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## Group Bible Study

The priority of any Bible study is to seek to understand what the Bible is saying to the people to whom it was first written as well as to understand it for our particular day and generation. So, the top priority is first to understand the text and then to make it meaningful and relevant. Here are some pointers to help you as you study the Bible:

**Pray:** Our preparation for any Bible study should begin and end with prayer. We need to ask God, through the help of the Holy Spirit, to guide us as we read the Bible and prepare for a study.

**Ask:** In order to understand the Bible properly, we need to keep in mind six important questions:

1. **Who is speaking?** Everything in the Bible was written by men who were inspired by God. Though every writer of the Bible was inspired by God, sometimes the writers record words which come from the hearts of evil men. So, dealing with the question “Who is speaking?” will help us to know whether the words we are reading are words that we should obey today.
2. **Who is spoken to?** We need to realise that not every command that comes in the Bible is a command for us today. For example, the command by God to Noah to build an ark is obviously pertinent and relevant for Noah, but not for us.
3. **When is the Bible writer speaking?** In answering this question, we will need to make a distinction between those who are living under the law and those who live under the guidelines and principles as outlined to us in the New Testament, the way of Christ. Therefore, the principles we see with regards to worship in the Old Testament have a relevance to us, but we need to read them in the light of the New Testament. It is always important to bear in mind that one part of the Bible can often help us to understand another part.

4. **What type of language is the writer using?** The languages used are usually one of two types: either literal or figurative. Sometimes both will be mixed together in one passage – for example, Jesus is spoken of as the Lamb of God, which is clearly a figurative form of speech. However, he is also described as the one who takes away the sin of the world, which is literally true for those who believe. So, Jesus was not an actual lamb, but he was the one who became the offering for our sins.

5. **What are the conditions or circumstances in which this writing is given?** If we can get to grips with the particular circumstances the writer is facing when he writes, it helps us to understand what he is saying.

6. **What is the context of the Bible passage?** Think about what has just been said and what is about to be said in the particular book of the Bible, as well as the context of the passage within the whole Bible.

The Bible is indeed God's inspired word, it is his revelation to all mankind. So in order for us to understand the Bible we must study it properly. Only then can we "*correctly handle the word of truth*". And if we keep these six simple questions in mind as we prepare our study, we will find that we can indeed get to grips with God's word.

**Plan:** For those who are preparing and leading a study, the following steps should prove helpful:

1. Try to break the passage into parts or sections so that you can clearly divide up the passage you are looking at.
2. Think about what you don't understand in the passage and therefore what others might not understand as well. What parts do you need to gain more background and information about? Be ready to deal with puzzles that people will ask you about. So, for example, when studying John 3, people might ask 'What is the kingdom of God?', 'What is a Pharisee?' These are obvious things that people might need to have some more information about.

3. Having broken the passage up into sections, we then come to thinking about questions. You can use the questions that are in this book. However, you may want to write your own, which is of course perfectly all right. Questions can be one of three types.

**Understanding.** The first type of question should be aimed at trying to draw out our understanding of what the passage is saying.

**Significance.** Only once we have begun to understand the passage can we move on to questions that try to highlight the significance of the passage in the light of the particular book or letter, and of course against the backdrop of the whole Bible.

**Application.** Then we move on to questions which apply to the situations we are facing today.

#### **Additional Comments**

Do make use of clergy and commentaries and other Christians who have a maturity which you can rely upon when you are seeking to tackle Bible passages.

It will sometimes prove helpful to have more than one translation as this will give you some fresh insights into the verses which you are focusing on.

As we come to study the Bible we need to keep in mind that all the books of the Bible have one great theme: that is God's plan to save mankind from his sins through Jesus Christ.

Fundamentally, make sure that whatever you do, you seek to do it to honour and glorify God.

## Introduction

### The Life of David – the years of becoming King

We are coming once again to David, the Shepherd, the hymn writer and the murderer! I think it is nothing less than shocking to realise that God chose a man who would fill each of these roles and sit on the throne of Israel. David is very much a real man with real issues and real problems. We have to recognise, however, that David as a Bible character stands like a giant across the pages of the Bible, and yet what we also glimpse as we look at David is something that reflects the coming of his greatest son, the Lord Jesus Christ. As we have already seen in our first series, he does not look very promising material, but as we learnt last time God looks on the heart. In this series of studies we will see how, through his family, David would become a great King of the Jews. From him would come, just at the right time, David's greater Son, Jesus Christ. As we look closely at David in our studies we will see that though he is a man after God's own heart, he is a man who is far from perfect. I hope that as we undertake each of the studies we will come to a realistic evaluation of this leader.

The great central theme and truth of both 1 and 2 Samuel comes from the very lips of the prophet Samuel, right back in 1 Samuel 3:9-10, *"Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening."* The entire two books are a series of case histories of those who listened to the Lord and his word, and receive blessing in time. Of course, those who did not listen to the Lord would in time discover sorrow and judgement. We will see that the Lord Jesus spoke the same truths in the words, *"Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it"* (Luke 11:28).

