

David, the shepherd who became king

Volume 4

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Preface

This fourth volume in the series on the life of David records a period in his life where he experienced what we might call many ups and downs. David is now established as king over all of Israel. There are great joys, but also deep sorrows that David went through, and we will find many parallels to our own lives and experiences. We see David climbing to great heights of love and devotion to God and graciousness to others. Then by contrast we see him falling into the deep valley of sin and disobedience of such a grievous nature. The Bible records it all for us to learn from so as to avoid David's errors and to imitate his obedience and love. Overriding all of these things is the gracious hand of the Lord and his merciful dealings with his servant. We see God as the sovereign Lord of history who is in control of all things. We see him as a God of remarkable patience and grace. We also see him as the Holy One who cannot tolerate sin and who must deal with it, but who also is amazingly merciful and kind to those who truly repent. Someone wrote to me once saying that

the biblical record of David is so human, and that is true because the Lord honestly records the experience of this man. In his life we inevitably see a reflection of our own. It is also a record that is so full of God; the God who did not spare his own dear Son but delivered him up for the salvation of sinners like David and ourselves. May we all fix our eyes on the God of grace, and by his help walk with him each day of our lives.

Derek French

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Chapter 1: David Brings the Ark To Jerusalem – 2 Samuel 6

Introduction

In the early chapters of 1 Samuel we read of a disaster that came upon the nation of Israel. They were defeated by the Philistines. This was an act of judgement from the Lord for their persistent ungodliness, particularly the two sons of Eli the priest, Hophni and Phinehas. (See 1 Sam 4.) The result was that these two were killed and the ark of God was captured. The ark was normally kept in the most holy place in the tabernacle (Exod 25:10-22). The news of this disaster so shook Eli that he fell backwards off his chair and broke his neck and died. However, the hand of God was against the Philistines while the ark remained in their presence and so they decided to return it to Israel. (See 1 Sam 6.) They placed the ark on a new cart and sent it back. When it arrived at Beth Shemesh the people rejoiced and

sacrificed to the Lord, but some of the men looked into the ark – something that God had forbidden in Numbers 4:17-20. The result was 70 men were struck dead by the Lord for their irreverence. The ark was the place where God had manifested his presence among Israel and therefore it was to be treated with great honour and respect. Their failure was very costly. The result of all this was that the ark was sent to Kiriath Jearim, also known as Baalah of Judah, to Abinadab who consecrated his son Eleazer to guard the Ark. And it remained there throughout Saul's reign (1 Chron 13:3).

1) A Good Intention, verses 1-5

Now that David was established as king over the whole nation, and after consultation with his officers (1 Chron 13:1), he planned to bring the ark of God back to Jerusalem. We must say that this desire was a good one. It was right that God should be honoured at the very centre of the nation and as Jerusalem was David's capital it was the obvious place for it to be situated so that God may be honoured at the centre of their national life. We read in I Samuel 6:2:

“He and all his men set out from Baalah of Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the Name, the name of the Lord Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim that are on the ark.”

We are told of the ark's special significance in this verse and also the greatness of the Lord. He is the Lord Almighty, the sovereign King over all events and the one whose power knows no limits. He is not some lifeless idol of man's making, but the eternal God, Lord of all. The ark is described as *'called by the Name.'* This often signifies ownership in Scripture (see 2 Sam 12:28; Dt 28:19; Isa 4:1; Isa 63:19). Here the Lord was enthroned between the cherubim. And so David was acknowledging that the Lord was king over his own life and that of the nation. Hence his desire to put God's ark at the centre of national life was a potent symbol of this great truth. David's desire was good and right and proper. This was something his predecessor Saul had ignored at great cost to himself and the people, but David wanted to put God first and he wanted the people to do the same. Their agreement with him in this was so good and right and their celebration so fitting (v5). Indeed, the Lord should have the most prominent place in the life of all God's people at all times. This was part of the reason why Paul wrote in Colossians 1:15-18 concerning the Lord Jesus Christ:

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning

and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.”

2) A Solemn Discipline, verses 6-11

We must always remember with spiritual matters that we have to do things in God’s way. Failure is to dishonour God even if our motives are good. This is of the utmost seriousness as these next few verses make so plain. The ark of God was placed on a new cart and Uzzah and Ahio were guiding it (v4). This was the first mistake. God had ordered that the ark was only ever to be carried on the shoulders of the Levites. It had two large poles inserted in rings on its side for the purpose. God had stipulated this in a number of places.

Exodus 25:12-14 “Cast four gold rings for it and fasten them to its four feet, with two rings on one side and two rings on the other. Then make poles of acacia wood and overlay them with gold. Insert the poles into the rings on the sides of the chest to carry it.”

Numbers 4:5-6 “When the camp is to move, Aaron and his sons are to go in and take down the shielding curtain and cover the ark of the Testimony with it. Then they are to cover this with hides of sea cows, spread a cloth of solid blue over that and put the poles in place.”

Numbers 4:15 “After Aaron and his sons have finished covering the holy furnishings and all the holy articles, and when the camp is ready to move, the Kohathites are to come to do the carrying. But they must not touch the holy things or they will die. The Kohathites are to carry those things that are in the Tent of Meeting.”

David had completely ignored this clear instruction, and had reverted to what the ungodly Philistines had done when they returned the ark to Israel by using a cart! In fact, according to 1 Chronicles 15:13, David had failed to enquire of the Lord what the prescribed way was to carry the ark, but this seems to have been lost sight of in all the celebrations. However, as the journey progressed and came to the threshing floor of Nacon, the oxen pulling the cart stumbled and Uzzah immediately put out his hand and took hold of the ark of God. To human reasoning this seems a harmless action, even helpful if it stopped the ark from falling to the ground. But this was the ark of God and it was as if Uzzah had forgotten this. He was strictly forbidden to touch it on penalty of death because he was a Levite not a priest! Had the fact that the ark had been in his home for some time led him to act presumptuously? It seems to have been so. The Bible commentator Matthew Henry says: *“Familiarity even with that which is most awful, is apt to breed contempt.”* The result was most solemn.

2 Samuel 6v7 *“The Lord’s anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down and he died there beside the ark of God.”*

Because he had not followed the clear instructions about handling the ark the Lord considered his action as *‘irreverent’* and his anger burned against him because of this and he died. We can also add that the Lord was well able to protect the ark himself without the intervention of Uzzah.

Lessons:

- (i) The end does not justify the means! David’s good intentions were undertaken in a wrong way.
- (ii) Those who claim to serve the Lord as their King must acknowledge his rule with absolute seriousness. Failure will have solemn consequences. We see this with Aaron’s two sons Nadab and Abihu who offered unauthorised fire in their incense burners and who died as a result in Leviticus 10:1-2. We see the same with Achan who sinned against God by taking some gold, silver and a robe from the city of Jericho when everything was to be devoted to the Lord . He died (Josh 7:24-25). The same lesson is taught in Acts 5:1-11 with Ananias and Sapphira who lied over selling their land saying they gave all the proceeds to the Lord when they kept some

themselves. Their disobedience led to their deaths. Some in the Corinthian Church had been afflicted with sickness and some had died because they came to the Lord’s Table in the wrong attitude (1 Cor 11:27-32).

- (iii) When worshipping the Lord we should learn to *‘rejoice with trembling’* (Psalm 2:11) and never consider it a light matter but to have our hearts filled with holy fear. Remember that without holiness no one will see the Lord (Hebs 12:14).
- (iv) If the ark of the old covenant was so sacred, what about the blood of the new covenant? And what will be the end of those who trample the blood of Christ under their feet by their disregard of him! (See Hebrews 10:29.)

How careful we must be to examine our motives and actions at all times to ensure we are acting in accord with all God has made clear in the Bible, the holy Scriptures. Sadly we can all too easily make light of our disobedience. This incident in David’s life and the others we have cited make it clear that we need much help from the Lord to truly follow him in a way that pleases him. It also shows what hypocrites we are when we claim to be believers and to accept the Lordship of Christ yet tolerate flippancy and carelessness in our own approach to God. May we ever come before him with godly fear and loving reverence at all times, careful to act as he has directed us.

David's response was really not what it should have been in verse 8:

“Then David was angry because the Lord's wrath had broken out against Uzzah...”

Resentment, rather than repentance and humility, rose in his heart. He should have realised that something had been seriously wrong but he did not seek the Lord to tell him what it was, nor search the Scriptures. What is man that we should question God, which is really what David was doing by his anger, claiming God had no right to act as he did. He was also very afraid and refused to let the ark come to him, but instead arranged for it to be kept in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite. Again an over reaction for he should have said, ‘Let it come to me and I will learn from what has happened and treat the ark of God with respect.’ But Obed-Edom, a Levite, even though he knew of the solemn event that had just taken place welcomed the ark of God into his house. The ark was there for three months and the Lord blessed Obed-Edom and his entire family (v11). That which was a savour of death unto death for Uzzah was a savour of life unto life for Obed-Edom, for the Lord rewarded his humble service.

3) A Lesson Learned, verses 12-23

After three months David was told that the Lord had blessed Obed-Edom because of the ark of God and this stirred David again to go and bring it up to Jerusalem. A

reading of the parallel passage in 1 Chronicles 15 tells us that during those three months David had considered the incident with Uzzah in a more careful and spiritual way. We know this because he told the Levites to consecrate themselves so they could carry the ark, the very thing that they had failed to do previously.

1 Chronicles 15:11-13 *“Then David summoned Zadok and Abiathar the priests, and Uriel, Asaiah, Joel, Shemaiah, Eliel and Amminadab the Levites. He said to them, ‘You are the heads of the Levitical families; you and your fellow Levites are to consecrate yourselves and bring up the ark of the Lord, the God of Israel, to the place I have prepared for it. It was because you, the Levites, did not bring it up the first time that the Lord our God broke out in anger against us. We did not enquire of him about how to do it in the prescribed way.’”*

The lesson had been well learned. Sometimes it takes us a little time to recognise the obvious! How like the disciples of Jesus we are (see Luke 24:25), and like David, namely, slow to learn at times. But it is better to learn late than not to learn at all. We must also remember that sometimes we can be too late so this should never be an excuse for carelessness on our behalf, but on this occasion David had grasped the significance of his failure. He reformed and amended his behaviour so it was in line with God's Word. The result was that the ark was brought in the prescribed way (v13). And after the first six steps David sacrificed a

bull and a fattened calf to the Lord. The probable reason for this was twofold:

- i. That David realised his need to atone for his previous errors.
- ii. That David could see the Lord had not broken out in anger against the men carrying the ark and therefore he was profoundly grateful.

In all of this David expressed his great joy, verses 14-15.

“David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the Lord with all his might, while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouts and the sound of trumpets.”

Matthew Henry comments: *“...he leaped for joy, as one transported with the occasion, and the more because of the disappointment he met with the last time. It is a pleasure to a good man to see his errors rectified and himself in the way of his duty. His dancing, I suppose, was not artificial, by any certain rule or measure, nor do we find that any danced with him; but it was a natural expression of his great joy and exultation of mind. He did it with all his might; so we should perform all our religious services, as those that are intent upon them and desire to do them in the best manner. All our might is little enough to be employed in holy duties: the work deserves it all.”*

We are told David wore a linen ephod, something Samuel also wore in 1 Samuel 2:18 and was probably a very simple garment. This would have involved David in removing his normal clothes and replacing them with this ephod. As they approached Jerusalem David's wife Michal saw him from a window and sadly we are told she despised him for his zeal for the Lord (v16). David had pitched a tent for the ark and it was settled there. This is not the tabernacle which Moses built for that was still at Gibeon (2 Chron 1:13). Again David offered further sacrifices: burnt offerings and fellowship offerings in thankfulness to God and to seek his continued favour (v17). Then he blessed all the people (v18) in the Lord's name, desiring the goodness of God to rest upon them for their faithfulness to the Lord. What a godly example David was setting as a leader of the nation of Israel. So rarely do we find modern day leaders giving such a godly example and desiring the true blessing of God on their people. How we need to pray that God will raise up such godly leaders for our world today. Sadly it is often the reverse when seemingly good men gain high position they change and become corrupt bringing great disappointment and so often misery on their people. We need more Davids. David then gave everyone in attendance a present of a loaf of bread and two cakes, one of raisins and one of dates. All the men and women there received these tokens of the king's love.

4) A Disappointment Faced, verses 20-23

When David returned home on this joyful day of worship he did not receive the welcome we could have expected. He went home to bless his household, and his wife Michal, Saul's daughter, went out to meet him, but all she could do was to criticise David for the way he behaved. She evidently did not share his enthusiasm for the things of God (v20).

