

David, the shepherd who became king

Volume 3

Preface

The life of any believer has many ups and downs, and so it is no surprise to discover this was true for David also. In this third volume covering the life of ‘the shepherd who became king’ we will discover that of the many difficulties David faced, some were completely out of his control while others were his own fault. These things are recorded in Scripture for us to learn from them; to follow what is right in David’s life and not to do what was wrong.

Another great lesson that comes out so clearly is that when the hand of God is on a man’s life, God’s purposes for him cannot be frustrated. David was destined for the throne of Israel, but he did some very foolish things in the process and others opposed him, some even endangering his very life. However, God, in his grace sovereignly overruled it all and David was at last brought to the throne. The comfort of that fact for every believer is profound, for God’s eternal purpose for us is also guaranteed. We do not deserve this, neither did David, but this is not a matter of what we deserve but of God’s grace; his favour on the undeserving. God’s grace has been described in various ways. For example, his unmerited love and favour on sinners who deserved his condemnation. Another uses the letters in the word ‘grace’ as the first letters in each word in the phrase ‘**G**reat **R**iches **A**t **C**hrist’s **E**xpense’. Therefore the entire praise for the salvation and blessing of any of

God’s children belongs solely to the Lord. If you are a Christian believer it is our desire as you read these pages that you will be compelled to do just that, and thank the Lord for his grace to you. And if you have not yet trusted in Christ to be gracious to you, our desire is that this book will help you to do just that.

Derek French
November 2007

Chapter 1 – David in Philistine territory again: 1 Samuel 27:1-12

Introduction.

A fact about the weakness of human nature, even in the redeemed of the Lord, is that we are at times painfully slow to learn from past experiences. In addition there is also an inconsistency about us when we do learn from previous events in our lives. Some lessons change us for the rest of our lives while others are too easily forgotten. This is one of the reasons why we need to keep on reading the Bible even though we may have read through it many times. We forget so much and often need to re-learn lessons we thought we had grasped years ago. This comes out in the next episode in the life of David.

In 1 Samuel 26 we saw that David had learned the important lesson of leaving his future in God’s hands. In chapter 25 he had been very rash and wanted to seek his revenge on the man named Nabal and kill him without any good reason, whereas in the chapter before he had spared

Saul who was his enemy. Then when he had a second opportunity to end Saul's life he did not act rashly. He had learned from his previous mistake. Another lesson David had learned back in 1 Samuel 21 was that it was a dangerous thing to go and live amongst the Philistines, yet this is exactly what he did again in chapter 27. To make the situation worse, we need to remember he had had several very successful skirmishes against the Philistines starting with his defeat of Goliath back in 1 Samuel 17, so it was not like going to live with one's friends. But that is exactly what he did do. Had he forgotten? Was this a mistake? Did it endanger him? Was he safe? These are all questions that arise from David's actions and we shall have to examine the details to find the outcome.

1) The reason for his move v1-4

We have mentioned repeatedly that Saul, although sorry for the way he had treated David, was not in the least bit repentant, and the opening verses of 1 Samuel 27 show this to be still the case.

“But David thought to himself, ‘One of these days I shall be destroyed by the hand of Saul. The best thing I can do is to escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will give up searching for me anywhere in Israel, and I will slip out of his hand.’”

David did not trust Saul at all, and this verse implies that for all Saul had said, he still wanted David out of the way. This is backed up by the statement in verse 4:

“When Saul was told that David had fled to Gath, he no longer searched for him.”

So it was only when this news reached Saul that he really did give up searching for him. David's concerns were justified as far as Saul was concerned so it was a wise choice to move away from him. And certainly being in Philistine country would help because Saul would not want to fight against the entire Philistine army. But the question we must address is, ‘Was David right to go there?’ We must say this is far from easy to determine because his reasons were wholly plausible, Saul was a persistent danger. However, there are things which seem to indicate this was not David's best move for several reasons:

First, there is no mention of God in the Biblical text. David does not discuss his dilemma with the Lord nor pray for his guidance: he is not mentioned at all.

Second, had not the events of the previous nine chapters of 1 Samuel demonstrated to David irrefutably that God was able to protect him even if he stayed in Israel? Before we become too harsh, though, we have to confess that this is just how we are so often. We go from great heights of faith in God to deep fears of men. We are so up and down ourselves. The fact that we have this record in the Bible indicates it is there to instruct us so that we are more consistent in our trust in God. One day the disciples of Jesus asked him in Luke 17:5 *“Increase our faith”* and we need to do the same. The fact that David said *“...I shall be destroyed by the*

hand of Saul...” indicates his faith was under strain and cracks were beginning to appear in it.

Third, his previous experience in Philistine territory in chapter 21 where he had to pretend he was mad in order to secure his life should also have helped him to see the dangers. But he seems to have forgotten that incident.

Fourth, he had confidently told Abishai in the previous chapter (v10) that he knew God would deal with Saul, but now he seems to doubt that and fears he was the one who would die. It was all contrary to his previous confidence and trust in God. He was feeling the strain and succumbing to it.

Fifth, back in 1 Samuel 22:5 the prophet Gad had told him to go to Judah and this word from the Lord had not been rescinded.

Sixth, the Lord’s promise through Jonathan and Abigail that God would make him king in Israel seems to have eluded his heart.

We need to remember that in addition to Saul and his troops, there were other pressures on David at this time. By now David must have been exhausted, constantly on the run from Saul. When we are weary, longing for some respite, we are vulnerable to temptation and Satan exploits this. There was also the treachery and betrayal of the local population who had informed on him to Saul more than once. Then there were his wives and his men and their families to consider (27:3). There was also the need to secure enough food to sustain all these people. And so under this intense pressure he looks to Gath instead of to

God for his security. The commentator Gordon Keddie has written:

“David practically gave up these struggles at a point where all the hard evidence indicated impending victory...at a point which we know with the hindsight of Scripture, was very close to the final deliverance for which he fervently longed.”

We need to repeat again that we must not be over critical of David here for honesty demands us to question whether we might probably have done the same if we were in David’s shoes. That does not make it right though, and in the heat of the moment David does not lean on the everlasting and almighty arms of the Lord. If only he had reminded himself of God’s grace to him already, and of God’s adequacy for him in the future. But he feeds his heart on the fear of Saul, with the result that he looks to the Philistines. What he should have done and what we need to do is to feed our hearts on our true security, the Lord himself.

Lesson: We have said this before in this series and it is repeated here, that even the greatest of God’s servants are but men, just like us. The Davids of the world are no different from you and me, for we are all sinners. And this is important in that it helps us not to rely on our spiritual heroes but on the Lord himself. A sin we are all too prone to commit is to elevate men, especially prominent men, and Christian believers are as guilty of this as are others. When we do that we take our focus off the Lord. This is not to

say we do not appreciate godly men or their ministry. These are things to thank God for, but our main focus is always to be on the Lord and the Lord alone. Passages like this one help us to see the need to learn from both the strengths and the weaknesses of Bible characters.

2) The time amongst the Philistines v2-12

Amazingly, Achish the king of Gath seems to have welcomed David and his men along with their families. Undoubtedly news that David was now the enemy of Saul had an influence in this decision. And David achieved his desired end for Saul did leave off pursuing him (v4), but David had to pursue a path of deception with Achish. David requested that he be allowed to live in one of the country towns where he would have much more freedom rather than in Gath the royal city (v5). He had obviously gained favour with Achish because he gave him Ziklag (v6) which was one of the towns in southern Judah (Joshua 15:31) but which had come under Philistine rule at this time.

“So on that day Achish gave him Ziklag, and it has belonged to the kings of Judah ever since.”

And we are told David stayed there for a year and four months (v7) and in effect acted like a mercenary in Achish’s employ. All seemed to be working out well for David, but it is at this point in the narrative that we see David stooping to deception. David began raiding

parties on the peoples in the south, who were the enemies not of Achish but of Israel (v8).

“Now David and his men went up and raided the Geshurites, the Girzites and the Amalekites. (From ancient times these peoples had lived in the land extending to Shur and Egypt.)”

As was the custom of the time and also to continue to be in good favour with Achish, David brought some of the spoils of these raids to him (v9).

“ Whenever David attacked an area, he did not leave a man or woman alive, but took sheep and cattle, donkeys and camels, and clothes. Then he returned to Achish.”

However, when Achish asked him where he had been he would say against the southern part of Judah thus making Achish think David was a real enemy of Israel and a good ally to have (v10).

“When Achish asked, ‘Where did you go raiding today?’ David would say, ‘Against the Negev of Judah’ or ‘Against the Negev of Jerahmeel’ or ‘Against the Negev of the Kenites.’”

He was claiming to be fighting against the southern part of Judah, the enemies of the Philistines, when in fact he was fighting Israel’s enemies. The sad thing is David was lying, and he knew he was. He had got himself into a

difficult situation by going to the Philistines and now he was getting deeper into trouble each day. To protect himself further we are told that when he attacked an area on these raids he left no one alive so they could not tell Achish the truth about David's activities (v11).

“He did not leave a man or woman alive to be brought to Gath, for he thought, ‘They might inform on us and say, ‘This is what David did.’” And such was his practice as long as he lived in Philistine territory.”

David really stooped to the lowest by his killing sprees and it is a stain on his character. Again we see men, even the best of them, fall short of God's standard. The result of it all was that this deception gained Achish's favour (v12).

“Achish trusted David and said to himself, ‘He has become so odious to his people, the Israelites, that he will be my servant for ever.’”

While this seemed to be working out as David wanted it, it was also putting him and his men in considerable danger. If he went to battle with Achish against Israel his whole reputation would have been ruined at a stroke, but David does not appear to have thought this one through very carefully as we shall see in our next chapter.

Lesson: When we are under pressure to act quickly we need very much to seek the Lord's help because human discernment of what it considers the best way ahead is not necessarily the best or the right way. This passage teaches

us we need to depend on the Lord in absolutely every area of our lives. Alas, we all fail to do this with the consistency we ought to have. How we really do need the Lord to help us because we are so fickle at times! Proverbs 3:5-6 should be our daily practice:

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”

David was clearly leaning on his own understanding; hence he was putting himself in difficulty. The Lord himself must be our teacher and we must live by his Word not our own. Failure here will lead us into foolish ways as it did David. How all this shows us so strikingly that we always stand in need of the grace and love of God!

Chapter 2 – David's difficulties with the Philistines: 1 Samuel 29:1-11

Introduction.

We saw in 1 Samuel 27 that David very unwisely went to live in Philistine territory. He had not prayed to God about this nor sought the Lord's guidance, and we saw how in the end he had to stoop to lying to the Philistine king Achish to ingratiate himself to him. This was a sad period of a year and four months that is a dark stain on David's history. We reminded ourselves though that we are often like this and fall and stumble into sin. We therefore need to learn from David's mistake and humbly seek the Lord's help

each day of our lives and throughout the day as well. Frequent communion with God is vital!

We come now to the sequel to these events in 1 Samuel 29 and you may be wondering why we have not included 1 Samuel 28. The reason is that 1 Samuel 28 is mainly about King Saul and not David. In that chapter Saul consulted the witch of Endor, something strongly forbidden by God in his law – see Deuteronomy 18:9-13, Leviticus 19:31, Exodus 22:18 etc. The only thing Saul learned through his illicit behaviour was something he already knew, that God had torn the kingdom away from him and given it to David. While all this was going on David was still amongst the Philistines and a situation arose which really endangered him, something that would not have happened had he remained in Israel. This had been indicated in the opening verses of chapter 28 because Achish told David he and his men would have to go with him to fight against the Israelites. Remember that as chapter 27 ended he had deceived Achish into thinking he was a good man to have on the Philistine's side. So we come to 1 Samuel 29.

