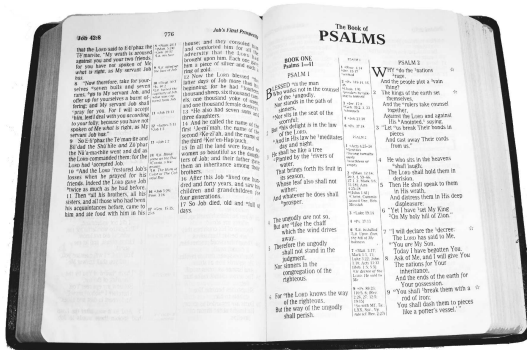


PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



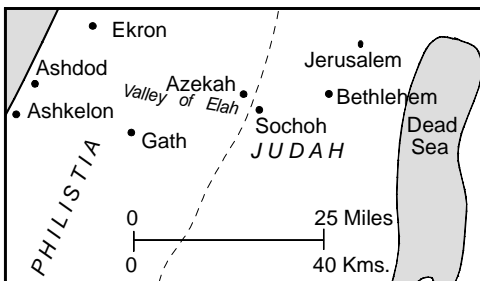
October 2016

Bible readings from 1 Samuel chapters 17 to 31
Psalms 85 to 89

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*Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the
armies of the living God?*

The ways of God are wonderful and surprising! We have already seen how he uses events which appear to have little significance to us, but which are crucial in his purposes (see notes for 16 September). David's errand



to take food to his three eldest brothers serving in Saul's army was to lead to the defeat of the Philistines. The Philistine armies had assembled for battle against Israel and were spread over the border of their two countries between the towns of Sochoh and Azekah (12 to 14 miles west of Bethlehem). Saul and his army faced the Philistines across the Valley of Elah (1–3).

The awesome figure of Goliath, standing over nine feet (three metres) in height reduced Saul and his men to fear and trembling (11,24). He was clad in heavy armour (5–7; a shekel weighed about 11 grammes or 2/5 of an ounce). Saul, now far from God, lacked any assurance that the Lord was with them. If we would be fearless, we must walk with God in obedience to his word. Goliath represented the Philistines and challenged Israel to produce a champion to fight him. The side whose champion was killed would then concede defeat (8–9, 23, 51–52). Goliath bellowed out his challenge twice a day, for forty days, but Israel had no champion to meet the giant (16).

When David heard Goliath's challenge, he was not intimidated. He asked, '*Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?*' (26). The God of Israel was the true and living God. How dare this Philistine defy him? This was a challenge to action and David rose to the challenge. **Many are mocking and defying God today. Are we fearful, or do we see it as a challenge to urgent, fervent prayer, and faithful service for the Lord?**

*The LORD, who delivered me from the paw of the lion ...
will deliver me from the hand of the Philistine*

David faced the contempt of his elder brother as well as that of Goliath. Eliab was angered by David's audacious offer to take on the challenge of Goliath (28). He may have harboured jealousy and resentment of David in his heart from the time that he had been passed over by Samuel (16:7).

David's brave words were reported to Saul and the king sent for him. Saul could hardly believe that this mere youth could defeat an experienced warrior like Goliath (32–33). David recalled the times when a lion and a bear had attacked his flock and of God's help when he killed these predators (34–35). David saw that the honour of God was at stake and that the living God who had enabled him to kill the lion and the bear would give him victory over Goliath (36). David was not intimidated by this challenge to his faith, but rather stirred into action. He said to Saul, '*The LORD, who delivered me from the paw of the lion ... will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine*' (37). David had proved the Lord in the past and was confident of his help now in the Valley of Elah.

Dale Ralph Davis writes, 'This is instructive for the people of God. Faith is sustained in the present and for the present as it remembers Yahweh's provision in the past. The rich history of God's past goodnesses nurtures faith in its current dilemma ... It is so crucial to remember God's past deliverances. If you've trouble doing so, invest in a diary. In God's economy no experience is wasted' (COMMENTARY ON 1 SAMUEL, page 151).

Our attitude to testing and trial makes all the difference! We should view difficulties and battles as challenges to prove God and to know him better. We know that he will never fail us!

*His love in time past forbids me to think
He'll leave me at last in trouble to sink.*

(John Newton)

But I come to you in the name of the LORD

The defeat of Goliath makes for thrilling reading. Saul wanted to give David as much protection as possible by arming him for the contest. The armour was a hindrance rather than a help and David discarded it (38–39). Saul and his troops had to learn the lesson that *the LORD does not save with sword and spear* (47). The Philistine champion was surprised and angered that the Israelites had sent a mere youth, apparently unarmed, to fight him (42–43). Goliath cursed David by his gods but the young man was not intimidated by his curses or threats. He knew that he was not meeting the giant in his own strength and he affirmed, '*But I come to you in the name of the LORD ... the battle is the LORD'S*' (45,47).

Notice the boldness of David as he hastened and ran to meet Goliath before hurling a stone from his sling (48–50). Goliath crashed to the ground and David took the giant's sword and cut off his head. The Philistines, who had been so confident, fled from the Israelite army in disarray. *God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty* (1 Corinthians 1:27). What a great victory God wrought for Israel through one who was an unlikely champion! Our great Champion, the Lord Jesus Christ, has defeated Satan and the powers of darkness (John 12:31; Colossians 2:14–15; 1 John 3:8). Seeming defeat at Calvary was a glorious victory! With such an almighty Champion on our side, why should we fear those who defy the living God? **The Lord did not fail David (37) and he will never fail you nor forsake you as you love, honour and obey him.**

How was it that Saul did not recognise David who had played his harp before him when he was troubled by the distressing spirit and who had been his armour-bearer (55–58; cp. 16:21–23)? The Lord does not reveal why Saul had this lapse in memory and it is fruitless to speculate. Such a restraint is also found in the case of the two travellers on the Emmaus road so that they failed to recognise the Lord Jesus whom they knew so well (Luke 24:16,31).

David behaved wisely in all his ways

We have already seen from earlier chapters that Jonathan was a brave and accomplished soldier. He greatly admired David after his victory over Goliath and they became the closest of friends (1–4). There is no suggestion anywhere in Scripture that Jonathan’s love for David was of a homosexual nature. Homosexual practices are wicked in the sight of God (Leviticus 20:13; Romans 1:27). Saul took David to live in the royal household and the young man became a commander in the Israelite army (2–5).

Saul’s esteem for David turned to jealous, murderous hatred after he heard the women ascribing greater military prowess to David than to himself (6–12). Let us beware of envy. It is a sin that will tear us apart and bring much misery as it did in the life of Saul (see James 3:13–18). Jonathan was heir to the throne of Israel and had far more reason to feel threatened by David than his father. He remained a loyal and precious friend, however (cp. chapter 20; 23:16). Saul was now prophesying, but not by the Holy Spirit of God (10; cp. 19:23).

