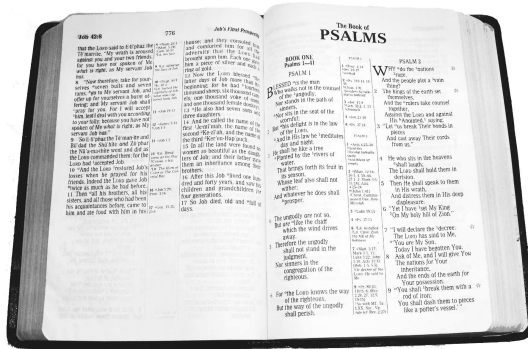


PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



January 2017

Bible readings from 2 Samuel chapters 1 to 16

Dear Friends

I remember sermons from such men as Dr Martyn-Lloyd Jones and Pastor Al Martin that I heard 40 to 50 years ago. There have also been sermons from other preachers that spoke to me in times of special need. I remember with gratitude the ministry of Keith Mawdsley who was my pastor after I left the Pentecostal movement in 1964.

I have heard thousands of sermons, but confess that most are forgotten and the problem increases as we grow older. Ask yourself what you remember of the sermons you have heard during the past couple of weeks. Do you read your Bible in the morning and by midday forget what you have read?

When the Lord Jesus told the parable of the sower he explained that the seed which is sown is the Word of God. When the seed falls by the wayside *Satan comes immediately* and snatches it away from the heart (4,15). We rightly see this parable in the light of gospel preaching but it is also true that Satan does all in his power to snatch away the Word from the hearts of believers whenever we hear it preached or when we read the Bible. How can we remedy this problem?

I suggest that you take brief notes of the sermons that you hear. Jot down the points and application made in the sermon and make a note of anything said that spoke to your heart. Look over the notes that you made when you arrive home or later in the day.

Do not rush your quiet time and read the Word of God prayerfully, thoughtfully and slowly. Read it aloud if possible; this will help your concentration. I also suggest that you read again the passage of Scripture that you read earlier in the day. Meditate on any verses that have been a particular challenge or blessing to you.

Be determined throughout the coming year to prevent Satan from snatching the word of God from your heart.

Yours sincerely in Christ

Alec Taylor.

Key to notes

- All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Version unless stated otherwise; they are printed in italics. **If you have a different translation of the Bible, you will still be able to use these notes.**
- The number in brackets eg. (6) refers to the verse number in the passage that we are reading; (23:16) refers us to another chapter and verse in the book of the Bible from which we are reading. When we read from Matthew, this would be Matthew chapter 23, verse 16.
- Where verses from other books of the Bible are brought to our attention, the name of the book is also indicated in the brackets eg. (Psalm 19:1).
- Where I ask you to compare another verse of Scripture, I prefix the reference with cp. (eg. cp. Psalm 1:1). I prefer this to the more common abbreviation cf. which relates to the obsolete word ‘confer’.

The word ‘Lord’ in the Old Testament

The Hebrew words translated ‘*Lord*’ are:

- ‘Adon’ which is used with reference to men (Genesis 42:33; 45:8–9), and with reference to God (Joshua 3:11,13; Psalm 8:1).
- ‘Adonai’ literally ‘my Lord’ (Exodus 4:10; Psalm 68:19).
- ‘Yahweh’ (‘Jehovah’), the sacred name for God, considered by many Jews as too sacred to utter. They regularly used ‘Adonai’ in its place. ‘Yah’ is a contracted form of ‘Yahweh’ (Isaiah 12:2; 26:4). The word ‘Alleluia’ or ‘Hallelujah’ (Revelation 19:1–6) means ‘Praise Yah’.

Dale Ralph Davis writes with reference to Exodus 3:12,14: ‘In light of verse 12, God does not here stress his being or existence so much as his presence and “Yahweh” captures and summarizes that thought – **he is the God who will be present to be all that his people need him to be.** “Yahweh” means the God who is present to help ... “Yahweh” is a personal name, while “the LORD” is a title ... there’s a devotional warmth in a personal name that a title can’t convey’ (THE WAY OF THE RIGHTEOUS IN THE MUCK OF LIFE – PSALMS 1–12, page 8).

NB. Our Bible translators have made it possible for us to recognise when ‘Yahweh’ is used in the Old Testament. ‘Yahweh’ is printed ‘*LORD*’, whereas ‘Adon’ or ‘Adonai’ are printed ‘*Lord*’.

2 SAMUEL

In our introduction to 1 Samuel (see notes for September 2016), I pointed out that the Hebrew Bible had only one book of Samuel which was not divided into two books until the 16th century. In his commentary on 2 Samuel, Gordon Keddie reminds us, ‘The Christ-centred focus of Scripture history must never be lost from our daily reading of shorter passages of the Word of God. In the case of the book(s) of Samuel, that focus comes explicitly to the fore in the latter part of 2 Samuel, where, in chapter 22, David reflects upon the Messianic King who was to come in a future day, and so puts into perspective the significance of his own reign and the unfolding drama of 1 and 2 Samuel as a whole ... 2 Samuel takes us from the triumph of David to the glory of the promised Messiah and the anticipation of the fulness of the gospel of Jesus Christ’ (TRIUMPH OF THE KING, Page 8)

Dale Ralph Davis comments, ‘Let me hasten to add that 2 Samuel is not about David. If you think it is, you will not understand it. ... Again and again, as we read 2 Samuel we have to shake ourselves and say, “This is not about David; it is not even about covenant kings; it is about a covenant God who makes promises to a covenant king through whom he will preserve his people.” ’ (Commentary, page 9)

Outline of 2 Samuel

David’s lament over Saul and Jonathan	–	1:1–27.
David established as king	–	2:1 to 10:19.
David’s sin with Bathsheba	–	11:1 to 12:31.
David’s troubles	–	13:1 to 21:22.
David’s song of thanksgiving	–	22:1–51.
David’s last words and his mighty men	–	23:1–39.
The census and the plague	–	24:1–25.

For further reading: I have found Dale Ralph Davis very helpful and relevant in his commentary on 2 SAMUEL, published by Christian Focus. Gordon Keddie: TRIUMPH OF THE KING, published by Evangelical Press.

How was it you were not afraid to put forth your hand to destroy the LORD'S anointed?

This chapter is full of ironies. David had defeated the Amalekites in a minor battle only to hear from an Amalekite of the defeat of Israel at the hand of the Philistines, and of the death of Saul and of Jonathan (1–4; cp. 1 Samuel chapter 31). Moreover, Saul's loss of his life and his kingdom was because he *did not obey the voice of the LORD nor execute his fierce wrath upon Amalek* (1 Samuel 28:18).

The Amalekite who brought the dreadful news of Israel's defeat and of the death of Saul and his sons claimed to have been with the army of Israel. It is highly unlikely that he was fighting with the Israelites against the Philistines, seeing the enmity between his people and those of Israel. This man was sufficiently acquainted with Israel's affairs, however, to know that David would succeed Saul as king and that he was dwelling at Ziklag (1–4). His account of Saul's death contradicts that recorded in 1 Samuel 31 and 1 Chronicles 10. How can we account for this? The man may have heard from the fleeing Israelites of the refusal of the armour-bearer to kill Saul and of the suicide of the king. He had stripped Saul of his crown and bracelet before the Philistines discovered the fallen king (1 Samuel 31:8). He wanted to ingratiate himself with David and so he lied. He thought that David would be pleased with him for killing Saul and for bringing his crown (possibly a helmet surrounded by a band of gold) and bracelet to David. He was expecting to be rewarded but he could not have been more wrong.