1) The danger David put himself in v1-2

War broke out between the Philistines and the Israelites. The two armies prepared to face each other in battle. The Philistines gathered all their forces at a place called Aphek in the north along the plain of Jezreel (see also 1 Samuel 28:4), while the Israelites gathered by the spring of Jezreel. This was a considerable number of armed men and

bloodshed was very much likely. The danger of the situation is plain for anyone to see, as is every war situation. But what was worse in this situation was that David and his men were with the wrong army, the Philistines (v2).

“As the Philistine rulers marched with their units of hundreds and thousands, David and his men were marching at the rear with Achish.”

A more dangerous place to be it is difficult to imagine. Consider what was at stake here if David actually fought with the Philistines. He was in danger of being considered a traitor by the people of Israel and could thereby forfeit their support to his kingship. He could have been severely injured or worse killed. He may have been responsible for Saul's death, or at least on the side of those who did kill him, which goes against all he had learned about not touching the Lord's anointed. It was an extremely risky enterprise, but one which really he could not get himself out of because of his conduct for the past sixteen months. He convinced Achish that he was his friend and the enemy of the people of Israel, and it was done by his own deceitful ways. If he backed down now he could have been accused of being a traitor by the Philistine king, so whatever course of action he took he was stuck. It was a no win situation which he could have easily avoided by not living amongst the Philistines in the first place. But this is so true to life, is it not, because we get ourselves into predicaments that would have been completely avoidable with some careful and prayerful thought.

Lesson: Dishonesty never pays in the long term. It might appear to bring some relief to our circumstances, but in the end it comes back on us. We need ever to remember the Biblical principle which Paul outlined in Galatians 6:7-8:

“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.”

It is on this difficult and somewhat dark background that we now see the overruling providence and grace of God at work at this stage in David’s life.

2) The discontent among the Philistine camp v3-5

Help came for David from a surprising source, the Philistines themselves! When the other Philistine rulers saw David’s men at the rear of their army with Achish they were not pleased. There seems to have been five rulers amongst the Philistines (see 1 Samuel 6:16) and they were probably from the five main Philistine cities. All but Achish would not have been aware of David’s behaviour over the previous sixteen months as he kept mainly in the south. These other rulers were not at all happy about the presence of David and his men, for they asked (v3):

“What about these Hebrews?”

But Achish is quick to defend David (v3).

“Achish replied, ‘Is this not David, who was an officer of Saul king of Israel? He has already been with me for over a year, and from the day he left Saul until now, I have found no fault in him.’”

And his argument was quite believable seeing he was unaware of David’s deceitfulness. But the other men were not at all in agreement and gave their reason that David would change sides if he went into battle with the Philistines, and by so doing gain more favour among Israel. They spoke of the way the Israelites sang about David’s triumphs in the past (v4-5):

“But the Philistine commanders were angry with him and said, ‘Send the man back, that he may return to the place you assigned him. He must not go with us into battle, or he will turn against us during the fighting. How better could he regain his master’s favour than by taking the heads of our own men? Isn’t this the David they sang about in their dances: “‘Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands’?”

Evidently they were still fearful of David, and we must add with good cause. His reputation over time had convinced them he was bad company to have at this juncture. We see here the amazing sovereign intervention of God who is in control of even the enemies of his people without them ever knowing it. He holds the nations in his hand and they are but nothing, and he can and does use the wickedness of

man to fulfil his purposes without ever being contaminated by their sinful ways. Joseph declared this about his brothers who had hated him and sold him into slavery in Genesis 50:20:

“You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good...”

And the supreme example is the crucifixion of Christ, as Peter showed on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:23):

“This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.”

Untold blessing has come as God has overruled the wicked schemes of men. And this was going to be so here, even though Achish and David may not have been aware of the situation.

3) The deliverance for David v6-11

Achish was compelled to send David away, much to David’s disgust (v6)!

“So Achish called David and said to him, ‘As surely as the Lord lives, you have been reliable, and I would be pleased to have you serve with me in the army. From the day you came to me until now, I have found no fault in you, but the rulers don’t approve of you. Turn back

and go in peace; do nothing to displease the Philistine rulers.’”

Achish was still under the delusion which David had perpetrated that he was trustworthy and would be an asset to have him fight by his side, but he had to let him go because of the others. He gave David the perfect way out, saving him from the accusation of treason by either the other Philistines or Israel, and preserving his life from mortal danger. The ways of the Lord are past finding out they are so wonderful!

David however protested, and we think he protested too much (v8):

“‘But what have I done?’ asked David. ‘What have you found against your servant from the day I came to you until now? Why can’t I go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?’”

It is as if he wanted to continue this charade of being the friend of the Philistines and the enemy of the Israelites. But Achish was firm. He trusted David but the others did not and therefore he had to leave in peace (v9). He instructed David to rise early and to depart with his men at daybreak (v10). And David did as he was told and went back to Ziklag in the land of the Philistines. God’s grace to David here is quite remarkable. He had failed to seek the Lord’s advice and had deliberately deceived Achish and even protested when he was given a way of escape. If ever someone was unworthy of the Lord’s intervention it was David. The Lord would have been well within his rights to

have severely chastised David. But instead, the Lord treats him kindly and provides for his safe retreat from the impending danger. His mercy endures forever and is never exhausted on his frail children. It was grace upon grace. What a wonderful God the Lord is! The hymn writer Augustus Toplady summed it all up when he wrote his hymn:

*“A sovereign protector I have,
unseen, yet forever at hand,
unchangeably faithful to save,
almighty to rule and command.
He smiles and my comforts abound;
his grace as the dew shall descend
and walls of salvation surround
the soul he delights to defend.”*

This was exactly how the Lord had intervened for David. This is not to be an excuse for us to act in a prayerless or deceitful way. Nor to deliberately engage on such a course of action presuming that the Lord will bail us out. To act like that is really to be guilty of tempting the Lord our God, and that was something both Moses (Deuteronomy 6:16) and Jesus (Matthew 4:7) spoke against. But we do learn that God is incredibly gracious, and were it not so none of us would ever reach heaven for we have all stumbled and fallen and failed the Lord as David did here. God’s amazing grace is none-the-less a tremendous comfort to us, particularly when we face times of danger and threat. He will not leave us in trouble to sink, but will come to our aid. Christian believers are able to call God our Father in

heaven, and this incident in David’s life shows just how far he is prepared to go to keep his children safe. May we never tempt the Lord our God but let us always trust him and seek to walk with him in everything we do.

Chapter 3 – David against the Amalekites: 1 Samuel 30

Introduction

How close David had come to disaster because of living amongst the Philistines, and what a marvellous deliverance the Lord had given him and his men when the Philistines told him to return to Ziklag and not go into battle with them against Israel! We said at the end of the last chapter and it is worth repeating, the overruling providence of God in David’s life is a marvel to see. We are not told this, but it must have been a great relief to David not to have had to fight with the Philistines against his own nation.

In 1 Samuel 30 it is now three days since he had left Ziklag with Achish the Philistine ruler, and when David and his men returned to Ziklag things were far different from when they left.

1) The Amalekite raid v1-5

There is an old saying which goes like this: ‘while the cat’s away the mice will play’. In other words, the mice take advantage when the fearsome cat is not there to hunt them down. It is a saying that is often applied to people who take advantage when someone in their group is away, such as the boss at work, or of children when their parents are

distracted doing something else. And that really was the situation David and his men discovered when they returned home. Their absence had resulted in the Amalekites taking advantage because it was then they attacked a large area of the south of the land known as the Negev, and Ziklag in particular (v1-2):

“David and his men reached Ziklag on the third day. Now the Amalekites had raided the Negev and Ziklag. They had attacked Ziklag and burned it, and had taken captive the women and all who were in it, both young and old. They killed none of them, but carried them off as they went on their way.”

The Amalekites were a particularly cruel and wicked people. King Saul had failed to destroy all the Amalekites back in 1 Samuel 15 and as a result the Lord rejected him as king. His failure to obey the Lord was bearing fruit several years later in their attack on Ziklag. We are told (v3):

“When David and his men came to Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive.”

This must have been a huge shock for them for we are told it drove all the men to tears (v4).

“So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep.”

These men were heartbroken because they had lost all their loved ones and everything else. Remember these were strong valiant men, yet they wept aloud. For David he had the double loss of both his wives, Ahinoam and Abigail. No doubt questions would have raced through their minds, such as ‘Are our loved ones alive?’ or ‘This would not have happened had we not settled in this city.’

2) David’s response v6-8

As their leader David came under some criticism from his men. In addition to losing his wives some of his men were blaming him for the disaster, and in a measure they were right for had David not settled amongst the Philistines this would not have happened. Some were even contemplating stoning David to death (v6a):

“David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters.”

So for David it was one thing after another. From danger from Saul, danger from the Philistines, and now danger from his own men. No wonder he was greatly distressed. It was a critical time for him. What could he do? He did the best possible thing he could have done, indeed, something he should have done before he decided to settle among the Philistines (v6b):

“But David found strength in the Lord his God.”

Earlier in his life in 1 Samuel 23:16 Saul's son Jonathan did a similar thing for his dear friend David:

“And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him to find strength in God.”

This time David was able to do that himself. What deliverance from the Philistines had not produced, disaster from the Amalekites did; renewed devotion and dependence on the Lord. And sometimes it is the same for us. We begin to grow cold or neglectful in seeking the Lord, our prayer life shrinks and Bible study becomes dry, and our once vibrant witness for Christ fades away. During this time the Lord still gives his blessing, perhaps as with David, deliverance from a situation we had foolishly got ourselves into, but we refuse to listen to what God is saying to us through it and we remain distant from him. And then the Lord brings trouble into our experience, perhaps pain or some loss, and it jolts us into seeking the Lord again, and achieves that reformation that was so much needed. It has been said we learn far more on the days we walk with sorrow than when all is easy and bright, and on this occasion that was true for David. No doubt for him this included prayer about the situation, a reminder to his heart of who God is and what he is like, and what he had promised. He laid the whole situation before the Lord. Then he asked God for some clear guidance about the way he should handle this. He had learned from his failure to do this previously, and wonderfully God did not turn away from him as he could well have done, but in his grace directed David very clearly (v7-8):

“Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelech, ‘Bring me the ephod.’ Abiathar brought it to him, and David enquired of the Lord, ‘Shall I pursue this raiding party? Will I overtake them?’ ‘Pursue them,’ he answered. ‘You will certainly overtake them and succeed in the rescue.’”

How gracious the Lord was to his servant, and we must say he is still gracious to his people today, even when we find ourselves in trouble because of our own failure. Whenever we seek the Lord in truth again he delights to be merciful. And on this occasion he gave David both a command *“Pursue them”* and a promise *‘You will... succeed...’*. What an encouragement to receive, and how that must have cheered his heart in the midst of his troubles.

