint). These books follow chronologically from Judges and Ruth, although there is some overlap since the estimated date of the birth of Samuel is 1105 BC, about 15-20 years after the marriage of Boaz and Ruth, and before the judgeship of both Jephthah and Samson. Samson died only about 5 years before the anointing of Saul as king in 1050 BC.

### 2. Author and date of writing

As with many of the Old Testament historical books, it is not easy to say exactly who wrote it. According to 1 Chronicles 27:24 and 29:29, there were four sources from which the book may have been compiled - the records of the prophets and seers: Samuel, Nathan and Gad, and the annals of David. A fifth source, the book of Jasher, is mentioned in 2 Sam 1:18. It seems that the writer lived until after the death of Solomon and the division of the kingdom under Solomon's son into Israel and Judah.

### 3. Contents and theme

As has already been stated, 1 Samuel describes the establishment of Israel as a monarchy. It is significant to note that the writer does not include a birth-narrative of either Saul or David. He does, however, describe the birth of the prophet Samuel, the forerunner and anointer of both Saul and David. The writer seems to be saying that in establishing kingship in Israel, flesh and blood are to be subordinated to word and Spirit. The king of Israel was not to think of himself as ruling by Divine right. He was to submit himself to God's word through the prophet.

In considering the early chapters of 1 Samuel, we need to remember the fact that the Lord was already their king. He had ruled over them as a nation since they had been delivered from the slavery of Egypt, although they had often been a disobedient and rebellious people. It was clearly God's will for them to have a king, but the people's

motive in wanting one was patently wrong. They wanted their king to be like the kings of the nations around them and were in effect rejecting the Lord's authority over them. Their first king, Saul, although starting well, ended up as a complete failure. Saul was their choice from wrong motives. It is as if God gave them an object lesson on the results of doing the right thing for the wrong reasons. On the other hand, David, the man after God's own heart, achieved more for Israel as their king than any other who followed. One lesson is surely clear - we are not only to do God's work, but we can only expect his blessing if it is done in the way he has laid down in his word. Saul sought to do God's work, but as we shall see was not always careful how he did it. God eventually rejected him from being king. David on the other hand, apart from two particular deviations, was careful to obey all of God's commandments, and the Lord blessed him abundantly. As such a king, he prefigures the office of the Lord Jesus Christ as the King of kings.

#### **4. The fall of Eli's house**

Before considering the life of Samuel himself, there is the question of Eli, the old priest who with his sons ministered before the Lord at Shiloh where the tabernacle was set up. Eli himself was a godly man, but his sons can only be described as covenant-breaking clerics. They abused their position in what was in effect the 'church' to suit their own ends. They had no reverence for God's commandments. They took more of the meat from the offerings than was due to them and they slept with the women who served at

the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. Eli had rebuked them, but they took no notice. Clearly Eli was at fault in this matter; he should never have allowed the situation to continue unchecked. And because of his position as high priest, with his sons serving as priests, God had to punish him severely by the death of both of his sons at the hands of the Philistines on the same day. In the matter of his sons' evil behaviour, Eli had honoured them more than he had honoured the Lord, and the Lord therefore had to judge them.

#### **5. Samuel - Prophet and judge**

The name Samuel means 'Asked of God', and as we read the opening chapter of the book we can see the aptness of this name. Samuel's mother Hannah was truly desperate for a child and being a godly woman, she turned her desperation into persistent and heartfelt prayer mingled with tears and accompanied by a vow. The Lord did not turn away from her pleadings and graciously gave her the child she desired. She duly paid her vow and thus Samuel was consecrated to the Lord's service at a very early age (4 or 5 years old). The story of Samuel's call as a child is well known and he subsequently grew up to become one of the godliest characters of the Bible and led the nation of Israel in a return to the worship of God. In response to their repentance, the Lord, under Samuel, also gave them deliverance from their oppressors, the Philistines (chapter 7). His sons did not follow his godly example, and so in chapter 8 we have the request for a king.

## 6. Saul - the people's king

### (i). Saul's anointing

The people had requested a king. They had done so from wrong motives, to be like the other nations around them. God had decided that they should have a king, but the first king he gave them ended up as a failure. But the providential events surrounding the choice of Saul clearly show that God had chosen him (chapter 9,10). The loss of his father's donkeys brought Saul into contact with Samuel, and Samuel anointed Saul secretly as king. This act of the prophet anointing the king showed that God was their true king and that their earthly king was but a vice-regent who was to act at the behest of God, given through the prophet.

