

EVANGELICAL BIBLE COLLEGE OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA



LIFE OF DAVID
(DAVID'S LAST YEARS)

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Revised 4 January 2022

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CHAPTER 14**INTRODUCTION**

Joab would appear to be a man with an eye on the succession. He was David's uncle, and older than David, and yet would live longer, and he possibly saw that David's health was not as good as his, and that he needed to have an eye to the succession. In his estimation Absalom was the best candidate for the succession, as he saw no other child of David as suitable and ruthless enough to be a king in his world.

Absalom was intelligent, and handsome, but he was arrogant with it. Joab was of course quite correct about Absalom's "marketability" from a purely "human viewpoint", but as God saw it, Absalom was disqualified by his arrogance, his malicious violence, and his lack of spiritual life. "Three moral strikes and he was OUT!" God's thoughts are however not our thoughts, but His are the correct ones! **Proverbs 29:23-27, Isaiah 55:6-11.**

It is not intelligence that makes a good leader, it is character, which is real intelligence applied with justice and integrity. Absalom is carnal and self focused, and his narcissism will destroy the value of his intelligence. Narcissism **always** destroys any other advantages a person has, for it is moral blindness, and it means that the self centred person does not see clearly to deal with the real issues, nor do they heed the good counsel of others.

Absalom was disqualified by lack of character, and subsequent events would prove that he was at best a carnal and weak man by his rebellion against David. Joab, while probably supporting him initially, would eventually be the one who would turn on him and run his own spear through him. 2 Samuel 18:9-15. Initially Joab sees in the young man hope, and may even have been content for Absalom to take over before David's death, but as we will see, the Machiavellian politics of this court were twisted indeed. People are often not what they appear to be, and not as their publicity photo or CV material apparently shows.

2 SAMUEL 14:1-33

14:1 Now Joab the son of Zeruah perceived that the king's heart was toward Absalom. **2** And Joab sent to Tekoah, and fetched thence a wise woman, and said unto her, I pray thee, feign thyself to be a mourner, and put on now mourning apparel, and anoint not thyself with oil, but be as a woman that had a long time mourned for the dead: **3** And come to the king, and speak on this manner unto him. So Joab put the words in her mouth. **4** And when the woman of Tekoah spake to the king, she fell on her face to the ground, and did obeisance, and said, Help, O king. **5** And the king said unto her, What aileth thee? And she answered, I am indeed a widow woman, and mine husband is dead. **6** And thy handmaid had two sons, and they two strove together in the field, and there was none to part them, but the one smote the other, and slew him. **7** And, behold, the whole family is risen against thine handmaid, and they said, Deliver him that smote his brother, that we may kill him, for the life of his brother whom he slew; and we will destroy the heir also: and so they shall quench my coal which is left, and shall not leave to my husband neither name nor remainder upon the earth. **8** And the king said unto the woman, Go to thine house, and I will give charge concerning thee. **9** And the woman of Tekoah said unto the king, My lord, O king, the iniquity be on me, and on my father's house: and the king and his throne be guiltless. **10** And the king said, Whoever saith ought unto thee, bring him to me, and he shall not touch thee any more. **11** Then said she, I pray thee, let the king remember the LORD thy God, that thou wouldest not suffer the revengers of blood to destroy any more, lest they destroy my son. And he said, As the LORD liveth, there shall not one hair of thy son fall to the earth. **12** Then the woman said, Let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak one word unto my lord the king. And he said, Say on. **13** And the woman said, Wherefore then hast thou thought such a thing against the people of God? for the king doth speak this thing as one which is faulty, in that the king doth not fetch home again his banished. **14** For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person: yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him. **15** Now therefore that I am come to speak of this thing unto my lord the king, it is because the people have made me afraid: and thy handmaid said, I will now speak unto the king; it may be that the king will perform the request of his handmaid. **16** For the king will hear, to deliver his handmaid out of the hand of the man that would destroy me and my son together out of the inheritance of God. **17** Then thine handmaid said, The word of my lord the king shall now be comfortable: for as an angel of God, so is my lord the king to discern good and bad: therefore the LORD thy God will be with thee. **18** Then the king answered and said unto the woman, Hide not from me, I pray thee, the thing that I shall ask thee. And the woman said, Let my lord the king now speak. **19** And the king said, Is not the hand of Joab with thee in all this? And the woman answered and said, As thy soul liveth, my lord the king, none can turn to the right hand or to the left from ought that my lord the king hath spoken: for thy servant Joab, he bade me, and he put all these words in the mouth of thine handmaid: **20** To fetch about this form of speech hath thy servant Joab done this thing: and my lord is wise, according to the wisdom of an angel of God, to know all things that are in the earth. **21** And the king said unto Joab, Behold now, I have done this thing: go therefore, bring the young man Absalom again. **22** And Joab fell to the ground on his face, and bowed himself, and thanked the king: and Joab said, To day thy servant knoweth that I have found grace in thy sight, my lord, O king, in that the king hath fulfilled the request of his servant. **23** So Joab arose and went to Geshur, and brought Absalom to Jerusalem. **24** And the king said, Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face. So Absalom returned to his own house, and saw not the king's face.

25 But in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him. **26** And when he polled his head, (for it was at every year's end that he polled it: because the hair was heavy on him, therefore he polled it:) he weighed the hair of his head at two hundred shekels after the king's weight. **27** And unto Absalom there were born three sons, and one daughter, whose name was Tamar: she was a woman of a fair countenance. **28** So Absalom dwelt two full years in Jerusalem, and saw not the king's face. **29** Therefore Absalom sent for Joab, to have sent him to the king; but he would not come to him: and when he sent again the second time, he would not come. **30** Therefore he said unto his servants, See, Joab's field is near mine, and he hath barley there; go and set it on fire. And Absalom's servants set the field on fire. **31** Then Joab arose, and came to Absalom unto his house, and said unto him, Wherefore have thy servants set my field on fire? **32** And Absalom answered Joab, Behold, I sent unto thee, saying, Come hither, that I may send thee to the king, to say, Wherefore am I come from Geshur? It had been good for me to have been there still: now therefore let me see the king's face; and if there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me. **33** So Joab came to the king, and told him: and when he had called for Absalom, he came to the king, and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king: and the king kissed Absalom.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 5. Joab is a true ruthless political general, but he is apparently loyal at this point to David, but he will, by his actions, prove himself devious at best through the Great Rebellion that will come out of these events. He seeks to ease the pain in David's heart, but he does so from a purely personal perspective, AND HE IS WRONG at all points here. These next chapters show the great limitations of human viewpoint decision making. At no point is anyone consulting the prophet Nathan, nor seeking the High Priest's intervention through the ephod (Urim and Thummim). God's holy will would have been far better than man's will in this situation.

In his grief over what has happened to his family David has gone inwards and become depressed, and has not poured his heart out towards the Lord, and sought the Lord's counsel regarding Absalom, as he once did regarding his strategic moves. 1 Samuel 23:2, 4, 10-12, Psalms 55:22, 75:4-7, Proverbs 15:33, Jeremiah 45:4-5, James 4:7-10, 1 Peter 5:5-9. It is God's plan and purpose that is required here, not any half baked forgiveness on David's part, and especially not the return of a man who has no concept or thought of genuine repentance.

Joab brings back a man who will become an active traitor to his father and a rebel against the kingdom. Joab himself will play politics with Absalom, and finally have to kill this young man before he talks about Joab's politicking. Absalom is not God's choice to rule, and the evidence that he is unsuitable is there for all to see, in the devious, malicious and nasty way he organised the murder of his brother Amnon. This is not a young man who seeks God's glory, but his own. It is a not a young man who is teachable in righteousness, for he is obsessed with his own glory and good looks.

Absalom has been living in exile in the kingdom of Geshur for some years before Joab launches his plot to use an older woman from the town of Tekoa who is a good actor. He gets her to pretend she has been mourning for the dead a long time and briefs her on her "script" that will be used to convince the king to forgive his son Absalom and bring him back. Joab will try to trick David into returning Absalom rather than having a godly reason for the action. Had Absalom written with a letter of repentance, or given evidence of a regret at his actions there would be some light here, but this young man is a servant of darkness, but will masquerade for a time as an angel of light. 2 Corinthians 11:13-15.

The prophet Nathan would have been the right man to consult! For some reason David is not asking the spiritual people around him for guidance. This may be an indication of the grief based depression that plagues him through this period. David is not thinking clearly here and he is embarrassed, but such self centred motivation opens the door to great evil from even more self centred people. The cost of his adultery with Bathsheba is weighing heavily upon him and it may be that his guilt and the resultant depression is disabling his choices.

We must pay attention to this, for although forgiven of a sin, we can let it disable us by guilt, and it maybe that guilt stops David speaking with Nathan, who was the one who convicted him of his sin. Let none say God lets David get away with his sins, for we see a man who is devastated for years after this great sin. He is forgiven by the Lord, but he is weighed down by the flow on effects of his great sin, and the depression that grips him has disabled his decision making for years now. Psalms 51 and 103.

Verses 6 – 8. David hears the case, which has some apparent similarities to his own situation. Two sons strive and one kills the other. There is no malice mentioned as existing beforehand, and no plan to kill the other, and so under the Mosaic Law the son who killed the other is able to flee to a place of safety and then appeal to the Levites and be forgiven if he proved he was innocent of planned murder.

Superficially there is nothing in this story that should be referred to the king, for, from what we are told, it is a straight forward case that the Levites could deal with. As we will see below however, the things the woman does not mention in her "summary of facts" bear crucial similarities to the key facts of Absalom's case. Refer to the Mosaic Law and read the rules regarding murder and manslaughter and see the difference defined in the Law. Exodus 21: 12-19, Numbers 35, Deuteronomy 19:1-13.

In one aspect of this case there is a crucial difference; Absalom is not the "only son", and nor is he the "only hope for Israel", as Joab clearly but mistakenly believes. Under the Law he is guilty of foul murder, and as we will see, as we reflect upon the woman's son in her story, so is he. Absalom has harboured deep and long malice that has led to his

planned execution of his brother Amnon. Absalom is guilty of murder, not manslaughter, nor legitimate execution, as you see from the above Mosaic Law passages.

David will give a judgement in the fake case the woman of Tekoa presents, but his sin has been to this point, that he has not delivered a true and public judgement in the real case against his son Absalom. Joab is trying to get David to deliver a public judgement, or decree of forgiveness, towards Absalom. The young man's status needs to be publicly affirmed, one way or the other. Joab is arguing, through this piece of play acting, for acquittal, but the Mosaic Law argues for condemnation. To acquit an evil person is to guarantee that more evil will flow.

The correct Mosaic Law procedure after a violent death was for the man slayer to flee to a City of Refuge and there await a fair trial by the local Levites. To flee to a foreign place was to admit guilt, and identify that you didn't want to be judged by the Mosaic Law, because you knew you were guilty, and only life long exile was possible. At the Levitical trial the facts were to be ascertained, and the pertinent facts were, (1) who struck the blow that killed the person, and (2) what sort of blow was it. They inquired also (3) as to the motivation behind the action, if any, and (4) the intention of the one who killed the other. If there was clear intention to kill, and a "lying in wait" to entrap and kill, then it was murder.

If the killing was done to avenge a previous capital offence (in this case rape) then the reasons for the execution had to be proven and accepted by a Levitical court beforehand. Execution could only be done under Levitical orders, and death was to be by stoning, or the penalty was to be permanently exiled. Leviticus 18:6-18, 29-30, 20:17.

If the person charged was proven innocent of the charge of murder, and was cleared by a Levitical Court, then they waited in the city of refuge until the death of the current High Priest, and only then could they return to their home town, with the Levites written judgement in their hand to be delivered to the town council of elders. David usurps the Levitical Court, as he can as king, and gives a judgement to the woman immediately, and by so doing is personally convicted of neglect, in not doing so in the case of the rape of Tamar, and the murder of Amnon.

Verses 9 – 11. This woman is very cunning in her words, and as they are Joab's words we know his cunning from them. Notice in verse nine her words about the king's throne being guiltless. David knows his throne is anything but guiltless because of his sins of commission, and lately of omission. David tells the woman that anyone who argues with her is to be brought to him and he will deal with them. This strength in decision making is what is called for in the case of Absalom. David has not practised what he is now preaching and this woman will catch him out in that.

She calls him to remember "the Lord thy God" and ensure no harm comes to her son. At this point if David remembers the Lord he ought to have called in the prophet Nathan, or the High Priests! He still doesn't call in spiritual help, nor seek the Lord's direction in any way, but keeps dealing with the case before him alone. David swears that the woman's son will be absolutely safe, and will be under his personal protection. He has not asked the crucial questions of intention, motivation, and malicious planning for the killing, and so he has failed to ask questions that would reveal the good or evil nature of the killer.

By making this ruling rather than passing judgement over to, or back to, the Levites, David is usurping Levitical authority, and this is an indication that things have changed in the land under the two kings, or recently under David. Has David turned away from the Levitical courts due to his own fear of their verdict on him, Amnon, and then Absalom? Was the Levitical system of Law generally now recognised as being second to the king in the land, or has the king become in effect a Supreme Court for the difficult cases that previously went to the Levites? Deuteronomy 17:8-13.

The fact that this passage from Deuteronomy was just before the passage about the kingship, (verses 14-20), had clearly led over the period of Saul and David's reign to the king being the final court in the land. There may be more than this occurring behind the scenes; our writer doesn't give us much more than a hint here that David's thinking is not in accord with the Mosaic Code.

Verses 12 – 14. This woman doesn't apparently know when to stop, but she is determined to fulfil all that Joab has requested of her, and she pushes the king further and further regarding the principles behind his forgiveness of her son. She wants David to get to the place where he acknowledges that his ruling regarding her son is well beyond the Mosaic Law, and so she will lead the king to the forgiveness of Absalom, who under the same code cannot be forgiven either. She directly accuses the king of a double standard, in that he has forgiven her son and sought his restoration, even though he may have intended to kill his brother.

Under the Law intention to kill, planning for the murder, and previous malice, were all reasons to return a verdict of guilty, and whatever the loss to the mother, the boy was determinedly evil and needed to be executed. Wickedness was to be put out of the land. Leviticus 20:7, 22-24, 26. She has not referred to these crucial facts in her case, and if intention to kill, planning and malice were all absent, then she would surely have mentioned them, as they strengthened her request for mercy.

The reason she has come to the king is that her son is truly guilty of murder, and is an evil man. David forgives him solely because he is the only son, and yet he has rejected his son, who clearly also intended to kill his brother, and is just as guilty of murder, but isn't his only son. Joab knows that Absalom is guilty under the Mosaic Law, and execution or permanent exile is the only legitimate option under the Law, but he also knows that God has forgiven David for the murder of Uriah and so he has that over David, for he was the agent of Uriah's death.

By forgiving Absalom Joab is also covering his own sin in the murder of Uriah. If God can forgive David for Uriah's murder, then David must forgive Absalom for Amnon's death, for at least he had a legitimate if only "semi-legal" (for it hadn't been approved by a Levitical Court) reason; this was something that David lacked in his murder. The questions and statements of this woman are pushing David into the corner where he feels he must accept Absalom back as he was accepted back. The only difference, as noted above, is that David was repentant, but Absalom is not at all; he keeps on harbouring evil in his heart.

This difference will lead Absalom to a place of resentment towards his father, rather than humble thankfulness for restoration rather than execution. The truth that the writer is underlining here is that Absalom should not have been forgiven, for he lacked repentance, and that crucial fact meant that later many others would die! If you show mercy to those who have showed no mercy, and are not merciful, then you will become party to their later evil deeds. Proverbs 21:13, Matthew 18:23-35, James 2:13. Read these verses carefully.

Verses 15 – 17. The woman continues, even though David has by this point realised that Joab has probably set her up to speak this way. She flatteringly speaks as if David is the very voice of God; an angel of the Lord. She is pushing David to speak forgiveness as he has been forgiven, by emotional manipulation, without the repentance of Absalom which would make such forgiveness legitimate. Luke 17:3-4.

The other problem with forgiveness here is that the offence is not against David; it is against God. David realised this in his repentance, Psalms 51:1-4, but Absalom is going to be forgiven and return in self righteousness and self centeredness. He does not recognise the wickedness he has done, only the wickedness of Amnon. He is dangerous!

The woman's pious blessing over the king in verse seventeen is pious hypocrisy and emotional manipulation. The key issues of murder have been glossed over in this case of hers (and David's) and the crucial issue of repentance has been ignored. Evil is pardoned here without life change, and so the evil continues. This is never the recipe for happiness and peace; rather it is the guarantee of future disaster. Many will die because of this false "mercy", and gross injustice.

Verses 18 – 20. Basically this woman says to David's question, "well caught sir". She knows that David is on to her and her script writer. She has acted well, but not well enough to hide the hand of Joab. She glows with her praise and flattery of David. Joab has picked a real politician in this woman; she earns her money. She says all that in a Middle Eastern Court would be expected. She says that Joab has instructed her to put the affair of Absalom in the best possible way, but David is too smart to be baffled and he has seen through it all. Her flattery is still purposeful, for she wants David to see the point. Absalom must be forgiven if David is to be consistent. It is wrongful, but she has studiously avoided that issue, and stuck to the use of the Lord's name, but without righteousness being mentioned.

Verses 21 – 28. David sees Joab's point, and it appears that Joab may have been asking for Absalom's return for some considerable time. He tells Joab to go and fetch the young man back. Joab is overjoyed and falls at David's feet in gratitude. He has been requesting this for some time and is filled with gratitude to David. Now pause and reflect upon this. What is his real motivation? David has been depressed about Absalom and it is hard to work with a depressed employer, but was that the only reason. Joab is a game player, like the woman he hired to tell the story. He is not a man who thinks about righteousness and truth, just what works to make life more pleasant and secure for him. He is quick to ride off to Geshur and bring Absalom back, but it is to be a return without any fanfare. Sadly Joab is proved a player here also, and his role in the later rebellion is clear to all – he is fatally flawed in his assessment of Absalom.

David cannot bring himself to definitively rule on Absalom's case and be seen publicly to receive him back fully. He is ashamed of his son and himself and doesn't want to be seen to be receiving back a killer of his own brother. Perhaps he was worried about what the other boys would think; we are not told. Absalom is however popular in Israel as a handsome man, for none was more beautiful than this man was. The writer particularly speaks of his mass of hair which was ceremonially shorn annually and weighed in at 200 shekels weight, around six pounds, or well over a kilo.

Strong hair was a sign of manliness and virility in the ancient world, and made Absalom a "Hollywood" type celebrity in his day. He is also married by this time and his wife, or wives, have a number of children. He has three sons, and a daughter who he names after his defiled sister. She becomes as beautiful as his sister was, and the writer speaks as if he has seen her in older life and she is the most beautiful woman he has ever seen. This may be a clue to the time of the writer, as being probably in the reign of Solomon, and someone close to the court.

Verses 29 – 33. Sadly David does not follow through on the return of Absalom to ascertain his state of mind and soul and make his peace for the great evil he has done. In our day we speak of this as getting "closure" on an incident. David does not seek closure and gives no opportunity for Absalom to make his peace with his father had he wanted to. By the time Joab obtains the permission to bring the two together it is too late, and Absalom has determined to unseat his father and rule in his place. As events play out from here, I suspect that Absalom has been nurturing the desire to rule anyway, and he may have been encouraged to think this way by his mother, and/or his father-in-law, the king of Geshur.

Absalom knows that Joab is his pathway back to his father and seeks Joab's permission to return to full activity in the court, and even obtain a ruling job again, but his father will not see him, and Joab will not answer his requests. In effect Absalom is a private citizen during this time and he is not wasting time, but has already started to parade about as the handsome prince charming. He seeks restoration with his father however, because that alone will place him close

enough to the power centre to be able to plan more effectively to be able to take over. Absalom starts to see over the years after his return that he will never be king by his father's wishes, but nothing is said, and he starts to plot.

He seeks Joab's help twice but Joab is not interested in helping him and getting off side with David. Instead of asking a third time he sets Joab's barley fields on fire just before the harvest. This gets the old soldier's attention and he comes to his house in Jerusalem and complains about the actions of Absalom's servants. Absalom complains in a self centred way to Joab about being better off back in Geshur, and that he is innocent of any evil.

All this is false and evil lying manipulative nonsense; and his actions and words are evidence that this is a very dangerous young man. Now I say young man, but he is probably nearly thirty at this time, and ready to make his move. His words and attitude indicate just how dangerous he is, but Joab agrees to help him. The king finally agrees to meet his son again and he kisses him in token of acceptance, but they do not speak long and seriously as they need to. The truth is not faced, and so lies and further deceit will begin to grow in earnest as a result.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. The Mosaic Law was given to Israel to keep the nation and the people safe from evil. To ignore the principles of the Law and make Absalom an exception was a grave error on David's part. David was forgiven and so should Absalom have been, but only after he had shown understanding of what he had done, and been truly repentant before the Lord. Anything less than that was simply the approval of evil and the certainty of more to follow.

"Easy believism" has been the bane of the modern American church, and "easy forgiveness", without true repentance, will destroy any society or church that practises it. God calls for full repentance and anything less than that does not require forgiveness, indeed forgiveness and acceptance of the unrepentant person will be dangerous to the innocent.

2. When serious issues need to be raised and discussed, that is what should happen. It is wrongful to everyone in the situation for the pastoral leader not to get to the heart of an issue that needs to be resolved. Very few real problems go away with being ignored; they deepen and the resentment that deepens with them is very destructive.

3. Depression deadens the thinking capacity of the mind. God's plan for us all calls for us to confront any depression and deal to it. This means being physically, mentally and spiritually active every day, stimulating our system to pump the right chemistry within the brain and body. Anything less than this will ensure our thinking becomes flat, pedestrian, and worse, carnal rather than spiritual. David missed the most obvious thing in the life of Absalom. He missed the fact that he had not repented of his evil, and by ignoring that crucial doctrinal principle he opened the door to evil that was far worse than the initial one of his and of Absalom's.

DEPRESSION – BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES FOR DEALING WITH IT

Proven Biblical techniques which you can use to successfully deal with depression in your life, REGARDLESS OF THE CAUSE:

1. CONFESSION OF PERSONAL SIN

Make it a spiritual habit to confess sins the moment that you become aware of them. This step toward recovery from depression is absolutely critical!! 1 John 1:9

2. THE FILLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Holy Spirit fills you and controls your life when you have no unconfessed sin in your life. You can trust the Holy Spirit to reveal sin to you when you commit it, or even before. The fruit of the Holy Spirit is given in Galatians 5:22-23 it is: Love, Joy, Peace, Longsuffering, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness and Self-Control. These 9 virtues replace depression

3. LIVING IN THE WORD OF GOD:

Make it a daily practice to read and study the Bible each and every day. By living in the Word of God you are constantly reminded of GOD'S viewpoint, of His Plan, of His provision, of His awareness of our spirit of heaviness; and we are reminded of what He wants to accomplish in us with the tests or trials that we are going through.

A Christian's response to the Word of God should be:

- [a] READ IT - Deuteronomy. 31:11; Isaiah. 34:16; Luke. 4:16; Ephesians. 3:4; Colossians. 3:16; 4:1; 1 Thessalonians. 5:27; 2 Timothy . 4:13; Revelation 1:3.
- [b] HEED IT - Psalm 119:9; 1 Timothy. 4:16.
- [c] SEED IT - Matthew. 28:19, 20.
- [d] DESIRE IT - 1 Peter. 2:2.
- [e] PREACH IT - 2 Timothy 4:2
- [f] RIGHTLY DIVIDE IT - 2 Timothy. 2:15.
- [g] LIVE BY IT - Matthew. 4:4

[h] USE IT - Ephesians. 6:17.

[i] SUFFER FOR IT, AND IF NEED BE, DIE FOR IT - Revelation 1:9; 6:9; 20:4.

THE CHILD OF GOD IS TO:-

KNOW IT in his HEAD

STOW IT in his HEART

SHOW IT in his LIFE

SOW IT in the WORLD:

Deuteronomy 4:1-10; 12:32; Joshua 1:8; Psalm 33:6; Proverbs 30:5, 6; Mark 4:24; Luke 8:12; John 12:48-50; Romans 8:7; 1 Corinthians 2:14; Hebrews 1:1-3; 2:1-4; Revelation 1:1-3; 20:12; 22:18; 19.

4. APPLY THE PRINCIPLES OF GRACE:

Depression is often caused by PEOPLE, and most of the time by people we cannot escape, or people we love, or people we cannot confront, or people we trust.

By applying the principles of grace we will develop the ability to look at people and see them as GOD sees them.

This includes the ability to let them live their lives as unto the Lord, and trusting God to make His way clear to them. This technique lets people make mistakes without your judging them. Matthew 7:1-5

5. FOCUS ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST:

When we focus on Jesus Christ it helps to cure depression because it gets our eyes off our spouse, our children, our neighbours, our friends, ourselves and our problems. Hebrews 12:2

Instead, as we move through the day, we are thinking about the Lord Jesus Christ, His plan for our life, the Father's provision for each incident in our life, and His provision of wisdom for each decision we must make.

6. TRUSTING AND APPLYING THE PROMISES OF GOD

When we trust and use the promises of God we then enter into the "REST" phase of Christian living.

We need to have a good grasp of just who God is so that we will not hesitate to believe that He can do what He has promised to do. Hebrews 4:1-11 [see topic PROMISES]

We need to know Him as He reveals Himself in the Bible. We need to believe Him when He tells us what He will do for us. Cast your burden on the Lord because He really does care for you!! 1 Peter 5:7

7. RELAX – TAKE IT EASY – BACK OFF AND LET GOD DO HIS WORK.

A relaxed attitude is based on knowing God personally and intimately as His special child that you are. A relaxed attitude is one of the results of living in the Word of God, walking in fellowship with Him, trusting in and using His promises to you, and being focused on Jesus Christ.

If you are a Christian, YOU are His personal gift to His Son, who categorically stated that no one can ever snatch you out of His Father's hand, nor out of His John 10:27-29

You are personally being trained and groomed by God Himself to rule this entire universe with Jesus Christ, the King of kings and Lord of lords. God already sees you seated in heavenly places perfectly sanctified and glorified. See topic on ROYAL FAMILY OF GOD

To have the glory, you must also have some suffering for a little while on this earth. This is part of your training. See topic on CHRISTIAN LIFE - SUFFERING

8. STRIVE FOR INNER HAPPINESS IN YOUR LIFE:

Inner happiness is not possible for the Christian who is occupied solely with himself and his own needs. It is also not possible for the person who occupies himself solely with his own problems, his own circumstances and his own efforts.

Inner happiness is a state of happiness and joy based on knowing that God is everything He claims to be and that He can do ALL that He has promised. See topic on BEATITUDES

Inner happiness is the joy of living where every provision for physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being is being made by God in the life of a Christian who is walking in daily fellowship with Him.

OUR OLD SIN NATURE

1. We are born with a nature, inherited from Adam, which is against God and prone to sin (Ephesians 2:1, Romans 5:12).
2. The old sin nature is perpetuated in the human race by physical birth (Psalm 51:5, 1 Timothy 2:13, 14).
3. We are therefore considered spiritually dead at the point of physical birth (Romans 5:12).
4. Names for the old sin nature:
 - a) Flesh - Galatians 5:16
 - b) Old Man - Ephesians 4:22, Colossians 3:9
 - c) Carnal - Romans 7:14
 - d) Sin - Romans 5:12
 - e) Heart - Jeremiah 17:9
 - f) Member - Colossians 3:5.
5. The believer continues to have an old sin nature after salvation (1 John 1:8, 1 Corinthians 3:1).
6. The believer under the control of the old sin nature is called carnal (Romans 7:14, 1 Corinthians 3:1-3).
7. The old sin nature frustrates true production of the Christian life (Romans 7:15).
8. The old sin nature has two tendencies (Romans 6:6)
 - a) Area of weakness - pushes us towards lawlessness and sins (Hebrews 12:1)
 - b) Area of strength - pushes us towards asceticism and self-righteousness (Isaiah 64:6).
9. The old sin nature is not found in the resurrection body (1 Corinthians 15:56, Philippians 3:21, 1 Thessalonians 5:23).
10. Victory over the old sin nature is achieved by considering your old life dead, surrendering to God, confessing sin and relying upon the filling of the Spirit (Romans 6:6,11, Colossians 3:9-10).

NOTES

CHAPTER 15

INTRODUCTION

What is called the "Great Rebellion" occurs within a few years of Absalom's return. He is working day and night to prepare for his coup d'état, and he is very nearly successful, and many will pay with their lives. David has not been operating at full power for a number of years. As we noted in the previous chapters, he is forgiven and knows it, but realises that the consequences of his terrible time of sin and evil is now flowing onwards in his family and nation. He is not at his best, and even his health may have suffered. He will eventually die of heart disease around age seventy and now in his early sixties he may be starting to manifest symptoms of that condition. 2 Samuel 18:2-4, 1 Kings 1:1.

The rich food of the palace may also have started to undo his previously robust health as a guerrilla leader in the open fields. He will suffer greatly during his escape from Jerusalem, but will also recover his previous vigour and write some of his greatest Psalms, Psalms 3-17, as he draws close to the Lord his God again. David has failed as the shepherd of the flock of Israel, and his family itself, but the rebellion helps him see the wolf that Absalom truly is, and he gains the strength to resist him. Absalom follows satanic logic, and the Lord counters his every move by leading David to the right people at the right time to render Absalom's plans of no value. Initially it looks as if Absalom will take the nation, but David, with the Lord's help, will triumph and Absalom will die at Joab's hands.

2 SAMUEL 15:1-37

15:1 And it came to pass after this, that Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him. 2 And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate: and it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city art thou? And he said, Thy servant is of one of the tribes of Israel. 3 And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee. 4 Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice! 5 And it was so, that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him. 6 And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel. 7 And it came to pass after forty years, that Absalom said unto the king, I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed unto the LORD, in Hebron. 8 For thy servant vowed a vow while I abode at Geshur in Syria, saying, If the LORD shall bring me again indeed to Jerusalem, then I will serve the LORD. 9 And the king said unto him, Go in peace. So he arose, and went to Hebron. 10 But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, As soon as ye hear the sound of the trumpet, then ye shall say, Absalom reigneth in Hebron. 11 And with Absalom went two hundred men out of Jerusalem, that were called; and they went in their simplicity, and they knew not any thing. 12 And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counsellor, from his city, even from Giloh, while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom. 13 And there came a messenger to David, saying, The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom. 14 And David said unto all his servants that were with him at Jerusalem, Arise, and let us flee; for we shall not else escape from Absalom: make speed to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly, and bring evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword. 15 And the king's servants said unto the king, Behold, thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my lord the king shall appoint. 16 And the king went forth, and all his household after him. And the king left ten women, which were concubines, to keep the house. 17 And the king went forth, and all the people after him, and tarried in a place that was far off. 18 And all his servants passed on beside him; and all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the Gittites, six hundred men which came after him from Gath, passed on before the king. 19 Then said the king to Ittai the Gittite, Wherefore goest thou also with us? return to thy place, and abide with the king: for thou art a stranger, and also an exile. 20 Whereas thou camest but yesterday, should I this day make thee go up and down with us? seeing I go whither I may, return thou, and take back thy brethren: mercy and truth be with thee. 21 And Ittai answered the king, and said, As the LORD liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be. 22 And David said to Ittai, Go and pass over. And Ittai the Gittite passed over, and all his men, and all the little ones that were with him. 23 And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people passed over: the king also himself passed over the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over, toward the way of the wilderness. 24 And lo Zadok also, and all the Levites were with him, bearing the ark of the covenant of God: and they set down the ark of God; and Abiathar went up, until all the people had done passing out of the city. 25 And the king said unto Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favour in the eyes of the LORD, he will bring me again, and shew me both it, and his habitation: 26 But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him. 27 The king said also unto Zadok the priest, Art not thou a seer? return into the city in peace, and your two sons with you, Ahimaaz thy son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar. 28 See, I will tarry in the plain of the wilderness, until there come word from you to certify me. 29 Zadok therefore and Abiathar carried the ark of God again to Jerusalem: and they tarried there. 30 And David went up by the ascent of mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot: and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up. 31 And one told David, saying, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom. And David said, O LORD, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness. 32 And it came to pass, that when David was come to the top of the mount, where he worshipped God, behold, Hushai the Archite came to meet him with his coat rent, and earth upon his head: 33 Unto whom David said, If thou passest on with me, then thou shalt be a burden unto me: 34 But if thou return to the city, and say unto Absalom, I will be thy servant, O king; as I have been thy father's servant hitherto, so will I now also be thy servant: then mayest thou for me defeat the counsel of Ahithophel. 35 And hast thou not there with thee Zadok and Abiathar the priests? therefore it shall be, that what thing soever thou shalt hear out of the king's house, thou shalt tell it to Zadok and Abiathar the priests. 36 Behold, they have there with them their two sons, Ahimaaz Zadok's son, and Jonathan Abiathar's son; and by them ye shall send unto me every thing that ye can hear. 37 So Hushai David's friend came into the city, and Absalom came into Jerusalem.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 6. Absalom takes his strategic plan and puts it into action with a serious and consistent series of what we would call today “marketing plans”. He acts consistently and daily as the “hope of Israel” and dresses and acts as if he is already a king. It would appear he does this over four years (forty years in verse seven is a copyist error, and likely is correctly four) and has total success right under David's nose.