David behaved wisely in all his ways, and the LORD was with him (14; see also verses 5,15,30). The root of the Hebrew word translated ‘wisely’ implies ‘wisdom’ but it can also mean ‘to prosper’ or ‘to have success’ as in the English Standard Version. David behaved wisely or had success:

- When Saul tried to murder him (11).
- When Saul turned him out of his house to command a thousand soldiers (13).
- When Saul sent him on a dangerous mission in the hope that he would be killed (25–27).

God used these severe trials to strengthen and to bless David (30). **Are you being provoked by someone at home, at work, at school, or even at church? Remember David!** Be wise in your conduct; commit your way to God and trust in him (Proverbs 3:5–6). He will honour and vindicate you and be with you as he was with David.

Now Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul

This chapter shows how God delivered David from Saul's murderous intentions on four occasions:

- Saul's hatred for David came into the open when he ordered his son Jonathan and his servants to kill him. Jonathan was David's closest friend and warned him of Saul's intentions. He also *spoke well of David to Saul*, reminding him of his loyalty and of his victory over Goliath. David was then able to return to the palace for a while and he went on to accomplish another great victory over the Philistines (1–8).
- Saul soon forgot his solemn promise to spare David (6). He attempted to kill him with his spear after the distressing spirit came upon him (9–10).
- David's wife Michal, daughter of Saul, warned him of another plot to kill him and helped him escape from his house. She took an image (a 'teraphim' or 'household god'; cp. Genesis 31:19) which she used to give the appearance of her husband lying in his bed (11–17). The Bible makes no comment about an idol being so readily available.
- David escaped to Ramah where he told Samuel what Saul had done to him (18–19). '*Naioth*' means 'dwellings' and probably refers to the buildings which housed the prophets at Ramah. Saul was told of David's whereabouts and sent messengers to arrest him. They came upon a group of prophets prophesying under Samuel's leadership, and they too prophesied after the Spirit of God came upon them. When Saul heard of this, he sent two more groups of men who also prophesied in turn. Saul then went to Naioth where he also prophesied. He lay naked day and night while David made good his escape (20–24; 20:1). The Holy Spirit came upon Saul and his men, not as a sign of blessing, but in order to render them helpless and unable to arrest David.

The Lord protected David in various ways. **God does not change and he watches over us and is with us.** He says, *'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'* So we may boldly say: *'The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?'* (Hebrews 13:5–6).

Whatever you yourself desire, I will do it for you

Saul's day and night of prophesying enabled David to escape from Naioth in Ramah. He sought out Jonathan and expressed his bewilderment at Saul's treatment of him wondering what he had done to cause Saul to seek his life. Jonathan still believed that his father would not really harm David without telling him, his son (1–2). David was not so sure. He rightly discerned that Saul would not reveal his true intentions to Jonathan, knowing of his friendship with David (3). They devised a plan by which they would discover whether Saul's attitude toward David had changed for the better. The beginning of the month at the New Moon (5,18) was a special time of sacrifice and celebration (cp. Numbers 10:10; 28:11–15). David's presence at the court would have been taken for granted. If Saul reacted with hostility to his absence it would indicate that all was not well (1–13).

Jonathan made a covenant with David, in which they solemnly committed themselves to care for one another's families (13–17; cp. 2 Samuel chapter 9). True friendship is built on mutual love, loyalty and self-denial (9,17). A friend loves at all times (Proverbs 17:17). Jonathan told David, '*Whatever you yourself desire, I will do it for you*' (4). Someone once wrote:

*True friends are like diamonds,
Precious, but rare.
False friends are like autumn leaves,
Found everywhere.*

True friendship is not one-sided. Some are friendless because they are self-centred and not prepared to give as well as to take. This is not true of every lonely person, however. The runaway success of social networking sites on the internet is testimony that there are many lonely people around us, crying out for friends. It is even more poignant when such people are fellow-believers in our own churches. **Are you willing to be a friend to some lonely person?** Remember too that many a needy person has been won to Christ after a Christian befriended them.

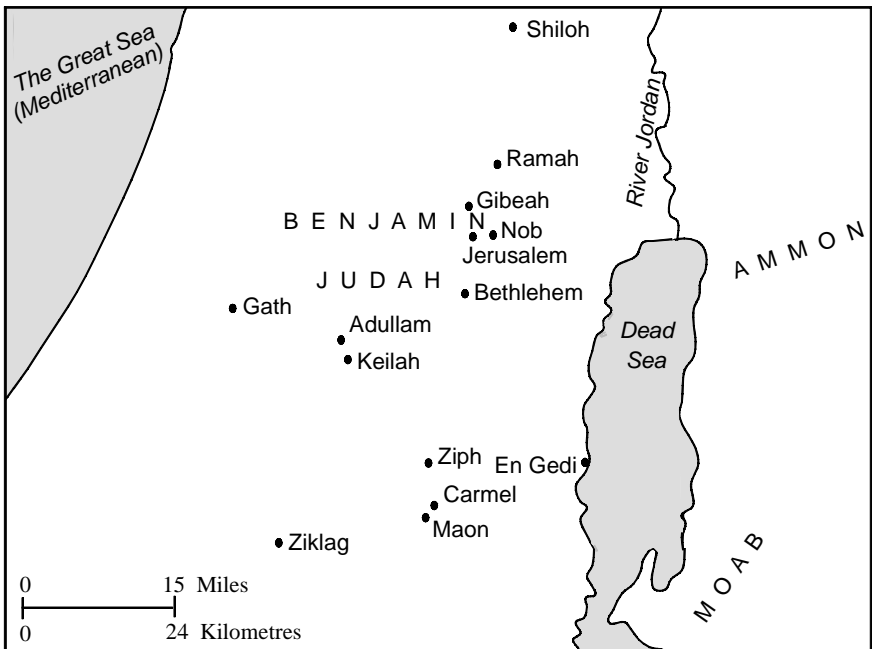
May the LORD be between you and me

Saul first assumed that David was absent because of some ceremonial uncleanness according to Mosaic regulations. He made no comment on David's absence until the second day when he contemptuously referred to David as *the son of Jesse* (27). Jonathan made excuses for his friend which aroused the anger of his father. Saul hurled insult and abuse at him and told him that as long as David lived, the dynasty of Saul's household would not be secure. He already knew, however, that God had rejected him as king over Israel (15:26). He ordered Jonathan to bring David to him so that he could kill him. When Jonathan questioned his father about these murderous intentions, Saul threw a spear at him (24–34).

Jonathan went out the next morning with a servant boy to engage in some target practice according to the plan earlier worked out with David. Jonathan's words to the lad indicated to David, who was hidden nearby, that all was not well. After sending his servant away, Jonathan and David met for a sorrowful farewell (35–42). They were only to meet on one more occasion (23:16) but they would remember their solemn promises to each other (14–17; cp. 2 Samuel 9:1–3). Jonathan called on God as a witness to these promises: *'May the LORD be between you and me forever'* (23,42).

We live in evil days when promises often count for little. God is called upon as a witness to marriage vows but so many soon forget these solemn promises and they bring much misery upon themselves and their families. **The world says, 'Promises are made to be broken' but Christians must be different. We must always keep our word!** We sin when we fail to keep our word. Remember, the Lord sees and hears us making our promises.