“When David returned home to bless his household, Michal daughter of Saul came out to meet him and said, ‘How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, disrobing in the sight of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would.’”

She considered his behaviour to be despicable and embarrassing that he should have expressed his zeal before the slave girls. The disrobing probably refers to him exchanging his ordinary clothes for the linen ephod he wore. She thought this was behaviour below one who was the king of the nation. She was ashamed of him. Pride was raising its ugly head in her heart! We see her sinfulness and ingratitude and total disrespect for the man who had brought her into his household again and who was the godly king of Israel. How sad this was that she did not share her husband's joy in the Lord and his goodness and mercy. But David refused to give in to her criticisms which are so typical of those who are opposed to the things of God. He told her that what he had done was done before the Lord, not before the slave girls. Her corrupt interpretation of events was firmly corrected. Further he

was prepared to be even more undignified if it meant bringing honour to the Lord (v21-22).

“David said to Michal, ‘It was before the Lord, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the Lord's people Israel—I will celebrate before the Lord. I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honour.’”

David firmly rebuked her ungodly attitude. He reminded her that the Lord had chosen him to be king above her father and therefore he would worship the Lord with all his might. Honouring God is more important than anything else, even if it means we may be humiliated in the eyes of others. In the presence of God David humbled himself and would continue to do so and as a result would in fact be honoured by the slave girls for his godliness. Solemnly we are told that God punished Michal for this attitude in her heart and she remained childless all her life (v23). We are reminded that a person will reap what they sow.

Galatians 6:7-8 “Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.”

1 Samuel 2:30 *“But now the Lord declares: ‘Far be it from me! Those who honour me I will honour, but those who despise me will be disdained.’”*

May we be careful to be amongst those who honour the Lord throughout our whole lives.

Chapter 2: The Lord’s Amazing Promise - 2 Samuel 7

Introduction

The chapter we are about to look at in the life of David, namely 2 Samuel chapter 7, is one of the most important chapters in the history of redemption in the Bible, even if the opening verses do not give that impression. One of the great ways that God deals with men and women is by entering into what is called a ‘covenant relationship’ with us. He did not simply create the world and man and then leave us to ourselves. That was never his plan. His purpose was to bring us into a relationship with himself. Covenants are between two parties, Biblically speaking, between God and man. Covenants also have conditions attached to them. This means that men and women are answerable to him because he is a covenant keeping God. Right at the beginning of the world God entered into a covenant with Adam. He placed him in the Garden of Eden and laid before him the terms of his covenant in Genesis 2:15-17:

“The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the

Lord God commanded the man, ‘You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.’”

God’s instructions were very clear, and this has been called ‘the covenant of works’. If Adam obeyed God he would live, if he disobeyed he would die. We are all too aware that Adam failed and fell into sin and plunged the whole human race into ruin as death came upon us all (see Romans 5:12 & v18). But then God revealed himself by a new covenant, often called ‘the covenant of grace’. It began when he made the most remarkable promise when he cursed the serpent who had tempted Adam in Genesis 3:15:

“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

We now know that the ‘offspring’ or ‘seed’ of the woman was none other than the Lord Jesus Christ (see Gal 3:14 & 29, Acts 3:22-26). God would bring deliverance of his people through Christ crushing Satan. As time passed the Lord unfolded this covenant of grace in greater detail. God assured Abraham that through him all peoples on earth would be blessed (Gen 12:1-3) and Jesus was the direct descendant of Abraham through whom God would accomplish this blessing. And this is developed further as the Biblical record proceeds. It is called ‘the covenant of

grace' because it declares God's provision of salvation as his gift and not something that can be gained by our works or by earning merit by our own efforts. We simply have to receive it through faith in Christ, who through his life and death and resurrection achieved all that is required by God because he paid the penalty of sin on our behalf. This covenant of grace reaches its final declaration in the Old Testament through the prophecy of Jeremiah 31:31-34:

“‘The time is coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their forefathers when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them,’ declares the Lord. ‘This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after that time,’ declares the Lord. ‘I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying, “Know the Lord,” because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,’ declares the Lord. ‘For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.’”

And the book of Hebrews helps us to see the fulfilment of this in Christ (Heb 8). Here in 2 Samuel 7 we have that part of the covenant of grace that is called the Davidic covenant.

1) A Human Plan, verses 1-3

a. A period of peace, verse 1

Back in 2 Samuel 5:11 we learned that Hiram had sent David cedar logs and stonemasons to build him a palace and now all that work was completed.. We are told in verse 1:

“After the king was settled in his palace and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him...”

His kingdom had been fully established both within Israel and amongst its surrounding nations. We need to note carefully that it was *‘the Lord’* who gave this to David. And that is a reminder that even when we have had to use our own skills and efforts any blessing that results is really because of the Lord's grace to us. We owe him everything, just as David did, and the glory and praise belongs to God alone. Lest anyone wants to protest our taking such a position, a few simple questions will show the rightness of this statement. Who gave David the strength to fight his enemies? The Lord. Who gave David the skill and wisdom to overcome his enemies? The Lord. Who protected him so his enemies did not kill him? The Lord. Who gave David the air he needed to breath in order to fight against his enemies? The Lord. Who sustained David's life so he could accomplish all of this? The Lord. In other words the source of it all was down to God; therefore it is so right that we too acknowledge the same

for each blessing that comes into our own lives. It has come from the Lord.

b. A plan devised, verses 2-3

As David considered his favoured position something occurred to his mind that seemed not quite right. He reasoned that it seemed unjust that he should be living in his fine cedar palace, while the ark of God remained in a tent. We remember that 2 Samuel 6 ended with David safely bringing the ark to Jerusalem where David had pitched a tent for it (2 Sam 6:17) and to David this just did not seem right. We can follow his reasoning without any difficulty. Here he was in a permanent and comfortable house, whereas the Lord's ark was in a temporary and flimsy tent. Really it was God who deserved the permanent dwelling place for his ark, not David. God had blessed him so much and David wanted to express his thankfulness to the Lord (v2):

“...he said to Nathan the prophet, ‘Here I am living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent.’”

It is clear what was in David's mind even though he did not actually say it. He wanted to build a house for the Lord's ark. Indeed, Nathan recognised immediately what David meant and so gave his reply (v3):

“Nathan replied to the king, ‘Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the Lord is with you.’”

David could not have asked for more encouragement. To Nathan, David's desire seemed honourable, good and right. David's motives and intentions were for the glory of God and to Nathan it seemed a fitting response for all the Lord's goodness to David. How good to see a truly grateful heart in a man of God. We live in a very selfish world which can rub off on the Lord's children too. How easy to forget to thank the Lord for his many goodnesses to us, and how much worse to deliberately neglect to do that. David's attitude and motive are a challenge to us.

2) A Divine Rejection, verses 4-7

BUT, though David's reasoning was good and honourable, that does not necessarily mean it was the right thing to do. Plainly there was no sinful motive behind David's desires, because he wanted to honour the Lord, but what did the Lord think of his plans? That was the real issue. David and Nathan retired to their beds for the night, happy with what they had agreed to do, but Nathan did not rest for long because the Lord spoke to him (v5-7):

“Go and tell my servant David, ‘This is what the Lord says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to

shepherd my people Israel, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?””

Now note carefully what is being declared here. First David is not rebuked for his desire, nor is the plan to build a house for the ark of God dismissed entirely. Rather, the Lord is telling David, “Not you and not yet.” The way he reasons is quite clear, for the Lord had never asked any of the leaders of his people to build a permanent house for the ark. God had always moved with his people and so a tent was the ideal dwelling place for the ark. He was telling David that he was quite content with things as they were for the present time and this would have considerably eased any sense of disappointment David may have felt. The Lord was teaching him that he did not want a cedar temple yet until he had made a secure place for his people first. This comes out a little later in the passage in verse 10:

“And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people shall not oppress them any more, as they did at the beginning.”

And this is really nothing more than a fulfilment of what he had said through Moses (Deut 12:10-11):

“...you will cross the Jordan and settle in the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance, and he

will give you rest from all your enemies around you so that you will live in safety. Then to the place the Lord your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name—there you are to bring everything I command you: your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, and all the choice possessions you have vowed to the Lord.”

We see here the amazing grace and condescension of the Lord in wanting to do good for his people **before** they build him a temple. He will not enjoy rest until his people enjoy rest first! He is the God who stoops down to share the hardships of his people and who is not ashamed to say he has been moving around with us. Here we see the remarkable closeness of God to his people. And this is always how God acts in his grace. He takes the initiative, and he blesses first, and blesses those who really are unworthy of his grace. Paul helpfully reminds us about this in his statement concerning the salvation that Christian believers enjoy in Christ in Ephesians 2:8-9:

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no-one can boast.”

Note as an important aside the responsibility God gave to each of the leaders of his people. They were commanded “...to shepherd my people Israel...” We have noted this responsibility earlier in this series, but it is a reminder to us that God expects leaders to truly care for their people and

not to treat them with contempt and certainly never to exploit them. In a sense this is true for all rulers of nations for they will have to render account to the Lord for how they have conducted themselves. Those who have been corrupt, cruel, unjust, dishonest, or unkind in any way will have to give account to Almighty God and if found wanting will be called to face the eternal consequences of their behaviour. That is one of the many reasons why we should pray for those in leadership over us, that they will govern our countries in an honourable way. Paul urged Timothy to pray for those in authority over us in 1 Timothy 2:1-4:

“I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”

This is even more true for leaders of the Lord’s people in the church of Christ for we read in Hebrews 13:17:

“...They keep watch over you as men who must give an account...”

All of God’s servants should serve with a shepherd’s heart of tender loving care for the flock of God, and never abuse their position for their own gain or prestige and never

abuse the Lord’s people. Returning to David, the Lord was saying to him that he did not want David to build him a house. We know that later on it was Solomon who was going to build the temple for the Lord, so David had to learn to submit his desires to the Lord’s sovereign will. A lesson from this incident is something we see elsewhere in Scripture, namely that God’s servants often mean well but lack the wisdom of God. How this should ever keep us humble in our walk with God! How we need the Lord’s help in everything we do, even those with the highest of motives! How this also reminds us not to put our trust in men, even godly men like David, but to put our trust in the Lord alone! Not everything that seems right is in fact in accord with what is God’s will for us at any particular time. Whilst our desires may not be sinful they also may not be what the Lord requires. Romans 12:2 speaks of God’s will in this way:

“his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

We always need to pray that the Lord will give us the discernment necessary to recognise what his will is. Lest we think this was going to be a crushing rebuke to David, the Lord had more for him to know and so he speaks to Nathan further.

3) A Glorious Promise, verses 8-17

The verses in this section can be summarised in this way: David was not to build a house for the Lord because the

Lord was going to build a house for David (see v11). In so doing David was given a promise that far exceeded anything he had ever considered before. A promise with messianic and eternal consequences.

a. The Lord remindeds David of what he had already done for him, verses 8-9a

“Now then, tell my servant David, ‘This is what the Lord Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you...”

This is a little summary of God’s grace which David had already experienced. God had chosen him to be the leader of his people. God did it. God had been with David wherever he had been. God did it. God had defeated his enemies. God did it. God had already lavished his grace on his servant again and again. It is like John’s description of God’s grace to each Christian believer in John 1:16:

“From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another...” or “grace upon grace.”

And the Lord had done this without David ever being required to build him a temple. Each Christian believer can testify to the similar way in which God has dealt with us. Long before we ever thought about him he provided us with a Saviour. God did it. Long before we ever even

thought about our need of his mercy he convicted us of our sins and made us aware of our great need. God did it. Long before we could ever have devised a way of escape he provided us with a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. God did it. We too have received grace upon grace from his hand. What a wonderful God the Lord is!

b. The Lord taught David of what he would do for him and Israel in the future, verses 9b-11

These are amongst the most astonishing and glorious words David had ever heard. Without him doing anything for the Lord the Lord was going to do great things for David (v9c)!

“Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth.”

The Lord had already made David’s name great and now he was about to make it even greater without David doing a single thing to build him a temple (v10-11a):

“And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people shall not oppress them any more, as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.”

David's kingship would be established in order to bring rest to God's people. David's greatness was not for his own prestige, although undoubtedly prestige came to him, but there was a greater purpose, the good of God's people and all this without any mention of the need to build a temple. It was all of God's grace, verse 11c.

"The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you..."