David and his men mourned and wept for Saul and his sons and for the fallen of Israel. He asked the Amalekite, '*How was it you were not afraid to put forth your hand to destroy the LORD'S anointed?*' (14). David then ordered one of his men to execute him because he had done (or so he said) to the Lord's anointed what David himself had been afraid to do even when his own life was in danger (1 Samuel 24:6,19; 26:9,23). God desires truth in the inward parts (Psalm 51:6). **The falsehood of the Amalekite cost him dearly. Let us avoid deceit and be afraid of offending the Lord.**

How the mighty are fallen! Tell it not in Gath

Dale Ralph Davis describes a lament as ‘an expression of thoughtful grief’ (OUT OF ADVERSITY, page, 21). David’s moving lament over Saul and Jonathan is called ‘The song of the Bow’(18). This title may have been used because Saul had been severely wounded by a Philistine arrow before his death (1 Samuel 31:3). Verse 22 also speaks of ‘*the bow of Jonathan*’. David said that this lament should be taught to the people of Judah and it was recorded in the Book of Jasher (also known as ‘the Book of the Upright’). This book was probably a collection of war songs; it is also mentioned in Joshua 10:13.

David repeated three times, ‘*How the mighty have fallen!*’ (19,25,27). David could not bear to think of the Philistines rejoicing over this tragedy. Though the king of Gath had befriended David, this was a tale not to be repeated to him: ‘*Tell it not in Gath*’ (19–20).

David had suffered much at the hands of Saul who had relentlessly pursued him with the aim of killing him. He was always respectful in his attitude towards the king when he was alive and he was not going to criticise him now that he was dead. David’s references to Saul are without any trace of bitterness or reproach. He emphasises Saul’s good points in his elegy. Saul and Jonathan had led Israel to great military victories and David calls on the daughters of Israel to weep for their king whose reign had brought prosperity to Israel (22–24).

We have no Gilboa defeat or reproach to distress us, but surely we should lament the weakness of the church. We hardly make an impact upon the godless people around us and the enemies of the gospel despise and scorn our Saviour. **This should drive us to urgent prayer. Surely we desire that God’s name be hallowed and that we see the increase of his kingdom.**

I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan

The depth and intensity of David's grief is revealed in his words concerning his precious friend Jonathan (25–26). Jonathan's great love for David did not come from a homosexual relationship as some claim. Homosexual practice is an abomination in the sight of God (Leviticus 18:22; cp. Romans 1:27). The love between David and Jonathan was rooted in the brotherhood of adventure, courage, brave exploits in war, and confidence and trust in each other (1 Samuel 23:16–17). Scripture does not hide David's real sins (see chapters 11 and 12) but there is never a hint of homosexuality in him. Matthew Henry observes, 'He had reason to say that Jonathan's love to him was wonderful; surely never was the like, for a man to love one who he knew was to take the crown over his head, and to be so faithful to his rival: this far surpassed the highest degree of conjugal affection and constancy' (COMMENTARY ON THE WHOLE BIBLE).

We cannot communicate with the dead, but David addresses Jonathan as though he were still alive: '*I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan ...*' (26). The greater our love for someone who has died, the greater our grief. Dale Ralph Davis writes, 'The sorrows and wounds God's people receive from their losses are not miraculously healed after a short time of emotional catharsis' (COMMENTARY ON 2 SAMUEL, page 22). We need to understand grief and its effects, and to support those who grieve with our love and prayers. * The emptiness and devastation caused by the loss of a loved-one often tears us apart. Scripture urges us, '*Weep with those who weep*' (Romans 12:15).

If you are grieving and know great sorrow, remember that God is *the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation* (2 Corinthians 1:3–4). **Grief cannot separate you from his great love.** What an encouragement to know that in heaven there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying' (Revelation 21:4).

* I have found Donald Howard's booklet, 'Christians Grieve Too' to be very helpful (Published by Banner of Truth).

May the LORD show kindness and truth to you

The Lord had sent Samuel to anoint David as king many years earlier and now that Saul was dead, he could have acted hastily to seize the throne. It is all too easy to do the right thing in the wrong way, but *David inquired of the LORD* (1). He sought the Lord for direction about going to Judah where he enjoyed the support of his own tribe. He took to heart the lesson taught to him by the Lord, ‘*Wait on the LORD, be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart; wait, I say, on the LORD!*’ (Psalm 27:14). A.W. Pink comments, ‘We never lose anything by believing and waiting patiently upon God.’ (THE LIFE OF DAVID). Are you faced with uncertainty or do you have to make some important decision? **Commit your way to the Lord and trust in him. Be patient and prayerful; he will not fail you (cp. Psalm 37:5).**

David left Ziklag to go to Hebron where he was anointed king by the men of Judah (1–4). His first act as king was to send messengers to Jabesh Gilead commending them for their kindness in burying Saul. He told them, ‘*You are blessed of the LORD ... and now may the LORD show kindness and truth to you.*’ He promised to repay them for their kindness and encouraged them to be strong and valiant (5–7). This was a wise move which would have reassured them that their loyalty to Saul, from whom David had been a fugitive, had not angered him; it would also have won them over to him.

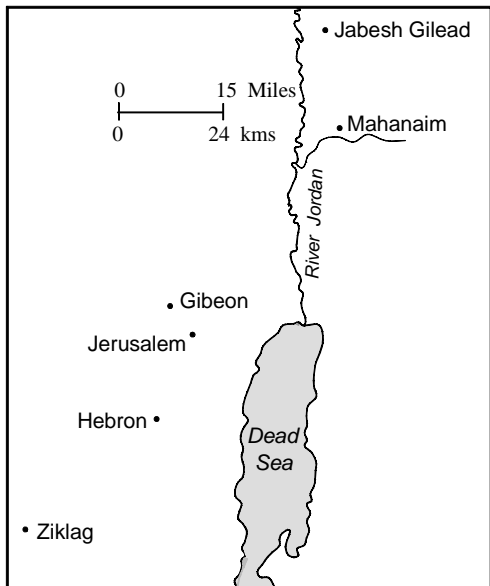
Abner, Saul’s army commander and cousin, made Ishbosheth, Saul’s remaining son, king over Israel (8–11; cp. 1 Samuel 14:50). This action deepened the division in the country. Abner had known David from the time that he killed Goliath (1 Samuel 17:57) and he knew that David should succeed Saul as king of Israel (3:9,17–18). He was very foolish to put family interests before the will of God. The Lord still had lessons for David in his school of discipline. David had to learn to wait patiently upon God for seven and a half years before he would rule over all Israel.

Do you not know that it will be bitter in the latter end?

There were two rival kings and armies in Israel and this led to civil war (3:1). Abner went with his troops to secure Gibeon which was on the edge of the territory of Judah, five miles north-west of Jerusalem. They came upon David's army, led by Joab. The two commanders agreed to a contest with twelve young men to represent each side. The callousness of both sides is seen in their enjoyment of watching the young men fight to the death. The contest ended evenly with the death of all the participants and Abner and his army were defeated in the fierce battle that followed (12–17).

