

# **Governing for God**

*Studies in 2 Samuel*

*David Gooding*

A Myrtlefield House Transcript



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## Governing for God

In these five<sup>1</sup> weeks that we shall spend together, we are to study themes in the second book of Samuel. We shall obviously not be able to cover the whole book. It has twenty-four chapters, and we shall scarcely do nearly five chapters per evening. Therefore, we must content ourselves with selecting certain themes from it.

It would be a help to me, and perhaps also to you, if you could devote some time during the week to preparing yourselves by reading the book. If that means putting aside your favourite biography or your special morning and evening notes to read pieces from 2 Samuel, perhaps the sacrifice will be worthwhile. We can only perceive the significance of something if we have first of all acquainted ourselves with its detail.

Tonight we begin by reading a token passage from the first chapter of 2 Samuel, beginning at verse 1.

After the death of Saul, when David had returned from striking down the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag. And on the third day, behold, a man came from Saul's camp, with his clothes torn and dirt on his head. And when he came to David, he fell to the ground and paid homage. David said to him, 'Where do you come from?' And he said to him, 'I have escaped from the camp of Israel.' And David said to him, 'How did it go? Tell me.' And he answered, 'The people fled from the battle, and also many of the people have fallen and are dead, and Saul and his son Jonathan are also dead.' Then David said to the young man who told him, 'How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?' And the young man who told him said, 'By chance I happened to be on Mount Gilboa, and there was Saul leaning on his spear, and behold, the chariots and the horsemen were close upon him. And when he looked behind him, he saw me, and called to me. And I answered, "Here I am." And he said to me, "Who are you?" I answered him, "I am an Amalekite." And he said to me "Stand beside me and kill me, for anguish has seized me, and yet my life still lingers." So I stood beside him and killed him, because I was sure that he could not live after he had fallen. And I took the crown that was on his head and the armlet that was on his arm, and I have brought them here to my lord.' Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and so did all the men who were with him. And they mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son and for the people of the LORD and for the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword. And David said to the young man who told him, 'Where do you come from?' And he answered, 'I am the son of a sojourner, an Amalekite.' David said to him, 'How is it you were not afraid to put out your hand to destroy the LORD'S anointed?' Then David called one

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<sup>1</sup> There are only four talks; the penultimate meeting didn't take place (see p. 40).

of the young men and said, 'Go, execute him.' And he struck him down so that he died. And David said to him, 'Your blood be on your head, for your own mouth has testified against you, saying, "I have killed the LORD'S anointed."' And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and Jonathan his son, and he said it should be taught to the people of Judah; behold, it is written in the Book of Jashar. He said: 'Your glory, O Israel, is slain on your high places! How the mighty have fallen! Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult. You mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew or rain upon you, nor fields of offerings! For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul, not anointed with oil. From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty. Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely! In life and in death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles; they were stronger than lions. You daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you luxuriously in scarlet, who put ornaments of gold on your apparel. How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan lies slain on your high places. I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant have you been to me; your love to me was extraordinary, surpassing the love of women. How the mighty have fallen, and the weapons of war perished!' (vv. 1-27)

God guide us in our study of his holy word.

Perhaps 2 Samuel is not the most difficult book in all Scripture, but it is difficult. There are some doctrines in holy writ that, in God's good mercy, are easy to understand. Praise God, the great doctrine of salvation is so simple that 'the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein' (Isa 35:8 KJV). What could be more simple than, 'Whoever has the Son has life' (1 John 5:12)? God is for us, and Jesus Christ, his Son, is for us. God gave his Son to die at Calvary, 'that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life' (John 3:16).

Similarly, those doctrines of Scripture that help us to perceive the resources that we have in Christ for a holy life, they too in God's good mercy are simple. They could be summed up in the phrase, *Christ not only died for us, but lives in us*. These are the fundamental doctrines of salvation, and by God's deliberate intention they are easy to grasp.

There are other parts of Scripture that are not easy, and could not possibly be, because they deal with topics that are as complicated as life is itself. One of those topics is the topic of *the government of God*, and what it means for men and women to be called to the high privilege of joining with God in government. That cannot be an easy matter. Ask any parent. Entrusted by God with the rearing of children and the duty of shaping their young lives as they grow up into their teens, directing and guiding them to please the Lord—that is not an easy task in this modern world. We should deceive ourselves if we imagined that the governing of young people for God was going to be a delightfully simple A, B, C affair. It isn't, because life is a complicated thing, and any attempt to govern for God in such a realm will presently meet the real situations of life.

Ask any church elder who is trying to govern for God about the one thousand and one problems that arise in the course of trying to shepherd the people of God. It's not easy to come to a right decision here, a fair decision there, knowing what to do next, how to reconcile

differences and mend things that are broken that perhaps will never be fully put together on earth again. Any elder will tell you that governing for God is not, and cannot be, a simple matter.

It is with the question of *governing for God* that the books of 1 and 2 Samuel deal. Of the two, I suppose, 1 Samuel is easier, because we shall not read very far into it before we shall see that David easily appears as a foreshadowing of Jesus Christ our Lord. All the children have heard of David and Goliath, and caught the idea that somewhere in that story of David going out to meet the giant and slaying him with his own sword, is a picture of Jesus Christ our Lord.

As we read the story of 2 Samuel, we can see the great similarity between God's methods in appointing David to be king, and the methods he has employed in appointing Jesus Christ our Lord to the throne of the universe.

### ***1. God first had to remove the false and disobedient King Saul***

First Samuel is particularly interested in how God went about that. He could have destroyed the wicked and disobedient and rebellious Saul and put David in his place. That would have been simple, but God didn't do it. God could have let King Saul carry on right to the bitter end, until eventually he was destroyed by his enemies, and only then anoint David as king over Israel in his place, but God didn't do that either.

God did a very curious thing. He did not destroy King Saul; he let him continue for years as king, but had David anointed king while the false king was still reigning. So David was anointed king, and for years after he was anointed he was persecuted and driven out into the wilderness and rejected by Israel. So persistent was the official rejection of her anointed king that Israel lost him to the Gentiles for a long time.

You can't read it but your mind goes to the method God has used for appointing Jesus Christ our Lord as king. Certainly God has anointed him with the Holy Spirit and with power. He was anointed by the Holy Spirit at his baptism and raised to the Father's throne at the right hand of God. But God has not yet intervened in our world to remove rebellious human government; he has let it go on. God has not moved in our world to destroy the rebellious in Israel who have rejected their Messiah. So we have the situation now, where Israel has officially rejected her anointed Messiah so persistently that he has been lost to the Gentiles these last two thousand years. The parallel between the two arrangements is striking, and easy to perceive.

All this builds up our expectation as we come towards the end of 1 Samuel, and we say, 'What a wonderful thing it will be when we come to 2 Samuel. For, if in 1 Samuel David is a picture of our Lord, anointed to be king but not yet placed upon the throne, surely when we come to 2 Samuel and David sits upon the throne, we shall have a glorious picture of how Christ will reign when he comes again.' Well, you're in for a great disappointment, for 2 Samuel is devoted to the story of David's actual reign for God in Israel one thousand years BC.

Whether you see in it any types or prototypes, that is irrelevant for the moment. The first lessons that we shall have to face are the lessons that arose when David eventually came to the throne and started the down to earth, practical business of trying to reign, first over Judah

and then over the united twelve tribes of Judah and Israel. The story is going to be about very practical things and the difficulties he ran into in those years long since past. The difficulties were so large that David more than once made lamentable mistakes. Far from being a picture of Jesus Christ our Lord, we shall often find in David sorry mistakes that will break our hearts. When you first read 2 Samuel it is inevitable that you will be disappointed with the character of David, though I'd better be careful what I say.

### *The influence of Joab on David*

Why was it that David lived the whole of his life under the thumb of Joab, and couldn't do anything about it?

You will remember how Abner came to bring over the ten tribes. David wanted them brought over, he entered into negotiations with Abner, and all was going according to plan when Joab got to hear about it. It wouldn't do, not for Joab anyway. Abner was commander of the armies of the ten tribes and Joab was commander of the other two. If Abner came over, Joab was liable to be displaced as chief general. So Joab called Abner back, pretending to talk to him, and put a dagger through his ribs (3:27). David denounced it before all the people. 'It is nothing other than sheer murder,' he said, though he couldn't do anything about it. Joab for many years got off scot-free, David protesting with all his might, saying, 'It ought never to be done, and I don't approve of it.'

Why didn't he deal with Joab?

If you read a bit later on, after Absalom rebelled there was a battle between the forces of the king and the forces of Absalom. As the armies went out under the captancy of Joab, David strictly charged him and all the captains of the host and all the people, 'Do not execute Absalom.' Presently some of the troops found Absalom hanging by his hair in an oak tree. They reported it to Joab, and Joab said, 'You fools, why didn't you slay him?' They said, 'We were afraid, because the king said we weren't to do it.' Joab took three darts and put them right through the heart of the young man (18:9-15).

And David did nothing.

When David eventually came back from exile, and he was going to cross the river, he sent a message to Amasa, saying, 'Amasa, I'm now going to appoint you as commander in chief over the forces of Israel in the place of Joab.' After about a fortnight there was another rebellion, and David told Amasa to get the troops out and put it down. It was only a little thing that could easily have been snuffed out, but Amasa dithered and the rebellion began to grow and become serious. Joab got out his sword and left Amasa lying in his blood (20:10).

David didn't, or couldn't, do a thing.

Why on earth did the historian record all those things, and show us how David seemed to be happily under the thumb of Joab?

There was one occasion when David did manage to resist, and put Joab in his place. David said, 'Joab, I want you to go out and number all the people of Israel.' Joab wasn't renowned for his godliness, but even he could see that it was wrong and questionable.

He said, 'Do you think we ought to do that?'

'Yes, I want it done,' said David.

'Why would you want to know the number of them?' said Joab.

'I don't care what you say,' said David, 'I'm having it done' (24:1-4).

Joab for once had to do what he was told. He went up and numbered the people, and a terrible plague from the Lord fell on Israel. It was one of the times that David had his own way, and made Joab do what he was told.

I believe with all my heart and soul that David was a man after God's own heart (1 Sam 13:14; Acts 13:22). I'm not casting doubt on the inspiration of Scripture, I affirm it; I believe it wholeheartedly. Believing in God's inspired word, then, we have to take it seriously. How could it be said that a man who made the desperate mistakes we see in this book, and was under the thumb of Joab for most of his life, was a king and a man after God's own heart? I shall be interested in the course of these studies to get to know you and to hear what your explanation would be.

### ***The principle of delegated authority***

It seems to me that recounting these facts introduces us to one of the great practical problems of governing for God in this world. For the moment we shall dismiss all thoughts of typology and come down to the practical details of daily life. One of the practical problems that confronts God in the governing of our universe is the problem of delegated authority, as we see exemplified in Joab.

Let me try and explain what I mean. God is the supreme moral governor of the universe, but he doesn't directly govern it all himself; he delegates authority to other people. God didn't come down from heaven this morning to tie your children's shoelaces or make their breakfast. He doesn't personally sit in the Sunday school and teach the children the difference between right and wrong. Why not? For the simple reason that God has delegated authority in the home to mother and father. If they are godly people and good at governing, the child will get a favourable impression of what the government of God is. But if they are careless or tyrannical people who can't govern themselves, let alone anybody else, it will be very difficult indeed.

I remember a friend of mine in Scotland telling me how he used to work among the children from broken homes in Glasgow. They were taken into a home run by the city, and he had the opportunity to go in and have a little Sunday school and Bible class with them.

One day in the course of his duties a nurse was admitting a child. The child screamed at the top of his voice, and the nurse had to ask my friend to go out. When she eventually pacified the child she brought back the good Christian man. 'I'll tell you the story about this little child,' she said, and she showed him the burns and weals all over the child's body. Presently the child said, 'My father always burns me.' When he got drunk he would make the poker red hot and beat the child with it. It was because the child had such an impression of grown men that he screamed his head off when my friend came in. He thought that all men were like that. Just imagine that child trying to form a concept of God as Father.

This principle of delegated authority is important. When men and women abuse their authority, God doesn't immediately take it back again, and say they can't use the authority

any more. From the way God runs our universe it is evident that, having delegated his authority, he very often leaves it. Even on the greatest of all scales, when Satan rebelled against God, God didn't make him forfeit the vast powers delegated to him. We live in a world complicated beyond description. Because it has pleased almighty God to delegate power, he does not immediately step in when men and angels have abused it.

You say, 'I don't understand why God has done that.'

Perhaps I don't either, but that's the real world, isn't it?

## **How can the government of God be put into action in this imperfect world?**

When David came to power he didn't sit on the throne of Israel and Judah as an absolute tyrant and rule it all by himself. That could not be done. He had to have officers, commanders, captains, lieutenants, judges and priests, and a whole bevy and array of men to whom he could delegate power. They would rule for him in their respective spheres: hence the problem. David became a kind of prisoner, because of the misbehaviour of the men to whom he had delegated power.

But instead of complaining about David, let's think about ourselves. Are you the boss of a business? Have you had to delegate authority to a foreman and various representatives who go out to represent your company? Let's hope they behave. Are you an elder? Haven't you delegated authority to the Sunday school teachers? Are they all perfect? Are you perfect to start with? At least we shall find that this second book of Samuel is down to earth and deals with the realities of everyday life.

### ***Absalom's rebellion against David***

Some of David's mistakes arose because of this problem of having to delegate authority. Other problems arose because of his own weakness and sinfulness. The middle part of the book is taken up with that sorry story of his lapse with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah. Resulting from that came the rebellion of his son Absalom. They are sad and sorry stories and raise all sorts of practical problems. How ought David to have dealt with that situation?

How would you have dealt with it? Would you have forgiven Absalom or not? After he murdered his brother Amnon and ran away to Geshur, Joab pleaded that David should allow Absalom to come back again (chs. 13-14). Would you have let Absalom back? Would you have said, 'Yes, we should be kind and compassionate and bring him back'? Or would you have said, 'No, the man is a murderer, we must keep him out'? Which would be the more Christian thing to do? We shall find ourselves faced with very down to earth, practical problems, and may God give us guidance for their solution.

### ***Satan's rebellion against God***

As we read that sorry story of the rebellion of Absalom, David's son, against his father, we shall find it provoking our thoughts higher to another problem in this universe. In spite of the fact that his government is utterly perfect, it's no secret that God himself has suffered a rebellion, the size of which we could not possibly imagine. It is hinted at in the word of God



that there was a rebellion in heavenly places on the part of some of the exceedingly high intelligences of the universe, and they turned against the God who made them. The anointed cherub, that guardian of Eden, lifted himself up against the King of kings in rebellion (Ezek 28:11–19).