It is incredible that David did not hear of this sort of action, nor take action against him, but David is distracted by either depression or politics. It is more likely he is depressed, for had he been distracted by politics, his spies would have reported Absalom's clear and obvious actions, and immediate judgement should have followed. David is only shaken out of his depression by the reality of the Great Rebellion. Absalom's behaviours are that of a king, with his chariot and his runners and his heralds.

He sets up his throne for judgement and deals with people as a crown prince and future king, and he openly tells all who will listen that the old king has lost interest in his work and needs replacing. It is an open challenge to David's authority and the fact that David does not act to stop it builds the legitimacy of Absalom's claims daily. By the end of four years David has little real political support left, as most consider him "past it" as a king; clearly too mentally weak and physically ill to govern properly.

Absalom's behaviours are a marketing ploy to amplify his reputation amongst the twelve tribes. He especially targets visitors to the court from other tribes and makes himself the key "go to" person for them. He cultivates the elders who visit and makes himself the young "hope of the nation". David is not his old self and the people are losing confidence in his ability to lead them strongly. His grip on logic and on power has slipped over the years since the death of Uriah. It is at least four years since Absalom's exile, possibly eight since he fled to Geshur, and maybe as many as ten since Uriah's murder and David's repentance. People may read Psalm 51 and 103, but still not trust or forgive David as God has!

Even some of David's closest courtiers will join Absalom as they fear that David cannot be trusted as their leader any more. Absalom has been working for four full years to build up his profile in the land as the future king. He has worked the politics of publicity and popularity, and like all who do this, he has nothing of godly character or righteousness behind the façade of external beauty. Proverbs 11:2, 16:18, 17:19, Jeremiah 22:13-17, Matthew 23:13-29.

Verses 7 – 13. Absalom's request to David after four years back in Jerusalem was an obvious clue that a coup was planned. Absalom has had four years to pay his vow, and had he done so within the first year it would have been legitimate but not with this delay. Had the vow been a legitimate thing it should have been spoken of immediately on his return, and would have been some sort of evidence then of spiritual insight and repentance, but four years later it is clearly hypocrisy and the indication that the day of open rebellion has come.

The Lord's words in Matthew 7:13ff rings loudly behind the false words of Absalom. There is no fruit of any worship of the Lord in his behaviour, and nor has there been to this point. This man has no fruit of righteousness in his life and so it is logical to deduce evil will come of his trip for "spiritual purposes", for he is not spiritual. Behind the trip to Hebron, the place where David was anointed, and Absalom was born, is traitorous rebellion. 2 Samuel 2:4, 3:2-5.

David weakly gives his blessing to his son to go and so start the rebellion proper. He leads two hundred men out with him to Hebron, but they are not all fully aware of his plans. He has kept his plans secret, with only his spies and special agents knowing the time of his move so they can gather the northern tribal support levies quickly. He is very cunning and totally focused upon his goal at this point. Like all narcissists however he will over-estimate his intelligence and unhinge quickly as he starts to believe his own publicity. Arrogance will undo him, as it does all stupid satanic workers. (Satan's people are all "stupid", for they ignore who Satan is, and how much he hates mankind – he always kills his own.)

David's main counsellor, Ahithophel, appears to have been involved in the conspiracy, for he also is out of Jerusalem at this key time, in his own city offering a sacrifice that should have been offered at the tabernacle. If he has been involved for some time he may have been blocking the information about Absalom's actions from getting to David for some time and so enabling the rebellion to grow stronger undetected. This man has been a traitor for some time it would appear.

The success of Absalom's rebellion is finally reported to David, with Ahithophel away, and he is told the awful truth. Not only has his son declared himself king in Hebron, but he has been accepted there and else-where as the better option for the nation than a depressed and previously devious old David, for he has left the nation all but leaderless for many years.

Verses 14 – 17. David is shaken out of his lethargy and depression by the shocking news. All hesitancy leaves him in a moment and he jumps to his feet and starts to give the right orders. Like most who have been paralysed by inaction through depression, David needed a distinct crisis to provoke him into action. Most psychologists and counsellors working with depressed people are seeking a crisis of some sort in the therapeutic process to work with and re-organise the person's motivation and focus around.

David gets all his court and family to pack and make ready to flee with their clothes and all the gold and silver to buy what they need on the run. All furniture and other precious items will be left behind, and the clothes taken are travelling clothes only. They are to flee for their lives, for Absalom has shown what he will do when he seizes power when he slew Amnon. The scales are off David's eyes now. Psalms 3:2, 4:2, 7:1-5. He becomes the king he truly is again and leads his people out of the city and heads down the Jericho road into the wilderness. He prays that he can get there.

David realises that it may be impossible to defend the city, as Absalom has had too long to undermine morale and turn some guards against him. He fears that the city may be put to the sword if he makes a stand there also. He fears for the lives of his other wives and children. We are not told what he does with Absalom's mother, and the absence of any reference to her may indicate she has gone with her son to Hebron. David's servants and soldiers of his home guard are ready to follow him anywhere and say so. This must have encouraged him greatly, and they form up and march out with him. All the men of the Philistine battalions he has gathered to him join him on this flight.

David leaves ten concubines behind to keep the palace working; these are possibly younger women who have recently joined the harem and have no children to be concerned about. These women will be the bait for Absalom to delay in Jerusalem, and in his lust he will take the bait. In his arrogance he will desire to prove he is the fertile stud the people believe him to be, and will stay and have sex with them all. This is a way to prove he is the new king, by taking the old

king's harem, but it also gives evidence of his virile power to the foolish people who believe in this sort of nonsense. It is however the spiritual evidence of his corruption and arrogance. It is this weakness that will be his down fall.

Verses 18 – 22. Once you have read these verses turn to **Psalm 3** and read it and the next Psalms a couple of times. These are the prayers that David prays as he sadly trudges his way up the hill to the top of the Mount of Olives on his way to the Jordan River crossing and into the East Bank territory where he would gather his army and make a stand. **Psalm 4:5-8** expresses his confidence in the Lord as he rises after the first night under the stars for many years.

Psalm 6:2-3 records the aching bones of the old king as he rediscovers old muscles long unused on this flight from Absalom, and as he rests in the Lord's help and finds old strength returning to him. Psalms 41:9, 55:12-14, expresses the sadness of knowing that one you loved has betrayed you, and that he failed him also! David however casts his cares and sadness upon the heart of the Lord. Psalms 55:20-23. He seeks the Lord's path through this terrible time. **Psalms 4:4-8, 5:7-8, 9:9-10, 13:5-6, . . .** etc.

The Cherithites and Pelethites are Philistine or Cretan-Mycenaean troops, and the 600 men of Gath are also men of Philistia. These tough professional soldiers, under the official command of Joab (who is also suspiciously absent this night), are the heart of David's army. They are mercenaries, but fiercely loyal to David. I do not think, with some commentators, the 600 are the men who were originally with him in Hebron, for they would all be senior citizens like David now. He is at least sixty at this time, and all his old team will be well above retirement age now, although it is conceivable that some may have joined him on this last campaign, just as Napoleon's Old Guard joined him at Waterloo.

The general of Gath, Ittai, leads the 600 Gittites (I believe these men are the men of Gath), and David offers for him to stay in the city, as he has apparently only recently joined David. Ittai is a noble soldier of the Homeric tradition, and strongly refuses to remain behind, casting his life and lot in with David, for better or worse. Proverbs 17:17, 18:24. He gives a powerful speech of loyalty and commitment to Israel's God and also to David, and leads his men across the Kidron valley with all their wives and children also with them. He has made his choice, for he knows he must either fight with David or against him. His nobility will be contrasted strongly to the devious Joab who will return to David only when he sees that Absalom is hopeless and will lose.

Verses 23 – 28. They all go with great grief at what has happened, but their weeping is not for themselves, but for the kingdom and the great evil that has come upon the land. David and his men know what this rebellion means; there will be civil war and brother will kill brother, and that very soon. Robert the Bruce's army also wept and prayed before the Battle of Bannockburn, knowing that they would soon be required to kill many men.

David's main challenge is to slow Absalom down in the city. The concubines will assist this plan, but he needs friends in the city as his spies and agents to undermine the counsel of Absalom's key conspirator Ahithophel. David is now thinking as the old guerrilla leader he once was. He moves with sadness, but the depression has been replaced with purpose and determination. David has some supporters in the area of the capital city and many come out to weep with him. The priests come out with Zadok leading them and they are carrying the Ark ready to join David in exile.

The Ark is set up by the side of the road and all the people file past it as they leave the city. David waits by the Ark as his household and army move past and over the Kidron stream below. David waits until all the people are out of the city before speaking to Zadok the chief High Priest. His words are the formal words expected of a king in such situations.

David instructs Zadok to take the Ark back into the city, and notes in faith, that if the Lord is gracious to him he will be back, but if he has sinned to the point where he loses the coming battles, then he needs now to say farewell to the Ark, for he is an unworthy guardian of it. He is absolutely correct in this, and we all need to be aware of this principle when we face great tests. Our sole focus is to be upon the Lord's will and if the Lord blesses us we will be blessed and if we are walking in sin we will receive judgement; we need to be able to relax with this truth and do what is right.

If the Lord "has no delight in us" then we are deserving of judgement, and so let it fall, for let the Lord's will alone be done in our life. This is a strong statement for David to make, but one we all need to be ready to make as pastors and leaders. Let the Lord's will be done alone! Psalms 39:4-9. David is content to receive from the Lord anything the Lord dishes out to him. He has accepted that he has been deserving of punishment and that he has received it, and will not hold the Lord responsible for his plight, for he sees that he has done all this calamity to himself.

He rests also in the prophetic office of Zadok the priest (called a Seer here), and knows that he will see the path of God in all this, and the future is secure in God's hands. He takes the readiness of Zadok and Abiathar to join him as evidence that they believe he will be victorious, and so he arranges for their respective sons to be the ones to carry important messages to him. He asks them to send word of events in Jerusalem and to certify that the priests are all well and alive (he may fear a massacre as with Doeg and Saul at Nob - 1 Samuel 22:18-23) and he mentions that he will delay at the ford over Jordan by the plain of Jericho to receive that assurance that all is well and everyone is alive.

In the midst of his distress his main concern is for the lives of his friends and loyal servants. It is now that we see the real David re-emerging from the depressive cloud that has obscured him for many years.

Verses 29 – 30. Zadok returns to the tabernacle with the Ark and awaits the arrival of Absalom. This young man will be tested by the presence of the High Priest and the Ark, and time will prove he doesn't think he needs the guidance of the High Priest. David himself walks as a common man in mourning, with bare feet on the rough ground and

his travellers' robe over his head in mourning and weeping as he goes. He seeks the common path and stays at the back of the column of march ready to be the first to die facing any pursuing troops. He is back to himself, and he is facing his sins of omission over the recent years, and is ready to die protecting his family, and he marches with these great soldiers who love him and are ready to die for him.

Every step he sheds a tear, but every step he grows back into the man he once was, and by the time he nears the top of the Mount of Olives he is no longer crying, he is worshipping the Lord. **Isaiah 61:1-3**. Amongst the family group are the older wives, all in their sixties also at this time, their sons, daughters, and there is the younger Bathsheba and their young son Solomon who will be around ten years of age at this time.

Verses 31 – 37. David is told that his main counsellor Ahithophel has joined the rebellion. This is a blow, because this man knows how David thinks and has been with him for many years. His wisdom and advice will undo David, and so he needs a person to counter this traitor's counsel. Remember Bathsheba and David's great sin against Uriah is likely the source of Ahithophel's rejection of David. David knows the problem and deals with it by worshipping God as he nears the top of the Mount of Olives. As he approaches the top of the hill he will meet two men; an old friend who is the answer to his prayers, and he will meet a solemn enemy, one of the house of Saul (next chapter deals with him).

The old friend is the aged counsellor Hushai. He meets the king with the manifest signs of mourning upon him and seeks a way to serve his lord and master. Hushai is too old or frail to accompany the king, and so he sees in his old friend the answer to his prayers about Ahithophel. He sees that he alone could convince Absalom that the counsel of Ahithophel is foolishness and so confound the arrogant and self confident, yet worried young man, and buy David the time he needs to escape to the East Bank and rebuild military strength. He tells him about the High Priest's sons who he can use as his messengers to report to David the success of his mission. Once David knows the priests are safe and the counsel of Ahithophel is confounded, he will know he can win against Absalom.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Failure to act against clear challenges to David's authority built the impression of weakness amongst the common people. David loses the respect of the people and this leads to Absalom's support for his rebellion. The common people, and even many of the officials, believed that David had "lost the plot" and is unable to govern with the strength and focused determination that people look for in a leader. People want to see strength of character and strength of resolve in their leaders, be they political or religious. As pastors of the Lord's people we need to manifest godly character at all times, and strength of resolve to move against any people who create schisms and factions within the church. Let us stand as the true shepherds of the Lord's flock and resist all wolves in words and deeds. Matthew 7:15, 10:16, Acts 20:29.
2. We are in the Lord's hands for blessing or judgement not the hands of men, and we need to be able to relax in that place. We can relax if we have dealt with our sin and seek His will alone. If we cannot relax in this place, we need to deal with the sin in our life and then get back into His holy Word, worship, fellowship with others, and prayer. Let us ensure we have the relaxed mental attitude of doctrine filled believers, for then we will advance into each challenge with strength in the Lord.
3. David pours out his grief, and also pours out his worship and prayers before the Lord. He rests upon the Lord in his despair and sees the answers to his prayers. Let us meet disaster with prayer and worship. If the devil finds us at prayer, in song, or in worship in the living Word of God he flees from us. James 4:6-10.

Notes

CHAPTER 16**INTRODUCTION**

When you have had power and lose it, different people come “out of the wood work” to bless and curse, and often they have confused emotions behind their actions. David has met Hushai, and he has been truly an answer to a specific prayer. He now meets two other men, both associated with the fallen house of Saul. Saul’s death is now nearly thirty years before, but many harbour desires to return the family of Saul to the kingship, replacing the aged David with a young and strong descendent of Saul.

The family and court of Saul will join in the Great Rebellion in some way. The writer only hints at it, for he does not want the unity of Benjamin and Judah broken by the full details of this story. Remember, the writer is not just telling history, he is writing a dynastic history, and so it is a selective story, with a purpose to celebrate David and his line, but he does not want to tell stories of the Benjamites that will re-open old wounds. This is a very selective history.

He is also writing close to the events, and so doesn’t have to give the details we would appreciate, for at his time of writing they were still very well known. We have had two clues to this early date. The first was his reference to the beautiful appearance of the younger Tamar; a woman the writer clearly saw. The second clue is his silence at this point of the story about the relationship of Ahithophel to Bathsheba. This was so well known at the time that he doesn’t remind his readers of it at this point; in fact, because he writes in Solomon’s day, and Ahithophel is his great-grand-father, he deliberately plays it down.

The first man of the old court of Saul to come is Ziba. We met him first in 2 Samuel 9. Go back at this point and re-read the commentary on that chapter, for there is much behind the scenes action with this man. He brings some food for David and David’s people, and mules for the older women and young children to ride upon. His motivation is unclear, for he is a true political animal, but his gifts are thoughtful, and useful, although a lot less than could be expected. My suspicion, (more below) is that he is covering his bets, and backing both sides.

The other is Shimei who openly curses David for the blood he has shed and the pain he has caused in the land, and he sees in this judgement the hand of God upon David. His cursings are strong and yet David takes them, for he feels he deserves such cursings, and truly he also sees the hand of God upon him. He will pour his heart out in the next night and write Psalm 7 as a result of this. Read this Psalm as a good introduction to this chapter.

The writer tells the story to make it clear that Shimei goes far too far, and his behaviour is disgusting. David will however not immediately kill this man, even though he is entitled to under ancient Law, but on David’s return he will be placed under house arrest for the rest of his life, and later when he breaks the conditions, he will be executed. The chapter ends with the first meeting of Absalom with Hushai, after the fake-king’s entry into Jerusalem with Ahithophel, and this leads then to the first strong pieces of counsel given by both Ahithophel, and then Hushai (recorded in the next chapter).

2 SAMUEL 16:1-23

16:1 And when David was a little past the top of the hill, behold, Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth met him, with a couple of asses saddled, and upon them two hundred loaves of bread, and an hundred bunches of raisins, and an hundred of summer fruits, and a bottle of wine. **2** And the king said unto Ziba, What meanest thou by these? And Ziba said, The asses be for the king’s household to ride on; and the bread and summer fruit for the young men to eat; and the wine, that such as be faint in the wilderness may drink. **3** And the king said, And where is thy master’s son? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he abideth at Jerusalem: for he said, To day shall the house of Israel restore me the kingdom of my father. **4** Then said the king to Ziba, Behold, thine are all that pertained unto Mephibosheth. And Ziba said, I humbly beseech thee that I may find grace in thy sight, my lord, O king. **5** And when king David came to Bahurim, behold, thence came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera: he came forth, and cursed still as he came. **6** And he cast stones at David, and at all the servants of king David: and all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left. **7** And thus said Shimei when he cursed, Come out, come out, thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial: **8** The LORD hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned; and the LORD hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son: and, behold, thou art taken in thy mischief, because thou art a bloody man. **9** Then said Abishai the son of Zeruiah unto the king, Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head. **10** And the king said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah? so let him curse, because the LORD hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so? **11** And David said to Abishai, and to all his servants, Behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life: how much more now may this Benjamite do it? let him alone, and let him curse; for the LORD hath bidden him. **12** It may be that the LORD will look on mine affliction, and that the LORD will requite me good for his cursing this day. **13** And as David and his men went by the way, Shimei went along on the hill’s side over against him, and cursed as he went, and threw stones at him, and cast dust. **14** And the king, and all the people that were with him, came weary, and refreshed themselves there. **15** And Absalom, and all the people the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel with him. **16** And it came to pass, when Hushai the Archite, David’s friend, was come unto Absalom, that Hushai said unto Absalom, God save the king, God save the king. **17** And Absalom said to Hushai, Is this thy kindness to thy friend? why wentest thou not with thy friend? **18** And Hushai said unto Absalom, Nay; but whom the

LORD, and this people, and all the men of Israel, choose, his will I be, and with him will I abide. 19 And again, whom should I serve? should I not serve in the presence of his son? as I have served in thy father's presence, so will I be in thy presence. 20 Then said Absalom to Ahithophel, Give counsel among you what we shall do. 21 And Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Go in unto thy father's concubines, which he hath left to keep the house; and all Israel shall hear that thou art abhorred of thy father: then shall the hands of all that are with thee be strong. 22 So they spread Absalom a tent upon the top of the house; and Absalom went in unto his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel. 23 And the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counselled in those days, was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God: so was all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 4. The account of the appearance and gifts of Ziba, is joined in the text to the cursing of Shimei, who was known to Ziba and part of the old court of Saul. It is inconceivable that the two men did not know of each other's mission this day, and it may be that they are coordinated to ensure that Ziba at least has equal bets on David and Absalom, so that whatever happens he can survive.

The house of Saul is implicated deeply in the Great Rebellion, but David does not move against them for several years, and it is only the Lord's own direct punishment upon the nation that brings this about (chapter 21 below). Ziba tells a story of Mephibosheth that is incredible, given his crippled physical status and his complete powerlessness in the politics of the day. To be crippled in this day was to be excluded from the priesthood, and not considered a suitable leader in anything; for manly, soldierly strength, and physical attractiveness was what was demanded of all leaders. It is incredible that Mephibosheth would even think he could be king, but the whole house of Saul will later be judged, and so there is some truth in the allegations of Ziba, but what that is we cannot tell at this distance, and the writer doesn't help us.

As noted above, the writer is writing this account, probably in the reign of Solomon, to bolster the claims of the house of David, and try to preserve unity in Israel, but especially in the tribes of Benjamin and Judah. For this reason the depths of the conspiracy are hidden from us, and the later judgement of the last of the house of Saul is laid directly at the Lord's feet, not any vengeance seeking on David's part. The old house of Saul may see that Absalom went last too long, and then they can launch their candidate from amongst the warrior sons of Saul's daughters.

David has several thousand people in his entourage, so a few hundred, even large, loaves of bread, and bunches of raisins, are not going to go far, and the single bottle of strong wine is clearly medicinal only, but they will give immediate sustenance to some who faint. It is not a large gift from a man who controlled such a large area of land as he did. He would have been able to empty his store and supply a camel train of goods for David, had he really been focused upon supporting him, but then he would have needed to join David in exile, and he clearly doesn't want to do this. When we lay together the small amount that is given, the fact that he tells an improbable story, and that he doesn't join David, we can only conclude that he wants the land of Mephibosheth, and wants to also not be seen to be a great supporter of David by Absalom when he enters the city.

His small gift can be explained away as a gift of honour, but the larger one that would have been really useful would have betrayed his support for David and made him the enemy of Absalom. Where does he go after giving this gift? That fact would give us some clue to his real position, but the writer doesn't tell us. When David returns, Ziba is quick to come out of hiding again, and he is once again in the company of Shimei, when they meet David at the Jordan ford. 2 Samuel 19:16-23.

A question mark hangs over this man, and his association with Shimei indicates they are co-conspirators in some way. Just to really leave us wondering what the truth really is, on David's return, Mephibosheth also comes out from Jerusalem to meet David, and he strongly denies being negative to David in any way, and gives evidence of mourning in his state of dress and personal hygiene. Chapter 19:24-30.

In summary then, I do not believe that Mephibosheth is in any way foolish enough to believe he could claim the throne, for Absalom is in charge and has the support of the people. He is, as a crippled man, neither attractive, or physically strong, nor even able to even walk to his own coronation, even if he believed he would have one. He owes his return to fortune to David alone and has nothing to gain from supporting Absalom, indeed he cannot expect to be seated at Absalom's table as he sat at David's. 1 Samuel 9:1-13. I do not see him as a man who expected to rule, but he may have had designs for his son or nephews, for it is finally his relationship with Jonathan alone that saves them all from death later.

David may be still unclear in his thinking on these things at this point, and his judgement may be arbitrary and harsh, but Ziba wins the first round of the contest between him and Mephibosheth and gets control of all the lands back. David's message by this judgement is that those who support him in any way will be rewarded, and any he thinks have failed to support him, or raised their hands against him, will lose all they have. This strong decision making, even if wrong is what the situation called for. Hesitancy, or weakness of any sort at this point would have sent the wrong message to the people with him. Mephibosheth will later forgo all claims to this land and be content to eat at the king's table again for the rest of his life.

Verses 5 - 8. Shimei will later say that his outburst this day was the ranting of an unstable and sinful man. 2 Samuel 19:19-20. He will recognise this as "sin" against the Lord's anointed, but that is only because he is caught out

and David has by then been victorious. This man hates David, and all of us will have “Shimeis” in any ministry we are led into. There will always be those who hate us and the Lord’s work, yet remain in the church, or group, we lead. Their motivation is baffling, but Paul experienced these people often and they turned on him in his imprisonments and mocked his captivity, so if we have experienced such people ourselves we are in good company. **Romans 16:17-18, Philipians 3:17-19, 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15, 2 Timothy 4:10-18.**

Shimei literally throws stones at David as he marches with his men. This man stands far enough away to get his stones over the heads of the guards, but not far enough away to stop them killing him, which the elderly Abishai offers to do for David, as he was ready to kill Saul all those years ago. 1 Samuel 24:4, 26:7-11. He throws stones at the soldiers as well as at David and he keeps doing it for a long time. These are not big stones, but small pebbles; it is insulting behaviour, not designed to injure or kill, for he is an old man himself.

His words are strongly accusatory towards David, indicating he blames David for all the blood shed amongst the house of Saul. He possibly blames him for the death of Ishbosheth and then of Abner, even though David is guiltless on both counts. He indicates that he believes the rule of Absalom is the judgement of God upon David, and that he has been “taken in mischief” and this is why he is suffering now. David is indeed suffering for his past sins, but there will be blessing in this, not cursing because of David’s attitude towards it. Some of David’s greatest Psalms will be the result of his flight to the wilderness. **Romans 8:26-28.**

Verses 9 – 14. Abishai speaks of this man as a “dead dog”. He is a true old soldier and no-one speaks to his king like this and keeps his head on his shoulders. He seeks permission to go across and kill this man, and he will do so again the next time they meet him. 2 Samuel 19:31. Abishai is also in his late fifties or sixties now, but he is firmly for David and still has the strength and fitness to march with his old friend. He is an example to us all.

Shjimeis is an opposite example, of malice and hatred towards the man of God. Remember, the great sins of David were now public knowledge, and even though he is forgiven and has been restored by the Lord, he is still hated and distrusted by many amongst the people, especially as they have seen him over recent years as depressed and uninvolved in the affairs of State. Many must have seen David as a man who no longer had any dignity, purpose or will to lead; as a man judged by God and about to be replaced.

David sees that Shimei is expressing what many, with reason to hate him feel, yet his own son has no reason to hate and rebel against him, yet he has determined to kill his own father. Absalom’s hatred of David is baffling to David and he will find it hard to understand his son during this campaign, and find it very hard to accept his death. David does see clearly that God has clearly a hand in all this, and God is to be obeyed and bowed to. David will take this insult, “as unto the Lord”. He will lay it before the Lord and trust in the Lord to redeem him from the midst of this by definite answers to prayers, not by any actions of men alone. **Psalms 9:9-10, 11:1-7, 13:5-6, 1 Peter 5:5-9.**

They can silence this man’s hatred by a single sword blow, but if the Lord answers David’s prayers for redemption and deliverance, then all the nation’s hatred of David will be silenced. David sums up his thoughts about Shimei later that day when he rests. **Psalms 7:5-10, 15-17, 9:3-5.** David will not act to deal with this man but will trust that the Lord will silence him; he will focus on the road ahead. Matthew 5:43-48, Luke 6:26-36, 9:54-56.

Verses 15 – 19. Absalom enters the city of Jerusalem in triumph, with Ahithophel as his counsellor riding at his right hand. Let us pause again and remember the very personal reasons why Ahithophel may hate David and desire his removal, and yet the tragedy at the centre of this situation. He is the grand-father of Bathsheba, and her seduction by David has been felt as a deep insult to the family. Now remember also by this time, Bathsheba has a young son Solomon, a great grand son of Ahithophel. We have some clue to their ages by this. Bathsheba was far younger than Uriah was, but her seduction of David cannot be identified as desiring a younger man, for David was the same age as Uriah. At least ten years have gone by and David is in his sixties at this point, Bathsheba in her thirties, and Solomon around ten years of age.

Tragically for himself, Ahithophel does not rate Solomon as a future king, for he is fooled by the narcissist Absalom. All this man had to do is wait and be loyal to David. All he had to do is try to see as God saw things. All he had to do was seek the prophet Nathan’s advice and sit and see his great-grand-son upon the throne, but he acted, as he thought, to protect the kingdom, but it needed to be protected from the very man he supported! This old man has been intelligent, and he is following “best practise logic”, but he is wrong. He has become carnal through resentment in his thinking, and his lack of spiritual discernment rooted in his personal sense of insult will cost him his life.

Ahithophel fears that the king has lost the plot, and that there isn’t time to wait until any of the younger sons are ready to take over. He fears that war is coming again to the kingdom, and he knows they need strong, and he believes, young and charismatic leadership. He believes that Absalom is the only one of the sons with the ability to take charge and lead the people into the crisis. He is wrong in this fear, for God rules, and tragically wrong in his decision making to meet the reality. Within a few years of the Great Rebellion the Philistines challenge David’s power again but the Lord delivers. 2 Samuel 21:15-22, 1 Chronicles 20:4-8.

God’s way is for us always to support anointed leadership until the Lord casts them down – unless there is clear evidence of unconfessed sin and evil to dismiss them. Under the kingship model this was not to be done at all – but prayer was to be made for God’s actions to deliver the kingdom.

After all these events, when David's heart condition worsens and he draws close to death, another son will challenge for the leadership, and he is not up to the challenge. 1 Kings 1:5-10, 4-50. Amongst the adult sons there is not a man who could replace David. God's choices work out in God's timing however, and David was able in his sixties to lead the nation again, and do well for another ten years. It is only in his seventies that the heart condition worsens to the point where he falters and must pass the torch on. It is a reminder that age is no barrier in the service of the Lord. Remember Winston Churchill led the British Empire to victory in its fight against the Axis Powers from 1940-1944, and he began at age 67! Let us beware of "thinking like men", instead of seeking God's path and people to guide us through the difficult times.

Hushai approaches Absalom as he enters Jerusalem and formally bows before him and calls him "my king" twice. It is a surprise to Absalom to see this great friend of his father's there instead of fleeing with his father. He challenges Hushai in strong terms, asking about his debt of friendship to David and why he has changed sides at this point.

Hushai is a master of politics, like his rival Ahithophel. His answer is a master piece of political double speaking, and its content will be quoted by Herod the Great a thousand years later when he swaps sides in the Roman Civil War, shifting from Marc Anthony's defeated side to Octavian's one after the Battle of Actium. Hushai speaks of loyalty to the crown, and who is ruling rather than loyalty to the man, and acts as if he is the true civil servant who is above politics, yet he is playing politics at the highest level and for the highest stakes in his life and in David's.

Verses 20 – 23. It was traditional in the ancient world for a new king taking over from an older one, to take all the women of the harem and have sex with the youngest ones as a sign that he was now the king. The older queens would be put aside or killed, but the youngest were appropriated and children reared up in his name in the place of the old King's children, who were then all killed. It was however forbidden by the Mosaic Law for any son to have sex with his father's wives or concubines. Leviticus 18:6-18, 20:10-21.

The advice of Ahithophel is traditional pagan advice, and it is carnal and sinful advice, proving this man is worthy of judgement. By giving it Ahithophel does fulfil the word of the prophet Nathan, and by so doing Absalom proves he is a worse sinner than his father was. 2 Samuel 12:10-12. It is the evidence that both men are walking in carnality, not spirituality, and that God's judgement will be upon them, and upon their enterprise. They cannot win long term by any immoral actions like this, for their hearts are not right before God.