3) David obeys v9-20

David did not need the Lord to tell him twice, for he obeyed immediately and set off in pursuit of these Amalekite raiders. The urgency of the need had already burned deeply into his heart and mind, and once the Lord had told him what to do he did it (v9-10):

“David and the six hundred men with him came to the Besor Ravine, where some stayed behind, for two hundred men were too exhausted to cross the ravine. But David and four hundred men continued the pursuit.”

Clearly all the travelling had its toll, marching the 120 miles to Aphek and back in the course of one week was some journey and 200 of his men were too exhausted to cross the Besor Ravine. This ravine is in the far south of Judah, so they had travelled virtually the whole length of the country. Descending and climbing the deep sides of the ravine was just too much for some of David's companions, so he left them to rest. The remainder pressed on and as they did so they met an Egyptian man whom they brought to David. He was evidently unwell and in a state of exhaustion, as it was necessary to give him food and drink to give him the strength to answer questions (v11-12):

“They found an Egyptian in a field and brought him to David. They gave him water to drink and food to eat—part of a cake of pressed figs and two cakes of raisins. He ate and was revived, for he had not eaten any food or drunk any water for three days and three nights.”

As David questioned this poor man he explained he was a slave of an Amalekite whom his master had abandoned when he became ill (v13), sadly a typical response from those who know nothing of the love of God in their heart. How different from the Good Samaritan in Jesus' parable who came to the aid of a man who had been abandoned by robbers (Luke 10). The Egyptian explained he had been with the raiding party and told where they had been and what they had done, including burning Ziklag (v14). David immediately enlisted his help and the Egyptian was willing to help but very afraid for his life (v15).

“David asked him, ‘Can you lead me down to this raiding party?’ He answered, ‘Swear to me before God that you will not kill me or hand me over to my master, and I will take you down to them.’”

Having gained this assurance from David he led David down to where the Amalekites were, and he found them revelling and feasting on their ill-gotten gains and spoils of war (v16):

“He led David down, and there they were, scattered over the countryside, eating, drinking and revelling because of the great amount of plunder they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from Judah.”

Even in this state they were still a formidable force to face for we are told that David fought them from dusk until the evening of the next day, and that is some time for hand to hand fighting. None escaped except a band of 400 young men who rode on camels, indicating the full number of the raiding party had been considerably more than this. But though David had only 400 men, with the Lord's help the enemy was defeated. David's obedience was honoured by the Lord who was his helper. The amazing thing was that everything the Amalekites had taken was returned and not even any of the children they had captured had perished (v18-19). David brought everything back, and the large number of livestock was driven ahead of them by his men and it was all described as *‘David's plunder’*. It was a remarkable victory, and there is no doubt that the Lord had

kept his promise and enabled David and his men to overcome this very large group of Amalekites. We must say this is so typical of the Lord who gives strength and grace to his obedient children, even when he requires them to do something which is difficult. What an encouragement to trust in and walk with him each day, for the Christian believer is also engaged in war against the enemy. This is not a war with worldly weapons, but a spiritual war with spiritual weapons and a spiritual enemy. It is a battle against sin, temptation, the wickedness in our world, against Satan and against the spiritual forces of evil. Paul has described the Christian's warfare in Ephesians 6:10-18:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. Therefore put on the full armour of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled round your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with

all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”

Paul gives us another description in 2 Corinthians 10:4:

“The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds.”

How important then for us to be found as David is seen here, obedient to the clear instructions of the Lord. May we also know much grace from the Lord Jesus Christ to resist the devil that he may flee from us, by ensuring we submit to and draw near to God (see James 4:6-7).

4) David's generosity v21-31

David's behaviour when he returned from the battle was significant and wise.

a. A problem overcome v21-25

First, there was a problem concerning the 200 men who were too exhausted the fight. As David and his men returned from the battle these 200 went out to meet them and David courteously gave them his greetings (v21). However, amongst the 400 men who did fight there were a certain number described as 'evil men and troublemakers' (v22) who were unwilling to share any of the spoils of war with the 200 who did not fight. What is clear about these particular individuals is that they were intensely selfish.

Their lives revolved around themselves and they were not as God centred, as they should have been. It was the Lord who had given them the victory in battle not merely their own strength and ability to fight, but it seems they could only see as far as themselves so were unwilling to share. They said (v22):

“...However, each man may take his own wife and children and go”

In a real way their refusal was also a test or challenge to David's leadership. David made no hesitation but immediately stepped in with firmness, grace, generosity and a God-centred reply (v23-24).

“David replied, ‘No, my brothers, you must not do that with what the Lord has given us. He has protected us and handed over to us the forces that came against us. Who will listen to what you say? The share of the man who stayed with the supplies is to be the same as that of him who went down to the battle. All shall share alike.’”

Note the gracious way he spoke to these troublemakers by addressing them as ‘my brothers’. Then note how he ascribed their victory entirely to the Lord, and a gift from him at that. He enlarged on that by reminding them it was the Lord who had protected them. It was God who handed over these Amalekites to them. In short from beginning to end the success was entirely down to the Lord's mercy and not their abilities, even though they were mighty men of

valour. David saw that even the ability to fight was God given; everything was from him. Knowing this great achievement was because the Lord had given it meant that the spoils of war were God's gift too, and so really something that they should consider with wonder and thankfulness, not with greed and covetousness. Because of this none of David's men, not even David himself, could claim any greater right to the spoils of war than anyone else. David viewed everything was by God's grace. To use the words of James 1:17:

“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.”

But these evildoers could only see themselves at the centre, and such greed is idolatry (Colossians 3:5). They had forgotten that God would judge their hearts and expose their motives (see 1 Corinthians 4:5). Once we see that everything is down to the grace of God, we see all the praise is his and we will not find it difficult to use what he has given for his glory. And on this occasion that meant sharing with those who did not fight. Christian believers need to remember the same applies to us, for we too are recipients of the Lord's grace and therefore this leaves no room for selfishness or pride. We read in 1 Corinthians 4:7:

“For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?”

David's action on this occasion was decisive because he could see the spiritual issues at stake, and so he made it a lasting ordinance in Israel that those who go to war were to share the plunder with those who were non-combatant (v25). Gordon Keddie has written:

“The army was a team! Like the church, which is described by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:14-26 as a body made up of complementary and interdependent parts. The various components were to be seen as indispensable to the effective operation of the whole.”

I well remember an airman telling me that for each fighter plane that goes into war in modern times there are around 100 people working on the ground to make it possible for one pilot to fly. There are engineers, fitters, radar personal, fuel suppliers etc. So in the Church of Jesus Christ, the one body is made up of many different parts and so when the Lord blesses we should share the joy of that with all the other parts of the body.

b. Thankfulness shared v26-31

Once David returned to Ziklag he acted consistently with the principle he had laid down for his men. He shared some of the plunder with the elders of Judah who had supported him over the years (v26).

”When David arrived in Ziklag, he sent some of the plunder to the elders of Judah, who were his friends,

saying, ‘Here is a present for you from the plunder of the Lord’s enemies.’”

He did not tell others to do something he was not prepared to do himself. He showed his gratitude for their support. Verses 27-31 lists the recipients and they end with these words:

“...and to those in all the other places where David and his men roamed.”

He shared with those who had opened their homes and shared their provisions and who fellowshiped with him when he and his men were under constant pursuit by Saul. This little detail indicates that there were many who had recognised God's hand on David as the next king, and who had supported him and his men regardless of the malice in Saul's heart. Undoubtedly this would have been costly and risky, for had Saul discovered this they would certainly have felt his wrath, but they emulated the same attitude we are told was in Moses in Hebrews 11:24-26

“By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be ill treated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward.”

So these people supported David, and he in turn expressed his thankfulness now that he was able to send them a gift. And God's people today should be a grateful people, grateful to the Lord for his goodness to us, and also grateful to his people who have been a source of help and encouragement to us. For David, this was again a gracious and wise course of action, and would have made the elders of these cities well disposed towards him when Saul was eventually removed.

Chapter 4 – David mourns for Saul and Jonathan: 2 Samuel 1

Introduction

You may remember that at the same time David was sharing the spoils of his victory over the Amalekites, the Philistine armies were waging war against Israel. Saul and his sons and his men were facing them in battle, probably at the same time or shortly after David had rescued Ziklag. The details and outcome of that battle with the Philistines are recorded in 1 Samuel 31. Tragically Saul and his sons, including David's closest friend Jonathan were killed. Saul had been severely wounded and he fell on his own sword. It was a dark day in the history of Israel and it marked the final stage in the Lord's judgement on Saul for his earlier disobedience. Israel was defeated, the army scattered and the people fled from their towns and cities which the Philistines were quick to occupy. In typical Philistine fashion, they mutilated the body of Saul and hung his body and those of his sons on the wall of Beth Shan. However, the valiant men from Jabesh Gilead came and took the

bodies down, burned them and then buried the bones in Jabesh. It was the end of an era; a tragic end and a tragic era during which Saul spiralled downwards until he met his solemn defeat in battle. We read in 1 Chronicles 10:13-14:

“Saul died because he was unfaithful to the Lord; he did not keep the word of the Lord, and even consulted a medium for guidance, and did not enquire of the Lord. So the Lord put him to death and turned the kingdom over to David son of Jesse.”

Whenever such a thing occurs it is always a solemn time, and even though Saul had been rejected by God and judged by him, this was no time for rejoicing over Saul's sad demise. We need to remember that the Lord takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11), but would prefer for them to turn from their wicked way and live. Gordon Keddie has written:

“Saul's self-destructive commitment to his opposition to God was confirmed by the descent of divine wrath upon him. But in the context of God's unfolding plan of redemption, this fearful sentence points away from itself towards the better way and says, ‘This is the way of the Lord. Walk in it!’ He who will by no means clear the guilty is, in Jesus Christ, keeping mercy for thousands!’ There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death’ (Proverbs 14:12). But there is another way: Jesus said, ‘I am the way...’ (John 14:6)”

Saul had failed to live up to the fact that as a ruler of the people his first responsibility was to serve God. This is something sadly many world leaders seem to have forgotten. O that they would take note of the Psalmist's words in Psalm 2:10-12:

“Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.”

All who govern are responsible to God for the way they rule, something Saul seems to have failed to do, hence his dreadful end. And whether they acknowledge him or not makes no difference, they will all answer to him, as will everyone else. Remember Hebrews 9:27:

“...man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgement...”

This is why it is so important to urge men and women to trust in Christ with all their hearts and to do it now – failure to have faith in Christ will end in God's fearful judgement. We need to remember that we must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ (2 Corinthians 5:10). We also need to remember that God in his mercy has told us that (Hebrews 9:27-28):

“Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgement, so Christ was sacrificed once to take

away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.”

Then if you have never done so, flee to Christ without delay and seek his pardon for all your sins.