Not only have angelic powers rebelled against God, but our world too. It is evident all around, isn't it? What's wrong with God that the likes of us have rebelled against him? How should God set about ending that rebellion? Should he have mercy on us, and say, 'Let's forget it and bring them all back. It doesn't matter who they are, let's forget all the old bother, make up and be friends, and let them all come to my heaven'? Or shouldn't he?

As we consider the practical, down to earth realities of governing for God, the question of sin and punishment, and the relation of punishment to forgiveness—when it is right to forgive, and when it isn't—we shall find that God only managed to solve the problem at the extreme cost of Calvary.

## **The divisions of the second book of Samuel**

As we go on we shall find that David's life, from the time he gets to the throne until his death, is divided into three periods.

### ***David's early years as king (1:1–8:18)***

At the end of chapter 8, the historian marks the conclusion of that part by giving a whole list of David's chief government officers and civil servants (vv. 15–18). The first eight chapters of the book tell us of David's early days, when he was learning to take over the power from Saul. First of all, he reigned in Hebron over the two tribes, Judah and Benjamin. After some years he was able to take power over the ten tribes of Israel as well, and reigned in Jerusalem as king of the united twelve tribes. In the early period of his reign, when he was still a comparatively young man, he had to watch his every step. Things were still difficult in Hebron when he was king over the two tribes, but not yet king over the other ten. A wrong move could have had him blotted out, until eventually the ten tribes of Israel too were prepared to accept him as king and make him their sovereign lord.

### ***David's difficulties in middle life (9:1–20:26)***

At the end of chapter 20, the historian marks the conclusion of this very large middle section of the book by once more giving a list of David's officers and civil servants (vv. 23–26). Like any successful king, he had a respectable civil service, we hope. This is the middle period of his reign and David has become middle aged. He's victor, he's arrived. He's head, not only of the two tribes, but of the ten tribes as well, monarch of the whole lot. His kingdom extended until it was bigger than anything he'd ever dreamed of. His treasuries were rich, his harem very thickly populated.

But as he begins to feel the weight of middle age spread, and when Moab and Ammon and others rebelled, David sent Joab and the army to fight and he stayed at home. This is the period when the difficulties began, the real difficulties, and David's sorry mistakes were

made. You know, even if we went no further, that passage seems to preach an exceedingly practical lesson.

We do well to hold meetings for young folks. We must encourage them when they're young. Of course we must; you can't work too hard for the young folks. You must come to their level and help them all you can. These are the men and women of the future, and what big battles they have to face. But they don't have to face half as big battles as the middle aged do. Who are the folks that cause all the disturbance in assemblies, by and large—is it the seventeen-year-olds? Who is it that, when they quarrel, split assemblies wide open? Is it the eighteen-year-old young ladies? Not normally, is it? It's the middle aged who do that.

I sometimes think it's about time we had some meetings for the middle aged and somebody talked to us straight about the perils of middle life. When people who once were full of ideas, and would have given up anything for the Lord to work for him, somehow get caught up in the humdrum of daily living. Things are not so difficult as they were in youth, they've arrived a bit and circumstances are easier. But they've got podgy spiritually as well as physically and aren't really doing anything much for the Lord now. They stay at home while others do it.

### ***David in old age (21:1–24:25)***

There is of course another part to 2 Samuel that fills the rest of the book. These are David's declining days, and when the book comes to its end you will find David getting out his harp and singing his poetry in praise to God as he reflects on the goodness of God all through the years of his long life. As he sums up the difficulties he has known and the problems of actually trying to govern for God, they are creating within him a sense that, whatever you do, in the end you cannot be perfect here on earth. It has increased in his heart the longing for the day when the Sun of righteousness shall arise; a morning without clouds (Mal 3:4; 2 Sam 23:4); when the perfect King shall come, undo earth's tangles, and rule perfectly for God.

In his last years, white haired (if he'd got any left), far too old to go out to battle, they persuaded him to stay at home. The wise old man, advising the elders, the captains, and the commanders who were still in middle life and carrying the burden of the day, David was loved and respected by all.

You say, 'Well, he'll be safe now.'

Really? Do you think old age is a safe haven? Then let's learn from David. The most terrible sin wasn't with Bathsheba. The most terrible sin, that nearly ruined the whole purpose of God in David's life as king of Israel, he committed in his old age when he insisted on numbering the people (24:10).

I said a moment ago, I thought we ought to have some meetings for the middle aged. Do you know, verging there myself, I think we ought to have some special meetings for the old aged. You organize them and I shall be there. It's a mistake to think that if we patiently get past thirty we've seen all the spiritual battles we're ever going to have. Some of the biggest battles lie at the end; they don't get easier, they get harder. David stands before us, the great sweet psalmist of Israel singing his poetry, as a reminder that it is possible to grievously sin in our old age.

*Life is a complicated thing*

As I said, we shall find 2 Samuel a difficult book. It will not send us home each night shouting 'hallelujah'; far from it, so don't expect it. It will send us home with all sorts of problems and questions and wonderings in our heads. We discover that life isn't quite so simple as some preachers make out, when it comes to being lived in the home, in the church, in business. Life is a complicated thing that will test our powers of discernment and our moral and spiritual judgment.

The book reminds us that it isn't always possible to choose between what is right on the one hand, and what is wrong on the other; between a perfect man and an imperfect man. We've got to settle for the better of the two. Then perhaps 2 Samuel will have done its job, asking us to take the great salvation we have and the resources that are in Christ, and apply them to the practicalities of daily living in the shop, the factory, the school, the home, in the family, and in the church.

**There's only one perfect king**

But there will be more than just practical advantages. As we think of these things our minds will go instinctively, as I said a moment ago, to that perfect man, Jesus Christ our Lord. We shall find our hearts instinctively rising to him, saying, 'Lord, in the end, it's impossible. You'll have to come, Lord. Your church cries for you; only when you come will she be perfectly right. Our families cry for you; only you can possibly give us the final solution to our problems. Our poor old world will never be at peace, Lord, until you come.' The very best man that ever walked earth, even David himself, was but an imperfect servant of God. There's only been one perfect lord, one perfect king, one perfect leader, and that is Jesus Christ himself.

You say, 'Why doesn't he come more quickly? If he's got the answer to the problem, why doesn't he come?'

Could it be for this reason? Because one day he wants you to share his perfect government with him? How would you govern for Christ in the days to come, if you didn't know what the problems were, and you've never had any practice at governing for God? It is something, my brother, my sister, to have discovered in this life what the problems of governing for God are. There's a rumour abroad—it's more than a rumour—that we who love the Saviour are to be called one day to rise to his very throne and rule with him, and judge the world and judge angels.

Says Paul to the Corinthians, 'If one of these days you're going to judge the world and judge angels, how about having a go and starting now? Learn by God's grace to come to godly and spiritual judgments in the fear of God in the governing of his people here in this life, that it might prepare us for the next (see 1 Cor 6:1–3).

That is the introduction therefore, and as God helps us in the coming weeks we shall spend some time on that first part, the problems of his early days; a little more time on the middle bit, the problems of his middle life; and we shall try and organize it so that on the last week at least we shall have time to think of the problems of his older days.

Shall we pray.

Lord, we thank thee for thy word, and we thank thee in particular that thou hast not sought to whitewash David and make him out to be absolutely perfect. We thank thee for the encouragement it is to our hearts to find that thou didst appoint him king, knowing all about his imperfections and suffering with him. In spite of his imperfections, yet as he walked with thee he became a man after thine own heart. Lord, that encourages us too, and amidst all of life's difficulties and problems, amidst all of life's mistakes and errors, we thank thee that we too can come to thee, men and women after thine own heart. May we put our hands into thine, and allow even life's mistakes to bring us nearer to thee, and open our eyes to see things more clearly.

So bless thy word, and through it make us better men and women, and more effective for thee, more compassionate, and wiser even now, and so go on to prepare us for those coming days when the Lord shall come and we shall reign with him. To this end bless thy word, we beseech thee, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## David's Early Years as King (1:1–8:18)

Next week, God willing, we shall be surveying chapters 9–15 of 2 Samuel that are marked in the first place by a series of love stories, if that is indeed the appropriate label to put upon them. Those middle chapters analyse the problems that lie at the centre of government and they introduce us to certain stories in the king's court that superficially are love stories, but they will make us begin to question the true nature of love and what would be worthy of that lovely word.

Then those chapters will tell us of Absalom's murder of his brother Amnon, and the beginning of the problems that it raised for King David, his father. In particular, whether or not to allow Absalom back to the court. We shall hear permissive arguments in favour of Absalom's return; that the whole idea of punishment is out of date; it doesn't do any good and people ought to know better than to continue with such barbarity. We shall see that argument prevail and Absalom is brought back without any repentance, so any reconciliation with the king is sadly inadequate.

The whole passage will therefore deal with the relationship of sin to punishment, and of punishment to love: a central problem with any government, and with the divine government more than any other.

So let's begin our study with a passage that may well prove to serve as a climax for the early chapters of the book.

Then King David went in and sat before the LORD and said, 'Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far? And yet this was a small thing in your eyes, O Lord GOD. You have spoken also of your servant's house for a great while to come, and this is instruction for mankind, O Lord GOD! And what more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Lord GOD! Because of your promise, and according to your own heart, you have brought about all this greatness, to make your servant know it. Therefore you are great, O LORD God. For there is none like you, and there is no God besides you, according to all that we have heard with our ears. And who is like your people Israel, the one nation on earth whom God went to redeem to be his people, making himself a name and doing for them great and awesome things by driving out before your people, whom you redeemed for yourself from Egypt, a nation and its gods? And you established for yourself your people Israel to be your people for ever. And you, O LORD, became their God. And now, O LORD God, confirm for ever the word that you have spoken concerning your servant and concerning his house, and do as you have spoken. And your name will be magnified for ever, saying, "The LORD of hosts is God

over Israel", and the house of your servant David will be established before you. For you, O LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, have made this revelation to your servant, saying, "I will build you a house." Therefore your servant has found courage to pray this prayer to you. And now, O Lord GOD, you are God, and your words are true, and you have promised this good thing to your servant. Now therefore may it please you to bless the house of your servant, so that it may continue for ever before you. For you, O Lord GOD, have spoken, and with your blessing shall the house of your servant be blessed for ever.' (7:18–29)

God give us good understanding of his word.

In our preliminary study of 2 Samuel last week we made the simple observation that its story covers three major parts of David's life. All are concerned with David's reign as king, but the first part deals with the period in which he was beginning to get the power into his hand. It deals therefore with the problems associated with the source of power. How do you get power, how do you consolidate it, and why should you want to have power anyway?

The middle chapters of the book then deal with David's middle age: his middle age as a man, and the middle period of his kingdom. The central problem then was not how to get power into his hands, but how to hold on to it, and how to deal with all the rebellions that raised their head against the power of the throne. What do you do when you have a civil war on your hands, and how should you treat people? These are the problems of middle age at any time, but particularly of David the king.

The last period of the book very naturally devotes itself to the final years of David's life, and of his government. It tells us of what was perhaps the most grievous mistake that David ever made, which he made in his comparative old age, and therefore stands as a warning to those of us whose hairs begin to grey, that we are not past the danger line yet. The older we get, the more serious our sins are. Yet this last section is also full of the treasures of experience gained in David's long life, both as an individual, and as a king of his nation. They will fill us with hope for the coming of a greater King, who alone shall be able to solve earth's problems of government.

### **The first part of David's reign**

Tonight however, we must attempt a bird's eye view of the first section. Our studies only comprise five in all, therefore all we can do is to try and notice its leading features that might entice us to study the detail on another occasion. I'm going to ask you to keep your Bibles open and to follow me, for I shall be offering comments on the stories that fill these early chapters and you will find it convenient to look down at the text to see where I've got to, and what the next story is. It will also have the practical benefit of helping every one of us to keep awake!

In this first part of David's reign there were three different places in which he had his headquarters, corresponding to the rising tide of the power that came into his hands.

### **1. Ziklag**

After the death of Saul, when David had returned from striking down the Amalekites, David remained two days in Ziklag. (1:1)

There he was in the city that the Philistines had given him, his headquarters in the time that he was rejected by the nation of Israel. He lived with his faithful, believing, and loyal remnant of retainers in Ziklag. It was there that he heard the news of the death of Saul, and the first chapter of 2 Samuel deals with two major matters that happened while David was still in Ziklag, with very little more than an armed band of a few men and David as their chieftain.

### **2. Hebron**

After this David enquired of the LORD, 'Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah?' And the LORD said to him, 'Go up.' David said, 'To which shall I go up?' And he said, 'To Hebron.' (2:1)

Now he moves from the comparative obscurity of Ziklag to Hebron, which he now makes his capital city for the next seven years. Breaking away from King Saul's descendants, the men of Judah transfer their allegiance to David; he becomes king over them and reigns in Hebron over Judah.

The succeeding chapters tell us a whole array of events that happened when David was still in Hebron as king of Judah and all the other tribes still adhered to Saul's son Ish-bosheth as king of Israel.

### **3. Jerusalem**

At Hebron he reigned over Judah for seven years and six months, and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah for thirty-three years. (5:5)

Chapter 5 moves to the next big stage forward, for the opening verses tell us how all the tribes of Israel come over to David at this juncture and he becomes king of all twelve tribes. The house and dynasty of Saul has come to its end.

The first thing he did, as the record will now relate, was to take his army and go to Jebus, a city still in the hands of the Canaanites. He stormed the city and took it, and set up Jerusalem as his capital city—capital now not only of the tribe of Judah, but of all twelve tribes of Israel under his government. The rest of the first section of the book deals with the events that happened when David reigned in Jerusalem over all twelve tribes.

## **1. Ziklag**

### ***The source and sacredness of power***

Let us follow these stories and note their stages as we go by. The first problem was of securing power: how do you get hold of it? The question was the source of power. Does it matter where

you get the power from, from whom you get it, and by what means you get the power into your hands?

### *The source of power*

The first stories are going to be about the source of power, and the sacredness of it in David's estimation. To highlight the question, our first story is of David, still in Ziklag after Saul had been defeated by the Philistines (1:2–16).

There comes to Ziklag, into David's presence, an Amalekite, if you please, with the crown of Saul in his hand, and he offers it to David.

'Where did you get that from? If I'm not mistaken, that's Saul's crown.'

'Yes,' said the Amalekite, 'it is Saul's crown. I happened to be on Mount Gilboa when the battle took place, and there was Saul, leaning on his spear, trying to commit suicide to avoid capture by the Philistines. As I went by he called me, for his life was still in him, and he asked me to kill him, so I killed him, and here for you, David, is his crown.'