Map covering events recorded in 1 Samuel chapters 21 to 27



Have I need of madmen

The Bible does not conceal the failings of those who served God and this chapter reveals two unhappy episodes in David's life. He failed to honour God when his life was in danger and the consequences were to prove disastrous. It appears that the tabernacle was no longer at Shiloh but at Nob. David's arrival at Nob surprised and disturbed Ahimelech the priest who must have suspected that something was wrong. The fugitive lied to Ahimelech to allay his fears.

Ahimelech was unable to provide food for David and his men apart from using the shewbread from the tabernacle. This 'holy' bread had been replaced by fresh bread (6) and the incident is spoken of by the Lord Jesus (Matthew 12:3–4). David also persuaded Ahimelech to give him the sword of Goliath which had been kept at the tabernacle (1–9). All was not well however. Saul's chief herdsman, a treacherous Edomite named Doeg, observed all that happened and reported it all to the king. David had proved the faithfulness of God so often in the past and there was no need to resort to lies to preserve his life now. He should have remembered that God would never fail him. His lies were to cost Ahimelech, his fellow priests and their families, their lives (22:6–19).

David then went to the Philistine city of Gath which was about thirty miles south-west of Nob. He knew that he would be safe from Saul at Gath but he was in greater danger among the Philistines. He was soon recognised and the servants of Achish, king of Gath told their king that the man who had killed so many Philistines was among them (10–12). David feigned madness to preserve his own life and the Philistine king was taken in by the deception. He asked the question, '*Have I need of madmen?*' (14–15). David's actions recorded in this chapter were foolish and sinful. **If we fail to trust in the Lord in difficult times, we too may do foolish things, bringing problems to ourselves and others.**

The cave of Adullam

God is very gracious and merciful and he preserved David who had foolishly fled to Gath. The thankful fugitive wrote Psalm 34 after this experience. He returned to Judah where he was joined by his brothers and their families. They were forced into hiding to escape the vindictiveness of Saul. *The cave of Adullam* * became a focal point where everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to David (2). From these he trained a highly disciplined army from this unlikely group of people (cp. 25:15–16).

David also went to the king of Moab to seek protection for his elderly parents (cp. 17:12). David's father was the grandson of Ruth, a Moabitess – Ruth 4:13–22). The king granted David's request and David knew that his parents would be safe from any vengeful schemes of Saul.

David was not without direction in distress and danger. The prophet Gad told him not to remain at Adullam but to go to Judah (3–5). Saul no longer had the privilege of God's direction, and was left to his own devices. The Lord had departed from him (16:14; 18:12; 28:6).

The local church should be a 'cave of Adullam' to needy souls – distressed because they are without God, in debt because of their sin which can only be cancelled by the blood of Christ, discontented because they have found that there is little satisfaction until Christ comes into their lives. When they are saved by the grace of God, they should grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. How sad it is that some Christians never seem to progress in godliness. They are never content and make heavy weather of their pilgrimage to heaven. How are things with you?

* Dale Ralph Davis points out that there are huge caves in the Adullam area which would have easily accommodated David and the four hundred with him.

I have caused the death of all the persons of your father's house

Saul was feeling sorry for himself and he made a pathetic appeal to those closest to him (from his own tribe of Benjamin) that they remain loyal to him. He told them that they had been part of a conspiracy against him because they had not informed him that his son Jonathan had made a covenant with David. He lamented that none of them were sorry for him (6–8). Doeg the Edomite reported that he had seen David with the priests at Nob where he was given provisions, and where Ahimelech had inquired of the Lord for him.

Saul summoned Ahimelech and the other priests to come to him and accused them of giving succour to David. Ahimelech protested that he understood that David was faithful to Saul (which was true) but his protests were in vain (9–15). Saul's servants were really great! They knew that the priests were the servants of the Lord and they bravely refused to obey Saul's order to kill them regardless of the danger to themselves (16–17). Do you have such loyalty and high regard for those who serve the Lord? The treacherous Doeg had no scruples and he instantly obeyed Saul, killing eighty-five priests. He then slaughtered their wives and children in Nob (18–19).

One of Ahimelech's sons, Abiathar, escaped to tell David the dreadful news. A heartbroken David confessed to him, '*I have caused the death of all the persons of your father's house*' (21–22). He wrote Psalm 52 at this distressing time. Dale Ralph Davis comments, 'Abiathar then stands as a witness to the way Yahweh insistently preserves a remnant of his people. The priests of Yahweh may be destroyed, but not completely destroyed. The people of God may often be put down, but never put out. Abiathar's escape does not mean that all God's servants are immune from the world's butchery but that the world's butchery can never wipe out all of God's servants.' (COMMENTARY ON 1 SAMUEL, page 188). David's deceit had brought disaster to the priests of Nob and their families (21:2). **Sin is never a private matter! We hurt others when we sin, and it affects the life and witness of the church. Let us be always on our guard against Satan's wiles.**

David inquired of the LORD

The towns in the west of Judah were vulnerable to attack from the Philistines. Keilah was about thirteen miles east of the Philistine stronghold of Gath (see map, page 10). When David heard that the threshing floors of Keilah were being plundered, he sought the Lord in prayer: *David inquired of the LORD* (2,4, cp. 10–12). His men recognised that if they were afraid of Saul's army, they could expect little chance of success against the Philistines (3). David again prayed to the Lord, who reassured him and then gave him a great victory over the Philistines.

Abiathar the priest, who had escaped the massacre of the priests at Nob, joined David after the battle of Keilah, bringing with him an ephod (4; cp. 22:18–21). Saul should have been grateful that Israel's enemy had been defeated, but he was convinced that God had delivered David into his hands (4–7). A man who rebels against God has a tremendous capacity for self-deceit.

David heard that Saul was planning to come to Keilah and this drove him to pray. He sought the guidance of God (probably through the Urim and Thummim kept by the priest; cp. 28:6; Exodus 28:30; Numbers 27:21). He wanted to know if Saul would destroy the city as he had destroyed Nob because they had received him. He also asked the Lord whether the men of Keilah would betray him and hand him over to Saul. The Lord revealed that these people whom David had saved would indeed hand him over to Saul (9–13). He must have been quite shocked; how could they show such ingratitude to him? How could they betray a man from their own tribe of Judah to Saul, a Benjamite?

Christian, if you have been hurt, if the way is presently rough, be like David and seek God in prayer. Wait on the Lord and be patient. He will bring you through!

Jonathan... strengthened his hand in God

David went from Keilah to the wilderness of Ziph. Saul continued to seek his life but the Lord preserved him (14–15). God is always mindful of his people! We read here of David's last meeting with Jonathan who knew where to find his friend even though his father searched in vain. Jonathan was a great encouragement to David: he *strengthened his hand in God* (16). God uses his people to encourage and strengthen their fellow-believers. Jonathan was sure that David would be the next king of Israel rather than himself, but there was no rancour or jealousy to be found in him. The Christian life is not easy. There are disappointments and battles and we all need encouragement. **When did you last encourage some hard-pressed Christian?**

The Ziphites betrayed David's whereabouts to Saul who appeared to be so spiritual in his response to them (21). Psalm 54 is a prayer uttered by David at this time. The Lord wonderfully intervened for him when he was trapped by Saul whose army was then called to deal with a Philistine invasion (26–27).