The reference to 'a house for you' is about much more than a literal building for David to live in. After all David already had his cedar palace (v2). The Lord was promising David that his dynasty would be established, that his family would be the royal line for the future in order to bring rest to the people of God. Dale Ralph Davies has written: The Lord "... intends David's kingship to inaugurate a new era; he means to end the terror, trembling, and turmoil of the judges' years." The Lord "...wants his people to have a home and to enjoy it in safety." Sadly we know that after David's time the Davidic kings failed to secure a safe place long term for the Lord's people to live and eventually they were exiled in a foreign land. However, the Lord's purpose and intention declared to David in 2 Samuel 7 was never changed by God, and it is still his ultimate purpose for his people. The remainder of the Bible declares this so clearly and God will never abandon his children until he brings them to a city that is eternally safe. That will be the new Jerusalem in the new heaven and new earth that God will bring into being on the last day. We are told it will be

so secure and God's people will be so safe that the doors of that city will never need to be closed. For a full description of this glorious future for the people of God read Revelation 21 & 22. Its inhabitants are described like this in Revelation 21:27:

"Nothing impure will ever enter it, nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life."

c. The Lord's promise concerning Solomon and beyond, verses 12-16

The Lord very graciously assured David that his word would be fulfilled long after David's life had come to an end. The immediate reference was to David's son Solomon (v12):

"When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom."

This was the exact opposite to the line of King Saul which concluded when he died. For David's line there was hope long into the future. Once Israel were secure in the land, then attention could be given to the temple David had desired to build for the Lord (v13).

“He (i.e. David’s son Solomon) is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever.”

And then the Lord assured David he would treat his son in a remarkably gracious way, disciplining him when necessary but never removing his love from him (v14-15):

“I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you.”

And then the Lord concludes with this glorious promise (v16):

“Your house and your kingdom shall endure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.”

This meant that God had chosen David and his line to have eternal consequences. Note that the Lord assured David that death, sin nor the passage of time would be able to hinder him fulfilling his promise. Now we have already noted the Davidic kings failed to fulfil the Lord’s requirements. Many of them died, many of them sinned, and with the passage of time they were all swept away, but God’s purpose was not going to be hindered by any of this. One would come who would fulfil all the conditions and who would overcome sin and death and reign for ever.

This promise was really referring to the Lord Jesus Christ who was from the family and line of David. The Prophet Isaiah foretold this later in Isaiah 9:6-7:

*“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time **on and for ever**. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.”*

And Jeremiah confirmed this in Jeremiah 23:5-6:

“‘The days are coming,’ declares the Lord, ‘when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land. In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The Lord Our Righteousness.’”

And this is exactly fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. The angel Gabriel declared this to Mary when he told her she was to be the mother of God’s Son in Luke 1:31-33:

“...the angel said to her, ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favour with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the

name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob for ever; his kingdom will never end.”

And Matthew begins his Gospel with these words in Matthew 1:1:

“A record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David...”

Jesus Christ would be the King who would perfectly fulfil the Lord’s purposes for his people and accomplish eternal salvation for them through his death on the cross and his glorious resurrection. He would conquer death because he would atone for sin, and the effectiveness of his work would last for eternity. The Lord in these verses is declaring to David that his covenant with him was one that would not fail neither would any one or any thing defeat or frustrate its fulfilment. This promise did not depend on human fulfilment, if so it would have failed miserably because all men are frail at their best. Rather it depended on God’s grace, his covenant love, his ‘Chesed’ to use the Hebrew term. Those kings who were to go astray he would most certainly chasten and punish, as our reading of the rest of the Old Testament demonstrates, but he would never totally remove his covenant love. The Lord would ensure his promise to David would not fail and that eventually there would be a King from David’s line who would reign eternally over and for the benefit of God’s people, namely

the Lord Jesus Christ. What a glorious promise all of this was. It is quite staggering as we see the grace of God displayed in his wonderful mercy to David and through his descendant the Lord Jesus Christ to all the world. God truly is the God of grace.

4) A Prayerful Response, verses 18-29

On hearing this astonishing news from the Lord through Nathan the prophet David responds in the only way that was fitting (v18):

“Then King David went in and sat before the Lord...”

He sought the face of God in prayer. He did not ignore God’s word to him, nor did he become the least bit angry because he was not allowed to build a temple for the ark of God. Instead there was humble worship expressed in loving praise and fervent petition. As David began his prayer he was clearly overwhelmed at what the Lord had just promised him (v18-19):

“Who am I, O Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far? And as if this were not enough in your sight, O Sovereign Lord, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant. Is this your usual way of dealing with man, O Sovereign Lord?”

David's exaltation to the throne had not made him arrogant and proud, but profoundly grateful to God for showing him such kindness. And as he considered what God had said about the future of his house and family he was astonished that such grace and honour should have been bestowed on him by the Lord. He is really expressing the deepest praise in his heart for the love the Lord has shown him. This was no dead, dry, formal prayer but thanksgiving and worship from the depth of his heart. The Lord's goodness had moved David's innermost being and he had to say thank you to the Lord. And we are reminded here that all true prayer comes from the heart. It is much more than going through the motions or reciting some words parrot fashion without really meaning what we are saying. That phrase 'parrot fashion' may seem unusual, so let me explain. Parrots have a wonderful ability to mimic human voices and will often repeat a phrase they have heard, much to the amusement of anyone listening, but of course the parrot has no idea what the words actually mean. Sadly some think that prayer to God is simply reciting some phrases they have heard without ever really opening their hearts to the Lord. God looks and longs for us to really pray, in spirit and in truth. David is setting before us an example each believer should follow when we consider the Lord's grace to us. Indeed, often when someone has first experienced the Lord's forgiveness in their hearts they cry to God with adoring praise and wonder, 'Why me, O Lord? Who am I to receive such forgiveness?' Such a response indicated David knew this was not something he had deserved, yet God had still done this for him: "*Who am I...*" It indicated

David gave all the honour entirely to the Lord and we must do the same. David simply marveled at God's grace to him, both in the past and in his promise for the future. True gratitude must express itself and never forgets what God has done. Then he marveled over the sovereign grace and mercy of God in it all (v20-21):

"What more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Sovereign Lord. For the sake of your word and according to your will, you have done this great thing and made it known to your servant."

David knew he had been singled out by God and it all originated in God alone. Why did the Lord do this and include David in it all? The answer is because the Lord wanted to do it this way; it was his choice, and his choice alone. David was so overwhelmed by it all that he was clearly struggling for words adequate enough to express the praise that God is worthy of, "*What more can David say to you?*" But the Holy Spirit of God comes to his aid and he utters the words of verse 22:

"How great you are, O Sovereign Lord! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears."

Then David's thoughts turned to the nation of Israel and God's dealings with them, and he was again constrained to acknowledge that their very existence is all down to the Lord's amazing mercy (v23-24).

“And who is like your people Israel—the one nation on earth that God went out to redeem as a people for himself, and to make a name for himself, and to perform great and awesome wonders by driving out nations and their gods from before your people, whom you redeemed from Egypt? You have established your people Israel as your very own for ever, and you, O Lord, have become their God.”

It was all God’s doing from beginning to end. God had redeemed them from the bondage and slavery of Egypt and redeemed them to a new Master, the Lord himself. They were now the servants of God. This is exactly paralleled with the redemption Christian believers have in Christ. We are redeemed from our bondage and slavery to sin and redeemed to Christ to whom we now belong and are to serve. Redemption literally means ‘to set free by the payment of a price’, but this freedom does not mean independence, it is much more precious than that. Christ has bought us by his own blood shed at the cross of Calvary, and so we are no longer our own but his, and therefore should seek to glorify him in our bodies.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 *“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.”*

In addition David declared that God was also preserving his people for he had made them his very own ‘for ever’. Amazingly we are being taught here that God considers his dear people of great worth to him, and what was true of Israel in the days of David is true of the Christian believer today. Though we may have many fears and doubts and may face many perils and dangers, the Lord will never let us go. Consider Jesus’ own words as the Good Shepherd of his people in John 10:27-30:

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no-one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no-one can snatch them out of my Father’s hand. I and the Father are one.”

God’s people Israel enjoyed the greatest of blessings anyone can ever enjoy while on earth, for the Lord had become their God.

“...you, O Lord, have become their God.”

And this is again paralleled for the Christian believer today:

Hebrews 8:10 *“I will be their God, and they will be my people.”*

1 Peter 2:10 *“Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”*

To know the Lord in this personal way and to belong to him is the highest of all privileges, for it not only means that we give ourselves to him, but also that he gives himself to us. That is how secure we are if we trust in Christ. Therefore it is no wonder that David was filled with praise as he considered not only God’s goodness to him and his family but also to the whole nation.

Then David turns from praise to petition in verses 25-29:

“And now, Lord God, keep for ever the promise you have made concerning your servant and his house. Do as you promised, so that your name will be great for ever. Then men will say, ‘The Lord Almighty is God over Israel!’ And the house of your servant David will be established before you.”

There are a number of important lessons to appreciate from David’s prayer. First we must note he did not ask for selfish reasons, but for the glory of God – ‘...so that your name will be great for ever...’. This is so important in all our praying, especially in our asking God for things for we should always only want God to give us things that will bring him honour and never want anything that would be contrary. Then notice that God’s promise to bless David’s family became the basis for his prayers – ‘...keep for ever

the promise you have made...Do as you promised...’ Sometimes people are not sure what they should pray or how to pray. One of the things we can always do is to ask the Lord to do the very things he has promised to do. God’s promises are there to give us assurance and also to direct our prayers. For example, God’s prophet Jeremiah foretold that the exile in Babylon would last 70 years, and when Daniel read that he began to pray for the Lord to fulfil his promise and end the exile (see Daniel 7). We can always be assured of praying in accord with God’s will when we pray for what God has promised in the Scriptures. We also see that David prayed with expectancy ‘...*And the house of your servant David will be established before you.*’ The Lord’s promise had really strengthened his faith and encouraged him to ask the Lord. We must say this was not arrogant presumption as a result of David’s pride, but rather a true submission to the revealed will of God and so he prayed expectantly. We need to learn to pray in the same way. May the Lord teach us so that our prayers will honour him and just in case we have not grasped this last point David said more (v27):

“O Lord Almighty, God of Israel, you have revealed this to your servant, saying, ‘I will build a house for you.’ So your servant has found courage to offer you this prayer.”

He realised he was praying with great boldness, but that boldness had come to him because the Lord’s promise had

given him courage to pray like this. This is a boldness the Christian believer is able to pray with.

Hebrews 10:19 *“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus...”*

It was because David knew God is faithful to all he has said, and he has the ability to always do what he has promised. David knew that men might fail but God never would for he always keeps his covenant promises, and so he concludes in this confident way (v28-29):

“O Sovereign Lord, you are God! Your words are trustworthy, and you have promised these good things to your servant. Now be pleased to bless the house of your servant, that it may continue for ever in your sight; for you, O Sovereign Lord, have spoken, and with your blessing the house of your servant will be blessed for ever.”

David seeks the honour of God from beginning to end in his entire prayer. And he humbly trusts in the Lord and seeks him to fulfil what he had said he would do. It is a most delightful conclusion where he is in effect saying, ‘Lord, if you bless then I will be blessed for ever.’ In so doing these verses look forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ for it is in his gospel that eternal life is proclaimed and through whom it is received. So those whom Jesus blesses are blessed for ever. Therefore let us seek

God’s mercy as he has promised, through humble trust in Christ and what he has done and suffered to deal with sin. And let us learn to pray with humble confidence as David did.

Chapter 3: David Strengthened - 2 Samuel 8

Introduction

A first and rapid reading of this chapter could lead us to the conclusion that the period recorded in David’s life was a bloodthirsty one because it records battle after battle with various of David’s enemies and records the deaths of many who had opposed him. War, of course, is not a pretty sight and bloodshed is inevitable at such times. This makes the details not the easiest to read. Also we are not always told why David fought with certain countries nor why he conducted the battles in the way that he did. It is simply a record of the events that took place with very little comment. David defeated the Philistines (v1), the Moabites (v2), the king of Zobah and the Arameans (v 3-8), and the Edomites, Ammonites and Amalekites as well (v12-14). Some may well want to ask why this information included is in Scripture. We must remember that all Scripture is God breathed and is profitable (2 Tim 3:16). Nothing is wasted in the Bible and so there are lessons for us to learn even from such a difficult chapter as this one. We can divide the passage into three sections.