What would you have said to that? Saul had been David's sworn enemy; what with outright attacks, attempted assassination, trying to get David's wife to connive at his arrest and destruction, the slaughter of all the priests for helping David, not to speak of the time when he marched the whole army in full power through the wilderness, hunting David like a single flea (1 Sam 26:20). Saul willingly would have murdered David, and many times he had tried to. Now Saul is dead, and here is his crown being offered to David.

What would you have said?

'Isn't it marvellous how God guides in life? Thank the Lord for taking you to Mount Gilboa that day, just at the right time, and bringing me the crown?'

He said nothing of the sort. He said, 'Who are you, standing there with that crown in your hand? Where do you come from?'

'I am the son of a sojourner, an Amalekite,' he said (v. 13).

An Amalekite, indeed! To understand the significance of that, we'd better just try and remember who the Amalekites were. They are consistently represented in the Old Testament as outright, deliberate opponents of God. They had defied God and tried to prevent him from bringing his people through the wilderness from Egypt to the promised land. They were a people who tried to prevent the very throne of heaven from carrying out its plans. They were rebels against God.

It was these Amalekites that God had sent Saul to destroy, because of their opposition to the purposes of God. But it was on that very occasion that Saul himself had turned rebel and disobeyed God, and in the end it proved to be Saul's own destruction. When disobedience has been allowed for whatever specious excuse, or cherished and indulged, like a baby lion cub that you've played with, but now it's grown up, it will in the end turn round and devour you.

So, as the Amalekite stood there offering the crown to David, David said, 'No, thank you. I am very choosy from whose hand I accept royal power.'

The crown may be glittering and attractive, but to take power from the hand of a rebel against God will ultimately put you in the camp of the rebel, and prove your own destruction. If you ponder the principle of the thing, your mind may well travel forward many centuries to a desert place, when Jesus Christ our Lord was tempted of the devil. He took him up a high



mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. ‘And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me”’ (Matt 4:9). That day Christ could have had universal dominion, but, had he taken it from that source, you and I would have perished as slaves in Satan’s darkness for ever.

The source of power, then. The very first thing we must consider is, who is offering it? How many a man in business or in politics has sold his very soul for power? How many a Christian preacher—let me say it with fear—has been compromised by doctrinal or moral evil for the sake of support and power? If it were given to me—and it isn’t—to advise elders of churches, I would say that, in your desire to be an elder, if you allow yourself to be swept into position by people who have no intention whatever of obeying holy Scripture, your true function of an elder, which is to get people to obey God, will be ruined before you start.

### *The sacredness of power*

Then David had another look at the man standing in front of him with the crown. ‘You actually killed Saul? Weren’t you afraid to do it?’

‘Afraid to do it? Everybody was doing it on Mount Gilboa. Thousands were dead; there were corpses all over the place. I merely joined in and gave the man the *coup de grâce*.’

‘He was the Lord’s anointed,’ said David. ‘Why weren’t you afraid to kill him?’

That was a new slant on power as far as the Amalekite was concerned; that there was anything sacred about it. He was brought up in a world where the biggest animal rules the jungle. The idea that power comes from God, and it is a sacred thing that we must respect with awe, was far from the Amalekite’s mind.

In some countries still, notably in our own, on the coronation of the sovereign, acknowledgement is made that power actually comes from God. Whatever people normally think when they go to the elections, formal acknowledgement is made at least on that occasion that power comes from God. Happy are those nations that have some concept of the sacredness of power; that it should not be simply the biggest bully with the biggest bombs who automatically qualifies to be the boss. The world will never be free from strife until it is brought to the acknowledgement that power is a sacred thing that comes from God.

At the thought of an Amalekite, of all people, slaying the Lord’s anointed, David could not contain himself and ordered the man to be executed (vv. 15–16).

What would you have done next, had you been David? Here you are in Ziklag, which isn’t exactly in the centre of the world. It wasn’t even in the centre of the map of ancient Israel. It was in the middle of nowhere, the kind of a place that the Philistines would give to a political refugee to get him out of the way of the establishment. You have your eyes on the throne, hoping that God has got one for you somewhere one of these days.

What you want is a propaganda campaign to bring you to the nation’s attention. David thought so too. They didn’t have television or radio then, nor daily newspapers, so he did what they did in the ancient world. He composed a poem and taught it to the people, so that everybody sang it. The tune was good, and it spread through the nation. People hummed it at work, sitting by the fire, feeding the camels. It was David’s signature tune, and they learned a lot about David and got the political message.

Had you been writing David's propaganda poem, what would you have put in it? 'Look at how the previous government has led us to disaster?' 'Look at how the Philistines have overrun our land through the incompetence of that silly chap Saul and his policies?' 'Come over to my side?'

If you had written that kind of poem, it would have been no good for David in the publicity department. His poem was altogether different and it went like this:

'Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely!' (1:23).

'Saul and Jonathan? David, they were your enemies, man. Saul's son Ish-bosheth is still alive and breathing, and ten, if not eleven, of the tribes are still in allegiance to him. If you go praising Saul and Jonathan like that everybody will say, "Why not keep them in the government?" You have to pick holes in them, David. You have to run them down. They can't have been good if they opposed you. Look at the terrible things they've done. You get power by running down the people who have opposed you.'

Not David. Enemies they had been; terrible dark deeds they had imagined and tried to put into action against David, but Jonathan was lovely, and Saul was the Lord's anointed.

'There was another side to their characters, you know,' said David. 'They did the nation a tremendous lot of good', and he taught the people to love his enemies.

My brother, is that how you do it in your church? Or do you sometimes yield to the temptation that, when somebody has done you a dirty trick, you can't imagine that anything he could do would be right and you run him down? Be careful, for the man who sits on God's throne at this moment, and one day shall sit on his own throne governing the universe, is the man who not only taught people to love his enemies, but he loved them himself and he died for them.

David could see the good even in Saul and Jonathan, and made poetry out of it. Just imagine making poetry out of the lives of his personal enemies, and he taught Israel to value even the wayward members of the nation. I needn't labour the point. Whether you sit on an ornate king's throne, occupy an elder's seat, or, like me, you are just an ordinary person in the church of God, let us learn from these Old Testament men a standard of behaviour towards their enemies that sometimes is better than one Christian for another.

## 2. Hebron

We come then to chapters 2-4. David comes to Hebron and the men of Judah make him king. What now will be the problems, and the lessons to be learned? As king of Judah he has more power, and at least one tribe is behind him. Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, is alive and, humanly speaking, he is the more powerful man, because he has eleven of the tribes of Israel on his side. He also has that capable warrior, Abner the son of Ner, commander of Saul's army. What was David going to do now?

### *The loyalty of the men of Jabesh-gilead*

First of all, we read that the men of Judah told David that it was the men of Jabesh-gilead who had buried Saul (2:4-7). What would you have said to them? They had been Saul's servants, and when Saul had fallen on the battlefield the men of Jabesh-gilead risked their lives out of

loyalty to him and went and collected his body and gave Saul a decent burial. What did David say to them?

'You'd better come and have a word with me and explain your actions. Don't you know that Saul was my great enemy? He tried to kill me. Now I am king in Hebron, and you tell me that you've gone and honoured Saul, and given him a decent public burial? This is nothing less than high treason against me, and must be construed as deliberate enmity, and a slap in a face that you've gone and honoured my enemy with a decent burial.'

He didn't say anything of the sort. David was a wise man. He knew loyalty when he saw it, and loyalty in itself is a quality whose value you could scarcely exaggerate. Loyalty is the thing that makes the universe hold together and stops it flying into ten million pieces. The loyalty of God to us his creatures: even when we've sinned against him, rather than we should perish, he gave his own Son for us. David wasn't going to smash the sense of loyalty in those men's hearts. What if they are loyal to his one-time enemy? If he smashed their sense of loyalty, even if they came over to him, it wouldn't make them perfectly loyal to him either, would it?

Sometimes we do misconstrue people. They're friends with the people who've just offended us, and, because they're their friends, they stick up for them. What would you expect them to do? Would you count them as enemies because they show loyalty?

'Now look,' said David, 'I am king; I'd like you to know that. Judah has now selected me as king. You have shown loyalty to your sovereign. Well done. You'll have nothing but praise from me.'

There's more than a hint there that one of these days he would be delighted to see them loyal to himself. David appreciated the men's sense of loyalty.

### ***Abner and Joab***

They went out on a day with some of their troops to the place called Gibeon (2:12–17). Some of you may have stood by the pool—it isn't a pool really, it's a water shaft, a magnificent piece of Canaanite civil engineering.

Joab and his men were on one side, and Abner and his men on the other side. It was a beautiful day and it gets boring sometimes when you've got a whole armoury of weapons and no chance to use them. So 'Abner said to Joab, Let the young men now arise, and play before us. And Joab said, Let them arise' (v. 14 KJV).

*Play?* What do you mean? Football? No, it was a war game. The Hebrew word 'play' should really be understood in the military sense, as in conducting manoeuvres. In the end Joab and Abner tell each other very wisely, 'We'd better not take this too far; it will end in bitterness.'

I wish at this moment you could hear the dying groans of the millions of men who walked behind Alexander the Great, Antiochus Epiphanes, Julius Caesar, Napoleon, and Adolph Hitler. In the days when those leaders made them *play* their little war game and carved up Europe, if it cost them millions of soldiers, what were soldiers for anyway? Power games, war games: is that all human life is? Men's lives merely pawns in the chess struggle of international power politics?

Thank God for a king, who, even in those ancient days, disapproved of it. And for a greater King who shed blood, indeed, rather than we should perish. If you are a Christian you serve a King who holds your life to be of infinite value, and gave his life for it. He will never play power games with you. What is this life all about? Is it just an afternoon's sport? God will never abandon the whole show and go off to some other galaxy. Indeed, not. In Jesus Christ, the greater than David, we have the very heart of God revealed. He'll be loyal to you, my friend, not playing games with your life, not rising to power simply by regarding you as expendable, but one for whom he willingly died himself.

Then we move on to another long story, and it need not detain us, because its principle is very similar.

### ***Abner's assassination by Joab***

Abner, commander in chief of the eleven tribes and their armies, had put Ish-bosheth, Saul's son, on the throne. Now and again Abner saw fit to remind Ish-bosheth of the fact. One day Ish-bosheth happened to make a few remarks that didn't please Abner. 'Right, my good man,' said Abner, 'I put you on this throne, and now I'm about to take you off it. God do so to me and more also, if I do not transfer the whole kingdom to David' (see 3:8–10).

To cut a long story short, on certain conditions David opened negotiations with him, and Abner was going to bring over all eleven tribes to serve David. They made this tentative arrangement, the agreement was initialled, and off Abner went to arrange the details. Joab had been off on a raid somewhere and when he came in and heard that Abner had been about the place that day, having negotiations with the king, Joab went in to protest to David.

Said David, 'He's going to bring over the whole ten tribes under my rule.'

'He's not going to do anything of the sort. Maybe he's a spy! It's no good this whole thing, David. I wouldn't trust him, not an inch. It's not in your interests to bring over the ten tribes' (see vv. 24–25).

Unknown to David, Joab called Abner back, and he returned to Hebron all unsuspecting. 'I want to work with you, Abner,' said Joab, and as they stood in the middle of the gate Joab put his sword through Abner's stomach, so that was the end of him (vv. 26–27). There wasn't another commander about, so Joab kept his job.

That was good for David, wasn't it? Or was it? Tell me, when Joab assassinated Abner, do you suppose that Joab was really thinking what was good for David? Joab could see what it would lead to if Abner came over with his eleven tribes, and Joab was commander of an army with only one, and he knew better than to let it happen. Was his interest for David? Of course not, for Joab couldn't really care what happened to David.

To descend from high international politics to small things, I've been in some extraordinarily funny places in my time. Once upon a time there was a church, and it had an organ. A good man played it, and did his best. He got seven out of ten notes right most of the time. The dear man did it to the very best of his ability; he'll get a reward when he gets home to heaven. Then somebody happened to come to the district who had a degree in music. He could play the organ well and the elders had the temerity to suggest that organist number one might give way to organist number two. What an ungodly thing to do.

'Why ungodly?' you ask.

Well it oughtn't to be done.

'Why not?'

Because it wouldn't be good for the Lord's cause.

'But surely the Lord's cause would be served a bit better if the second man played the organ?'

Our eyes get blinded. Whether it is arranging the flowers, giving out the hymnbooks, or doing the preaching, sometimes we're serving ourselves, and our own ambitions take the place of the Lord's interests.

Joab shed the blood of war at a time of peace, and went down to his grave at long last as a murderer.

### ***Ish-bosheth's assassination by his two captains***

There came at length another two men, Baanah and Rechab (4:1-12). If this wasn't sad, it would border on the comic. They entered David's presence, holding a man's head in their hands.

Shades of past history, when David had come into the presence of Saul, king of Israel, with the head of Goliath the giant in his hand, and all Israel had sung his praises. But this day it wasn't quite like that. Well, there was a head and I suppose it looked grisly, but whose head was it? Ish-bosheth was now king of Israel in the place of his father Saul, and two of his captains, seeing how things were going and that David was getting stronger, decided to jump ship. So they thought they would ingratiate themselves to David by going into Ish-bosheth's bedroom when he was taking a siesta, and just cutting his head off. They thought it was wonderful and they went up to David, proud of the fact.

But when David came to Saul with a head in his hand, it was the head of one of God's enemies. When these two fellows came in, it was with the head of one of God's people, and they hadn't the sense to see the difference. God give us the grace so that we shall always see it clearly. If we're going to cut off anybody's head, or cut down their character, or whatever we're going to do, let us first make sure that they are enemies of God, and not one of God's own dear people.

Such treatment for captains in Ish-bosheth's own household army, to assassinate the man in bed when he was asleep. You wouldn't find it in the world; the world would despise it. David would have none of it and had them executed. The sanctity of human life is stressed throughout these chapters. David would come to power, but not at the cost of devaluing human life.

You may think I'm on the gloomy side tonight, but I've been dealing with gloomy chaps. I have known older folks in churches of God to quarrel and fight until the young folks have been ruined spiritually. They didn't care, as long as they were proved right. Oh, the dangers associated with getting hold of the power.

### 3. Jerusalem

#### ***David is anointed king of Israel***

At long length all the tribes came to David, and they said,

Behold, we are your bone and flesh. In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led out and brought in Israel. And the LORD said to you, 'You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel' (5:1-2).

There are three lovely things there. Why did they make him king? They said:

1. *'David, you're one of us, bone of our bone, flesh of our flesh, wrapped up in our very life. You're not somebody imposed from the outside, who doesn't care, but somebody who is involved in our very living.'* So they made him king. Of course, he wasn't an outsider imposed on them, but one of themselves.