The nation as a whole was not aware that this private ceremony had taken place. Samuel then summoned all the people together so that a king should be chosen from among them. Before the lot was cast to choose the king, Samuel addressed the people. His address was a rebuke for their wanting a king instead of the Lord. Yet when the lot was cast, Samuel proclaimed Saul as God's chosen (10:24). As well as choosing the king, a constitution was drawn up and written by Samuel on a scroll. Thus Israel became a constitutional monarchy.

### (ii). Early promise

Saul's life was not an unmitigated disaster. At first he showed great promise. Not long after his inauguration, a crisis arose which required prompt and decisive action.

For many years the Ammonites, who were descendants of Lot's involuntary incest with his younger daughter, had adopted a policy of slavery and genocide to solve the 'Hebrew problem' on the east side of Jordan. The king of the Ammonites had now besieged the capital Jabesh Gilead and was proposing to gouge out the right eye of all the inhabitants as the terms of a peace treaty. When Saul heard this, he raised an army of 330,000 and gained a great victory over the despicable Ammonites. After the battle, he even showed great magnanimity to those who had spoken against him at his inauguration. And so Samuel gathered the whole nation again at Gilgal, where Saul was confirmed as king and Samuel delivered his farewell speech as judge, but not as prophet. He also promised ceaseless prayer for the nation, still a vital duty of the Church's leaders.

### (iii). Disobedience, failure and rejection

So much promise, so early, and yet what a miserable end. It began by Saul starting his own war with the Philistines without reference to Samuel and he began very soon to pay the price. The whole Philistine army assembled and caused the Israelites to retreat. Saul was supposed to wait for Samuel at Gilgal, but because of the urgency of the situation he ordered the offering of sacrifices before Samuel came. He was usurping Samuel's place as prophet and for this he suffered Samuel's severe rebuke and was told that he would not have a dynasty to follow him on his throne. However, it was not all doom and gloom. Chapter 14 describes how Saul's son Jonathan, in reliance upon the

Lord, enabled a great victory to be won. Saul's dubious contribution was to impatiently override the guidance from the priest and to stubbornly insist that the hero of the day be put to death because he broke Saul's over-strict oath. Rightly, the men of Israel would not hear of Jonathan's death. The imposed fast also resulted in the famished army violating God's command (Lev 17:10-12) and eating the blood of the plundered animals, because they were too hungry to wait for the blood to be drained out.

After that victory over the Philistines, Saul achieved much for Israel, but failed his final test when he did not thoroughly destroy the Amalekites as God had commanded through Samuel (chapter 15). And so he was finally rejected as king, and God would choose another after his own heart.

What are we to think of Saul? He was a man who had once showed so much promise in the service of the Lord but who ended his life consulting a witch. As such he is a great warning to us that to begin well is not enough; only those who persevere to the end will be saved (Mark 13:13). May God give us grace to do so!

The remainder of Saul's life - probably some 12-13 years - is intertwined with the life of David, and we shall only mention Saul when their paths cross.

## **7. The early life of David**

### **(i) The Lord's choice of king**

Samuel was not happy at Saul's demise, so God had to speak quite straightly to him and sent him to Bethlehem to anoint one of Jesse's sons as king. Because Saul was still alive, this had to be shrouded in secrecy and it seems that only Samuel and David really knew the purpose of the prophet's visit. A feast to the Lord was arranged and seven of Jesse's sons were then presented to Samuel, but none was chosen. Eventually David was summoned from tending the sheep and Samuel anointed him. We know little about the early life of this teenager, but even the fact that David had to work while the others had the day off shows that he was no spoiled baby of the family. At that comparatively early age he had also mastered the playing of the harp, and soon afterwards was to kill a lion and a bear in single-handed combat to protect the family's flock. But David also knew his God, for when not long after his anointing, he went to carry provisions to his brothers in the army, the thing which really fired David up was the insults which the Philistine Goliath was heaping upon God's people and therefore upon the Lord himself (chapter 17:26).

The incident, which thrust David from obscurity to fame, is one of the best-known but over-romanticized stories of the Old Testament. Probably in his late teens, David was of full stature. But he was only able to tackle the giant because of his previous exploits against wild animals carried out with God's help, and his present trust in the Lord. But kill the giant he did, and the result was a great victory for Israel, with Saul playing a largely spectator role.