Had Ahithophel called for the prophet Nathan, or the High Priests, to pray over them, then he would have given good counsel and they would have received God's verdict upon their enterprise. They do not however seek the Lord's face in this rebellion, for they have lifted their hand against the Lord's anointed. They may suspect, or even know, that the High Priests are in league with David, but they clearly do not know about the arrangement David has made with the sons of the priests. 2 Samuel 15:27-29.

Rebellion means you are a traitor to the one you ought to serve, and so those drawn to you will not tend to be loyal and true men! Dishonest enterprises always find it difficult to get honest and straight thinking staff! It is always wrong to depose a minister or other leader of God's people, without due process, and immorality as the reason. The leadership of Israel were to pray about such things, and await the judgment of God alone, but we are ordered to act in the church age. 1 Timothy 5:17-20.

If a minister today becomes unworthy of the role, he/she is to be publicly challenged, with two or three witnesses to any action of immorality or other disgraceful conduct. If proven guilty of any action bringing disrepute upon the body of Christ, then she/he is to be dismissed from office openly, before all, that every person might know the standards of God and walk in the fear of the Lord. Let us be even more fearful of politics however, for God is not honoured by secret plotting, only by open dealing.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. All ministries will confront examples of the three men David meets as he flees Jerusalem. All of us will find the men like Hushai, who are prepared to go into the greatest danger to serve us and the Lord through us. There are also the men like Ziba, who will cover their bets, and support us with minor gifts and play politics, but can be useful in the work. Then there will be the men like Shimei, who will curse us every time they can when we make any error at all.

Let us learn from David to be gracious in all our dealings with men, but discerning of the motives of men, trusting none that do not hazard their lives with us in the battles of the Lord. Let us not be distracted by religious politicians, who play for petty power on the side lines of spiritual life. These men achieve little or nothing for the Lord, and so let us not be distracted by them, but keep our own focus forward on what the Lord wants done in our life. Eternal assessments alone.

2. Suffering may come to us, as the flow on effect of sins we have dealt with, and when that occurs, we can cast our concerns upon the Lord and seek the Lord's blessing through the suffering. The Lord can turn the suffering into blessing when we cast our cares upon Him. To overcome the great pain of suffering that flows from past sins, the best path is the Lord's for us. When we experience great pain, distress or regrets about the past, the best action will always involve moving forward in the service of the Lord and increased energy being applied into Bible study and prayer. Keep moving forward believer and keep worshipping away the pain of past regrets.

3. Let us be like Abishai; fit, strong and loyal to the leaders of the Lord's flock. In our sixties, or seventies, if we have fitness and strength we can do anything the Lord calls us to. Let us not speak of retirement until we are ready to

enter heaven. David still has another ten years of solid work before him, and he has overcome the debilitating depression that has plagued him since his affair with Bathsheba. Remember Churchill led the British Empire to victory through four tough years of battle in the Second World War, and he was in his late sixties and early seventies. The only thing a believer needs is spirituality and the physical and mental fitness to carry the will of the Lord through. Let us work daily to keep our body and mind well and strong.

4. Ahithophel could have died "full of years", quietly in his own home, with his great grand son Solomon as the greatest king of his age, but he acted from human logic and opposed his old friend and lord David. He acted from genuine revulsion at what David had done, and correct and righteous disgust at the immorality that was part of his grand-daughter's life. He was right to be revolted by David's actions, but wrong not to alter his opinion after Nathan's rebuke of his lord, and David's confession. Ahithophel was the key counsellor to the king, so he would have been there to hear the rebuke and see David's response. When David fell into the deep depression, Ahithophel was there to work with Nathan to bring David through, yet he decided to replace him. God's standard of forgiveness is hard to accept at times, for we don't forgive so quickly, but we must to get the best God has for us.

David has been depressed for years by this point, so from a human point of view this is understandable, but as believers we have higher standards to fulfil. We are called to "wait upon the Lord", and that means waiting to see exactly what the Lord has as His plan, and walking with God, not trusting our own logic or political concerns. Psalms 25:3-5, 27:14, 37:7-9, 62:5, 130:5, Proverbs 20:22.

5. Let us beware of church politics. God is not honoured, nor is the work of the Lord advanced by political manoeuvrings. God's call to His people is to openness and transparency in all our administration of His flock. Remember the Lord's words in Matthew 7; we are known by the fruit of our life. The fruit of Ahithophel is evil, and his end is in ignominy where it could have been in glory. Let us wait upon the Lord in all things and follow the provisions and directions of His Holy Word.

REFLECTION UPON BELIEVER'S SUFFERING

1. Ultimately, all suffering is a result of the sin of Adam.
2. God is sovereign and allows even undeserved suffering to come upon the world for a reason (Romans 8:28)
 - a) To bring people to a point of helplessness where they call out to Him
 - b) To test and develop faith, so bringing glory to Himself.
3. There will be no suffering for believers in eternity (Revelation 21:4).
4. Unbelievers will suffer forever in the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:12-15).
5. Suffering can be caused by:
 - a) Discipline for your own sins
 - b) The effect of the sins of others on you - gossip, war, crime
 - c) Self-induced suffering as a result of your own actions – e.g. sickness from smoking, poverty from poor stewardship
 - d) The sovereign will of God - health, weather.
6. Premise of Suffering:
 - a) All suffering is designed for blessing in the Christian walk (1 Peter 1:7, 8, 4:14)
 - b) Even discipline is designed to restore fellowship (Hebrews 12:6)
 - c) Suffering follows the principle of grace (Romans 8:28, 1 Thessalonians 5:18).
7. Purpose of Christian Suffering:
 - a) To receive discipline for carnality or backsliding (Psalm 38)
 - b) To glorify God (Job 1:8-12, Luke 15:20, 21)
 - c) To illustrate doctrine (Book of Hosea)
 - d) To learn obedience (Philippians 2:8, Hebrews 5:8)
 - e) To keep down pride (2 Corinthians 12:7-10)
 - f) To develop faith (1 Peter 1:7, 8)
 - g) To witness for Christ (2 Corinthians 13:4)
 - h) To demonstrate the power of God (2 Corinthians 11:24-33, 2 Corinthians 12:7-10)
 - i) To manifest the fruit of the Spirit (2 Corinthians 4:8-11)
 - j) To help others who suffer (2 Corinthians 1:3-5)
 - k) From indirect action - because other believers get out of fellowship (Romans 14, 1 Corinthians 12:12, 13, 26, 1 Samuel 21, 1 Chronicles 21).
8. Dealing With Suffering - Applying Spiritual Daily Orders:
To be a believer is to be associated with suffering. It is not a strange thing, it is our duty, and we are to take it as a soldier takes the rigours of a long campaign; without complaint, and with dignity and strength.

The five "Daily Orders" for the battle against the adversary, to be applied in the church age, in the power of the Holy Spirit are found in 1Peter 5:8,9. They will protect us against the cunning of the "lion".

a) Be Sober! - At all times be self controlled, not under the control of any emotion, or any other substance(drink or drugs), but only by the Holy Spirit. Romans 13:11-13. 1 Thessalonians 5:6 -8.

b) Be Vigilant! - At all times, stay awake to danger, don't relax your guard, don't get careless.

c) Resist! - Stand up to, resist, oppose everything he stands for. Zero tolerance of evil is to be the standard for our lives. Also refer, Luke 4:3-12, Ephesians 4:27, 6:11-13, James 4:7.

d) Be steadfast in the faith once delivered to the apostles! Be unbreakable, stand as a solid mass of soldiers resisting attack. Stand with the apostolic doctrines, and their practices. As a local church be united, stand together, tight and committed to each other.

e) Keep on knowing you are not alone! All believers suffer pressures when they stand for their Lord.

SPIRITUALITY

1. All Christians have the Holy Spirit indwelling them. When we allow Him to control our lives, we are said to be "filled with the Spirit" or "walking in the Spirit".

2. The filling of the Holy Spirit can be lost by

- a) Grieving the Spirit - by sin
- b) Quenching the Spirit - by not submitting to His leading
- c) This is called being carnal, or controlled by the flesh, the old sin nature.

3. The filling of the Holy Spirit can be regained by

- a) confessing sin (1 John 1:9)
- b) surrendering your life to God (Romans 12:1-2)
- c) This is called being spiritual, or controlled by the Holy Spirit.

4. Only the Holy Spirit in us can produce good works acceptable to God - anything in our own strength is unacceptable (Romans 8:8-9, 1 Corinthians 3:10-15)

5. The spiritual believer

- a) Imitates God. (Ephesians 5:1, 1 John 3:9)
- b) To glorify Christ. (John 7:39, John 16:14)
- c) Fulfills the Law. (Romans 8:2-4, Romans 13:8)

6. In the Bible the human race is divided in three Categories:-

[a] Natural Man - A person born physically alive, but not regenerated. He may be highly sophisticated, civilised, gentle and kind, but is completely ignorant of any spiritual phenomena. (1 Corinthians 2:14) Equivalent to the cold person in the church in Laodicea.

[b] Carnal Man - A person regenerated or born again but living his life under the power of his old sin nature. Prolonged activity in this area produces a Christian who is still a baby. (1 Corinthians 3:1-4). Equivalent to the lukewarm person in the church of Laodicea.

[c] Spiritual Man - A person regenerated and living generally in the power of the Holy Spirit. He discerns the difference between the things of God and man. (1 Corinthians 2:11-13) He has fellowship with God in his daily life. (Ephesians 5:18-20) Equivalent to the hot person in the church of Laodicea.

7. Carnality

[a] The believer possesses an Old Sin Nature after salvation (1John 1:8, Romans 7:14,15).

[b]. The Old Sin Nature is desperately wicked (Jeremiah 17:9).

[c]. The believer under the control of the Old Sin Nature is called carnal (1Corinthians 3:1-3, Romans 7:14).

[d]. The Old Sin Nature frustrates bona fide production in the life of the believer (Romans 7:15).

[e]. The Old Sin Nature is acquired at the point of physical birth (Psalm 51:5).

[f]. We are therefore considered spiritually dead at the point of physical birth (Romans 5:12).

[g]. The Old Sin Nature has several facets: areas of weakness produces sins, areas of strength produces human good. It has trends towards asceticism or lasciviousness. In many cases asceticism is considered to be spirituality.

[h] The Old Sin Nature is not found in the resurrection body.

NOTES

CHAPTER 17**INTRODUCTION**

Having given sexually immoral advice to Absalom, Ahithophel now gives the military advice that should have been the first thing he said. This man knows Absalom is a man obsessed with his own sexual and other appetites, and he has already turned away from spiritual paths in the advice he has given this thoroughly evil young man. After taking time out to have sex with the ten concubines Absalom is feeling very relaxed, but will also be quite physically exhausted. He is not in the sharpest state of mind when the next discussion occurs. This mental state suits Hushai, for Absalom's desire to linger in Jerusalem is now paramount on his mind; like all fools before they have won the real victory, they want to celebrate their "victory". He is not thinking as a soldier, but as a "stud" now, and this advice regarding taking the sexual pleasures of a king will backfire on Ahithophel.

The arrangements David has made with the High Priests, who remain loyal, is quickly actioned, and David is told by fast riders about the plans of Absalom, so he knows he has less than twenty four hours to cross the Jordan before a pursuit is likely to be launched. Absalom's delay in pressing his military advantage will cost him the throne, just as the delay of the general of the Allied troops at Anzio cost them that battle. Absalom's weak character starts to fully emerge as we see his inaction when he faces his first test requiring dynamic decision making. Ahithophel is the first to die as a result of this rebellion, but sadly he is only the first of many.

2 SAMUEL 17:1-29

17:1 Moreover Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Let me now choose out twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night: 2 And I will come upon him while he is weary and weak handed, and will make him afraid: and all the people that are with him shall flee; and I will smite the king only: 3 And I will bring back all the people unto thee: the man whom thou seekest is as if all returned: so all the people shall be in peace. 4 And the saying pleased Absalom well, and all the elders of Israel. 5 Then said Absalom, Call now Hushai the Archite also, and let us hear likewise what he saith. 6 And when Hushai was come to Absalom, Absalom spake unto him, saying, Ahithophel hath spoken after this manner: shall we do after his saying? if not; speak thou. 7 And Hushai said unto Absalom, The counsel that Ahithophel hath given is not good at this time. 8 For, said Hushai, thou knowest thy father and his men, that they be mighty men, and they be chafed in their minds, as a bear robbed of her whelps in the field: and thy father is a man of war, and will not lodge with the people. 9 Behold, he is hid now in some pit, or in some other place: and it will come to pass, when some of them be overthrown at the first, that whosoever heareth it will say, There is a slaughter among the people that follow Absalom. 10 And he also that is valiant, whose heart is as the heart of a lion, shall utterly melt: for all Israel knoweth that thy father is a mighty man, and they which be with him are valiant men. 11 Therefore I counsel that all Israel be generally gathered unto thee, from Dan even to Beersheba, as the sand that is by the sea for multitude; and that thou go to battle in thine own person. 12 So shall we come upon him in some place where he shall be found, and we will light upon him as the dew falleth on the ground: and of him and of all the men that are with him there shall not be left so much as one. 13 Moreover, if he be gotten into a city, then shall all Israel bring ropes to that city, and we will draw it into the river, until there be not one small stone found there. 14 And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel. For the LORD had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the LORD might bring evil upon Absalom. 15 Then said Hushai unto Zadok and to Abiathar the priests, Thus and thus did Ahithophel counsel Absalom and the elders of Israel; and thus and thus have I counselled. 16 Now therefore send quickly, and tell David, saying, Lodge not this night in the plains of the wilderness, but speedily pass over; lest the king be swallowed up, and all the people that are with him. 17 Now Jonathan and Ahimaaz stayed by Enrogel; for they might not be seen to come into the city: and a wench went and told them; and they went and told king David. 18 Nevertheless a lad saw them, and told Absalom: but they went both of them away quickly, and came to a man's house in Bahurim, which had a well in his court; whither they went down. 19 And the woman took and spread a covering over the well's mouth, and spread ground corn thereon; and the thing was not known. 20 And when Absalom's servants came to the woman to the house, they said, Where is Ahimaaz and Jonathan? And the woman said unto them, They be gone over the brook of water. And when they had sought and could not find them, they returned to Jerusalem. 21 And it came to pass, after they were departed, that they came up out of the well, and went and told king David, and said unto David, Arise, and pass quickly over the water: for thus hath Ahithophel counselled against you. 22 Then David arose, and all the people that were with him, and they passed over Jordan: by the morning light there lacked not one of them that was not gone over Jordan. 23 And when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed, he saddled his ass, and arose, and gat him home to his house, to his city, and put his household in order, and hanged himself, and died, and was buried in the sepulchre of his father. 24 Then David came to Mahanaim. And Absalom passed over Jordan, he and all the men of Israel with him. 25 And Absalom made Amasa captain of the host instead of Joab: which Amasa was a man's son, whose name was Ithra an Israelite, that went in to Abigail the daughter of Nahash, sister to Zeruiah Joab's mother. 26 So Israel and Absalom pitched in the land of Gilead. 27 And it came to pass, when David was come to Mahanaim, that Shobi the son of Nahash of Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and Machir the son of Ammiel of Lodebar, and Barzillai the Gileadite of Rogelim, 28 Brought beds, and basons, and earthen vessels, and wheat, and barley, and flour, and parched corn, and beans, and lentiles, and parched pulse, 29 And honey, and butter, and sheep, and cheese of kine, for David, and for the people that were with him, to eat: for they said, The people is hungry, and weary, and thirsty, in the wilderness.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 3. This is the advice that should have been given immediately after Absalom entered Jerusalem. He ought not to have “celebrated” his kingship with the harem until he securely had the throne. The advice of Ahithophel was carnal, and he will pay for this dearly, for he now doubts he has chosen the right man. There is still time to catch David if the right move is made at this point. They have wasted valuable time, and in that time they have given David the opportunity to escape closer to the Jordan River and escape to find support in the lands of the East Bank.

Ahithophel is an old man, but wise in the affairs of men, and he knows that the death of David is all that is required to end the battle that will otherwise be needed. He knows if David is dead, then all the people will gather to Absalom, for the desire of the common people is simply for strong leadership again, and they will accept the son as they accepted the father. The common people throughout history simply desire peace and contentment, and any one who rules is acceptable if they win their battles and then leave the people in peace. The problem with this self centred thinking, is that peace based upon evil is always unsustainable. Proverbs 1:15-16, 4:16-19, Isaiah 48:22, 57:21, Jeremiah 6:14, 8:11.

Ahithophel is clear thinking about what is required to achieve the result he seeks, which is, peace at home, and strength facing their enemies abroad. By immediately taking 12,000 men with him to achieve this purpose he can achieve overwhelming superiority against David and force him to surrender and be killed. If he has to eliminate David’s army he can with this force, for he has at least odds of six to one in his favour. Ahithophel being the killer of David will also keep Absalom’s hands clean of his father’s blood, and so ease the way for him.

His advice is similar to that of those who murder the Lord a thousand years later. John 11:50, 18:2-8. The reason for this similarity is that the source is the same; Ahithophel has become the servant of evil. Ahithophel is thinking as Joab thought regarding Abner, and had he succeeded in killing David, he would have settled the kingdom in Absalom’s hands. The elders, who support Absalom at this point, all agree with this advice, for they know it is wise and will be successful in ending the affair quickly. The problem with this advice is not its falsehood, (for it is deadly accurate and correct), it is that it goes against the clear will of the Lord God of Israel and is evil. God has prepared a counter argument to Ahithophel, and the will of the Lord will be done here. God is working to protect David, as He protects us.

Verses 4 – 7. Absalom is not the strong and clear thinking leader that Ahithophel has previously believed him to be. A strong and courageous leader, like David, would not have hesitated and sought another voice to confuse matters; he would have acted on what was clearly the right military thing to do. However, as already has been noted, a clear thinking, self controlled leader would not have wasted time having sex at this critical point, before he secured the throne underneath him. Delay is always fatal at critical times in political crises – Normandy June 1944 – good example.

Absalom is proving he is not the man he appeared to be to the masses. He has no wisdom, and his lack of military insights means he will not, indeed **cannot ever be** the nation’s hope against the Philistines. Even the fact that Ahithophel must suggest that he rides after David, rather than urging Absalom to ride with his general Amasa, tells us that Ahithophel is starting to lose faith in his “king”. He now suspects this young man is not up to the real task of kingship.

Ahithophel still hopes that by Absalom following his advice he can make this young man into a great king. Such thinking is satanic delusion, for this young man has satanic arrogant self centeredness at the core of his being. He thinks more about his great mane of hair than he does about true rulership. Hushai sees the weakness of Absalom in the very question itself. No man worth following would ask this question, for militarily it is so obvious. He seizes the opportunity Absalom gives, and urges the application of the pursuit but “not at this time”. By not mocking Ahithophel’s advice, nor arguing against a pursuit he opens the door to delay, which is all David needs to escape certain death.

Verses 8 – 10. Hushai talks up David’s strength and the power of his men. Many of David’s guard are old lions indeed, but they are a “Dad’s Army”, with many of them old men now. They are tough and great warriors, but they are all older, and a strong army attacking them as they retreat down to the Jericho Ford would see them all cut down one by one. They will all fight to the death. By psychologically raising doubts about the ability of Ahithophel to securely destroy this army of David, Hushai sows seeds of doubts in all the men present, and reminds them that David has many mighty men who individually have turned enemy armies to flight in the past. 1 Chronicles 11:10ff.

Hushai paints a picture that is true 100%, thirty years before the days they are debating in! In the Armed Forces when you analyse a threat you practise a technique called, “Threat Reduction”; this means you analyse the weaknesses of the enemy and talk down their strength, but with realistic logic, and so you do not lose your opportunities against them. Hushai has achieved the opposite result. Hushai’s advice is cunningly successful for David, and disastrous for Absalom.

He speaks of David possibly adopting guerrilla warfare tactics as he did against Saul. He uses language that reminds the men present of David’s expertise as a guerrilla leader thirty years before, and raises the possibility that he could score a surprise defeat against Absalom’s forces from some secret lair he has gone to in the Judean wilderness. David has indeed taken the wilderness road, they know that, but he is heading for the Jordan Ford by Jericho, not for the wilderness to fight a protracted campaign; he lacks resources for that.

David has not seen his wilderness lairs for over thirty years now, and they would be of no use to him now. He has all his older women and all the younger children with him, so he cannot immediately stage a guerrilla campaign, he must seek a

place of safety quickly, and that would logically be Moab or the cities of the East Bank where he has support. He must be moving quite slowly with this mixed family group and so he will be able to be overtaken. Logic says “Attack NOW!”

Hushai’s argument doesn’t have good military logic behind it, and yet he is not challenged by anyone present. This tells us that amongst Absalom’s counsellors there are either not men of good military logic, or they are too concerned about Absalom’s reaction to their words to speak up. Déjà vu of the days of King Saul.... Either way Absalom doesn’t have the military strength in honest strategic thinking in his court to defeat David. Satan’s people also hate being corrected or challenged and so the best ideas never come to the surface, or are ignored if the “leader” hasn’t thought of them.

By Hushai raising the possibility of a surprise defeat by his forces at the hands of David’s old lions, he has reminded all present in the court that day, that a loser cannot come back easily in such a rebellion, for all men are looking for the “hand of God” in this, and defeat will be seen as God’s judgement. This very logic argues for a sudden and overwhelming attack upon David’s retreating column, but Hushai has turned it the other way, and makes Absalom rest and call up the entire Army for a later massive showdown, when in reality he has overwhelming odds with him right at this moment.

Ahithophel’s offer to take 12,000 men after David must be a real one; the men are standing by. Even if a cavalry force was sent out at this point they would know where David is at least and what his intentions are. Hushai avoids all intelligent military advice, and distracts the young prince from any serious thinking, and encourages his arrogant belief that he has “done enough today”, and that no action is required at this time. The delay will cost Absalom the throne, for all David needs is time, and all Absalom doesn’t need is delay. The opportunity for victory is now gone, and Ahithophel knows it as soon as Absalom has given his final judgement on the matter.

Verses 11 – 13. Hushai makes the delay appear to be the course of action that operates “without risk of failure”. There is a saying that is relevant in this situation, as it is in many situations in life. “If a course of action, or any person, is ‘too good to be true’, then that is because it is!” If any course of action is sold as the action that is “without risk of failure”, be very scared, for such over confident plans nearly always have a fatal flaw. When you do not pray and seek the Lord’s face you get what scared and limited human logic provides – certain disaster.

Hushai speaks of Absalom leading the greatest Army ever gathered in Israel and leading it in person with absolute certainty of victory. This appeals to his ego and also to his cowardice; for this man is going to be proved a coward. He murdered his brother, with others drawing their daggers to kill him, and that was the early clue that this man is a coward, getting others to do his dirty or dangerous work. Had he been a real man he would have openly challenged his rapist brother and slain him in an open contest of arms. 2 Samuel 13:22-29.

Absalom is no warrior, and his riding into battle will be as a figure head, but not as a general of any sort at all. Hushai knows this, and he also knows that every military man will know this also, and their commitment to Absalom will not be that of the soldiers to David. There is little chance of Absalom’s “great” army beating David and his men, no matter how big Absalom’s army is. The exception to this is this very day, for David has only a few hundred guards and could be easily overwhelmed. Satanic arrogance will unhinge the satanic man, as it so often does in history. Hitler is the recent example of this same satanic, arrogant over confidence, and yet hesitancy to act in a timely and well advised fashion.

Hushai has summed this evil man up well here; he has seen his character weaknesses and will utilise them fully to defeat him. His speaking of a siege, as if it can be achieved by sheer weight of numbers is not in accord with the military reality of the time. As we saw in 2 Samuel 11:1 – 12:31, in the siege of Ramah, a serious battle fought to take a city could take several years. It will not be achieved by pulling walls down with ropes no matter how many men man the ropes! No true military men would hear such nonsense without laughter!

This man Absalom is as foolish as Rehoboam will prove himself to be sixty years later. 1 Kings 12. He doesn’t have the experience, or the wisdom around him to win this campaign if it drags on for any time at all. Every week the campaign drags on Absalom’s weaknesses will be seen by more and more soldiers and their morale will weaken as the days go onwards, and their desire to fight David, the hero of Israel, will weaken even more. Hushai knows he has won now, and Ahithophel knows now with certainty that Absalom will lose also at this point.

Verses 14 – 17. The readiness and eagerness of the counsellors of Absalom to be influenced by the words of Hushai tells us that they are not men of intelligence, strength and confidence either. These men are not up to the task, and do not have the “edge” to seize the initiative that is required. At their heart centre they have growing doubts about what they are doing. They quickly swing against Ahithophel and support delay as their strategy.

Twice in Proverbs there is the Hebrew phrase translated as, “in the multitude of counsellors there is strength, or safety”. Proverbs 11:14, 24:6. In both cases the correct translation should say, “in the strength/wisdom/greatness of the counsellor there is safety/strength”. It is what is called in Hebrew a “plural of magnitude”, and in this situation before us we see the danger of many counsellors who lack the wisdom and clarity of the one wise man. Arrogant men like Absalom often gather “yes men” around them, and they normally make it hard to disagree with them or challenge them.

Ego driven managers operate this way, referring to all challenges as “negative thinking”. Beware such people, for they are doomed to fail in time, for it is in healthy debate and challenge that the truth emerges, and it is never in the number of counsellors, but in their quality that the correct actions are known. Strong argument and serious disagreement is not wrong. We can be angry in debate at times, and not sin in the process. Let us not fear the truth emerging in strong debate. Ephesians 4:26.

The early church had a number of very serious arguments; the first is recorded in Acts 15:2ff. It was crucial that they really argued this principle out, and they did, and came to a godly conclusion in the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul also seriously disputed with Peter over eating non-kosher food, and separating from Gentile believers as he records in Galatians 2:11-16. Later in his own life Peter testifies to their great friendship and of his own admiration for Paul's teaching. 2 Peter 3:15ff. Great debates can be bitter at times, but if the Lord's will is sought then blessing will emerge every time. Paul and Barnabas fell out greatly over the role of John Mark in any further missionary journeys and yet their dispute doesn't stop their later reconciliation. Acts 15:37-41, 2 Timothy 4:11.

The great debate in the court of Absalom doesn't happen, because Absalom is a dictatorial leader, and having heard Ahithophel he won't let him reply, and having seen that everyone is now happy with Hushai he swings that way. This is a man without a real mind of his own, and one who lacks the strategic thinking ability and strength of character to win against David, (and as the writer points out clearly, against God!)

Hushai moves quickly now to contact the High Priests and secure their son's secret mission as quickly as possible to be sent away to David. He reports fully to the priests what has just been discussed in the court and asks that they send the two young priests immediately on their errand to David to report to him. The message is a strongly worded direction for David to quickly cross the Jordan ford at Jericho lest Absalom repent of his delay and send out a force that could ambush David and wipe his small army out.

The two young priests have been staying at En-Rogel, at the bottom of the old city, close to an exit point, and they have been in hiding since Absalom's arrival in the city. By a secure serving woman the message is passed to the two young men and they slip out of the city, but are seen by a young boy in the pay of Absalom, and so the hunt for the two "spies" is on with a vengeance. Note the importance of the "little people" in intelligence gathering and communication

Verses 18 – 21. It becomes very clear to the two men that the pursuit is called out after them by the time they have gone over the Mount of Olives toward the small town of Bahurim. They go there and find a "safe house" with people loyal to David, but unknown to the people with Absalom. A woman there quickly thinks about how to hide the two priests and takes action thoroughly. The cover over this well may have been a large one and she covers it with ground corn as if to thoroughly dry it out and make it look as if it has been there a long time.

The men seeking them know exactly who they are after by name. This fact tells us now why Absalom does not contact the priests, as he has already heard they are on David's side, and he suspects the spies. Given this fact his inaction to arrest and confine the "traitor priests" is baffling. He doesn't need to kill them, but he must secure all potential spies, and he hasn't even done this! He is truly a weak and arrogant man who thinks he has time to deal with problems, when in a coup you do not have time to waste, but must mop up all opposition before the government forces regroup. The woman is loyal to David and lies about the two priests, and the pursuers ride or run off to seek them along the wilderness path, but as it grows dark they do not go further, fearing an ambush by David's forces.

Basic military thinking would have demanded Absalom send a full cavalry force after David, even if just to keep touch with him and send regular reports back, or by smoke signal order an immediate pursuit and attack. Absalom has not acted prudently with any regard to military strategy. He has seized the city and, it would appear, has no other plans. It is almost as if he didn't expect to get this far, or that he believed David would have rolled over and died at this point. To have launched his coup without a clear plan on what to do once the first stage was successful is the final proof of his foolish and fatal arrogance.

The pursuers do not have the required clear and aggressive orders from Jerusalem, and give up the hunt far too easily and return to the city before nightfall. As soon as it is clear that the pursuit has been called off the two priests emerge from the well and head quickly down the road to Jericho, meeting David on the road, and give the order. This tells us that had Absalom pursued David hard that day he would have overtaken him and his old guards easily before dawn.

Verses 22 – 24. David's people now walk-run all night and cross the river during that night, and by dawn none are on the West Bank of the river. David is now in friendly territory where his armies have beaten back Moabite, Edomite and Ammonite armies. He can now gather an army that will stand with him against Absalom and against the tribes from the West Bank.

Ahithophel knows exactly what inaction that first night means for him; he knows that David now has the time to gather his forces and that he will be victorious, for he now clearly sees that Absalom doesn't have the brains or the courage to win. As we say in New Zealand, "he has backed the wrong horse!" He therefore quietly, and in deep depression of spirit at his fatally flawed choice, heads to his home, and sets his affairs in order, and like Judas a thousand years later, commits suicide. Matthew 27:3-10.

By doing this he takes personal responsibility and possibly saves his lands for his sons. Had he lived the entire family could have suffered the fate of a traitor and all was lost. The great tragedy of this, is that he didn't have to act against his old friend and colleague David. He just had to seek the Lord's path, and it would have led him to the throne of his own great-grand-son Solomon. He was buried in his own grave, for his suicide was not seen as cowardice, or shameful, but as saving his family from later, and now certain, judgement by David. His suicide will further weaken Absalom's side, for all thinkers will know what it meant for Ahithophel to do this – he has broadcast that David will certainly now win!

Verses 25 – 29. The next verses raise an important point. Joab has not been mentioned as a part of David's army as it marches out to battle until this point. There is an open question at this point as to whether Joab had joined the rebellion, as later he will that of Adonijah. 1 Kings 1:5-10. Was Joab out of town when the news came of the rebellion, or was he quietly away, as Ahithophel was, ready to assume power in the new order? Commentators are divided on this. The way the writer describes Absalom's choice of commander indicates he could have selected Joab, and that he was available.

We have not had Joab's name mentioned in the text since chapter 14 verse 33, when Joab ensures Absalom is returned to David's court. Joab was a key mover, indeed the only mover, in the return of Absalom! He is in this rebellion up to his ears, but he is clever and is able to return to David's army and fight with him, and then silence the only man alive who can destroy him - Absalom! It may be that Hushai's advice being heeded and the decision of commander by Absalom makes up Joab's mind to return to David. I believe he is here ready to join the rebels until he gets "miffed" and shocked.

The writer has had plenty of occasions to indicate Joab was with David as he left the city, but no such mention is made. Abishai is mentioned, as is Ittai, the two other commanders, but Joab is apparently not there at the time. He does not take charge of the Army of David; the old king does himself. The strong implication is that Joab was away from David, but with a reason that convinced David, when he did rejoin him, that he was not actively disloyal.