If I asked you why you obey the Lord Jesus and have made him king of your life, I wonder what you'd say. I wonder if you'd quote me that delightful verse from Hebrews 2, 'For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified all have one source. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brothers' (v. 11). The great transcendent Lord of time and space came down, became one of us, and because the children were partakers in flesh and blood, he himself partook of the same, and was born in a stable and died on a cross, that he might be one of us. You love him for it, don't you? Not all the glories of heaven would bow your heart into obedience to Christ like the fact that he became one with you.

2. *'It was you, David, who led out and brought in Israel.'* Saul had done a few good things in his early days, but for a great part of his life he let other people get on with the job. He didn't go out and fight Goliath, he kept at a safe distance from him.

It is a thing about governing folks, you know, that you don't really get very far if you don't do anything, and expect other people to lead them. In the end the people will love those who lead them to victory.

If I were an elder I would say, 'God help me to keep doing the job.' Wouldn't you? Elders who don't actually lead the people of God in their spiritual work, in their spiritual conflicts, and let other people do the work, in the end lose their power. It's those who actually lead God's people, and do the work, and win the victories, that the people will love and follow.

How that applies to our Lord I needn't tell you.

3. *'God said that you were going to be king,'* they said; 'so it's about time we submitted to the Lord and made you king.' So, as they obeyed David, they felt they were obeying God. 'At Hebron [David] reigned over Judah for seven years and six months, and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah for thirty-three years' (5:5).

#### ***The relation of David's power to God's power and authority***

The third section deals with a number of important things, and asks us to consider, therefore, the relation of David and his use of power to God and God's power. That is always a question with human government at whatever level you meet it, even with our Lord. If I am to obey

somebody, and acknowledge his power and authority over me, what is the relation of that power and authority to God's ultimate power and authority?

So David had to be taught two lovely lessons, and I must skim over them very briefly.

### *Bringing the ark to Jerusalem*

The first great lesson was when David tried to bring up the ark of the Lord on the first occasion, and he did it the wrong way round. Quite rightly, he thought that it would be a good thing to have the symbol of the very presence and power of God among them and with him in Jerusalem. That would make the people sit up and take notice, wouldn't it? The very ark of God in his capital city. So they put it on a cart, and the bullocks began to draw it. As it went down the road the oxen stumbled, the cart wobbled a bit, and the ark was a little bit shaky. A man by the name of Uzzah instinctively ran and put out his hand to hold the ark up. He thought the throne of God was about to fall over, and God smote him dead (6:1-7).

You say, 'That was unkind of God, wasn't it?'

Not really, for this is an exceedingly important lesson. To start with, let me give you a little practical advice. If one of these days you get home to heaven—I hope you do—and, coming near the throne of God, you should get the impression that it's wobbling a bit and about to fall over, don't try and hold it up. Run as hard as you can run. If God can't keep himself up and it falls over on top of you, that will be the end of you and the end of the whole universe.

Idolaters think they have to carry their gods. They think they have to manipulate and control them. In the old pagan world, when they wanted the gods to bless their harvest, they'd think, 'Now what do we have to do, for the gods to bless the harvest? We'll give them a little cash, or an offering or something.' If you could bribe the gods and somehow get them on your side, then you'd enjoy their power. Idolatry is a question of trying to use God for your ends.

Many a politician has done it. They'll get a whole bunch of bishops to say prayers because they want to be sure God is on their side. It's unfortunate if the enemy is praying to the same God. That's using God, and the next step in that procedure is to think that you've got to hold God up. What slavery that would be. It isn't that way round, you know. 'Look to me,' says God. 'You don't have to carry me; the reverse is true: I carry you.' In that delightful passage in Isaiah, God reminds us, 'even to your old age I am he, and to grey hairs I will carry you' (46:4).

It wasn't a question of David using God, but of God using David. I don't know what job God has given you to do. Perhaps to bring up a family, govern teenagers, govern a factory? We need to be careful not to fall into the mistake of thinking we've got a job to do, so we'd better try and persuade God to be on our side to help us. If it wasn't going very well, we might fall into the notion of thinking that God wasn't too willing, which is not so. God is not there to be used; he uses us and will carry us, as we are willing, to fulfil the task to which he has appointed us.

### *David's desire to build a house for God*

So David learned his lesson, and we finally come to the climax of this section (ch. 7). Having seen a little of the wonder of God, the God who was prepared to carry him, David made a suggestion to the prophet that he should build God a house, and the prophet said, 'Go and do it, for God is with you' (see v. 3). But that same night God spoke to Nathan.

‘Go and tell David, no thank you very much. Ask him, “Would you build me a house to dwell in?”’ (see v. 5). ‘I don’t want you to build me a house, David. I chose you when you were little in your own sight, when you were a shepherd lad, and I made you king of Israel. It was my idea, not yours.’

Long before David had thought about it, God had been planning David’s life, and it was a bigger plan than anything David could ever have dreamed about.

‘David, I don’t want you to build me a house. I am going to build you a house. I’m going to do for you what I never did for Saul. I’m going to consolidate not only your power but your dynasty, and I’m going to build you a house that will never fail. The plan I had in mind when I chose you as a shepherd boy will go on right through the ages of history. You shall have a son, and he shall build me a house. If your son offends, I shall discipline him, but I shall never reject him; I shall not take my mercy from him like I took it from Saul. I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a son. You’re sitting on this throne because from all eternity I had a plan to have a house, which a son of yours would build, and I’ve given you a part in it’ (see 7:1–17).

When David heard it he was overwhelmed, and he went in and sat before the Lord. As it began to dawn on him why he had been made king at all, it was a bit too much to take in. Why would he want to be king?

Why would you want to play the organ? Why would you want to be an elder in a church, or a parent in a family? Is it because you like the feeling of power? What’s the whole scheme about? Dangers galore would lurk in our path if we were to get it into our heads that it is some little scheme we cooked up according to our own private ambitions. Let’s consider the ultimate question: why has God placed me here, gifted me, and given me things to do? Way back in eternity, before you’d ever begun to think of any such thing—because you weren’t there to think it—God had a plan. One day his own blessed Son would enter our time and space and create a house for God, made up of people of every tribe, kindred, language and nation, where God might come and dwell among them. He got you when you were a rebel and began his work in you. You’re delighted with how far you’ve come, but you don’t have a clue yet of what still lies ahead in the great purpose of God

As he began to get hold of it, David said,

Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far? And yet this was a small thing in your eyes, O Lord GOD. You have spoken also of your servant’s house for a great while to come, and this is instruction for mankind, O Lord GOD! And what more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Lord GOD! Because of your promise, and according to your own heart, you have brought about all this greatness, to make your servant know it. (vv. 18–21)

‘I’ve a purpose that will go beyond life’s history, and my son will build your house? Why have you done it, O Lord GOD?’ he said. ‘It was for your own sake you’ve done it, for your own purpose and for your own will, and you’ve just told me now what your purpose is. Therefore, your servant has found courage to pray this prayer to you. You will do it Lord, won’t you, and let your servant’s house be blessed?’ (see v. 29).



David was thinking of a son, his name was Solomon, and he would build a house. God would be Solomon's father, and Solomon would be God's son (vv. 13–14). David was thinking of a long line of kings, Hezekiah and Josiah and a few more like that, and he thought it was wonderful. It was wonderful; but did he catch that there was more in it than even he could begin to imagine? One day there would come a Son of David who would be Son of God in the absolute sense, and he would build God an eternal house. He knows it now!

*We are also in the purpose of his will*

And so do you, don't you? As we sit back now at the end of this long lecture, may God apply the lesson to us and help us to take it in. 'Oh Lord, who am I? You chose me, and you've brought me thus far, redeemed and forgiven. I can't be an ancestor of the Messiah, but I'm called to be a member of his house and one day I shall sit upon his throne with him.' When God's great purpose of having a cosmic house is complete, our Lord has built it and God blessed it, we shall reign with Christ. Just imagine, that's true of you.

You say, 'Why has God done it?'

He's done it according to the purpose of his own will. 'In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will' (Eph 1:11).

Sometimes, like David, I'm just a little bit afraid it's too good to happen, but my prayer is that God will do it according to his will, and I shall be content with whatever part he gives me to play in that house.

Shall we pray.

Lord, we thank thee for thy holy word. We thank thee for these ancient stories and their practical lessons. We thank thee more than ever that again they remind us of Jesus Christ thy son, the attractiveness of his person, the glory of his kingship, and the riches of his principles. Now we thank thee above all that thou hast made known to us thy purpose of having an eternal house, built for thee by Jesus Christ thy Son; and for the consciousness that thou hast taken us up into that great purpose by thine own will and volition. This consciousness overwhelms us here this evening, and humbly now we pray, Lord, that thou will go on to reveal to us the implication of thy purpose, and that in thy good time thou will in all thy faithfulness fulfil thy word that thou hast made known.

So send us home in thy peace, with thy word in our hearts, and help us, Lord, to commune with thee as we go. Draw near to us, for the day declines, and the coming of the Lord is near. Draw near, Lord, we beseech thee, cause us to know what thou hast in store for us by thy grace through Jesus Christ thy Son. Amen.

## David's Difficulties in Middle Life (9:1–20:26)

Let us begin our study this evening by reading in 2 Samuel 14, beginning at verse 1.

Now Joab the son of Zeruiah knew that the king's heart went out to Absalom. And Joab sent to Tekoa and brought from there a wise woman and said to her, 'Pretend to be a mourner and put on mourning garments. Do not anoint yourself with oil, but behave like a woman who has been mourning many days for the dead. Go to the king and speak thus to him.' So Joab put the words in her mouth. When the woman of Tekoa came to the king, she fell on her face to the ground and paid homage and said, 'Save me, O king.' And the king said to her, 'What is your trouble?' She answered, 'Alas, I am a widow; my husband is dead. And your servant had two sons, and they quarrelled with one another in the field. There was no one to separate them, and one struck the other and killed him. And now the whole clan has risen against your servant, and they say, "Give up the man who struck his brother, that we may put him to death for the life of his brother whom he killed." And so they would destroy the heir also. Thus they would quench my coal that is left and leave to my husband neither name nor remnant on the face of the earth.' Then the king said to the woman, 'Go to your house, and I will give orders concerning you.' And the woman of Tekoa said to the king, 'On me be the guilt, my lord the king, and on my father's house; let the king and his throne be guiltless.' The king said, 'If anyone says anything to you, bring him to me, and he shall never touch you again.' Then she said, 'Please let the king invoke the LORD your God, that the avenger of blood kill no more, and my son be not destroyed.' He said, 'As the LORD lives, not one hair of your son shall fall to the ground.' Then the woman said, 'Please let your servant speak a word to my lord the king.' He said, 'Speak.' And the woman said, 'Why then have you planned such a thing against the people of God? For in giving this decision the king convicts himself, inasmuch as the king does not bring his banished one home again. We must all die; we are like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. But God will not take away life, and he devises means so that the banished one will not remain an outcast. Now I have come to say this to my lord the king because the people have made me afraid, and your servant thought, "I will speak to the king; it may be that the king will perform the request of his servant. For the king will hear and deliver his servant from the hand of the man who would destroy me and my son together from the heritage of God." And your servant thought, "The word of my lord the king will set me at rest", for my lord the king is like the angel of God to discern good and evil. The LORD your God be with you!"' Then the king answered the woman, 'Do not hide from me anything I ask you.' And the woman said, 'Let my lord the king speak.' The king said, 'Is the hand of Joab with you in all this?' The woman answered and said, 'As surely as you live, my lord the king, one cannot

turn to the right hand or to the left from anything that my lord the king has said. It was your servant Joab who commanded me; it was he who put all these words in the mouth of your servant. In order to change the course of things your servant Joab did this. But my lord has wisdom like the wisdom of the angel of God to know all things that are on the earth.' Then the king said to Joab, 'Behold now, I grant this; go, bring back the young man Absalom.' And Joab fell on his face to the ground and paid homage and blessed the king. And Joab said, 'Today your servant knows that I have found favour in your sight, my lord the king, in that the king has granted the request of his servant.' So Joab arose and went to Geshur and brought Absalom to Jerusalem. And the king said, 'Let him dwell apart in his own house; he is not to come into my presence.' So Absalom lived apart in his own house and did not come into the king's presence . . . So Absalom lived for two full years in Jerusalem, without coming into the king's presence. Then Absalom sent for Joab, to send him to the king, but Joab would not come to him. And he sent a second time, but Joab would not come. Then he said to his servants, 'See, Joab's field is next to mine, and he has barley there; go and set it on fire.' So Absalom's servants set the field on fire. Then Joab arose and went to Absalom at his house and said to him, 'Why have your servants set my field on fire?' Absalom answered Joab, 'Behold, I sent word to you, "Come here, that I may send you to the king, to ask, 'Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me to be there still.' Now therefore let me go into the presence of the king, and if there is guilt in me, let him put me to death.'" Then Joab went to the king and told him, and he summoned Absalom. So he came to the king and bowed himself with his face to the ground before the king, and the king kissed Absalom. (vv. 1–24, 28–33)

The Lord give us good understanding of his word.

We begin our study of the second part in the life and reign of King David, to consider the problems that confronted him in the middle years of his life and of his reign. Last week, in a very rough and ready fashion, we were considering the first parts of David's life as king, and found that the problems that beset him then were largely to do with the takeover of power. First, the question of *methods*—by what means do you acquire power? Then the question of *source*—from what source would you be willing to accept power and support? Finally, the question of *motives*—why would you wish for power?

This evening we move on to David's middle period, where it is no longer a question of what methods you use in obtaining power, where you get power from, or why you would wish for power. David is now a middle aged man and a very successful king. I suspect he's a bit portly now compared to his youth and, not only that, he feels he has arrived. His kingdom is secure at this stage, advancing and bidding fair to becoming one of the leading empires in the then Middle East. Indeed, had God allowed it, it could have become a rival to such kingdoms as Babylon and Persia.