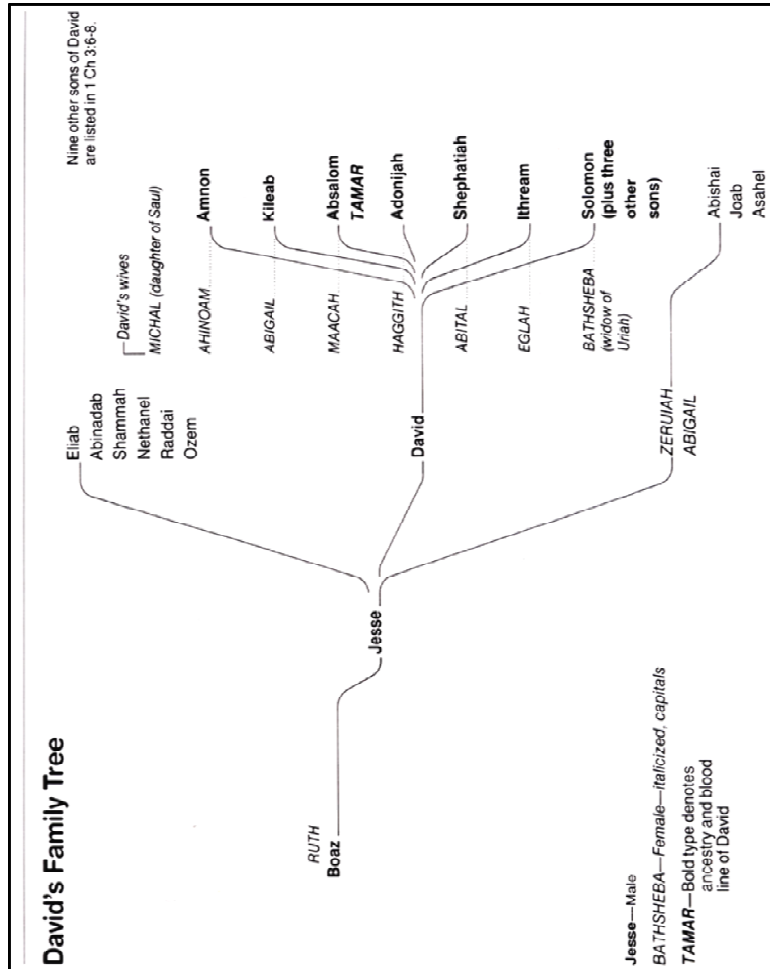
Early on in 2 Samuel, David is made King at Hebron by the tribe of Judah (2 Samuel 1-4), and then subsequently by the remaining tribes after the murder of Ish-Bosheth, one of Saul's surviving sons (2 Samuel 5:1-5). What we will discover in the opening chapters of 2 Samuel is that his

leadership was both decisive and effective. David in time captured Jerusalem and made this his royal city (2 Samuel 5:6-13), and then this was followed by the bringing of the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, there publicly acknowledging the Lord's kingship and rule over not only himself but also over the nation of Israel (2 Samuel 6).

What we go on to discover is that under David's kingship the Lord caused the nation to prosper. Equally we see that the enemies of Israel are defeated and this will fulfil the promise that was made to Abraham back in Genesis 15:18. We will also realise that David wanted to build a temple for the Lord, in a sense a royal home for God, a place for God to have his throne (the Ark). What we discover then from the prophet Nathan is that David was not to build the Lord's house, rather the Lord would build David a house (a line). We get the wonderful promise in 2 Samuel 7 that David's line would indeed endure for ever. So we discover in 2 Samuel 7 that the Lord will establish a special covenant with David (2 Samuel 7:1-29). And through the work of the prophets we will come to see that David's greater Son, who would sit upon David's throne would fulfil the role of completing redemption of God's people (Isaiah 9:6-7; Ezekiel 34:23-24; Jeremiah 30:8-9). If you look on to chapters 10-20, you will see the darker side of David, and the eclipse of his reign is explained there, as his weakness and failures come not only to his attention but to that of the nation.

Finally, we see that the highs and lows of David's life are often like ours, full of extremes. But what we recognise in David is that God was never far away from where the action was taking place. In this great book of 2 Samuel David's high moments, the winning of battles, the bringing of prosperity to Israel are certainly proclaimed. But we also see him succumb to temptation and to be complicit in the murder of another person. The results of David's sin follow him through the rest of his life and in fact impact the lives of his children. At the end of the book we discover that David had not lost hope in God, because as the book closes

we still find him praising the Lord, the God of creation, the God of Israel. May we, like David, also discover that God can be our rock and our fortress not only in the times that are good but also in those more difficult moments of life.



### Study 1 – The same old story, 1 Samuel 26:1-25

As we come to examine 1 Samuel 26, there are two things to take note of during our study. The first is David's patience: time and again across this chapter, it is interesting to see how David is provoked by Saul and by his own men to act recklessly. Secondly the study also highlights God's providence: though David knows that the kingdom has been promised to him, he recognises the hand of God not only on his own life but on the life of Saul, the King. These are two important lessons for us to take hold of: the importance of patience in overcoming discouragement and recognising that we want and long for God's will to be done.

In chapter 24 David spared Saul's life. The King admitted that his efforts to kill David were evil (1 Samuel 24:17). However Saul's repentance did not last long. We learn in this chapter that he could not resist the temptation to try once more to finish the job off and kill the successor to the throne. So we discover in these opening verses that Saul set out with 3,000 men and made up camp by a road near Jeshimon. David and his band stayed in the wilderness. On learning the news of Saul's movements he sent out scouts to confirm the King's presence. David and his men took up a position overlooking Saul's camp; from this position he was able to see that the King and his military commander, Abner, were sound asleep along with the whole camp. This deep sleep had been caused by God (verse 12). At this moment David does an extraordinary thing – he decides to go down to the camp to Saul himself. What is David's motivation? Is he planning revenge? If revenge is on his mind then he will certainly violate the sacred oath that he made not to harm Saul (1 Samuel 24:12-13). As events reveal he is hoping to show Saul that he had the King in his power once again; he wants to confront Saul before Saul has time to slip back into his evil ways.