My suspicion is that Joab has a secret deal with Absalom, but Absalom breaks the deal and appoints Amasa as head of the Army in his place. Once this became clear to Joab, he made his way across Jordan as quick as he could and had a story that allowed him to return to the Army, although not as the sole commander. This explains why David takes charge this time, not Joab, and why he is given only a third of the army to command. This would also explain why Joab himself kills Absalom, against David's specific orders, as he doesn't want the truth about his secret deal with him to get back to David, and he also may feel particularly aggrieved at Absalom, because Joab really put himself out to assist Absalom get back to Jerusalem in the first place.

David's appointment of Amasa to control his own army later tells us that David has his on-going doubts about Joab, and he gets his job back only because he ends up being the most ruthless man standing. The nature of Amasa's appointment also gives Joab real cause for personal resentment against him, and he murders him also, even though he is a relative through his own mother.

Several weeks pass. David sets himself up in Mahanaim. This is a fortified place where he could resist a siege, and have a secure camp to organise the troops that are now pouring in to support him against Absalom. He builds his new army there around three corps commanders. Ittai takes the Philistine and Cretan-Mycenaean Guard troops at the centre of the line, and Abishai and Joab take a flank each of Israelites. David stays at the centre with Ittai and his old Guard around him. Absalom has his army fully gathered now, and marches across the Jordan to do battle with David. He seriously outnumbers David, but his men are tribal levies and are not the battle hardened veterans that have gathered to David, nor do they trust their commander, as David's men do.

It is of note that the Ammonites, who David seriously defeated, come to him and provide very large amounts of supplies for him. David's entire army is provided for by these men and their people. These men and their people could wait and see who the winner will be, but they act in loyalty to David and obedience to the Lord. God provides for us when we are in distress, but are still on His path for us. This is further evidence that those who argue David persecuted and tortured them after their defeat are wrong, for they come out as men who appreciate David and want him as their king; these are not actions of people who were subject to genocide. Refer back to the commentary on 2 Samuel 12:26-31.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Holy Spirit led people will have two characteristics in their leadership style that set them apart. They will be people who see the big picture in all projects they are involved in, and will be clear thinking in their planning and execution of their plans. Spirit filled people are thinking at the top level of logic and precision. The second characteristic of their thinking is the ability to be challenged and argue for a position with others to reach the best possible solution. They are always prepared for the Lord to show them a better alternative to the one they initially believe correct. Arrogance and intransigence are signs of Satan's presence, just as humility and teachability are the signs of the Lord's work in the life. Hushai sees that none, other than Ahithophel, have leadership ability, and he is able to exploit this weakness.

2. Numbers never mean anything except numbers. Outnumbering an enemy is no guarantee of anything except you need to coordinate and control and supply your forces better than your smaller opponent. Being out numbered is also nothing to fear, for smaller numbers well led and coordinated will always be victorious over poorly led superior forces. It is walking with the Lord that matters, never the numbers of those who walk with you. It is the quality of the people and the quality of leadership that produces the results. We build spiritual quality by Holy Spirit filled Bible teaching and application. Let us build great teams of Spirit filled people in the ministries the Lord has called us to.

3. God provides for His people. David had to flee without much food at all, but the Lord provides on the way and at his destination. David and all with him had to walk fast and strongly through a day and night and be ready to suffer on the march in order to escape, but having arrived at their destination the Lord met them with provisions. Let us be as fit as we can be and ready to handle adversity on the march through this life that we are called to walk.

CHAPTER 18**INTRODUCTION**

David's reasons to doubt Joab become very clear over this chapter and the next. David will try to replace Joab, but his sheer ruthless ability to do anything to retain power will ensure he stays in the job, even if he has to murder to achieve his goals. I believe that the events of the next two chapters back up my previous observation that Joab is implicated in the rebellion but he murders the only men who could tell David the truth. The truth emerges in Solomon's day as Joab's guard speaks to save their own necks. He survives as leader of the army for another ten years, but David tells his son Solomon to do what he couldn't do because of the great service this ruthless old man had given him. Solomon is told to kill Joab, even though he clings to the very horns of the altar. 1 Kings 2:5-6.

David has nearly fully recovered from the depression that debilitated him since the death of Uriah, but like all serious depression that has a real cause, it re-emerges with the great grief of Absalom's death here and overwhelms him again. His great grief for Absalom is recorded at the end of this chapter, and it is the overwhelming grief because his true guilt compounds the emotions associated with the deaths of all the others who have paid the price for Absalom's evil and David's neglect, and re-triggers a depressive wave of emotion, but he bounces back from this after Joab's challenge.

Even though Joab is a thoroughly evil and nasty man, he is a great and very pragmatic leader, and he gives David the pragmatic advice he needs to hear and snaps him out of the grief-depression over the death of Absalom just in time to save his army. Joab is not consistently loyal, for he is implicated in the conspiracy, and guilty of murder to cover his tracks, but he does understand real political power and the actions needed to be a survivor. Having secured David's strong actions to reward his soldiers for their victory, he commits to David again totally, for he sees he is now completely in control. While David is healthy and strong Joab commits to him, but when David weakens, his commitment weakens again, for he respects only strength and power.

Joab is a ruthless realist, and he is what David needs at this point, although events will show that he has lost the support and approval of the majority of the Israelite people. David will try to replace him as leader of the Army after the rebellion, but the man he chooses, Amasa, doesn't have the military ability of Joab, and Joab eliminates him by murdering him. The politics of this time was "rough", and the godly alone, like Nathan, emerge unscathed from this Age.

2 SAMUEL 18:1-33

18:1 And David numbered the people that were with him, and set captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds over them. **2** And David sent forth a third part of the people under the hand of Joab, and a third part under the hand of Abishai the son of Zeruah, Joab's brother, and a third part under the hand of Ittai the Gittite. And the king said unto the people, I will surely go forth with you myself also. **3** But the people answered, Thou shalt not go forth: for if we flee away, they will not care for us; neither if half of us die, will they care for us: but now thou art worth ten thousand of us: therefore now it is better that thou succour us out of the city. **4** And the king said unto them, What seemeth you best I will do. And the king stood by the gate side, and all the people came out by hundreds and by thousands. **5** And the king commanded Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom. And all the people heard when the king gave all the captains charge concerning Absalom. **6** So the people went out into the field against Israel: and the battle was in the wood of Ephraim; **7** Where the people of Israel were slain before the servants of David, and there was there a great slaughter that day of twenty thousand men. **8** For the battle was there scattered over the face of all the country: and the wood devoured more people that day than the sword devoured. **9** And Absalom met the servants of David. And Absalom rode upon a mule, and the mule went under the thick boughs of a great oak, and his head caught hold of the oak, and he was taken up between the heaven and the earth; and the mule that was under him went away. **10** And a certain man saw it, and told Joab, and said, Behold, I saw Absalom hanged in an oak. **11** And Joab said unto the man that told him, And, behold, thou sawest him, and why didst thou not smite him there to the ground? and I would have given thee ten shekels of silver, and a girdle. **12** And the man said unto Joab, Though I should receive a thousand shekels of silver in mine hand, yet would I not put forth mine hand against the king's son: for in our hearing the king charged thee and Abishai and Ittai, saying, Beware that none touch the young man Absalom. **13** Otherwise I should have wrought falsehood against mine own life: for there is no matter hid from the king, and thou thyself wouldst have set thyself against me. **14** Then said Joab, I may not tarry thus with thee. And he took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through the heart of Absalom, while he was yet alive in the midst of the oak. **15** And ten young men that bare Joab's armour compassed about and smote Absalom, and slew him. **16** And Joab blew the trumpet, and the people returned from pursuing after Israel: for Joab held back the people. **17** And they took Absalom, and cast him into a great pit in the wood, and laid a very great heap of stones upon him: and all Israel fled every one to his tent. **18** Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and reared up for himself a pillar, which is in the king's dale: for he said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance: and he called the pillar after his own name: and it is called unto this day, Absalom's place. **19** Then said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok, Let me now run, and bear the king tidings, how that the LORD hath avenged him of his enemies. **20** And Joab said unto him, Thou shalt not bear tidings this day, but thou shalt bear tidings another day: but this day thou shalt bear no tidings, because the king's son is dead. **21** Then said Joab to Cush, Go tell the king what thou hast seen. And Cush bowed himself unto Joab, and ran. **22** Then said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok yet again to Joab, But howsoever, let me, I pray thee, also run after Cush. And Joab said, Wherefore wilt thou run, my son, seeing that thou hast no tidings ready? **23** But

howsoever, said he, let me run. And he said unto him, Run. Then Ahimaaz ran by the way of the plain, and overran Cush. 24 And David sat between the two gates: and the watchman went up to the roof over the gate unto the wall, and lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold a man running alone. 25 And the watchman cried, and told the king. And the king said, If he be alone, there is tidings in his mouth. And he came apace, and drew near. 26 And the watchman saw another man running: and the watchman called unto the porter, and said, Behold another man running alone. And the king said, He also bringeth tidings. 27 And the watchman said, Me thinketh the running of the foremost is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok. And the king said, He is a good man, and cometh with good tidings. 28 And Ahimaaz called, and said unto the king, All is well. And he fell down to the earth upon his face before the king, and said, Blessed be the LORD thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the king.

29 And the king said, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Ahimaaz answered, When Joab sent the king's servant, and me thy servant, I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what it was. 30 And the king said unto him, Turn aside, and stand here. And he turned aside, and stood still. 31 And, behold, Cush came; and Cush said, Tidings, my lord the king: for the LORD hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee. 32 And the king said unto Cush, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Cush answered, The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is. 33 And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 5. David does more than “number” the soldiers who have come to bear arms in his support. This was the way of saying they were organised into units, commanders appointed, and joint training begun. The officer corps is both appointed and co-ordinated by the three generals. The nature of the battlefield chosen by David is a forested area. Today this whole land is pastoral land, but in this day, 3000 years ago, with far greater rainfalls, it had many forests, and this one, (now location unknown) was known as the “forest of Ephraim”.

It is a reminder that the ecology of the land has been decimated through the centuries by war and climate change. We cannot know exactly where this battle occurs, but it is on the East bank somewhere, as both armies are in the Vale of Gilead. The city of Mahanaim is in the Vale of Gilead, close by to the river Jabbok, and the forest may have been to its south-west and/or north-west. It is close enough for David to give directions to the three generals to ensure they got the tactics right. The three generals have equal power over their units. The forest covers the approach to Mahanaim, and so must either be seized by Absalom, or skirted around, to ensure a safe approach to Mahanaim.

The three units will be co-ordinated by a simple battle plan set by David that will involve each moving steadily in tight units through the forest, coordinated by trumpet/shofar calls, and fighting the forces of Absalom who will be spread out combing the forest trying to find them. By concentrating his forces in three tight and powerful formations David ensures that whenever his men meet Absalom's in the forest they will have superior or equal numbers in each encounter, whereas Absalom's larger forces will not be able to concentrate and use their superior numbers. The forest itself will tie up most of Absalom's men and they will not be able to engage David's forces.

The writer notes that the forest itself disabled most of Absalom's men and they fled the battlefield, many never seeing their enemy, but just hearing their war cries and the screams of their own friends dying in the wood. David's genius is seen in this plan. A general always tries to select the place that is best for his army to fight and have the best chance of victory. The great Chinese General Sun Tzu referred to this as, “selection of ground”, and he would have referred to David's choice here, as the selection of “Winning Ground”. David can only win here by keeping his units moving through the forest in tight formations, and Absalom's benefit of numbers is lost to him, and he can only lose when his men enter this forest and fan out. When Amasa decides to enter the forest he has lost the war, and proved himself a useless leader.

David is ready to lead his men into this battle, but he is not really needed in this sort of battlefield, for the men will only be able to see those immediately around them, and the presence of the king would be unnecessary and irrelevant. He has set the field of action and established the winning plan, and that is all he needs to do. In an open battle David's presence could be useful as a rallying point, but in the thick forest his death would be more likely, as in isolated actions a chance encounter could lead to his being lost in a minor skirmish to no point. His death will end the hope of the army, and they all bluntly tell him this. David and his “Guard” will remain visible at the centre, with the two wings going through the forest in units that will always outnumber and outfight the opposing spread out forces.

Notice the difference between David's army and Absalom's court. Absalom did not allow debate or correction of his own decisions, but David is open to his men and they feel safe in speaking their minds to him. His presence in the gate of the city will be their encouragement. He is also acting as “bait”, enticing Absalom forward to his army's ruin. David then gives a public order to his generals in the presence of the entire army regarding Absalom. The army is told to try to take the young prince alive. The writer repeats the point that all the soldiers heard the orders regarding Absalom.

Verses 6 – 8. With superior numbers on his side it was rank foolishness for Amasa to lead the army of Israel into the forest where their advantage was lost. This man is not the brightest general, and the experienced generals of David's forces must have secretly rejoiced when they saw the enemy fan out in a vast line and enter the forest. For David to brief his entire army outside the city gate, and for all his men to hear his orders regarding Absalom, it tells us that his army is significantly smaller than Absalom's army. The fighters of David's army are in their element here however, and can sweep into the ranks that oppose them and kill them at will, selecting only those they wish to eliminate

and hitting them with superior numbers, letting others pass them by in the wood, and then hitting them from behind later. The wood acts as an equaliser of the forces. David's men are still fighting in tough units, Absalom's spread out.

David's men concentrate to attack the single line abreast enemy, and always have larger numbers, leaving the far dispersed wings of the enemy army alone. This was similar to the tactic of "Island Hopping" adopted by General Douglas McArthur in World War 2. He hit strategic and central Japanese forces only with a superior concentration of local forces, but left the widely dispersed and totally numerically superior Japanese forces alone, and they simply starved on their strong but useless island fortresses that McArthur bypassed.

The losses are significant and 20 "units" die that day. Now remember my repeated reminders regarding the word "eleph", translated as "thousands" here only from the 3rd century BC. It refers to units that could be anywhere from 10 – 1000 in number. Many die this day and the result is that the Israelites lose far more than David, (twenty units of their army) and the Israelite Army under Amasa leaves the field of battle defeated, and flees back to the West Bank.

Verses 9 – 13. Absalom is not riding a horse, but a mule, which is not a soldier's or even a king's mount, but a simple beast of burden; a lazy and unfit man's mount. This was a means of transport, for carrying supplies, not a sensible means for a warrior to enter a forest to fight upon. Had he been a soldier he would have been armed, and on foot, with his hair tied up or under a helmet. This man was not ready, able, or courageous enough to fight, and he is not even wearing a helmet! His arrogance has meant he has let his long thick hair blow in the wind and his hair is caught in the small branches of an oak tree he rides quickly under to escape the men of David.

He is running from the battle that he was told he couldn't lose! He is left dangling in the air and doesn't even have the common sense to cut his own hair off to ensure he escapes to the ground safely, he just hangs there and panics. One of the men of Joab's division reports to him that Absalom is caught in the oak. Notice Joab's words in verse eleven. He has secretly offered a reward to his men for Absalom's death! Joab does not want this young man alive to tell his father David about his scheming with him earlier. Joab is guilty of another murder here to cover his own earlier traitorous actions.

The soldiers of the army will not disobey David's clear instruction, but Joab is not troubled by David's command, for he has very good reasons to see this young man never speak to his father again. He takes his personal guard with him and heads to the place where the young prince hangs by his hair a few inches off the ground (riding a mule = low to ground).

Verses 14 – 18. Joab takes three javelins when one would do, and thrusts all three through Absalom's chest (not heart – as one thrust through the heart would finish him off). None of these javelins kill him and it is his ten personal security guards who finish Absalom off on the ground. It is a slow and particularly brutal slaying of the young man and shows that deep personal malice drives Joab. Joab knows how to kill with a single thrust, and the only explanation of the three javelins and the hiding of the body later is that he is speaking to the young man as he thrusts each one in and reminding him of his possibly three promises to make him a leader, and his breaking of his word.

Joab doesn't just kill Absalom he tortures him in his death. He is really bitter towards this arrogant and stupid young man and he intends him to suffer and die horribly. Joab is vindictive and nasty, and he will "get even" with Amasa later also. I suspect Absalom expected to be taken alive and handed to his father and forgiven again, and I suspect he spoke to Joab as the old general approached, and he probably dictated the details of the "hand over". My suspicion is that Absalom's arrogance got the better of him here, as it had all his life, and he said foolish things, but Joab answered with his javelins, as he always intended to do anyway. Joab doesn't believe in mercy to people who know too much.....

The death is nasty, and the battered and skewered body is thrown in a pit in the forest and a vast quantity of stones is cast in on top of him to hide the location. This is a hidden pit for catching wild animals in, and the same word is used by Hushai, in chapter 17:9, to describe the sort of hiding place that soldiers could secret themselves in, and emerge from later behind those looking for them. Joab hides the body so none will later find it. He doesn't want anyone bringing this body to David, and he tries to delay the message of his death arriving to David. Joab wants Absalom to simply be reported as "missing in action" for this first night, but the story gets out and finally the full awful truth is known by all, but probably only in Solomon's reign after Joab's death.

Joab is a fearful man and none cross him and live, so even his guards probably didn't tell the whole story until much later after his death. Our writer has the story, and can only have this detail from one or more of the ten guards. David feels he cannot execute Joab for killing a rebel, but he can order his death later and he does. David is caught here by his own deep sense of loyalty to Joab, for he has saved him and later the nation many times over forty years of hard fighting. He is a real soldier's soldier and he wins battles. The other generals are great, but this man is a consistent winner. His later choice of Amasa shows how desperate David is to try to win back the favour of the people, who clearly hate Joab, but Joab is simply too useful as a ruthless general. Solomon will act quickly to execute him and replace him with another great man, but Solomon's and his general's defence oriented strategy is fatally flawed. 1 Kings 2:5-6, 28-34.

Absalom's arrogance and the pathetic nature of his life are underlined by his erection of this pillar of stone in his own honour that is mentioned in verse 18. Young men ought not to seek great monuments to their own honour, for that is something that many years of service alone deserves. To seek too many honours when young means you are trying to convince yourself and others of your own greatness, and such over-compensation is a sign that you are not great at all. Honours are best received from others, never from yourself! This young man was full of his own importance, and he was wrong in his self estimation.

The writer notes that he spoke as he reared the monument that he said he did it because he had no sons to stand after him. We were told in 2 Samuel 14:27 that he had three sons, but their names were not given there. This would only occur if the boys died very young, and the comment here regarding the pillar makes this most likely the case. When he goes into this battle he has no living sons, and with his death his line ends. It may be that this was the reason Ahithophel supported him, for he saw that he was a caretaker king only and could be replaced by Solomon later. Even if that was the case, Ahithophel erred, because this young man Absalom did not have the character to rule and was the “great hope” of fools without discernment only.

Verses 19 – 27. This young priest Ahimaaz is a spy, a soldier, and a runner, and is good at all three. He is right there in the thick of the battle in the forest to report the death of Absalom, but he is told in no uncertain terms that he “has no news to tell” by Joab. I suspect Joab would have killed him also to silence him but couldn’t because of those around him. Ahimaaz is well known in the army and nation and is respected as a great runner and will be recognised a long way off from the city where David is waiting.

He had run all night to warn David to get across the river and he has stayed with the king and fought in the battle with his men, not just stood by in a priestly manner. His focus is godly, for he sees that the Lord has given victory over those who stood against the Lord’s anointed, but Joab just sees political expediency. He doesn’t want David told of Absalom’s death today. He wants a victory parade first and the celebration of their great feat of destroying a superior army, and only after victory has been well and truly celebrated, for the death of Absalom to be a small “unfortunate” post script.

Ahimaaz is told he is not to bear any tidings of the battle. Joab softens the rejection by saying that he will bear tidings another day, but not today because the news is bad, the king’s son is dead. It is not Joab’s concern for Ahimaaz and the king that stops him sending him, it is that he doesn’t trust him and expects he will say too much. Joab calls an Ethiopian runner (a Cushite) to bear the news to David, as he is a foreigner and will say only what he is told to say. Like all men who have just murdered someone, Joab is not thinking straight, and doesn’t give the Cushite clear enough instructions, and the word about Absalom’s fate will get out before Joab intends. As Joab disobeyed David, so will both Ahimaaz and the Cushite.

Ahimaaz runs off towards David anyway, and he outpaces the Cushite and beats him to the gate where David sits waiting for news. David is hopeful that his forces have won, but also that his son is in chains and on his way to him. In this David is wrong, for his son needed to be executed for the nation’s sake to extinguish the rebellion totally, but as a father who had failed his son, David cannot face that necessity. David is out of touch with political reality because of his guilt regarding his son.

When David sees Ahimaaz he believes the news must be good, because he is such a good man. There is no logic to this at all, and it shows David is still not 100% well from his depression and is engaged in what is called “magical thinking”. Depression takes time to completely heal from and David requires a lot more time before he will be well and leave his guilt behind. The grief of Absalom’s death, and what it reminds David of, (both his sins and their flow on consequences), will retrigger a full depressive wave of emotion again.

Verses 28 – 33. Ahimaaz is the fastest runner and arrives first, but notice he has got the threat of Joab really clear in his mind and doesn’t tell David the truth about Absalom. He lies about being sent by Joab and he lies about not being able to see what happened in the tumult of the battle regarding Absalom. He is trying to “soften the blow” of the news for his king, but this was unnecessary and will be of no avail. When a person is affected by the sort of serious depressive disorder that has debilitated David for years now, they will swing wildly with emotion and no “softening” of news will assist them for their minds are over-reactive.

David simply tells Ahimaaz to stand aside as he waits for the next runner. It is the sign that David is not fixated on victory, but on Absalom. Ahimaaz realises at this point that he has wasted his time and made an enemy of Joab by disobeying his order, and nothing has been achieved for the king or the nation. Absalom needed to be executed, because to forgive a rebel like him after he had led nearly the whole kingdom away was impossible without creating future divisions and factions that would destroy the nation. His death was needed, but David will experience the double grief of his son’s death, and the sadness at the malice of his men who disobeyed his orders.

When the Cushite arrives he delivers the news of victory again. Note then his way of responding to David’s direct question about Absalom. He doesn’t lie, but delivers the news of his death in a diplomatic and courtly manner. It doesn’t “soften the blow”, for nothing can. David immediately collapses into deep and inconsolable grief. He wails aloud, and cries, and goes into a public mourning that everyone in the city hears. It is a total mental and emotional collapse, and it is so strong that it is an embarrassment to all who observe or hear it.

Whenever people mourn too loudly and passionately, it is normally a sign of some significant dysfunction in the relationship between the deceased and themselves. Real grief, without guilt, may be powerful at times, but it will have dignity or anger (where the loved one has been murdered) associated, but it will not be so loud and theatrical that it doesn’t ring true. David’s grief is guilt driven and it is disgraceful! Please do not accuse me of insincerity myself here, for I have seen the grief for a child in a family, as my parents grieved for my sister who died aged eleven just before Christmas of my thirteenth year. Their grief was powerful and long, but not theatrical. Theatrical = something is wrong!

We must be very careful and prayerful in this area when we are dealing with people who grieve, for “over the top” grieving is normally associated with some deep issue that needs resolving. In David’s case the grief is compounded by

his lack of guidance for his son over many years, and his lack of action regarding Absalom's true nature and evil actions. This man is guilty of killing his own son by his inaction for years and he knows it, and paradoxically the true killer of his son will be the one to help him face the truth.

The worse the theatrical nature of the grief, the worse the guilt, or the worse the relationship actually was. Theatrical grief is a sign of deep problems within the person who is "grieving". It may even show guilt for the death, and in David's case it does. In New Zealand a man was theatrical in his grief at the funeral of his murdered wife and daughter, and as I saw his performance at the funeral on national TV I said to me wife, "He is the murderer!" I was right, and he was later found guilty. David is beside himself, because he knows it is his failure as a parent that has led to his son's character and decision making.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Walking with the Lord means thinking all the way and asking always, "what does the Lord want me to do?" David plans his battle strategy and assigns leadership well. He orders the battle so that he turns potential disaster into victory. He uses all his skills to ensure that Absalom and Amasa's numerical superiority is nullified. When we serve the Lord we are to serve with all our past skills and experience dedicated to the Lord in focused energy. Let us devote all our energies into the Lord's work, utilising every experience we have ever had to the Lord's advantage, and so bring glory to the Lord.

2. David's failure as a parent had to be faced, but not as he faces it on the battlefield. David's weakness here nearly costs him the throne at the very point of his victory over the Great Rebellion. He nearly plucks defeat from the jaws of victory! This is "personality disorder type behaviour" and illustrates just how great his collapse has been since his great sin with Bathsheba and over Uriah. He is becoming as narcissistic as his son, but he will recover. He has been forgiven and restored by the Lord, but he has neither forgiven himself fully, nor dealt with Absalom as he should have. It is a reminder that "easy believism" and "easy forgiveness" does nothing except create greater carnage down track.

Repentance must be real, and the follow up to repentance involves both subsequent personal life change and the education of others around the scene. If the sin that has been confessed is not openly dealt with, and those affected by it healed also, then the sin will keep working like a cancer in the family, the church and the state. Let us not treat sin lightly in our ministries, nor lead people to the false belief that simple confession is all they need to do with a great sin. Evil **MUST** be eliminated, and the damage caused by the sin healed as far as is possible, or the evil will grow again.

3. David is still not thinking at 100% efficiency after the death of Absalom and he needs the words of the evil Joab to get him back into action (as we will see in the next chapter), but he needed to follow up on Joab's actions and resolve this murder against his orders. His failure to act, and his belief that he didn't have an alternative to Joab kept him from acting strongly. Joab will later be part of the rebellion of Adonijah; he is not a good judge of character.

We **must not keep bad men/women on our staff** because of their supposed strengths and abilities. If a man/woman is proved evil he/she must be dismissed, and the Lord's will sought for his/her replacement. David needed the counsel of Nathan, but it is not apparently sought here. It is a long road to recover from depression, and the evidence so far from our writer is that David has not yet really recovered. Let us keep ourselves from the sins that create the guilt and grief that debilitated David.

REFLECTION UPON "DYING GRACE"

1. We are all here upon the earth as in a "strange country"; we are strangers and pilgrims upon the earth, and are not meant to be too comfortable here. Philippians 3:12-17, Hebrews 11:13, 1 Peter 2:11.

2. Death is the strangest thing we confront on this earth; the weirdness of being her one minute, alive, alert and warm, then a second later, dead, cooling and inert. Death is meant to appear strange to us, for it is the evidence before us that we are not permanent inhabitants here, but simply playing out a part as we pass through. This is not a place we are meant to get attached to.

3. The death of believers is a precious thing to the God who has given his life to save us from the judgement of sin and death. 1 Samuel 26:21, 2 Kings 1:13-14, Psalms 49:8, 72:14, 116:15, 1 Peter 1:7, 2:4. Refer Grace.

4. We all must die, but that is not the end. 2 Timothy 4:7-8, Hebrews 11:13. The mature believers facing death see through it, to the other side where they meet with the Lord face to face. 1 Corinthians 13:12, 2 Corinthians 5:6-10.

5. Dying grace is provided to all believers who are looking to their Lord as they die, for his perfect provision for each of us from eternity past has everything we need provided in advance of our life, let alone our death itself. There are no surprises to God, and all things we face have provision for them there to be claimed by faith. 1 Corinthians 10:13, 2 Thessalonians 3:3, 2 Peter 2:9, Jude 24-25.

REFLECTION UPON GENUINE AND “FAKE” REPENTANCE

1. Two words are translated repentance in the New Testament:-
 - a) Metanoia - META - to change, NOIA - the mind, which means to change one's opinion or mind about something or someone.
 - b) Meta Melamai - to feel sorry for - an emotional reaction because of acts undertaken. This is fake repentance!
2. Repentance in salvation is to change one's attitude toward the person and work of Christ. (Luke 13:3,5, 15:7, 10, 16:30, 3 1, Acts 17:30, 31, 20:2 1, Romans 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9)
3. Repentance is used in salvation mainly for the Jews. The Jews had seen Christ as a great teacher, a wise man, a prophet. They repented and now recognised him as the Son of God. In the case of the Gentiles, the word believe is used. (Acts 16:31) as they had no previous ideas about the person of Christ.
4. The Fruit of Meta Melamai, such as penance and sorrow does not save. E.g. Judas repented of his actions and went to eternal damnation.
5. However, Godly sorrow works repentance. (2 Corinthians 7:8-11)
6. The Holy Spirit is responsible for repentance in salvation. (1 Corinthians 2:14, John 16:8-11) It convicts of sin, righteousness and judgement.
7. The Believer is told to repent from dead works or human good.
8. When God is said to “repent”, it is symbolic use of language. (Genesis 6:6, Exodus 32:14, Judges 2:18, 1 Samuel 15:35, Jeremiah 15:6, Amos 7:3, 6, Hebrews 7:21)

CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS

1. Forgiveness is by the death of Christ (Matthew 26:28, Revelation 1:5)
2. Divine forgiveness is to all who believe in Christ (Acts 10:43, Acts 16:31)
3. The penalty of sin was paid by Christ on the cross. (Hebrews 9:22, 2 Corinthians 5:21)
4. When a believer sins his fellowship with God is disrupted. God forgives these sins upon confession and cleanses from the unknown sins in the believer's life as well as known sins. (1 John 1:9).
5. Jesus Christ is our propitiation. (1 John 2:1,2)
6. In human forgiveness we are told to forgive others even as God has forgiven us (Ephesians 4:32). This can only be accomplished by the filling of the Holy Spirit. (Ephesians 5:18, Galatians 5:22,23)
7. Steps towards restoration of fellowship
 - [a] Examine yourself for genuineness of motivation. (2 Corinthians 14:5)
 - [b] Act on what you see (Romans 4:7-8)
 - [c] Deal with any sin by confession. (1 John 1:9, Psalm 66:18)
 - [d] Forget the sin you have confessed. Do not proceed into a pattern of guilt. (Philippians 3:13-14, Psalm 103:10-12)
 - [e] Resume your active spiritual walk. Avoid areas where you might be tempted by the sin which so easily besets us. (Hebrews 12:12-13)
 - [f] Be reconciled to others once you have been reconciled to God. (James 5:16)
 - [g] Get moving and grow up. (2 Peter 2:17-18)

NOTES

CHAPTER 19**INTRODUCTION**

David weeps and wails for more than a day over Absalom. As I noted in the previous chapter, his behaviour is initially quite disgraceful for a king, and has a very detrimental effect upon his Army, but he quickly transforms this grief in his own room in the city into something positive. Now normal grief over the murder of an adult son or daughter can debilitate and devastate a father or mother for several years, so a powerful reaction to such a death must be considered "normal". The grief associated with this sort of death alone can kill a parent, and we have all seen that many times in the News.

David's grief is however severely compounded by guilt, both over his own sins, for which all this is punishment, and for his failure to talk with his son and either judge/execute him, or fully restore him. 2 Samuel 12:1-14. Given his severe depression through the years before the Great Rebellion this sort of shock could also be expected to create a further, and potentially even fatal, depressive episode for David. Compound grief is the most difficult to assist people to recover from and some people take years to recover from such things, if they do at all.

The fact that David snaps out of this, and through his sadness takes charge again, tells us that the power of the Holy Spirit is at work in his life again. People cannot humanly speaking bounce back from the place David has got to, even with the tough words of the old soldier Joab ringing in their ears, unless the Lord lifts them up. This is David's testimony regarding his deliverance at this time. The power we have in the indwelling Holy Spirit is not to be under-estimated, and the command to walk in the filling of the Spirit, Ephesians 5:18 is to be taken seriously at such times.