The man David was secure, so it was not a question of how did he get power, but how did he use it, and on what principles would he maintain it? When we begin to answer these questions we shall find a whole series of what we could loosely describe as *love stories*. They will force our consideration of this question of *love* and let us ask what exactly the term 'love' means. *What is genuine love?*

Then, as we proceed, we shall find David becomes involved in a very difficult case of discipline. One of his sons by the name of Absalom murdered his half-brother, and then ran away in order to escape punishment. This eventually raised the question of whether David would insist on punishment, or whether, with time, he would bring Absalom back without any punishment. We shall hear the case that punishment in and of itself is offensive, a useless and disgusting thing, and ought to be put aside in the name of love and charity. That will again raise some very large questions: *what is the relation of love to punishment, and punishment to love?*

We shall see David won over by, what you might call, the *permissive* argument on punishment and he brings Absalom home again. However, we shall detect some uneasiness in David's behaviour. Absalom may have been brought back, but for a while he was not allowed to see the king's face. When we ponder it, you may well come to consider that a reconciliation that will bring a man home, but not grant him entry into the king's presence, is a very funny kind of reconciliation. That will raise another big question: *what does 'reconciliation' mean? Can you have true and sound reconciliation if there is neither repentance nor punishment?*

Finally, we shall see one of the greatest horrors in David's life, when the son whom he has brought back and excused from all punishment, turns round and leads a revolt against his father, and nearly throws him off the throne. But then, *unjudged sin has terrible potential*. David is torn in two: his responsibility as a king to destroy the rebel, and his concern as a father to save his son. We shall hear of his terrible dilemma with great sorrow and sympathy, and pray God that we are never in it ourselves. How would you solve the problem? As a king you ought to judge a rebel and destroy him; when that rebel is your son, as a father you would do anything to save him. David's divided heart in the matter led to a perpetuation and a worsening of the revolt, and it could have ended in utter disaster had it not been for his army commander, Joab.

Therefore, the major problem that is raised by our passage this evening will not be solved within the confines of the book of Samuel. Nevertheless, we shall presently observe that a similar problem has beset the very throne of God. God Almighty himself has suffered an enormous offence, and not only here on earth but in high places as well. Earth unfortunately has become involved in this rebellion against God and his government. That has raised a problem that lies at the very heart of the universe, the question of punishment and law. *Are punishment and law irreconcilable opposites to love?*

This is a problem that concerned not merely David but God himself, and he has only been able to solve it by the extreme and drastic measure of giving his own Son to die a rebel death. As we think of the central message of the gospel—how that God loved us and did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all so that we might be truly reconciled with God—what is the significance of the cross of Christ? *Is it right to talk of the sufferings of Christ in terms of him being punished by God?*

Liberal thought says no. Liberal thought believes in a God who wouldn't punish anybody. But then, if God wouldn't punish anybody, you can see at once that that changes the whole significance and interpretation of the death of Jesus Christ on Calvary.

Let that suffice as a very rapid survey of the kind of problems raised by the middle chapters of the second book of Samuel. We shall follow the stories that ensue and cover as many as the clock permits. Keep your Bibles open because we shall be turning to the passage from time to time.

## The true nature of love

### *David's kindness and loyalty*

Chapter 9 begins the second part of David's life with these famous words, 'And David said, "Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?"' (v. 1). Chapter 10 repeats this very interesting topic: 'And David said, "I will deal loyally with Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father dealt loyally with me"' (v. 2). Chapter 11 then tells us that there came a war with Ammon. The normal custom was that the king would go out with his troops to attack the enemy, but on this occasion David chose kindness to himself. He stayed at home in Jerusalem and took it easy.

What do we mean by *kindness*, and is it always a good thing? David was now an established monarch with all the power to do exactly as he pleased. Not only was he able to look around for opportunities to show kindness and loyalty to others, but, if you please, to show kindness to the house of Saul, who at one time had been his bitterest enemy.

### *David and Jonathan—chapter 9*

The reason is given by David—'Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness *for Jonathan's sake?*' Our minds go back to the time when David was still on the run. Before he must leave Israel for a while and flee for his life, he had his last meeting with Jonathan (1 Sam 20). Jonathan arranged the whole occasion with the arrows, and shot the bow to tell David that he soon must go. On that historic occasion, when it dawned on both of them that Israel was going to officially reject the messiah and he would have to go, who knows how far, into the desert, David left his hiding place and embraced Jonathan and Jonathan embraced David, and they both wept.

At that moment, when David felt that it was all useless and he would have to flee before the enemy, we read that David made a covenant with Jonathan. Said Jonathan to David, 'In spite of the fact that the nation is now rejecting you, one day you'll be king. Swear to me that when you become king and power is in your hand, you will be kind to me and to my offspring for ever.' And David swore, and they made a covenant (see vv. 14–17, 41–42).

How delightful it is now to see David honour that covenant. David is in power and Jonathan is long since dead. No one else has survived who knew about that covenant made in secret between David and Jonathan. Would David say, 'It was only a political manoeuvre and it suited me at the time to make that arrangement with Jonathan, but circumstances are different now and I don't have to honour it'? Not David. It was in weakness that he made the covenant with Jonathan. Now that he has come into power, even though Jonathan is gone, he will honour it. Perhaps you perceive yet another reason why, in spite of his many faults, David

was a king after God's own heart, for you see in him a prototype of the coming Messiah himself.

#### *The new covenant*

Peter couldn't believe it when our Lord said that Israel would reject the Messiah. He even contradicted the Saviour and told him it was all nonsense, but Peter had to discover the hard way that it was so. Israel were sworn enemies of their Messiah, and they would repeatedly reject him. On that very night, when he took bread and took a cup filled with wine, and said, 'This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood,' he had to tell them, 'For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined' (Luke 22:19–20, 22).

That little band of men went down into the darkness of the garden, and presently Jesus Christ our Lord was dead, crucified on a tree. Now the heaven of heavens isn't big enough to contain him, and all power is in his hands. I bid you, as the writer to the Hebrews bade his readers, 'Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession' (3:1). He made a new covenant and he will honour its terms to an endless eternity. He doesn't need Martha's dining room now, nor Peter's boat, nor the winding thorn they gave him for a crown, but he will remember his covenant with his people forever.

#### ***David and the king of Ammon—chapter 10***

Not all oriental monarchs were kind like that to their former enemies. Before we applaud David's kindness, perhaps our feelings will be mixed when we come to this chapter and observe his attempt to show kindness to the king of Ammon.

'I will show kindness to the king of Ammon now, as his father showed kindness to me,' said David (see v. 2 KJV), for the king of Ammon apparently had shown kindness to David when David was a fugitive from the court of Saul. But, now that David was on the throne of Israel, was it wise to try and show kindness to Ammon?

You say, 'Why not? Oughtn't you to be kind, even to your enemies?'

Well yes, I suppose you should in a way; but being kind to your enemies is one thing, being kind to what they stand for is another, isn't it?

So you say, 'What did Ammon stand for?'

According to the Old Testament, which is the inspired word of God, Ammon stood for certain things. He might be kind personally to an Israelite, if the Israelite was running away from the Israelite government, as David was at a certain stage. It could have suited him politically to have David in his hand as a pawn to use against Saul, if the occasion arose. But as for the people of God, Ammon was an undeviating enemy against them. You might perhaps wonder whether it was a wise thing, then, for the monarch on the throne of Israel to try and show kindness to the monarch on the throne of Ammon.

You say, 'What was wrong with Ammon? How was he an enemy of Israel?'

Let's listen to the history. You'll find throughout the Old Testament that Ammon was constantly attempting to steal Israel's inheritance, or what parts of it he could get his hands on. There is the story in the book of Judges (ch. 11), in the time of Jephthah, where Ammon

sent messengers to Israel, and said, 'Look here, Israel, you know that you have no right to this territory that you now occupy, it belongs to us' (see v. 13).

Jephthah had to send the ambassadors to Ammon and say, 'I'm sorry, but you've got this wrong, it belongs to us.'

'No,' says Ammon, 'you have no right to it, and if you don't give it up we shall come and take it.'

Jephthah got out the Scriptures, and read the man a lesson in history. 'I'll have you know,' he said, 'that this is how we came by this land. We are not aggressive, and it is our right. We're sticking by our God-given inheritance.'

Ammon persisted with his claims and Jephthah was obliged to use the sword on them.

The centuries passed and Nehemiah came back to Jerusalem to complete the restoration of the city, and then to get the temple in good working order. He was opposed by many of the little nations around him at that stage, and not least by Tobiah the Ammonite. Presently, Nehemiah had to go back to the court in Persia, and many months later, when he was able to return to Jerusalem, he found a very curious thing. There was Tobiah, if you please—the very man who had been amongst the foremost opponents of Nehemiah and the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the reuse of its temple—personally occupying one of the rooms in the sacred precincts of the temple. Not only would he steal Israel's inheritance, but, if he could, God's inheritance as well (see Neh 13:1–9).

You may not be surprised therefore, to find God complaining through his servant Jeremiah, 'Has Israel no sons? Has he no heir?' (49:1).

What do you mean, has Israel no heir?

'Well,' says God, 'Ammon is lording it in Israel's inheritance.'

Why is that? Has Israel run out of heirs and given the whole thing, lock, stock and barrel, to Ammon?

They were always planning to steal the God-given inheritance of Israel, and in the process forever making a mockery. You will remember what the king of Ammon did in the days of Saul. He besieged Jabesh-gilead, and when the men of Jabesh said to Nahash, 'Make a treaty with us, and we will serve you,' Nahash said, 'On this condition I will make a treaty with you, that I gouge out all your right eyes, and thus bring disgrace on all Israel' (1 Sam 11:1–2). He wanted to mock them.

On this occasion in 2 Samuel 10, when David sent messengers to comfort the king of Ammon on the death of his father, what did they do? They got hold of the men, 'shaved off half the beard of each and cut off their garments in the middle, at their hips . . . the men were greatly ashamed' (vv. 4–5). That's the Ammonite technique.

We've already referred to the time when Nehemiah had begun the rebuilding of the wall. Do you remember what Tobiah the Ammonite said to his friends when they came up to have a look at it? He said, 'if a fox goes up on it he will break down their stone wall!' (4:3). The same man was very glad of accommodation in the temple later on.

That being Ammon's determined and consistent attitude all down the centuries, to rob the people of God of their God-given possession, it is questionable, don't you think, whether as monarch of Israel David did right in attempting to show kindness to the king of Ammon?

We're meant to love our enemies, but we cannot compromise with their objectives. You might as well try to show kindness to the devil himself, who is relentlessly behind every effort that denies God's people of their inheritance. Many times he's done it; denying people the right to read the Bible. 'These uneducated people can't make sense of it; it ought not to be given to the ordinary person.'

Who gave it to them, then? Is it not part of their God-given inheritance? You cannot make friends with the policy that would deprive people of their God-given inheritance. Who ordained it that all God's people are free? Who ordained it that every believer has the right to know that he has eternal life? You cannot make friends with the doctrine that would deny the right of believers to know that they have eternal life. Thus the compromise is not kindness. At the very best, it is misguided kindness.

### ***David and Bathsheba—chapters 11-12***

Apparently David was in the mood for kindness, and when war broke out with Ammon he sent Joab with the armies to the front and he stayed at home. That's a big temptation for the middle aged, isn't it? If you ask me how I know, just look at me. Once we were keen, but we've got older now and haven't quite got the energy we used to have. We've 'arrived' a bit more, haven't we? Life isn't the struggle it was; we can pay the mortgage and don't have so many worries. Then comes the temptation to settle down and be kind to one another. We're not quite the warriors that we used to be. That is middle life's temptation, isn't it?

It's a temptation you've got to be on your guard against, because the work of God, whatever form it takes, is one of those things that is calculated to preserve us. While I'm busy in his work and busy at my prayers, asking for grace from the Lord to do it as I ought to, then perhaps I am safe. But if we have given up and don't do anything in particular for the Lord, the danger of wandering from him and indulging wrong appetites increases proportionately.

So it was, all unintentionally, that David turned to sin, took Uriah's wife and murdered Uriah by proxy. I wish to say very little about that sorry episode in his life. I would have preferred that it was not there. Let others speak of it who are more qualified. What was fundamentally wrong with it? We will gather how God viewed the whole episode if we listen to the prophet who came in to convict David of his sins.

#### *Nathan's parable*

There was a very rich man in a certain town, and a very poor man. The rich man had herds in abundance; the poor man had only one little lamb and he treated it as though it was one of his children: 'it was like a daughter to him' (12:3). There came a visitor to the rich man, and, instead of taking one of his many lambs, he chose to take away the poor man's ewe lamb, butcher that, and serve it to his guest.

When David heard that story he was indignant, and declared that the man should die, but the parable and the sentence rebounded on David's head, for he had done likewise, hadn't he? The greatest sin in the parable was robbing another man of his *property*. I shall have to be careful as I go out, for to conceive of a married woman being the 'property' of her husband isn't to the taste of modern women, and the greatest sin in this matter is the stealing of another



man's property. But these were different times, and that's how God viewed it: the stealing of another man's property.

Even that little lamb was rather a special bit of property. If you took that away, you took away a little piece of the man's personality, because that little lamb was part of him. For the sovereign on the throne to steal another man's property in the form of his wife, was to steal a most sacred part of that man's personality.

Just ponder the matter for a moment. If you don't like the idea that the married woman is her husband's property, just think of private property in general. There are those who, in their general political and social theories, would tell us that private property is a very bad thing, and the way forward is to ban private property. There have been those who have taught that it is an essential part of Christianity to give away all your private property when you get converted. Of course, it's not true.

In the early days of the Acts, Luke tells us that some of the early Christians voluntarily gave away their private property.

Now the full number of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things that belonged to him was his own, but they had everything in common . . . There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. (Acts 4:32, 34–35)

Not even to Ananias and Sapphira did Peter say, 'Look here, your sin is dreadful; do you not know that if you profess to be a Christian you ought not to have any private property?' Of course he didn't. It is an exceedingly fundamental and important principle of life. If private property is wrong, the whole experience of giving and receiving is wrong.

You see, if I had no right to this pen because it's not my private property, I can't give it to you. It isn't mine to give. Consider what would happen if private property was utterly and fundamentally wrong and unrighteous, and un-Christian as well. The whole experience of giving and receiving would be wiped out. Consider the fearful thing it would be if women were not owners of their own bodies, and a man had no right to his wife, nor she to her husband. If they were both the common property of anyone who liked to come and take them, how long would the concept of love survive in such a society?

This is fundamental, because in the ancient world there were many oriental monarchs, and, like David, they committed many serious offences. But, unlike him, they didn't repent of them and put it on public record that they'd done wrong by taking your wife. What oriental despot in those days was going to say any such thing? It is altogether an extraordinary thing that as king and emperor David would bow down and confess himself to be a guilty sinner for having stolen the wife of one of his soldiers (2 Sam 12:13; Ps 51). God's concept of power is that if the man on the throne will abuse his power and destroy your right to private property, God will judge him because God himself insists upon the right to private property. In the government of God, he will never deprive you of your basic personal right to private property.

You say, 'What do you mean?'

You have a free will, haven't you? You can decide what to do with yourself. You know that God loves you, but he will never overrule your free will, and take you without your consent. If you decide to say no to God and you persist in saying no to his advances, and pass into eternity still saying no, God will respect your choice and your decision for ever.