1) David’s Victories, verses 1-8 & verses 13-14

In a real sense the victories described in these verses are a part fulfilment of God's promises previously to establish David's kingdom. David's kingdom was in effect God's kingdom on earth at the time, and God had promised that his kingdom would increase and be established. But whenever God's kingdom is evident there is always opposition as the powers of darkness seek to oppose the work of God, often raising up enemies against the Lord's people. In a very real sense these battles were inevitable as various opponents opposed the work David was called to do. But it is important that we do not falsely accuse David of only seeking to further his own political ends by brutality. At the end of verse 6 we are told:

"The Lord gave David victory wherever he went."

In fighting these enemies David was doing the will of God. He was the Lord's servant. The Philistines (v1) had been long term enemies of the Lord's people as we have already seen in previous episodes in the life of David. Twice previously David had gone into Philistine territory when he should not have done and got into trouble as a result, but now he subdued these persistent enemies of the cause of God (v1):

"In the course of time, David defeated the Philistines and subdued them, and he took Metheg Ammah from the control of the Philistines."

Metheg Ammah is probably near the ancient Philistine city of Gath if we read the parallel account in 1 Chronicles 18 verse 1.

The next enemy defeated were the Moabites (v2):

"David also defeated the Moabites. He made them lie down on the ground and measured them off with a length of cord. Every two lengths of them were put to death, and the third length was allowed to live. So the Moabites became subject to David and brought tribute."

We know that Saul had fought against them in 1 Samuel 14:47 but previously David had sought refuge there for his aged parents while he was fleeing from Saul (1 Samuel 22:3-4). Therefore the reason why he attacked and defeated them on this occasion is difficult to understand because we are simply not told why. The Bible commentators Keil and Delitzsch suggest the following: *"...the Moabites must have grievously oppressed the Israelites afterwards, (i.e. after David had removed his parents from Edom) that David should have inflicted a severer punishment upon them after their defeat, than upon any other of the nations he conquered with the exception of the Ammonites..."* The result was that the surviving Moabites became David's subjects and brought him tribute.

The next group included Hadadezer king of Zobah and the Arameans of Damascus (v3-8):

“Moreover, David fought Hadadezer son of Rehob, king of Zobah, when he went to restore his control along the Euphrates River. David captured a thousand of his chariots, seven thousand charioteers and twenty thousand foot soldiers. He hamstringed all but a hundred of the chariot horses. When the Arameans of Damascus came to help Hadadezer king of Zobah, David struck down twenty-two thousand of them. He put garrisons in the Aramean kingdom of Damascus, and the Arameans became subject to him and brought tribute. The Lord gave David victory wherever he went. David took the gold shields that belonged to the officers of Hadadezer and brought them to Jerusalem. From Tebah and Berothai, towns that belonged to Hadadezer, King David took a great quantity of bronze.”

The mention of the Euphrates river reminds us that this region was included in God’s promise to Abraham that his descendants would possess this region (Gen 15:18-21). So the Lord’s word is being fulfilled, as it always is. Again we are told that David took a great deal of spoil from these battles and again tribute was brought to him by those he had defeated, the significance of which will become apparent shortly.

Then we are told David defeated the Edomites (v13-14) when 18,000 were killed. In 1 Kings 11:15-16 we are told that David’s commander Joab stayed in Edom for 6 months until he had:

“...struck down all the men in Edom.”

David then put garrisons throughout the region. These military details are then concluded by a very important phrase at the end of verse 14:

“The Lord gave David victory wherever he went.”

It is very clear that the Lord was strengthening David and establishing his kingdom because geographically he had conquered the four points of the compass around his capital Jerusalem. But the question we need to ask is ‘What does all this have to teach Christian believers today?’ This is an important question for various reasons. Believers today are involved in a spiritual battle to conquer the world for Christ, but followers of Christ are not called to take up arms for his cause. Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:12:

“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

We also read in 2 Corinthians 10:4:

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

So what principles are there in David's victories that we should apply to ourselves today?

The first is most encouraging, namely, that the kingdom of God will grow to its completion and none will be able to defeat it. This is so important to grasp, especially if we live in an area or period of time when it seems the enemies of God are succeeding. Jesus said he would build his church and the gates of Hades would not prevail against it (Matt 16:18), and a number of his parables speak of the growth of his kingdom such as the mustard seed and the yeast. Further, Paul teaches us that Christ must reign until this is all brought to its final completion in 1 Corinthians 15:25:

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

So we have every encouragement to persevere in the midst of difficulties because each Christian believer is on the Lord's victory side.

The second thing to remember is that if we are to conquer the world for Christ this is to be done not by force of arms but by taking to others the message of the love of Christ seen supremely at the cross. Just as David still had to fight these battles, so the Lord expects every believer to do all we can to share the good news about Jesus with others and the third lesson is that we are to engage in the inward spiritual battle within our own hearts, and to stand firm

against sin and temptation whenever they raise their ugly heads. Our desire and prayer to God should be that we grow in holiness. James helps us immensely in this by giving us the battle strategy in James 4:7:

“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

As David submitted to God so the Lord gave him each victory, and we too must submit our lives to God and live in humble obedience to his commands, and he will grant us his help. Therefore by God's grace let us engage in the battle for his glory and praise.

2) David's Devotion To The Lord, verses 9-12

We have noted several times already that as a result of these victories David accrued considerable wealth in the form of the spoils of war. There was regular tribute from the Moabites (v3). There was the capture of chariots from Hadadezer (v4). There were gold shields belonging to Hadadezer's men (v7). There was a great quantity of bronze (v8). In addition when one of the kings to the North who bordered the land of Hadadezer heard of his defeat he sent gifts to David (v9-10):

“When Tou king of Hamath heard that David had defeated the entire army of Hadadezer, he sent his son Joram to King David to greet him and congratulate him on his victory in battle over Hadadezer, who had

been at war with Tou. Joram brought with him articles of silver and gold and bronze.”

Though Tou was among the surrounding nations he did not have to be captured because he willingly submitted to David and hence gave him the riches we have just mentioned. So David benefitted immensely from these victories. It is at this very point that we see David's complete devotion to the Lord and gain a glimpse of the godliness of his heart because he kept none of this wealth for himself (v11-12):

“King David dedicated these articles to the Lord, as he had done with the silver and gold from all the nations he had subdued: Edom and Moab, the Ammonites and the Philistines, and Amalek. He also dedicated the plunder taken from Hadadezer son of Rehob, king of Zobah.”

What a remarkable act of devotion to the Lord! He kept nothing for himself. By the end of his life David had dedicated a huge amount to the Lord so that his son Solomon could build the temple as we read in 1 Chronicles 22:14-16:

“I have taken great pains to provide for the temple of the Lord a hundred thousand talents of gold, a million talents of silver, quantities of bronze and iron too great to be weighed, and wood and stone. And you may add to them. You have many workmen: stonecutters,

masons and carpenters, as well as men skilled in every kind of work in gold and silver, bronze and iron—craftsmen beyond number. Now begin the work, and the Lord be with you.”

David presents a principle to us that applies to all of God's people regardless of the age they live in. All we are and have should be dedicated to the Lord. Consider Paul's instruction in Romans 12:1-2:

“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

We should want our lives to be channels whereby the Lord's love can be shown to others so as to direct them to him. This is very searching. It involves our time as well as our talents. In fact the whole of our lives should be devoted to and spent in serving the Lord who loved us so much he died for us on the cross. An example of this is found in Paul's second letter to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:3:

“I thank God, whom I serve, as my forefathers did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers.”

Paul served God and spent consistent time in prayer to him. Another example is found in Hebrews 13:15:

“Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name.”

The Lord’s people should be a thankful people, just as David was. Indeed there are many ways that we can show our devotion to the Lord as David did in 2 Samuel 8.

We also need to note that David’s amazing victories, and the resulting fame that came to him as a result (v13) did not make him proud. Instead he humbled himself under God’s mighty hand and ensured all the glory and honour for what was achieved was given to God alone. The catechism, when answering the question. ‘What is the chief end of man?’ replies, ‘Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him for ever.’ David did exactly that and so must we. This is exactly what the Lord Jesus Christ will do when his kingdom is complete, all his people are safe and his enemies are finally destroyed according to 1 Corinthians 15:24-26:

“Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.”

And if Jesus will do this then how important is it for us to give God the glory now for each victory and blessing he gives to us.

3) David’s Concern For All The People, verses 15-18

As we read through the books of Kings and Chronicles we find with increasing regularity descriptions of the kings of Israel and Judah that go something like these.

“He did evil in the eyes of the Lord” or “He did more evil than all the kings who lived before him.”

Something similar could certainly have been written about Israel’s first king Saul, but what about David himself? With him it was so different. We have a summary description in 2 Samuel 8:15:

“David reigned over all Israel, doing what was just and right for all his people.”

It really is a delightful description of this godly man. His concern was not to further his own cause at the expense of others, but to care for *‘all Israel’* and *‘for all his people’*. We have to say that sadly many earthly rulers right down to the present time have not acted so honourably. Thankfully David was not a corrupt leader who in secret exploited his people with brutality in order to advance his own cause. Instead he cared for all of them regardless of their position in society and without any prejudice

regardless of the part of the kingdom to which they belonged. He could so easily have favoured Judah over the rest of the tribes because they had been the first to recognise him as king, but he did not. In so doing he points us to the reign of the Lord Jesus Christ over his people which, better than David's, is a perfect reign. Jesus now occupies the highest place in the Universe (Philippians 2) and he rules over all things for the benefit of his people as Paul tells us in Ephesians 1:22:

“And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church...”

What an encouragement this is to continue to trust in the Lord even when times are difficult, for the ultimate end of all things is for the glory of God and in Christ our good. How this also should stimulate us to tell others about Christ that they might come to know him as their Lord as well and come under the influence of his gracious reign over all things! In addition David's example is something that should also characterise every follower of Jesus today in our relationships with other people. We too should do what is just and right because as members of the Lord's kingdom this is what he expects from us, for in a real sense we are the Lord's ambassadors on earth.

Returning to David, he delegated various positions to trustworthy individuals. Joab looked after the military side of things, Jehoshaphat looked after administration, Zadok

and Ahimelech cared for the spiritual needs of the nation, Seraiah was secretary looking after royal correspondence, Benaiah looked after the special royal guard (see 2 Samuel 23:22-23), and David's sons were royal advisers (2 Samuel 8:16-18):

“Joab son of Zeruiah was over the army; Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was recorder; Zadok son of Ahitub and Ahimelech son of Abiathar were priests; Seraiah was secretary; Benaiah son of Jehoiada was over the Kerethites and Pelethites; and David's sons were royal advisers.”

All of these arrangements were for the honour of God and the good of all the people in line with verse 15 which summarises David's rule. And so we can see the Lord strengthened David immensely.

Chapter 4: David And Mephibosheth - 2 Samuel 9

Introduction

One of the great characteristics of God is that he is the God of grace. He delights to lavish his mercy and love on those who do not deserve it at all. He loves to do good to sinners, even though we have rebelled against him and given him many, many causes to condemn us and treat us accordingly. He delights to come to those whose lives are in a mess because of the way they have lived and to forgive and transform them. Paul's great testimony when he wrote

to the Ephesian believers about how they had become the people belonging to Jesus put this wonderful transformation down to the grace of God in Ephesians 2:8-9:

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no-one can boast.”

We did not earn God’s mercy because we have sinned. We did not merit his favour because we have broken his laws. We did not deserve the smallest blessing from him. It was by God’s grace that he gave us his wonderful salvation which we received when we trusted in Christ. Indeed, throughout the whole of every believer’s life the grace of God surrounds, protects and keeps us secure. Perhaps one of the most well known expressions of this outside of the Bible is the hymn written by John Newton:

*Amazing grace (how sweet the sound) that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found: was blind, but now I see.*

*’Twas grace that taught my heart to fear, and grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed!*

*Through many dangers, toils, and snares I have already come;
’Tis grace has brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.*

*The Lord has promised good to me, his Word my hope secures;
He will my Shield and Portion be, as long as life endures.*

*Yes, when this flesh and heart shall fail and mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess within the veil a life of joy and peace.*

*When we’ve been there a thousand years, bright shining as the sun,
We’ve no less days to sing God’s praise than when we first begun.*

Those who receive the grace of God in salvation are then expected by God themselves to be gracious to others, even those whom we may consider our enemies. The Lord Jesus taught this in his sermon on the mount in Matthew 5:43-45:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.”