Why does the Lord lead us through trials? Why did he ordain (not just 'allow') David to suffer such testing times? The Hebrew for 'Ziph' means a refining place. It is likely that iron was smelted there. The metal was subjected to intense heat until all the dross was removed from it. **The Lord is wise and gracious. He leads us into trials to refine us and to fit us to serve him.** If you are feeling the heat of trial, trust in the Lord and persevere. He will not fail you and he will make you all the stronger and will bring you into closer fellowship with himself (cp. Romans 5:3–5; 1 Peter 4:12–14).

*When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace all-sufficient shall be Thy supply;
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume, and thy gold to refine.*

(‘K’ in Rippon’s Selection, 1787)

The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my master

Dale Ralph Davis comments, ‘Readers have long known that David is the man after Yahweh’s own heart (13:14), and chapters 24–26 show that the man after Yahweh’s own heart does not seize the kingship Yahweh promised but waits for it to be given to him’ (COMMENTARY ON 1 SAMUEL, page 198).

Saul was told that David was in the wilderness of En Gedi. That area had some great caves which were often used to shelter sheep. Saul took three thousand of his best troops to seek out David and he unwittingly went into a great cave where the fugitive was hiding (1–3). We may easily misinterpret the providence of God and David’s men did just that. They knew that the Lord had promised to deliver David’s enemy (Saul) into his hands and this fulfilment of God’s promise gave an opportunity to get rid of Saul. This may have seemed reasonable but David interpreted the providence of God in a different manner.

The Lord had delivered Saul into David’s hand to do to him as he thought fit. David did not see this as an opportunity to kill Saul but to show him mercy. He also recognised that Saul had been anointed king of Israel at God’s command and he was prepared to leave the Lord to deal with Saul. He cut off a corner of Saul’s robe but felt guilty about this and said, ‘*The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my master*’ (4–6). He would not allow his men to harm Saul. There are two vital lessons for us here:

1. The ways of God do baffle us at times and it is not always easy to know how we should act in the light of God’s providence. We must always be prayerful and be sure that our heart is right in the sight of God and that our motives are not selfish. It is possible to claim God’s providential leading or protection as an excuse for wrong action.
2. We must never seek personal revenge against those who have harmed us: *Do not say, “I will recompense evil”; wait for the LORD and he will save you* (Proverbs 20:22). **If someone has mistreated you, do not fret or allow bitterness to fill your heart. Wait on the Lord and commit your way to him (Psalm 37:7–8).**

Saul lifted up his voice and wept

David showed remarkable restraint and humility in his dealings with Saul. He had even felt guilty about cutting off a corner of the king's robe and he restrained his men from harming the unsuspecting Saul (4–5). After Saul left the cave, he was startled to hear David's shout, 'My lord the king!' When he turned, he saw David bowing in obeisance to him (8).

David addressed him as his 'father' (Saul was his father-in-law). He asked the king why he listened to those who said that he was seeking to harm him. He pointed out to Saul that the Lord had delivered him into his hand and that he had spared him despite the desire of his men for revenge. David held up the corner of the robe to prove his point and asked Saul what reason he had to hunt him down (9–11). He appealed to God the righteous Judge to judge between him and Saul and pointed out that he was no more of a threat to the king than a dead dog or a flea (12–15).

When Saul heard these things, *he lifted up his voice and wept* (16). He acknowledged that David was more righteous than himself and had rewarded him with good. He admitted that the Lord had delivered him into the hand of David who had spared him. He affirmed that David would be king of Israel and asked him to promise mercy to his descendants (16–21). After David solemnly swore that he would do this, the men parted, but Saul was soon to hunt him again (chapter 26).

Saul lifted up his voice and wept (16) **but tears are not always a sign of a tender heart or of genuine repentance.** They may be an evidence of emotional instability as in the case of Saul. Words and tears are not enough! The true state of Saul's heart is revealed later (26:1 to 27:1). Christians must show by their actions that they have really turned their back on a selfish, sinful way of life. If we love the Lord, we will gladly obey his word (John 14:15).

He is such a scoundrel that one cannot speak to him

This chapter begins by recording the death of Samuel (1). It appears that the prophet and last judge over Israel died after David had spared Saul in the wilderness of En Gedi. He was buried at his house in Ramah, perhaps in a special burial plot in the courtyard of his house or in the garden.

David and his band of men had voluntarily protected the livestock of Nabal who was a very wealthy man. Nabal was *harsh and evil in his doings* (3) and when there was a time of festivities for him and his workers, David sent ten of his young men to greet him. They asked him for some food from his plentiful supply, pointing out how they had always respected and protected Nabal's shepherds and animals. Nabal responded with insults and sent David's men away empty-handed (4–13).

David had shown great restraint and mercy in his dealings with Saul, but in this chapter we see a different man. He was so furious when Nabal slighted him, that he determined to kill not only Nabal but also every male in his household (13,21–22). We must beware of taking hasty action when we are upset or angry. David had to remember that God would deal with Nabal just as he would deal with Saul.

One of Nabal's young men told Abigail what had happened and warned her that their household was in great danger. It is interesting that he could speak openly to Abigail concerning her husband's character: *'He is such a scoundrel (worthless man) that one cannot speak to him'* (17). Nabal was a prosperous man, but he was a fool (that is the meaning of his name – see verse 25). A fool is someone who refuses to listen to sense or reason, or who rebels against God's holy laws (cp. Isaiah 32:6). There are some Christians who will not listen to any reasoning from Scripture concerning their strange ideas or behaviour. **They are so sure that they are right 'that one cannot speak' to them. How sad!**

Blessed is your advice and blessed are you

Nabal's wife, Abigail was so different from him. She was a beautiful *woman of good understanding* (3). Her actions in calming David were marked with much graciousness. She prepared provisions for David and his men but did not tell Nabal what she was doing. She agreed with the servant's opinion of her husband (17, 25). She continually acknowledged the Lord in her plea to David, and that God had appointed him to be ruler over Israel (26–31).

By her gentleness and godly reasoning, Abigail turned David away from bloodshed. She won his respect and he acknowledged that the Lord had sent her to meet him (32). But for her intervention, he would have been guilty of bloodshed and of taking matters into his own hands to avenge himself of Nabal's snub. He would now leave the Lord to deal with Nabal (33–34). He said to her, *'Blessed is your advice and blessed are you'* (33). David was different from Nabal in that he would listen to sense and reason (17,35). **Are you prepared to listen to the counsel of others, even if it is disagreeable to you?** *The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy* (James 3:17).

David accepted Abigail's provisions and sent her on her way in peace (35). It is quite apparent that Abigail endured a very unhappy marriage to a dreadful man (25). She did not allow this to drive her to despair or to crush her spirit. Her gracious character shone all the more in her very difficult circumstances. She was a very gracious woman whom God blessed and honoured. Her name, 'Abigail', means 'a source of delight.' Both she and her husband were true to their names ('Nabal' means 'fool,' 25). The Lord is delighted when we walk with him and show his grace in our lives. Is your life a delight to the Lord and to your fellow-believers?