David's three nephews, Joab, Abishai and Asahel were involved in this battle and Asahel, a very swift runner pursued Abner. The latter warned his pursuer to go away and be content to fight someone else. He had no desire to harm the young man, but Asahel refused to listen and was slain. Joab and Abishai then pursued Abner, who pleaded with them from a hilltop vantage-point to cease hostilities. He asked, '*Do you not know that it will be bitter in the latter end?*' (26). Joab and his men called off their pursuit and the armies returned to their respective bases at Hebron and Mahanaim. Abner's words were to prove true. The bitterness between the two groups continued and Abner was to suffer a terrible end.

It is also foolish to engage in rivalries in the local church. It certainly does not become Christians and will lead to bitterness *in the latter end* (cp. Galatians 5:15).



Now then, do it! For the LORD has spoken

As David's side grew stronger during the years of civil war, Abner was strengthening his grip on the house of Saul (1,6). Scripture does not hide the fact that David was a polygamist. We have here a record of six sons borne by six different women whom David had married (2–5). Three of these sons grew up to become wicked men who died violent deaths (Amnon, Absalom and Adonijah). God never sanctioned polygamy and throughout the Bible record you find that such a practice brings grief and trouble (eg. 11:1–9; 1 Samuel 1:1–7).

If Ishbosheth's accusation that Abner had taken Saul's concubine was true, it indicates a brazen bid for power (6–7; cp. 1 Kings 2:17,21–22). The army chief's angry outburst indicates his contempt for his king who was a weak and pathetic individual. He warned Ishbosheth that he would turn over his kingdom to David, but the king made no response because he feared him (8–11). Abner contacted David to make a covenant with him, promising to bring Israel over to his side. David insisted that his wife, Michal, whom Saul had given to another man (1 Samuel 25:44), first be returned to him. He sent messengers to Ishbosheth who meekly complied with this demand (12–16).

Abner knew that it was God's will for David to be king over the whole nation and gathered support from Israel's elders for his plans to go over to David. He told them, *'Now then, do it! For the LORD has spoken of David, saying, "By the hand of my servant David, I will save my people Israel from the hand of the Philistines ... "'* (18; cp. verses 9–10). Abner was only willing to obey God's Word and acknowledge David as king when it suited his own purposes. Such an attitude is not acceptable to the Lord and Abner was not to see any personal gain from his scheming even though he was wined and dined by David (19–21). **Let us always be sincere and God-honouring in our behaviour.**

These men are too harsh for me

Joab had been away on a raid when Abner visited David. He was very angry to find on his return that the man who had killed his young brother in battle had been made welcome by the king. Joab was David's nephew (1 Chronicles 2:13–16) but he appeared to show little respect for his uncle as he voiced his suspicion of Abner. He was convinced the man had been on a spying mission (22–25).

Joab sent messengers calling Abner to return to Hebron. He then called his rival aside for a private conversation and killed him in revenge for the blood of Asahel. This was a treacherous act! His victim had not sought any contest with Asahel who had been killed in a fight as a result of his own self-confident folly. David had been unaware of Joab's wicked scheme and in his grief, he uttered an awesome curse upon the house of Joab when he heard of Abner's death (26–30).

The murder of Abner could have turned the other tribes of Israel against David and Judah, but the king distanced himself from Joab. He led the mourners and wept at the grave of Abner; he also sang a lament and fasted. His genuine grief convinced the people that he had played no part in the death of Abner and they united behind the king (31–37). David asked in his lament, *'Should Abner die as a fool dies?'* (33). We have already seen that Abner was foolish to imagine that he could choose to obey God when it suited his own ends. In this sense, he died as a fool.

Joab and his brother were brilliant soldiers, but were also treacherous men. David observed, *'The LORD shall repay the evil-doer according to his wickedness'* (39). This is a vital truth, but David should not have hidden behind it when it was his responsibility to punish Joab, who was later to repeat the same treachery (20:8–12; cp. 1 Kings 2:5–6). David confessed that he was *weak* (ESV = 'gentle') *though anointed king* and that *these men are too harsh for me* (39). **Those who are harsh in church leadership do great damage to the cause of Christ. We must speak and maintain truth and righteousness in love.**

Thinking to have brought good news

Ishbosheth sank into despair when he heard of the murder of his general knowing that his reign could not survive, and all Israel was troubled (1). The cycle of violence continued with his assassination by two of his army captains (1–7). These two wicked men came upon their unsuspecting king while he was resting during the heat of the day and killed him. They then took his head to David at Hebron expecting to gain his commendation and a reward for their vile deed. They could not have been more wrong!

They told David that the Lord had avenged him that day, but he told them about the man who had brought to him the news of Saul's death, *thinking to have brought good news*. David added, *'I arrested him and had him executed in Ziklag.'* His just reward was not honour or riches, but death (8–10). The Amalekite hadn't really killed Saul (see notes for 1 January), but there can be no doubt that this pair were guilty and they made no effort to cover their guilt. Treacherous behaviour is never good news!

David commanded that the assassins be executed and he had the head of Ishbosheth buried in the tomb of Abner (11–12). He was sending a powerful message to Israel by his reaction to this murder – that he was determined that his kingdom should not be established by treachery or bloodshed. His punishment of the murderers would also have served as a warning to the treacherous Joab. David knew that the Lord had promised to give him the whole of the kingdom. **He was prepared to wait for the Lord to fulfil his promise rather than to take matters into his own hands.**

The way was now clear for David to unite the nation and to reign over all Israel. Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan is mentioned in verse 4 which informs us of the accident which made him lame. He was preserved from the wicked vendetta against the household of Saul. When David learned about him after his reign was established, he was to show him great kindness (chapter 9).

The LORD God of hosts was with him

David now became king of the whole of Israel by popular acclaim (1–5). He wanted Jerusalem as his capital, but it was still occupied by the Jebusites. God had promised Abraham that he would give to his descendants the territory occupied by the Jebusites (Genesis 15:18–21). The Jebusites had not been driven out of Jerusalem (Joshua 15:63). They felt so secure in their well-fortified city that they sent word to David, taunting him. Their message was that the blind and the lame would be able to repel any attack that he mounted upon the city. It appears that David's men took Jerusalem by climbing up into the city through the water shaft by which the inhabitants of the city obtained their water supply (18). *'The blind and the lame, who are hated by David's soul'* refers to the mocking Jebusites (8).

David had the help of Hiram, king of Tyre in the construction of his palace (11). Dale Ralph Davis argues that this help came later in David's reign and that 2 Samuel, chapter 5 does 'not follow a strict chronological' order and that Hiram's help did not come 'immediately after David's conquest of Jerusalem (vv. 6–9) since Hiram's reign seems to have overlapped only with the last ten years of David's (Hiram 980–947 BC, David approx. 1010–970 BC); hence verse 11 reports something from relatively late in David's reign. ... The chapter is orderly but not sequential. It is a collage; it is a collection of fragments intending to give us a proper view of the kingdom' (COMMENTARY ON 2 SAMUEL, pages 49–50).

Jerusalem became known as *Zion and the City of David* (7). *So David went on and became great, and the LORD God of hosts was with him* (10). David owned his success to be of the Lord (12). **We must always remember to depend upon God and to trust in him at all times. When God is with us, what have we to fear (Hebrews 13:5–6)?**

David inquired of the LORD

David was different from other kings of his time because he acknowledged God's work in his life (12). He followed the custom of these kings, however, by taking a number of wives and concubines (13; cp. 3:2–5; see notes for 6 January).