1) The news reached David 2 Samuel 1:1ff

Returning to David, while all this was going on in the north of the country, David, who was in the south, was blissfully unaware of the developments. He returned to Ziklag with his men and their families and stayed there for two days (2 Samuel 1:1). On the third day the news reached him of the tragic defeat of Israel and the deaths of Saul and his sons. An Amalekite who had been at the scene of battle came to tell David the news with torn clothes and dust on his head which was the traditional appearance when mourning (v2). What this man was doing there we are not told and some commentators have suggested he was helping himself to some of the spoils of war before the Philistines came the next day. This sounds plausible because the man had taken Saul's crown and his armband (v10), but we have to say that we are actually not told the reason. However, the young man claimed that he just happened to be on the battlefield, and it was as the Philistines were bearing down on Saul with their chariots (v6) when Saul spoke to him. The implausibility of his explanation is quite obvious. No one just happens to be on the battlefield and just happens to be near the king who just happens not to have his armour bearer or any of his soldiers near him and just happens to be

leaning on his spear! He does seem to have wanted to gain favour with David for he told him that in actual fact Saul had asked him to kill him, which clearly contradicts the record of 1 Samuel 31:4 which tells us Saul fell on his own sword, committing suicide. If the Amalekite's story was true then the very least he should have done was to try to help Saul off the battlefield away from the Philistines. Then bringing Saul's crown and armband and the fact that when he arrived the Amalekite bowed to the ground to pay David honour (v2), all adds to the view that his intention was to gain favour with David. After all, David was Saul's enemy. The Amalekite was evidently a lying opportunist, but of course David was completely unaware of this. We need ever to remember that the Lord does not delight in falsehood:

Psalm 51:6 *“Surely you desire truth in the inner parts...”*

Proverbs 12:22 *“The Lord detests lying lips, but he delights in men who are truthful.”*

2) David's reaction 2 Samuel 1:11ff

a. To the tragic news v11-12

David's first reaction was quite remarkable and tells us something of the quality of his heart. He could have so easily gloated that at last his enemy was dead; that the man who had hunted him down like a wild animal had met his just deserts. But there was not even the slightest hint of

such a reaction. Instead, we read of the very opposite (v11):

“Then David and all the men with him took hold of their clothes and tore them. They mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the army of the Lord and the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.”

Instead of some hollow meaningless condolences there was true grief and sorrow of heart. And we may well ask why such a reaction, for surely Saul only got what he deserved? We can perhaps easily understand why David mourned for his dear friend Jonathan because they were closer to each other than brothers, but why weep for Saul, his enemy? Even though Saul had indeed met the judgement of God, no true child of God can think of the death of another with indifference. In a sense the sadness is felt even keener when the one mourned had forsaken the Lord for they had died without hope. For them there is no place reserved in heaven, but only that fearful outer darkness of hell. The Puritans used to say that no preacher should ever preach on hell without tears in their eyes. Whether those tears are literal or figurative, the sentiment is exactly right. As already stated even God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, so we certainly should not. When Jesus stood over Jerusalem and spoke of its impending judgement because of its refusal to repent Luke tells us he wept (Luke 19:41). And we see the same here in David; he was indeed a man after God's own heart. It was a very sad day for the nation of Israel, but we see the grace of God triumphing in

David's heart and his generosity towards Saul is quite remarkable. Though David was Saul's enemy, Saul was never David's enemy, and this alone accounts for the fact he never once lifted his hand against Saul and why he grieved as he did over his death. David's mourning showed he still had a genuine love for Saul's person and a respect for his office as the king, the Lord's anointed. More important than even that is that his behaviour shows his love for God and his Word. By way of application of the principle seen here Dale Ralph Davies states,

“Do we not have an obligation to mourn over unbelief, apostasy and coldness in the visible church? ... Rather such unbelief or error in the church should drive us to mourning and grief and prayer and sorrow.”

b. To the Amalekite v13-16

If the Amalekite had hoped to gain favour with David by his story and confession that he had killed Saul, then he was badly mistaken. David began to question him (v13):

“David said to the young man who brought him the report, ‘Where are you from?’ ‘I am the son of an alien, an Amalekite,’ he answered.”

The man does not seem to realise that David had just successfully fought against his own people. Further, as an alien in the land he would have been familiar with the position of the king as the Lord's anointed (v14).

“David asked him, ‘Why were you not afraid to lift your hand to destroy the Lord’s anointed?’”

We have seen this consistently with David that the appointed king, even a bad king such as Saul, was still the Lord's anointed and therefore the Lord's to sustain or remove. Had not David's conscience struck him when he had simply cut a small piece off Saul's clothes when he was in the same cave as David in 1 Samuel 24? (See also 1 Samuel 26:10-11.) The fear of offending God should have restrained this Amalekite from any wrong behaviour, but his own confession indicates he did nothing of the sort. As far as David was concerned God alone had the right to remove Saul, and certainly not this Amalekite. The Amalekite's silence at this point speaks volumes, he was without excuse. He had been guilty of admitting murder, treason and usurping the prerogative of God. David ordered his execution because he had condemned himself with his own words when he said he had killed the Lord's anointed (v15-16). What a solemn passage this is, and how it warns us to cultivate the fear of the Lord in our hearts. In some cultures such is the strong family unit that anyone who does wrong brings shame on the whole family, and therefore this has a powerfully restraining effect when family members are tempted to do wrong. How those who claim to belong to the family of God should be governed and restrained in a similar way. Sadly this Amalekite did not and suffered the consequences of his own folly!

3) David's lament 2 Samuel 1:17-27

David composed a lament for Saul and Jonathan. A lament was a poem sung in mourning someone who had died. And because it was in written form it was the result of careful and thoughtful composition where the words were chosen carefully to express the deep sense of loss felt. A lament then, is a more considered form of expression which is different from the initial wave of emotion and shock that can hit you when you first hear of the death of someone. This is a reminder to us that the wounds of bereavement often fill with sorrow the hearts of those close to the one who has died for quite some time and we need to be sensitive to those who feel that pain. We are told David's lament was written in the book of Jasher (v18) which we first learn about in Joshua 10v13. We know little about this book and it appears to have been a collection or anthology of poems commemorating the national life of Israel. It was called the lament of the bow, possibly linking it with Israel's military life and Jonathan's bow which is mentioned in verse 22. It begins with what has become a well known phrase or saying that is often applied to other important individuals who have ended in disgrace, namely (v19):

“Your glory, O Israel, lies slain on your heights. How the mighty have fallen!”

Again we cannot fail to note that David does not utter a word against Saul, and he displays a most generous spirit. We also need to state that even though there were some terrible defects in Saul's conduct not all of his reign brought misery. He had reigned for 40 years, had united

the nation and defended Israel against its enemies. Saul was a mighty warrior and the nation had benefited from all of this, but now tragically all that had been swept away and they were vulnerable again at the hands of their enemies. David highlighted the fact that when the failures of the Lord's people are displayed before the world that can only be the cause for deep sorrow and shame and humble repentance, so he wrote (v20)

“Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines be glad, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised rejoice.”

Gath and Ashkelon were two of the Philistine most major cities and the thought that these enemies of the Lord and his people would rejoice over Israel's defeat was a tragedy. And we are reminded here of how the testimony of our lives has a powerful effect on others who see us. That witness can have a profoundly good effect as they see the godliness and faithfulness of God's people, but it also has a detrimental effect when they see our failures and sins. Therefore a person's fall into disgrace can never be rejoiced over nor should it be gossiped about, but prayed over. Then David even calls on the land to bear witness to and remember the terrible loss which took place upon it: a loss that also included the death of some of their enemies (v21-22).

“O mountains of Gilboa, may you have neither dew nor rain, nor fields that yield offerings of grain. For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of

Saul—no longer rubbed with oil. From the blood of the slain, from the flesh of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, the sword of Saul did not return unsatisfied.”

In so doing David is urging the people and us never to forget what happened there and to learn from this experience and to enter into the sorrows of those who suffer and pray for them. Then in a most moving and loving manner David specifically mourns over Saul and Jonathan (v23):

“Saul and Jonathan—in life they were loved and gracious, and in death they were not parted. They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions.”

Even though Jonathan did not agree with his father’s treatment of David, none-the-less their lives were both given in the defence of Israel. Noble Jonathan did not forsake his father. David used the figures of the eagles and lions as a picture of their skill and bravery and strength in battle. Then David called on the women in Israel to mourn for Saul (v24).

“O daughters of Israel, weep for Saul, who clothed you in scarlet and finery, who adorned your garments with ornaments of gold.”

During Saul’s long reign the land had enjoyed an extended period of peace compared with the turbulent times of the judges, and the nation prospered as a result. This is seen in

the reference to the fine clothes and jewellery the women were able to wear, but which now were at the mercy of the Philistine hoards, therefore they should weep. As the lament draws to its close we have perhaps the deepest expression of loss of all as David writes of his loss of his dear friend Jonathan (v25-26):

“How the mighty have fallen in battle! Jonathan lies slain on your heights. I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women.”

Here David was outlining his own deep personal loss of his closest friend and supporter. We must say as we have said earlier in this series that there was nothing immoral or perverted or sexual about the relationship between David and Jonathan. Instead it was a deep bond of affection and confidence which men can have with one another when their lives depend on the faithfulness and courage of the other, and this was certainly true for David. It was Jonathan who warned him when his father Saul was determined to kill him, something Jonathan did at risk to his own life. It was Jonathan who rejoiced to know that David would succeed his father as the next king and this he did without any resentment or sense of rivalry (see 1 Samuel 23:17). No wonder David mourned the loss of someone he owed so much to and who had been so loyal. Matthew Henry has rightly said, *“The more we love the more we grieve.”* David then ended with a repetition of *‘How are the mighty fallen’* and a declaration that the weapons of war had perished (v27). So we see that the

Bible never glorifies war or death and neither does David. But this lament raises the question that is relevant for every age, namely, how can we cope when we lose loved ones? This is something that comes to all people, and often we lose those who are very near and dear to us, so what can we do at such times? Dale Ralph Davies has expressed it like this:

“How can we endure such sorrow unless we are convinced that underneath it all stands a love from which we can never be separated?”

And Paul puts this so clearly in Romans 8:35-39:

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

What this passage teaches us is the need every human being has of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He alone can give real lasting comfort to us in the face of death, because he alone has dealt with the cause of death, namely our sin,

through his own death on the cross. Remember what Romans 3:25 said about the Lord Jesus:

“God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood.”

And his glorious resurrection demonstrates he has dealt with sin completely triumphing over it and death for all who will believe and trust him for forgiveness. Reader, have you trusted him yet?

Chapter 5 – Civil war breaks out in Israel: 2 Samuel 2

Introduction

With the death of King Saul a new era was ushered in for the people of Israel. However, as we shall see, it was not an easy transition of power and there was considerable loss of life in the process. But before coming to that sad state of affairs we need first to consider what David did.

1) David Anointed King Over Judah 2 Samuel 2:1-7

It was inevitable that since David knew he was to be the next king he should pursue that now that Saul was dead. But what is significant is that David did not rush into this neither did he take things into his own hands (2 Samuel 2:1):

“In the course of time, David enquired of the Lord. ‘Shall I go up to one of the towns of Judah?’ he asked.

The Lord said, 'Go up.' David asked, 'Where shall I go?' 'To Hebron,' the Lord answered."

David still put the whole situation into the Lord's hands and sought his guidance. Even at this obvious juncture he did not want to be out of the will of God, so he *'enquired of the Lord'*. This is a delightful little phrase which tells us again of David's godliness and dependence on God. The Lord was his Lord and Master and King, and his whole life was submitted to him. The Lord assured him this was what he should do and that he should go to Hebron. David obeyed (v2-3) taking his two wives and his men and their families and they settled there. It was then that the men of Judah came and publicly anointed David as their king. Samuel had done this privately in 1 Samuel 16, but now there was a public recognition and David was placed over the whole of Judah. The little detail in verse 4 *"over the house of Judah"* is telling in itself because the other tribes were not party to this action. They were absent and this prepares us for the difficulties ahead. Though David was the King not everyone accepted the fact that the Lord had appointed him to this position. So this was a small, but none-the-less very significant start. God's kingdom had become visible and God's king was on the throne.