And Paul expresses it in his letter to the Galatian believers like this in 6:10:

“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”

Those who have enjoyed the grace of God in their own lives are to show grace to others. And this has a direct link with 2 Samuel 9 in the life of David. We have seen again and again as we have studied his life up to this point that David had received God’s grace again and again. Right from the beginning when God chose him to be the next king even Samuel thought God’s choice would have been one of David’s older brothers, but no, God had chosen David. God had been gracious to him. We have also seen God surround David by his grace protecting him through numerous dangers, toils and snares, to use John Newton’s words and in 2 Samuel 7 we have seen God promising to build a house for David and his descendants, and that he would always have someone to sit on his throne, a prophecy fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ. David knew that God had been very gracious to him and it amazed him again and again. Well, in this chapter David takes the initiative in a very gracious way himself. He is reflecting the grace which God had lavished on him.

1) David’s Question, verse 1

In 2 Samuel 9:1 we read:

“David asked, ‘Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan’s sake?’”

In many ways this was quite an amazing thing for David to ask about, because king Saul had really been his sworn enemy. For years he hunted David down with the sole intention of murdering him. David had needed to flee for his life and hide away like an escaped convict, when in actual fact he had done nothing wrong at all and had served Saul so well. Now that David was king and established in his kingdom he could so easily have used his position to take revenge on Saul’s remaining family, as many others have done similarly over the years. But David does not even consider such a thing. In fact, he remembered his promise to Saul’s son Jonathan made several years previously. He and Jonathan were the closest and best of friends and in 1 Samuel 20 they made a covenant with each other and Jonathan had asked David to show him kindness in 1 Samuel 20:14-15:

“But show me unfailing kindness like that of the Lord as long as I live, so that I may not be killed, and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family— not even when the Lord has cut off every one of David’s enemies from the face of the earth.” (See volume 1 chapter 7 of this series.)

When David and Jonathan parted Jonathan declared in 1 Samuel 20:42:

“Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the Lord, saying, ‘The Lord is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants for ever.’ Then David left, and Jonathan went back to the town.”

Jonathan had been killed in the same battle as his father, but now that David is established on the throne of Israel, instead of forgetting Jonathan and the promise they had made to each other he remembered it. He wanted to show kindness, to be gracious, to any of Saul’s descendants. The word ‘*kindness*’ that David uses is the Hebrew term Chesed – covenant love. And true covenant love is faithful regardless of any change in circumstances, and that is why David remains faithful to his promise to Jonathan even though that was made over 20 years previously.

There is a lovely illustration of the strength of covenant love in the life of Benjamin Breckinbridge Warfield who was a theologian in Princeton Seminary many years ago. While studying in Germany, he and his wife had their honeymoon walking in the Harz Mountains when they were caught in a terrific and frightening thunderstorm. Sadly Annie, Warfield’s wife, never fully recovered from the shock of this and virtually became an invalid for the rest of her life. Warfield never left her except for his seminary duties and even then for no more than two hours,

and he cared for her in this way for 39 years. One of his students remarked that whenever he saw the Warfields walking together ‘*the gentleness of his manner was striking proof of the loving care with which he surrounded her*’. This is the power of covenant promises and love, they are faithful. This was the same thing which moved David to want to show kindness to Saul’s family at this time; he was faithful. The great challenge of this for us is to ask if we have kept all the promises we have made to the Lord and to others. This is very searching, but the Lord expects us to keep our word. For David, his keeping of his promise to Jonathan was a part of his devotion to the Lord. Therefore for us our word ought to be our bond. This is very practical because it includes our promises to others whether to pay a bill, or to help them with a job, or directly concerning our relationship to the Lord such as promising to pray more, be more faithful in our attendance when our Church meets for worship, or to witness more about Christ to the lost. We live in a world where broken promises are even encouraged by some, but remember the Lord is pleased when we keep our word. May the Lord find us faithful and not weighed in the balance and found wanting.

We cannot help but see how David’s request here points us forward to his greater descendant the Lord Jesus Christ who loves to do good to those who were once even the enemies of God. When we deserved his judgement he has shown us his mercy, and when we deserved his condemnation he has shown us his compassion. And the cost of this he bore entirely himself when he died for us on

the cross, bearing our sin and its punishment that we might be pardoned and set free. And, as with David here, it was Jesus who took the initiative. He made the first move towards us in his grace. The Lord has always been like this as Isaiah the prophet discloses in Isaiah 65:1:

“I revealed myself to those who did not ask for me; I was found by those who did not seek me. To a nation that did not call on my name, I said, ‘Here am I, here am I.’”

Indeed, we have to say if he had waited for us to make the first move to come back to him he would still be waiting, but thankfully he reached out to us first and drew us to himself and as with David so the love of Christ is faithful for ever.

2) Mephibosheth Identified, verses 2-4

In answer to David’s question about any surviving relatives of Saul he was told that one of Saul’s former servants, a man named Ziba was still alive and he was called to David (v2):

“Now there was a servant of Saul’s household named Ziba. They called him to appear before David, and the king said to him, ‘Are you Ziba?’ ‘Your servant,’ he replied.”

David then repeated his question asking if there was anyone surviving from Saul’s family that he could help (v3) and this time he used an interesting phrase to describe the help he wanted to give.

“The king asked, ‘Is there no-one still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show God’s kindness?’”

The kindness of God is really kindness shown because of God and for his sake. It is similar in meaning to Jesus’ instruction to his disciples when in Luke 6:36 he urged them to

“Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

Ziba told David there was a son of Jonathan who was lame in both his feet (v3). This was a man named Mephibosheth whom we first learned about in 2 Samuel 4:4:

“Jonathan son of Saul had a son who was lame in both feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel. His nurse picked him up and fled, but as she hurried to leave, he fell and became crippled. His name was Mephibosheth.”

This information along with the fact that Mephibosheth had a son of his own, meant he could have been in his mid twenties by this time, and the affliction in both his feet would mean he probably could not walk either very well or very far, if at all. We know that Saul had other relatives

(see 2 Sam 21:8), but this was the one which Ziba mentioned as he was Jonathan's son. David enquired where he was living and was told he was deep in the territory of Gilead on the east side of the Jordon, far away from both Saul's estate and from Jerusalem (2 Samuel 9:4):

“He is at the house of Makir son of Ammiel in Lo Debar.”

Makir was later to give David his aid in 2 Samuel 17:27f.

3) David's Kindness, verses 5-13

When Mephibosheth was brought to David he showed him great respect (v6):

“When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honour. David said, ‘Mephibosheth!’ ‘Your servant,’ he replied.”

We can imagine some of the fears that might have occurred to Mephibosheth, such as, ‘What does David want and what will the king do to me?’ It was not uncommon for kings to kill all the survivors of the previous dynasty so it would have been quite understandable if Mephibosheth was worried. However, David anticipates this because his first words to him in v7 were, *“Don't be afraid...”* It was a most reassuring statement to make to this lame man, and what was to follow must have almost overwhelmed him.

“‘Don't be afraid,’ David said to him, ‘for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table.’”

This was wonderful generosity and kindness and a great honour bestowed by David, and Mephibosheth was stunned at such favour as his reply to David shows (v8):

“Mephibosheth bowed down and said, ‘What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?’”

This was a most unusual expression of deep humility and self abasement to call himself a ‘dead dog’. We meet this use of the term ‘dog’ in 1 Samuel 17:43 when Goliath used it to pour scorn on young David as he went out to fight him. Then David used it himself in 1 Samuel 24:14 when he spoke to Saul to try to show him he was not worth pursuing as Saul had done with such malice. In 2 Samuel 3:8 Abner used it when he accused Ish-Bosheth of insulting him, and we will find it again when we come to chapter 16. It was a term which if someone used it to describe you, was most insulting, and so when someone used it of themselves it was a mark of deep humility. And here Mephibosheth humbled himself before David utterly amazed and astonished that the king should show him such kindness, and how like Mephibosheth is every sinner whom the Lord chooses to bless! We are poor wretched individuals crippled by a much graver fall than he suffered, the fall into

sin by which Adam plunged us all into spiritual darkness and iniquity. Yet the Lord delights to choose the weak things of the world, the unworthy and unattractive. And that is exactly what we are apart from him, for sin has ruined our lives. Therefore how amazing that the Lord should ever love us at all! How we need to willingly humble ourselves before him!

To ensure Mephibosheth was adequately provided for and that Saul's estate was cared for properly, because his own disability would have prevented him farming the land, David ordered Ziba to do this and he and his family and household became Mephibosheth's servants (2 Samuel 9:9-11):

“Then the king summoned Ziba, Saul's servant, and said to him, ‘I have given your master's grandson everything that belonged to Saul and his family. You and your sons and your servants are to farm the land for him and bring in the crops, so that your master's grandson may be provided for. And Mephibosheth, grandson of your master, will always eat at my table.’ (Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.) Then Ziba said to the king, ‘Your servant will do whatever my lord the king commands his servant to do.’ So Mephibosheth ate at David's table like one of the king's sons.”

Mephibosheth did not have to grovel like a beggar at David's feet, but was welcomed as a family member, like

one of David's sons and sat at his table. We can only say that David provided for Mephibosheth lavishly. And what a wonderful illustration of the way Almighty God provides for the believer through the Lord Jesus Christ. If we think David's kindness to Mephibosheth was lavish, it really is miniscule compared to what we receive through Christ. Through Christ we receive the complete forgiveness of all our sins (1 John 1:7). Through Christ we are justified by faith (Romans 3:22; 5:1-2). Through Christ we are reconciled to God (Rom 5:11; 2 Cor 5:18; Rom 5:1). Through Christ we are adopted as sons of God (Eph 1:5; Gal 4:5). Through Christ we are sanctified by the Holy Spirit of God (Titus 3:5; 1 Cor 6:11). Through Christ we are preserved and kept for ever (John 10:28-29). Through Christ we enjoy daily access to the throne of heaven in prayer (John 14:6). Through Christ we have the presence of God with us wherever we go (Heb 13:5). Through Christ we have a place reserved in heaven for us (1 Peter 1:3-5). Through Christ one day we will be glorified and live with him for ever (Rom 8:29-30). This is wonderfully expressed in 1 John 2:1:

“How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are!”

David owed Mephibosheth nothing but gave him so much. The Lord Jesus Christ owed us nothing but has given us so much more. It is truly amazing what God has done for us in his grace, therefore we should in turn seek to be gracious

and generous in our dealings with others, especially our fellow believers. Those who have received mercy from God will want to show that mercy to others. In addition the Lord has commanded us to be merciful and will bless all who are (Matthew 5:7).

This passage closes with some further biographical details about Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel 9:12-13:

“Mephibosheth had a young son named Mica, and all the members of Ziba’s household were servants of Mephibosheth and Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king’s table, and he was crippled in both feet.”

Strictly speaking we have to say that Mephibosheth would have been considered David’s enemy because he was a grandson of Saul. But David did not treat him like an enemy at all but like an adopted son. And this takes us immediately to the way God has through the Lord Jesus Christ treated guilty undeserving sinners.

“...when we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son...” (Romans 5:10)

It is amazing grace. And this is the glorious message of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Chapter 5: Ammonite Ingratitude Punished - 2 Samuel 10

Introduction

Some battles cannot be avoided. This is in many ways sad, but the Lord’s people have always found that there are those who would wish to oppose them. We know that ultimately behind all of such opposition to the work of God lies the hand of the devil, and therefore the people of God will inevitably have to stand against him. James was only too aware of this when he wrote his book in the New Testament.

“Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” James 4:7

It is not that the people of God deliberately look for trouble and want conflict, but there are times when this is inevitable and some people will have to be resisted. Sometimes the enemy is at work within the company of God’s people and his attack is from inside. For example, Jesus was aware of this when he recognised the devil was behind Peter’s refusal to accept that Jesus was to be crucified in Matthew 16:21-23:

“From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life. Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. ‘Never, Lord!’ He said. ‘This shall never happen to you!’ Jesus turned and

said to Peter, ‘Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling-block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men.’”

Sometimes the enemy is at work outside the people of God and the attack is from without. Nehemiah recognised this when his work of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem was opposed by the enemies of God in Nehemiah 4:7-9:

“But when Sanballat, Tobiah, the Arabs, the Ammonites and the men of Ashdod heard that the repairs to Jerusalem’s walls had gone ahead and that the gaps were being closed, they were very angry. They all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and stir up trouble against it. But we prayed to our God and posted a guard day and night to meet this threat.”