David's restored mind is chronicled in some of the great Psalms which date from this period. Some Psalms may be the result of several episodes of the Great Rebellion, and may even have been re-written or completed after the victory described in the previous chapter. Read Psalm 41 right through before reading this chapter, as it appears to be describing the mental and spiritual process leading to the recovery from the shock of Absalom's death that Joab then prompts. David is doing a lot more than just weeping and wailing; he is praying, and writing out his thoughts, and then spreading them out before the Lord. Also prayerfully read through, **Psalms 7:8-17, 15:1-5, 24:1-10**.

David sees that Absalom has been judged by the Lord, just as he had been, and he accepts the Lord's verdict, and he determines to move back towards Jerusalem, to sit again upon the throne. As he pours his heart out, he is processing his grief, and dealing with his guilt again, and this time, it is for the last time. David is lifted up by the power of the Holy Spirit. **Psalms 102:10-28**. All this is good, but he needs to get out into the city and tell the people what has been happening within him, because they can't see that, and they need to, for he is their king and people look to their leaders for strength and purpose.

David acts, with Joab's prompting, and the situation in his East Bank base is stabilised. The people of the West Bank who readily accepted David had "lost the plot", and needed to be replaced, now gather to him. For some, it is with prompting, but nearly all accept him back. We have here in this chapter the "good, the bad, and the ugly", all trying to get back in David's favour. David does not do what Absalom would have done and kill all other conspirators, rather, he forgives all, and rebuilds unity in the land. We have seen in our own day, at the end of some bitter civil wars, the work of "Reconciliation Commissions", bringing the murderers and the victims surviving families together. This is a work of a Holy Spirit filled people alone, for only the Lord moves upon men and women and helps them find the grace required to forgive others for such great evils done.

David is walking in the Spirit now and the last vestiges of his depression are gone as we end this chapter. David does not plunge back into depression, for he has taken his great grief before the Lord and his weeping has lasted for the day and night only, for it is accompanied by prayer and poetry writing! **Psalms 30:5-12, 139:1-11, Lamentations 3:22-24**.

He pours all his pain and distress out to the Lord, and so the initially disgraceful behaviour becomes spiritually powerful through the transformation ministry of the Holy Spirit, working out change within the heart and mind. When David re-emerges to take the lead he does so with quiet dignity and spiritual strength that is summed up in the Psalms we have read above. Hebrews 12:9-15. This is the challenge of biblical leadership – to live a Holy Spirit transformed life, no matter what has happened to us earlier that day or week.

2 SAMUEL 19:1-43

19:1 And it was told Joab, Behold, the king weepeth and mourneth for Absalom. **2** And the victory that day was turned into mourning unto all the people: for the people heard say that day how the king was grieved for his son. **3** And the people gat them by stealth that day into the city, as people being ashamed steal away when they flee in battle. **4** But the king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son! **5** And Joab came into the house to the king, and said, Thou hast shamed this day the faces of all thy servants, which this day have saved thy life, and the lives of thy sons and of thy daughters, and the lives of thy wives, and the lives of thy concubines; **6** In that thou lovest thine enemies, and hatest thy friends. For thou hast declared this day, that thou regardest neither princes nor servants: for this day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well. **7** Now therefore arise, go forth, and speak comfortably unto thy servants: for I swear by the LORD, if thou go not forth, there will not tarry one with thee this night: and that will be worse unto thee than all the evil that befell thee from thy youth until

now. 8 Then the king arose, and sat in the gate. And they told unto all the people, saying, Behold, the king doth sit in the gate. And all the people came before the king: for Israel had fled every man to his tent. 9 And all the people were at strife throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, The king saved us out of the hand of our enemies, and he delivered us out of the hand of the Philistines; and now he is fled out of the land for Absalom. 10 And Absalom, whom we anointed over us, is dead in battle. Now therefore why speak ye not a word of bringing the king back? 11 And king David sent to Zadok and to Abiathar the priests, saying, Speak unto the elders of Judah, saying, Why are ye the last to bring the king back to his house? seeing the speech of all Israel is come to the king, even to his house. 12 Ye are my brethren, ye are my bones and my flesh: wherefore then are ye the last to bring back the king? 13 And say ye to Amasa, Art thou not of my bone, and of my flesh? God do so to me, and more also, if thou be not captain of the host before me continually in the room of Joab. 14 And he bowed the heart of all the men of Judah, even as the heart of one man; so that they sent this word unto the king, Return thou, and all thy servants. 15 So the king returned, and came to Jordan. And Judah came to Gilgal, to go to meet the king, to conduct the king over Jordan. 16 And Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite, which was of Bahurim, hasted and came down with the men of Judah to meet king David. 17 And there were a thousand men of Benjamin with him, and Ziba the servant of the house of Saul, and his fifteen sons and his twenty servants with him; and they went over Jordan before the king. 18 And there went over a ferry boat to carry over the king's household, and to do what he thought good. And Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king, as he was come over Jordan; 19 And said unto the king, Let not my lord impute iniquity unto me, neither do thou remember that which thy servant did perversely the day that my lord the king went out of Jerusalem, that the king should take it to his heart. 20 For thy servant doth know that I have sinned: therefore, behold, I am come the first this day of all the house of Joseph to go down to meet my lord the king. 21 But Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered and said, Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the LORD's anointed? 22 And David said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah, that ye should this day be adversaries unto me? shall there any man be put to death this day in Israel? for do not I know that I am this day king over Israel? 23 Therefore the king said unto Shimei, Thou shalt not die. And the king sware unto him. 24 And Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king, and had neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he came again in peace. 25 And it came to pass, when he was come to Jerusalem to meet the king, that the king said unto him, Wherefore wentest not thou with me, Mephibosheth? 26 And he answered, My lord, O king, my servant deceived me: for thy servant said, I will saddle me an ass, that I may ride thereon, and go to the king; because thy servant is lame. 27 And he hath slandered thy servant unto my lord the king; but my lord the king is as an angel of God: do therefore what is good in thine eyes. 28 For all of my father's house were but dead men before my lord the king: yet didst thou set thy servant among them that did eat at thine own table. What right therefore have I yet to cry any more unto the king? 29 And the king said unto him, Why speakest thou any more of thy matters? I have said, Thou and Ziba divide the land. 30 And Mephibosheth said unto the king, Yea, let him take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house. 31 And Barzillai the Gileadite came down from Rogelim, and went over Jordan with the king, to conduct him over Jordan. 32 Now Barzillai was a very aged man, even fourscore years old: and he had provided the king of sustenance while he lay at Mahanaim; for he was a very great man. 33 And the king said unto Barzillai, Come thou over with me, and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem. 34 And Barzillai said unto the king, How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem? 35 I am this day fourscore years old: and can I discern between good and evil? can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king? 36 Thy servant will go a little way over Jordan with the king: and why should the king recompense it me with such a reward? 37 Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and of my mother. But behold thy servant Chimham; let him go over with my lord the king; and do to him what shall seem good unto thee. 38 And the king answered, Chimham shall go over with me, and I will do to him that which shall seem good unto thee: and whatsoever thou shalt require of me, that will I do for thee. 39 And all the people went over Jordan. And when the king was come over, the king kissed Barzillai, and blessed him; and he returned unto his own place. 40 Then the king went on to Gilgal, and Chimham went on with him: and all the people of Judah conducted the king, and also half the people of Israel. 41 And, behold, all the men of Israel came to the king, and said unto the king, Why have our brethren the men of Judah stolen thee away, and have brought the king, and his household, and all David's men with him, over Jordan? 42 And all the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, Because the king is near of kin to us: wherefore then be ye angry for this matter? have we eaten at all of the king's cost? or hath he given us any gift? 43 And the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, and said, We have ten parts in the king, and we have also more right in David than ye: why then did ye despise us, that our advice should not be first had in bringing back our king? And the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 4. The Army works its way back to the city, and this is probably the next day that they arrive back. Joab blew the recall for the army to return to their start point as soon as Absalom was securely buried in the pit. 2 Samuel 18:16. From that place the normal practise was, that the next day, at first light, they would scour the battlefield for the lightly wounded, and would strip the dead of weapons and bury the bodies, and then return to their city. It may be twenty four hours after the messenger's arrival that Joab returns to the city and seeks out David.

Joab has been told by his men that the returning soldiers are feeling like cowards and traitors and they are starting to slink away as if despised for their victory. David has no idea this is happening, for he is locked away in his chamber

mourning and praying and writing. Grief makes us self-absorbed, and this is normal, but for a king it is potentially disastrous for the morale of his followers in such a situation.

The situation is desperate, and David may have all his men creep away back to their towns and villages, and he will be left with no men to march with him on his return to the capital. All the blood spilt that previous day will have been in vain. All in the city can hear the king's grief filled cries for his evil son, and they are ashamed of him and themselves. They do not see him writing the Psalms, but they need to sing a Psalm, and see their transformed king before it is too late.

Verses 5 – 7. Joab gets away with words here that would have led to the death of lesser men. He speaks as if he is Nathan the prophet, but without the dignity and politeness. All he says is true, and yet he doesn't see the spiritual change within David. He is however used of the Lord here as the final challenge to David to arise from his grief and get back to kingship. To lead others the leader must be able to put aside their own feelings and thoughts and serve their people only. Joab paints a stark picture, but it is the one that David's behaviour has created. The men believe David would be happier if they had all died and the evil Absalom had lived!

David's grief has been excessive, given the truth of Absalom's traitorous behaviour, but the misinterpretation of his true inner state is to be expected, for others cannot see into his heart, they only hear his words cried aloud. Joab makes it clear that if David's grief lasts until this second evening, then there will be no soldier left to him. This is an exaggeration, for David's Old Guard would remain, but he will lose most of the Israelites who flocked to him. David receives the rebuke from his evil old uncle, because all his words are true, and even though the murderer of his son says them, he knows they are truth and he accepts them. This is a measure of David's recovery and spiritual transformation. **Isaiah 55:6-11.**

Verses 8 – 10. David's response is immediate. It is reminiscent of his transformation after the death of Bathsheba's first child. **2 Samuel 12:15-23.** He immediately rises, washes and dresses in his robes, and heads for the city gate. He sets up a throne there and speaks with all the people. His men creep out from their hiding places and come now before their king and see a transformed man. David's men gather to him and are encouraged; the crisis is averted and the army is bonded back into unity and the people rightly rejoice in the victory over rebellion.

On the other side of the Jordan River the news of Absalom's death and the defeat of their army of rebellion has reached the tribal areas within days, as their surviving men return. Fear and paralysis grips them all as they face now the true facts. David was their mighty king, and even though he had become depressed and withdrawn from civic life, he was still their king, and they rebelled against him. They have now seen that they have trusted in a mirage; that Absalom was nothing but a fake, and a self centred coward.

They fear what David may now do to them; they debate their options, but sit still. There is no leadership to take charge for some time, and this tells us that the descendants of Saul are not charismatic or powerful, for in this vacuum if they wanted to move this was their opportunity. Each tribal elder asks the other, "Why do we hesitate to ask David back?" They know the answer; they are all ashamed of themselves for their rebellion. When we trust in human logic rather than the Plan of God, and then we sow rebellion against God given authority, then we can expect to receive a crop of shame! **Psalms 70:1-5, Isaiah 41:41:10-14, 42:17-25, 45:16-23, Jeremiah 8:7-9.**

Verses 11 – 13. David knows that the best way to get the reconciliation he seeks is through faith and spirituality, so he seeks the work of the High Priests with the elders on his behalf. I suspect he sent the sons of the high priests back to their fathers as his emissaries. This was a master stroke, for David seeks a spiritually based reconciliation, not a purely political one. He seeks to rebuild unity around the temple that his son Solomon will build, and for most of the rest of his life he will be focused upon gathering the resources needed for that. He seeks the only unity that will be lasting for his people, and that is unity around the national worship that Moses established.

He especially targets for gentle rebuke the elders of Judah, who in Hebron were the first to welcome Absalom as their king. He speaks words of conciliation and moral challenge to them however, not revenge and judgement. He will be true to his word and will not wreak any vengeance upon them later as others have done in history. King Charles II returned to England as its king after the English Civil War at Parliament's request. He did so with promise of reconciliation and then promptly had executed all he could get to who had signed the death warrant for his father. He was a man of no character at all, and his subsequent adulteries, refusal to repay debts, and lack of military-naval action to deal with many other issues proved this. All you could depend upon with Charles, was what he promised would be proved unreliable!

David shows himself to have character, whereas others through history, like Charles II, prove they have no integrity. David is a greater king than any other in history, for he wins the battle against himself, and the normal human desire for justice and revenge. **Deuteronomy 32:35-43, Psalms 94:1, Romans 12:19, Hebrews 10:30.**

Verses 14 – 15. David's work amongst his people has the desired effect, and all bow their hearts and then their knees before him. This is an interesting phrase for the writer to use and tells us the depth of the reconciliation David achieves. The people deeply regret their actions, repent of them, and nearly all accept him again whole heartedly as their king again. They send the message of recall, possibly through the sons of the priests again.

This whole process may take a month or more, and it is only after he has received a firm invitation back does David once more head for the Jordan River with his entire Army and family. David does not want to enter the capital city again without their whole hearted invitation, and he wants to enter in good order, and as the mighty king who God has forgiven,

answered and given victory. He will not come as a conqueror to dominate their will, for he comes again as God's man, and the people must acknowledge that, or the Lord's will cannot be done amongst them.

The leaders of Judah go to Gilgal and assemble there, at the place of unity, where Joshua spoke to them, the Lord spoke to them through his angel, where Samuel ministered, and where Saul was acknowledged as King. **Joshua 4:9-10, 5:10, 9:6ff, 14:6, Judges 2:1, 1 Samuel 7:16, 11:14-15, 15:21.** Having gathered at that place, and likely worshipped there, and reflected upon the unity of the twelve tribes, the elders of Judah then head down the wilderness road to the Jordan and meet the king to bring him across the river in triumph.

Verses 16 – 23. Now the “rats” come out of hiding. We now have three doubtful men and a really good man approach David. These men are political animals and it is hard to know what their real status and attitudes are, except that they are self centred and probably liars. **John 2:24-25** always applies with politicians. Solomon will later order the execution of Shimei if he leaves the city of Jerusalem, and that order will be followed through on after a couple of years. He is a political power player and acts that way here, bringing one thousand men in his retinue to emphasize that he is a powerful man of Benjamin and can muster many troops to his side.

By appearing this way Shimei reminds David that he may yet be useful to David, but David is not impressed, nor does he see him as anything other than what he is, a traitor and a man of on-going doubtful loyalty. Solomon will deal with him in the right time. 1 Kings 2:8-9, 36-46. When we study the life of Solomon we will see why Solomon acts with such violence towards this man. It is not vengeance, but political necessity, given his visit to work with the king of Gath. This man lives and dies a plotter against the house of David, but at this time he receives undeserved grace and mercy.

The first man to approach David is Shimei. When we met him first, on the road from Jerusalem, he was alone, throwing stones to insult the memory of David and call God's judgement upon him for the death of the house of Saul. His behaviour was disgraceful and wrongful, as David had done no violence to the house of Saul. David however, mindful of the words of Nathan the prophet, 2 Samuel 12:9-14, accepts the insults of Shimei at that time “as unto the Lord”. Shimei is given the benefit of the doubt, that he may be delivering a prophetic judgement and so he is not allowed to be killed at that point by Abishai.

Abishai seeks to kill Shimei again at this point, and David's words to him indicate he has lost patience with him and Joab for their unnecessarily blood thirsty behaviours. He speaks of both “sons of Zeruiah” as “adversaries” to him. This is a serious charge; that Joab and Abishai have been secretly working against him, and sadly it may be true. Abishai is around sixty years of age himself at this time, and he will be removed from the generalship within months of this time. 2 Samuel 20:23. He will be replaced by Benaiah, and only Joab will hold his job until Benaiah has learned all there is to know by under-studying him, when he will take over under Solomon. 1 Kings 2:35.

Verses 24 – 30. The second man to approach David is Mephibosheth. He looks a complete mess, not having washed, trimmed his nails or done his hair since David left Jerusalem, or so he argues. His story however does not add up completely, any more than Ziba's did when he delivered his gifts as David left the city. 2 Samuel 16:1-4. David directly asks Mephibosheth why he didn't ride out of Jerusalem with him. He couldn't walk, but could have organized a ride!

The explanation as to why he didn't is unsatisfactory. He must have been in touch with the court, for he ate at David's table. David left quickly, but the news of Absalom's rebellion was around the city like wild fire, so he knew his duty; he was to fly to the king, even if he had to crawl. Even with Ziba's opposition he has been able to get the ass to ride on down to the Jordan valley to welcome David back, and that proves he could have emptied his larder and joined his king when he left the city had he really wanted to. Ziba could not have stopped him as he argues he did.

This man was not as grateful to David as he ought to have been, and he does not share the love of David that his father had. David has been kind to him for Jonathan's sake, but the kindness is not apparently returned except in words at this point. His words ring hollow here and in some way Shimei, he, and Ziba are implicated in the rebellion. The whole house of Saul, and the old court of Saul have in some way been involved in the rebellion, supporting Absalom for their own objectives.

David is suspicious of them all, and his words regarding the property indicate he is dismissing this man's story as unlikely to be true. He is sick of his talking to excuse himself, and tells him to be quiet and divide the property between himself and Ziba. David clearly believes they are as bad as each other. Mephibosheth's final words are formal and indicate he is content to take nothing, just rejoice in David's return, but there is no record of what happens next, and the suspicion I am left with at this point, is that this man is now not welcome at David's table either. David will later spare his and his son's life, but only because of his oath to Jonathan, not because of any love for this man. He presents here as a lame weasel!

Verses 31 – 38. Having dealt with the “bad and the ugly”, David deals here with the good man. Barzillai of Gilead has been whole hearted in his support for the king since his arrival on the East Bank of the Jordan and has spent the equivalent of hundreds of thousands of dollars on food and supplies for David and his men and all their families.

Barzillai is over eighty years of age and in frail health, but he rides down to the Jordan River and brings David across to the other side in triumph. He is frail, has poor hearing, declining eye sight, and reduced enjoyment of food and wine. He is moving closer to death by the day and he feels it. This account is placed by the writer as a deliberate contrast in the text to the actions of Mephibosheth, who is lame, but able to ride well, and is still only a middle aged man. David offers to

feed this great old man at his table in the palace until the end of his life. The old man appreciates the offer but politely rejects it, as he wants to die at home, and be buried in his own family tomb.

This desire to be buried with ones own believing ancestors, was the desire of all believers of this age. They saw that the company of the body in burial was the company of resurrection when the Lord came to rule upon the earth. To be buried with your ancestors was testimony of the faith of Israel, as our burial service remains today our testimony regarding our faith in the bodily resurrection. Although he cannot accompany David back to the capital city, Barzillai sends his son on his behalf there to serve David as he can. We hear no more of this young man, but he may have gone on to serve David and Solomon.

Verses 39 – 43. All the leaders of the people, and probably many of the common people also went down into the Jordan Valley to welcome David back. Everyone wanted to appear happy to have him back, even if they had been happy to welcome Absalom several months before. Human nature is interesting. People who have been traitorous will often be especially joyful in their return of the one they betrayed. The English playwright summed this up in his phrase, "The lady doth protest too much methinks!"

Always be suspicious of those who are "too good/sad/shocked to be true" in their protestations of shock, loyalty or love, for often they are simply covering up their past behaviours and real feelings by false words and actions. Remember that the crowds welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday with cries of "Hosannah in the highest", and yet within days cried out "crucify him!" **Matthew 21:8-11, 23:37-39, 27:22-23, Luke 23:18-23, John 18:40.**

The king marches up the Valley-Wilderness road to Gilgal and there he stops, and receives the homage of the twelve tribes. Notice again the "too good to be true" political game playing of the elders and orators. Sadly the rivalry between Judah and the other tribes will open up into open warfare within a year of Solomon's death. There was a great and violent verbal argument about who loved the king more, and who had the right to bring him back across the river first. The men of Judah really argue their point and they are louder than the others, as they have been more disloyal before.

We are not told whether David silenced them all, but they all follow in his train back to the capital at Jerusalem. The return is not 100% welcomed, and the writer hints at this with his reference to "half the men of Israel" in verse forty. There is a faction that still resists David, and there will be one further rebellion against him before things settle fully again. This rebellion will be dealt with in the next chapter.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. It does not matter what our opinion is of a messenger, we must learn to concentrate upon the truth they bring. Let us pay attention to the words of the Lord, whether we admire or despise the messenger who brings them. God's servants come in all shapes and sizes and characters, and even when an evil man tells the truth from God we need to be ready to heed it and obey it. Joab is thoroughly evil, but when he tells the truth David responds to it.

Let us value the truth above all things, and hunger for the Word of God so much that we can see past any weird or awful aspects of the minister who brings the truth. My own wife was led to personal salvation in Christ Jesus by an unbelieving elder who simply preached the Word of God. He didn't really believe it personally, but he preached it, and she believed it, for it is the Word that is blessed by the work of the Holy Spirit, not the vessel that delivers it! Isaiah 55:11.

2. We cannot lead the Lord's people without their wholehearted support and invitation to lead them forward. A half hearted call to ministry is not a godly call, and nothing will come of it. God's people must cast themselves totally upon the Lord, and seek His face in prayer, and then devote themselves to obedience to the Lord. If the church is slack in the work, and hesitant to commit to any move forward the godly pastor "waits upon the Lord", just as we see David do here. This means to call for prayer meetings to occur until the spirit of the people is revived, and that nothing is done until the people are Holy Spirit filled and ready to move forward again.

3. All manner of people are drawn to a victorious ministry; the good, the bad, and the ugly! We must be discerning when men praise or welcome us, for their motivation is not necessarily good. We must always remember that Satan places his most dangerous helpers into the very midst of the church to undermine it's ministry that much more powerfully. Satan loves to cause division and argument; anything that stops the Lord's people focusing forward is his work. Let us be vigilant in guarding against the work of the devil amongst the congregation and let us teach the truth about the Angelic Conflict so that all hear it and understand the devices of the devil. 2 Corinthians 2:11.

REFLECTION UPON THE FILLING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

1. The Holy Spirit indwells every believer. We are commanded to allow Him to fill (or fully control) our lives (Ephesians 5:18).

2. The filling (controlling) of the Spirit can be broken by:

- a) Grieving the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30) - sin, doing something you shouldn't.
- b) Quenching the Spirit (1 Thessalonians 5:19) - not doing something you should (like quenching a fire, allowing the flame to go out).

3. The filling (controlling) of the Spirit can be restored by confession of sin and full surrender to do the will of God (1John 1:9)

4. The Spirit produces the very character of the Christ in the believer: (Galatians 4:19, 5:22, 23, Ephesians 3:16, 17, Philippians 1:20, 21, 2 Corinthians 3:3)
 - a) The fruit of the Spirit:
 - i) Galatians 5:22-23 - Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Gentleness, Self-control.
 - ii) Romans 14:17 - Righteousness, Peace, Joy.
 - iii) Colossians 3:12-15 - Compassion, Kindness, Humility, Gentleness, Patience, Forgiveness, Love, Peace, Thankfulness.
 - iv) 1 Thessalonians 1:3 - Faith, Love, Endurance, Hope.
 - b) Rejoicing in Christ (Philippians 3:1, 4:4).
 - c) Loving one another (John 15:12, Romans 12:10, Ephesians 5:2).
 - d) Striving for the faith (Philippians 1:27, Jude 3).
 - e) Putting away all sin (1 Corinthians 5:7, Hebrews 12:1).
 - f) Abstaining from all appearances of evil (1 Thessalonians 5:22).
 - g) Submitting to injuries (1 Corinthians 6:7).
 - h) Subduing the temper (Ephesians 4:26, James 1:19).
 - i) Shunning the wicked (2 Thessalonians 3:6).
 - j) Abounding in the works of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58 1 Thessalonians 4:1).
 - k) Showing a good example (1 Timothy 4:12, 1 Peter 2:12).
 - l) Following after that which is good (Philippians 4:8, 1 Timothy 6:11).
 - m) Perfecting holiness (2 Corinthians 7:1, 2 Timothy 3:17).
 - n) Hating defilement (Jude 23).
 - o) Overcoming the world. (1 John 5:4-5)
 - p) Adorning the gospel. (Philippians 1:27, Titus 2:10)
 - q) Forgiving injuries. (Romans 12:20)
 - r) Living peaceably with all. (Romans 12:18, Hebrews 12:14)
 - s) Visiting the afflicted. (James 1:27)
 - t) Sympathising with others. (Romans 12:15, 1 Thessalonians 5:14)
 - u) Honouring others. (Romans 12:10)
 - v) Submitting to authorities. (Romans 13:1-7)
 - w) Being content. (Philippians 4:11, Hebrews 13:5)
 - x) Walking worthy of the Lord. (Colossians 1:10, 1 Thessalonians 2:12)
 - y) Walking in the newness of life. (Romans 6:4)
 - z) Walking as children of light. (Ephesians 5:8)
 - aa) Glorifies Christ in his body. (Philippians 1:20, 21)
 - bb) Christ is at home in his body. (Ephesians 3:16,17)
 - cc) A lifestyle which honours God in the presence of men. (2 Corinthians 3:3)

5. The filling of the Holy Spirit in every believer only occurs in two dispensations:
 - a) Church age Ephesians 5:18, Galatians 5:22,23
 - b) Millennium - Joel 2:28, 29 (characterised by ecstasies)

RESURRECTION

1. The resurrection of Christ is central to the gospel. (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)
 - a) Had there been no resurrection then we would all still be in our sins. (1 Corinthians 15:17).
 - b) Resurrection indicates completion of justification. (Romans 4:25, 2 Corinthians 5:2 1)
 - c) Resurrection is a guarantee of ultimate sanctification. (1 Corinthians 15:20-23)
 - d) The resurrection is the Father's seal on Christ's completed work, and the public declaration of its acceptance.
 - e) Without the resurrection it is impossible for Christ to be glorified. The humanity of Christ is glorified higher than the angels. (John 7:39, John 16:14)

2. Historical proof of the resurrection:
 - a) The empty tomb. (Matthew 28)
 - b) Many of witnesses died rather than change their testimony.
 - c) Subsequent changes and confidence of the disciples after the resurrection.
 - d) The day of Pentecost. The reality of the resurrection was so well known that when Peter preached the first two sermons in Jerusalem over 8000 people were saved. (Acts 2:41, Acts 4:3-4)
 - e) The observance of the first day of the week as the worship day. (Acts 20:7, 1 Corinthians 16:2, Revelation 1:10)
 - f) The historic existence of the church. The church worships a literal risen Saviour, and not merely the memory of a dead martyr. (Romans 5:12,14,17, 6:3-9, 8:2, 1 Corinthians 15:26,54-55, Hebrews 2:14)

3. Baptism is a sign of the new resurrection life. (Romans 6:3-11, Colossians 2:12).

4. The Lord's Supper is a reminder of the expected return of the risen Lord. (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

5. Order of the resurrections:-
- a) The first for believers only including Jesus Christ which is divided into four parts.
 - i) The resurrection of Christ. (1 Corinthians 15:23, Romans 1:4, 1 Thessalonians 1:10, 1 Peter 1:3)
 - ii) The Rapture of the church (1 Corinthians 15:51-57, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18)
 - iii) The Old Testament saints and tribulation martyrs at the end of the Tribulation. (Daniel 12:13, Isaiah 26-19-20, Revelation 20:4)
 - iv) The Millennial saints and those who survive the Tribulation to enter the Millennium in their physical bodies.
 - b) The second resurrection occurs at the end of the Millennium and is for unbelievers only. They are judged and cast into the lake of fire forever. (1 John 5:28, 29, Revelation 20:12-15, 2 Peter 3:7, Matthew 25:41)
 - c) Jesus, who must be the first eternally resurrected human, was not raised until three days after the crucifixion.
 - d) People in the Old Testament who were "raised from the dead" were merely resuscitated, and later died.
 - e) Matthew 27:52-53 is a transfer scene not a resurrection scene. The transfer is one of saints from paradise to the third heaven (Ephesians 4:8). Some were given resuscitated bodies to witness to the Jews.

6. The sequence of events at the Lord's resurrection is as follows:-
- a) Mary Magdalene, Salome and Mary the mother of James and Joses head towards the tomb followed by other women carrying embalming spices.
 - b) The three find the stone rolled away. Mary Magdalene goes back to tell the disciples. (Luke 23:55-24:9, John 20:1-2)
 - c) Mary the mother of James and Joses draws near to the tomb and sees the angel. (Matthew 28:2)
 - d) She goes back to the women carrying the spices.
 - e) Peter and John who have been advised by Mary Magdalene arrive, look inside the empty tomb and go away. (John 20:3-10)
 - f) Mary Magdalene returns weeping, sees two angels and then Jesus. (John 20:11-18)
 - g) As instructed by the Lord she goes to tell the disciples.
 - h) Mary the mother of James and Joses meets the women with the spices and returning with them they see the two angels. (Luke 24:4-5, Mark 16:5)
 - i) They also receive advice from the angels and, going to seek the disciples, are met by Jesus. (Matthew 28:8-10)

Notes

CHAPTER 20**INTRODUCTION**

Men like Sheba, son of Bichri, are interesting/baffling people. They have no real right to claim power, nor the brains or even assets, but in their arrogance and self importance they claim more than they can sustainably handle. In weak times, where weak leadership rules, they can sometimes seize and hold power long enough to really destroy the State, but where strong leadership exists they are stamped upon like the termites they truly are. Such men must be squashed quickly or other fools will gather to them. Hitler and his thugs were like this, but weak leadership opened the door for their power and evil to spread, as in many recent African tyrants, and their associated gangster political parties.

This man is a "man of Belial", which is our writer's way of saying, he is a self centred/satanic man who doesn't have the ability to rule. It will however always stagger you to discover just how much initial support fools will gain by their apparent strength. When Abraham Lincoln uttered his famous words, "You can't fool all the people all the time", he was being a clever politician, for you can fool most of the people most of the time! Sheba fools many people in Israel into thinking he can revive the kingdom of Saul and raise Benjamin up again. He plays upon their rejection of Judah as arrogant people, and thereby hides his own arrogance. He must be stamped upon quickly, and rooted out of the nation!

Behind the scenes there is much intrigue, possibly involving the house of Saul, and it is potentially very dangerous to David and his house. Many are watching and waiting to see what will happen, for they see David won against Absalom with only a few men, and he apparently needs the levies of Israel to defeat Sheba. David is vulnerable, and has yet to strongly rebuild his significant standing army. Most of northern Israel remain in their cities and help neither side, for they are waiting to see who to support, and they seek a "winner".

As noted above, people seek strength when they face uncertainty, and many would support a strong alternative to their aging king. David's kingdom hangs in the balance a number of times before his final days of peace. This challenge is a severe one, but in the end it is defeated by the murderous cunning and ruthlessness of general Joab.