When the Philistines twice marched on Israel following the anointing of David as king (17–22), we read that *David inquired of the LORD* (19, 23). God directed him and the Philistines were defeated on each occasion. The Philistines left their images behind after their defeat (21). These useless idols could not save the Philistines who carried them into battle or prevent David from having them destroyed (cp. Psalm 115:3–8).

David did not need to inquire of the Lord concerning his will for marriage. He would not have been ignorant of the Lord's command that kings must not multiply wives for themselves (Deuteronomy 17:17), yet he did just that (13). David appeared to have a 'blind spot' in this matter and the rivalries between the half-brothers born of these marriages were to bring great trouble and distress. We ignore God's word at our peril.

We do not need to pray for guidance in our decision-making in a situation where God's word gives clear direction. For example, a believer must not marry an unbeliever and it is foolish and perverse for any professing Christian to engage in a courtship with someone who is not a Christian (2 Corinthians 6:14–18). We must shun any course of action which is questionable. God does not honour disobedience! If we love the Lord, we will seek to honour him in our lives.

We must never forget that even great men and women are sinners whose behaviour may be questionable on occasions. Dale Ralph Davis observes 'Even David compromises and mars the kingdom over which he rules; ultimately, the kingdom is only safe in the hands of David's Descendant who always does what pleases the Father (John 8:29).' – COMMENTARY ON 2 SAMUEL, page 57.

*The ark of God, whose name is called by the Name,
the LORD of hosts*

The capture of the ark by the Philistines in past history had been a national disaster (1 Samuel 4:5–7, 11, 21–22). The Lord had visited the Philistines with judgment and they returned the ark to Israel after seven months (1 Samuel 5:1 to 7:1); it had been kept at the house of Abinadab since the time of Samuel’s leadership.

The ark of God was made of acacia wood which was overlaid with gold. It is described in Exodus 25:10–22 and it measured $3\frac{3}{4} \times 2\frac{1}{4} \times 2\frac{1}{4}$ feet ($120 \times 69 \times 69$ cms). The two tablets of stone on which the ten commandments were engraved were housed in the ark (Deuteronomy 10:1–5). The ark symbolised the presence of the living God among his covenant people; it was carried ahead of the Israelites when they journeyed to the promised land. On such occasions, Moses would pray, *‘Rise up, O LORD! Let your enemies be scattered and let those who hate you flee before you.’* When the people stopped to set up camp, Moses prayed, *‘Return, O LORD, to the many thousands of Israel’* (Numbers 10:34–36). The ark was also known as, *the ark of God, whose name is called by the Name, the LORD of hosts* (2).

Israel was now united under David who had established his capital at Jerusalem. The king was eager to establish Jerusalem as the centre for the worship of God in the nation and he erected a tabernacle there for the ark of the covenant (17; cp. 1 Chronicles 15:1). He went with thirty thousand ‘choice men of Israel’ to bring the ark to Jerusalem from Baale Judah. **Worship is important!** Dale Ralph Davis helpfully points out, ‘God’s people are not sustained merely by crises ... Crises may stimulate us to action but they do not sustain life. The church must never look to the latest cause for her life. We cannot ignore the enemies outside the city of God, but we must not be absorbed by them. War must not efface worship. The real question is not ‘Who is against us?’ but ‘Who is among us?’ (COMMENTARY ON 2 SAMUEL, page 63).

God struck him there for his error

The ark of God had been kept in Baale Judah, also known as Kirjath Jearim since its return by the Philistines to Judah (2–3; 1 Samuel 6:20 to 7:1). The return of the ark to Jerusalem was to have been a joyful occasion but it resulted in judgment and in the death of Uzzah. *David became angry ... David was afraid of the LORD* because God had struck Uzzah and the ark was left at the house of Obed-Edom (7–11). David had been sincere in his desire to please God. What had gone wrong? We read in verse 7 concerning Uzzah, ‘*God struck him there for his error*’. What led to this error of Uzzah?

- David, who usually sought God’s direction did not do so in this important matter. Had he done so he would have been pointed to God’s Word for the instructions on the movement of the ark. David acknowledged, ‘*The LORD our God broke out against us, because we did not consult him about the proper order*’ (1 Chronicles 15:13). Uzzah’s error arose because of David’s negligence to seek the Lord.
- The ark should have been carried by the Kohathites of the tribe of Levi on poles which were inserted on each side and not removed (Exodus 25:14–15). God had given a solemn warning that any who touched the ark would die (Numbers 4:4–6, 14–15). David chose, however, to ignore this warning, and followed the example of the spiritually ignorant Philistines who had used *a new cart* to transport the ark (3; cp. 1 Samuel 6:7–8). The Philistines may have removed the poles used for carrying the ark but had David consulted the word of God, the poles would have been replaced and served as a reminder of the way in which the ark was to be carried.

What a warning there is for us here! We must prayerfully seek God’s directions as laid down in his Word for all aspects of our church life. Many today, in their desire for results, have adopted worldly methods for evangelism and worldly entertainment in their worship because they appear to work. **‘Philistine’ methods are not acceptable to God and any apparent blessing from such things is an illusion!**

And the LORD blessed Obed-Edom and all his household

The death of Uzzah filled David with fear and he placed the ark of God in the home of Obed-Edom (9). This man is one of the lesser-known figures in the Bible but we have much to learn from him. Those belonging to the Philistine city of Gath were known as Gittites (15:18), but Obed-Edom was no Philistine. He was a Levite, probably from the Levitical city of Gath-Rimmon (Joshua 21:24–25; 1 Chronicles 15:17–18,24). His name means ‘servant of Edom’ which implies that at some time he or perhaps his father had been enslaved by the Edomites.

Can you imagine the reaction of most people if asked to take the ark into their house? Its presence had brought judgment to the Philistines and now Uzzah had been slain. Obed-Edom accepted the ark into his home and would have kept it in a room of its own. He saw this as an unexpected opportunity to serve God and he rose to the challenge.

And the LORD blessed Obed-Edom and all his household (11). He only had the ark for three months but the blessings were obvious to those around him (11–12). It was also seen in his family. His sons were chosen to serve with him to care for the ark. They were men of great ability (1 Chronicles 26:4–8). The reproach of serving Edom was forgotten as they were honoured by God. **God’s blessing is knowing his smile on our lives, his peace guarding our hearts and his presence surrounding us.** Christian, you once were enslaved by sin (John 8:34–36), but the Lord Jesus has freed you to serve him. **Are you taking up the opportunities that God gives to you?**

*How blest is life if lived for thee,
My loving Saviour and my Lord;
No pleasures that the world can give
Such perfect gladness can afford.*

*All day to walk beneath thy smile,
Watching thine eye to guide me still,
To rest at night beneath thy care,
Guarded by thee from every ill.*

She despised him in her heart

God's blessing on Obed-Edom prompted a fearful David to bring the ark to Jerusalem in the way God had instructed. He now made sure that the ark was transported in the proper manner (1 Chronicles 15:11–14). David was so joyful when the ark was brought into the city, that he *danced before the LORD with all his might ... he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts* and distributed food to all present (14–19).