Abishai, David's nephew, agrees to go with David into the camp. So, together they steal down from the hills into the very centre of the camp to the side of the King of Israel who is sound asleep. Like all sinful human

beings, Saul cannot reform himself. Each of us needs the Holy Spirit to give us the desire to serve and to empower us to live for God.

### **David's discovery (v8-12)**

Saul is once again in David's power, and once again David is getting poor advice. Abishai pleads with David to strike Saul and end his persecution. The young man is certain that God has allowed this situation. He is filled with murderous rage and we are told he plans to put all his energy into a spear thrust to pin Saul to the ground.

However, David has a different view. David does not deny God's role – who could? However, he is sure that it is not God's will for him to kill the King, so he orders Abishai not to strike. He remembers that God put Saul on the throne. David's words show that he has been learning, for he knows that God will surely deal with the King in his own time. David has had a rich experience of seeing how God deals with the wicked. David therefore has confidence that he can withhold his judgement on Saul and allow God to carry out his perfect justice.

David does, however, take advantage of the situation into which God has brought him. He acts quickly and takes the King's spear and water jug to show that he has no ill feelings towards the King. Like others, however, David probably questioned why God did not act immediately against the wicked.

### **A warning for Saul (v13-20)**

David leaves Saul and climbs the hill. It is from there that he calls out to Saul and all his men; they awake from their slumber and hear David shouting out that Saul has not been protected when he was sleeping. In particular, David singles out Abner who should have been ready to fight the King's battles and protect him, but David tells us that he has been negligent.

Saul overhears David's calling and responds to ask if it is in fact David. David confirms that it is; he in turn asks why Saul is still chasing him. David then offers some possible reasons why Saul might still be after him. First he acknowledges that God may be motivating Saul; second David speculates that evil men may be egging Saul on; there is a third reason that David does not mention, that Saul's pursuit is because of his own animosity to David.

David now warns Saul not to shed innocent blood, for God will see it. David knew his wilderness exile did not separate him from God, but he did feel the pain and loss of public worship.

### **Sorry again (v21-25)**

The Bible encourages believers to be forgiving. But pious sounding words of repentance are just not enough – a true change of heart must be demonstrated by a new way of living. Just as before, Saul is sorrowful. This time his response seems to indicate a deeper connection – Saul declares that he has sinned; he admits that his pursuit of David is evil in God's eyes; he is willing to say that he has 'played the fool'. Saul even goes as far as to promise that he will not harm David!

However, David does not believe it. No doubt David knew the confession that Saul had made to Samuel all those years ago, a confession that he would change but he never did (1 Samuel 15:24). So David puts his trust not in Saul but in God. First he signals his refusal to return by asking Saul to send someone over to get his spear and water jug. Second he expresses the hope that God will reward him for his faithfulness – and David is only too willing to bow to God's will in this matter. Third he appeals to God for ongoing protection from harm.

So when David has finished speaking, Saul adds a prayer to David asking that God will bless him. Saul, speaking as a prophet, said that David would in fact do great things and would one day come to the throne. But

it is with some poignancy that we realise that when these men part they will never meet again.

### Questions on 1 Samuel 26:1-25

1. Read 1 Samuel 26:1-5. Based on what we know about David's and Saul's leadership styles and this scene (v1-5), how would you describe their different styles? Discuss both their strengths and weaknesses.
2. What did David and Abishai find when they came into Saul's camp (26:7)? Saul's spear has a great historical significance in David's life. Look up these verses and discuss each snapshot from Saul's past.
  - 1 Samuel 18: 8-12
  - 1 Samuel 19: 8-10
  - 1 Samuel 20: 27-34
3. What two things did David take from Saul? Why would these two things be so important to Saul?
4. The natural world generally responds to conflict with a "fight or flight" response. How does David respond and what can we learn? What basic convictions motivate David? Can you think of other biblical examples who respond similarly? Who is the ultimate example and why?
5. What are the kinds of things that make a relationship turn sour? What are the lessons for us to learn from Saul and David's relationship and how might God be teaching us to respond to our relationship issues? What specific things have you learnt about God, David and yourself from these verses?

## Study 2 – Victory from the jaws of defeat, 1 Samuel 30:1-31

### David in turmoil

David is now overwhelmed with turmoil in his heart and mind. Having been dismissed from participating in a Philistine attack on Israel, David and his men go back to their home in exile – the Philistine city of Ziklag. This is some 50 miles south of where the battle may well have commenced. However, on arriving at Ziklag the men and David find that the Amalekites have raided the city, burnt it and taken captive all the inhabitants. It is almost certain that this raid was intended as part of the response to David's pretending to be an ally of Achish of Gath. At the same time we witness God's mercy continuing, for we discover that the Amalekites kill none of David's people – we see here that God's hand is upon the situation.

On discovering the attack on the city, David and his men are distraught. The grief that they feel now turns to anger and they begin to talk of stoning David their leader. David must now deal with his men who are on the point of rebellion. This is indeed a dark moment.

David does the right thing – he turns to the Lord. But what does this mean? David believed that it would be right and proper to present his case to God, for he trusted in both the power and the providence of God. He knew of God's justice and goodness and he knew that God would bring low and then raise up those who were his people, those whom he loved, those who put their trust in him. David remembered that God had promised to bring him to the throne and knew that God would be faithful to that promise. David was now ready to take action.

What do you do when you are in distress? Do you rely on your own strength or you do you look to God and his strength? If we are honest, we probably find that our response varies. In the school of suffering we can find that we are either driven to God or away from him; either we rely on his teaching or we reject it.