David's first recorded action, as king was to thank the men of Jabesh Gilead who had buried Saul. He was generously and graciously reaching out his hand to them. They had gone at risk to their lives to retrieve Saul and Jonathan's bodies from the Philistines as recorded in 1 Samuel 31:11

ff. On hearing of their actions David sent messengers to thank them for their kindness to Saul (v5-7):

"...he sent messengers to the men of Jabesh Gilead to say to them, 'The Lord bless you for showing this kindness to Saul your master by burying him. May the Lord now show you kindness and faithfulness, and I too will show you the same favour because you have done this. Now then, be strong and brave, for Saul your master is dead, and the house of Judah has anointed me king over them.'"

David still showed great respect for Saul and he expressed his desire for the Lord's blessing to be on them for their actions and also that he was not just interested in Judah but in all Israel. The fact that he mentioned Judah had made him king may have been an invitation for them to support him as well. We do not know if they responded positively to his winsome appeal but probably they did not join him if the mention of Gilead in verses 8 to 9 included Jabesh Gilead. It is worth noting that by the time we meet David in detail again in chapter 3, verse 1 civil war had gone on for a long time and David had fathered six sons including Amnon and Absalom and shortly afterwards he would be King over the entire nation.

2) A Rival King Leads To Civil War 2 Samuel 2:8-32

Abner, a nephew of king Saul (1 Samuel 14:50) and the commander of his army, acted rapidly in the political vacuum caused by Saul's death. He had vested interests in

continuing the line of Saul's dynasty so he took Saul's surviving son, Ish-Bosheth and made him king over the northern territories in Mahanaim (v9):

“He made him king over Gilead, Ashuri and Jezreel, and also over Ephraim, Benjamin and all Israel.”

It seems that Ish-Bosheth was really a pawn in Abner's hands as we are told in chapter 3, verse 11 that he was afraid of Abner. Abner's actions here were clearly against David and against God for he refused to recognise God's king. It is the same for many today with the Lord Jesus Christ who is King of kings and Lord and lords, yet they refuse to accept him and rebel. So we have two distinct kingdoms, the one the appointment of God with David as king, and the other the appointment of man with Ish-Bosheth as king. This is a theme we find running throughout human history that the kingdom of God is opposed by another kingdom set up by men. We are told Ish-bosheth reigned for only two years while David reigned over Judah for seven years and six months. A number of suggestions have been made to reconcile these two figures and perhaps the best is that Ish-Bosheth's reign immediately preceded his death which is recorded in 2 Samuel 4. If this is right then it would mean that Abner acted as a kind of war lord for the first five and a half years of David's reign during which time he sought to gain support for his choice of Ish-Bosheth. Even having said this, it is only conjecture because the Bible itself does not give any details.

Eventually Abner and the men of Ish-Bosheth went to Gibeon on the border of David's territory (v12), probably to prevent David extending his area. Abner was on the offensive so David was forced to defend. Joab, David's nephew and a mighty and ruthless commander in his army went out to meet Abner with David's men. The two groups of men eyed each other on different sides of the pool of Gibeon (v12-13), and Abner suggested a representative group from each army engage in hand to hand fighting. Twelve men from each side engaged in battle leaving twenty-four corpses (v16). It appears that following this, open warfare took place between the two armies and Abner and his men were defeated by David's men (v17). As Abner withdrew, Joab's brother Asahel decided to go after Abner because he was a good runner like a gazelle (v18). He was really no match for Abner who warned him twice, but he persisted so Abner thrust the butt of his spear in Ashael's stomach and it came out through his back and he died immediately (v19-23). Joab and Abishai therefore pursued Abner even more until he was on a hilltop with his men from Benjamin (v25). He called a truce with Joab to stop the killing because they were all from Israel and so it would be like killing brothers. Reluctantly Joab agreed, Abner returned to Mahanaim with his men. Nineteen of David's men were discovered missing but 360 Benjamites who had been with Abner had been killed. Asahel they took and buried in his father's tomb in Bethlehem and Joab marched through the night to arrive at Hebron at daybreak (v32). This was the start of a long and bloody civil war between these two rival groups, the house of Saul and the house of David, but the Lord strengthened David's hand

while the house of Saul grew weaker (3:1-2). Abner's resistance to David can only be explained by blatant sinful rebellion against God's choice for the kingdom which he fully understood (see 3:9-10 & v17-18). This is sin's *'stupidity, perverseness and twistedness'* says Dale Ralph Davies. He knew the truth but resisted it anyway! How we need to guard our own hearts from doing the very same thing. How many know that Christ is the only Saviour, God's appointed King, yet they refuse to come to him in humble repentance. May the Lord give us grace to obey him and trust him and not foolishly and arrogantly rebel.

Chapter 6 – David Strengthened Even Though Violence Continued: 2 Samuel 3

Introduction

As we come to 2 Samuel 3 the chapter begins with the sad record of the continuing civil war between the house of David and the house of Saul followed by the details of two murders, but it ends with David's position being much stronger, and the opening verse summarises this (v1).

“The war between the house of Saul and the house of David lasted a long time. David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker.”

The precise time involved is not given, but it is clear prolonged hostility continued between Judah and the rest of Israel under Ish-Bosheth, Saul's son, with the result of David's influence being increased bit by bit. Again we

have to note that David did not rush things. He had God's promise that he would be king of all the land and he was content to wait God's timing. But it is right to ask the question, 'How was David's hand strengthened?' as this chapter gives us some answers to it.

1) Strengthened Domestically v2-5

This short section tells us how David's own family grew during this period. David had six sons: Amnon, Kileab, Absalom, Adonijah, Shephethiah and Ithream. We might wonder why such details are included in the Biblical text. In the Ancient Near East a king's reputation and power was often measured in terms of the number of wives he had and sons in particular. In these verses we are told David had six wives at this time which would have been looked on with some admiration. Undoubtedly there was some obvious political purpose in his choice of wives because Absalom's mother was Maacah, and we are told she was the daughter of the king of Geshur (v3). Geshur was an area on the northeastern border of Ish-Bosheth's kingdom (see Deuteronomy 3:14). Such alliances were cemented by intermarriage. A number of things need to be mentioned about this.

First, we know that three of these sons turned out to be very wicked men, Amnon, Absalom and Adonijah. This is a solemn matter, but this reminds us that salvation is not something inherited by our children genetically. We cannot pass on our salvation to our children. To be brought up with godly parents is a

great blessing and brings many privileges because such children are introduced to the things of God from their earliest days, but that does not guarantee their salvation. They each need to come to personal faith themselves, that faith which James tells us in his epistle is displayed by lives that are obedient to the Lord Jesus Christ. These three sons squandered the privilege they had and perished as a result. How those of us who have children need to urge them to trust in the Lord Jesus Christ with all their heart and to submit their lives to him in loving obedience. How all of us need to pray for the salvation of the children of believers we know who are still unsaved. And how we should seek to comfort and support such parents whose children have gone far from the Lord because they carry a heartache that is enormous.

Second, we must not forget that David's taking of six wives was not in accord with the teaching of Scripture. There is first the general instruction of the Lord to Adam in Genesis 2:24 *"For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they shall become one flesh."* You will note in that verse that 'wife' is in the singular, and Jesus reinforced this in Matthew 19:5 and Mark 10:7-8 and Paul did also in 1 Corinthians 6:16 and Ephesians 5:31. But in addition to this there was the specific command for kings in Deuteronomy 17:14-20 *"He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray."* A similar command is given to elders and pastors in the New Testament on several occasions. 1 Timothy 3:2 *"Now the overseer must be above reproach, the husband of*

but one wife..." Titus 1:6 *"An elder must be blameless, the husband of one wife..."* The same is required of deacons in 1 Timothy 3:12. Therefore, returning to David, we are left with the conclusion that in marrying a plurality of wives as he did David was failing to obey the clear teaching of God. This does not mean Christian believers can use David and other similar figures in the Old Testament as an excuse for doing the same. Any form of disobedience to Scripture is sin. We have to say that the Lord was extremely gracious to David in the light of his conduct.

Third, another important lesson is presented to us here and it is that sometimes the believer has to refuse a particular course of action because the Bible forbids it, even though in his culture that action might be quite normal. These are never easy decisions to take, but if Christ is truly our Lord and Saviour then his will revealed in Scripture is to be our final authority. How we need to pray for strength and grace to make that stand faithfully whenever we may be called to do so!

2) Strengthened Militarily v6-21

The world's history shows political intrigue and power struggles occur right across the globe and in almost every country from time to time. Therefore it is not surprising to find this is what was happening in the land of Israel at this time. You will remember from 2 Samuel 2 we saw how Abner the commander of Saul's army had taken his son, Ish-Bosheth, and made him king of the other tribes of Israel. We said then that he was an opportunist and was no

doubt doing this for his own gain and prestige using Ish-Bosheth as his puppet. This is now stated quite clearly in 2 Samuel 3:6:

“During the war between the house of Saul and the house of David, Abner had strengthened his own position in the house of Saul.”

This probably indicates that he had his own eye on the throne of the northern tribes. In those days one way a rival would lay claim to a deceased king's throne was to take over his harem. Ish-Bosheth virtually accused Abner of doing this by saying he had slept with Saul's concubine, a woman named Rizpah. Whether Abner actually did sleep with this woman we are not told, but clearly Ish-Bosheth thought that Abner was conspiring to take his throne, so he made the accusation (v7):

“Now Saul had had a concubine named Rizpah daughter of Aiah. And Ish-Bosheth said to Abner, ‘Why did you sleep with my father's concubine?’”

Abner's response was swift and catastrophic as far as Ish-Bosheth was concerned (v9-11):

“Abner was very angry because of what Ish-Bosheth said and he answered, ‘Am I a dog's head—on Judah's side? This very day I am loyal to the house of your father Saul and to his family and friends. I haven't handed you over to David. Yet now you accuse me of an offence involving this woman! May God deal with

Abner, be it ever so severely, if I do not do for David what the Lord promised him on oath and transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and establish David's throne over Israel and Judah from Dan to Beersheba.’ Ish-Bosheth did not dare to say another word to Abner, because he was afraid of him.”

This response gives us considerable insight into the kind of man Abner was. He did not deny the claim of immorality, but defended his faithfulness to Saul which he indignantly said he would now give to David. He clearly was the power behind the throne because he knew he was able to persuade all of Saul's house to defect to David. He also clearly knew he had been acting contrary to what God had made known, namely, that he had declared David would be the next king after Saul, which made his previous support of Ish-Bosheth an act of rebellion against the Lord. We must say that Abner only referred to Scripture (i.e. God's promise to David) when it suited his own ends. He also showed something of his temperament because he flew into a rage when Ish-Bosheth had accused him. He felt he had been extremely insulted which is why he used that reference to a 'dog's head'. So, having failed to make progress with Ish-Bosheth he seizes the opportunity to gain favour with David. And Ish-Bosheth's own weakness and unsuitability to rule the people as he should, is seen in his fear of Abner. Undoubtedly he knew his own days as king were going to be short. But what turned out to be a disaster for Ish-Bosheth resulted in great advantage for David. David was of course not aware of what was going on, but the sovereign hand of God is evident most remarkably in

that he used this accusation to fulfil his purposes for David. So Abner sent David a message about his intentions and sought an agreement with David (v12):

”Then Abner sent messengers on his behalf to say to David, ‘Whose land is it? Make an agreement with me, and I will help you bring all Israel over to you.’”