David's wife Michal *despised him in her heart* as she looked out from a window in the palace to see his exuberant dancing (16). She may have been bitter and resentful that David had forcibly taken her back from her second husband (3:14–16). She was so different from her brother Jonathan who was David's best friend. He had encouraged David in the Lord (cp. 1 Samuel 23:16). When David returned to bless his household, he found that Michal did not share his joy (20). She scorned his zeal for the Lord and spoke to him in a sarcastic manner. She considered his behaviour undignified but David refused to be put off by his wife's scorn. He told her that his joyful exuberance had been *before the LORD* (21). He also pointed out to her the Lord had chosen him in the place of her father Saul and his dynasty (21). This may have been a further cause of resentment in her life. Michal was childless to the day of her death, a great reproach for a woman in those times (23; cp. Genesis 30:1,23).

These verses are not a sanction for so-called 'dancing in the Spirit' which is common today in some charismatic churches. Such things are often displays of exhibitionism and are not sanctioned in New Testament worship any more than the animal sacrifices offered by David on this occasion. True zeal for the Lord leads to godly living and shining as lights in this dark world. We must learn to distinguish between fanaticism and devotion to the Lord. **How is it with you? Are you living for Christ or are you cold in heart, despising those who are not ashamed to own their Lord?**

*But it happened that night that the word of the LORD
came to Nathan ...*

When everything is going well for us, it is easy to forget God and become lukewarm in heart (cp. Revelation 3:15–17). David was different! He had established his kingdom but it troubled him that while he was now living in a house of cedar, the ark of God remained in a tent. He was concerned that God be worshipped in a proper building rather than the tabernacle (1–2). He may have remembered the Lord's instructions to the Israelites before they crossed into the promised land. They were then told that they should build a permanent place of worship once God had given them rest from their enemies (Deuteronomy 12:10–14).

Nathan the prophet encouraged David to fulfil his God-honouring desires (3). The Lord had different plans however. *But it happened that night that the word of the LORD came to Nathan ...* (4). God's will was not for David to build the temple, but for his son to do so (12–13). Dale Ralph Davis observes (COMMENTARY, page 70), 'God's servants often mean well but lack the wisdom of God. In the present case, a human plan (vv. 1–3) must be corrected by a divine revelation (4–17).'

There are times when we may earnestly desire to serve God in a particular way, but he blocks our plans (cp. Acts 16:6–7). Why does God do this to us? We do not always know; it could be that we do not have the necessary gifts for the work we desire to do. This was not so with David, however, who had all the resources available to build a house for the Lord. Our faith is sorely tried when we suffer disappointment in God's work, but let us remember that the Lord's will is perfect and that he may have something better for us.

Remember, God is in control of all our disappointments! If we put the Lord first in our lives, he will give us more than we could ever imagine (see Matthew 6:33). Are you seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness?

The LORD tells you that he will make you a house

Nathan had encouraged David to go ahead and build the temple but that night the Lord revealed to him that it was not his will was for David to do this, but for his son to do so (4–17). He told David that he was not to build the temple because he had been a man of war and had shed blood (1 Chronicles 22:8; 28:3). God revealed that his son who would succeed him as king would build a house for him (12–13; cf. 1 Chronicles 17:11–12). Solomon, son of David, was to have a magnificent temple built for the glory of God.

David wanted to build a house for God (5) but Nathan had a wonderful message from God for David. He first reminded David of his grace toward him. The Lord had taken him from his humble work as a shepherd to rule over his people, Israel. He had been with David and given him victory over his enemies (8–9).

Nathan then said to David, *‘The Lord tells you that he will make you a house’* (11,27). This was not a house made of timber, stone, marble, nor any other building material. It was a dynasty which would last for ever: *‘Your house and your kingdom shall be established forever’* (16). This promise speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ who is a far greater king than David. When the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would be the mother of the promised Messiah, he said of Jesus, *‘He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end’* (Luke 1:32–33).

The promise of God to David was far more precious than the building of the temple. Today, we worship, adore and praise David’s greater Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. When people called Jesus the Son of David, they were recognising that he was the promised Saviour and King (Matthew 21:9; 22:41–45). **The glorious purposes of God in the salvation of sinners were centred in the holy Son of God whose human descent is traced from David.**

You are great, O Lord GOD. For there is none like you

David accepted God's will which denied him the privilege of building the temple. He was filled with a sense of wonder that the Lord had great plans for his house (19). When we accept our disappointments and trust in God's sovereign goodness and wisdom, we are truly blessed! David sat before the Lord and poured out his heart in worship and thanksgiving. His prayer teaches us how we should approach God:

- We must come to God in a humble frame of mind. David prayed, *'Who am I, O Lord GOD? And what is my house, that you have brought me this far?'* (18). We are insignificant, yet God is mindful of us and gracious to us (cp. Psalm 8:3–8).
- We should come to God with gratitude for all his mercies to us. David was so overwhelmed with the goodness of God to him, that he was almost lost for words to express his feelings: *'What more can David say to you? For you, Lord GOD know your servant?'* (19–20).
- Worship involves adoration of God: *'You are great, O Lord GOD. For there is none like you, nor is there any God besides you'* (21–22). The Lord Jehovah is a great God who does great things for his people! Is it any wonder that we love him and adore him?
- We should seek the glory of God: *'So let your name be magnified forever'* (25–26). David was not seeking the blessing of God for selfish ends, but that God's name may be glorified. The Lord Jesus teaches us to pray, *'Hallowed be your name'* (Matthew 6:9).
- We must trust in the promises of God's Word (27–29). David believed that God's Word is true and he humbly asked the Lord to fulfil his promise.

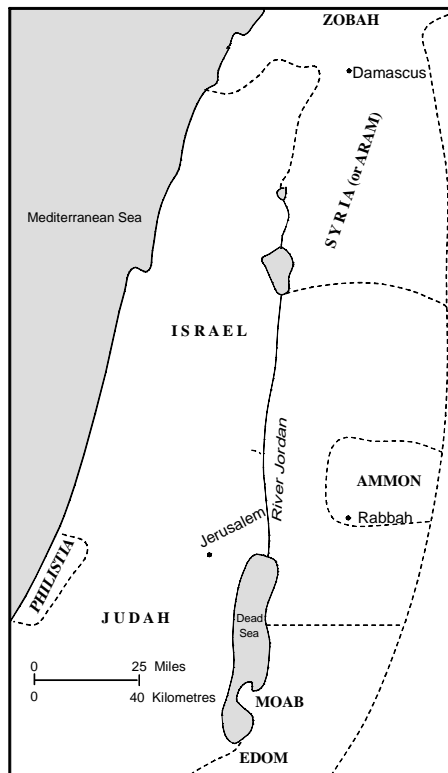
Our prayers are often dull compared with those of the great men and women in the Bible. **Let us be more thoughtful and biblical when we approach God so that our prayer life will be enriched.**

The LORD preserved David wherever he went

This chapter lists some of David's campaigns against Israel's neighbours (see map below). We saw from the previous chapter how David desired the glory of God by building him a house. God honours those who put him first in their lives; the Philistines, a thorn in the side of Israel for many years, were at last subdued (1). 'Syria' and 'Syrians' (12–13) should read 'Edom' and 'Edomites.'

We read, '*The LORD preserved David wherever he went*' (6,14). This was the story of David's life, and what a story it was! He was preserved by God in all kinds of danger (the Hebrew translated 'preserved' is usually translated 'saved'). What a privilege it is to be a child of God! We can say, '*The Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen!*' (2 Timothy 4:18). What have we to fear when the almighty, sovereign God preserves us? He will keep us in all our trials and we know that we cannot be lost.