### **God's will (v7-10)**

David now seeks God's guidance. It is interesting that he does so in a situation in which divine direction would hardly seem necessary. However, David will not go on without receiving the counsel of God. Here he is showing his dependence on God.

David summons the priest and asks him to bring the ephod. David would ask God two questions:

- Should he pursue the Amalekites?
- Should he expect to overtake them?

God's response is clear – David will without fail recover all. What is more, God also reveals the outcome of his pursuit – what joy it is that he has been told that he and his men will get back their loved ones still alive. God has revealed his will to them.

David and six hundred men now begin the task of tracking down the Amalekites and getting ready to do battle with them. However, before they have gone too far, many of the men are beginning to lag behind. No doubt they are weary because of all the equipment that they are carrying and all the travel that they have undertaken. David now makes a strategic decision: the weariest men are left at a place called the Besor Ravine. David realises that without these men and their equipment he and the rest of the men will be able to move faster. So, trusting in God's promise, David continues the pursuit with four hundred men.

God leaves many of the ordinary decisions of life to us. We should always be careful that any given course of action is in fact God's will. The priority will be to seek him and always to check out by prayer and our reading of Scripture that we do not just know his will but we also understand it.

### **Illness (v11-20)**

As David and his men pursue the Amalekites they make an unexpected discovery. It seems that a young Egyptian has been left behind – he had collapsed without food and water, but David sees in all of this the hand of God. David takes time to give the man food and drink, and he is revived. David then asks him his origins and loyalties. The man quickly replies that he was the servant of an Amalekite who was part of the raiding party on Ziklag. He tells the story of how he had become sick and had been left behind, left to die in the desert. David now asks the critical question: whether he can show them where the Amalekites had gone. The Egyptian replies and he can and will. The one assurance that he needs is that David will not kill him. With this promise the Egyptian now fulfils his part of the bargain.

The Amalekites clearly believed that David was still far away, probably fighting with the Philistines, but he was about to teach them otherwise. David launches a surprise and quick attack for a night and a day. We are told that the Amalekites are spread out over the land. Clearly there are a great many of them, and not very many who are fighting on David's side. What we discover now is the overwhelming victory that David achieves, for he recovered all that the Amalekites had carried off. What a transformation! For the men who had so recently been ready to stone David are now ready to reward him and rejoice over his leadership.

Clearly God's hand was in the illness of the Egyptian. God's action was behind the man being left behind. The providential hand of God can be seen to be at work from beginning to end. So we, too, should be ready to trust God in every circumstance of our lives, both great and small (Romans 8:28).

### **David, the leader (v21-31)**

In this final section we find two footnotes to the rest of the story in this chapter. First we are told about a disagreement arising between David

and his men. The issue and dispute is over the two hundred men who had stayed behind because of exhaustion. It was a question of who would share in the spoils. David will have none of this dispute; he orders that those who stayed with the supplies get an equal share, and later on he will make this a law in Israel. David realises that the battle is God's (1 Samuel 17:47). He remembers that God is the one who has preserved this band of men around David, so greed should have no part in their victory.

The second is the safety when they are back in Ziklag. David sends some of his spoils to the elders of Judah and to others whom he counts as friends. We might see this as David trying to buy support and influence, but we need to know that David is being generous and kind to people, just as any King of Israel should be; he probably also realised that some of the spoils that he had captured had come from Judah. In addition, David is wise enough to realise that he is making some payment back to those who had helped him in the past. We need to remember that when God gives to us, we should also be ready to give to others.

David remembered that God had assured him of victory and caused him to triumph even against overwhelming odds. It seems in this account that David's men had forgotten; they had focused too much on their own role in the battle. God is calling us to labour and to fight in the spiritual battle, but ultimately we need to know that the victory given is his and, if spoils are won, they belong to the Lord.

As the chapter closes, we find that David's men share equally in the spoils (v21-25) and secondly that David has the opportunity to send gifts to the cities of Judah which have supported and helped him in the past (v26). All this was happening as God was preparing David for a momentous time in his life.

### Questions on 1 Samuel 30:1-31

1. When David and his men returned to their home in Ziklag, what did they find (vv1-3)? What are we told about the depths of their feelings (v4-6)? Reflect on a difficulty or stressful situation you are currently facing. How can David's experience give you hope?
2. What was his men's response to this disaster? Why do his men react in this way? After David has found strength in the Lord, how does he also find help from the Lord (vv7-20)?
3. What was wrong with the logic of those who said, "*Because they did not go out with us, we will not share with them the plunder we recovered*" (v22)? Can we sometimes see then same attitude in the Church today? Why is the 'oneness' of the Church so important?
4. David declares that the Lord "*has protected us and handed over to us the forces that came against us*" (v23). How can David's experience help us to have a realistic view of the difficulties we might face as Christians?
5. We learn here in this chapter that David had strength in defeat and generosity in victory. How does this chapter reveal these qualities? Consider your own response in times of discouragement and success. How have you grown in your trust and faith in God when passing through troubling times?