That's God's concept of government. For David to abuse his power and rob a man of this most sacred element in his private property, and then go further and rob him of life in order to get his wife, that is such an outrageous slander on the character of God, who anointed him to be king, that God will deal with him. Where David is not a man after God's own heart, the world must be told that he isn't.

### *The consequences of David's sin*

Let us leave it there and move on to the outcome. When David confessed his sin God forgave him, but through the prophet Nathan he told David that, while the guilt of his sin was forgiven, the consequences would not be removed.

That is a distinction that, if we have not pondered already, we do well to consider. We are accustomed to telling the unconverted that if they trust Christ the guilt of sin and the penalty will be removed, but sometimes we don't make it altogether clear that the consequences are not necessarily removed.

In your wild unconverted days, you were given to drinking methylated spirit, and not only did you ruin your own insides but you murdered somebody else. Now you've come to God in repentance, and the moment you trusted Christ it's true of you, 'There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus' (Rom 8:1). That doesn't mean that God will put your stomach right overnight; you may be a physical wreck for the rest of your days. As for the poor man you murdered, God won't say, 'Now that you've repented, I shall raise him to life again.' That's one consequence that can never be undone.

Moreover, in order to make David see the seriousness of what he had done, God said, 'David, I've forgiven your sin; there is no penalty. But I shall discipline you, and you will suffer trials in your kingdom and in your home and family because of this evil thing you have done.'

You say, 'That was rather severe of God, wasn't it?'

No!

I remember as a child I was warned, as were all my superior brothers and sisters, not to play ball too near the window. However, I persisted, and lo and behold, the inevitable happened. My father, being a great gentleman and a Christian, forgave me out of the wealth of his heart for cracking his pane of glass. It was really only a small pane of glass, and it wouldn't have cost him much to replace it.

Do you know what? He didn't replace it. Here come Uncle George, Jack, or John, and aunts who can be very prying in these matters. 'You've got a cracked window. What happened?' I wished he'd put in a new windowpane, and then these aunts and uncles wouldn't enquire. But no, he left it; and it taught me not to play ball near the window. If I'd been excused the penalty too easily, I might have got the impression that it didn't matter; these things can easily be replaced. A wiser head decided that the consequences must remain for a while to teach me the seriousness of disobedience.

The difficulties that began to come into David's home weren't by way of making life miserable simply for the sake of being miserable. They drew David nearer to God's heart. When God allowed one of David's own sons to rebel against him, David began to understand how God feels about a whole universe in rebellion against him.

With the discipline that must inevitably follow, God will use our very mistakes to train us for glory. If we submit to him, we shall in the end not only be conquerors but 'more than conquerors', as God uses the consequences of our mistakes and the disciplines he imposes as a means of chastening us and making us more conformed to his own heart (Rom 8:37).

### ***Amnon, Tamar, and Absalom—chapter 13***

In the palace there were many harems, and the king had many different wives. The son of one of those wives was Amnon, and he loved his half-sister, Tamar. She was also Absalom's sister. 'Amnon, David's son, loved her,' says the Bible (v. 1), but if you read the story closely you may decide that it isn't any more than a euphemism. What does it mean by *love*, then? He took the woman and satisfied his desires, and then he threw her out. For him, 'love' was not love of her; it was simply being in love with his own feelings. That isn't love, is it? This modern world needs to be told that there's no paradise or lasting pleasure on that concept or practice of love.

While we are here, perhaps we could transpose the idea. It is no accident that God speaks of his love for us, and of the love of the Lord Jesus for his church, in terms of human love. So, permit me to make the analogy.

Do you love the Lord?

'What do you mean by *love*?' you say.

Well, you love him when he fills you with all sorts of wonderful experiences, and you feel 'on top of the moon'. If that's true, then our love for the Lord is a pretty shallow kind of love, isn't it? He loves us, as the phrase has it, 'for better and for worse'. He knew us through and through before he 'proposed', and 'having loved his own which were in the world, he will love them to the end' (see John 13:1). He will never throw you out, like Amnon threw out Tamar.

When Amnon treated his sister like this, David ought to have intervened. The law of Deuteronomy said quite clearly what the king ought to do, but there is no record that David made a move to do anything. Some have suggested that perhaps he was too embarrassed by the public memory of his own faults to dare to do anything, lest other people pointed the accusing finger at him and his behaviour. For whatever reason, he seems not to have done anything. Whereas Absalom, Tamar's brother, in hot hatred and determination to get revenge, deliberately murdered Amnon, and showed his own sense of guilt by running off to a foreign country and taking refuge there for three years.

Doubtless if you had talked to Absalom he would have said he was only having justice, but the calm dispassionate view of the thing would show that his justice was a crime worse than the original one. Not all who cry 'justice' really are for justice. By justice, they mean 'revenge'.

### ***The wise woman of Tekoa—chapter 14***

This all set the king a great problem. Absalom, a son he loved exceedingly, had been away now for three years, and Joab saw that the king's heart went out to Absalom. The passage of time has a way of dulling things, and not least our moral judgment. What looked a very bad thing yesterday won't look quite so bad this time next year, and even less the year after, until we ask, 'does it really matter after all?' Time doesn't affect God like that. A murder today is evil in his sight, and ten million years from now it will look exactly the same to him as it does now.

David's heart went out to Absalom, and Joab saw it as an opportunity to persuade the king to bring Absalom back. As we read earlier, he instructed the wise woman of Tekoa to make up a little charade and go in to the king. Her message was altogether on the question of love and punishment. With a very modern ring to it, she puts one view of the discussion to him.

'Save me, O king,' she said. There was a sob in her voice, her clothes were a little dishevelled, and I think there was a tear now glistening in her eyelid. How she managed it, I'm not quite sure.

'What is your trouble?' said the king.

She said, 'Your servant had two sons, and they quarrelled with one another in the field and one killed the other. It was terrible. Now the townspeople have risen up and are saying to me, "Hand over the man who killed his brother, that we may execute him for murder." This business of punishment, what good will it do? Is it not enough that I've lost one son? Now they're threatening to destroy the heir. My husband's dead, and it will be the end of our family forever, if they "quench my coal that is left", and put my light out' (see vv. 6-7).

You could have felt for the woman, had it not been a whole yarn from start to finish. If it had been real, what good would punishment have done? Doesn't it make the matter worse? Her modern counterpart says, 'Why insist on punishment, what good does it do? How do you cure one death by demanding another?'

David said, 'I must admit, I'd never thought of that before. Go to your house and no one shall touch you.'

She said, 'It's very nice of you to say that, but I'm afraid of the people, lest they kill my son.'

'No, it won't happen,' said the king. 'Go to your house, your son will not be punished.'

'May I say something to the king?'

'Yes,' he said, 'what is it?'

She said, 'By saying that, in a certain sense you're almost making yourself guilty, aren't you?'

'Me, guilty? Why?'

'Because you're not bringing back your own son, and still insist on punishing him by keeping him in exile.' She said, 'You know, really, we're all like water spilled on the ground, aren't we?' (see vv. 13-14).

(We use a different metaphor; we say, you can't gather up spilt milk.)

‘It’s bad that my son got killed, but he’s dead now and there’s no point crying over spilt milk. It doesn’t bring him back to life if my other son is executed. Even God doesn’t take away life.’

She slipped that one in pretty quick. ‘God will not take away life’ — is that true?

The law book of Israel says many times over that such things should be followed by the punishment of capital execution. Before things get too bad and go down the slippery slope too far, dig in your heels and think hard about it. Is it true that God is such a God of love that he will never take away anybody’s life?

Then what’s the meaning of Calvary? Was it just that brutal, sadistic men took Jesus Christ and crucified him, and God let it be done? If so, to what do you owe your salvation?

Are you saying that Jesus Christ so loved them that he didn’t do anything; he let them crucify him, and they got off scot-free? Is God so kind that he says it doesn’t matter, and they can all come into his heaven whether they repent or not? Would God not punish anybody? Is that what you’re going to say? Or are you going to say what holy Scripture says, that God ‘did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all’ (Rom 8:32)? He answered to the sanctions of the law, and was made a curse for us.

The woman passed over it glibly. ‘God doesn’t take away life,’ she said, ‘but *devises* means so that the banished one will not remain an outcast.’ That is perfectly true, but she did what Satan constantly does, mixes one lovely half-truth with a lie.

God has indeed devised *means* so that the banished is not permanently outcast from him. The ‘means’ is Calvary, where God’s wrath turned upon his Son, and ‘it pleased the LORD to bruise him’ (Isa 53:10 KJV).

You say, ‘I don’t like that doctrine; it doesn’t sound to me much like love.’

Who are you thinking of?

‘Absalom, for instance, who killed his brother. To think that God would punish him for it, that doesn’t sound like love.’

Half a minute! You’ve been concentrating on one brother, but let’s have a look at the other one. He’s dead of course, but what if he could hear us?

‘We know you’re dead, and you had all of life before you when your brother murdered you.’

The dead man says, ‘What are you going to do about it?’

‘Nothing! You’re dead now, and we never cry over spilt milk.’

You didn’t want him to get murdered, but now that he is dead you say there’s nothing you can do about it. Do you call that love? You only have to ask the question to expose it as a lie. It is a cruel denial of love to say that sin may remain unpunished. God cannot stand by and say that it doesn’t matter because the man is dead. The day he was murdered, God said it mattered; ten million years from now God will still be saying that it mattered. Why? Because God loved the man.

I can understand the mother’s grief. You’d sympathize with it, were it a real situation in life. But here you have a terrible dilemma. Love doesn’t want to carry out punishment on the murderer, but love for the murdered would demand it. How do you reconcile the two?

*Joab brings back Absalom*

David wasn't able to reconcile them, so he yielded to the permissive argument and brought Absalom back. It showed how uneasy he was about it, because, when Absalom came back, David said to Joab, 'He is not to come into my presence' (v. 24). What kind of reconciliation is that, I wonder?

You talk about being reconciled to God: what quality of reconciliation have you got? There are many people walking around our cities, claiming to be believers. If you were to ask them if they have any certainty of heaven and boldness to enter into the very holiest of all to see the king's face, they would say, 'No, of course not. Nobody could have that certainty.'

What kind of reconciliation is that? What kind of a love of God is that? He would let you come back so far, but not let you in to see his face? The only kind of reconciliation that's worth having is a reconciliation that will receive you right into the very heart of God and admit you into the divine presence, into the holiest of all (Heb 10:19). That can only be done when God's law is honoured and fulfilled, the penalty is paid, and sin is pardoned. There is no assurance of salvation other than through that doctrine of the cross that teaches that the suffering of our Lord was a God-sent punishment upon his Son for our sin.

*David brings Absalom into his presence*

Finally, Absalom got impatient with being in Jerusalem but not allowed to see the king's face, so he burned Joab's field of barley and made Joab go and see David, and bring Absalom in.

Here comes Absalom, and here is the king. I wonder what David was thinking the first time he set eyes on the young gentleman since he murdered his brother. David is so kind, and he loves his son. Will Absalom say, 'Sorry, Dad'? Not on your life. He thought he had the right to come in. If Joab doesn't bring him in, he'll burn his field of barley. Without a word of 'sorry', without any repentance, he comes in, and the king kisses him. What a disaster, to kiss the man when there's been no repentance. You'll see what that will do. It's not long before Absalom turns around and organizes a rebellion to throw his father off the throne.

Solemn stories, aren't they? As we go, may God give us the grace to try and think them through. Please don't take what I've been saying as the last word. Think them through for yourselves, because these are not simple problems, but problems that lie at the very heart of the universe, and at the very heart of the story of redemption and reconciliation.

The Lord use his word for our instruction and our better understanding, all to his glory, for his name's sake. Amen.

## David in Old Age (21:1–24:25)

Thank you Mr Chairman for those kind words. It has been nothing but a pleasure to be with you here. I'm sorry that the events of last week mean that we shall not now complete the book, or at least I shall not complete it, but there is no reason why you shouldn't. It is always frustrating to have to finish before a book is ended. On the other hand, if I have been able to open a window or two on to the great landscape of the second book of Samuel, then I shall feel that I have done something worthwhile. I am assured that what you will get from your own reading will be of far more benefit, more importance, and more enjoyment to you, than what you might have learned through me.

Now for this evening let us read from 2 Samuel 15, beginning at verse 1.

After this Absalom got himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before him. And Absalom used to rise early and stand beside the way of the gate. And when any man had a dispute to come before the king for judgement, Absalom would call to him and say, 'From what city are you?' And when he said, 'Your servant is of such and such a tribe in Israel', Absalom would say to him, 'See, your claims are good and right, but there is no man designated by the king to hear you.' Then Absalom would say, 'Oh that I were judge in the land! Then every man with a dispute or cause might come to me, and I would give him justice.' And whenever a man came near to pay homage to him, he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him. Thus Absalom did to all of Israel who came to the king for judgement. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel. And at the end of four years Absalom said to the king, 'Please let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed to the LORD, in Hebron. For your servant vowed a vow while I lived at Geshur in Aram, saying, "If the LORD will indeed bring me back to Jerusalem, then I will offer worship to the LORD.'" The king said to him, 'Go in peace.' So he arose and went to Hebron. But Absalom sent secret messengers throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, 'As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then say, "Absalom is king at Hebron!"' With Absalom went two hundred men from Jerusalem who were invited guests, and they went in their innocence and knew nothing. And while Absalom was offering the sacrifices, he sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counsellor, from his city Giloh. And the conspiracy grew strong, and the people with Absalom kept increasing. And a messenger came to David, saying, 'The hearts of the men of Israel have gone after Absalom.' Then David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, 'Arise, and let us flee, or else there will be no escape for us from Absalom. Go quickly, lest he overtake us quickly and bring down ruin on us and strike the city with the edge of the sword.' And the king's servants said to the king, 'Behold, your servants are ready to do whatever my lord the king decides.' So the king went out, and

all his household after him. And the king left ten concubines to keep the house. And the king went out, and all the people after him. And they halted at the last house. (vv. 1–17)

Then let us read some verses from chapter 19, beginning at verse 9.

And all the people were arguing throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, ‘The king delivered us from the hand of our enemies and saved us from the hand of the Philistines, and now he has fled out of the land from Absalom. But Absalom, whom we anointed over us, is dead in battle. Now therefore why do you say nothing about bringing the king back?’ And King David sent this message to Zadok and Abiathar the priests: ‘Say to the elders of Judah, ‘Why should you be the last to bring the king back to his house, when the word of all Israel has come to the king? You are my brothers; you are my bone and my flesh. Why then should you be the last to bring back the king?’ And say to Amasa, ‘Are you not my bone and my flesh? God do so to me and more also, if you are not commander of my army from now on in place of Joab.’” And he swayed the heart of all the men of Judah as one man, so that they sent word to the king, ‘Return, both you and all your servants.’ So the king came back to the Jordan, and Judah came to Gilgal to meet the king and to bring the king over the Jordan. (vv. 9–15)

Then we shall read in chapter 20, and verse 1.