How did David respond to the goodness God? He dedicated the spoils of his battles to the Lord, as well as the gifts given to him by the king of Hamath (9–12). *He administered judgment and justice to all his people* (15). This honoured God. **How do you respond to the goodness of God in your life? Do you seek to please him in all that you do?**



The kindness of God

Jonathan had been dead perhaps for fifteen years but David remembered the covenant that they had made together when Jonathan had pleaded, ‘*You shall not cut off your kindness from my house forever*’ (1 Samuel 20:14–17). Dale R. Davis points out that the Hebrew word translated ‘kindness’ is ‘the devoted love promised within a covenant ... love that is willing to commit itself to another by making its promise matter of solemn record’ (COMMENTARY ON 2 SAMUEL, page 100). David remembered his promise to Jonathan and he discovered that he had a surviving son Mephibosheth who was lame. Mephibosheth was only five years old when Jonathan was killed in battle (2–4; cp. 4:4). David summoned him to his palace and told him that he would restore to him all the land of his grandfather Saul. Moreover, he would eat at the king’s table in the royal palace (5–13).

Think about the expression, ‘*the kindness of God*’ (3). God has been so kind to us in giving his beloved Son to die at Calvary to save us from our sins (Ephesians 2:4–7; Titus 3:3–7). He has brought us into his family, making us his children and joint heirs with Christ (John 1:12; Romans 8:16–17). What amazing kindness! If we are Christians, let us always be praising God and showing his kindness in our lives (Ephesians 4:32 and Colossians 3:12).

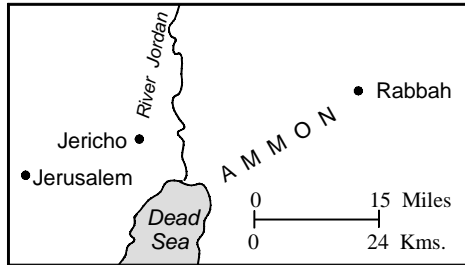
The kindness of God is self-sacrificing and costly. It reaches out to the forgotten and the unloved. **Are you a kind person? Are you showing the kindness of God to those around you for the sake of your best Friend who laid down his life to save you?**

*Give me a faithful heart,
Likeness to thee,
That each departing day
Henceforth may see
Some work of love begun,
Some deed of kindness done,
Some wanderer sought and won,
Something for thee.*

(Sylvanus O. Phelps).

I will show kindness ... as his father showed kindness to me

Nahash, the king of Ammon had shown kindness in the past to David, possibly when he was a fugitive from Saul, who had defeated the Ammonites in his first battle as king over Israel (1 Samuel 11). On hearing of his death, David said, *'I will*



show kindness to Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father showed kindness to me' (1–2). He sent messengers to convey his sympathy at this time of grief, but his kindness was spurned and his servants were humiliated (3–4). To make matters worse, the Ammonites, fearing reprisals, enlisted the help of the Syrians to prepare for battle against Israel. The Israelites, under the command of Joab and his brother, Abishai, gained a great victory and in a further battle, the Syrians suffered heavy losses (5–19).

When we show the kindness of God, we become very vulnerable and we open ourselves to misunderstanding and hurt. That is a price which we must be prepared to pay. There are some who do not appreciate or respond to kindness. Another aspect of kindness is seen in David's treatment of his humiliated servants. They would have been a laughing-stock in Jerusalem with their half-beards. The king thoughtfully ordered them to remain in Jericho until their beards had grown (5).

To be kind is to be considerate and thoughtful. Kindness is not only shown in acts of compassion and mercy, but in a refusal to slight others in conversation. If we are kind, we would not think of enjoying a joke at the expense of another person and we will shun all forms of rudeness. Love suffers long and is kind ... does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked (1 Corinthians 13:4–5).

He saw ... sent and inquired ... and took her

This solemn chapter records the fall of David into the most dreadful sin. In chapters 9 and 10 we find him wanting to show kindness to Mephibosheth and the Ammonite king. Here in chapter 11 David is not showing kindness, but stealing the wife of a good man and then plotting this man's murder. David had many wives and concubines (5:13) and he appears to be someone who could not control his lust. His undisciplined lifestyle made him very vulnerable to temptation, and sure enough, he fell!

After defeating the Syrians, Joab led the Israelites against their Ammonite allies. David should also have been on the battlefield but he remained at the palace (1–2). He was to learn that Satan strikes when we are off our guard. We are often safer when we feel the heat of the battle against evil than when we are at ease. David saw a woman bathing (2). The 'chance' glance was not enough for David. He looked again, and again, feeding the lust that was rising up within him. *He saw ... sent and inquired ... and took her* (2–4).

David schemed in every way possible to cover his adultery when he discovered that Bathsheba had become pregnant by him. He had hoped that by giving Uriah home-leave from the battlefield, the man would believe that his wife had conceived at that time. Uriah's godliness stands in sharp contrast to David's evil scheming (11). He was too honourable a person to be at ease while his fellow-soldiers were fighting and he did not go to his house as David had hoped (5–13). His loyalty stands in complete contrast to David's treachery.

One sin often leads to further sins. David was hoping to cover his adultery by showing feigned kindness to Uriah. His scheming was frustrated, however. **We may succeed in hiding our sin for a time, but eventually our sin will be uncovered, if not in this life, on the day of judgment (Numbers 32:23; Romans 2:16).**

The thing that David had done displeased the LORD

Uriah had not taken advantage of David's offer of home-leave from the army and the king was driven to more desperate measures in order to avoid his sin being discovered. He was very wicked and callous to write a letter to Joab, his army commander, which would lead to Uriah's death in battle and then to use Uriah to carry the letter to Joab, .

The more David tried to cover his sin, the more he sinned. His evil scheme brought death to others as well as to Uriah (17). When he heard that Uriah had lost his life in battle, he sent a message to Joab, '*Do not let this thing displease you*' (19–25). The Hebrew is 'Do not let this thing be evil in your sight' (25). Sin cannot be dismissed just like that! It may be hidden from men but it cannot be hidden from God. See the contrast in the statement of verse 27: *The thing that David had done displeased the LORD* ('was evil in the eyes of the LORD').

David's fall is a warning to each of us. Even the most spiritual person can fall into the most appalling sin. I know of those who appeared to be keen Christians and even ministers of the gospel who have fallen into adultery. Men and women, young people, I beg you to be on your guard! The devil is so crafty and will do all that he can to ensnare us and to tempt us into sin. If you are tempted to be unfaithful or sexually immoral, stop to think of where your actions will lead. So often in such cases, we fail to think of the consequences of such sin. The trail of misery brought through the selfishness of the unfaithful husband or wife, and the destruction of Christian homes is heartbreaking.

The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9) and the remains of sin will be with us until we die. The Lord Jesus said to his disciples, *Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation* (Matthew 26:41). **Are you indulging in an unwholesome thought life? Is there anything in your life displeasing to God? Confess your sin and forsake it. If you cling to it, it will bring you misery and judgment.**

You are the man!