### **Study 3 – The King is dead; long live the King, 2 Samuel 1:1-27**

#### **Breaking news (v1-12)**

We now move from 1 Samuel into 2 Samuel. This change is in fact meaningless because the two books were originally one. Saul is dead, and David's path to the throne is now clear. David has been back to Ziklag after rescuing the families who had been taken away by the Amalekites (see 1 Samuel 30). No doubt while all this was taking place David was thinking about the outcome of the Philistine attack upon Israel. Finally, after his return, a man arrives with clothes which have been torn and with dust on his head – the symbols of mourning. The man falls before David, becoming the first person to honour David in this way. The man tells his story that Saul and Jonathan are now dead. David wants more information – he wants to know how it has happened. The man recounts how he had encountered Saul after he had been wounded and that Saul had asked him to finish him off! The man took Saul's crown and brought it to David. However, it is interesting to note when comparing it with 1 Samuel 31, that there are significant differences between the account there and this man's story. No doubt the man was trying to curry favour of the new King. David rightly sees that the deaths of Saul and Jonathan were a tragedy that had befallen Israel – he tears his clothes in grief and he mourns and weeps.

Notice that David did not celebrate, rather he mourned. He put national interests over his own. We must remember that we are part of something greater than ourselves... the kingdom of God.

#### **No reward (v13-16)**

At this point David now returns to the man who brought him the news. The man is not going to receive any reward from David. David, however, has questions for which he wants answers. The first question is: "Where are you from?" David discovers that the man is an Amalekite. David calls

the man to account for his actions by asking, "Why were you not afraid to lift your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?" It is at this moment that the man's own words condemn him. David issues the order and the man is killed. The man has brought judgement upon himself.

Was David right in taking this action? At least two things come to mind as we consider our answer. First, David had often had to restrain his men from killing Saul; so ignorance of this truth was no excuse. Second, it is possible that the man was lying about how Saul had died. However, we must not forget that he was an Amalekite and as such, he was under God's judgement (1 Samuel 15).

David asked the Amalekite why he was not afraid to strike Saul. He showed no fear of God. In a sense all sin flows from that poor understanding of God and his justice.

#### **Broken hearted (v17-27)**

David now writes a lament over Israel's fallen King and his oldest son. The theme of this lament is stated in verse 19. David rightly sees this not only as a national tragedy but also shame. In his lament we learn that these heroes (Saul and Jonathan) went down fighting. David focuses on the positive things that both Saul and Jonathan achieved. At the end David expresses his deep distress at Jonathan's death. We need to see that David was generous to Saul throughout his life and even in his death; David had the wisdom always to realise that God had a plan and a purpose. We therefore need to remind ourselves that we can leave our futures safe in his hands.

#### **Questions on 2 Samuel 1:1-27**

1. What is the Amalekite from Saul's camp dying to tell David (v1-10)? What were the motives in doing this? What is our reaction to news of

loss? Why do you think David would mourn at the death of Saul, a man who was his sworn enemy?

2. The Amalekite thought he was telling good news to David but the man did not know David. Why did David have the man killed (v11-16)? How should we respond when someone brings us news with a hidden motive? (What might Acts 5:1-11 teach us when Ananias and Sapphira lied to the Holy Spirit?)

3. What do we find about transition and change difficult? What is David discovering about this process of change taking place in his life?

4. What light does this episode in David's life shed on his character (v19-27)? Remember that Saul attempted to murder David several times, so how did David's lament reveal his godly character (2 Samuel 1:11-12, 17-27)?

5. What did David say about God in this episode (v19, 25, 27)? David feels the pain of the loss of both Saul and Jonathan. His lament tells us not only about a father and son, but about David's relationship with God. What do we discover? What additionally do we learn from Scripture about dealing with the loss of a loved one?

## **Study 4 – Nation at war with itself, 2 Samuel 3:1-39**

### **Family conflict (v1-5)**

The battle that took place in 2 Samuel 2 kicks off a long war between the house of Saul (meaning Ish-Bosheth and Abner as his chief of staff and leading general) and the house of David. It may seem strange to us that this is a long war because David clearly has God on his side; yet we need to realise that God sometimes allows conflicts to endure for wise and holy purposes. Across the battles we see David growing stronger and the house of Saul growing weaker.

The seven and a half years that David spends with Hebron as his base prove to be years of blessing. We are told of six sons being born to him during that time. It is in Deuteronomy 17:17 that the kings are reminded that wives can turn their hearts away from the living God, so it is interesting to see that his third wife is the daughter of King Geshur and obviously not an Israelite. It is possible that David entered this marriage to firm up a relationship with this neighbouring kingdom. Again, God had clearly said that no Israelite should intermarry with those outside God's kingdom.

So as far as the Bible tells us, none of these sons grow to be men who will walk with God. Three of them will in fact bring great heartache to David – Amnon rapes his sister (2 Samuel 13), Absalom will rebel against David (2 Samuel 15-18) and Adonijah will rebel against David when David decrees that Solomon should succeed him (1 Kings 1-2). We need to see that though David shows many signs of being a good and great King, following in God's ways, he is also a man whose heart is sinful.

### **Shifting loyalties (v6-21)**

The house of Saul is growing weaker. David will soon prevail. Abner the chief of staff for the house of Saul now begins to consider how he may secure his own future and keep power for himself. There seems to be

conflict within the house of Saul as Ish-Bosheth accuses Abner of taking one of Saul's concubines; he was possibly doing this to give himself some future claim on the throne. Abner uses this disagreement with Saul's son as grounds for transferring his loyalties to David. In part, at this moment he sees himself as a king-maker of David. Sadly he is usurping the position of God! He sends a message to David – what he offers is the throne in exchange for a covenant of peace. David agrees, with the condition that Abner brings back to him his first wife, Michal. It seems as if Michal's husband is broken hearted at losing her but acquiesces. Abner now uses his influence, reminding them that David has been their choice and God's choice as King.

We are left pondering the question why God would use such a scheming, prideful man as Abner to boost David's cause. But what we see is God establishing David upon his throne and he is using even the evil purposes of men to achieve this end.