2 SAMUEL 20:1-26

20:1 And there happened to be there a man of Belial, whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjamite: and he blew a trumpet, and said, We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: every man to his tents, O Israel. **2** So every man of Israel went up from after David, and followed Sheba the son of Bichri: but the men of Judah clave unto their king, from Jordan even to Jerusalem. **3** And David came to his house at Jerusalem; and the king took the ten women his concubines, whom he had left to keep the house, and put them in ward, and fed them, but went not in unto them. So they were shut up unto the day of their death, living in widowhood. **4** Then said the king to Amasa, Assemble me the men of Judah within three days, and be thou here present. **5** So Amasa went to assemble the men of Judah: but he tarried longer than the set time which he had appointed him. **6** And David said to Abishai, Now shall Sheba the son of Bichri do us more harm than did Absalom: take thou thy lord's servants, and pursue after him, lest he get him fenced cities, and escape us. **7** And there went out after him Joab's men, and the Cherethites, and the Pelethites, and all the mighty men: and they went out of Jerusalem, to pursue after Sheba the son of Bichri. **8** When they were at the great stone which is in Gibeon, Amasa went before them. And Joab's garment that he had put on was girded unto him, and upon it a girdle with a sword fastened upon his loins in the sheath thereof; and as he went forth it fell out. **9** And Joab said to Amasa, Art thou in health, my brother? And Joab took Amasa by the beard with the right hand to kiss him. **10** But Amasa took no heed to the sword that was in Joab's hand: so he smote him therewith in the fifth rib, and shed out his bowels to the ground, and struck him not again; and he died. So Joab and Abishai his brother pursued after Sheba the son of Bichri. **11** And one of Joab's men stood by him, and said, He that favoureth Joab, and he that is for David, let him go after Joab. **12** And Amasa wallowed in blood in the midst of the highway. And when the man saw that all the people stood still, he removed Amasa out of the highway into the field, and cast a cloth upon him, when he saw that every one that came by him stood still. **13** When he was removed out of the highway, all the people went on after Joab, to pursue after Sheba the son of Bichri. **14** And he went through all the tribes of Israel unto Abel, and to Bethmaachah, and all the Berites: and they were gathered together, and went also after him. **15** And they came and besieged him in Abel of Bethmaachah, and they cast up a bank against the city, and it stood in the trench: and all the people that were with Joab battered the wall, to throw it down. **16** Then cried a wise woman out of the city, Hear, hear; say, I pray you, unto Joab, Come near hither, that I may speak with thee. **17** And when he was come near unto her, the woman said, Art thou Joab? And he answered, I am he. Then she said unto him, Hear the words of thine handmaid. And he answered, I do hear. **18** Then she spake, saying, They were wont to speak in old time, saying, They shall surely ask counsel at Abel: and so they ended the matter. **19** I am one of them that are peaceable and faithful in Israel: thou seekest to destroy a city and a mother in Israel: why wilt thou swallow up the inheritance of the LORD? **20** And Joab answered and said, Far be it, far be it from me, that I should swallow up or destroy. **21** The matter is not so: but a man of mount Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri by name, hath lifted up his hand against the king, even against David: deliver him only, and I will depart from the city. And the woman said unto Joab, Behold, his head shall be thrown to thee over the wall. **22** Then the woman went unto all the people in her wisdom. And they cut off the head of Sheba the son of Bichri, and cast it out to Joab. And he blew a trumpet, and they retired from the city, every man to his tent. And Joab returned to Jerusalem unto the king. **23** Now Joab was over all the host of Israel: and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites and over the Pelethites: **24** And

Adoram was over the tribute: and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder :25 And Sheva was scribe: and Zadok and Abiathar were the priests: 26 And Ira also the Jairite was a chief ruler about David.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 3. Any man can “blow his own trumpet” and call up other foolish people to active and passive rebellion against authority, but their lack of character, shown by their rebellion, will normally be revealed over time. This man calls for rebellion against David. The writer records “every man of Israel” deserted David. That is clearly not the case, but this was the Hebrew way of saying that the vast majority were tempted, and many left David’s side, and went home. The rebellion does not involve many men at this early point, but there is discontent, and the men of Israel, though still dispersed to their cities, are unhappy with David, and unloving towards Judah. Inaction will fan the flame of this evil.

As noted above, the meeting at Gilgal didn’t go as well as it could have and the writer ends his account of it with the note that the fierceness of the men of Judah was greater than the fierceness of the men of Israel. He doesn’t say that David gave a great speech to restore full unity, nor record any specific action David took to create a sense of unity again. While it is unwise to argue fully from a writer’s silence, the result of that meeting at Gilgal led to Sheba being able to secure a considerable following in Israel. David must take action quickly to ensure he doesn’t face yet another great rebellion.

On his arrival in Jerusalem, and before he hears of Sheba’s actions, he confronts the question about the ten women he left behind to guard the palace. They are provided for as princesses for their whole life, but after being unwilling sexual partners of his son, he places them out of bounds for his own sexual relationship. This was a correct action, in accordance with the Mosaic Law, for anyone who had had sex with one’s parent or child was not eligible for any other family member as a sexual partner. Leviticus 18:6-18, 20:10-21.

Verses 4 – 7. David foolishly trusts Amasa, even though he led the combined army of Israel against him, and he led it badly!!! It is “possibly” a good political move to require Amasa to gather the tribal levies, as he was the one who led the Great Rebellion Army, and so he may be the one that the men of Israel would gather to, certainly rather than Joab. However he led them to defeat, and he entered the great forest where he was able to be out fought by a smaller force. This is not the brightest, most ruthless, or sharpest general, and he will also prove slow and inefficient. For whatever reasons he had, he now fails in the fulfilment of his orders from David.

His instructions were clear; he was to send out the call up orders to all the areas of Judah at least, and have the army ready to move on the third day. This was possible, and yet he has failed to do it with several more days added. David speaks to Abishai and tells him his fears, and sends him in charge of the mobile striking force of the old regular army to try to push Sheba into a place where he is contained, and so cannot gather all the northern tribes together to his banner.

Time is of an essence, for if he has time to gather the ten northern tribes properly, and close to their own homes, he may succeed in gathering an unbeatable army, or create a civil war. Abishai must move quickly, and he does so within the hour. He moves off to the north with the Old Guard, referred to as “Joab’s men”. Joab is with him but as his brother, not the commander at this point, although his status amongst the men is such that they owe personal loyalty to him.

Verses 8 – 13. Amasa has appointed the town of Gibeon as the gathering point for the tribal levies, and he is there waiting for the men to arrive. It is just over ten kilometres from Jerusalem and so only a couple of hours march until Abishai and Joab arrive there. They meet Amasa by the great stone that is there as a land mark. It is close by to the place where Abner and Joab met and battled many years before, and close by to where Asahel was killed. 2 Samuel 2:13, 3:30. Why has Amasa not moved fast? Is he playing for time to see if another rebellion might be successful? Whatever his game, it is a fatal one when someone who is efficiently so ruthless as Joab is around.

The writer describes how Joab is not dressed in battle gear, which is another clue that he is not the general in this case. He has been dismissed in favour of Amasa. He has his short sword hidden in the folds of his undergarment, and as he approaches Amasa to greet him he allows the folds of his garment to release and this allows him to slip the short sword hidden there into his hand.

He murders Amasa with it by slitting open his stomach and driving it up deep through his heart. It is a brutal but quick death for Amasa, but it spills litres of blood and all Amasa’s intestines onto the road. This doesn’t bother Joab, and he immediately acts as if he is the general again and rallies the men to him over the blood of their slain previous commander.

A significant force has already assembled to Amasa and they hesitate to follow Joab after the murder, but he has what is called in the military, “power of command”, and men will follow such a man because he promises them victory by his demeanour. The body of the slain Amasa is moved, or rather “pushed” off the highway into the ditch by an eye witness amongst the soldiers, and none oppose Joab, and as the body is moved aside and covered the men in ranks start to move forward to follow Joab.

The weakness of Amasa means there is a feeling of vulnerability amongst the men, and therefore an opportunity to unite the army under a strong commander, even though David has appointed Abishai to command. As mentioned above, psychologically men desire a winning or “lucky” commander, for with him there is a better chance of returning alive, and so the pragmatic desire of the soldiers to have the toughest commander wins the day. Even Abishai backs away and lets his older brother Joab take charge again. This action will cost Abishai his command within months.

Joab speaks as if he has the total authority of David to act as general. The men initially have hesitated, but then follow him, and so Joab leads the army north to the city of Abel in Beth-Maachah, where Sheba is based trying to gather further forces. Joab has acted without orders, so he must win and win quickly over Sheba or incur David's wrath and judgement. He cannot escape punishment for the murder of Amasa as he did the murder of Abner unless he wins a significant and speedy victory. To save his own life now he must save David's kingdom.

Verses 14 – 22. While the writer records again that many were gathered to Sheba, he was able to be closed up in one city, and that means he has not yet got the numbers to be able to take on Joab's forces in open battle, and that means he doesn't have more than a few thousand men, if that many. It isn't the significant army that it could have been had David's forces delayed any longer, but it tells us that there is a wide spread spirit of rebellion in the north, and only the quick death of Sheba will end it. It is further evidence that most people, although unhappy with the tribe of Judah are not ready to become active rebels against David after Absalom's defeat, but its not due to any love for David.

Joab quickly throws up siege works around the city to ensure no-one leaves the city to co-ordinate help from any other place. Time is still critical, and Joab is looking for a quick victory for his sake and the nation's sake. His aggressive siege is felt with fear by the people within, and this is his objective. They know what it will mean for them if Joab's men break into the city. To support a rebel like Sheba meant that everyone within the walls could be killed.

Joab starts to attack the wall and tear it down under siege works to protect his men as they mine away at the foundations of the wall. Joab is recognised as the leader by a wise older woman on the wall, and she calls to him and asks what he needs to go away and leave them all in peace and alive. She tells him that not all the people support Sheba, in fact the impression she gives is that the rebellion lacks deep popular support, and most are apathetic to Sheba. The fact that she is able to hold this conversation with Joab under the walls tells us that Sheba is not a great military leader, isn't on the wall at the right place, does lack support, and he has not taken precautions against being turned on by the people here.

Sheba lacks organization as a general, and as we will see, he lacks even the strength to resist this old woman's logic, either by his sword, or by his oratory. Joab tells the old woman bluntly that the delivery of Sheba to him is the price for all their lives. She goes to the people and argues for this course of action, and very quickly they grab Sheba, cut his head off and throw it over the wall. Sheba truly was a fool without enough support to even save his own life from the people he sought safety amongst. Joab is true to his word, he blows the trumpet of recall, and the army leaves Abel in peace and heads back to Jerusalem. The north breathes a sigh of relief and is spared further war and loss, but they have the message clear again – don't mess with Joab, go along with David, accept his kingship again. Deep resentment however.

Verses 23 – 26. Joab's re-appointment to the leadership of the Army of Israel is announced here. No mention is made of the murder of Amasa, nor of where Abishai and Ittai have gone as commanders. Benaiah son of Jehoida is now commander over the foreign troops. Jehoida was the prince of the tribe of Levi, of the sons of Aaron. 1 Chronicles 12:27. Benaiah is by birth a priest, but by vocation a warrior, and his son, also called Jehoida, will serve David as advisor. 1 Chronicles 27:34. This man will take over as general after Joab, and will be detailed off by Solomon to kill Joab, but at this point David doesn't believe he is ready to replace Joab. Joab survives because he is the only man to lead the army as it faces the next threat, which involves two serious rebellions amongst the tribute paying Philistines. Chapter 21:15-22.

The list of men who served David here refers to the period after his return from exile, and they serve for the next ten years until his death. The earlier list of the "Cabinet" of David was given in chapter 8, verses 16-18. The main difference is that the sons of David are no longer serving as counsellors, but David has trusted men who have come through the Great Rebellion with him. He appoints Ira the Jairite as his Prime Minister to administer directly in his name.

The tragedy for David in this list is that he doesn't have any son who excels as a warrior or government official. Both Ira and Jehoida may be a similar age to his older sons, and yet the sons of David do not figure in the government. None of his sons have been active with distinction in the battle against Amasa's forces, nor the "government in exile" in the city of Mahanaim. None appear to have the character, courage, or ability to lead or rule with efficiency and effectiveness. Only Solomon will have the ability, and at this point he is just over ten years of age. David's wisdom is seen in not giving his stupid sons any role. Without ability and character his sons are just sons, and have no power given them at all, and it appears they did not even acquit themselves well in the battle to earn any general role later.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. Rebellion against authority must be moved against with speed and thoroughness. Anyone who raises their voice wrongly against the legitimate pastoral leadership must be silenced quickly, before they lead the foolish into actions that will disgrace them and undermine the unity of the church. The sin of rebellion against godly authority is as witch-craft in the Lord's eyes. 1 Samuel 15:23. If there is a bone fide reason to challenge the pastor it must be done openly and in accordance with the Biblical standards of godly behaviour.

2. Joab does not get away with his evil actions, and eventually the sword of justice finds him, and he is slain at the very altar of God. Evil may gain a person power for a time, but it does not gain them eternal life, or eternal rewards. Do not envy the wicked believer, for they may prosper for a time, but their day is short. Remember the Word of God. "Be sure your sins will find you out". Numbers 32:23.

3. David's older sons are not like their father, and are unfit for full time service. God has sons and daughters, not grand-sons and grand-daughters. Each generation must stand before the Lord by their own spiritual and natural giftings and abilities, and must walk before the Lord in self discipline and passionate commitment to their Lord and God. David's older sons are unworthy of office and have not taken the opportunities that the Great Rebellion gave them to excel in any area of service.

4. Challenging situations are opportunities for leadership to be tested and excel, and these young men have missed their opportunity, or been found wanting. The best men and women alone are to be selected as leaders over the Lord's people, in accordance with their living relationship with the Lord, not their natural relationship with any great believing ancestor. It is not our natural birth, but our second birth, and subsequent spiritual walk, that opens the door to eternally significant service and the rewards associated with that service.

REFLECTION UPON LEGITIMATE CHURCH DISCIPLINE

1. Those who will not heed the Word of God within the church are to be first warned and then rebuked (privately if the error is private, or publicly if their error is public). 2 Thessalonians 3:14, Titus 1:13, 14.

2. If they still will not listen to the truth then the individuals are to be isolated from the fellowship and others are to separate themselves from them. 1 Timothy 6:3-5.

3. If they still refuse to change they are to be expelled from the fellowship. Titus 3:10 Galatians 1:6 -10.

4. Paul warns about false doctrine. 1 Timothy 1: 4, 11. Then he expels the two false teachers, Hymeneus, and Alexander, that they might learn the truth and stop blaspheming. 1 Timothy 1:18-20.

5. Any expulsion is only temporary, it applies only so long as the person is unrepentant. When they repent they are to be received back again as was the prodigal son, Luke 15:11-32, and the man in adultery. 1 Corinthians 5:1-13. 2 Corinthians 2:5-11.

PASTORAL AUTHORITY

1. Christ taught with authority and so should his men in his ministry. Matthew 7:29, Mark 1:27, John 5:24-30.

2. All spiritual authority comes from God, and if legitimate, is of God, and its exercise will bring glory to God. Matthew 21:23, Mark 11:28.

3. Christ has authority over all things. Mark 1:27, Luke 4:36.

4. Christ has delegated some authority to some members of his body the church, by way of special authority gifts. In the church this is the gift of pastor-teacher. Mark 13:34, Luke 19:17, Hebrews 13:7,17.

5. In the early church the apostles were the leaders in authority (above even the pastors), given specially at the beginning to establish the church. Luke 9:1, 2 Corinthians 10:8.

6. No woman was given this authority within the early church, and the language of the passages where the gift is discussed means we must be cautious in placing any woman in this position. 1 Timothy 2:12, 1 Corinthians 14:34,35. In mission and other situations if the Lord directs, woman may lead, but men must back them up as Barak backed up Deborah.

7. Pastoral authority is not a cause for boasting, it is a grace gift received from God. 1 Corinthians Chapter 12.

It is leadership based on service for the saints in a spirit of strong humility, as the Lord made it clear all his leaders should have. John 13:5-17.

It is an authority that carries with it a great responsibility to pour themselves out for the saints. 2 Corinthians 10:8, Galatians 6:3-5.

8. Ministers must be clear and open about their authority; there must be no softness on any issue that affects the Word of God. Their authority is not over the private lives of the people but over all matters of doctrine and practise of it; their authority is authority to teach so that all will see the truth clearly. If they are wrong in their teaching they are to be convinced from the Scriptures by their elders. Titus 2:15, 2 Corinthians 13:10, 2 Timothy 4:2.

9. Age is not to be a barrier here, as a called pastor may be younger than many he will teach. 1 Timothy 4:9-12.

10. If a believer cannot take the authority of a called pastor teacher they will not tend to grow spiritually at all. Pride is often the reason people will not heed the pastor's authority. 1 Peter 5:5,6, 1 Thessalonians 5:12,13.

11. If the pastor becomes apostate then she/he becomes an object of the Lord's discipline. If the church cannot convince him/her of their error they may be removed, or the people must withdraw from them to make room for the Lord to judge. 1 Timothy 6:3-5, James 5:19-20.

CHAPTER 21

INTRODUCTION

David has not been vindictive towards the house of Saul, or the other Benjamites who were involved in the rebellion of Sheba. He has been forgiving towards all involved in that latter rebellion, and towards those who sided with Absalom also. The kingdom has internally settled down after the two rebellions, but there are several major challenges from the Philistines also during this period. We are not told the chronological order of events, but the significance order is given here.

Some deep and powerful evil was done by the house of Saul during this period, and it was through that the Lord determined to punish them for this sin, and those of their ancestor Saul, who had murdered the Gibeonites, and the priests. The Mosaic Law was very clear that no-one was to die for the sins of their father, but for their own sin alone they were to die. Exodus 20:4-7, Deuteronomy 24:16, 2 Kings 14:5-6, 2 Chronicles 25:3-4, Jeremiah 31:29-30. Read these verses before reading this chapter, as they will clear up any theological confusion before we examine this action of God and the response of David.

This is the Law of God, and so He is not going to order David to break this Law here. Commentators err if they accuse David of anything arbitrary here, for he has had a track record of forgiveness, not malice. Even the Ammonites were saved, 2 Samuel 12:29-31, 17:27, and during the rebellion of Absalom came and supported him; certainly not the actions of people who he had previously abused or murdered!

The **"Four Generation Curse"** operates only where each generation continues with the hatred of God that their father had and do similar sins. Exodus 20:5-6. The only explanation for the death of the seven adult grand-sons of Saul in this chapter is that they had been involved in a similar evil to their grand-father, and in some way they were responsible for their own deaths. God is not unrighteous and does not break his own Law, and commentators who try to explain the events of this chapter in any other way err in theology and in fact.

There are also several Philistine attempts to seize back sovereignty during these early years after the Great Rebellion of Absalom. I would expect that these occur quite quickly after David's return, as the subsequent rebellion of Sheba son of Bichri would have demonstrated that the nation was not fully united and was potentially vulnerable. The Philistines are however split, with many of their best men serving with David, and so their rebellion is easily crushed each time.

These Early Iron Age warriors were men who followed fame in warfare, and were attached to their own leaders by personal bonds and commitments, so they were quite happy to fight against their own country-men at times. The Guard of foreign troops remain loyal to David throughout his reign, which is another testimony of his nobility, hero status, (with some character flaws allowed) and personal "power of command".

2 SAMUEL 21:1-22

21:1 Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David enquired of the LORD. And the LORD answered, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites. **2** And the king called the Gibeonites, and said unto them; (now the Gibeonites were not of the children of Israel, but of the remnant of the Amorites; and the children of Israel had sworn unto them: and Saul sought to slay them in his zeal to the children of Israel and Judah.) **3** Wherefore David said unto the Gibeonites, What shall I do for you? and wherewith shall I make the atonement, that ye may bless the inheritance of the LORD? **4** And the Gibeonites said unto him, We will have no silver nor gold of Saul, nor of his house; neither for us shalt thou kill any man in Israel. And he said, What ye shall say, that will I do for you. **5** And they answered the king, The man that consumed us, and that devised against us that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the coasts of Israel, **6** Let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them up unto the LORD in Gibeah of Saul, whom the LORD did choose. And the king said, I will give them. **7** But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, because of the LORD's oath that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul. **8** But the king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bare unto Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; and the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul, whom she brought up for Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite: **9** And he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them in the hill before the LORD: and they fell all seven together, and were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first days, in the beginning of barley harvest. **10** And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night. **11** And it was told David what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done. **12** And David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from the men of Jabeshgilead, which had stolen them from the street of Bethshan, where the Philistines had hanged them, when the Philistines had slain Saul in Gilboa: **13** And he brought up from thence the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son; and they gathered the

bones of them that were hanged. **14** And the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son buried they in the country of Benjamin in Zelah, in the sepulchre of Kish his father: and they performed all that the king commanded. And after that God was intreated for the land. **15** Moreover the Philistines had yet war again with Israel; and David went down, and his servants with him, and fought against the Philistines: and David waxed faint. **16** And Ishbibenob, which was of the sons of the giant, the weight of whose spear weighed three hundred shekels of brass in weight, he being girded with a new sword, thought to have slain David. **17** But Abishai the son of Zeruiah succoured him, and smote the Philistine, and killed him. Then the men of David sware unto him, saying, Thou shalt go no more out with us to battle, that thou quench not the light of Israel. **18** And it came to pass after this, that there was again a battle with the Philistines at Gob: then Sibbechai the Hushathite slew Saph, which was of the sons of the giant. **19** And there was again a battle in Gob with the Philistines, where Elhanan the son of Jaareoregim, a Bethlehemite, slew the brother of Goliath the Gittite, the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam. **20** And there was yet a battle in Gath, where was a man of great stature, that had on every hand six fingers, and on every foot six toes, four and twenty in number; and he also was born to the giant. **21** And when he defied Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimeah the brother of David slew him. **22** These four were born to the giant in Gath, and fell by the hand of David, and by the hand of his servants.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 6. For three years after David's return there was famine in the land, caused by inadequate rains. David enquired of the Lord after the third year and requested the Lord's answer as to what was the reason, and why the famine-drought had not broken. He is told of an atrocity committed by Saul, that he was clearly not aware of. (If David had known of this murder of the Gibeonites, he was not aware of the full impact of it upon them and upon the nation.) The Gibeonites were protected by a solemn promise before the Lord made by Joshua, and were to be treated with respect forever by Israel. Joshua 9, 10.

The full extent of what exactly happened is not made clear by the writer, but he uses words which indicate Saul sought the good will of the people of Judah and Benjamin by abusing the Gibeonites, and he decided to dispossess the Gibeonites of their land, and murder those who resisted him. Saul was homicidal at times, and was barely restrained by his own people in one situation from slaying his son Jonathan, 1 Samuel 14:43-44, but sadly it appears that his sons and their sons were in some way personally involved in these murders. Even though he did great evil, he was given many years to personally repent, and also his family members, also involved in the atrocity, have had many years to make right the evil done to the Gibeonites, but they have kept on working evil themselves, and enjoying the fruit of their theft. No one has moved to right the wrong, even David has not moved so far in his reign, and so God moves!

The Gibeonites have nursed this grievance and waited until the Lord moved the king to ask them about it. They had passed this matter over to the Lord in prayer and waited for the Lord to hear their prayer and judge their case. 1 Peter 5:5-9. They truly passed vengeance to the Lord and He heard them as they waited upon the Lord – for His Timing to resolve the historic injustice. **Deuteronomy 32:35-43, Psalms 94:1, Romans 12:19, Hebrews 10:30-31, 12:29.** The Lord waited to see what would be done by the house of Saul. They had many years of grace to repent and make right the evil done. This evil must be at least thirty years old at this point, for David has reigned for over thirty years when this is mentioned. **Isaiah 28:21, Ezekiel 33:11, 2 Peter 3:9-11.**

The sons of Saul were young when he murdered the Gibeonites, but they must have been involved in some way, or done other things of the same sort to be judged now as guilty of death. These men are all at least forty years of age. David asks the Gibeonites what they require to compensate them for their losses. They ask for seven men of Saul's household to be hung up in Gibeah, Saul's old capital, as payment for the blood Saul must have shed there of the people of Gibeon. David agrees to their request, which given the things they say have been done to them, may be only a token execution. The suspicion is that far more Gibeonites died and the majority have been dispossessed by these families of Saul and for years the family of Saul have been enjoying the stolen wealth.

Verses 7 – 9. The sparing of Mephibosheth was only because of the oath between David and Jonathan. It appears that he is implicated in some evil, and the oath between David and Jonathan alone saves him from the death which the writer hints that he probably deserves. The others assigned to death are the sons of Rizpeh, and Merab and Adriel, and possibly Michal. It may be that Merab died and Michal brought the boys up, or that there is a copyist error in the text, but Adriel married Merab, not Michal.

All seven men, most in their forties or fifties are slain in Gibeah, where they grew up as members of the cursed royal family of Saul, and where the murders of the Gibeonites occurred, which they also must be directly involved in for this judgment to fall upon them. They are hung on stakes as a sign of their being cursed by God. Deuteronomy 21:22-23. All murderers were to be cut down the next day, but in these men's case they were left on their stakes until the rain fell and the evidence was seen that the curse of the Lord was lifted.

They are killed in the start of the Barley harvest (in Nissan – our April) and their bodies are left hanging until the rains fall later that year (in October). The rains must have been falling a little for there to be a harvest, but the real rains now fall for the first time in three years, and they fall on time five months after the seven men are killed. All through this time Rizpeh, who must be at least sixty to seventy herself, sits upon a rough blanket of horse hair under the bodies of her sons and the others and ensures no birds of prey feed upon their rotting corpses.

Verses 10 – 14. Rizpeh's devotion to the bodies of her sons is reported to David and he remembers that the bodies of Saul and Jonathan are also still buried a long way away from their father's tomb. The rains tell him that the curse is lifted from the land because of Saul, and the evils of his house are appeased by the deaths of the guilty adult sons. David himself apparently travels to Jabesh-Gilead and collects the bones of Saul and Jonathan and brings them all back to Gibeah. He takes down the bodies of the seven men killed on the stakes and they are all buried together in the tomb of Saul's father Kish at Zelah.

This dignity done to the bodies of Saul and his family ends the judgement of God upon the land for Saul's great sins of violence. It is a dignity not done to the people of Gibeon when Saul murdered them, but by doing the right thing to Saul and his sons, the guilt of the land is dealt with. The Lord wants the right thing to be done, and He waits for the individual people involved to do right, and moves against them only when they do not do right. Once all this is done, formal prayers are made by the priests and the king for the land to be healed, and the Lord hears the prayers of David and the people. The sins of Saul are finally appeased. God has waited a long time for the house of Saul to repent, but it didn't!

Verses 15 – 17. The Philistines launch an attack upon David around this time. David is old, but he is now feeling ready to head out to war again, with his spirits fully restored. He leads the Army to deal with their old adversaries. David's spirit is willing, but his flesh is weaker than he realises. The battle is fought and David is in the thick of it and becomes faint with fatigue, or possibly with his heart condition during the battle. It is this that will kill him in the end around seventy, (1 Kings 1:1), and it may have started to kick in at this time and create fatigue at a crucial time.

A great giant of a man, Ishbibenob, is standing over him and thinks he has killed the Israelite king. At the crucial moment Abishai (around the same age as David) leaps into the picture, and kills the giant and comforts and nurses David in the midst of the battlefield. This is a Victoria Cross level of action by Abishai, and is another proof that he is a great man in David's service, even though he has been apparently reduced in rank, he still leaps to his king's defence. Loyal to the end, unlike brother Joab.

David's men are not happy for David to go into battle again with them after this incident. They do not want him to die and for them to lose their kingdom because of it. All the men know that David is the divinely appointed glue that holds the kingdom together at this point and at this time there are no real contenders for the throne.

Verses 18 – 22. The challenge of the Philistines is not over. For nearly thirty years there had been peace, but the rebellion of Absalom opened the door to rebellion all around. There are three more minor conflicts in and around Gob and Gath. In each one a son of the giant Abishai slew, or in one case a younger brother of Goliath is also slain. Each of these battles ends the challenges against David and secures Israel as the power of the region. The "six fingered giant" is a piece of evidence that backs the story, for the genetic abnormality that creates Gigantism can be associated with the hereditary tendency to six fingers and toes also. 1 Chronicles 20:1-8.

The enemies of the Lord are all overcome, no matter how great they appear to be. David was the first giant killer, but his men do even more valiantly than he did and slay the others. These men are mighty in the Lord and for their king. The purpose of every great leader is to create greater leaders amongst his followers or disciples. David has done this, and his men outdo him in winning renown. 1 Chronicles 11-12, John 14:12.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. God is gracious and waits for men to do his work and deal with their sins. Evils once done do not go away, and when we are convicted of any great evil we are meant to do something about it before the consequences of the acts overwhelm us. God waits for the descendents of Saul to set right the great evil their ancestor did, but they fail to do so, and continue in the same sort of sins, and so the Lord judges them all because of it. Let us deal with sin, and if we know of a great past injustice that we have benefited from, and that we have continued in our own behaviours, then we must act to deal with this before the Lord does!

2. David seeks the Lord's guidance as to what he ought to do. He seeks the guidance of the people involved, and then prayerfully he takes the required dramatic action. The evil men are executed and then all the family of Saul is laid to rest with a dignity they didn't give their innocent victims. By David doing the right thing the curse over the land is removed. In many nations there is great evil from the recent past that many still benefit from, through stolen money or lands. If our prosperity is built upon past theft and murder, then we had better seek to do righteousness and spiritually heal the wounds of the descendents of those who were cruelly abused and murdered. Believers are in the fore front of the reconciliation commissions in South Africa and Rwanda, and will be in Zimbabwe when the evil there is over. Let those who prosper by ancient murder and theft beware, for the Lord is a consuming fire to those who work evil and don't care for the innocent. **Hebrews 10:30-31, 12:29.**

THE FOUR GENERATION CURSE

1. General Scripture (Exodus 20:4-6)
2. A believer without God's Word is in the position of hating the Lord, as no believer can love God without the Word of God being respected and heard.

3. There are then two kinds of people who hate God.
 a) Unbelievers - those who have rejected the word at salvation.
 b) Believers who reject the Word of God even though they are loved by God.
4. In this scripture the discipline goes to the 3rd or 4th generation but only if each generation rebels against God. The purpose of discipline is to focus the unbeliever's attention on Christ.
 a) Generation I - God disciplines where there is rebellion against Him.
 b) Generation II - God disciplines again but there must be rebellion in that generation.
 c) Generation III - If there is rebellion he punishes again.
 d) Generation IV - Where there is rebellion he punishes again but after the fourth generation a change occurs because if not there would be no perpetuation of the human race.
5. Should any of the generations believe in Christ, God's cursing is turned to blessing.
6. "And showing mercy unto thousands" -- Exodus 20:6
 In each generation God does not visit the sins of the fathers on the children without their involvement in rebellion. Each generation stands on its own and is responsible for its own sins.

7. **EXAMPLE - THE HERODIAN LINE**

- a) 1st GENERATION - Herod the Great (Matthew 2) He was an unbeliever who had every chance to receive Christ as Saviour, he killed 3 of his own sons, attempted to kill the Lord Jesus Christ at Bethlehem and died miserably. As a young man he was a great athlete, very handsome and a great ruler. He degenerated and died in misery.
- b) 2nd GENERATION - Herod the Fox (Matthew 14) Herod who married his niece Herodias. Both had every chance to be saved. They came face to face with John the Baptist and the Lord Jesus Christ. Both rejected the gospel which was presented to them. Both died miserably in exile in Spain.
- c) 3rd GENERATION - Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12) Agrippa heard the gospel and rejected it. He was responsible for the martyrdom of James and had ordered the death of Peter, though Peter escaped. Agrippa died in a very miserable manner as an unbeliever.
- d) 4th GENERATION - Herod Agrippa II (Acts 24,25) Agrippa and his two sisters who represent the 4th generation heard and rejected the gospel from Paul. They died in a very dramatic and unusual way. The Herodian line eventually disappeared as the last members of the family were killed in Pompeii when Vesuvius erupted in AD 78

CHAPTER 22

INTRODUCTION

This Psalm here is an almost identical record to that which we have as Psalm 18, with some echoes to others. It is David's summary of praise for all that the Lord has done in delivering him from his enemies through his hard and challenging life. When we have two versions of a poem/song the debaters come out to argue which is the older and where do the variations come from. Some have argued copyist errors, but the changes between the Psalm as it is in the book of Psalms and here, all appear to be deliberate, and to me give testimony to this version being the one that David edited from the Psalter and made his final narrative and reflective version of his older years.