The LORD has returned the wickedness of Nabal on his own head

Abigail returned home to find Nabal in a very drunken state. The next morning, when he was sober, Abigail told him of the peril in which he had been. *His heart died within him, and he became like a stone.* He died ten days later. Notice that he died because *the LORD struck* him (36–38). When David heard of this, he gratefully blessed God for upholding his cause against Nabal and for keeping him from doing evil saying, *‘Blessed be the LORD, who has pleaded the cause of my reproach from the hand of Nabal, and has kept his servant from evil. The LORD has returned the wickedness of Nabal on his own head’* (39). Those who scoff at the teaching of God’s judgment upon sinners are very foolish to ignore the teaching of Scripture. *Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap* (Galatians 6:7).

Abigail’s gracious disposition had obviously made a great impression on David. Following the death of Nabal, he sought her hand in marriage and she accepted his proposal (39–42). David’s wife Michal was the daughter of Saul and the king had given her in marriage to another man. David also married Ahinoam of Jezreel and was behaving like rulers of that time in practising polygamy. By the time he reigned in Hebron, he had six wives and was later to marry Bathsheba and take concubines (1 Chronicles 3:1–9). The Lord strictly forbids polygamous practices (Deuteronomy 17:17) and David was to suffer much because of his disobedience. Family division caused by rivalry between his wives and their children brought him much heartache and grief.

This chapter begins with the death of Samuel, a man who listened to God and obeyed him (3:10). It ends with the death of a godless man who would not listen to God nor man. **How is it with you? Are you prepared to die?** If your heart is not right with God, come to the Lord Jesus now, confessing your sin and trusting him to save you. He will not turn you away (John 6:37).

I have played the fool and erred exceedingly

The Ziphites again informed Saul of David's whereabouts (1–3; cp. 23:19–20). The king took three thousand of his best troops to pursue David who found out from his spies what was happening. Abishai, one of David's commanders, volunteered to go into the camp of Saul with his leader. Saul had his spear *stuck in the ground by his head*; this was a symbol of authority which kings of that period in that area often kept with them (4–8; cp. 18:10–11; 19:9).

The Lord brought a deep sleep upon Saul and his troops (12). Abishai acknowledged that God had delivered Saul into their hands and he wanted to kill the king. David again refused to touch *the LORD'S anointed* but he took Saul's spear and jug of water (9–12). He then went to the top of a hill and called out to Abner, Saul's commander, taunting him for his failure to guard his king. David recognised that the Lord may have stirred up Saul against him (to chastise him?). If this was so, he would bring an offering to God. On the other hand, Saul may have been influenced by malicious gossip against David who keenly felt that as a fugitive, he could not attend the feasts at the tabernacle and join with the faithful in worship (19).

Saul again acknowledged his sin in seeking David's life and he blessed David. He knew that David would do great things and prevail, but Saul was not to be trusted (21,25; 27:1). Saul confessed, *'I have played the fool and erred exceedingly'* (21). He was referring to his jealousy of David and of its consequences, but that statement sums up his life. He had played the fool by his deliberate disobedience of God, in making rash vows and in wasting so many opportunities to repent of his sin. What a contrast to another Saul of the tribe of Benjamin – the great apostle Paul. Shortly before he was martyred, he wrote, *'I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith'* (2 Timothy 4:7). **Are you playing the fool, or are you fighting the good fight and keeping the faith?**

There is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape

David felt very vulnerable and he again sought refuge in Gath where he was out of the reach of Saul. His folly in returning to Gath led him into compromise and sin. He was given the city of Ziklag (near to Judah) but it is pathetic to read of the conqueror of Goliath of Gath (chapter 17) now owning himself as the servant of the king of Gath (5; 28:2). He lived a lie for sixteen months, pretending to Achish that he and his men were raiding southern Judah and its surrounding territory, when in reality, he was fighting against Israel's enemies (the Amalekites and others). He was obliged to cover his deception by shedding much blood (7–12). But for the intervention of God, he would have found himself fighting against Israel and his beloved Jonathan (28:1–2; chapter 29).

David had proved God in perilous situations on many occasions; he had expressed his confidence in God to Saul (26:24). He could write such great words as found in Psalm 27:1–3 and yet lapse in his faith and trust in the Lord. What caused this and what lessons are there for us here?

- In the weariness of trial, he gave way to despairing thoughts and was convinced that Saul would eventually kill him (1). The Lord did not come into his reckoning at this point and he lost his faith in the promises of God.
- He acted hastily when he should have been prayerful and cautious. He said to himself, *'There is nothing better for me than that I should speedily escape to the land of the Philistines'* (1). In fact, there was nothing worse for him than this; notice the word *'speedily.'*

David escaped the place of trial by going over to Achish, but he also lost the blessing of God upon his life. **Are you being assailed by difficulties in your Christian walk? Do not act hastily but be prayerful at all times.** Come to the throne of grace where you will obtain mercy and find grace to help you in the time of your need. The Lord will never fail you! (Hebrews 4:16). *Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding* (Proverbs 3:5).

When Saul enquired of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him

The events recorded in verses 3 to 25 took place in the time between chapters 30 and 31. Saul was terrified when he saw the massive army of the Philistines and sought God for direction but received no answer. He had despised God's word and had wilfully rebelled against the Lord. He went on to acknowledge later, '*God has departed from me and does not answer me any longer*' (15). Verse 6 is one of the most solemn and sad verses in all Scripture: *When Saul enquired of the LORD, the LORD did not answer him.*

Disobedience to God brings darkness to the soul and shuts up heaven to our cries (cp. Psalm 66:18). Herod feared John the Baptist *and heard him gladly*, but he did not repent of his sin and had John beheaded at the insistence of Herodias and his step-daughter (Mark 6:19–28). When he questioned the Lord Jesus on the day of the crucifixion, Jesus had nothing to say to him (Luke 23:7–9). **If we persist in disobeying God and insist on going our own way, the time will come when we will not be able to find the Lord (Isaiah 55:6–7).** It is very foolish to trifle with the warnings of God's word.

Though Saul had purged the land of occult practitioners (3,9), he sought guidance from a medium at Endor, asking her to bring Samuel up from the dead. Samuel had warned Saul that rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft (15:23) and now the king descended into the darkness of the occult. God strictly forbids all kinds of spiritism, fortune-telling, casting of spells and witchcraft (Deuteronomy 18:10–12). Most newspapers and magazines carry horoscopes. Never, never read them! Many of them are rubbish, but they are not harmless fun. By consulting them, you may unwittingly tap into dark powers and bring yourself into great bondage. Why should you resort to such dark practices when you can know God as your heavenly Father? He lovingly watches over you if you belong to Christ and he wisely takes care of your future. What more do you need?