### **Vengeance (v22-27)**

Three times the author of 2 Samuel tells us that Abner departs from David's presence in peace (v21, 22, 23). The author is quite clearly wanting to show us that David had given Abner safe conduct, that in a sense he had guaranteed his safety. However, when Joab, a military commander along with David, realises that David has agreed to Abner's terms he only has one thing in mind, and that is vengeance. As far as Joab is concerned he believes that his King has done a very foolish thing. Joab is convinced that Abner only came to Hebron to spy on David and the camp. Joab now proceeds from disrespect to his King to actual treason, for he sends messengers after Abner asking him to return and at the gate of the city of Hebron we find that Joab fatally stabs Abner. Surely this is a monstrous crime: Abner has clearly violated a fundamental command of his King (1 Kings 2:5). Yes, judgement will come for those who do evil. There is a marked contrast here: David

repeatedly resists the temptation to take vengeance on those who wrong him in evil and vicious ways, but Joab shows no such restraint. It is good for us to remember that it is not for us to act, but rather for us to leave the situation in God's hands.

### **Questions on 2 Samuel 3:1-39**

1. What eventually happened as the war between the house of Saul and the house of David continued (v1)? What lessons does Jesus teach when reading Luke 11:17, and how might this apply to David's situation? And where does David, God's King, stand amidst the conflict and betrayal in this chapter?
2. What does the Bible teach in Genesis 2:24 about marriage? What lesson should David have learnt from this part of Genesis and his situation? What were the consequences for his family and the Kingdom over him ignoring God's word about relationships (v2-5)?
3. Abner quoted Scripture when it suited him and ignored Scripture when it suited him. (In Matthew 4:1-11 how is the Bible handled?) What lessons can we learn from Abner and his handling of the Bible in regard to our own lives? What did Abner decide to do regarding the kingdom of Israel (v6-12)?
4. What did David ask Abner to bring with him (v13-16)? Which actions show David's political cunning and which show his wisdom?
5. Who killed Abner without David's permission (v22-30)? How should we react to the defeat of an enemy? Who seems to be in charge of our world? How should we be different, in actions and motivations, to those around us with this knowledge?

## **Study 5 – Joy and judgement, 2 Samuel 6:1-23**

### **David's plan (v1-2)**

2 Samuel 6 is where we now turn and find one of the strangest and most disturbing stories in the Bible. Yet it is also a very informative story.

David's throne is established and the nation is now secure. So, understandably the new King turns his mind to spiritual matters. We learn that he gathers thirty thousand men, not for war this time but because he wants to bring the ark of the covenant into his capital, Jerusalem. You will recall that the ark symbolises the very presence of God with his people; back in 1 Samuel the ark had been kept at Shiloh, which was the home of Abinadab in the city of Kiriath Jearim (1 Samuel 7:1). The ark is also sometimes spoken of as the very throne of God. It almost seems as if the ark had been forgotten.

David now goes to the city of Kiriath Jearim to bring the ark to Jerusalem. The writer clearly tells us David's purpose – he speaks of God as the Lord of hosts, the commander of the armies of heaven and earth. What we learn is that King David is preparing to bring David's God into the very heart of Jerusalem. Symbolically what we see here is that God will reign over his people and David will be his vice-regent. With the ark in Jerusalem God, rather than David, will have the place in the very heart of Israel's national life. Surely the same should be true of the Church – we need constantly to remind ourselves that God is building his Church and is ruling over all things.

### **Time for the great event (v3-5)**

David has gathered all Israel. The ark is greeted by a musical fanfare performed by David and others. It is clearly a very joyous and exciting occasion. Going with the ark are Uzzah and Ahio, who are called the sons of Abinadab.

Yet we find in this section some troubling details:

1. We are told that the ark is brought out and placed on a new cart. What we need to note is that the ark has never been transported in this way before. By looking back to 1 Samuel 6:7 and Numbers 7:9 we see that God did not prescribe that the ark should be transported in this way. Rather, it was to be carried by Levites.
2. It appears that the ark is not properly covered. This, again, was strictly forbidden by God. The ark was to be covered, even from the sight of the Levites who were meant to carry it (Numbers 4:5, 20). So, despite the best intentions of David, the ark is not being handled properly.

What we need to see here, is that though we may be full of joy and exuberance in our walk with God, we must not overlook what God has directed over how we should live and speak. Surely there is a lesson here for us today.

### **Fear of the Lord (v6-11)**

The ark on its new cart is heading to Jerusalem. Then, without warning, joy is shattered by a sudden turn of events, for God himself, over what appears a trifling moment, steps in and shatters their world. We do not know why Uzzah simply stepped up to touch the ark – it could be that the cart jerked, or that the road was rough, or there was a sudden movement of an animal – but God grows angry and strikes him, causing him to die on the spot. Uzzah's offence seems small and the punishment massive. Is God overreacting? Remember, the Israelites have already violated God's commands about how the ark was to be transported – they had failed to cover it and God had already told the Levites that they were to carry the ark. They knew that the penalty for touching it was death (Numbers 4:15). Why does God not withhold his anger? Uzzah's action could be seen as presumptuous because surely God can protect his own throne.

David should humble himself at this point and confess his sin, but he does not. His first reaction is anger, directed towards God. He is upset that God did not spare the man. We also learn that David is now afraid for his own safety if he brings the ark into the city. Even if Uzzah had meant well, we need to remind ourselves that a good intention will not justify a bad action.