God was gracious to David in sending the prophet Nathan to him. Nathan's parable was simple but devastating in exposing David's sin. The king was very angry and vowed that the rich man who had stolen the pet lamb belonging to the poor man would die (1–5). How easy it is to harshly condemn the sins of others while overlooking our own sins! David was passing judgment upon himself. Nathan said to him, '*You are the man!*' (7). David had not only taken Uriah's wife, but had also robbed him of his life. He had *despised the commandment of the LORD* (9; the sixth and seventh of the Ten Commandments – Exodus 20:13–14). There are vital lessons to be learned from these verses:

- It is no light matter for a believer to sin! When we sin, we despise the Lord by a lack of appreciation for his goodness and by rebelling against his commandments (7–9).
- Though David truly repented (see Psalm 51 for his prayer) and found God's forgiveness (13), he had to live with the consequences of his sin for the rest of his life. He had killed Uriah with the sword of the Ammonites and the sword would not depart from his own house. God would raise up adversaries from his own house and his own wives would be taken from him and given to another (9–12). **Forgiveness does not cancel out the effects of our sin!** The immediate consequence of David's sin was that the child conceived in his adultery would die (14).
- Another lesson to learn is that if a believer falls into public sin, it gives *great occasion to the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme* (14). The work and witness of many a church has been hindered by the bad testimony of professing Christians. Unbelievers blaspheme the name of God and understandably think to themselves, 'All talk and hypocrisy – so much for their religion and their God.' **Sin has terrible consequences for ourselves, for the church, and for the honour of God. Let us examine our hearts and repent of any unwholesome desires lurking within.**

Who can tell whether the LORD will be gracious to me?

David pleaded with God for his son when the child became very ill. He went without food for seven days but his prayers and fasting were of no avail for God had told him that the infant would die (14–17). When David heard of his son’s death, he washed, anointed himself and went to the tabernacle to worship God. His servants were puzzled when he returned to the palace and ate food. Surely he should have rather fasted in his bereavement than when the child was ill (18–21)? David explained, ‘*While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, “Who can tell whether the LORD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?” But now he is dead; why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me*’ (22). We learn two important lessons here:

- We should pray for those who are sick (James 5:14) but always with the attitude, ‘*Who can tell whether the LORD will be gracious to me?*’ God does heal today, but those who believe that we can have healing on demand deceive themselves and fail to understand that God promises no such thing. **When we pray, we must always be ready to submit humbly to God’s wise and holy will.**
- The claim of spiritists that they can bring back the dead to communicate with us is false. Our loved-ones who have died can not come back to us and Scripture forbids any attempt to contact them (23; cp. Deuteronomy 18:10–12; Isaiah 8:19–20).

David comforted the heartbroken Bathsheba who later bore another son whom he called, Solomon. We read that ‘*the LORD loved him.*’ Solomon was also called ‘Jedidiah’ which means ‘beloved of the LORD’ (24–25). David had fallen into sin with Bathsheba when he should have been leading his army against the Ammonites. Joab, in an act of selfless loyalty, sent word to David to come and lead his troops into the Ammonite capital, Rabbah (24–31).

Do not do this disgraceful thing

This chapter and those that follow trace the fulfilment of Nathan's prophecy of the trouble that would follow David as a result of his sin (12:10). He was to prove that though sin may appear to taste sweet, its fruit is very bitter. Amnon, David's first-born by Ahinoam of Jezreel (3:2), conceived an unholy passion towards his half-sister Tamar, who was born of Maacah, the daughter of the king of Geshur (3:3). In common with the custom of those times, Tamar would have been kept in seclusion in her mother's house and the law would not allow Amnon to marry her (Leviticus 18:11). Amnon shared his problem with his cousin and friend Jonadab, and they devised a scheme which led to him being left alone with Tamar. He then overpowered her and raped her.

Amnon thought that he loved his half-sister, but it was unbridled lust. He showed no self-giving commitment or tender devotion to her, nor did he seek her highest good. He lied to David, feigning illness and asking his father to send Tamar to visit him and prepare food for him (5–10). Tamar protested in vain when she discovered Amnon's evil intention. She said, *'Do not do this disgraceful thing'* (12). The Hebrew word, 'nebalah' translated *'disgraceful'* is used of the wickedness associated with rape and unchastity (eg. Genesis 34:7; Deuteronomy 22:21). When Amnon's lust was satisfied, his 'love' for Tamar turned to hatred. He treated his distraught half-sister with callous contempt and he ordered her, *'Arise, be gone'* (15). His words to his servant, *'Here! Put this woman out, away from me, and bolt the door behind her,'* are truly dreadful (17). She tore her royal robe as a symbol of her mourning and the weeping princess was cared for by her brother Absalom (18–20).

When a man burns with lust, all sense and reason fly out of the window. He doesn't stop to think of the terrible consequences of his sin. **We must not allow our thinking to be influenced by the world's standards which fall far short of God's holy standards (Romans 12:1–2).** *This is the will of God, your sanctification; that you should abstain from sexual immorality* (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

When King David heard of all these things, he was very angry

Absalom, Tamar's brother, comforted his distraught sister and cared for her. He hated Amnon for what he had done to her and was determined to have his revenge (20, 22). Two years passed before the opportunity for revenge came. It was sheep-shearing time (an occasion of festivity, cp. 1 Samuel 25:11,36). Absalom invited David and all his brothers to the festivities at Baal-Hazor, about fifteen miles north of Jerusalem (probably knowing that David would not be able to attend). The king must have been suspicious when Absalom specifically requested that Amnon go with him but he complied with this request (26–27).

Once Amnon was merry with wine, Absalom ordered his servants to kill him. David's other sons fled in terror and the first news that reached the king was that Absalom had killed all of his sons. The king tore his garments and lay on the ground, mourning the loss of his sons. Amnon's friend Jonadab reassured David that only Amnon was dead and his other sons soon arrived at the palace where there was much weeping. In the meantime, Absalom fled to stay with his grandfather, the king of Geshur, where he remained for three years (28–39; cp. 3:3).

David suffered sorrow and loss as a consequence of his own sin and because of his own failure to take any action against Amnon for his wickedness. We read, '*When King David heard of all these things, he was very angry*' (21). He had good cause to be angry and though we must never lose control of ourselves through anger, we must have the courage to do what is right. David's failure to punish Amnon led to the murder of his son at the hand of Absalom with more trouble to follow. **Do you turn a blind eye to wrong-doing though perhaps burning with anger? Do you fail to take action as appropriate to that situation? Anger must always be controlled so that we keep ourselves from sinful anger (Ephesians 4:26).**

Do not let him see my face

Absalom was guilty of murder and he knew that he could be brought to justice if he returned to Jerusalem. David was concerned about him, but while Absalom was in Geshur, he was not forced to take any action against him. Joab wishing to bring about a reconciliation between the king and his son, enlisted the help of a wise woman from Tekoa. The woman told David that her two sons had been in a fight and that one had been killed by the other. She pleaded with David to intervene to save this son because her family wished to have him executed. Like Nathan (12:1–15), she turned the parable against David (12–17).

The parable did not truly represent the facts, however:

- Absalom had not killed Amnon in a fight, but had carefully plotted his death (6; cp. 13:26–29).
- Absalom deserved to die; the case against the man in the parable was not as clear-cut (7).
- David had other sons to succeed him if Absalom was executed (7).

David discerned that Joab was behind the woman's visit and he commanded him to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem (19–22). He said, *'Let him return to his own house, but do not let him see my face'* (24). He could not lightly pass over Absalom's crime, but his failure to act in a reasonable manner was to lead to greater trouble. There is a vital principle here concerning forgiveness:

- There can be no real forgiveness unless the offender has repented of his sin. Absalom was a prodigal son but he did not repent of his sin. He was not like the prodigal of Luke chapter 15.
- True forgiveness leads to reconciliation, but David was not reconciled to Absalom who *did not see the king's face* (24).