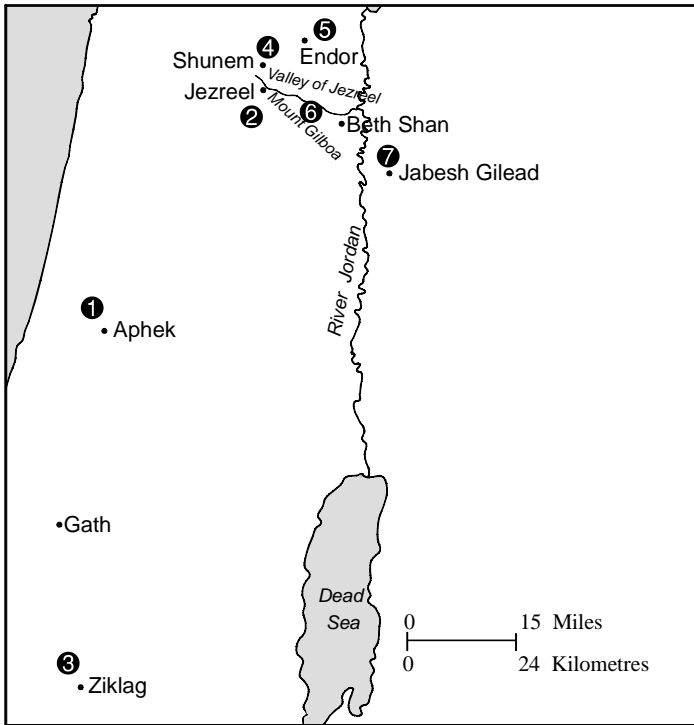
When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice

Saul should have repented of his sin when Heaven was silent to his prayers, but instead he sought a spiritist medium (6–7). This passage of Scripture is used by spiritists to support their dark practices and it raises a number of questions. What are we to make of it? We must recognise that though some mediums use trickery in their séances, many do come under the control of their spirit guides. These are evil spirits who cannot bring up the dead, but who can certainly impersonate them. *When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice* (12–13). The woman was not ‘at home’ in this situation; it was not a séance!

The dead cannot be contacted nor brought back (2 Samuel 12:23; Luke 16:26–31). **Those who die in Christ are with the Lord in heaven (2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23). Satan and his agents cannot disturb them nor have any control over them.** What then are we to make of the appearance of Samuel if these things are so? The woman cried out in fear which is out of character with the normal practice of a medium (12). She had no power to bring back Samuel. Dale Ralph Davis and many other Bible commentators believe that God permitted Samuel to go with his message for Saul (after all, Moses appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration to speak to the Lord Jesus Christ; Matthew 17:1–3). Matthew Henry believes, however, that the woman contacted an evil spirit which then came in the guise of Samuel.

The apparition censured Saul for disturbing him and condemned him for his disobedience to God (15–18). Such a thing would never happen at a normal spiritist séance where demons deceive those prepared to listen to them. The lesson of this chapter is that true security can only be found in the Lord and that those who dabble in the occult do so at their own peril: *They will ... see trouble and darkness, gloom of anguish; and they will be driven into darkness* (Isaiah 8:19–22). That is what happened to Saul!

The last days of Saul (1 Samuel chapters 28 to 31)



1 & 2. The Philistine armies assemble at Aphek while the Israelites gather at Jezreel. The Philistines refuse to allow David to fight with them and head for Jezreel without him (29:1–11).

3. David returns to Ziklag to find that it had been plundered and burned by the Amalekites whom he pursues and defeats (chapter 30).

4. In the meantime, the Philistines prepare for battle at Shunem, the Israelites at Gilboa (28:4).

5. Saul inquired of the Lord but received no answer. In desperation, he goes to a spiritist medium at Endor requesting that she bring up Samuel at a séance. Samuel tells him that he will suffer defeat and death at the hand of the Philistines the following day (28:5–25).

6. Saul and his three sons are slain on Mount Gilboa (31:1–10).

7. The men of Jabesh-Gilead recover the bodies of Saul and his sons from Beth Shan for burial at Jabesh (31:11–13).

What are these Hebrews doing here?

David had lapsed in his trust in the Lord and had compromised himself by going over to Achish, the king of Gath. He now found himself with the Philistine armies which were assembled to fight his own people. The other Philistine leaders were rightly suspicious of him and asked Achish, *‘What are these Hebrews doing here?’* (3). They feared that David would turn against them in the battle against the Israelites. They had not forgotten the song of the women of Israel, *‘Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands’* (1–5).

Achish called David to tell him of the fears of his fellow-leaders and dismissed him from his army. David remonstrated with Achish, protesting his loyalty (6–8). Achish said, *‘I know that you are as good in my sight as an angel of God’* (9). This appears to be an expression of gratitude which was common at that time (cp. 2 Samuel 14:17; 19:27). The Philistine did not know that David had deceived him on many occasions (27:8–11). We may deceive others and appear to be walking with the Lord while in reality, we are backslidden and not right with him. God knows our hearts and we cannot deceive him!

We do not know whether David was sincere in expressing his willingness to fight against Israel (8). It is hardly conceivable that he would really fight against his own people and against his best friend, Jonathan. We can see the hand of God in causing the Philistines to reject the help of David and his men. The Lord overruled his folly and spared him from doing the unthinkable. God is so gracious in his dealings with us, even when we lose heart, compromise or backslide. *If we are faithless, he remains faithful; he cannot deny himself* (2 Timothy 2:13). **Christian, If you have strayed from the Lord, could be asked, ‘What is this Christian doing here?’** Let us beware of compromising our Christian testimony by aligning ourselves with the ungodly and being led into situations which could cause us to deny the Lord.

But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God

When David and his men arrived at Ziklag, they found a scene of devastation. The Amalekites had plundered and burned the city and had taken captive all the women and children. The men were in such a state of shock and sorrow that they wept, until they had no more power to weep. David's distress was increased by some who blamed his leadership for this catastrophe and who sought to stone him (1–6). What did David do in this bitter circumstance? He *strengthened himself in the LORD his God* (6). Here we find a different David from the man who so lapsed in his faith when he went over to the Philistines!

How do we strengthen ourselves in the Lord? We must first acknowledge our complete dependence upon him. We recall his goodness to us in the past and we worship and praise him. We seek God in prayer (8) and turn to his word for encouragement. Are you feeling down-hearted? Are you at a low spiritual ebb? Do you feel like giving up that work for God which is so tough? Strengthen yourself in the Lord. He will never fail you.

David then sought God for direction and the Lord promised that they would have success against the Amalekites and that their loved-ones would be recovered (7–8). The Amalekites were a very cruel nation. One of them had an Egyptian slave and had callously abandoned him to die when the man fell sick. God providentially brought David and his men to find this slave who had not eaten nor had any water for three days. Notice that they stopped to show kindness to the slave, though they were on an urgent mission. When they heard the man's story, they found that he was able to lead them directly to the Amalekite raiders.

The slight delay experienced in showing kindness more than compensated for the valuable time saved by the information given to them by the slave. **Never be too busy to have compassion on some needy soul and to show them kindness.** The Lord gave David a great victory, the captives were released and all that had been plundered was regained (11–20).