(ii). David the fugitive

David's success provoked the jealousy of Saul. He realized the potential of this young man and tried by all kinds of ways to kill him. His first attempt in a fit of insane anger failed, but subsequent attempts to end David's life were clearly premeditated. Eventually, despite the intervention of Jonathan, David in desperation fled from Saul and decided to leave the country and go to the Philistines at Gath. It was a doubtful move which involved lying to Ahimelech the priest, who gave him and his men the consecrated bread, for which kindness all the priests were later put to the sword by Saul. David later recognised his partial responsibility for their untimely deaths. David was soon unwelcome in enemy territory and only managed to escape by feigning madness. That his spiritual condition had been at low ebb is deduced from Psalm 56, written while he was imprisoned in Gath.

Psalm 34 on the other hand, written after his release, shows renewed spiritual composure. Driven away from the Philistines, David came back to live in the cave of Adullam, not far from Jerusalem. It was here that he wrote Psalms 57 & 142, both models of how to pray in oppressive circumstances. His brothers joined him in the cave, and David also at this time made provision for his parents to leave the country.

Chapters 23 - 26 describe Saul's further attempts to kill David by "hunting him like a partridge in the mountains".

On two notable occasions David could have killed Saul, but did not regard the apparently providential 'open door' as guidance to do so. He would not lift up his hand against the "Lord's anointed". 'Open doors' must always be tested by scripture principles before we take advantage of them.

During this period David had been 'divorced' by Saul from his wife (Saul's daughter) but came into contact with a godly woman called Abigail. She prevented him from over-reacting and taking hasty revenge against her boorish husband Nabal, who had sullenly slighted David and his men's request for food. In the event God took Nabal's life and Abigail's godly charms were not lost upon David, who subsequently married her.

The closing chapters of the book show the bringing together of all God's threads of providence. Saul, in his final battle with the Philistines, was killed with his three sons on mount Gilboa. Meanwhile, David spent a further period of backsliding in Philistine territory, again involving lies and deceit. The Lord had to chastise him through the Amalekites attacking Ziklag and carrying off all the women and children. This caused David and his men great distress, but David again repented and found strength in the Lord his God (30:6). They pursued the Amalekites and destroyed them and were able to rescue all their families intact. Saul's life had ended in disgrace; a new brighter phase of David's was about to begin.

Also written during this period were Psalms 52, 59 and 63.

## 8. Suggested sermon outlines from 1 Samuel

### 1. The kingship in Israel

- Not by divine right, but in submission to God's word through the prophets
- God's will for them to have a king
- The people choose a king for the wrong reasons
- Saul, the people's king, ends in failure
- David, God's choice of king, although not perfect, brings great blessings
- We need to do God's work in God's way (as laid down in Scripture)
- David as king, prefigures the Lord Jesus Christ

### 2. Lessons from Eli's life

- A priest who feared God
- Influential in Samuel's early life
- His covenant-breaking sons allowed to stay in office
- Divine judgement finally falls on him and his family
- Even difficult children are to be brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord
- Some children may go astray, even with the best of upbringing

### 3. Samuel – Prophet and judge

- The birth of Samuel – 'asked of God'

- Consecrated to the Lord's service
- Early spiritual response to the Lord – child conversions not to be despised
- Restores the worship of God in the nation
- God gives early victories over the Philistines
- Sets up 'schools of the prophets' (seminaries)
- His prophetic work mainly preaching and teaching God's word
- A man of prayer – a vital duty for church leaders

### 4. Saul – the people's king

- His selection and private anointing
- Public selection and anointing by Samuel
- Shows early promise – victory over the Ammonites
- Samuel steps down as judge
- Saul's impatience and its consequences (chapter. 13)
- Jonathan's exploit and Saul's rash vow (chapter. 14)
- Partial obedience leads to rejection (chapter. 15)
- Saul's life a warning – final perseverance, the mark of true godliness

### 5. David – God's choice for a king

- The youngest of eight sons, but not the spoilt 'baby' of the family
- Hard-working, courageous and gifted
- Zealous for God's name

- Rises to prominence by killing the giant Goliath
- His success provokes Saul's jealousy
- His friendship with Jonathan – a gracious provision for both
- David – fugitive for several years
- Escapes to the Philistines (writes Psalm 56)
- Hides in the cave of Adullam – (Psalms 57 & 142)
- Refuses opportunities to kill Saul (the Lord's anointed)
- God deals with Nabal – David marries Abigail
- Backsliding in Philistine territory
- Saul and Jonathan killed in battle at Gilboa
- David's lament – does not gloat over Saul's demise (See 2 Samuel 1)
- Hardship and persecution often used by God as training for leadership
- (e.g. Joseph & Daniel)

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## Chapter 5 Bible survey – 2 Samuel

The last part of 1 Samuel traces the life of David up to the death of Saul and Jonathan on Mt. Gilboa. 2 Samuel continues the narrative of the subsequent life of David.