This opposition did not cease so Nehemiah took direct action in Nehemiah 4:14-17:

“I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, ‘Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.’ When our enemies heard that we were aware of their plot and that God had frustrated it, we all returned to the wall, each to his own work. From that day on, half of my men did the work, while

the other half were equipped with spears, shields, bows and armour. The officers posted themselves behind all the people of Judah who were building the wall. Those who carried materials did their work with one hand and held a weapon in the other.”

In 2 Samuel 10 we have another instance of an attack from without which David was compelled to face, and it is all the sadder when we realise this was in response to David’s kindness.

1) The Ungracious Ammonites, verses 1-4

The neighbouring kingdom of the Ammonite people suffered a bereavement with the death of their king, Nahash. We first read of him in 1 Samuel 11 when he brought his army out to fight against Israel and was defeated by Saul who led the Israelites into battle. It may well be that by the time of 2 Samuel 10 there had been a treaty made between David and the Ammonites because the wording of the opening verses is like that used in formal treatise. David speaks of Nahash’s kindness to him at some point in the past. David’s response to the sad news was most generous and thoughtful in 2 Samuel 10:1-2:

“In the course of time, the king of the Ammonites died, and his son Hanun succeeded him as king. David thought, ‘I will show kindness to Hanun son of Nahash, just as his father showed kindness to me.’ So David

sent a delegation to express his sympathy to Hanun concerning his father.”

We learn from Genesis 19:36-38 that the Ammonites were the descendants of Lot. (See also Deut 2:17-19.) They lived east of the tribal land allotted to Gad near the upper regions of the River Jabbok to the east of the River Jordan (Deut 2:37 & Josh 12:2). So David’s message of condolence was an act of thoughtful kindness and respect to his neighbours, and something that was highly commendable. Indeed, it was something which the New Testament commends to Christian believers in Romans 12:15:

“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.”

And an act of such kindness should have brought considerable consolation to Hanun, the son of Nahash who had died, and to his people. In actual fact we find that it was rejected and despised in a most humiliating way and without any good reason in 2 Samuel 10:2-4:

“So David sent a delegation to express his sympathy to Hanun concerning his father. When David’s men came to the land of the Ammonites, the Ammonite nobles said to Hanun their lord, ‘Do you think David is honouring your father by sending men to you to express sympathy? Hasn’t David sent them to you to explore the city and spy it out and overthrow it?’ So

Hanun seized David’s men, shaved off half of each man’s beard, cut off their garments in the middle at the buttocks, and sent them away.”

Shaving their beards off in this way was most insulting as normally beards were only shaved as a sign of deep mourning (see Isaiah 15:2; Jeremiah 41:5, Ezekiel 5:1). The Ammonites further degraded David’s servants by cutting off their clothes which was the customary way of humiliating captured prisoners of war (Isaiah 20:4). They were guilty of a grossly inappropriate response. Here we have an example of the terrible way that sin corrupts and twists the hearts and minds of men that they consider evil good, and good evil (see Isaiah 5:20).

2) The Kind David, verse 5

There is a positive and a negative in this verse. Positively David responded kindly towards his men who had suffered such humiliation. He ensured their privacy until their beards had re-grown. Something he did not do was to ridicule them in any way or allow others to do the same. Further, once their beards had re-grown they were to return to David and serve him as before. They were not penalised because of this misfortune that had fallen on them. There is a time to speak and a time to be silent, and for David it was a time to be silent so that the dignity of his men could be maintained. So that is his positive response.

His negative response is seen in that there is no record of him wanting to seek revenge against the Ammonites, which was most remarkable when we consider his previous wrong reaction to Nabal's similar abuse (1 Sam 25). David had learned the lesson well. We cannot help but think of Paul's instructions to the believers at Rome in Romans 12:19:

“Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.”

David did not seek retribution. He was not looking for war.

3) The War Came, verse 6-14

We said at the beginning of this chapter that some battles are unavoidable and this was one of those. Realising their grave mistake, instead of making a profound apology to David and his men and seeking some means of reconciliation, the Ammonites make plans for war against David in 2 Samuel 10:6:

“When the Ammonites realised that they had become an offence to David's nostrils, they hired twenty thousand Aramean foot soldiers from Beth Rehob and Zobah, as well as the king of Maacah with a thousand men, and also twelve thousand men from Tob.”

We see something of the foolishness and pride of the human heart here. Instead of humbling themselves and admitting they were wrong the Ammonites turn to violence as their solution of the problem and not just violence, but violence on a large scale because they hired large numbers of soldiers to act as mercenaries on their behalf. It was a formidable army that was being assembled against David which left him with no option but to resist and so the two armies, Israel and the Ammonites, were lined up for battle (v7-8). Israel's army under Joab's leadership were under attack from two fronts (2 Samuel 10:9-10):

“Joab saw that there were battle lines in front of him and behind him; so he selected some of the best troops in Israel and deployed them against the Arameans. He put the rest of the men under the command of Abishai his brother and deployed them against the Ammonites.”

Being attacked from two directions meant the army of the Lord's people had to be divided, which in effect weakened their attack on both counts. Realising this, Joab sought to encourage his men with these words in 2 Samuel 10:11-12:

“Joab said, ‘If the Arameans are too strong for me, then you are to come to my rescue; but if the Ammonites are too strong for you, then I will come to rescue you. Be strong and let us fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God. The Lord will do what is good in his sight.’”

He gave them their tactics so that they could help each other if one was finding the battle too hard for them, but he did not stop at that for he came to the real core of the matter. This was not just some aggressive enemy but an enemy of the people of God and of the cities God had given them. There was a spiritual aspect to this battle that meant the people of God had to make their stand. They could not give in for the honour of the Lord and his work on the earth was at stake. Then Joab declared what they all knew but were reminded of at this critical moment, that the Lord would do, as he always does, that which is good in his sight. Not just good in the eyes of men, but in his eyes. Good that was right and just and God glorifying. Joab encouraged them to rest in the Lord and to fight in his strength, and again these words are reminiscent of words later penned by Paul when he wrote about the spiritual warfare each Christian believer is engaged in against wickedness and evil in Ephesians 6:10-11:

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armour of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.”

Spiritual battles require spiritual strength which comes from relying on the Lord alone. So depending on the Lord and fighting for his sake, the army of Israel went into battle, and the Lord gave them a remarkable victory in 2 Samuel 10:13-14:

“Then Joab and the troops with him advanced to fight the Arameans, and they fled before him. When the Ammonites saw that the Arameans were fleeing, they fled before Abishai and went inside the city. So Joab returned from fighting the Ammonites and came to Jerusalem.”

The Lord did not fail his people and a great victory was achieved. We are told specifically that Joab returned to Jerusalem and there was no pursuing the enemy any further.

4) The Persistent Folly Of men, verses 15-19

The stubbornness of sinful man’s folly is quite astonishing at times! Men are so slow to learn even when the Lord has been shouting at them, metaphorically speaking. How strongly the Lord had shown these attacking nations that they were no match for him. Surely such a sound defeat would make them sit and review the situation and make them realise their need to make peace with David, but sadly they did not. The Arameans whom the Ammonites had hired to help them in battle regrouped and called for reinforcements in 2 Samuel 10:15-16:

“After the Arameans saw that they had been routed by Israel, they regrouped. Hadadezer had Arameans brought from beyond the River; they went to Helam, with Shobach the commander of Hadadezer’s army leading them.”

They refused to learn from their past defeat and they refused to give up their attack. This is something God's people have encountered again and again. The enemy of souls does not give up easily, and those under his influence are just like him. They persist in their opposition to the Lord and his work. Jesus suffered in a similar way for after his temptations in the wilderness Luke tells us Satan only left him until another opportune time arose to attack him (see Luke 4:13). But such persistent rebellion against the work of God shows the true spiritual state of those who act in this way, for they are children of the devil and under the wrath of God. How we all need to search our hearts to ensure we are not like them! Again David was left with no option but to defend the cause of the Lord and this he did again gaining a huge victory in 2 Samuel 10:17-18:

“When David was told of this, he gathered all Israel, crossed the Jordan and went to Helam. The Arameans formed their battle lines to meet David and fought against him. But they fled before Israel, and David killed seven hundred of their charioteers and forty thousand of their foot soldiers. He also struck down Shobach the commander of their army, and he died there.”

It was a resounding victory for David and it had quite an effect on those kings who had been servants of Hadadezer the Aramean leader for we read in 2 Samuel 10:19:

“When all the kings who were vassals of Hadadezer saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they made peace with the Israelites and became subject to them. So the Arameans were afraid to help the Ammonites any more.”

And so the Lord worked all things together for David's good. There were in fact two battles to fight in this chapter and neither could be avoided, and when David and his army honoured the Lord and stood for him the Lord gave them a remarkable victory. The Lord has not changed and his power to help his people has not diminished. While under the new covenant we do not take up arms to fight the Lord's cause, we do use spiritual weapons (2 Corinthians 10:4):

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

We are to be clothed in the whole armour of God and wield the Word of God which is the sword of the Spirit and be given to prayer (Eph 6:10-18). As we do so, relying on the Lord alone to be our helper, we shall see the devil increasingly flee from us and know personal victory over sin and temptation in our own lives, and see the cause of Christ in the world grow as more and more are brought to trust in him for salvation and mercy.

Chapter 6: Only A Look! - 2 Samuel 11

Introduction

We have noted several times as we have examined the Bible's teaching about the life of David that it is an honest book. This should not surprise us because the Bible is unique in all the world and in all of time. There is not another book like it because it alone is the inspired Word of God (2 Tim 3:16). Because this is God's book and he is its ultimate author even though he used individuals to commit it to writing for us, we would expect it to be honest. God is holy and true, and it is impossible for him to lie and be deceitful. Therefore he does not cover over the cracks in people's character to give us a false impression about them. We have seen this with David several times as it has recorded his mistakes and folly and sins on a number of occasions. But I think it is fair to say the chapter before us describes the most blatant and grievous episode in David's life.

Before coming to the details we need to remember that these Bible verses describe the man whom God declared was a man after his own heart. This makes David's behaviour described here all the more despicable and ungodly, and is also a solemn warning for every true child of God because none of us is immune to the temptation which presented itself to David and none of us can claim we would never fall into such serious sins. It is a passage that warns us in capital letters to guard our hearts and minds constantly against the ravages of sin that present themselves to us a thousand ways every day of our lives.

We need to pray each day the prayer of the godly Robert Murray M'Cheyne, a Christian minister from Scotland who died when he was only 29 years old. He prayed daily, *'Lord make me as holy as it is possible for a saved sinner to be.'* Whether we are new believers or have followed Christ for many years the danger is still there for all of us to fall into sin and grieve the heart of God. By the time we have come to 2 Samuel 11 David had been committed to the service of God for many years. He was what we would call a mature believer. He had enjoyed the most precious communion with God, his protection when in danger, his help when in conflict, and had even been promised that God would raise up one from his family who would reign on his throne for ever – a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ himself. David had been favoured by God in countless ways and God had blessed him very much. Clearly David was a man who walked with God. He had stumbled before and the Lord had needed to teach him some important and valuable lessons about the need to guard his own soul, but on this day he became careless. Why was this? Was David self-confident now that his kingdom was established? Did he think that because he had been so blessed he would be immune to temptation and sin? Whatever it was, David was caught off guard and his fall was a huge one.

1) Only A Look, verses 1-5

The passage is set in the spring of the year following the battle with the Ammonites and David's defeat of the Arameans (2 Samuel 11:1):

“In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.”

It was customary for kings to go to war immediately after the grain harvest in April and May when conditions for travel were best. The Ammonites were the particular target because although they had been defeated they had not yet been conquered fully. So the army attacked their capital city Rabbah. Significantly we are told that on this occasion David stayed at home when his men went to fight which was quite unusual for previously he had been with them. This seems to indicate that David was beginning to become less diligent in his responsibility to shepherd his people as the Lord had called him to do. He was at ease in his palace in Jerusalem while his men were in tents and considerable discomfort expending their effort on fighting the enemy. However, we are told that the Ammonites were destroyed and their city placed under siege by the Israelite army.

All appeared to be going well until one particular night. We are told David got up from his bed one evening. We do not know if he could not sleep or if he just wanted to be in the cool night air, but something happened that was to become disastrous (2 Samuel 11:2):

“One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful...”