It has the marks of further reflection upon it, and if you read this passage with the book of Psalms open and read the parallel passage there you can make up your own mind as you read as to which is first and which is the further reflection. It is a powerful testimony to the mature faith of a man who has been tested in the furnace of great afflictions, and faced many severe dangers to his life and that of his nation. God has become his rock, his fortress and his deliverer. This passage and the associated Psalm was Martin Luther's inspiration for the mighty hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is our God".

2 SAMUEL 22:1-51

22:1 And David spake unto the LORD the words of this song in the day that the LORD had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul: 2 And he said, The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; 3 The God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my saviour; thou savest me from violence. 4 I will call on the LORD, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies. 5 When the waves of death compassed me, the floods of ungodly men made me afraid; 6 The sorrows of hell compassed me about; the snares of death prevented me; 7 In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried to my God: and he did hear my voice out of his temple, and my cry did enter into his ears. 8 Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations of heaven moved and shook, because he was wrath. 9 There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it. 10 He bowed the heavens also, and came down; and darkness was under his feet. 11 And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: and he was seen upon the wings of the wind. 12 And he made darkness pavilions round about him, dark waters, and thick clouds of the skies. 13 Through the brightness before him were coals of fire kindled. 14 The LORD thundered from heaven, and the most High uttered his voice. 15 And

he sent out arrows, and scattered them; lightning, and discomfited them. 16 And the channels of the sea appeared, the foundations of the world were discovered, at the rebuking of the LORD, at the blast of the breath of his nostrils. 17 He sent from above, he took me; he drew me out of many waters; 18 He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them that hated me: for they were too strong for me. 19 They prevented me in the day of my calamity: but the LORD was my stay. 20 He brought me forth also into a large place: he delivered me, because he delighted in me. 21 The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness: according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me. 22 For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed from my God. 23 For all his judgments were before me: and as for his statutes, I did not depart from them. 24 I was also upright before him, and have kept myself from mine iniquity. 25 Therefore the LORD hath recompensed me according to my righteousness; according to my cleanness in his eye sight. 26 With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful, and with the upright man thou wilt shew thyself upright. 27 With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt shew thyself unsavoury. 28 And the afflicted people thou wilt save: but thine eyes are upon the haughty, that thou mayest bring them down. 29 For thou art my lamp, O LORD: and the LORD will lighten my darkness. 30 For by thee I have run through a troop: by my God have I leaped over a wall. 31 As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all them that trust in him. 32 For who is God, save the LORD? and who is a rock, save our God? 33 God is my strength and power: and he maketh my way perfect. 34 He maketh my feet like hinds' feet: and setteth me upon my high places. 35 He teacheth my hands to war; so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms. 36 Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy gentleness hath made me great. 37 Thou hast enlarged my steps under me; so that my feet did not slip. 38 I have pursued mine enemies, and destroyed them; and turned not again until I had consumed them. 39 And I have consumed them, and wounded them, that they could not arise: yea, they are fallen under my feet. 40 For thou hast girded me with strength to battle: them that rose up against me hast thou subdued under me. 41 Thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies, that I might destroy them that hate me. 42 They looked, but there was none to save; even unto the LORD, but he answered them not. 43 Then did I beat them as small as the dust of the earth, I did stamp them as the mire of the street, and did spread them abroad. 44 Thou also hast delivered me from the strivings of my people, thou hast kept me to be head of the heathen: a people which I knew not shall serve me. 45 Strangers shall submit themselves unto me: as soon as they hear, they shall be obedient unto me. 46 Strangers shall fade away, and they shall be afraid out of their close places. 47 The LORD liveth; and blessed be my rock; and exalted be the God of the rock of my salvation. 48 It is God that avengeth me, and that bringeth down the people under me. 49 And that bringeth me forth from mine enemies: thou also hast lifted me up on high above them that rose up against me: thou hast delivered me from the violent man. 50 Therefore I will give thanks unto thee, O LORD, among the heathen, and I will sing praises unto thy name. 51 He is the tower of salvation for his king: and sheweth mercy to his anointed, unto David, and to his seed for evermore.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 4. Psalm 18 was written to be sung by David, and to be sung by others as their expression of faith also. It is a personal poem of love and worship, and so begins with a proclamation of love for the Lord. The narrative version before us, though still Hebrew poetry, begins with the proclamation of faith and doctrine, for it is the truth that God can be trusted that the writer wants to emphasise as a part of this account of the history of David's reign. The writer records that the Psalm dates from the days of David's flight from Saul, but incorporates the truth about multiple deliverances from the Ammonites, Moabites, Israelite rebels, and Philistines also.

The writer uses the Mosaic formula for starting the psalm in verse 1. Deuteronomy 31:30. This was a recognised way of drawing attention back to the origins of Hebrew cultural identity, and reminding all the readers that David stands in the Mosaic and Patriarchal tradition, and shares their faith-experience of the Lord's deliverance. Exodus 15:1-19.

The introductory verse reminds us all that the Lord does not change; that He is the same in power and purpose, and His mercy towards, and deliverance of His own, is renewed every morning. Psalms 30:5, 59:16, 65:8, 92:2, 139:9, Lamentations 3:23. David sings here of the Lord's power to provide through the various battles of life, and to deliver each time we fight the enemy in accordance with His Plan, and he worships in between the battles, assured of the Lord's power to deliver fully each time. He is sure that he will be delivered from his enemies. (Verse 4).

The Lord is a mighty rock of strength and protection for all who come to Him as their Saviour and Lord. His mighty person and plan is like a fortress to hide within in the battles of this life. God's character provides stability and security for the believer, for His purposes and nature do not change, and so we are secure in our union with Him.

The image is of overwhelming strength and power within which the believer can find safety and security in the worst of times. The Lord's character and plan are doctrines that are to be our places of safety, but this operates as such only for those who know it, and trust in it. Knowledge of doctrine provides the building material for faith in difficult times. We build our love for the Lord by feeding upon His Holy Word, for the more we know of Him, the more we have reason to love Him and the more stable that loves becomes in the testing times of life's journey. The truth sets us free from fear, but we must know the truth or we cannot use it in the dangerous times. **John 8:32-36, Romans 3:18, 1 Corinthians 16:10, 1 Timothy 1:7, 1 John 4:18.**

The thought of the Lord as the mighty rock is repeated in verse three, and the active response is given. The initial response to the reality of the mighty majesty of the Lord is passive resting in His power and plan, but then as life experience builds in Christ, the believer commits to actively stand in battle for the Lord. Our strength grows as we rest in

the rock, but it grows so that we might one day stand upon the rock and fight for Him. In Him the mature believer now trusts, and takes up the shield of faith, and fights for the Lord. Ephesians 6:10-18. The soldier of the Lord sees that the Lord is his strong tower, to which he can flee for refuge if the battle becomes too strong against him. He is the saviour from evil and the rescuer of the soul from dangers. Violence is the norm in this world, for evil is here, but the Lord's power is greater than the powers of evil. **John 12:31-32, 14:29-31, 16:7-11, 33, 1 John 4:4.**

Verses 5 – 7. Many believers believe falsely that doubt and depression are unspiritual, even sinful. David's words here are an encouragement to all who have ever been in fear of their emotional responses to real pressure situations. The great Viennese psychiatrist Dr Viktor Frankl once said, "There are certain things, that if they happen to us, and we don't lose our minds, it's only because we didn't have a mind to lose!" Frankl went through the death camps and wrote the book, "Man's Search For Meaning". He describes his experience in the death camps and explains his breakthrough in understanding how man deals with the ultimate abuse of genocide. His comment above is a good one to recall as we reflect upon David's life.

David faced incredible stress on the way to the throne and then in the early years with multiple battles for his life. At times he is seriously depressed and anxious, and this is "normal" for the extreme stressors he faces. In these verses before us David reflects upon the chronic stress load of all the battles he has had to fight. He may be also reflecting upon the close call in the last battle against the Philistines where the giant Ish-bi-benob actually knocked him down and thought he had killed him. David was saved there by Abishai's intervention at the last minute. 2 Samuel 21:15-17, Psalms 18:4-6. Abishai's character is proven true, for while losing his job as general he remains loyal to the death.

When you are surrounded by death and the possibility of dying, adrenalin flows through the body like waves of uncontrollable power, and it mixes confused emotions together, of excitement, fear and rage. It can be like standing at the doorway to death itself with hewn or battered bodies at your feet. People today experience this on major open battlefields, and also after major motorway vehicle crashes with bodies scattered around.

In David's case he was often fighting multiple enemies who surrounded him at times. He fought his way out of many situations many times where others would have succumbed to fear and given up. David's incredible tenacity and fighting power and ability meant he kept fighting until he was victorious, but he looks back and sees his survival as being totally dependent upon the Lord. He sees that the Lord has answered his prayers many times in the heat of battle. He has cried aloud to the Lord and his cries have always entered into heaven itself, and his prayers have been answered. Psalms 27:1-4, 34:6, 15-17, 116:1-9, 120:1.

Verses 8 – 16. This section is a poetic expression of a glimpse of the glory and power of the majesty of the Lord God. It may use an actual earthquake as an example of the power and majesty of God, but it goes well beyond the simple earthquake. Verse nine could almost be seen as a tectonic eruption, and it may also be that an eruption of some sort was witnessed by David in the Dead Sea area with sulphurous clouds expelled from the earth. David takes these natural phenomena as an indication of the fragility of the earth, and evidence for its created nature, and the power of the creator who made and will unmake it. **2 Peter 3:10-13.** Verse ten may describe an eclipse of the sun or moon and is also a reminder to man that the Lord made this earth and the heavens above it and He is lord of all. **Psalms 18:15-17.**

Subsequent verses describe the great thunder storms that can burst over the desert and frighten all who witness their power while standing in the open fields. David may also have seen the oceans move and the sea bed exposed by tidal surges created by strong weather, and he stands in awe of the creator God for all the wonders of the created world. Does David also reflect upon the drying of the Yam Suf (Sea of Reeds) before the Israelites when they left Egypt, or is he just referring to an event he witnessed? Psalms 106:9-12, 114:3-7.

Let us examine ourselves on our own attitudes on these things. How well do we understand our nature as creatures before the Creator God? Do we bow before the Lord of the storm, or have we become so "scientific" that we have removed awesomeness from our life experience? Do we praise God aloud every time we see a display of natural power in the weather or in other natural phenomenon? Let us draw close to men like David and share their joy in the Lord.

Verses 17 – 19. God's individual response to our own individual need for deliverance is David's testimony here. David argues that the Lord takes direct action, in response to our prayer to deliver from specific situations. David has been seriously hated by the enemies of truth, as will we all if we stand out in our service of the Lord. Quiet, ineffective and ineffectual believers will never know the hatred of the enemy, but true spiritual leaders will experience the "restrained" malice of the enemy. John 15:18. I say "restrained" malice because the Holy Spirit presently restrains the enemy and he is restricted in what he can do to us. Job 1:9-12, 2 Thessalonians 2:7, 1 John 4:4.

The enemy has power and will use it powerfully against us at times, but the Holy Spirit is always more powerful than Satan and his forces, and the Lord makes up any short fall in our ability to stand against the enemy. The enemy will "fall upon us" (the correct translation for the word "prevented" in the KJV) at times, and will resist us to the point of stand still, but our prayers will bring deliverance. We are delivered from Satanic attack by the power of the Lord alone, not by any strength we have as men. Psalms 3:7-8, 56:9-11, 2 Corinthians 1:8-11, 2 Timothy 4:17-18.

We are called to walk close to the Lord, so that we never get away from His path for us, and out of His will for us. When we move forward in His plan we move forward in the security that God's person and power give to all who belong to Him. 1 Corinthians 6:20, 7:23, 1 Peter 1:19, 2 Peter 2:1.

Verses 20 – 25. From the constricted places of pressure the Lord brings us into the “open places” where we can relax and rejoice. The Chinese General Sun Tzu spoke of “constricted ground”, where it is difficult to fight because of pressure all around, and he urged the general to strive to reach open-fighting ground where he can manoeuvre again and have the chance to win. David sees that the Lord alone moves us into “open ground”; for it is the ground of His choosing that we battle upon. If we feel we are in a “constricted” space and require help and deliverance, then we are to besiege heaven with our prayers and we will be delivered. 1 Corinthians 10:13, 2 Thessalonians 3:3-4, 1 Peter 5: 5-9, 2 Peter 2:9.

The Lord delivers us because He “delights in us”, because we are in union with Him in Christ. God’s response to us is not based ever on what we deserve, but on what His attitude towards us is, and that is love. God’s response is mediated to us through the love of Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit. We are, through His love for us, recipients of grace, mercy and peace! The Lord deals with us on the basis of our imputed righteousness in Christ Jesus, not our natural righteousness, which is simply “filthy rags” in God’s sight. We never stand before the Creator in our own strength and our own righteousness, or we are blown away! Psalms 51:3-11, 53:2-4, Isaiah 63:10-11, 64:6.

David then says in verses 21-22 things that baffle us when we consider his great sin with Bathsheba and over the death of Uriah. How can he say these things about being without sin? The answer is discovered in Psalm 51. After his sincere repentance and confession, he was forgiven and restored, and so he is as clean as snow again in God’s sight. Isaiah 1:16-20. In God’s sight forgiveness is forgiveness, and sins are taken away quite literally as far as the east is from the west. Psalms 103:12.

David is able to say at this point that he has not “wickedly departed from the path of God”. His sin was terrible indeed, but forgiven, and he has not gone down any path of sinfulness again, and so has been able to enter each battle confident in the Lord’s protection over him. This is the security a soldier needs to have as they enter a battlefield, and I would argue that this is the assurance anyone needs to have as they travel the dangerous highways of the modern world also.

David has spent a life time meditating upon the words of the Lord and he has treasured them in his heart. He fell terribly once, but his settled desire now is to keep the Word of God, and he has done so ever since his repentance, and so he can relax in the protection of the Lord his God, for his heart is resting in God. He has kept himself clean in God’s eyes, and has not considered the eyes/opinions of men, who can be fooled by politicians and hypocrites.

David’s eyes are fixed upon the Lord and he has focused his heart and mind upon the Lord alone. David’s great sin overshadows his life to many commentators, but we must remember it was an aberration in an otherwise spiritually powerful life time. God does not judge him by the evils of the year he spent away from living fellowship with Him and in gross sin and evil; He judges him by the clean heart that was restored by confession and re-entry into the plan of God for his life.

Let us be encouraged by David’s words and see that any sinful aberration on our part, if dealt with as David dealt with his sin, will not stop the Lord’s blessing coming upon us further down the track in our life. David paid a terrible price in the flow on effect of his sins, but that did not include loss of safety in his active service of the Lord. David was kept safe in the midst of the great pressures that flowed from his sin. David could not stop the effect of his sin from flowing on in time, but the eternal significance of this sin was wiped away by his repentance and confession.

Absalom’s rebellion was a result of David’s sin, and yet in the midst of that, David sought and received the Lord’s guidance, and powerful answers to prayer throughout. David was put through the pressure situation, but he was victorious through it, and that is the Lord’s promise to us all, even if we have sinned to establish the difficult situation. Confession and restoration of spiritual life changes the dynamic and opens the door to blessing again. No-one studying David’s life thoroughly will ever delude themselves into believing that David “got away with” his sins, for he did not at all, but the Lord’s guidance and blessing over his life was restored when he faced his sins and dealt with them biblically. Let us learn and be encouraged by the stable, loving character of God. James 4:6.

Verses 26 – 30. God is absolutely fair in His dealings with mankind. Man receives exactly what he desires in this life and the next. Those who desire to be away from God get their wish! An old preacher who taught me as a young man said, “The Lord is a gentleman; he never forces anyone to accept a gift they do not want to receive”. Those who end up going to hell are there because they have chosen to be there by their rejection of the claims of the Lord their God over their life. They have worked hard at unrighteousness to get to this final destination. Revelation 20:10-15.

Those who persist in rebellion are judged but those who are “afflicted” by their sinfulness will always receive forgiveness from the Lord. **Psalms 72:12-13, Isaiah 61:1-3.** The humble are always received, but the arrogant choose the path of evil, and they must accept the final result, just as they have enjoyed the fruit of their wicked labours. Luke 18:9-14.

David covers another important principle in these verses. As we give to others so we receive from the Lord. Those who show mercy, receive mercy, and those who give righteousness receive it from the Lord. The Lord will repeat this principle in the Beatitudes. Matthew 5:7. James also picks this up in James 2:12-13.

David has not been merciless and brutal to others, and his desire has been to be upright before the Lord, and with the one great exception to this, he has been upright before the Lord. The Lord desires these things in His creation, and He hates those who follow after Satan and go against all these things. The Lord hates those who are arrogant, hate filled,

and envious of others, for their heart is after Satan. They are rebels against the created order and must accept the eternal consequences of their evil choices.

If we believe in and value the words of the living God then we will value the Bible, God's Holy Word, and we will open it often. The choice to be made each day for every one of us is given in verse twenty nine. We will desire the Word of the Lord and we will open the Bible and feed upon it often. The Lord is the light to our path, and He reveals Himself through His Holy Word. Psalms 27:1, 84:10-11, John 8:12, 12:46. The Lord is the light that brings comfort in the dark places we may have to walk through in our pilgrimage through this world.

David has beaten vastly superior odds in battle through the comfort of God's Word and the assurance of God's presence within him. He has been able to calmly lead his men into battles that humanly speaking they should not have won. He has "leapt over walls" of difficulty through his fellowship with the Lord. He has received super human strength at times to achieve things that appeared to be impossible to the natural man, for the Lord was with him. John 3:3-8, 1 Corinthians 2:12-16.

Verses 31 – 32. Everything in this life depends upon the ground that you trust yourself to and walk upon. It is not faith in any abstract concept that saves us, for faith in the wrong object or person will lead to disaster. It is only faith in the Lord that saves, for He alone has the character that is worthy of saving faith. God alone can be trusted, for His character is perfect and His way is the only right one through this world that He created. The Lord's words are pure and form the sure foundation of stability for this life to all who trust upon them. **Psalms 12:6, 18:30-31, 119:140, Proverbs 30:5-6.**

The Lord is a strong shield ("buckler") to those who trust in Him. Psalms 91:1-5, Proverbs 2:6-8. There is no rock to cling to, or stand upon, other than the stable and certain rock of the character of the Lord our God. Isaiah 44:6-8, 45:5-7, Jeremiah 10:6-7, 23-24. Let us stand upon the stable rock of the truths of Scripture as we face the difficulties of daily life.

Verses 33 – 35. David echoes the words of Moses here. Exodus 15:2ff. God is our strength alone. There is no other strength that lasts in the furnace of affliction than the strength that the Lord gives. His presence in the life is the power to live victoriously upon this earth. John 10:10. When David speaks of his way being made "perfect", the word used means "complete". David is highlighting the point that meaning and significance in any life comes only as we look back and see that we did all that we were here to do before the Lord. God alone gives a sense of completeness to life, for in His plan only do we find the purpose and meaning that we need as created beings. We are made for meaning, and the true meaning of life comes only when we are rightly related to our creator. **Isaiah 43:11, Acts 4:12, 16:31.**

The power that God gives lets us run with speed and focus through life like the deer in the forest, and it gives us the inner strength to break any weapon forged against us (the bow of bronze was the strongest picture of a weapon of its day). Psalms 27:1, 28:7-8, 31:4-5, 46:1-3, Isaiah 41:10-14, Zechariah 10:12. It is in reading and singing these Psalms and prophetic passages that the Jewish soldiers fighting in the Great Tribulation period will strengthen themselves for the long battle they will have until the Lord delivers them. Zechariah 12:10ff.

Verses 36 – 46. Notice the wonderful phrase in this first verse; "Thy gentleness has made me great". The Lord deals with us gently, not as we all too often deal with others! He deals with us gently, for He knows we are dust. Genesis 3:19, Psalms 103:14. We are dealt with gently and we are protected strongly. The shield of salvation is before us to protect us. The Lord stops our feet from slipping on slippery ground. We are kept safe by the Lord. Psalms 17:5, 94:17-19, 121:1-8, Proverbs 4:12.

When enemies stood in hatred against David and the Lord, then the Lord delivered them into his hand every time. None could stand against David, for he stood for the Lord. David became the leader of his people, and also the one that even heathen nations looked to and followed, for they saw that God was with him. When we stand for the Lord we will draw all people to us who seek the truth. This is one of our purposes upon the earth. Matthew 5:14-16, Romans 1:13-17.

Verses 47 – 51. David ends the Psalm with a song of praise within the song. The Lord lives! The rock of man's strength is to be blessed, and the rock of man's salvation is to be exulted and worshipped. David ends his praise with worship to the holy name of the Lord. It is the power of the Lord alone that has made David who he is as a mighty king, and it is the Lord's power alone that keeps him ruling in majesty and strength.

The Lord alone delivers David from all his enemies and keeps the nation safe. The Lord is the safe place, the tower of strength, and He alone is merciful and guarantees the future of David's house forever. David desired to build the Lord a Temple, but God had promised to build David a house that would last forever, and David ends this Psalm reminding himself that the Lord will always do what He has promised He will do. Luke 1:28-33.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. How sure are we of the Lord's deliverance in each of the battles of this life? David was sure of the Lord and rested in His protection every time he threw himself into the action of a battle. David got stuck in to the fighting and was often facing death in the face as he battled the enemies of Israel with his sword in hand. He is absolutely sure of his prayers being answered and so was willing to hazard his life, for he saw that his life was in the Lord's hands at all times anyway. Do you have this confidence believer?

This confidence of David is the standard for judging our own behaviours; and so let us take the challenge and throw ourselves into this day and its challenges with the confidence that the Lord will indeed bring us through. Powerful faith begins with acceptance of our limits as fragile creatures, but then casts that fact before the Lord, and boldly advancing into danger in confidence that the Lord will keep us on the path He has called us to walk.

2. Awesomeness is a thing that we have demystified in our so called scientific age. We have done so to our eternal peril. When man thinks he is more than a creature he places himself in the seat of a fool and over the trap door of disaster. We are limited creatures, prisoners in our logic of the categories of space and time. We cannot even have a thought that isn't limited by space and time, and that alone should cause us to hesitate before the power of nature rather than try to explain all things away, as if our explanations give us power. There is confusion today in science, for our explanations do not give us any power over nature, they simply predict expectations. We see every year man's expectations blown away with storms that destroy cities. We have had our fill of "one hundred year storms" and yet some in arrogance still argue that man is getting the power over nature! Let us stand with David, in awe at the Creator Saviour God!

3. We are not our own any more; we were bought by the Lord with His precious blood. 1 Peter 1:18-19. That means we are no longer responsible for our own lives, or for our security. These things are now in the Lord's hands and we are to pass them over to Him. All situations are able to become blessing in Christ Jesus if we draw close to the Lord. Forgiveness restores blessing and sin is gone forever! Let us fully draw near to the Lord daily, deal with sin, and live in the daily joy of the Lord. Let us praise the Lord for the benefit of forgiveness through the Cross. We are all forgiven, and we all need to quickly deal with any foolish small sins before they create the destruction that David experienced in his later life. Let us praise God even more however, that even through our failures, He remains faithful to us, and we are blessed as we return and walk with Him. 2 Timothy 2:13. We are at times faithless, but He remains faithful to us. Halleluiah!!!

4. The Lord's purpose alone is worthy of life and security when we face our death. Nothing done outside the Lord's plan is worth the effort, but everything done for the Lord is worth our greatest effort. Finding our place in the plan of God is finding hope, focus and strength to advance through any difficulties that are before us. Let us focus all our energies upon what the Lord has for us.

5. What the Lord has promised, the Lord will always fulfil. We rest in His plan and in the certainty of the fulfilment of all He has promised to perform. The Lord Jesus will return, exactly as He promised, and He will rule in David's place over Israel and the entire earth. As we raise our Communion Cup each Sunday, let us remember that we show the Lord's death this way only "until he comes". Let us keep the Communion service with passion and prayerful rejoicing. 1 Corinthians 11:23-29. Let those believers who stand in the Great Tribulation remember that He is coming to deliver them, and that as He promised so He will fulfil all He has said. Our God can be trusted.

WALKING IN FAITH

1. The Christian life can be divided into three sections or stages.

- a) Stage 1 - Salvation.
- b) Stage 2 - The Christian Walk.
- c) Stage 3 - The Christian in Heaven.

2. Man has three means of obtaining knowledge:

- a) Faith - to believe or trust that something is true
- b) Reasoning - using human logic to deduce that something is true
- c) Experimentation - to test and prove something to satisfy yourself that it is true

3. The only acceptable method of gaining grace is by faith, since this means depending upon God without our human merit.

- a) Stage 1 - Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved - salvation (Acts 16:31).
- b) Stage 2 - Trusting in the promises and principles of the Word of God - the Christian walk.
- c) Stage 3 - Trusting in God's provision - Heaven.

4. To illustrate belief and unbelief we follow the Jews from the plagues in Egypt to crossing the Jordan:

Incident	God's Promise	Scripture	Response	Result
Last plague	Passover Lamb	Exodus 12:21-30	Trust	Jews spared last plague.
Egyptian Army	Red Sea Crossing	Exodus 14:1-31	Trust	Moses leads Jews over Red Sea.
No Water	Water	Exodus 17:1-7	Trust	By striking rock (Christ) water obtained.
Gold Calf	God's Doctrine	Exodus 32:15-28	Distrust	Sons of Levi (Priests) slaughtered for leading
Quails	Manna	Num 11:10-33	Distrust	Many deaths due to quails

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Giants	Enter Canaan	Num 13:1-14:38	Distrust	Death of fearful spies. Wandering in desert
No water	Water	Num 20:2-13	Distrust	Moses strikes rock in disobedience. Will not enter Promised Land.
Wanderings	Cross Jordan	Joshua 3:1-17	Trust	Israel crosses Jordan on dry ground

5. Salvation faith is the complete trust in the Lord Jesus Christ, who died for your sins and rose from the dead to give you eternal life. (Acts 16:31, Romans 4:20-25)
6. Anything added to faith becomes works, and therefore nullifies faith (Romans 4:4)
7. Faith is shown outwardly by confession with the mouth. (Romans 10:9-10)
8. Since faith does not depend on our own abilities, anybody can believe. Even little children (Matthew 18:2-4)
9. Assurance is by faith (Hebrews 10:22)
10. Faith is trust which does not ask to know all about God but believe all that God has said.
11. Salvation faith receives Christ as Saviour and Lord. (John 1:12, 3:16, 3:36)
12. Faith of salvation is the complete trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as having been delivered from our transgressions and raised again for our justification. (Romans 4:20-25)
13. By Faith God gives the soul assurance of the reality of things never yet seen by the natural man. (Hebrews 11:1-3)
14. The triumphs of faith in daily life are illustrated for the believer in Hebrews 11:1-39. Abel, Noah, Moses etc.
15. Faith comes from hearing and hearing from the Word of God. (Romans 10:17)
16. Faith is the only non meritorious means of understanding things the other being rationalism and empiricism.
17. To become like a little child is an analogy to faith as a young child only has faith. (Matthew 18:2-4)

OVERCOMING BY FAITH

1. By faith learn to accept conditions as God's will for life and be thankful - Romans 8:28, 1 Thessalonians 3:3; 5:18
2. By faith maintain fellowship with God, walking in the light - 1 John 1:7
3. By faith consistently day by day examine your conduct, confessing all known sins - 1 Corinthians 11:28, 31, 1 John 1:9
4. By faith receive the Word of God daily as being more necessary than daily food - Matthew 4:4; 5:6, 2 Peter 3:18
5. By faith approach the throne of grace boldly in every case of need, requesting aid, casting every care on Him - Hebrews 4:15-16; 1 Peter 5:7
6. By faith resist the attempts of Satan and he will flee from you - Ephesians 6:10-13, 1 Peter 5:8
7. By faith maintain the habit of thinking and meditating on spiritual values and priorities - Philippians 4:6-9
8. Walk by faith and not by sight - 2 Corinthians 5:7

NOTES

CHAPTER 23**INTRODUCTION**

The writer will spend three chapters on the last months of David's life, as they sum up in practise the words sung in worship as recorded in chapter 22. The chapter before us gives us the short summary of David's "last words", and then lists the mighty men of David and some of their activities. He then goes to the last error of judgement of David in ordering a census before the accession of the next king (chapter 24). The first chapter of 1 Kings completes the story of David's last days. The writer continues to make the central point, that it is absolute obedience to the Lord that matters to God, and it is to be maintained until the end. The verdict over David's life is given, and it is righteous, but his previous right standing with the Lord doesn't stop the Lord dealing with his disobedience in the census.

David has failed dramatically but his failures do not stop the grace, mercy and peace of God towards him, and our failures do not stop God being gracious to us. David is great because he rises from the earth each time he falls. He is great because he recovers from any sin and then commits his whole being to obey the Lord, and his men are great because of their loyalty and obedience to David. David illustrates the principles of restoration and renewed obedience. While we live we devote ourselves to service and worship, and David mentors both to us. As the hymn writer said many years ago, "Trust and obey, for there is no other way, to be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey".

2 SAMUEL 23:1-39

23:1 Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said, **2** The Spirit of the LORD spake by me, and his word was in my tongue. **3** The God of Israel said, the Rock of Israel spake to me, He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. **4** And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain. **5** Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow. **6** But the sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands: **7** But the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear; and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place. **8** These be the names of the mighty men whom David had: The Tachmonite that sat in the seat, chief among the captains; the same was Adino the Eznite: he lift up his spear against eight hundred, whom he slew at one time. **9** And after him was Eleazar the son of Dodo the Ahohite, one of the three mighty men with David, when they defied the Philistines that were there gathered together to battle, and the men of Israel were gone away: **10** He arose, and smote the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand clave unto the sword: and the LORD wrought a great victory that day; and the people returned after him only to spoil. **11** And after him was Shammah the son of Agee the Hararite. And the Philistines were gathered together into a troop, where was a piece of ground full of lentiles: and the people fled from the Philistines. **12** But he stood in the midst of the ground, and defended it, and slew the Philistines: and the LORD wrought a great victory. **13** And three of the thirty chief went down, and came to David in the harvest time unto the cave of Adullam: and the troop of the Philistines pitched in the valley of Rephaim. **14** And David was then in an hold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then in Bethlehem. **15** And David longed, and said, Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate! **16** And the three mighty men brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem, that was by the gate, and took it, and brought it to David: nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the LORD. **17** And he said, Be it far from me, O LORD, that I should do this: is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives? therefore he would not drink it. These things did these three mighty men. **18** And Abishai, the brother of Joab, the son of Zeruiah, was chief among three. And he lifted up his spear against three hundred, and slew them, and had the name among three. **19** Was he not most honourable of three? therefore he was their captain: howbeit he attained not unto the first three. **20** And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man, of Kabzeel, who had done many acts, he slew two lionlike men of Moab: he went down also and slew a lion in the midst of a pit in time of snow: **21** And he slew an Egyptian, a goodly man: and the Egyptian had a spear in his hand; but he went down to him with a staff, and plucked the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and slew him with his own spear. **22** These things did Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and had the name among three mighty men. **23** He was more honourable than the thirty, but he attained not to the first three. And David set him over his guard. **24** Asahel the brother of Joab was one of the thirty; Elhanan the son of Dodo of Bethlehem, **25** Shammah the Harodite, Elikah the Harodite, **26** Helez the Paltite, Ira the son of Ikesh the Tekoite, **27** Abiezer the Anethothite, Mebunnai the Hushathite, **28** Zalmon the Ahohite, Maharai the Netophathite, **29** Heleb the son of Baanah, a Netophathite, Ittai the son of Ribai out of Gibeath of the children of Benjamin, **30** Benaiah the Pirathonite, Hiddai of the brooks of Gaash, **31** Abialbon the Arbathite, Azmaveth the Barhumit **32** Eliahba the Shaalbonite, of the sons of Jashen, Jonathan, **33** Shammah the Hararite, Ahiam the son of Sharar the Hararite, **34** Eliphelet the son of Ahasbai, the son of the Maachathite, Eliam the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite, **35** Hezrai the Carmelite, Paarai the Arbite, **36** Igal the son of Nathan of Zobah, Bani the Gadite, **37** Zelek the Ammonite, Nahari the Beerothite, armourbearer to Joab the son of Zeruiah, **38** Ira an Ithrite, Gareb an Ithrite, **39** Uriah the Hittite: thirty and seven in all.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 7. The writer records here the last words of David, and then he will go on to give some details of the events of the last months, possibly the last year. He will then return to the “last words” as he describes his death. These words here form the framework for the last actions of David as king and they are the foundation upon which Solomon will build his kingdom. David’s last failure relates to the census he runs as part of the handover of power, but he quickly issues the required counter orders.