David agreed but made one condition that Abner bring Saul’s daughter Michal who had been given to David (1 Samuel 18:27) but whom Saul had later given to Paltiel when David had fled for his life (1 Samuel 25:44). This was an act designed to show that David did not intend any harm to Saul’s family, but instead wanted national unity and peace; Michal after all was his first wife. David therefore ordered Ish-Bosheth to get Michal for him and this was done much to the distress of Paltiel her husband. Ish-Bosheth submitted to David’s demand and Abner told tearful Paltiel to go back home. One cannot help but feel for Paltiel, but we have to say the fault for this lay with Saul who had no right to give Michal to him in the first place, and Paltiel himself should not have taken another man’s wife for himself. Sinful behaviour never pays in the end, but brings misery.

Abner then urged the elders of Israel to make David their king, as this was something he said they had wanted to do for some time, giving us another insight to the crumbling of Ish-Bosheth’s power. Again Abner cited God’s promise to make David king in v18 and he spoke personally to the tribe of Benjamin, for Saul was a Benjamite. Then Abner

went to David at Hebron, where there was a feast, following which Abner asked permission to bring the army of Israel so they could make a compact with David as their ruler. Verse 21 ends with the words,

“So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace.”

This is an expression that indicates David had assured him he would be safe and not harmed. So we see the purpose of the Lord is being fulfilled more and more as David’s hand is strengthened. And this is a great encouragement to us because all God’s purposes for his people will be fulfilled however chaotic the circumstances may appear to human sense. None, however powerful, influential, or wicked will be able to frustrate his purposes. For example, he will build his church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. His Word will not return to him empty but will accomplish what he desires. He will bring many sons to glory. He will glorify those he has justified. He will transform every Christian believer’s lowly body so that it will be like Christ’s glorious body. Therefore dear believer do not lose heart, none can separate you from the love of God shown to you in Christ Jesus our Lord. Just as David was God’s temporary earthly king, so Christ is God’s eternal heavenly king. Remember the angel Gabriel’s words to Mary concerning Jesus in Luke 1:32:

“He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever.”

Men in their wickedness opposed and crucified him, hoping thereby to destroy him, but they failed miserably because the cross was the path to the throne, and on the third day he rose from the dead to demonstrate this was so. To bow the knee to him is the wisest thing any sinner can ever do.

3) Strengthened pastorally v22-39

The way a king cared for his people indicated the worth or otherwise of his reign. David was at a very delicate stage in his exaltation to the throne of the whole nation. Everything was moving in the right direction but he was not there yet, and something happened which could have quite easily deprived him of it. While Abner was away fetching the other tribes to David, Joab, David's army commander, returned to Hebron and David after the army's latest raid. When Joab learned of the latest developments with Abner and how David had sent him away in peace, he was not at all pleased. He immediately went to David and accused Abner of spying on David in order to attack him (v24-25), something completely false. Joab then sent for Abner, hiding this from David. Abner trustingly returned as David had assured him of his safety, and Joab took him aside in the gateway, as though to speak with him, when he stabbed him in his stomach. He did this to avenge the blood of his brother Asahel whom Abner had killed in a previous battle recorded in 2 Samuel 2, but in so doing acted treacherously as the king had promised immunity to Abner. This could have devastatingly turned against

David, for the northern tribes of Israel could have reacted violently against him as a result. Abner was their commander after all! And we must add that Joab had no right to do what he did. Had his brother been killed as manslaughter or murder then that would have been different. The law of God made provision for that, but Asahel was killed in war and then only after a gracious warning by Abner. Joab was making a public war into a personal vendetta to seek revenge. And we cannot help but think that Joab probably also feared his own position in David's army if Abner was still alive and serving David too. Jealousy is a very pernicious evil. And here we are warned to search our own hearts to ensure such envy of others is rooted out.

So how did events turn out? Immediately David made it quite clear publicly that he not only knew nothing about Joab's intentions, but repudiated what he had done and he called down a curse on Joab for his actions (v29). Without hesitation David ordered Joab and all those with him to tear their robes and put on sackcloth and mourn for Abner. They were made to walk in front of Abner as he was taken to his burial place and David walked behind him weeping. David even made a lament for Abner (v33-34). Following this the people urged David to eat some food, but he resolutely refused to eat, but said he would fast until the sun set (v35). He was a king who truly cared for his people. And this pastoral approach of David strengthened him even further (v36-37):

“All the people took note and were pleased; indeed, everything the king did pleased them. So on that day all the people and all Israel knew that the king had no part in the murder of Abner son of Ner.”

What could have been a double tragedy resulted in David endearing himself in the eyes of all the people. Then the chapter closes with these words (v37-39):

“So on that day all the people and all Israel knew that the king had no part in the murder of Abner son of Ner. Then the king said to his men, ‘Do you not realise that a prince and a great man has fallen in Israel this day? And today, though I am the anointed king, I am weak, and these sons of Zeruiah are too strong for me. May the Lord repay the evildoer according to his evil deeds!’”

Many have asked if David should have done more with Joab rather than let him continue as the army commander. It does seem that David failed in this respect for Joab went unpunished at this time due to the weakness David had just professed as a new king. He certainly asked God to judge Joab, and that is something the Lord would most certainly do, but David failed to give that godly lead which such a ruler ought to give in punishing the evildoer (Romans 13). Joab was certainly put to disgrace by David’s public condemnation of him and by making him lead the mourning as Abner’s body was taken to his tomb but he deserved much more. We have to say the Bible is silent until David is on his death bed when in 1 Kings 2:5-6 he

urged Solomon not to let Joab’s head go down to the grave in peace and Joab was struck down. This is another reminder of the words of Moses in Numbers 32:23:

“...be sure your sin will find you out.”

Therefore let us all pray that the Lord would help us to live in such a way that we never bring dishonour on him or his church. May we so conduct ourselves that we will always seek to do what is good and right and where necessary to denounce evil, especially among those who profess to be the people of God. Let us not do so out of pride but out of a deep love for the honour of God and of Christ and for the repentance of the one who has sinned. Let us never countenance any evil deed, but always love and promote that which is righteous and glorifying to God.

Chapter 7 – A cowardly murder: 2 Samuel 4

Introduction

Following the death of king Saul we are told that although God had declared David was to be the next king, Abner made sure that Saul’s son Ish-Bosheth was anointed king of the northern tribes of Israel instead. We have seen that this was an open act of rebellion against the revealed will of God through the prophet Samuel several years earlier. And like many who are filled with ambition and a desire to promote themselves Ish-Bosheth gladly accepted Abner’s proposal. So we have to say this was rebellion against God by both Abner and Ish-Bosheth. The last chapter saw the defection of Abner from Ish-Bosheth to David taking the

northern tribes with him, as well as the record of Abner's own demise when Joab murdered him. The question now remaining to be asked is, 'What happened to Ish-Bosheth?' Well, treachery was about to raise its ugly head again.

1) A Cowardly Murder v1-7

We have already noted the weakness of Ish-Bosheth when in 2 Samuel 3 we were told he was afraid of Abner. This is repeated but in more striking terms in this chapter (v1):

“When Ish-Bosheth son of Saul heard that Abner had died in Hebron, he lost courage, and all Israel became afraid.”

The words translated *'lost courage'* literally are 'his hands dropped'. It was as if all the strength went out of him and he fell into despair. And not only that, but the northern tribes over whom he had reigned for such a short period became afraid as well. We can imagine the sort of questions that rushed through their minds. 'If they killed Abner, what will they do to us? Joab led David's army, will they all come north to massacre us too?' The weakness of Ish-Bosheth's supposed rule is plain for all to see. It is in this situation that two of Ish-Bosheth's own men decided to take things into their own hands. We know little about these men; their names were Baanah and Recab and were leaders of raiding bands under Ish-Bosheth's rule. These men were from the tribe of Benjamin, Saul's tribe, and were sons of a man named Rimmon who lived in Beeroth, a town they had previously captured (v2-3).

Before coming to the details of their actions the author includes another significant detail which again stresses the weakness of Saul's dynasty. When the news of Saul and Jonathan's death came from Jezreel a nurse picked up Jonathan's son Mephibosheth and fled (v4.). Sadly, as she ran she dropped the child and he became lame in both his feet. Even though he lived, he was in effect helpless and therefore no threat to the throne even though he was Jonathan's heir. We will hear more about him when we come to 2 Samuel 9.

Returning to Baanah and Recab, these two men decided that the best thing to do was to get rid of Ish-Bosheth (v5-7). They made their way to Ish-Bosheth's house and arrived during the heat of the noonday sun when he was resting on his bed, something still done in many parts of our world today. These two men entered the inner section of the house under the guise of getting some wheat, such was their deceitfulness. They then stabbed Ish-Bosheth in his stomach and he died (v6) and they slipped away unnoticed. In typical Hebrew style their actions are described in the next verse adding a further detail (v7):

“They had gone into the house while he was lying on the bed in his bedroom. After they stabbed and killed him, they cut off his head. Taking it with them, they travelled all night by way of the Arabah.”

Their gruesome deed was done and they had murdered Ish-Bosheth! At first we might think they looked bold and

courageous men, but that would be a grave mistake. Dale Ralph Davies has described their action like this:

“They are not strong but weak, not courageous but cowardly, not manly but mercenary.”

They attacked an unarmed man while he was asleep and without any good cause. The real truth about these men is that they were wicked.

2) A Plausible Excuse v8

These two men travelled for probably two days carrying Ish-Bosheth's head until they reached David at Hebron. Like others we have seen before in our look at the life of David they thought their actions were going to win his approval and gain his favour. We saw this with the Amalekite who claimed to have killed Saul in 2 Samuel 1, and also Joab in the last chapter. They were both wrong so would it be different this time? The two men in question Baanah and Recab thought the same and indeed claimed special authority for their actions as we see in their conversation with David in (v8).

“They brought the head of Ish-Bosheth to David at Hebron and said to the king, ‘Here is the head of Ish-Bosheth son of Saul, your enemy, who tried to take your life. This day the Lord has avenged my lord the king against Saul and his offspring.’”

Their approach was quite subtle. They named Ish-Bosheth as David's enemy. Then their strongest argument of all was that they claimed their action was really the Lord avenging David against Saul and his offspring. This second layer in their argument was designed to be the most powerful of all, because by saying the Lord had directed them to do this they were laying claim on David to reward them accordingly. Sadly this approach is still used by some today to excuse wrong behaviour by people saying ‘The Lord told me to do this’ or ‘This was the Lord's will.’ The moment anyone makes such a statement they are claiming infallibility for their actions and no one else has the right to even question them. For example, sadly many a genuine believer has claimed the Lord told them to marry an unbeliever when the Lord has specifically forbidden this in both the Old and New Testaments. We should be very careful indeed about ever making such a claim unless we have the clear mandate of Scripture to verify our claim. We always need to examine our motives for all that we do, because it is so easy for us to claim to be acting for good reason when in fact we are doing the opposite.