The roofs of ancient houses were often flat, as many still are today in various parts of the world, and so David walked on the roof of his palace. As he looked out over the city of Jerusalem his eye suddenly caught a glimpse of a very beautiful woman bathing. Now we must say at this point that nothing wrong had taken place. David's view of this lady was not premeditated and there is no record that his intention when he first stepped onto the roof was that he was planning something evil. He just caught sight of this lady, we might say accidentally. Now this is a rather delicate subject but we are talking here in particular about sexual sin. That was the temptation that was presenting itself to David, and it is so easy to fall into such sin. Often in this world things present themselves to our eyes which we cannot avoid. Up to that point nothing wrong has been done, but once that has happened the situation becomes critical, because the way that we react to what we have seen will result in us either pleasing God or displeasing him. What should happen is that we immediately look away rather than linger over what we have seen. Sadly in many parts of the world literature is on sale in bookshops and newsagents which portray the naked bodies of both men and women on the cover. Magazines are particularly prone to do this. Now if you go into a bookshop or newsagents shop to buy a pen or a writing pad it can be almost unavoidable that your eye will come into contact

with this immoral literature. What you do immediately that happens is crucial. If you turn away from it immediately and perhaps even quietly pray for the Lord to cleanse what you have seen from your mind, you will have gained a victory over temptation and have pleased God. BUT if you linger and look again and for longer you have already succumbed to the temptation and grieved God. We need to remind ourselves that it is possible to commit adultery with someone of the opposite sex without ever going to bed with them! Jesus said in Matthew 5:27-28:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.”

This is why it is so important to lift our eyes away from all that is impure and not to pursue what we have seen. Sadly, indeed tragically, David did not do this. Instead of putting the woman completely out of his heart and mind and praying for the Lord’s help to do so, he fed the temptation. He enquired further about her. He should have stopped and checked himself immediately, but he failed to guard his own heart (2 Samuel 11:3):

“David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, ‘Isn’t this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?’”

His servant seems to be completely unaware of what was happening, but in David’s heart lust was burning and David was adding fuel to its fire. We need to remember John’s instruction in 1 John 2:16:

“For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does— comes not from the Father but from the world.”

Having received the information that Bathsheba was a married woman should have stopped him in his tracks for the seventh commandment forbids adultery (Exodus 20:14). Not only that, but she was also the daughter of Eliam who is mentioned in 2 Samuel 23:34 as one of David’s personal bodyguards. And if that was not enough to get him to reconsider, he was told her husband was Uriah, who was fighting with the army at that moment and who was also among the royal bodyguard (2 Samuel 23:39). So these were trusted men whom David relied on for his own safety. We are told Uriah was a Hittite and that shows us that he had become a believer. His name means ‘My light is the Lord.’ While the alarm bells should have been ringing loudly in David’s heart and mind he ignored it all. Instead he sent for Bathsheba and slept with her. This she seems to have done without any struggle so was a willing partner in the sin (2 Samuel 11:4):

“Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (She had purified herself from her uncleanness.) Then she went back home.”

The reference to her being purified from her uncleanness indicates she was not already pregnant by her own husband Uriah. In that short space of time David and Bathsheba had fallen into sin of a most tragic kind. The result was Bathsheba became pregnant and sent word of this news to David (v5). This meant that both David and Bathsheba deserved the death penalty under the Old Testament Law of God as they both knew only too well (see Lev 20:10 and Deut 22:22).

2) David’s Plan Of Cover-up, verses 6-15

David knew he was in serious trouble. He had acted very wrongly and was without excuse. The tragedy was that although there was probably a lot of remorse in his heart that his sin resulted in this unwanted pregnancy and meant he was in trouble, there was no repentance. There was no godly sorrow and a pleading with God for forgiveness and mercy. All David could do was to try and escape from the predicament so the blame would not be laid at his own door. He schemed to get Uriah from the battle and send him home for the night so that he would sleep with his wife and everyone would think the child was his not David’s (2 Samuel 11:6-9):

“So David sent this word to Joab: ‘Send me Uriah the Hittite.’ And Joab sent him to David. When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. Then David said to Uriah, ‘Go down to your house and wash your feet.’ So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master’s servants and did not go down to his house.

As cunning and devious as the plan was, it failed because Uriah did not sleep at home that night but with David’s other servants. On hearing of this David questioned Uriah who showed he had much more devotion to duty than David was displaying (2 Samuel 11:10-11):

“When David was told, ‘Uriah did not go home,’ he asked him, ‘Haven’t you just come from a distance? Why didn’t you go home?’ Uriah said to David, ‘The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my master Joab and my lord’s men are camped in the open fields. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!’”

But David did not give up and ordered Uriah to stay another night in Jerusalem, and then proceeded to get him drunk hoping that in a drunken stupor he would return home and sleep with Bathsheba. But again his plan failed and Uriah slept with David’s servants (v12-13). At this

David realised that Uriah was a man of much greater integrity than he had bargained for and this meant there was only one way of escape left, namely, to arrange for Uriah to be killed (2 Samuel 11:14-15):

“In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. In it he wrote, ‘Put Uriah in the front line where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so that he will be struck down and die.’”

It was a most heinous crime and an act of the greatest of wickedness. Under the guise of the battle being too strong Uriah would be killed and no one would ever dream of linking this with David as he was not even on the battle field! We need to pause at this point and note the progress of David’s sinfulness. It started with an innocent look, was fed by asking for more information, was consummated by bringing Bathsheba into his bedroom and committing adultery with her, was deepened by his deceitful attempt at a cover up and now was going to result in the murder of an innocent and godly man. It was a slippery slope that David travelled down and it got steeper by the minute and he fell at such great speed. Jesus himself warned us about this danger and urged urgent action on our behalf when sexual temptation presents itself to us (Matthew 5:27-30):

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery. ‘...But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye causes you to sin,

gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.”

Drastic action is required speedily if we are to escape from the same sins that David committed against the Lord. May the Lord give us all grace to act on his wise advice and not be fooled into the thinking which governed David’s heart and mind in this incident.

3) The Plan Appears To Have Worked, verses 16-27

On receiving the letter from David, Joab did as he was asked and tragically godly Uriah was killed (2 Samuel 11:16-17):

“And it came to pass, when Joab observed the city that he assigned Uriah unto a place where he knew that valiant men were. And the men of the city went out, and fought with Joab: and there fell some of the people of the servants of David; and Uriah the Hittite died also.”

Joab sent news to David of the loss not only of Uriah’s life but also others in David’s army. He gave a message to the messenger just in case David became angry over what had happened (2 Samuel 11:19-21):

“When you have finished giving the king this account of the battle, the king’s anger may flare up, and he may ask you, ‘Why did you get so close to the city to fight? Didn’t you know they would shoot arrows from the wall? Who killed Abimelech son of Jerub-Besheth? Didn’t a woman throw an upper millstone on him from the wall, so that he died in Thebez? Why did you get so close to the wall?’ If he asks you this, then say to him, ‘Also, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead.’”

Although Joab was unaware of David’s adultery he was certainly aware of David’s cunning plan to get rid of Uriah and so he instructed the messenger accordingly. The messenger delivered the message as instructed and David’s reply was quite astonishing (2 Samuel 11:25):

“David told the messenger, ‘Say this to Joab: “Don’t let this upset you; the sword devours one as well as another. Press the attack against the city and destroy it.” Say this to encourage Joab.’”

Not a word of sorrow, not a gram of repentance, but rather relief that his plan had worked and he had escaped, and hypocrisy was at its worst in saying war inevitably brings death. On hearing the news of Uriah’s death Bathsheba mourned for him. This was probably for the short period of one week (see Gen 50:10; 1 Sam 31:13). Then David married her and she became his wife and any child born would be considered legitimate by everyone else. To all intents and purposes it looked as if David had got away

with it and had escaped any penalty for his grievous behaviour. But the chapter closes with these stinging words (1 Samuel 11:27):

“But the thing David had done displeased the Lord.”

We shall have to wait until the next chapter to see how this worked itself out and how God dealt with David, but it stands for us all as a solemn warning that we cannot sin and get away with it even if we manage to hide it from every other human being, because God sees everything. Sadly there are many who go through their entire lives without ever considering this and without ever seeking God to be merciful to them and grant his forgiveness through his Son the Lord Jesus Christ. We need to remember that it is a fearful, a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb 10:31). If we have sinned like David had then let us seek God in humble repentance and look to his dear Son to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Chapter 7: Rebuke and Repentance - 2 Samuel 12

Introduction

David’s adultery with Bathsheba and the killing of her husband Uriah, was a dark period indeed for God’s chosen king. His attempt at a cover up only served to underline the sinfulness of David’s actions, and the chapter ended with these words (2 Samuel 11:27):

“But the thing David had done displeased the Lord.”

David may have hidden his sin from the eyes of men, but he could not hide it from the Lord. Indeed, it was almost as if he ignored God’s existence altogether, or at least chose to forget him. But we cannot escape from the eyes of the Lord for they are in every place (Proverbs 15:3). Indeed, David knew this deep down in his heart because he wrote Psalm 139 where he tells us that God is everywhere and there is no hiding place from him. Well, all seems to have gone according to David’s cunning and evil plan to get Uriah out of the way so he could marry Bathsheba and cover up his sin. Indeed probably the best part of a year had passed because the child Bathsheba conceived had now been born and David could so easily have felt at ease with himself, but the Lord had not forgotten! David therefore had an urgent need of deep repentance from his backslidden state, and the Lord stepped in to achieve this desired state of heart in his servant.

A man we have met previously in our examination of David’s life is the prophet Nathan. He was God’s man for the hour, one who would faithfully deliver the Word of God regardless of what God said and to whom he sent him. And we must say that such a calling demands considerable spiritual courage and strong faith in God. So the Lord sent Nathan to David.

1) The Lord’s Message, verses 1-4

We must notice at the very start of this study that it was the Lord who made the first move. He sent Nathan to David (v1). God took the initiative not David, and that prepares us for the grace we will find in this whole chapter of David’s life. God in his grace pursues the sinner and exposes his sin to him, and so the Lord would not let David settle in his sin because David was the Lord’s servant. We can be sure that if we are his servants and we sin he will not let us remain comfortable in our sin. He will vigorously pursue us and expose it. This will be a far from pleasant experience, as we will discover with David, but it is still something we should be profoundly thankful for because if the Lord abandoned us in our sin it would be dreadful. The Lord is going to expose David’s wickedness, but the way in which he was going to do it was to cause David to condemn himself, thus driving the point home even more forcefully.

He went about it by giving Nathan a story to tell David. Nathan courageously obeyed the Lord and went to David fearlessly. He told David of a rich man and a poor man who lived in the same place. The rich man was very wealthy as he had a large number of sheep (v2). By contrast the poor man had only one ewe lamb. This lamb he had purchased and it really became the family pet because he cared for it and raised it with his own children. He shared his food with it, allowed it to drink from his own cup, and he even allowed it to sleep in his arms. He cherished this one ewe lamb because we are told it was like a daughter to him (v3). But something was to happen

which spoiled this idyllic and happy family. A traveller came to the rich man. It was the custom and still is in many parts of the world, to offer such a traveller the best hospitality that you are able to give. Someone with lots of animals would often slaughter one of those to feed such a guest, but Nathan told David that the rich man refused to do that. Instead, he took the one ewe lamb belonging to the poor man and killed that to feed the traveller. He had no need to do so because he was rich and had plenty of his own, and to deprive this poor man was of course despicable.

2) David's Response, verses 5-6

David's response was immediate and as expected. He could see the total injustice of the situation and how wickedly the rich man had behaved. His sense of justice was quick to act and so he spoke (v5-6):

“David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, ‘As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.’”

We can all see the rightness of David's response and the rightness of prescribing a penalty to teach the rich man a valuable lesson. This was not David acting rashly but in accordance with the Law of God (Exodus 22:1):

“If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he must pay back five head of cattle for the ox and four sheep for the sheep.”

David knew the rich man had been terribly wrong in what he had done. He had no excuse for his actions. This was so contrary to another law of God in Leviticus 19:18 because this man did not love his neighbour as himself. He had been governed by complete selfishness and not by submission to the Word of God. The man stood condemned. As far as David was concerned there was no doubt about it, it was as clear as crystal, the man was guilty.

3) The Lord's Rebuke, verses 7-12

Unknown to David or at least unrealised by him, he had set a trap for his own feet! With great faithfulness to God and courage in the presence of the king of Israel, Nathan was quick to speak and his words must have penetrated David's heart just as if Nathan had hurled a spear at him (v7):

“Then Nathan said to David, ‘You are the man!’”