You shall not do so with what the LORD has given us

Some of David's men are described as wicked and worthless because they did not want to share the spoils of the battle with those who had been too weary to fight (10, 21–22). David would have none of this mean-mindedness and he told them, '*You shall not do so with what the LORD has given us*' (23). They owed their victory and its gains entirely to the Lord! None of them was any more deserving than the other to receive the spoils. Some had fought and others had guarded the supplies; both tasks were necessary (24). David decreed that from that day forward, all in his army should share the spoils of victory (25). Moses had established a similar practice hundreds of years earlier (Numbers 31:25–34). David went even further on this occasion by sharing some of the spoil with his own tribe of Judah (26–31). We must cultivate a thankful, praising heart so that we will never have the fleshly, self-sufficient attitude displayed by David's men.

There is a vital spiritual principle in these verses. **We must always acknowledge that we owe what we are and what we have to the grace of God.** We must never despise other believers who do not appear to be as well-blessed as ourselves, whether in spiritual knowledge and growth, or in material things. On the day of judgment, the Lord will reward all faithful Christians including the humble saint whose work goes largely unnoticed by men (cp. Matthew 25:34–40).

*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)

All the valiant men arose

This chapter records the tragic end of Saul and his sons on Mount Gilboa. Saul's son Ishbosheth may not have been involved in the battle because he succeeded his father to the throne of Israel (cp. 2 Samuel 2:8–10). The Israelites were routed and David's brave, noble and great-hearted friend, Jonathan was among those who were slain (1–2). Saul's disobedience had terrible consequences not only for himself, but for his family and for Israel. Had he not divided the nation by his jealous attitude and hatred of David, the latter would have been fighting with him against the Philistines to give a different outcome. Our sin is never a private matter! It affects others and often divides churches and greatly hinders the progress of the gospel.

Saul knew he was so severely wounded that he would not escape death at the hand of the Philistines. Rather than let this happen, he told his armour-bearer to kill him, but the man was too afraid to do such a thing and Saul took his own life by falling on his sword (4–5). The Philistine victors found the bodies of Saul and his sons when they came to strip the slain the following day. They fastened them to the walls of Beth Shan and placed Saul's armour in one of their temples. There was great rejoicing in their idol temples but they did not realise that Saul's death would make way, in God's purposes, for David, who would defeat them and break their grip on Israel (2 Samuel 5:17–25).

The people of Jabesh-Gilead had never forgotten the kindness of Saul to them (see chapter 11). *All the valiant men arose* and travelled through the night to recover the bodies of Saul and his sons from the walls of Beth Shan. They were determined that they should be given an honourable burial in Jabesh (11–13). *Valiant men* had to do something about the shame that had befallen their king and country. They were prepared to risk their lives on a very dangerous mission. **Do you have such qualities of faithfulness, fearlessness and self-sacrifice? They will be needed some day in the work of the Lord.**

PSALMS

The title ‘The Book of Psalms’ is used in the New Testament (Luke 20:42; Acts 1:20). The Greek word (‘Psalmos’) is a translation of the Hebrew title (‘Mizmor’) used in 57 of the Psalms. ‘Mizmor’ is a song which is accompanied by a stringed instrument. David wrote almost half of the Psalms; other writers include Moses (Psalm 90), Solomon (Psalms 72; 127) and Asaph (Psalms 50; 73 to 80).

The Psalms have always been a hymn book for the church as they were for Israel (cp. Ephesians 5:19). They are a rich devotional handbook which we should know well and continually use. They encourage us to worship God. They give us much insight into the blessings, struggles and moods of a saint of God in various circumstances — in joy and in sorrow; in trial and in rest; in danger and in peace; in defeat and in victory; in penitence and in praise; in doubt and in trust. The Psalms are a great antidote to the false teaching that gives the impression that the Christian should always be on the ‘mountain-top’ of rejoicing and blessing, living above struggles or sorrow.

Hebrew Poetry is not based on rhyme or metre as is usual with English verse, but uses a number of devices, the most common being parallelism. In parallelism, a similar or a contrasting thought is expressed:-

Psalm 30:5 *Weeping may endure for a night,
But joy comes in the morning.*

Proverbs 15:20 *A wise son makes a father glad,
But a foolish man despises his mother.*

Another device is the use of acrostics, eg. Psalm 119 which has 22 sets of 8 verses, one set for each letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In each set, every verse starts with the same letter of the alphabet, eg. verses 1–8 all begin with the same letter ‘Aleph’.

I warmly commend C.H. Spurgeon’s commentary on the Psalms, ‘THE TREASURY OF DAVID’.

Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?

Some commentators believe that this psalm was written after the return of the Jews from exile in Babylon, but I am inclined to agree with Spurgeon that this song was penned when the land was oppressed by the Philistines and that it anticipates the peaceful years of David's own reign. The first three verses speak of the restoration of the nation to God; there is then a prayer for further blessing (4–7). The psalm closes with promises of blessing (8–13).

The psalmist acknowledges the goodness of God to his people:

- *'LORD, you have been favourable to your land; you have brought back the captivity of Jacob'* (1).
- *'You have forgiven the iniquity of your people; you have covered all their sin'* (2).
- *'You have taken away all your wrath'* (3). We must always remember that God is angry with sinners and that he will punish those who refuse to repent of their sin (Romans 1:18; 2 Thessalonians 1:6–9). When sin is forgiven, divine wrath is removed and we are no longer under condemnation (Romans 8:1). We owe so much to the Lord for saving us from judgment and wrath. He is worthy of our love and worship.

We live in barren times with widespread spiritual apathy around us. We have seen much better days when God visited us and brought many thousands into his kingdom. False religions are now flourishing and the churches are generally weak. Is not all this an evidence of the anger and judgment of the Lord? We need to repent of our lukewarmness and prayerlessness! We need to pray, *'Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?'* (6). When God visits his people (*glory dwelling in the land*, 9) there is great joy, there is mercy, there is truth, there is righteousness and peace (10–11). The psalm closes with a note of expectation of God's blessing (12–13). **Let us pray earnestly that God will revive his church so that his great name will be honoured and many sinners will be saved.**

Unite my heart to fear your name

The title of this psalm is ‘A prayer of David’ and it can be divided into three sections, each ending with a note of gratitude or confidence (1–7, 8–13, 14–17). This is the prayer of a godly man (*holy*, 2) and because he has been set apart to God, he can expect the Lord to bow down his ear to hear his prayer (1–2). Spurgeon comments, ‘It is not self-righteous in good men to plead their innocence as a reason for escaping from the results of sin wrongfully ascribed to them; penitents do not bedaub themselves with mire for the love of it.’ For David, prayer was a way of life (3–4). How did he pray for himself?