Now there happened to be there a worthless man, whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjaminite. And he blew the trumpet and said, ‘We have no portion in David, and we have no inheritance in the son of Jesse; every man to his tents, O Israel!’ So all the men of Israel withdrew from David and followed Sheba the son of Bichri. But the men of Judah followed their king steadfastly from the Jordan to Jerusalem. (vv. 1–2)

The Lord give us good understanding of his holy word.

On our last occasion we saw that when David felt established in his kingdom and that his throne was secure, he looked around to find someone to whom he might show kindness. First of all he found Mephibosheth, and showed kindness to him for the sake of Jonathan and the covenant they had made. That was good. Then he tried to show kindness to the king of Ammon, but we might have questioned the wisdom of David trying to show kindness to such an inveterate enemy of Israel as the king of Ammon. In the end Ammon made it quite impossible, and rejected David’s kindness. Then David began to show kindness to himself. Instead of going out to the war against Ammon along with his commander and his armies, he stayed at home and indulged himself, and thereby fell into grievous sin with Uriah’s wife. Upon his repentance he was forgiven the penalty of sin, but not its consequences.

We pondered over this to remind ourselves of the very important distinction between the penalty of sin and sin’s consequences. In this life God forgives those who trust in Jesus Christ our Lord of the penalty of sin, but he does not always remove the consequences. Sometimes he uses them for our discipline, to teach us the seriousness and the cost of sin, and to bring us nearer to his own heart and way of thinking, so that we shall not sin again so easily. So God forgave David the penalty of his sin, but announced that he would allow grievous discipline



to enter David's life—in the palace, in the royal family, into the politics of the nation, so that David might learn how grievously he had sinned. We found that through those disciplines David was brought nearer to the heart of God, and began to understand the problems that have beset the very throne of God itself through the outbreak of rebellion by fallen angels and by humankind.

So we saw that, through Absalom's murder of Amnon, the king was faced with the difficult problem of the relationship of punishment to love, and of love to punishment. Being a king he realized he ought to punish sin, but being a father he was reluctant to punish one of his favourite sons. He listened to the woman of Tekoa who was sent to him by Joab. Being swept off his feet by the speciousness of her arguments, he allowed Absalom to come back unrepentant, without even a word of being sorry. Eventually he kissed Absalom and allowed into his court the inevitable result of forgiving people that have not repented.

It is at this stage that we take up the story. Many invasions took place in David's kingdom as a result of his misjudgment and wrongdoings. Absalom, the very son whom he had forgiven, engineered and finally achieved a massive rebellion against the king that put David off the throne and into exile. We shall not have time to discuss it, but we have read in chapter 20 about another rebellion. Instead of driving the king off the throne, it split the nation and took half of them away from David in secession from the royal house of Judah. Before they could ruin David's power permanently, these two rebellions were eventually put down.

To help us to see what kind of questions we should be posing to the historical record that God has given us, I'm going to ask you to do three very difficult things. First, I'm going to ask you to *imagine that you were living in those very days when Absalom first started his rebellion*. Then, an even more difficult thing, I'm going to ask you to *imagine that you don't know the results of that rebellion, and who won*.

Absalom raised his standard against the king, and multitudes were flocking to Absalom, all saying that he was right, and it was about time they removed David. His government of the nation had been sinful and what he'd done with Uriah's wife was awful. When Absalom was leading the rebellion he was so popular that some of the leading politicians went after him as the way to their political salvation.

Next, I want you to *ask yourself who would you have followed, and why?* Would you have followed David after what he'd done with Bathsheba, and then not dealing with Absalom? Are you sure you would have followed David? There were many leading men, like Ahithophel, who followed Absalom. How would you have made up your mind?

#### *It's not a choice between the perfect and the imperfect*

We can look at what we are told in the historical texts, of course. As we come to choose between David and Absalom, we shall find that it will not be a choice between one perfect ruler and one bad ruler. You see, there never have been any perfect rulers or kings. There never will be, except for one. Sometimes people forget that there never have been any perfect elders in the church. We are not faced with the choice between perfect elders or imperfect elders. There never have been any perfect parents, except God the Father. So, whether it is in the church, the world, the family, or wherever, it is always a choice between imperfect people.

People trying to be what they should be, on the one hand, and ungodly people, on the other. How then shall we decide?

## **Absalom (1)**

He was better looking; what tremendous hair (see 14:25–26). David was a bit middle aged and frayed at the edges. Once upon a time he had been all the talk, everyone had sung his praises and thought there was nobody on earth like David, and all he had done. That was in the past, but you can't live in the past, can you? David had fought the giant, but this Absalom was winning over the hearts of the people. You should have seen him coming down the road with the horses and fifty men running in front of him! They didn't remember that the chariots belonged to David, and Absalom had bought them with the money David had given him.

These are incidental details, and there was something more serious. Absalom began the habit of standing by the gate, and when anybody came to the king for judgment Absalom would call over to him, and say, 'What city are you from?' And he would tell him that he was of such and such a tribe of Israel. 'What is your problem?' Absalom would say. 'Your claims are good and right, but there is no man designated by the king to hear you. If only I were made judge in the land, I would see that everyone got justice' (see 15:1–4).

### ***The important matter of justice***

Unfortunately, that was partly true. Middle aged David was going slack on the question of justice. When men who should be leaders behave like that, they're opening a back gate for ambitious men who want to go places.

*So, Absalom's interested in justice?* That's an interesting concept. He said that if he was in power he would do justice. When anybody came to see the king about a dispute, Absalom would tell him that his claims were good and right, but how could they all be good and right? Some would have been bad and wrong. How could they all be right? It was doubtful.

Was he really after justice? When the man heard Absalom telling him that his affairs were good and right, he wanted to bow down and pay homage to him. 'No!' says Absalom, and he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him. How does that impress you?

You say, 'That's democracy for you. He's coming down to the level of the people. I don't like a man who stands on a pinnacle.'

Well, perhaps it is some kind of democracy, but is that what judges ought to do? Suppose the other chap in the dispute comes along. Absalom hasn't heard him yet, but he has already kissed the first man. Would you like to have appeared before Absalom if you had been claimant number two? Absalom wants to be judge, but what kind of justice is that? I thought judges were meant to be impartial.

When did you last see the judge at the assizes in Belfast, or anywhere else, stopping outside the door of the court and kissing mothers and their babies, let alone both the defence and the prosecution? There is a place for love and affection and kindness, but it's no good talking nonsense. The judge is not on the people's level, otherwise he isn't a true judge. The judge is meant to be above everybody else because while he's there he's representing the law and the sovereign. For a would-be judge to try and curry favour by kissing the first side, even

before the second side has had time to turn up, is nothing short of a complete miscarriage of justice. Then why did Absalom do it? Because he wanted their votes, that's why.

Absalom could have made a very sad and true case that David hadn't been too concerned with justice. It sounds a bit odd coming from Absalom though, because, if David had dealt out nothing but justice, Absalom wouldn't have survived to tell the tale. He would have been in a murderer's grave long since. I know you can say that David was too weak-kneed, and he ought to have executed Absalom. My point is that, when a man like Absalom owes his very breath to David's kindness, and David didn't insist on one hundred per cent justice, it hardly becomes Absalom to start saying how concerned he is for justice and complaining against David.

Sometimes you hear dear Christian men saying that they're all for justice; the emphasis should be on justice. Sometimes I want to ask them, 'If Jesus Christ had been only concerned to do justice on you, where would you have been?' If ever we start talking about justice with other folks, we ought to remember that we're only here to tell the story because Christ bore the penalty of the law for our sakes, and instead of the penalty that we justly deserve, he had mercy upon us.

#### *The beginning of Absalom's treachery*

Presently Absalom comes to the king and announces that he would like to go to Hebron, because he vowed a vow to the Lord while he was in exile that, if ever he came back, he would go and offer worship to the Lord (vv. 7-8). How easily some people can join religion with politics. What he was about to do was fulfilling a vow to the Lord, was it?

So, off he went with two hundred men from Jerusalem who knew nothing of his plans. Then he sent for Ahithophel, David's leading counsellor, who found himself surrounded and couldn't get out. He felt obliged to advise Absalom about what he should do. Absalom was using David's 'brains' to try and rebel against him. Why didn't he use his own brains? Because he hadn't got any.

If I may be allowed to wander for just a moment. What a sorry state humankind is in without God; using the very brains God has given them to try and prove that there is no God, and to rebel against him.

## David

Let's leave Absalom there for the moment, for that's where the text leaves him, and think about David (15:13f). When he heard that the rebellion had taken place and multitudes had gone after Absalom, with a strategist's insight David saw there was no use trying to hold on to Jerusalem; the rebellion was so strong that he must get out. Perhaps now, if never before, he saw how he had lost the respect and popularity of the people. All these years of middle life he had been resting on his oars. He hadn't had a victory since I don't know when, and he had been relying on the past to keep the loyalty of the people in the present. It doesn't work, you know. Now with a severe shock he finds that he has lost the hearts of the people. Multitudes of them are going after Absalom, and the only hope of survival is for David to run off into exile as hard as he can.

*There now follow ten scenes, and we shall see how David and/or Absalom reacted in each situation.*

## **1. The Gittites**

six hundred Gittites who had followed him from Gath, passed on before the king. Then the king said to Ittai the Gittite, 'Why do you also go with us? Go back and stay with the king, for you are a foreigner and also an exile from your home. You came only yesterday, and shall I today make you wander about with us, since I go I know not where? Go back and take your brothers with you, and may the LORD show steadfast love and faithfulness to you.' (15:18–20)

I wonder if David saw the implication of that. The Gittites were men from Gath; they were Philistines. In the manner of ancient monarchs, the Israelite kings brought in foreign troops to be bodyguards of the king, and these Philistine men from Gath had been employed as mercenary bodyguards to protect David. Strictly speaking, they were there merely to protect him; the politics of Israel were none of their business.

So David said to Ittai, their commander, 'I would like you to go home. You didn't bargain for this when you came to me. I hired you as a bodyguard for the reigning sovereign in Judah. I didn't ask you to protect me in exile; there was no thought of that when you came. Unfortunately, things have turned against me, so I release you from your loyalty to me. You don't have to stand with me, and I shall think none the worse of you if you go over to Absalom.' What a tremendously big man David was.

Have you ever known any of your friends to get into some difficulty where there are two sides? As soon as you meet them they will as good as tell you, 'You'll have to take my side.' It doesn't matter to them who's right or wrong; you must stay on their side.

Not David. He says to Ittai, 'You didn't bargain on coming into exile like this with me, so I set you free.'

That's a unique thing about our Lord Jesus Christ. He will ask you to stand with him, even in the days of his exile. If you come after him, you'll have to pay the cost. But with lesser foes, David gets ten marks out of ten in my book, for he doesn't force Ittai to be on his side. David is prepared to admit that he could be wrong.

## **2. Abiathar and Zadok**

And Abiathar came up, and behold, Zadok came also with all the Levites, bearing the ark of the covenant of God. And they set down the ark of God until the people had all passed out of the city. (15:24)

Once again, picture David and his forlorn band of followers, a few thousand maybe, but no more, and they're fleeing for their lives. Absalom has already been pronounced king of Hebron and the multitudes are flocking to him, when certain priests come, bearing the ark of the Lord. Israel was a religious people, they believed in God and in his priesthood, so it would be tremendous if David could get his hands on the ark. Whoever had the ark could tell the people, 'God is on my side.'

What would you have done if Zadok and Abiathar had brought you the ark? Would you have said, 'Praise the Lord, now I can see that the Lord is on my side. This is a proof of his guidance.'

Not David. 'Please, take the ark back into the city,' he said. 'You must do whatever God tells you, for I do not suppose that everything I've done is agreeable to him. You mustn't think that you've got to be on my side to agree with God. You must remain loyal to God.' Now that David was in exile, he did not presume that he'd always been right, so he told them to take it back. I know what Absalom would have done if he could have got his hands on the ark, don't you?

Tell me, have you got any people who utterly disagree with you? What kind of people are they? If they disagree with you, do you feel that they must be unspiritual by definition? To come to a different level of exposition: many a nation has gathered its forces to go into an aggressive war and has made the people think that God is on their side. What a blasphemy it is to suppose that our side of an argument is necessarily God's side.

So David told them to take the ark back. But he wasn't stupid; he told them to use their wits in the city, act as his intelligence, and send their sons back to him with information that could be helpful. David wasn't taking leave of his senses, or being anything less than practical. He had enemies, and if he didn't defeat them they would take his life.

### **3. Hushai (1)**

Hushai was an honourable counsellor used to advising the king. Said David, 'I've got no use for you here, Hushai. If you would like to go back into the city and help me in dealing with Absalom, go, and may God be with you' (see vv. 32–37). So Hushai went back to the city, and we shall hear more of him shortly.

### **4. Ziba**

Meanwhile, as David was going further out into exile he met Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth, with donkeys loaded with all sorts of goods (16:1–4). 'Tell me Ziba, where is Mephibosheth?' said David. Ziba proceeded to concoct a devilish lie, and said that Mephibosheth was staying at home because he thought that the political tide was turning. With David in exile, perhaps the nation would restore the throne of Saul and give it to Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson. It was a lie, and alas in the circumstances it had a certain possibility about it. David fell for it and stripped Mephibosheth of all his possessions, and gave them to Ziba. Once more, we shall not have time to discuss what Mephibosheth did about it.

Didn't I warn you that you're not choosing between a perfect man and a baddie? Your choice will have to be between two men who are both failures, and here is David, taken in by a lie.

### **5. Shimei and Abishai**

Then there came out Shimei, a member of the family of Saul (vv. 5–14). Seeing his opportunity to do what he'd been wanting to do for a long while, Shimei cursed David until the air went blue with the curses. Abishai, one of David's commanders, said to him, 'Let me go over and take his head off.'

David said, 'Maybe God has told him to curse me. You see, Abishai, I didn't get into this muddle without being in the wrong myself. There's no good pretending that I'm perfect. Maybe this is God's discipline.' The words that God spoke through Nathan would have been coursing through David's mind.

'But it isn't true what he's saying, David. You're not a man of blood' (see v. 8). It was a ghastly travesty of the truth that Shimei was voicing. 'Never mind,' says David, 'let him curse. Maybe the Lord will look upon it, and in his compassion bring me back again.'