### 1. Saul's death and David's lament

Some modern scholars have made much about the discrepancy between the two accounts of Saul's death (1

Samuel 31 & 2 Sam 1). For those who accept the truth of every word of Scripture, the apparent discrepancy can be answered by recognizing that the Amalekite who reported the incident to David was lying, in the hope of gaining favours from the heir-apparent to the throne of Israel. He got no such thing, but summary justice for his alleged regicidal act. Most of the remainder of chapter 1 describes the mourning and lament of David over Saul. Here are the words of a truly gracious man, glossing over Saul's ill treatment of himself; he has nothing but praise for Saul and Jonathan. It was a bad day for Israel to lose their king and his sons at the hands of the uncircumcised Philistines.

### 2. Coronation and civil war

The tribe of Judah was quick to publicly acknowledge David as king over them. His seat of power was in Hebron. One of the first things he did was to commend the men of Jabesh-Gilead for courageously retrieving the bodies of Saul and his sons from the Philistines in Beth-Shan and burying them in Jabesh-Gilead.

Meanwhile Abner, the commander-in-chief of Saul's army, made Ish-bosheth king over the remaining tribes of Israel. His capital was in Mahanaim, east of Jordan.

The civil war began by Abner advancing with his army to the very edge of David's territory and the two armies facing each other across the pool of Gibeon. At Abner's suggestion, twelve men from each side engaged in hand-to-hand combat which produced 24 corpses. So the two

armies had no option but to do battle. Asahel, Joab's brother, went for the big fish and pursued Abner. Despite two warnings he continued the pursuit and was only stopped by a fatal rearward thrust of the butt of Abner's spear. The battle raged all day until Abner appealed to David's commander Joab for a truce and then withdrew to Mahanaim.

After two years of civil war, with David's position becoming stronger, Ish-bosheth angered Abner, who responded by avowing that he would from now on support David. David was pleased with Abner's defection to him, but only agreed to it if his first wife Michal was returned to him. This among other things would prove the new king's goodwill towards the house of Saul.

Abner's support was to be short-lived, for he was brutally murdered by David's nephews, Joab and Abishai, in revenge for the killing of their brother Asahel in the earlier battle. The murder took place at Hebron, one of the cities of refuge, where no one was to be put to death without a fair trial. David was exceedingly displeased with this act but could not bring himself to execute justice on his relatives, Joab and Abishai. The whole affair, however, clearly grieved David deeply, as the lament he sang at Abner's funeral shows.

Chapter 4 describes another murder, that of Ish-bosheth, an act which also displeased David, with the result that the assassins were executed. With Saul's son and army

general both dead, all the tribes of Israel now formally accepted David as their new king.

But where was his capital to be? Rather than in Judah or Israel, David decided upon the till-now unconquered city of Jebus, which he renamed Jerusalem and set up his royal residence there.

The Philistines thought that they might do to David what they had done to Saul, but under God's direction and with God's help, David achieved another resounding victory. Chapter 5:23-24 shows how important it was to wait for God to move before attacking the enemy.

### **3. Reformation and rebuke**

With the Lord's help, David had established his throne in Jerusalem. He now wanted to make the capital the centre of worship and made plans to bring back the Ark of the Covenant. It was undoubtedly an awe-inspiring procession and all was going well until one of the attendants put out his hand to steady the ark and was struck down by the Lord. The whole project came to a sudden halt, the ark was deposited at a nearby threshing floor and David withdrew to 'sulk'. His confidence in the Lord had been severely dented. But when God blessed Obed-Edom, where the ark was in residence, David began to recover his composure and again renewed his resolve to establish God's covenant worship at Jerusalem (see Psalm 132). This time he had referred to the scriptures for how it should be done and the Lord blessed his biblically-based efforts with success. No wonder that David danced for joy as he

accompanied the singing of the 24th Psalm as the ark entered Jerusalem on the shoulders of the priests! It was truly a high point of holy triumph.