The rich man in his story was in actual fact David himself, the ewe lamb was Bathsheba and the poor man was Uriah, therefore the man David condemned was himself. It was a devastating and crushing rebuke from the Lord. David had not been able to hide his sinful behaviour from God. Nothing can be concealed from him, and now he was

exposed as if Nathan was replaying the scene captured on a video or DVD recorder, and it is a devastating exposé of David's ingratitude to the Lord for all his kindness to him (v7-9):

“This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.’”

God had lavished his kindness on David and given him everything in abundance, and if David had asked for it God would have given him even more! Notice the number of times the Lord says to him ‘I’ did this for you and ‘I’ did that for you. It is no less than 5 times! God had been so gracious to David, and the Lord declared David had in fact despised his Word by behaving as he did and therefore had despised the Lord himself. The commands not to commit adultery and not to murder and not to bear false witness were something David was very familiar with from the 10 commandments in Exodus 20 and elsewhere in the Old Testament. Therefore his sinful submission to lust, murder and deceit was abysmal. It would be abysmal for any one to commit such sins because sin is always a dreadful thing,

but we must say with David it was much worse because he was a child of God, who knew God's Word and who had been so blessed by God who had secured him as the king of Israel. But before we go any further we have to say it is exactly the same when any child of God breaks God's law, because we know better than those who do not know the Lord. And for us today we have to admit God has shown his favour to us in the most glorious way possible, through the death of the Lord Jesus Christ for us at the cross. Knowing what it cost him to deal with our sin surely shames us when sometimes in our folly we carry on sinning against him. How this shows us all our frailty, ingratitude and need to watch and pray so that we do not fall into temptation for none of us is immune from this! May we prayerfully seek the Lord's help and protection not only from the devil and his attacks and from the sinful world in which we live, but also from our own sinful nature. May we seek the help of the Holy Spirit to keep us from grieving God, which David had done and which we can so easily do also. The Lord through Nathan exposed David's iniquity in no uncertain terms and showed his attempted cover up was useless. David was guilty because to use his own words ‘he had no pity.’ And note how he both committed iniquity against God and ruined other people's lives.

The Lord pronounced on David a solemn judgement (v10):

“Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.”

Sadly this was fulfilled dramatically in the years that followed because David’s three sons all met with violent deaths. Amnon was killed by his brother Absalom’s men in 2 Samuel 13:28-29. Absalom himself was killed by Joab in 2 Samuel 18:14. Adonijah perished under his brother Solomon’s orders in 1 Kings 2:25. This was a very solemn pronouncement by the Lord through his servant Nathan, and it is a reminder to us that sin is never a light matter, especially in the lives of the children of God. We must note again that the Lord repeated the fact that David, by his conduct, had despised him for sin is always an affront to the character of God. And there was yet more solemn news for David to hear from the Lord.

(v11-12):

“This is what the Lord says: ‘Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.’”

As we shall see in future studies, David was driven from Jerusalem by the rebellion of his own son Absalom (2 Samuel 15:1-15) and he violated the women in his father’s household (2 Samuel 16:22). This was not done in secret

as David had acted, but openly for all to see. David’s sin resulted in a terrible harvest that was reaped for years to come. This teaches us there are often consequences from our sin that we so carelessly ignore when temptation unleashes its strong and attractive pull. Therefore we must stand against it at all costs. We all need to be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power or we will fall too. Paul’s words come to mind from Galatians 6:7-9:

“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life. Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”

4) David’s Repentance, verse 13a & Psalm 51

We can only say that as David listened to the faithful words of God’s prophet Nathan his heart was deeply wounded as he realised exactly what he had done and what the Lord thought of him. In fact his words recorded in this chapter are really quite brief but they reveal a man who was deeply repentant (v13):

“Then David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the Lord.’”

The temptation and prospect of pleasurable sexual gratification that had blinded him from seeing how wrong he was, and the deceitfulness and wickedness of his attempted cover up, now burned into his heart and it was broken before God. In many ways the brevity of his confession tells it all, just like the tax collector Jesus spoke about who simply prayed,

God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” (Luke 18:13)

David had done wrong, he knew he had done wrong, and now all he could do was to confess his guilt. He accepted this rebuke and his guilt unreservedly. These were the words of a broken heart. It was God he had offended. It was the Lord, the great God of grace, who had loved and abundantly blessed him so much over many, many years and who had promised his family would have one to sit on his throne for ever, this was the one he had sinned against. And he condemned himself without a single word of excuse. David was deeply humbled under the mighty hand of God and knew he deserved all that had been said about him and indeed much more. We need to say that this terrible dark period in David’s life has resulted in him writing some of the most significant Psalms, and Psalm 51 in particular. The best thing we can do is simply to read it, for not only are these the words of David but over the centuries they have been taken up by the Lord’s people again and again as they have come to him in true repentance for their own sins.

“Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge. Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me. Surely you desire truth in the inner parts; you teach me wisdom in the inmost place. Cleanse me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me. Then I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn back to you. Save me from bloodguilt, O God, the God who saves me and my tongue will sing of your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise. You do not delight in sacrifice, or I would bring it; you do not take pleasure in burnt offerings. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. In your good pleasure make Zion prosper; build up the walls of Jerusalem. Then there will be righteous sacrifices, whole burnt offerings

to delight you; then bulls will be offered on your altar.”

We need to note that David’s open confession and repentance is an evidence of true spiritual life. No true believer can continue in sin but will eventually come to true repentance.

5) The Lord’s Forgiveness And Discipline, verses 13b-23

a. Good news given, verse 13a

Nathan, who had so faithfully and courageously delivered God’s stern rebuke, also had the privilege of delivering God’s message of mercy (v13b):

“Nathan replied, "The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.”

We have to say that the Lord was doing what we read of in John 1:16, namely, he was pouring grace upon grace into David’s life, one blessing after another. We know David did not deserve this. He knew he did not deserve it (see Exod 21:12f, Lev 20:10 & Deut 22:22). Yet this is the amazing thing about the Lord. It is precisely what God’s grace is, his mercy to those who deserve his wrath. Again the New Testament helps us here to understand what was going on in David’s heart. It speaks of two kinds of sorrow over wrong doing: one is godly sorrow the other worldly sorrow in 2 Corinthians 7:10:

“Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death.”

And as God penetrated the inner recesses of David’s heart he saw that genuine godly sorrow was welling up like a tidal wave of grief that brought David to repentance, hence the Lord forgave him.

b. Solemn news given, verses 13b-15

However, the Lord was still going to chasten him, and chasten him in a most solemn way. Nathan was again God’s messenger and he faithfully delivered what must have been a very difficult message to tell David and difficult for him to receive (v14):

“But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt, the son born to you will die.”

God’s forgiveness would include this discipline which would be open for all to see. God would vindicate his reputation, righteousness and justice before all the nations. We need to note that there is no incompatibility between God’s pardon and us facing the consequences of our sin. We need to remember that there is a difference between the forgiveness of sin and relief from the consequences of sin, and these consequences we may have to live with for the rest of our lives. We are able to look forward to the day the Lord Jesus Christ returns when we will be free from all

the consequences of our sins for ever, but until that day arrives the Lord uses these to sanctify us and prepare us for the glory we shall enjoy with Christ on that great day. In the case of the believer who sins the Lord's disciplines are not strictly judgements because they are designed, to use Gordon Keddie's words, "to correct, straighten and guide our path in the future." We need also to say that through these solemn chastisements others would see that David's behaviour was known by God and disapproved by God. Again Nathan displayed remarkable faithfulness to God and declared all that God had told him. When he left David and returned home the Lord struck the child (v15):

"After Nathan had gone home, the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife had borne to David, and he became ill."

The fact that Bathsheba is again referred to as Uriah's wife serves to underline the gravity of David's sin.

c. David's response, verses 16-23

Had David only been pretending to repent then undoubtedly the news that his child would die would have stirred his anger which could have endangered Nathan and others. But David's repentance was genuine and he knew he was only receiving the just deserts of his sinful behaviour. In reality he actually deserved far more than the Lord laid on him because sin is a most terrible thing in the eyes of God, and David knew this only too well. So he

turned to the Lord in prayer for the child, fasting and refusing to be comforted or even to eat (v16-17):

"David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and went into his house and spent the nights lying on the ground. The elders of his household stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he refused, and he would not eat any food with them."

Undoubtedly David was humbled under the mighty hand of God as he spent nights cast upon the Lord in prayer. On the seventh day the child died. David's servants were themselves alarmed at the news and because of their love for and respect for David they were fearful of telling him (v18):

"On the seventh day the child died. David's servants were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they thought, 'While the child was still living, we spoke to David but he would not listen to us. How can we tell him the child is dead? He may do something desperate.'"

Their reaction was very touching to behold and they did not want to make matters worse for David, but their fears were turned into perplexity. David noticed they were whispering among themselves and came right out and asked them if the child was dead (v19) and they affirmed this was the case. And it was at this point that David acted in a most unusual way. When a relative died those

surviving went through a period of mourning, which often included extended fasting and prayer and lamenting and even dressing differently. But David did none of this and his servants could not understand it (v20-21):

“Then David got up from the ground. After he had washed, put on lotions and changed his clothes, he went into the house of the LORD and worshipped. Then he went to his own house, and at his request they served him food, and he ate. His servants asked him, ‘Why are you acting in this way? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead, you get up and eat!’”

His behaviour puzzled them, but David’s answer is quite instructive (v22):

“He answered, ‘While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, “Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me and let the child live.” But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me.’”

The fact that David went to the house of the Lord showed he had accepted the discipline his sin had brought upon him, and his words to his servants reinforce that.

Another lesson to learn from David’s words is that prayers for the dead are totally unbiblical. Death is a most solemn

event and we need to pray for people before they die so they will be ready to meet the Lord.

Hebrews 9:27 “...man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgement...”

Therefore we need to urge people and pray for people to turn to Christ before they die, as only then are they able to face God’s judgement with peace and assurance. Prayers for the dead are not found in the Bible.

6) Another Son, verses 24-25

The Lord was again gracious to David. He gave David and Bathsheba another son who was to become one of Israel’s most famous kings (v24-25):

“Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and he went to her and lay with her. She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. The LORD loved him; and because the LORD loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidah.”

Solomon was internationally famous for his wisdom and wealth as the Queen of Sheba discovered when she visited him many years after this chapter. (See 1 Kings 10.) The name Jedidiah means ‘loved by the Lord.’ We have to say that the Lord was so gracious and kind to David and Bathsheba in giving them Solomon and sending them further encouragement through Nathan.

7) A Further Victory, verses 26-31

The chapter closes with the details of yet another military victory over the Ammonites. Joab, the commander of David's army had captured Rabbah the Ammonite capital, called the royal citadel verses 27-28, taking its water supply. Joab sent a message to David to come with the rest of the army to seize it lest Joab take it and it be named after him. David assembled his soldiers and attacked the city taking the inhabitants prisoner including its king (v29-31):

“So David mustered the entire army and went to Rabbah, and attacked and captured it. He took the crown from the head of their king— its weight was a talent of gold, and it was set with precious stones—and it was placed on David's head. He took a great quantity of plunder from the city and brought out the people who were there, consigning them to labour with saws and with iron picks and axes, and he made them work at brick making. He did this to all the Ammonite towns. Then David and his entire army returned to Jerusalem.”

He did not remain at home as previously, resulting in his sin with Bathsheba, but took his responsibilities seriously and went with the army. Again the Lord was most gracious to David and granted him this resounding victory. The crown he took was very heavy indeed and would probably only have been worn for short periods on special occasions as it weighed 75 pounds or 34 kilograms.

Conclusion

This chapter begins with the solemn after effects of David's sinfulness, yet ends with his receiving mercy from God and this exceptional victory over the Ammonites. What David wrote in Psalm 23:3 was in fact his experience. The Lord who was his shepherd also restored his soul. These were sad and tragic events between David, Bathsheba and Uriah, and they hold great warning and great comfort for the believer. The warning is clear; God does not want us to behave as David did. Failure here will bring God's painful chastisement upon us, so this episode in David's life does not give us any excuse for continuing to live a sinful life. But there is great comfort too, for those who genuinely repent of their sins and confess them to God are graciously granted his pardon. And God is able to grant such forgiveness because his dear Son the Lord Jesus Christ has paid the penalty for our sin in full through his own death on the cross and the shedding of his precious blood. Hebrews 9:21 teaches us

“...without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.”

And John declares in 1 John 1:7

“But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.” (See also Hebs 9:14; Rev 1:5 and Rev 7:14)

This resounds to the Lord's glory for he is abundantly merciful and his mercy endures through all generations (Psalm 136).

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