*Have you begun to make up your mind which side you're going to choose?*

## **Absalom (2)**

Now the scene changes and we leave David in his hideouts in the plain, while we go back to the city to have another look at Absalom. Absalom now has thousands of people around him in Hebron and the rebellion has begun. The question arises: how would he consolidate it and actually seize the throne? Don't forget that Absalom is the man who is concerned with justice. So he calls his privy councillors to inquire of them what the best tactics would be now to deal with the situation and secure the throne.

### **6. Ahithophel's first piece of advice**

So now comes Ahithophel, David's leading advisor (16:15–17:23).

'What shall I do, Ahithophel?' says Absalom.

Ahithophel had two pieces of advice. Mark them both well, for they were clever. They bordered on being devilishly clever.

'If I were you, Absalom, the first thing I would do is to spread a tent on the roof of the palace, and go in to your father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.'

I don't know if Absalom was able to see the point of it.

You say, 'It's a shocking thing to do. What *is* the point?'

If you want to start a rebellion, get the throne and divide the nation, you'll have to do a few shocking things. It was only the king who had a harem like this, and if a foreign king had invaded the land and slain the king, then he had the right to take over the king's harem. If Absalom had been a foreigner, he would have been expected to do it. But Absalom wasn't a foreigner, he was the king's son. For him to take over the harem was the grossest of shocking things to do.

'Go and do that,' says Ahithophel, 'and all Israel will hear that you have made yourself a stench to your father, and the hands of all who are with you will be strengthened' (see 16:21).

You say, 'I don't follow the logic.'

The people will see that there is no possibility of any reconciliation, so they'll have to take sides. They were already with Absalom anyway, but some of them might have been hoping that after a while both sides would see sense, simmer down, and find some face-saving formula. Presently they'd come together, the king would kiss Absalom, he might even make him his viceroy, and it would all be settled. But now, when Absalom had done something so shocking, all Israel would see no possibility of any reconciliation and they would have to follow Absalom. That was clever, wasn't it? I didn't say it was good; I said it was clever.

### **7. Ahithophel's second piece of advice**

Moreover, Ahithophel said to Absalom, 'Let me choose twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue David tonight. I will come upon him while he is weary and discouraged and throw him into a panic, and all the people who are with him will flee. I will strike down only the king, and I will bring all the people back to you as a bride comes home to her husband. You seek the life of only one man, and all the people will be at peace.' (17:1-3)

Ahithophel could see that at the heart of the whole business, it wasn't justice at all. It wasn't even the interests of the people; it was a plainly selfish ambition. Absalom wanted the throne.

'I'll tell you how to get the throne,' says Ahithophel. 'Go after David and kill him. Some of the older folks will weep and remember David as he used to be, but they'll get over that in a week or two. With nobody else to be king, you will be king, Absalom. It's as simple as that— "All the people will be at peace"' (v. 3).

That is as good a description of rebellion as you will find. You may grumble about everything under the sun, but at the highest level of all it is a matter between you and God Almighty as to who's going to be king: is it your will or his will? If you want to be the perfect rebel, you kill God.

'Don't bother about anything else,' said Ahithophel to Absalom, 'just kill the king.' This was the very king who ought to have had Absalom executed, and in his kindness had spared him. 'Kill the king to get the throne,' and the saying pleased Absalom, who was supposed to be concerned with justice. 'That's a very good plan,' said Absalom, 'but just so that we can think the thing through, we'll call Hushai.'

You'll remember that Hushai was David's loyal counsellor, whom he had sent back to the city.

### **8. Hushai (2)**

'Shall we do what Ahithophel says? If not, you speak,' says Absalom to Hushai (vv. 5-14).

'Ahithophel's counsel doesn't appeal to me at this time,' said Hushai. 'He's got it all wrong. Your father is a redoubtable warrior. Even now he's enraged, like a bear robbed of her cubs, and he's hidden himself in one of the pits somewhere. If you send a small detachment of troops down and some of them are slaughtered, the news will spread that some of Absalom's men are fallen, David has begun a counter attack, and the people will panic. I know you don't want to do that, Absalom.'

'What shall I do then?'

'Let's do nothing hasty. I should send messengers all around Israel from Dan to Beersheba, commanding that the whole nation's forces turn out in all their thousands, and you lead them personally. I wouldn't let anybody else do it. You head up this army.'

That sounded like a very good plan to Absalom.

'We'll go after the king with you at the head of the united forces, and if he withdraws into a city, we'll get ropes and drag the whole city into the valley' (see v. 13).

Absalom said, 'That's better than Ahithophel's plan.'

So he foolishly decided for Hushai's plan. Ahithophel could see that it was fatal, and he went straight home, made his will, and hanged himself (v. 23).

Can't you see it's fatal? While Absalom was waiting to connect the armies from Dan to Beersheba, David was getting away. The people were beginning to come back to him and the advantage of surprise would all be gone. David was gathering a tremendous army behind him, and for Absalom to lose those valuable days was suicide.

You say, 'Why did he choose that stupid plan, instead of Ahithophel's brilliant plan?'

It was because he wasn't interested in justice, nor mercy either. Absalom was only interested in himself: Absalom being the big man, the one in charge, the one who would be in front of all the armies, giving out the orders, blowing the bugle. His pride became his undoing and Hushai played on it.

Ever since he rebelled against God for that very same reason, how skilfully Satan has destroyed many a man or woman. Perhaps in the end you might be glad that, mercifully, sin is a self-limiting disease that in the end destroys itself. If pride could succeed to the throne of the universe, then the very universe would be hell. In God's great mercy, sin destroys itself in the end by its own folly.

*I've already long since made up my mind whose side I'm going to be on.* I know you can find fault with David, but, if I've got to follow one imperfect man against another, I'm going to follow the imperfect David. For all Absalom's talk of justice, it is now exposed for what it really was: nothing other than Absalom's pride and self-seeking for position.

## **9. The death of Absalom**

You know the story and I needn't detain you. Because Absalom waited and delayed and followed Hushai's tactics, David had time to amass the armies and Absalom was killed in the battle. When the message came home to David, he went to the room above the gateway (a lodge), and sobbed as if to break his heart, 'O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would that I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!' (18:33). David's treatment of Absalom may have been tinged with his own self-indulgence, but we'll leave that for the moment. In those sobs we may hear a distant echo of the very heart of God, who at Calvary said, 'I gave my Son for you, because I love you.'

We must face final stern realities. As David was sobbing his heart out in the room above the gate, Joab the commander came home and saw what was happening. The crowds that had followed David were beginning to dwindle away, for this was embarrassing. They'd gone out, risking their very lives for David's sake to defeat Absalom, and now the king was upstairs making more fuss over Absalom than he was of them. You might have thought that they were the evildoers instead of Absalom, for he was grieving more about the criminal than he was about the people who had defeated his enemy.

When Joab saw what was happening he ran up the stairs, and said, 'You love those who hate you and hate those who love you. For you have made it clear today that commanders and servants are nothing to you, for today I know that if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then you would be pleased' (19:6).



'If you don't tell the people how grateful you are to them, you'll lose the whole lot,' he said. So David swallowed his grief and came down and thanked the people who had executed his son. What a thing to have to do to retain power.

My dear friends, ponder again what God Almighty has done to retain his throne and get your obedience: 'He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?' (Rom 8:32). That's true kindness, for it's true justice. Ah, but it's more than justice, it is love.

Had we another week we should have had time to think about how David staged his return, and what he had to do when he came back again. We should have had to consider it at the lowly level of the practical politics of Israel and Judah, with all sorts of pulling of wires and manoeuvrings to get David back on the throne.

Inevitably of course, it has echoes in our minds of another event, when our 'greater than David' is coming back for the day of reward. But that's a very big story, and we must leave it now.

Our Lord is now rejected,  
 And by the world disowned,  
 By the many still neglected,  
 And by the few enthroned,  
 But soon He'll come in glory,  
 The hour is drawing nigh,  
 For the crowning day is coming by and by.<sup>2</sup>

Before we finish I have just one more story to cover.

### **10. Amasa**

Whatever you think of it, there's one incident I want refer to, and simply at one level. It's the story of what David did to Amasa, who had led the forces of Absalom's rebel armies.

David was over on the east side of the River Jordan. Amasa was in Jerusalem City with the armies that had belonged to Absalom. He was commander in chief of the rebel forces that had led the fight against David. What would David do to him? What would you have done, had you been David?

You say, 'Well I'd have gone over there in force, and five minutes after I'd found Amasa that would have been the end of him.'

That isn't what David did. He sent a message, 'Are you not my bone and my flesh? God do so to me and more also, if you are not commander of my army from now on in place of Joab' (19:13).

Are you thinking that winning over Amasa was a cheap way of doing things? You see, Amasa still had a lot of forces behind him, and if he'd chosen to dig in his heels and fight he

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<sup>2</sup> D. W. Whittle (1840-1901), 'Our Lord is now rejected.'

could have put up a very good battle for a while. If he thought that David was coming over to kill him, Amasa would have fought to the very last to stop being destroyed, wouldn't he? David knew a thing or two, and to stop that happening he would make Amasa commander in chief so that he wouldn't have any reason to oppose David's return. That was David's strategic plan.

You don't approve of that? Well let's think again before you finally decide.

## **Saul of Tarsus**

In Christian times there was another army commander, a commander of spiritual forces. His name was Saul of Tarsus. He led such a rebellion against the name of Jesus that he was afterwards described as the worst thing that ever happened to the church. He was so determined that he tortured the followers of the Lord Jesus to make them blaspheme against the name.

What did the risen Lord do after he'd brought the man to his knees? Did he say, 'I will watch your behaviour very carefully for the next ten years, and if you show yourself to be a good man and true, I might make you a corporal'?

Not Christ. Saul was on his knees in fear, and the Lord sent Ananias to him, 'Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel' (Acts 9:15).

You say, 'So soon?'

Yes, so soon.

Paul never forgot it, and when he wrote his conversion as a pattern conversion for us all, he said,

I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. (1 Tim 1:12-15)

What a courageous Christ, to take the archenemy Saul, bring him to his knees, and then, instead of destroying him, make him one of the chief apostles. That's Christ, as it was David, and isn't that what Christ has done with you? If he came again, and found you still a rebel, what eternal disaster that must be for you.

My dear friend, not only has he forgiven you, but the very moment you trusted him he was prepared to trust you and put you into his service. One day we're going to see him, and he shall reward his servants for their faithful service.

Shall we pray.

Father we thank thee now for thy holy word. These are solemn parts of it, and they send us home quiet and subdued. They remind us once more that life is not simple; its issues are often far from straightforward. Even in the best of us, the human heart is desperately sick and deceitful above all things. Even when we think we serve thee well, often we subsequently discover that our motives have been a dark tangle of unworthy things. Therefore now we thank thee for thy mercy. Thou hast forgiven us our rebellion, and not only washed us from our sins in the blood of Jesus Christ thy Son, but dared to count us faithful, and put us into thy service. We pray, Lord, that we might be loyal until thou shall come again. Not only loyal, but wise.

Therefore, use thy word, we pray thee, and our meditations upon it, and by the guidance of thy Spirit exercise our hearts so that in all our decisions, at all the different levels at which we must live life, we may learn to take those attitudes that more nearly reflect the attitude of our blessed Lord.

And so we part, and seek thine evening blessing, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## APPENDIX

### Contents and Themes of 2 Samuel

#### **1:1–8:18**

##### *General Theme*

THE RETURN OF GOD'S ANOINTED MESSIAH TO ISRAEL AS KING, FIRST IN HEBRON AND THEN IN JERUSALEM. PRINCIPLES IN THE TAKEOVER OF POWER. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF HIS KINGDOM AND GOD'S PROMISE TO BUILD A DYNASTY (HOUSE) THAT SHOULD INCLUDE THE MESSIAH (2 SAM 3:14; HEB 1:5).

1. David's attitude to the house of Saul and to the sanctities of life.
2. David's unification of Israel and his capture of Jerusalem: its significance in history, in theology (e.g. Gal 4; Heb 12), and in prophecy.
3. The bringing up of the ark to Jerusalem.
4. David's desire to build God a house and God's promise to build him one.

#### **9:1–14:33**

##### *General Theme*

##### *The Problems of Governing (1)*

IN THIS SECTION AND THE NEXT DAVID SUFFERS, THROUGH HIS OWN FAULT, A GRIEVOUS REBELLION, WHICH NEVERTHELESS BRINGS HIM NEARER TO UNDERSTANDING THE HEART OF GOD, WHO ALSO HAD SUFFERED A VAST REBELLION.

1. Kindness, true and false; love, true and false.
2. Forgiveness of the penalty of sin, but not of its consequences.
3. Is punishment inconsistent with love? What is the purpose of punishment?
4. David's failure to deal properly with Absalom's crime, leads to Absalom's rebellion against David.

#### **15:1–19:8**

##### *General Theme*

##### *The Problems of Governing (2)*

DAVID'S REACTION TO THE REBELLION OF THE PEOPLE, CONTRASTED WITH ABSALOM'S MOTIVES AND METHODS IN SERVING POWER, HELPS US TO SEE WHO HAS THE BETTER CLAIM TO BE THE TRUE KING.

1. Absalom's false attitude to justice.

2. David takes practical steps but meekly leaves the verdict to God.
3. Absalom's vanity leads to his own defeat.

## 19:8-20:26

### *General Theme*

THE RETURN OF THE KING FROM EXILE: DAVID'S QUESTIONABLE METHODS USED TO PACIFY THE REBELS AND REGAIN THEIR LOYALTY.

1. Was David right:
  - a. To appoint Amasa to replace Joab?<sup>3</sup>
  - b. In favouring the Judahites more than the Israelites?
  - c. In refusing to execute Shimei?
  - d. In his treatment of Mephibosheth and Ziba?
  - e. In the method used to end Sheba's revolt?
2. David's uneasy conscience over some of these issues is shown in 1 Kings 1-2, which many scholars think was originally a part of 2 Samuel.

## 21:1-24:25

### *General Theme*

THE SECRET OF DAVID'S POWER TO COMMAND THE LOVE, LOYALTY AND OBEDIENCE OF HIS NATION, OF HIS MIGHTY MEN, AND OF HIS WIDESPREAD GENTILE EMPIRE. A PROTOTYPE OF CHRIST'S UNIVERSAL REIGN.

1. Saul and David contrasted their attitude towards Gentiles in Israel.
2. David's last words.
3. David's sin in numbering the people, and his offer to bear the judgment.

### **A Point for Discussion**

1. Would you agree that:
  - a. David often disapproved of Joab's behaviour?
  - b. David seems to have been helplessly dominated by Joab?
2. What conclusions do you draw from the facts?
3. Is God responsible for all the sins and scandals committed by his servants?

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<sup>3</sup> The last talk ends at this point.

## About the Author

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