#### **4. David's desire and God's covenant blessing**

David had built himself a palace in Jerusalem, but the ark was still in a tent, so David asked the prophet if he could build a more permanent and fitting building for the worship of God. At first Nathan agreed with the suggestion, but the Lord then sent a message to David that he did not wish David to carry out that task. His desire to please God was commended and God renewed his covenant with him and not only promised to establish his son on his throne, but told him of the everlasting kingdom of great David's greater son, the Lord Jesus Christ. David's response (chapter 7) shows his close relationship to the Lord and his gratitude for all God's blessings in the past and those promised in the future. David's mode of talking with his God with humility yet holy familiarity is a great example for our praying.

#### **5. God's servant - victorious yet merciful**

Chapters 8-10 give a summary of David's military campaigns in which God gave him success. In the first instance he was only taking the land, which God had promised, but which the nation had failed to conquer in the 400 years since Joshua. But he also conquered the neighbouring countries of Moab, Ammon and the northern territories up to the Euphrates. At first sight, these military victories seem like a policy of imperialist expansion, but

the statement that the Lord gave him victory gives the lie to that idea. Jewish writers say that the Moabites had massacred David's family, which would explain his severe treatment of them. Then the Ammonites picked a quarrel and were assisted in their war by the Arameans. Both national groups became part of greater Israel. No doubt there was good reason also for the war against Edom. David's ordering of his affairs at home also shows great wisdom; nothing was left to chance, all was ordered and firm.

But amidst all this military activity, we have in chapter 9 the touching story of David's great kindness to Mephibosheth. Mephibosheth had nothing going for him. Crippled in body, his very name means 'a shameful thing'. A member of the rejected house of Saul, even living as a lodger in a pasture less location (Lo-Debar), he is a perfect illustration of what we were in our sins. But when David showed mercy on him, his life was transformed so that he enjoyed all the privileges of a member of the royal household. And that is what our king, Jesus, has done for his people. He has taken us off the rubbish heap and made us sit as princes at his very table!

#### **6. Relapse and chastisement**

Would that we could jump over the next few chapters, for they cast a dark shadow over an otherwise outstandingly righteous life. I am referring, of course, to the episode of David and Bathsheba. This incident has a pedigree in that one of David's weaknesses was a roving eye for a beautiful

woman. In OT times, more than one wife was allowed as a concession, but the king was not supposed to take many wives (Deuteronomy 17:17). David had clearly not heeded this prohibition, for by this time the size of his harem was well into double figures and he was about to add another in the person of Bathsheba.

The story is well known: David taking it easy at home when the nation was at war; his seduction of and adultery with Bathsheba, then his efforts to cover up the resulting pregnancy by getting her husband Uriah the Hittite back to spend some time with his wife. When that failed, he sent Uriah into the hottest part of the battle so that he would be killed, and then after a brief but ostentatious mourning for Uriah, he married Bathsheba so that no one would know that the child had been conceived as a result of David's adultery. But the Lord knew, and sent Nathan with a message to David, who in response to Nathan's anecdote, in righteous indignation implicated himself, and his sin was discovered to the prophet, who then pronounced God's judgement upon it. What a catalogue of troubles came upon David and his household because of his sin. Not only did the child die, but before long, trouble after trouble came upon him and his family. Three more sons died prematurely and David was exiled for several years under Absalom's rebellion.

Yes, David did bring much trouble on himself by his secret sin, but he did also repent and was restored to full

fellowship with the Lord and knew again the 'joy of his salvation' (Psalm 51).

### **7. David and Absalom**

David's eldest son, called Amnon, had a burning lust for his half-sister Tamar. Through the offices of a so-called friend, arrangements were made for the couple to be alone so that Amnon could gratify his lust. But as is so often the case with rape, because the victim has emotionally rejected the rapist, he then turns on her in anger. Amnon literally had Tamar thrown out to suffer the consequences of the rape on her own. Understandably, Tamar's brother Absalom was furious and determined to take his revenge. When David was told about it, what did he do? He fumed and fretted, but as in the case of his murderous nephew Joab, refused to apply the law. Amnon should have been brought to justice for his crime, for which the penalty was death. But David's inordinate affection for his son clouded his judgement and precipitated even greater calamities. Absalom lay low for two years, but all the time was harbouring resentment and waiting his time to take revenge. He duly engineered a plot to have Amnon murdered, which has echoes of David's scheming to kill Uriah. Having carried out the plan, Absalom then fled the country to his grandfather, king of Geshur, where he remained in exile for 3 years.