### **A new dwelling (v12-19)**

The King now resolves to try once more to bring the ark to Jerusalem. Three months has passed since his first attempt. David has had time to analyse what went wrong and to get new instructions. David sees that the ark can be brought into the city in safety, only if it is done God's way (1 Chronicles 15:13). David now adds a sacrifice, in part at least to make atonement for the former sins and perhaps also to make an intercession for the safe transfer of the ark. David acknowledges God and seeks his blessing – wearing the priest's garment, David now dances excitedly before the ark of God. The people see this dance as an expression of great joy, and David blesses the people in the name of God giving them a gift of food. We learn that God has now chosen a new dwelling place (Deuteronomy 12:5), for the ark is now in Jerusalem – God is enthroned in the capital among his people. The joy is nearly universal – it seems that only one person has a sour face that day.

### **Venom in the tongue (v20-23)**

The one person who is displeased with what has taken place is Michal, his first wife. She comes to meet David on his arrival home. She had seen David dancing in that simple priestly ephod rather than in his royal robes and she did not approve (verse 16). She begins her criticism of David by speaking with regard to David's modesty. Interestingly she is spoken of three times here as the daughter of Saul (verses 16, 20, 23). Not only is she a voice of the former regime, but it appears she is far more concerned about appearances than about celebrating God's arrival

into the heart of his people and into the city which will bring God to dwell in the heart of his people. David, by contrast, believes that honour will be found in being a humble servant of the Lord (verse 22). This passage closes on a sad note, for we learn that Michal will suffer a lifelong reproach of not having children. We learn also from this passage that our first priority must always be to please God and not men.

### **Questions on 2 Samuel 6:1-23**

1. What words would you use to describe the mood of those bringing the Ark to Jerusalem (v1-5)? How does this chapter help you to understand God's holiness?
2. Why is sin such an issue? (Read Hebrews 10:19-22). Retell in your own words what happened to Uzzah (v1-8). Why then did the Lord's anger burn against him (v17; see also 1 Chronicles 15:11-15)? Compare how the Philistines and David's men handle the Ark. See 1 Samuel 6:7,8a & 2 Samuel 6:3.
3. At whose house did the Ark remain for three months (v9-11)? What do we learn about God from these events? What did David do when he brought the Ark to the City of David (v12-15)? Do our times of worship tend to be serious or joyous? Explain your answer.
4. What was Michal's reaction to David's dancing before the Lord (v16-20)? And then what happened to Michal (v21-23)?
5. It is clearly risky to handle the Ark in haphazard way. Are there any lessons about us and how we enter God's presence to worship him in a Sunday, if God is the same yesterday, today and forever?

## **Study 6 – Building a home, 2 Samuel 7:1-29**

This is one of those very significant moments in the Bible's story. It starts with David wanting to do something for God. In fact, it will turn out that God does something incredibly significant for David, the implications of which affect not only David and the people of Israel but will also affect us.

2 Samuel 7 is significant in the Bible's story because of its relationship to salvation history. It is here that we find God's covenant with David, the covenant that is a divine promise that David's throne will endure for ever. What is shown here is God's revelation of his plan to save his people: God himself will come down as the Messiah and he will come in the line of David. This will be a blessing not just for the Israelites but for the world. This is great news – an incredible blessing for David and his people!

### **An aspiration (v1-7)**

After the ark is brought to Jerusalem David realises that he is living in a fine house while God is dwelling in a tent! In David's mind this is not right. He recognises that he, the King, is living with all the luxuries that Israel can provide for a King, yet God, the supreme King, is living in a humble tent. David therefore decides to build a temple for God. We must recognise straight away that this is a good idea, but David wisely takes a moment to seek God's direction. It is at this point that Nathan the prophet is first mentioned in David's story. Nathan does not believe it is necessary to seek God on this matter, based on what he knows of God's revealed will, so he encourages David with the idea of David building a temple and gives him his blessing.

However, God has other ideas and steps in to David's life once again as David is about to put his plans into action. Later that night, God speaks to Nathan a message for David. The message is simple: do not build the temple! But notice God does not rebuke David; in fact as Solomon his

son will reveal later, he actually praises David for this aspiration (1 Kings 8:18). What David needs to realise is that he has been a man of war (1 Chronicles 22:8), but God wants the task of building the temple to be done by a man of rest (1 Chronicles 22:9). Until that day comes God is content to reside with his people simply in the tent. It is helpful to be reminded that God was as present with his people when the ark was in a tent as when God and the ark resided in the temple. Also we need to note that God never complains about his dwelling.

It is always good to aspire to do great things in God's service. Yet we need to take into account that God deploys his servants as he sees fit. So we should consider ways in which we may serve within the life of the church, asking ourselves what qualifications we have, what skills we have been given, what spiritual gifts we can exercise to build up God's kingdom.

### **Grace (v8-11)**

We glimpse great kindness and compassion of God in this next section. In the first verses of this passage Nathan the prophet had to inform David that he would not be the man to build the temple in Jerusalem. God knows David well enough to know that he will be disappointed not to have the opportunity to undertake this great enterprise. So God now instructs Nathan with words which are intended to comfort the King and to remind him of his standing in God's sight, not only reminding him of the role he has played but also of the great plan that God has for his people.

First God informs David of the way in which over the years God has poured his grace into his life. He reminds David that he raised him up from being merely a keeper of sheep and after many trials he shaped and moulded David so that he could become the King of Israel. In all this pilgrimage that God has undertaken with God, David has known the

privilege of God being with him day by day, giving him strength and assuring him that he will overcome his enemies.