The story is told of a little boy who was warned not to go near a pond. However, in disobedience he walked too near and fell in. Afterwards he explained, “When I got to the edge I said ‘Get behind me Satan’ – and he pushed me in!” As amusing as that story may appear the boy's action was sinful, yet it is an approach many people use as an excuse for their own evil actions. Another example is someone who may have regularly broken the speed limit while driving a vehicle and claim the Lord has kept them from

being caught by the police! Dale Ralph Davies cites a student who regularly failed to stop at an important cross roads where it was mandatory to stop before proceeding and claimed the Lord had kept him from having an accident when in actual fact he had persistently broken the law. These two murderers who stood before David were doing exactly the same thing. To the unsuspecting it sounded so plausible, but in fact it was a blatant lie and because of this we have to say rather than it being instigated by the Lord, it was in fact Satanic. Why? Because he is a liar and the father of lies as Jesus tells us in John 8:44. This is not to say that God could not use what they did for his ultimate glory and David's good, because God overrules all events, even those from the enemy of souls himself to fulfil his sovereign purposes. The best example of that is the death of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. If ever there was something that had Satan behind it, it was his crucifixion. We are told concerning his betrayer Judas Iscariot in John 13:27:

“As soon as Judas took the bread, Satan entered into him. ‘What you are about to do, do quickly,’ Jesus told him...” (See also Luke 22:3)

Then on the Day of Pentecost as Peter addressed the crowd, many of whom weeks earlier had cried out for Jesus to be crucified, he clearly laid the blame at their feet, but also at the same time spoke of how God overruled to fulfil his purposes concerning his great plan of salvation (Acts 2:23):

“This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.”

And the same can be said concerning the murder of Ish-Bosheth that it paved the way for David to be recognised as king by the whole of the nation of Israel. But that is quite different from claiming murder was at God's direct instruction. We must therefore be very careful in our own lives and in our churches not to be those who use spiritual language to validate our unspiritual behaviour. May God help us never to manipulate either him or his Word to justify ourselves from not submitting to his clear instructions in Scripture.

3) A strong and righteous response v9-12

David's response was immediate, accurate and decisive (v9-11):

“David answered Recab and his brother Baanah, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, ‘As surely as the Lord lives, who has delivered me out of all trouble, when a man told me, ‘Saul is dead,’ and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and put him to death in Ziklag. That was the reward I gave him for his news! How much more—when wicked men have killed an innocent man in his own house and on his own bed—should I not now demand his blood from your hand and rid the earth of you!’”

We cannot help but see the contrast between David's opening words and those of Baanah and Recab. They spoke of *'Saul your enemy'*, while David spoke of *'the Lord... who has delivered me...'* In so doing David is showing these two men that he was already under the protecting and delivering and redeeming hand of the Lord, and did not need any men to intervene on his behalf. By so doing they were ignoring this fact and were usurping God's position. David could so easily at this point have been tempted to consider that these two men were his deliverers, but he steadfastly resisted that and clung faithfully to the Lord and the Lord alone. It was the Lord who had redeemed his life out of every danger, and he owed everything to the Lord and not to men and was full of gratitude to him. Many of God's servants over the years have been called to make a compromise but like David have not given in. One lovely example from the days of the early Church is 86 year old Polycarp, a leader of the church in Smyrna. He was challenged to acknowledge that Caesar was Lord and to curse Christ. He was told he would be thrown to wild beasts or burned in the fire if he refused to do as the Roman Consul dictated. His answer was remarkable.

"Eighty and six years have I served Christ, and he has done me no wrong; how can I blaspheme my King who has saved me?"

Such faithfulness to Christ cost him his life in the flames, but he gladly died for the Lord who had done so much for

him. And in 2 Samuel 4 David is governed by a similar gratitude and was not taken in by these wicked men. His condemnation of them is devastating, citing as a previous example the Amalekite we mentioned earlier whom David executed. These two men had killed an innocent man while he was defenceless in his own bed. The result was these two murderers were executed, their bodies mutilated by having their hands and feet cut off and their bodies were hung by the pool of Hebron as a curse according to Deuteronomy 21:22-23. The Lord's chosen king redressed the wrong done and showed he was going to be governed by righteousness and not corruption. In a very small way this is an illustration of the much greater justice David's greater Son would execute, the Lord Jesus Christ, God's eternal King. A day is coming when God will judge the world by him (Acts 17:31) and every instance of injustice will be put right and the perpetrators of it dealt with accordingly. Every tried and persecuted child of God, though banished and despised by men, even murdered by them, will be vindicated on the last day by Christ our King and coming Judge. These are solemn truths, but they are clearly taught in the Bible and therefore should have a powerful effect on us. If we are believers this is a great encouragement to persevere when we are most afraid and to remain faithful to the Lord against the severest provocation. Remember we are Christ's and nothing can separate us from him. If you are not a Christian believer yet, then this truth should strike terror and holy dread into your heart because you too will be judged by Christ. This is inescapable. Therefore turn to him now, seek his forgiveness and mercy, submit your life to him as your

King and when he comes to judge the world you will discover your Judge to be your Saviour.

And so David's kingship was being established by the Lord.

Chapter 8 – King of all Israel at last: 2 Samuel 5

Introduction

From the first time we read about David in 1 Samuel 16 we have been waiting for the day described in the opening verses of 2 Samuel 5. Samuel had anointed him by God's instruction to be the next king to succeed Saul (1 Samuel 16:13). As we have traced David's history since that time we have seen him pass through many ups and downs, some of which threatened his life and brought him into great danger. Sometimes David could not have avoided these difficulties, but on other occasions he got himself into some of them, but the hand of God had been on him in it all. And now the great purpose of God for him to be king of the whole nation of Israel was to come to its fulfilment. And it is worth pausing at that point for a moment and for us to marvel at the way the sovereign hand of God watched over David throughout all this period. God had said David was going to be king, and no one and no thing was going to prevent that, even though at times it appeared that it might all come to nothing. And the lesson here is such an encouragement to us all who trust in God, for the same hand that safely guided David through those turbulent years is also guiding us in our lives. We have stated before in this series that God's purposes for us cannot be

frustrated or defeated and he will bring all his promises for us to fulfilment and in the end bring us to heaven to be with him. Therefore let us not lose heart or be too discouraged when life is difficult or the Lord's work seems slow, instead we must fix our eyes on Jesus as we read in Hebrews 12:2-3:

“Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.”

David is a picture or type of Christ here and the parallels between him and Jesus are easy to see but with some significant differences because his kingship is much greater than David's. David's kingdom was earthly and temporary; Christ's kingdom is heavenly and eternal. David was safely brought through trials that could have prevented him coming to the throne; Christ was brought through the trial of the death of the cross to be exalted above every other name and to sit with his Father on his throne. Just as David triumphed over his enemies, so Christ triumphed over all his and this will one day be clear for all to see because we are told in 1 Corinthians 15:25:

“...he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.”

1) David's coronation v1-5

After all the infighting and civil war, the whole nation of Israel came to acknowledge David as their one king. The fragmentation between the northern tribes of Israel, who had been loyal to the house of Saul, and Judah who had been loyal to David was now over. The people came as a single unit to make David their king (v1-2):

“All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, ‘We are your own flesh and blood. In the past while Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel on their military campaigns. And the Lord said to you, “You shall shepherd my people Israel, and you shall become their ruler.”””

We note that they gave three reasons why they were now united in accepting David as their king.

First, David was their own flesh and blood and this blood relationship still existed in spite of the civil war that had rumbled on for several years.

Second, David had been their military leader even when Saul was king and they had all benefited from his wisdom and skill in battle.

Third, David had been appointed by God to this position and this was the highest reason of all for their willingness to make him king of the whole nation.

It is lovely to see the whole nation submit to what God had revealed instead of living in rebellion to his clear instructions. We sinful human beings are all too prone to

act in disobedience to God, and when we are it is not only to our shame but also to our detriment. One can only conjecture how many lives would have been spared in Israel if they had submitted to God’s declaration concerning David earlier. But we must also say that though their obedience was delayed, when it came it was a joy to see. May it be our prayer that the Lord will help us to obey him speedily, and if there are areas of our lives where we have been disobedient then let us repent and put them right quickly.

We also note the nation tells us what kind of king David was to be. He was to be both the ‘shepherd’ and the ‘ruler’ of God’s people. David was well suited to that role for he was looking after his father’s sheep when he is first introduced to us in 1 Samuel 16. He was to be a king who cared for his people, who loved them and guided them and protected them and governed them. He was not to be some cruel tyrant who exploited his people, as has sadly been the case with many rulers. David was never to forget that Israel were God’s people not his. This meant he could not just treat them in any way he pleased, and also God would hold him accountable for the way he ruled over them. Again we cannot help but draw the parallel with David’s greater successor the Lord Jesus Christ who is the Good Shepherd who not only cares for his sheep but who laid down his life for them. How wonderful to be in his care and keeping. There is no better or securer place to be.

David’s actual coronation is described in a most simple way in verse 3:

“When all the elders of Israel had come to King David at Hebron, the king made a compact with them at Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel.”

The ceremony seems to have been very simple, but that does not in any way diminish the importance of what was taking place. For everything was done before the Lord. Both David and the people entered into a solemn covenant to bind themselves to fulfil the requirements God had placed upon them in accepting his divine will. They were accepting both their privileges and their responsibilities. And this marked the third and final time that David was anointed – the first was by Samuel in 1 Samuel 16, then by the tribe of Judah in 2 Samuel 2, and now over the whole nation in 2 Samuel 5. Then we are given a little summary of the whole of David’s reign in verses 4 and 5:

“David was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned for forty years. In Hebron he reigned over Judah for seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah for thirty-three years.”

2) David’s Capture Of Jerusalem v2-15

Although Israel had been in the land of Canaan for many years there were still parts of it that remained unconquered. One of those was the city inhabited by the Jebusites which was called Jerusalem. The city was known as far back as

Abraham in Genesis 14:18 where it is called Salem (see also Psalm 76:2). David makes this his first target after his anointing as king of the whole land. Jerusalem was situated on the border of Judah and Benjamin and this may well have been why he chose to establish the city as the centre of his administration. Neither Judah nor Benjamin had control of the city, whereas Hebron and Gibeah were too tribal. Their early attempts at conquest (see Judges 1:8) were partial as they failed to dislodge the Jebusites (see Judges 1:21 and Joshua 15:63). So as far as Israel and Judah were concerned Jerusalem in David’s time was neutral territory and establishing his court there prevented either of them saying he favoured one above the other. But in addition it was situated in an ideal place militarily on a high hill with steep valleys on three sides and tall walls all around so it offered considerable security. In typical Canaanite fashion the Jebusites poured scorn on David (v6b):

“The Jebusites said to David, ‘You will not get in here; even the blind and the lame can ward you off.’”

They thought their stronghold was impregnable and impossible to defeat, but they were badly mistaken for their presumptuous attitude. David turned their scorn back on them for he realised the only way into the city was through a water course or tunnel, called a shaft in verse 8:

“On that day, David said, ‘Anyone who conquers the Jebusites will have to use the water shaft to reach those ‘lame and blind’ who are David’s enemies.’”