David is very sensitive to issues of obedience to the Lord, and any errors of judgement he makes in his later life are just that, “errors” that are quickly reversed. His sole focus is upon the service of the Lord in holiness. Solomon will begin to rule the same way, but he has been brought up in the harem, and he will be too influenced by beautiful women, and they will turn his heart away from God, rather than he turn them to the living God. 1 Kings 11:1-13.

The writer’s words in verse one indicate that David has become, by the time of writing, a past and revered figure. My suspicion, mentioned in an earlier chapter, is that this book before us was written in the later days of Solomon. The key points about David that he highlights are, that firstly, he was raised up by God from humble origins to be the king. Secondly he notes that he was like his ancestor Jacob, a frail and all too human man, but that the God who kept Jacob also kept and blessed David. Thirdly he is remembered as the “sweet psalmist of Israel” by all the people of the writer’s day. The three themes of the writer for David’s life are, humility, forgiveness and restoration, and worship. These are some of the great biblical principles around which to centre our own lives.

Verse two begins the song of David, and it is a poem-song, or Psalm, that we are reading here. David first notes that he was privileged to have the Holy Spirit of the Lord speak through him. He saw many times in his writings that the Lord’s very words were upon his tongue effortlessly and they poured out onto the paper. This is a beautiful glimpse of the process of inspiration. The work of the Holy Spirit within a spirit filled life is a smooth operation when the life is clean and the human spirit in complete harmony with the Holy Spirit. This is how all gifts operate properly, and inspiration to write the scriptures was one such very special gift that David had, with a very select group of men through history. 2 Peter 1:20-21.

Verse three makes absolutely clear that we understand, that David is claiming divine inspiration for all his Biblical writings as the words of the Lord through him. Men at the time can recognise that they are writing scripture; they do not need to await the verdict of history as some theologians have argued. The best example of this is the words of Peter regarding Paul’s letters. 2 Peter 3:14-16.

David’s title for the Lord is significant for the king of the nation to use; “The Rock of Israel”. David reminds us by the use of this title for God that the nation is built upon God alone, not upon any king. David reminds all kings that they rule by the grace and favour of the Lord and He holds them responsible to rule with absolute justice; to rule in the fear of the Lord. If the king fears the judgement of God, then he will do what is right before men, for he will be looking at the higher court where he will be finally judged.

The other poetic images of kingship are instructive as to David’s attitude towards the leadership responsibilities of the king. He saw the king as the “light bearer” of the Lord’s people; the one who should set the example of holiness and doctrinal truth. This is how the Lord Jesus himself sees us all, so David is well on track with this concept. Matthew 5:14-16. As leaders of the Lord’s people we are to be light bearers of righteousness, and David must have felt this point deeply, for his earlier failure led so many astray. In verse five he notes with sadness that he failed on these points, but God’s grace kept him and the land, and so reinforced the importance of each and every one of these principles for the health and welfare of the land. He had his own bitter experience to reinforce the need for the leader to be “blameless/without offence”, so that none are led astray by him. 1 Timothy 3:1-10, Titus 1:5-9, 1 Peter 5:1-4.

The behaviour of the spiritual leader is to be as a “day without clouds”. Nothing in the life of the leader is to distract the follower’s attention from the Sun of God’s righteousness, and they are to ensure that the “grass grows”. This is a lovely picture of the watering of the water of the Word of God over the Lord’s people that they might be fruitful to the glory of the Lord. Regular Bible teaching is a crucial part of the leadership responsibility, for the Word acts as both a cleanser and a means of spiritual growth and fruitfulness.

All believers are to be like the tree planted by the waters, with roots deep into God’s Word, so that we might be fruitful even in the most trying times of later great personal pressure. Psalms 1:1-5, 42:1ff, 62:1ff, Proverbs 21:1ff, Ephesians 5:26. The pastor-teacher is to ensure there is no drought of Bible teaching in the Church, but regularly preach the Word of Truth every time they can, so that the Word washes over the people every time they gather together. Acts 10:42, Romans 10:8-15, 1 Corinthians 9:14-18, 2 Timothy 4:2. God’s Word stored away within the heart prepares us for the days of pressure that can come in the later days of our mature service.

David could see the wonder of the grace of the Lord in the way that he had been treated by the Lord, and the wonder of his own forgiveness, and the nation’s salvation from the rebellion of Absalom, and the other things that flowed from his time of sin. He recognises that it is the Lord’s everlasting covenant with him that has ensured he has been blessed, not his own worthiness. God is true to His words and promises, and even though David has failed, the Word of the Lord has not.

All David's desire was to see the glory of the Lord in the land. It is this whole hearted desire on his part that makes this man the great man he was, even with his many faults. He loved the Lord and desired the Lord's blessing for the land, and this was the source of his own and the nation's blessing.

The enemy are always around. Matthew 24:9, John 15:18-25, James 4:7-8, 1 Peter 5:8-9. The "sons of Belial" will always hate the children of light! **John 12:35-46**. It is facing the reality of the Angelic Conflict that keeps us safe from despair at times on our journey through this present life. When we face nameless malice and consistent hatred it can be hard to keep going at times. It is vital to remember that if we are hated for the right reasons and are in the right company, then we are still on the right path.

There are thorns on the path of the Lord through this life, just as there were thorns in his crown to picture the penalty of sin upon the earth. Genesis 3:17-19, Matthew 7:13-14, Matthew 27:29ff. The only way to deal with evil men on the path is to be in the full armour of the Spirit, and then you will see the judgement of the Lord over these people. They are unfruitful and they are a test/trial to all who desire to bear fruit for the Lord, but like all thorny ground, they will be dealt with by the owner of the field in His time. Matthew 13:24-30, John 15:6, Hebrews 6:7-8. All evil will be judged in the final day, but it is just "not yet". We leave the judgement of evil men and women to the Lord who will judge them when they have been given grace long enough to be without any excuse before him.

Verses 8 – 38. This great list of men is skipped by many, but was worthy of note by the author, and we had better pay attention to it ourselves, for these were mighty heroes and there is much to be learned from this list. The mark of a great leader like David is that they draw great people to them to serve under them. In modern management manuals the professors note that great leaders always draw great people to them; indeed the quality of a leader can be seen after a couple of years in the job, in the quality of their management team. Good people draw good people and bad leaders drive good people away. If a leader has driven good people away but still speaks as if they are a great leader, fire that person from your organisation; they are hypocrites and probably have some personality disorder.

In my time as an Officer in the Navy I would always call in any leader who had lost more than 10% of their division in the last year and ask them to explain the losses. Those who were not able to explain their losses were "on report" and were counselled, watched, and possibly removed from positions of authority. Bad leadership is seen by the response of those around and under them. David was one of the great leaders of history, and when we consider his great sin and the loss of respect this created, the fact that he could still number his heroes as he does here tells us about the strength of this man's character. This was a man who could fail, and recover, and win the respect and love of his men again. That is the final test for leadership character.

DAVID'S LIST OF THE ARMY HEROES WHO SERVED HIM THROUGH THE YEARS (1 Chronicles 11)

1. Adino the Eznite. He was a spearman who slew over 800 men in one battle. These men were tough and fit in this day and would fight all day, but even so, this is a man who you take your hat off to!
2. Eleazar, son of Dodo, the Ahohite. The incident here is not recorded anywhere else, but it appears that just four men, (one being David himself), stood against an entire Philistine Army at some point, and this man was one of them. This man fought so hard that after so many hours of killing the enemy his hand was stuck to his sword and he couldn't let it go. The army returned only to loot the bodies, they did not arrive back in time to help the four heroes.
3. Shammah the son of Agee that Hararite. This man fought a one man delaying action in the midst of a field of lentils with everyone else having run away, and he filled the field with dead Philistines. The Lord empowered him to win a great victory and through his bravery he turned a defeat into a victory. These three mighty men were the ones who went to the well in Bethlehem when the Philistines garrisoned the land, and took water from that well under their very noses and brought it to David. David's character is shown by his pouring out of the water as a libation offering to the Lord in honour of these three men.
4. Abishai, the brother of Joab, the son of Zeruiah. Abishai was a great warrior all his life and he begins the list of the rest of the heroes after "the three", for he was a leader of the three men above and the others listed beneath his name. He also fought several actions, where he was vastly outnumbered. In one of these he slew over 300 men himself. These men were incredibly fit and strong and had no fear of anything except dishonour and running away. They were ready to stand and die, but would never think about surrender. It is this tough mental attitude that they illustrate and mentor to us today.
5. Benaiah son of Jehoida is mentioned next. He fought many actions and later is general under Solomon. He slew two "lion like men of Moab". Each of these men ruled others after they had proven themselves heroes in actions they had fought alone. They were tested leaders who had already proved their worth before they were given command. All leaders in the church are also to be tested and tried as leaders in small things before they are given more important areas to command and control. Like David this man had killed a lion, but he had fought the lion in a pit, or water cistern, in a time of snow when the lion would have been especially fierce and hungry. He also was attacked by a tall Egyptian warrior who was armed with a great spear that would have skewered a bull. Benaiah only had a walking staff and yet he disarmed the Egyptian and killed him with his own spear. Like Abishai, this man was not in the category of the first three men, for they were heroes above and beyond all others, but this man was after them the greatest of David's men. The space taken by the description of him is another indication that he is possibly still alive as the writer records these words.
6. Asahel, the son of Zeruiah, was a short lived hero who died pursuing Abner, but he had done many great deeds on the battlefields that David fought upon.

7. Elhanan, the son of Dodo is another of the great heroes of David. Refer to the earlier chapter 21:19. The rest of the men we know little of if anything, although I suspect there was a written record available at the time of all their deeds, much as there are books today on Victoria Cross winners.
8. Shammah the Harodite.
9. Elika the Harodite.
10. Helez the Paltite.
11. Ira the son of Ikkesh from Tekoa.
12. Abiezer from Anathoth.
13. Mebunnai the Hushathite.
14. Zalmon the Ahohite.
15. Maharia the Netophathite.
16. Heleb the son of Baanah, a Netophathite.
17. Ittai the son of Ribai out of Gibeah of the children of Benjamin.
18. Benaiah the Pirathonite,
19. Hiddai of the brooks of Gaash,
20. Abialbon the Arbathite,
21. Azmaveth the Barhumit,
22. Eliahba the Shaalbonite, of the sons of Jashen,
23. Jonathan
24. Shammah the Hararite,
25. Ahiam the son of Sharar the Hararite,
26. Eliphelet the son of Ahasbai,
27. (Hepher) the son of the Maachathite,
28. Eliam the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite,
29. Hezrai the Carmelite,
30. Paarai the Arbite,
31. Igal the son of Nathan of Zobah,
32. Bani the Gadite,
33. Zelek the Ammonite,
34. Nahari the Beerothite, armourbearer to Joab the son of Zeruiah,
35. Ira an Ithrite,
36. Gareb an Ithrite,
37. Uriah the Hittite

These great heroes were men who stood with David until their death. We have no idea how many died in battle, but many may have, but all are honoured in this list as men of renown. God keeps lists, and He will honour and reward all who serve Him faithfully with all their heart. Malachi 3:16-17, Revelation 20:12-15, 21:27.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. The biblical qualities of leadership are vital for all who aspire to lead God's people. If a man or woman is not qualified to be appointed to a pastoral role, in accordance with the Timothy/Titus/Peter passages, then they are not to be appointed, even though they may have great natural abilities. It is moral character and steadfastness in reputation which is crucial for the stability and reputation of the church in the pagan world. David brought great disgrace upon the Lord and his land because of his sin, and he was able to rule again only because of a special dispensation of the Lord; his forgiveness and restoration does not set a precedent for pastors today, as Paul and Peter make very clear.
2. Do we have David's heart? Do we seek the Lord's blessing upon others as he did? Do we see that the blessing of the Lord is the only thing to be sought in this life? Let us exercise our hearts and minds after God's path for ourselves and be worthy leaders for all others we walk through this earth with.
3. The Lord will deal with all evil, but it will occur in His time, not in our preferred time frame. Like David we must accept the reality of the enemy's presence, but be on alert and fully armoured daily so that we can deal with the enemy forces. Ephesians 6:10-18.
4. David's heroes were tough and strong; able to fight for hours and hours without a break. They were physically and mentally tough, and this is the call to us all; to be as strong and mentally tough as we can be in the Lord's service. Abishai's last action is fought when he is well into his sixties and he slays a giant to protect David in that battle. We are never too old to remain tough and strong. Let us train physically daily until we can no longer walk. Let us train spiritually in prayer and Bible study until we can no longer breathe. Let us be like these mighty men and never give up.
5. As Pastors, let us be team leaders; gatherers of great people. Let us be like David, not threatened by the excellence of others, but rejoicing in the strength of the team that forms around us. The test for great management and leadership is the ability to gather great people to you and form them into a coherent and enthusiastic winning team. If we find ourselves threatened by excellence at any point, let us get on our knees immediately and deal with the pride and fear that will disable us unless it is dealt with.

CHAPTER 24**INTRODUCTION**

When we do ordinary things we often do them without prayerfulness, simply because they are so ordinary. This chapter is a reminder that the “ordinary” can be the forbidden at times, and all things need to be taken before the Lord and prayed through. We need to be aware of the need for daily prayer and for carefully advancing through this life. The judgement that stems from David’s census is stopped at the very point above the city of David where Solomon will later build the temple.

The Lord uses the very judgement to identify the place where the new temple is to stand; out of cursing, comes greatest blessing. In the parallel passage to this, 1 Chronicles 21, the writer there uses this census story to introduce David’s extensive preparation for the building of the temple. 1 Chronicles 22:1-19, 28:11-19.

2 SAMUEL 24:1-25

24:1 And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah. **2** For the king said to Joab the captain of the host, which was with him, Go now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, and number ye the people, that I may know the number of the people. **3** And Joab said unto the king, Now the LORD thy God add unto the people, how many soever they be, an hundredfold, and that the eyes of my lord the king may see it: but why doth my lord the king delight in this thing? **4** Notwithstanding the king’s word prevailed against Joab, and against the captains of the host. And Joab and the captains of the host went out from the presence of the king, to number the people of Israel. **5** And they passed over Jordan, and pitched in Aroer, on the right side of the city that lieth in the midst of the river of Gad, and toward Jazer: **6** Then they came to Gilead, and to the land of Tahtimhodshi; and they came to Danjaan, and about to Zidon, **7** And came to the strong hold of Tyre, and to all the cities of the Hivites, and of the Canaanites: and they went out to the south of Judah, even to Beersheba. **8** So when they had gone through all the land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days. **9** And Joab gave up the sum of the number of the people unto the king: and there were in Israel eight hundred thousand valiant men that drew the sword; and the men of Judah were five hundred thousand men. **10** And David’s heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly. **11** For when David was up in the morning, the word of the LORD came unto the prophet Gad, David’s seer, saying, **12** Go and say unto David, Thus saith the LORD, I offer thee three things; choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee. **13** So Gad came to David, and told him, and said unto him, Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land? or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they pursue thee? or that there be three days’ pestilence in thy land? now advise, and see what answer I shall return to hi that sent me. **14** And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let us fall now into the hand of the LORD; for his mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man. **15** So the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan even to Beersheba seventy thousand men. **16** And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, It is enough: stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD was by the threshingplace of Araunah the Jebusite. **17** And David spake unto the LORD when he saw the angel that smote the people, and said, Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father’s house. **18** And Gad came that day to David, and said unto him, Go up, rear an altar unto the LORD in the threshingfloor of Araunah the Jebusite. **19** And David, according to the saying of Gad, went up as the LORD commanded. **20** And Araunah looked, and saw the king and his servants coming on toward him: and Araunah went out, and bowed himself before the king on his face upon the ground. **21** And Araunah said, Wherefore is my lord the king come to his servant? And David said, To buy the threshingfloor of thee, to build an altar unto the LORD, that the plague may be stayed from the people. **22** And Araunah said unto David, Let my lord the king take and offer up what seemeth good unto him: behold, here be oxen for burnt sacrifice, and threshing instruments and other instruments of the oxen for wood. **23** All these things did Araunah, as a king, give unto the king. And Araunah said unto the king, The LORD thy God accept thee. **24** And the king said unto Araunah, Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing. So David bought the threshingfloor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. **25** And David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the LORD was intreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel.

REFLECTIONS

Verses 1 – 4. Taking a full census for the purpose of paying the Atonement-Redemption money to the tabernacle was always bone fide, but it was a census of the first born only, and purely for the purpose of collecting the temple tax from that generation. Exodus 30:12-16, Numbers 3:42-51. David’s purpose was to discover just how many able bodied fighting men he could muster if he had to and where they were in the land for ease of administration. This was not needed, for his trust was to be in the Lord not in the numbers of men he had. The very fact that we had the heroes listed before this reminds us of this fact, for every one of them fought against superior numbers and triumphed because the Lord was with them.

David didn't need superior numbers any more than we do in any task we are sent to accomplish. All David needed was to be sure of the Lord's will and then to do it in accordance with the Mosaic Law, with God's people to help. This meant sifting the volunteers anyway, and dismissing to their homes all who were fearful or distracted in any way. Deuteronomy 20:1-9. Numbers were never to be a factor in Israel's defence, as courage and total devotion to the Lord were to be the factors that separated her armies from their enemies.

Joab, for all his evil and malice towards anyone who crossed him, was right on target with his comments about the military census, and warned David strongly against running such a thing. The Lord would provide enough men every time for what was required, and Joab had learned faith in the Lord's provision through the years. David was, I suspect, trying to see how the balance of power between Judah and the other tribes of Israel was progressing, especially after the Great Rebellion of Absalom, and the minor rebellion of Sheba. He knew that Judah had become the greatest of the tribes, but he didn't know how close the numbers were. Once again, he didn't need to know this, he simply needed to trust in the Lord and move forward in the tasks the Lord had given him. The message for us is the same – focus ahead only.

Verses 5 – 10. The census is done with military precision and completed by Joab and his commanders. It may be that they had to test the men as they counted them and ensure they indeed could bear arms. The results came in after nearly a year of hard work, and they would have shocked all observers, with in our translation, 800,000 men in the northern and east bank eleven tribes, and 500,000 men in Judah capable of bearing arms.

Once again on the numbers, the word "eleph" is translated as "thousands", but it means "units", or large groups, and it may be that these were the separate "units" that were able to be assembled under commanders from the tribal levies; with 800 from the eleven tribes and 500 from Judah alone. Exact number referred to here is guess work.

David had over ruled Joab and ordered the census to be conducted by the Army, and after nine months (lunar months of 28 days each) and twenty days (total of 272 days) the census was completed. David felt very satisfied with the project until all the numbers come in and he is looking at them on paper, and then the impact of what he had done struck him. When he saw the vast army he had the ability to call up he was humbled, and he realised that he didn't need to know this detail, and that it was an act that illustrated lack of faith in God, even though he had not intended it to mean that.

Verses 11 – 14. David's confession is strong and powerful and complete. The Lord will hear him but will punish him and the people of the land for their arrogance and self reliance. The deaths will be selective and we are not told what instructions the angel of death has, but the principles of the Lord's judgements are to be bourn in mind. Only those personally guilty of a capital crime before God are ever slain by the Lord. Deuteronomy 24:16, 2 Kings 14:5-6, 2 Chronicles 25:4, Jeremiah 31:29-30.

The Lord is not unjust, and so as you read of the angel of death's work through the land, recognise that the numbers killed (5% of the army) indicate selectivity, and that the specific selectivity here is just and fair, for it is directed by God. Psalms 68:20, 116:15, Jeremiah 15:1, 24:4-7.

When David raises his head off the pillow the next morning after his confession he is visited by the prophet Gad. The Lord sends the prophet to speak words of judgement to David. It is a reminder to us that prophetic words are spoken for either warning or judgement, never encouragement, for the Word of God encourages us, and no prophet needs to speak such words. Prophets did not arrive with "weekly messages" either, but only as directed by the Lord and there could be many years between their messages.

David is offered three options for discipline for the sin of presumption and arrogance in ordering the census. The Lord wants David to learn and apply doctrinal truth in this process of correction and make the right choice for discipline for the arrogance that was behind the census. It is also clearly more than David's arrogance that was behind the census, and the arrogance of other men may be the factor that is behind their own deaths. David is offered the alternatives of firstly, 7 years of famine, secondly, 3 months of military defeat, and thirdly, 3 days of pestilence through the land.

David sees that his choice must be made upon the basis of what will cause the least harm to the kingdom and will keep the hand of discipline under the Lord's personal control, not in the hands of pagans. He does not want to have unsaved men administer the discipline, for that would be disastrous. He had read in Leviticus 26, and Deuteronomy 27-28, of the cycles of discipline, and he didn't want to let pagans loose in the land to wreak havoc. He selected the three days of pestilence, not because it was the shortest, but because the Lord would personally oversee the deaths involved, and so all that occurred would have justice and righteousness in it directly from the Lord alone. **Isaiah 47:5-15.**

Verses 15 – 16. The angel goes through the land and seventy "elephs" of the total count of the 1300 "elephs" are slain. There is a five percent "cull" of all the fighting men of the land, for it is the fighting men who die in this judgement, not the women or children. The Lord doesn't "change his mind" about the judgement, but decides that the judgement will be over as the angel approaches the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite on the hilly land above the City of David. This is another reminder that the capture of Jerusalem didn't lead to the extermination of all the Jebusites, and the survivors of the siege were living amongst the Israelites, and were now serving the God and the king of Israel.

This threshing floor was on a rocky hill under the great platform on which sits the two mosques today. The actual place is a mater of debate, but my suspicion is that it is exactly west of the Golden Gate, under the small pergola that sits in the middle of the platform there, called by the Arabs the "shrine of Moses". This was quite a way north of the City of David and was in open country at that time.

Verses 17 – 21. David confesses his sin again to the Lord as he sees the people die before his eyes as a result of his, and their own sin. He takes the responsibility for the error of judgement he has made and prays for his people with passion. He asks for the punishment to be upon himself and his own family, and asks what have the people done? As noted above, none die in such a judgement without justice on the Lord's part, but David would rather he and his family suffer than his people. This is the true heart of the leader who would always rather suffer than see those he leads suffer.

Gad comes that third day and instructs David to rear up an altar at the spot where the angel rested. David heads up the hill from his city to the heights where the threshing floors were located and Araunah sees him coming. He falls on his face before the king and pays him homage as his sovereign. David announces his intention of buying the threshing floor from the Jebusite to make a permanent altar there to give thanks for the end of the judgement. Once again we have the character and mercy of David, for this man was previously an enemy, yet he is treated as a citizen here. This interaction reminds us that those who accuse David of blood thirsty actions and the elimination or genocide of the Jebusites and Ammonites are not looking at the entire text!

Verses 22 – 25. Araunah offers everything he owns to David to use to build the altar and offer up the sacrifice of thanksgiving. He may be fearful that David would take it anyway, but he may equally have a desire to worship God himself, and honour the Lord of Israel, for he has accepted David's kingship over him, and that means he has accepted his God. His prayer is that the "Lord thy God will accept thee". He desires the king to offer the sacrifice, and his prayer is that the sacrifice will be acceptable to the Lord, and he is happy to play his part in the process.

David's words in verse 24 however remind us of the principle that we need to embrace ourselves; we are to give ourselves to the Lord, and we are not to bring before the Lord things that have cost us nothing. We bring offerings to honour the Lord and that means we have put personal thought and energy into them. David pays the price of fifty silver shekels for the threshing floor, and the altar is built and the sacrifices are offered.

The prayers of David are answered and the plague is permanently stayed. The altar is now in place, and the area around it will be the storage site for the materials that will later build the temple. David will gather the material and Solomon will build the temple. The story of David's final actions is continued in 1 Kings, and we will complete the story in our study of that book.

PASTORAL AND PERSONAL APPLICATIONS

1. David does not stop and think about the census, and the error costs him dearly. He realises his error only after nearly ten months have gone by and the job is done. The Lord waits for his breakthrough in understanding and then moves against him to teach the vital lesson to him and the entire land. It is not by might, nor by power, but by the spirit of the Lord that we are saved. Zechariah 4:6. We don't need great numbers, but we need great faith, and the Holy Spirit will provide that; all we are challenged to do is obey the Lord our God. God is just and fair, and in all His dealing with man He has our good in mind. Judgement is God's "strange work" but He will do it when required, and the way to avoid that is to be obedient to what we have been instructed.

2. We don't get the opportunity to select our discipline as David did, but let us learn from him. David's only desire was that he might suffer rather than the Lord's people. His desire was to do anything he could to take responsibility and any action that might stop the judgement of God. He places himself between the Lord and the people and this is our role as the servants of the Lord. Let us focus our hearts upon the good of others and be devoted to the Lord's people as David was to those he led.

REFLECTION UPON "THE SIN UNTO DEATH"

1. There is a sin unto death (1 John 5:16, 17, 1 Corinthians 11:31,32)
2. The sin unto death is the physical death of a believer, where ultimate discipline is administered to the Christian due to unconfessed sin of a serious nature.
3. Confession of sin under the concept of 1 John 1:9 is the way to forgiveness.
4. Examples of sin unto death:-
 - (a) The Corinthian pervert - (1 Corinthians 5)
 - (b) The Corinthians who habitually came to the Lord's Table in an unworthy manner. (1 Corinthians 11:27-32)
 - (c) Moses (Deuteronomy 32:48-52)
 - (d) Achan (Joshua 7:16-26)
 - (e) Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11)
5. Whilst there is a sin unto death there is no condemnation to them in Christ Jesus - all believers (Romans 8:1).

6. The effect of the sin unto death is to reduce the time which a believer can spend on earth accumulating good of eternal worth. The gold, silver and precious stones of 1 Corinthians 3:11-15.

THE PROPHET AND the gift of PROPHECY

1. The gift of prophecy and the office of the prophet are distinguished in Scripture. In the Old Testament there were those who had the office of prophet, and served in an official capacity within the worship system of Israel but there were also those who at times were given the gift of prophecy to give a special prophecy even though they were not full time prophets. Elijah was a man with the office and the gift, where-as David had the gift at times but not the office.

2. The roles of the person with the office of prophet were many and varied:

- (a) - Aaron was a preacher Exodus 7:1
- (b) - In Nehemiah's time the prophet-preacher had a role to exegete the Word of God clearly so that the people would know the truth. Nehemiah 6:7, Hosea 6:5.
- (c) - As revivalists they were to call people to repentance. Judges 6:7-12, Zechariah 7:7-12.
- (d) - They were to oppose apostasy so that those who were likely to be misled by a false teacher would have no excuse. 1 Kings 18:36-39, 40, 2 Chronicles 25:15 Ezekiel 2:5, 2 Kings 20:11.
- (e) - They were encouragers of the people. Ezra 5:2.
- (f) - They were sometimes song/worship leaders for the people. 1 Samuel 10:5.
- (g) - They led in prayer at worship. 2 Chronicles 32:20.
- (h) - They were the advisers to the kings and they were associated with coronations. 1 Samuel 10:1, 1 Kings 11:28, 29, 2 Kings 9:1-6, 2 Chronicles 12:5, 2 Chronicles 12:6, 15:2-7.
- (i) - They were spiritual advisers or seers for the kings; they "saw" the immediate future and so were able to advise the kings of the right decisions. 1 Samuel 9:9, 2 Samuel 24:11, 1 Chronicles 21:9, 24:29, 2 Chronicles 19:2, 33:18, 2 Kings 17:13, Isaiah 29:10,
- (j) - They were fore-tellers of significant future events. 2 Samuel 7:5-16, Amos 9:11, Isaiah 9:6,7, Isaiah 53, Ezekiel 34:22ff, Micah 5:2, Daniel 9:26, Zechariah 13:8, Joel, Zechariah 14, and many more.
- (k) - God intended them to be the shepherds and vine-dressers of the nation. As such they were to be the type of Christ who is referred to in the Old Testament as "the great prophet". Deuteronomy 18:15-19, Zechariah 13:5,6, Matthew 21:11, Luke 7:16, 8:18-20, 24:19,23-26, John 7:40,41.

3. The Methodology of the prophets. There was no "set" formula for the prophets to follow, but certain things were established as "tests" for the people to be sure the prophet was genuine.

- (a) - The prophet had to have a spiritual life witness that was like Moses. Deuteronomy 34:10-12.
- (b) - God spoke to the prophets by dreams and visions. God spoke to Moses face to face but he was an exception. Numbers 12:6-7.
- (c) - The prophet had to be totally confident of his message, as he was judged by God if there was any falsehood in it. 1 Kings 22:13,14, 2 Kings 5:8.
- (d) - There were to be no secret prophecies, everything was to be open and clear, so that all the people might be warned of God. Jeremiah 23:25-29.
- (e) - The prophet had to be specific in his message and had to be obeyed literally. 2 Kings 5:10-19, note especially vs 13.

4. There were always false prophets; in fact the great prophets of the Old Testament were always outnumbered by false prophets in their own day. Jeremiah 2:8, Ezekiel 13:1-23.

Our Lord warned us that there will always be false prophets about. Matthew 7:15-23.

NOTE THE LORD'S WORDS HERE in that the personal walk of the prophet is to be paid attention to:-

No spiritual fruit in their life = no truth in their words.

God allows the false prophets to operate without immediate judgment upon them, so that believers are always presented with an obedience test, to see whether we will obey the Scriptures or follow our own lusts to judgment.

False prophets will abound at times of poor Bible teaching. Weeds only grow in poorly cared for soil. Hosea 4:5,6, 9:7,8.

5. Tests that believers must apply when confronting a person claiming the gift of prophecy.

- (a) - The words of the prophet will never contradict the Word of God. Jeremiah 23:33-36, 2Pet 2:1-3, 1Corinthians 14:32.
- (b) - The prophet will never call people away from genuine worship of God. Deuteronomy 13:1-5.
- (c) - The prophet will always be specific and the prophecy will be able to be tested. Deut 18:20-22, Jeremiah 28:9.
- (d) - Any prophet who asked for money was to be treated as false. Jeremiah 8:10.
- (e) - Any prophet who was a drunkard was to be treated as false. Micah 2:11.
- (f) - Any unconfessed sin of envy, jealousy, strife, etc in their life, they were false! Jeremiah 23:11.
- (g) - If they were found only in groups they were probably false, as God's prophets were men alone. 1Ki 22:5-8, 18:22.
- (h) - Does the prophecy accord with Scripture (this is more than just not contradict)? 1Corinthians 14:37,38, 2 Kings 23:2.