God promises him that his grace will not cease. This is followed up by God speaking to David about things that are yet to take place. God promises that David will indeed be a great man on the earth; he promises to establish his people in a home where they will no longer be under threat. This process has been under way since the conquest of Canaan during the time of the Judges, and God is now saying that he will give Israel both peace and security. God is creating the conditions under which a temple can be built. God also promises that he will not abandon his people.

Finally, God promises David that he, too, will rest from his enemies. We need to be reminded that the enemies of David are also Israel's enemies. So, David will not build the temple, but he will be used by God to set the stage for its construction. And David will also be reassured that he is being used mightily by God for Israel's good. It is important that we learn the lesson from these verses that we can never earn God's favour – it is fully by grace – it is by grace from God from beginning to end. We are to live with a grateful heart for the past grace that we have received and trust God for the grace we need for the future.

#### **Promise (v11-16)**

God has determined to work through David in ways that David cannot even begin to grasp the true significance of. In these verses God reveals his plans – God intends to build a house for David, not a house such as Hiram built for David in Jerusalem, but a family line. In David's case, a kingly line! God promises that when David dies God will allow one of David's sons to wear the crown after him. But there is so much more to this promise than merely the passing on of a crown from a father to a son, for God promises to bless the son and to establish his kingdom, giving him a high degree of security and stability during his reign. God

also promises to treat the son of David as his own offspring – *“I will be his father, and he shall be my son.”* We learn even more: no matter what sin the son commits, God's mercy will not depart from him. God tells David that the son shall be the one to build the temple. This is God's grace, and it will flow from the father to the son.

At the heart of all these promises we learn that God now says that he will establish the throne of this kingdom for ever. This is a promise that David's descendants will rule over Judah for centuries to come, but is God saying more than that? God is making the bold promise of a Messiah who will come to the world; God is saying that at some particular moment in time one will come from David's line to take the throne and hold it for eternity. What God has revealed in these verses, then, is that he himself will one day descend to the earth in human form in the line of David. He will be the King of Kings, and he will come to claim the throne that is his own. You can certainly imagine that at this point, during this great revelation that is given to David, he is no longer feeling any sense of loss at being denied the privilege of building the temple. I would imagine he is almost overwhelmed by the promises that God is making and the recognition of how blessed he is to be loved by God.

#### **Overwhelmed (v17-24)**

Nathan the prophet brings God's amazing words to David. On hearing this news David goes and sits before the Lord, probably where the ark is housed. From his words we can see that David is humbled and perhaps also stunned by what he is discovering.

David starts by confessing his unworthiness. He is conscious that God has brought him on a long journey. David realises that God has done an amazing thing in his life, to bring him to the throne of Israel, and he now sees that God is capable of doing far, far more than he can begin to ask or imagine. David then wonders aloud how he can thank God for the

great mercy that he has received. He knows that God knows him through and through and knows what is best for his needs.

David is well aware that it is not all about him. He understands that God has acted this way because of his love for his people. In behaving this way, God has shown himself to be great! There is none like him – he alone is God. Of all the nations of the earth God has set his love upon a particular people, Israel – he made them his people for ever, and yet it is not all about Israel either, for surely it is ultimately about God. David says that God has done all things in order to make a name for himself! God's great purpose, then, in choosing Israel, in delivering them from captivity, in establishing them in Canaan in giving them a King and in revealing his plans for salvation in his coming Messiah, is that he might reveal himself and draw the people to worship and honour him. I guess when we look at God's big picture we should find ourselves staggered by the amazing grace that God has poured out on our lives and the lives of his people. It should also make us more aware of our sin and realise the offence and depth of pain that this causes to God.

#### **Promise (v25-29)**

Look at what David is asking for in his prayer. We discover that he asks that his house will last for ever (verse 29), but is that not what God has already promised? Could it be that that is what is informing and helping David to pray? We know we should pray according to the will of God, but how do we know God's will? Surely it is as we read God's word, as we meditate upon it day and night, that we come to glimpse exactly what God has planned for his people. There are parts of God's will that will of course be hidden to us, but God has revealed his will to us in his word. So it is good that when we pray we should remind God of the promises that he has made and ask him to fulfil them in our lives. That is what we witness when David prays asking that his descendants will continue to be

faithful to God. Through all this David is longing for God to be glorified as he fulfils the great promises that he has made.

In this chapter we have witnessed God establishing his covenant with David and also pledging to establish David's line as a great dynasty that will be used to save his people. This is a chapter of blessing upon blessing that far exceeds anything that we can begin to imagine (1 Corinthians 2). It is good that we, too, look for these blessings in faith and hope, whilst remembering that there are those whom we know and love who will miss out on them because they have turned their backs upon the one who came to save.

### Questions on 2 Samuel 7:1-29

1. What motivated David to want to build a house for the Lord (v1-3)? Across history, sincere people have built memorials for the Lord that he never asked for (v4-7). How can we avoid the same mistakes? What checks should we be making about T4C so as to ensure that God is behind and leading this project?
2. The Davidic covenant can be found in v8-16. What specific promises does God make to David? And how do the promises in v8-16 find their ultimate completion in Jesus Christ (see, for example, Luke 1:30-33)?
3. After learning about God's promises David prays (v18). Why is he astonished not only with the promises but with God himself (v18-24)? After praising God for his greatness, what requests does David make (v25-29)?
4. What insights does this passage give us into the relationship between God's sovereignty and our responsibility? Why is this topic so hard to handle?
5. You are helping to draw up a profile of the new Vicar. What part should God play and what part should we play in the process? When have you been astonished to discover that both God and his plans are far greater than you imagined? In what ways has the Lord demonstrated his greatness or goodness to us here in Moulton? (See also 1 Samuel 26:1-5.)