Have you grudgingly said that you would forgive someone who has wronged you, but that you 'would not forget'? That is not biblical forgiveness. If you refuse to see their face (to restore fellowship with them), you have not truly forgiven them and this will spoil your walk with the Lord (cp. Ephesians 4:32).

In all Israel there was none who was praised as much as Absalom

When Absalom was in exile in Geshur, David longed to see him, but he did not afterwards allow his son access to the palace. Absalom had been back in Jerusalem for two years and David still refused to see him (28; cp. 13:39). He was torn between his love for his son and the need to show that Absalom's crime could not be passed over without some show of disapproval. Absalom's pride was wounded and he began to nurse a grievance because he was denied access to his father. He sought to enlist the help of Joab to intervene on his behalf. The army commander sensing that Absalom was a threat to the stability of the country remained indifferent to his pleas. Absalom was determined to gain his attention and resorted to a criminal act. He sent his servants to destroy Joab's barley harvest by setting his field on fire.

It is obvious that Absalom wanted Joab to know who was responsible for the destruction of his field. Joab went to see him and Absalom challenged him that he should either see the king's face or be punished if he was guilty of any wrong (32). It is an indication of Absalom's perversity that he should protest his innocence. Joab passed on Absalom's message to the king and David sent for Absalom and kissed him (33). Subsequent events were to prove that Absalom hated his father.

Absalom was admired in Israel despite his treachery: *Now in all Israel there was no one who was praised as much as Absalom for his good looks* (25). **A beautiful body may hide a cesspit of corruption. How we need to be discerning!** Many modern film stars, sports stars and pop-idols are admired and hero-worshipped because of their looks, or their sporting or artistic skills. Many of them have wicked lifestyles however, and must not be held up as examples to be followed. It is also true that the qualifications that matter for recognition for leadership in the church are not good looks or a powerful personality, but a godly and gracious spirit to go with the gifts required for the work. **Never be taken in by outward appearances (cp. 1 Samuel 16:7)!**

So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel

David suffered the greatest crisis of his reign with the rebellion of Absalom who used much guile to undermine his father's rule. This wretched son of David was very conscious of his self-image and he set about promoting himself as the ideal king. He needed to look like a king so he provided himself with chariots and horses to supply a sense of glittering pomp for his public appearances (1).

He made a great fuss of those who came to Jerusalem to seek a hearing from the king concerning their grievances. Absalom made known to them his desire to be a judge and promised that if he were appointed, there would be justice for all (1–5). His attitude shows that he was not fit for such an office, but he succeeded in deceiving the people – *So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel* (6). Absalom may have won over to himself an undiscerning people but he failed the basic requirements for rulers and judges – *Able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness* (Exodus 18:21).

Four years (ESV) rather than *forty years* (7) would appear to be a more accurate reading and appears as such in some manuscripts. With his popularity growing, Absalom became confident that he could successfully take the throne of Israel. He lied to his father using a religious reason for leaving Jerusalem. Ahithophel, David's trusted counsellor went over to Absalom's side and others were unwittingly drawn into the conspiracy (7–12).

Many churches have been wrecked by self-seeking, ambitious men with a spirit like that of Absalom. They covet positions of leadership in the local church of which they are not worthy. They steal the hearts of the less discerning members and undermine their leaders. It is always easy to criticise pastors and other leaders in the church; they are human and they make mistakes, but they need our whole-hearted support and prayers.

In whatever place my Lord the king shall be ... even there also will your servant be

Why did David allow Absalom to seize his throne without a fight? He knew that Absalom had gained much support and that a battle in Jerusalem could result in the destruction of the city. He still loved his treacherous son and did not want him to be killed in any fighting (see 18:5). By withdrawing, he would also have time to organise his troops.

Times of crisis bring out the worst in some people and the best in others. Ahithophel, a trusted friend, deserted David, but others remained very loyal. Ittai the Gittite was a Philistine and David did not expect him to take any risks in following him and told him to remain in Jerusalem. Ittai responded by saying, *In whatever place my Lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also your servant will be* (18–21). Dale Ralph Davis observes, ‘Ittai is an island of fidelity in a sea of treachery.’ (COMMENTARY ON 2 SAMUEL, page 157.) Such self-sacrificing loyalty would have been a great encouragement to David in his distress. Are you prepared to follow the Lord Jesus and to live for him alone, whatever the cost to yourself?

David urged the priests, Zadok and Abiathar, to return to Jerusalem with the ark, taking their two sons who would be able to pass on strategic information to David. Hushai also agreed to return to Jerusalem and to ingratiate himself with Absalom so that he would be able to defeat the counsel of Ahithophel. He also would be able to get inside information to David (23–37). In his sorrow and loss, David did the best thing. He prayed that the Lord would cause Ahithophel to give foolish counsel and he worshipped God (31–32). He was on the mount of Olives (30) where just over a thousand years later, the Lord Jesus was to agonise in Gethsemane and say to God the Father, ‘*O my Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will*’ (Matthew 26:39). **We will only be able to worship God in bitter and perplexing circumstances if we accept his will and trust in him. He will not fail us!**

It may be ... that the LORD will repay me good for his cursing

Ziba and Shimei were both connected with the household of Saul and both were treacherous men. Ziba disguised his treachery by coming to David with two donkey-loads of food to refresh him and his company. When David enquired about Mephibosheth, he slandered his master, and David believed him, undoubtedly deceived by Ziba's apparent generosity (3–4; cp. 19:24–27). Ziba was later to be found in the company of the wicked Shimei (19:16–17). There is a warning for us here; when under stress (like David), we may readily believe malicious gossip or half-truths about others. We must be very careful not to pass hasty judgment. Someone once quaintly observed, 'God has given us two ears that we may hear both sides.'

Shimei was quite open in his opposition to David, cursing him and throwing stones at him. He blamed David for the blood of the house of Saul and called David a *bloodthirsty man* and a *rogue*. David was not responsible for the death of Saul nor anyone else in his household, though he did have the blood of Uriah on his hands (5–9). Abishai would have killed Shimei but for the restraint of David whose reaction was far different from the time when Nabal slighted him (1 Samuel 25:21–22). How was David able to remain so cool in the face of such insults and provocation?

- He recognised that if his own son was seeking his life, he should not be surprised at opposition from outside of his family (11).
- He saw the hand of God in this trial and he committed his cause to the Lord. He was thus able to trust in God, saying, '*It may be that the LORD will look on my affliction, and that the LORD will repay me good for his cursing this day*' (10–12).

Is someone hurting you? Be encouraged! God has purposes of good for you in this trial. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad; for great is your reward in heaven (Matthew 5:11–12; Romans 5:3–5; 1 Peter 4:12–13).

A Thought on the Sea-shore

*In every object here I see
Something, O Lord, that leads to thee
Firm as the rocks thy promise stands,
Thy mercies countless as the sands,
Thy love a sea immensely wide,
Thy grace an ever-flowing tide.*

*In every object here I see
Something, my heart, that points at thee;
Hard as the rocks that bound the strand,
Unfruitful as the barren sand,
Deep and deceitful as the ocean,
And, like the tides, in constant motion.*

(John Newton)