- He worshipped and praised God (5,8–10, 12–13).
- He encouraged himself in the goodness and mercy of God: ‘*For you, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon you*’ (5).
- He expressed his desire to know God’s way and to walk in his truth (11). One of the Puritans, Thomas Watson, once said, ‘Let the word be the sundial by which you set your life.’
- He wanted to be rid of all double-mindedness and he prayed, ‘*Unite my heart to fear your name*’ (11). When our hearts are free from divided loyalties and when we are single-minded in our desire to please the Lord, we will be whole-hearted in our praise of God (12).
- He prayed for personal protection from his enemies (14,16). He was confident that God would answer him in the day of trouble (7).
- He did not pray for the destruction of his enemies but rather that they would be ashamed. God is abundant in mercy and can save them too (15,17)!

Some misguided souls who have only a superficial knowledge of the Bible allege that the Old Testament shows God to be harsh and lacking in love. That is nonsense; God does not change! Look at the grand description of God’s goodness, mercy, compassion in verse 15. **If your heart is not right with the Lord, turn to him now.** You will then prove the words of David, ‘*For you, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon you*’ (5).

Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God!

Jerusalem (Zion) has been very special to the Jews ever since David established it as his royal city and as the centre of worship at the tabernacle and then in the temple. This psalm and Psalm 48 speak of the beauty of the city: *Glorious things are spoken of you, O city of God!* (3). The church is now all important; it is *'the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem'* (Hebrews 12:22; cp. Galatians 4:26). John Newton reflects this in his hymn, 'Glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion city of our God.'

When a child is born, the birth is registered by the parents and the birth certificate is often needed to obtain various documents, eg. passports. God also registers the names of all those who come to faith in Christ and who follow him (Hebrews 12:23). The psalmist speaks of those born in Jerusalem, individuals from various nations, all registered by the Lord (4–6). *'This one was born there'* is found three times in these verses. *'Rahab'* (4) refers to Egypt. These verses look forward to the time when people from all nations are saved and are gathered into the church (cp. Colossians 3:11).

The Lord loves his church which is his body (Ephesians 1:22–23; 5:25). **If the Jews could be so enthusiastic and joyful about Jerusalem (7), how much more should we rejoice in our privilege of belonging to Christ's church!** Let us pray that God will be pleased to bring many to new life in Christ and that they will come into our local church.

*Saviour, since of Zion's city
I through grace a member am,
Let the world deride or pity,
I will glory in thy name.
Fading is the worldling's pleasure,
All his boasted pomp and show;
Solid joys and lasting treasure
None but Zion's children know.*

(John Newton)

My soul is full of troubles

Heman and Ethan, the writers of Psalms 88 and 89 were wise men (1 Kings 4:31), but wise men are not immune from sorrow and despair. The words, ‘*O LORD, God of my salvation*’ (1) are the only rays of comfort in this psalm that is full of gloom and lacking in hope. The psalmist was so overwhelmed with trouble, affliction and sickness that he felt close to death (3–9). He felt trapped, shut up and unable to escape (6–8). His loved ones and friends had deserted him and he felt that God had cast off his soul (8,14,18).

There are times when a Christian may pass through a dark valley of perplexity, trial and sorrow when he seems to have no hope. His prayers seem to meet with the silence of heaven and there appears to be no hope in death. The questions in verses 10 to 12 are unanswered in this psalm, but we know that when the believer dies, he goes to be with the Lord in heaven. He will praise the Lord! He will not be *in the place of destruction* (11) but in glory, where he will sing of God’s lovingkindness and faithfulness. He will continually rejoice in God’s wonders and in his righteousness.

The psalmist said, ‘*My soul is full of troubles*’ (3) but he did not abandon prayer. He acknowledged the God of his salvation and cried out to him day and night (1–2,9,13). **This is surely an encouragement for us to turn to God in prayer when our souls are full of troubles!** Our dearest Friend, the Lord Jesus Christ, went through a deep valley of sorrow and suffering to save us from sin. He felt abandoned by God the Father as he hung on the cross (Mark 15:34) so that we would never be forsaken by God. Let us trust in him in all of our trials and troubles; he will never fail us or forsake us (Hebrews 13:5)!

*When all around my soul gives way
He then is all my hope and stay.
On Christ the solid Rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand .* (Edward Mote)

I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever

The Hebrew Scriptures divide the Psalms into five books, each ending with a doxology. Psalm 89 is the last psalm in Book Three (73 to 89). C. H. Spurgeon describes it as ‘the majestic covenant psalm’ (‘THE TREASURY OF DAVID’). This lovely psalm begins with a reminder of the Lord’s mercies, faithfulness and greatness (1–18). *I will sing of the mercies of the LORD forever; with my mouth will I make known your faithfulness to all generations* (1). The psalm then continues with a description of the covenant which the Lord made with David (19–37; cp. verse 3). The psalm then has a lament concerning the calamity which had befallen the house of David and a prayer that God would again show his covenant mercies to the house of David (38–51).

The *mercies* (translated ‘steadfast love’ in the English Standard Version) and *faithfulness* of God are truly wonderful. The word ‘*faithfulness*’ is found in verses 1, 2, 5, 8, 24 and 33. Think about the *mercies* associated with our salvation– the glorious gift of God’s holy Son to die for us, the gift of forgiveness and cleansing from sin, the gift of peace with God, the gift of free access into God’s presence, the gift of eternal life, the gift of an inheritance in heaven, the gift of God’s word to guide us. There are also other mercies such as daily blessings and provision from the hand of God who is faithful. We have so much cause to praise him.

God is glorious in his awesome power and unfailing goodness and he is supreme over all the angelic beings (5–6). **Let us worship and serve him with reverence and godly fear (7; cp. Hebrews 12:28)!**

*Thy mercy, my God,
Is the theme of my song,
The joy of my heart,
And the boast of my tongue;
Thy free grace alone,
From the first to the last,
Hath won my affections,
And bound my soul fast.*

(John Stocker)

Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound

Who is this God who is unchanging in all of his mercies and goodness, who will never fail in all his faithfulness (33)? He is the only God, the almighty One who is glorious and invincible in his power (8–10). His miracle in parting the Red Sea to destroy the Egyptians is recalled (10 – Egypt is sometimes referred to as ‘*Rahab*’ in the Old Testament).

We are reminded that God created all the universe (11–12). Many people have a very mistaken notion of God. They believe that he is a benign power, limited by our will. They could not be further from the truth. Our God is strong! *You have a mighty arm; strong is your hand, and high is your right hand*’ (13). He is the God of righteousness, justice, mercy and truth: *Righteousness and justice are the foundation of your throne; mercy and truth go before your face* (14). God is too powerful to fail, too wise to make a mistake, too righteous to be unfair, too good and gracious to be unkind. What an encouragement and comfort it is to know this, especially when we are experiencing trials and difficulties. We have every reason to rejoice in him (16).

Blessed are the people who know the joyful sound! They walk, O LORD, in the light of your countenance (15). ‘*The joyful sound*’ is the praise of God’s people and how blessed are those who worship and praise God! To walk in the light of God’s countenance is to enjoy his favour. What a wonderful thing it is to be favoured by God who strengthens us and defends us (18). **Let us bring to the Lord our joyful praises!**

*And will this sovereign King
Of glory condescend?
And will he write his name
My Father and my Friend?
I love his name, I love his word,
Join all my powers to praise the Lord.*

(Isaac Watts)