In 1 Chronicles 11:6 we are told it was Joab who was the first to lead the troops into battle and as a result became the commander-in-chief of the whole united army. The details of the battle are not recorded; just the success and so David conquered Jerusalem and made it his royal residence and fortress. We must also note that this defeat of the Jebusites is a fulfilment of part of the promise given to Abraham in Genesis 15:18-21 many centuries earlier for the Jebusites are named amongst those who would be defeated by Abraham's descendants (v9):

“David then took up residence in the fortress and called it the City of David. He built up the area around it, from the supporting terraces inward.”

Throughout this whole period the secret for his astounding success was all down to the Lord's goodness to him (v10):

“...he became more and more powerful, because the Lord God Almighty was with him.”

And what an encouraging statement this is, as well as very humbling. Humbling because it meant all the glory belonged to God and left no room for the arrogant pride that can so easily raise its ugly head in the human heart and claim all the honour for self. David's success was due to the Lord's presence, the Lord who is the Almighty, All-Powerful, the Omnipotent God who reigns forever and ever. And the encouragement is that the Lord God Almighty, the same God who was with David, is also with

every Christian believer today. We live under his watchful and caring and compassionate eye and are in his strong hands from whom none is able to pluck us, as the Lord Jesus himself declared in John 10:28-29. And that is such a comfort not only in the long term as we anticipate the end of life and being safely brought to heaven, but also in the here and now as we face life's trials and battles, the Lord is with us in them all. Therefore we need to keep close to the Lord by frequent communion with him in prayer and the study of the Scriptures and the fellowship of his people in our local church, and remembering the Lord's death often, which is done in the church in the communion service. Participating in these things regularly are the chief means whereby our spiritual life is sustained and kept alive and warm, providing we do them out of hearts that truly love the Lord. It is no use doing these things with a cold and indifferent heart and mind, then it is just going through the motions and not because we really want to walk with God. The Pharisees of Jesus' time were much like that and received his sternest rebukes. Returning to David the Lord's hand which we have seen to have been upon his life from the beginning, had now brought him into the fulness of God's intentions for him and he was growing stronger by the day.

We are then told Hiram (v11) the king of Tyre north of Israel, who was a Phoenician gave the new king international recognition and a close trade relationship began between them which lasted until the Babylonian exile many centuries later. He sent cedar wood and stonemasons and carpenters to build David a palace. (NB.

The record of Hiram is probably not in strict chronological order as the details referred to here come later on in David's reign but have been included at this point to emphasise the way the Lord was establishing David throughout his reign.) Then we have this lovely note that David was fully aware that it was the Lord's blessing on him (v12):

“And David knew that the Lord had established him as king over Israel and had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel.”

Many who have been brought to great prominence and positions of status in our world, never ever consider to thank God for his goodness to them, but David was not like that. He was so conscious that his exalted position was the Lord's goodness to him and was for the benefit of God's people. This inevitably impressed itself on his mind and added weight to his sense of God-given responsibility to serve the people under his care, and not the other way round.

With this in mind the next thing we are told brings a shadow over these things for in verses 13 to 14 we learn David took many more concubines and wives. We know that this was typical of the times and kings in the ancient near east showed their rise to power by taking on such commitments, but as we mentioned when looking at 2 Samuel 3 this was not in accord with the teaching of Scripture (Deuteronomy 17:17). This flaw in David's character was going to come back on him later which we

shall consider when we look at his relationship with Bathsheba. This reminds us that David, great king though he was, was just like us, an imperfect man. Therefore how thankful we ought to be that the Lord Jesus Christ who is the King of kings is different from David for he was perfect in all he did (John 8:29). The lesson of this is that while we thank God for those great men he has used down through history, our faith is not to be in them but in Christ. This should keep us from hero worship of the creature and help us to truly honour the Creator, something very important in today's popularity culture which exalts man. Again Dale Ralph Davies sums up the situation:

“Granted, chapter 5 as a whole is positive toward David; it is only in verse 13-16 that we meet with a ‘yes’ and a ‘no’. We must not mute the ‘no’. Here is both David's strength and his stupidity.”

Having said that, the Lord still remained gracious to David, and he had many children and their names are listed for us in verses 14 to 15 and they included Solomon indicating the details of these verses go forward a number of years from this point in time.

3) David's Conquest Of The Philistines v17-25

This chapter which begins with David's coronation ends with his double victory over that persistent enemy of God's people the Philistines. We notice first that it was the Philistines who started both these battles. True to previous patterns this wicked idolatrous people had no qualms about

attacking the people of God and David his appointed king. So this was really a direct assault on the work of God and an act of opposition to him. A very dangerous thing for anyone to do (v17):

“When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over Israel, they went up in full force to search for him, but David heard about it and went down to the stronghold.”

We need to remember that opposition to David from the Philistines was long standing, and now that he had become king he became the target of all their animosity. The Philistine army was also a well armed fighting force. However, as always they had not counted on the Lord in their thinking, and he is the most formidable opponent anyone can face. In God’s providence David discovered that they were searching for him so he went to the stronghold, which probably refers not to the stronghold in Jerusalem but in the area of southern Judah where he had also gone to escape Saul earlier. The Philistine army camped in the valley of Rephaim. David then did something that he had failed to do on at least one previous occasion and suffered for as a result, namely he prayed (v19).

“...so David enquired of the Lord, ‘Shall I go and attack the Philistines? Will you hand them over to me?’”

He had learned the lesson well and he openly displayed his complete submission to and dependence on the Lord. Here is the mark of every godly leader, namely, they commit everything to the Lord in prayer and seek by his grace to do only what he instructs. The Word of God is our guide. Of course we are more privileged in one way than David in that we now have the completed Scriptures, the entire Word of God, the Bible. This means we have an infallible means whereby we can test what we should do, for God would never want us to do something contrary to his Word. David knew this and this is why he enquired of the Lord and needed to know that God would hand the Philistines over to him. In reply, also in verse 19, the Lord told him,

“Go, for I will hand the Philistines over to you.”

It was a wonderful reassurance from the Lord and David acted on the strength of it and gained a great victory (v20):

“So David went to Baal Perazim, and there he defeated them. He said, ‘As waters break out, the Lord has broken out against my enemies before me.’ So that place was called Baal Perazim. The Philistines abandoned their idols there, and David and his men carried them off.”

Baal Perazim means ‘the Lord who breaks out’ and so David attributed the entire victory to the Lord and took no glory to himself. As with other incidents in David’s life we see some more important lessons here.

First, even though victory was assured, David still had to fight the enemy. He could not just sit back and do nothing; he had to enter the battle. Similarly for the Christian believer the Lord has promised that his work will not fail but succeed. There are many promises about this such as Jesus' promise that he would build his church and the gates of Hades would not prevail against it (Matthew 16:18). His kingdom will spread worldwide; that is guaranteed. But it would not happen without his people taking the gospel out into the spiritual battlefield of the world. It is no use the Church of Christ simply sitting back and doing nothing, just waiting for the lost to queue up to come to Christ. We have to go into all the world and preach the gospel (Matthew 28:19-20), because it is through the preaching of the cross and the precious blood of Christ that sinners are saved and the Lord's church is built. So like David we have to go into the battle, but we can do so with the assurance the Lord will go with us.

Second, this principle applies in the realm of personal holiness. This is a real battlefield and we have a three-fold enemy: the devil, the ungodly world we live in, and our own weak flesh. Now we know that God has predestined every Christian believer to be conformed to the image of his dear Son (Romans 8:29). This is guaranteed and will be accomplished, but that process will only be achieved as each individual believer goes into battle against sin and temptation and resists the devil, the world and the flesh. In Ephesians 6 Paul teaches us not only that we are involved in this spiritual battle, but also that God has supplied the

spiritual armour we need to use to gain the victory. Therefore we must use it, and we must resist the devil so that he will flee from us. We must say 'No' to temptation, and deny ourselves and take up our cross and follow Christ. We are to be involved actively in opposing sin and wickedness in our world in general, and in our own personal lives and circumstances in particular.

Third, another lesson David teaches us is that in every victory granted to us we must give all the glory to the Lord and take none to ourselves. David said (v20), "*...the Lord has broken out against my enemies before me.*" It is so easy to fail at this point and either neglect to thank God for his help, or in pride to give the praise to ourselves. David acknowledged to all that this was God's doing.

Fourth, we also see the failure of Philistine religion which was idolatrous. For when the Philistines fled from David and his army they abandoned their idols. They thought that by bringing their idols into the battlefield this would secure their victory, but idols are lifeless and useless with eyes that cannot see and ears that cannot hear. See Jeremiah's exposé of the futility of idols in Jeremiah 10 and the glory of the one true God. David's trust was in the only true and living God. David then took these idols and according to the instruction of Deuteronomy 7:5 and the record of this same event in 1 Chronicles 14:12, burned them. It is worth pointing out that at an earlier period in 1 Samuel 4 the Israelites had used the Ark of the Covenant in a similar way thinking its presence would assure them

victory when their own walk with God was wrong. They were defeated then ironically by the Philistines and the ark was captured. They were in effect using the Ark like an idol, rather than trusting in the living God and obeying him. May the Lord help us never to misuse him and his promises to us in that kind of way.

So David defeated the Philistines, and we might think that this was the end of the matter, but alas that was not so. Some time later, we are not told how long, the Philistines came out again against David. And what is even more amazing is they camped in the same valley as before when David defeated them (v22)!

“Once more the Philistines came up and spread out in the Valley of Rephaim...”

How persistent they were, and there is a lesson for us even in that. The enemies of God’s people, in particular the devil, will persist in attacking us throughout our lives. A previous victory will not mean we will be free from attacks in that area of our lives again. The best example of this is when Jesus battled with the devil when he tempted him in the wilderness. Satan was totally defeated by the Lord, but though he had to leave Jesus he did not leave him for ever and Luke tells us about this in Luke 4:13:

“When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him (i.e. Jesus) until an opportune time.”

In other words until he could attack him again. Therefore we need to watch and pray constantly so that we do not fall into temptation.

David again brought the whole matter to the Lord, but this time the Lord’s answer was different from before (vv23-24).

“Do not go straight up, but circle round behind them and attack them in front of the balsam trees. As soon as you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, move quickly, because that will mean the Lord has gone out in front of you to strike the Philistine army.”

David’s submission to the Lord is a delight to see in this chapter, and it was tested here because he could have so easily thought, “The enemy is in the same place where I defeated them last time so I’ll just go straight up and fight as before.” However, the Lord told him to approach this battle in a different way and this time he was to attack from the rear and only when he heard the sound of marching in the tops of the trees. This is an unusual incident and this marching sound was no doubt the heavenly host of the Lord going into battle before David. Such a sound required a rapid response from David, and he could do so confidently because the Lord had gone before him to strike the Philistine army. Significantly there was no questioning this different approach by David, nor did he argue or protest or excuse himself, but he simply obeyed (v25):

”So David did as the Lord commanded him, and he struck down the Philistines all the way from Gibeon to Gezer.”

God had spoken and that was enough for him, and his obedience resulted in a marvellous victory. So we end the chapter on this victory note, and it is a further indication of how powerfully the hand of God was with David throughout his reign, and how in these early years he strengthened him. As we said at the beginning of this book, it was all down to the grace of God.

This book is supplied by Grace Baptist Mission and other titles are available in e-mail format at the address below:

**Grace Baptist Mission
12 Abbey Close
Abingdon
OXON
OX14 3JD
UK**

e-mail: radio@gbm.org.uk