Again, what was David's reaction? It was an inordinate affection for his murderous son and an unwillingness to obey God's law in bringing him to justice. Eventually,

through the subtle scheming of Joab, Absalom was brought back, but clearly David had a bad conscience, for he would not receive him at court for a further two years. Joab may have rued the day he helped the murderer return, for Absalom, by an act of terrorism, forced Joab to appeal to the king for him to be fully reinstated. But Absalom's bowing down to David was mere pretence. Clearly he considered his father to be a washout, as the events of the next four years were to show. Absalom used this time to gain the beginnings of a following, which finally blossomed in a full-blown rebellion, with Absalom being proclaimed king in Hebron.

David's flight from Jerusalem may appear to be an act of weakness, but the orderly manner of it shows it rather to be a strategic withdrawal. No doubt David was smarting under the chastisement which Nathan had foretold, but his faith in the Lord to deliver him did not waver, as the words of Psalm 3 indicate. And even though Shimei's curses were unfounded, no doubt David recognised an overall justice in them when he said that the Lord had told him to curse (chapter 16:11).

Before leaving Jerusalem, David had done two important things. He had prayed that the counsel of Ahithophel would be overthrown and he had planted a spy in Absalom's court. Ahithophel, Bathsheba's grandfather, was considered to be one of the wisest men in the realm, but Absalom only followed that part of his advice which he found easy to follow. It was comparatively easy to sleep

with his father's concubines, but quite another matter to take the field of battle. So when David's spy Hushai advised a delay in any military activity, then Absalom readily agreed. But time was on David's side and the result was that when battle was joined, Absalom was defeated, but not before 20,000 men were sacrificed on the altar of his selfish ambition.

Before the battle, David had given instructions that they were to be gentle with his son. Joab, ever the hardheaded soldier, made sure, however, that Absalom, the very cause of the war, was killed. After the battle we have the almost ridiculous situation of the king's self-indulgent grief having to be rebuked by Joab, who reminded him that he owed far more to the loyalty of his faithful troops than ever he had to Absalom. What a lesson this is in the power of inordinate family affection clouding a man's better judgement.

### **8. Return from exile**

David did not immediately march on Jerusalem and take up his former position. He waited to be invited by the nation. The northern ten tribes seemed the more eager to bring him back, while Judah appeared to be dragging their feet; so David sent a message to the elders of Judah to encourage them and to appoint the late Absalom's army commander as his own army commander. This meant that Joab was again demoted.

As the king was returning, several people who wished to make their peace with him greeted him. First of all Shimei, who had cursed David, now begged for forgiveness. David, ever gracious, granted him an amnesty, although Shimei's loyalty was again put to the test under Solomon and when found wanting was duly punished. Next came Mephibosheth, whose servant had misrepresented him to David on David's flight. But Mephibosheth was loyal as ever, and the land which his servant had tried to acquire was returned to him. The aged Barzillai also greeted David, but declined the invitation to go up to Jerusalem and sent his son Kimham instead.

### **9. Rebellion and murder**

The recent division in the nation was not healed that easily, for the disagreement between North and South over bringing the king back soon developed into a revolt, with the ten tribes following a man called Sheba. David told his new army commander to summon his army in three days. Amasa took longer and because of the danger of further delay, Abishai was asked to carry out the task and pursue the rebels. Joab was now only third in command. But having contravened David's wishes twice before and got away with it, he had no difficulty in also assassinating Amasa, before once again leading the army to defeat the rebels. Sheba had holed up in a city in the north of the kingdom, but following the advice of a wise woman, the citizens executed Sheba and his head was thrown over the wall. Thus further bloodshed was averted and the kingdom was at peace. Notice that the ruthless Joab had promoted

himself again to overall command of the army, with nothing being done about Amasa's murder.

### **10. Famine, final victory and praise**

The account of the first part of chapter 21 may not be in chronological sequence. It refers to a famine that lasted for three years. David's response is very instructive; he enquired of the Lord. When there is spiritual famine, the church ought first and foremost to seek the Lord in humility and repentance. In David's case, Saul's near-genocide of the Gibeonites had not been overlooked by God, and restitution was required, with seven of Saul's descendants being hanged. Note that the rain poured down upon the bodies, indicating that God's anger was appeased and the drought was ended.

The second half of the chapter describes final victories over the Philistines and the destruction of the remaining giants. These were the last of David's enemies, and their final destruction called forth the Psalm of chapter 22, which is a variant of Psalm 18. This Psalm, although speaking of David's victories, is also clearly Messianic, for it contains passages which could only refer to Christ's kingdom and triumph. (cf Romans 15:9).

### **11. Last words and final chastening**

The last words of chapter 23 seem to be a kind of public statement by David, shortly before his death. They are his last will and testament and resemble the last words of Jacob and Moses.

The remainder of chapter 23 is a flashback, giving a list with anecdotes of David's mighty men, his professional soldiers, without whom he could never have achieved all he did. As well as the touching story of the water obtained from the well at Bethlehem when it was behind enemy lines, notice that Uriah is listed, whom David had murdered.

Chapter 24 gives an account of one of David's last public sins and how the nation was punished for it. It is important for us to remember that God was angry with the nation, and the numbering of the people was the means used to bring judgement upon them. 1 Chronicles 21:1 says that Satan incited David. No doubt David's pride in his army reflected national pride, which needed to be chastened. Typically, David chose direct judgement from God, and then by his urgent pleadings God's hand was stayed. The place where David built the altar to mark the end of the plague became the site for the temple.

## **12. Suggested sermon outlines from 2 Samuel**

### **1. Establishing the kingdom (chapters 2-5)**

- Judah anoints David as King
- Civil war between Judah and Israel
- Joab's revenge killing of Abner (chapter. 3)
- Capturing neutral Jerusalem for David's capital (chapter. 5)
- The Philistines further subdued

- Re-establishing godly rule in the Church will often involve conflict

### **2. Restoring true worship (chapter 6)**

- David's first attempt to bring back the ark ends in failure
- Reasons for divine displeasure – the Biblical pattern ignored
- The presence of the ark – a blessing to Obed-Edom
- The ark successfully brought to Jerusalem – carried by the priests
- Biblical principles, not human wisdom, should govern our worship and work for the Lord

### **3. The Lord renews the covenant (chapter 7)**

- David's good desire to build a temple
- God's purpose otherwise
- Establishment of David's throne and kingdom promised for ever
- Fulfilled only in Messiah and his kingdom
- David's response – a model for prayer and praise
- God will reward our unfulfilled holy desires with greater blessings
- God is no man's debtor

### **4. God's servant – victorious yet merciful (chapters 8-10)**

- Finishing the uncompleted conquest
- Subduing the surrounding nations – not imperialist expansion but divine directive (8:6,14)
- A well-ordered realm (8:15-18)
- Mercy shown to the vanquished house of Saul (Mephibosheth) – chapter.9
- David's kindness a picture of God's grace to sinners

### 5. David's fall and restoration (chapters 11-12)

- David's roving eye – the prohibition of Deuteronomy 17:17 not heeded
- Overtaken by temptation
- Abuses his power to take Bathsheba – power often corrupts
- Cover-up with lying and murder
- Rebuked by the prophet (Nathan)
- Repentance and deep contrition (Psalm 51)
- Brings on himself and others a catalogue of troubles
- God will not even let his people escape the immediate consequences of pardoned sin
- God's overruling grace demonstrated in the birth of Solomon to Bathsheba

### 6. David's troubles (chapters 13-20)

- Incest and murder within his family (chapter 13)

- Absalom's exile and return (chapter 14)
- Absalom's rebellion and David's exile (chapter 15-16)
- David in exile plans to return (chapter 17)
- Absalom's rebellion crushed – with Absalom's death (chapter 18)
- David's inordinate affection for the rebel – Joab's rebuke (chapter 19)
- David's return to power – Sheba's rebellion (chapter 19-20)
- Joab murders Amasa (chapter 20)

### 7. Famine, final victory, final words and final chastisement & praise

- Famine because of bloodguilt – remedied after the guilty had been judged (chapter 21)
- Spiritual famine in the Church should lead us to inquire of the Lord
- Final destruction of the giants (21:15-22)
- Praise for God's deliverance (chapter 22) – similar to Psalm 18 with clear Messianic references to 'great David's greater son'
- David's last words (spiritual wisdom and prophecy) –chapter 23a
- David's mighty men – natural means used by God for his work
- Numbering the people brings chastisement – David chooses direct divine judgement

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