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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.

DAVID, THE EARLY YEARS – INTRODUCTION

This term we are going to do a series of studies on the life of David. You might well ask why we are studying David, and that would be a good question to ask, but once we do a little bit of analysis we will see that there are compelling reasons for us to give ourselves to the study of this significant character, who appears right across the books of the Bible. David's name appears over 1,000 times in the Bible; he is mentioned in 28 books of the Bible – that is a staggering 42% of the Bible! These would be reasons enough for us to give time to understanding David and his significance in biblical history, but when we stop and compare him to other Bible characters then we will see he stands out even more. So, for example, Abraham's story is told in 14 chapters of the Bible; Joseph is also described in 14 chapters; Jacob is mentioned in just 11 chapters.

However, it is not just when we compare David to other people in the Bible that we see how great David is. In the ancient world one of the most celebrated figures was a student of Aristotle, namely Alexander the Great. He is known in history as one of the great military generals of all time. He is seen as a man who made incredible achievements in a short life – he made great military conquests, aided scientific advancement and promoted cultural unity. But as great as Alexander was, David may well deserve the title 'the great' even more, for David is seen as the King of Israel, whose reign was such an example that the very kingdom of God has been associated with it, to the extent that of Christ's kingdom is seen as its consummation. It would be fair to say that David's arrival ushered in a golden age for Israel, he was distinguished as a warrior defeating the giant, Goliath, as a youth and expanding Israel's borders to the widest point as a man. David was also Israel's Poet Laureate, with such books as his Psalms being read around the world. Yet surely David is set apart from other great men such as Alexander the Great because it was God who was with him. No doubt his spectacular gifts and talents were gifts from God not only for

the good of David but for the whole nation. From his life we have so much we can learn.

These of course would be reasons enough for us to want to study the life of David, yet there are more compelling reasons for us to take hold of our studies this term. It was not for nothing that God's Spirit saw fit to preserve for us David's life, for it to be recorded and to be shared with us to help influence and shape us, so that we might understand God's dealing with humankind. I think also as we come to look at David's life we will find time and again how his reactions relate so closely to our own. We will see as we look at his life that he was not just a shepherd, a musician, a songwriter and poet, a warrior, a servant in the King's court, a fugitive, a king, a saint, a sinner, a lover, an adulterer, a father, but also a type of Messiah and a prophet. Yet, as we look at him we also see that he was a man, a husband, a failure and a success. We will encounter not only his triumphs but also his disasters. I think it is because his life was so rich and so varied that he has constantly intrigued not only Bible scholars who have sought to get to grips with his life but also ordinary Christians who have recognised that he was a man who had been called by God and was seen to be a man after God's own heart.

So, when we come to look at David you can see the magnitude of the man who stands astride so much of the Bible's history. Not only was he described as a man after God's own heart, but he is also seen as a forerunner and pointer to the Lord Jesus Christ. My hope and prayer is that these studies of his life will both inspire us and encourage us in our walk with God in 2011.

Family background

David was the great-grandson of Ruth and Boaz. He was the youngest of 8 brothers (1 Samuel 17:12) and was brought up to be a shepherd. This occupation taught him much – not only courage that he would put to such good use when he was leading the armies of Israel, but also

tenderness and care when he had the responsibility of caring for the people of God in Israel. He can also be compared with Joseph, who also suffered from jealousy and ill-will from the family. No doubt David was a young man with great talent which God had given to him (1 Samuel 18:28). Looking forward we know that David was to be the father of a great line, notably his descendants who would eventually lead us to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ as Matthew's gospel shows in chapter 1.

David bursts upon the scene when God rejects Saul from the kingship of Israel. David was revealed to Samuel, the prophet, as the successor to Saul when he was anointed as King in Bethlehem (1 Samuel 16:1-13). Of course, one of the results of Saul's rejection was the departure of the Spirit of God from him, with a consequent depression of his own spirit. It is as we see the decline of Saul that we see the rise of David, and surely we recognise here the hand of God at work. For many of us David first appears on the scene when he encounters the great Philistine giant and champion, Goliath, in 1 Samuel 17. It is David's agility and skill with the sling that allows him to destroy the giant who has put such fear into the army of Israel. It is interesting to note that as David returned from slaying the giant, Goliath, the women of Israel greeted him by singing "Saul has slain his thousands and David his tens of thousands". This would bring to Saul great feelings of jealousy and anger towards David which, for much of his early life, would mean that he would live in fear of fatal retribution by Saul. We will also discover that along with the hostility of Saul, Saul's son Jonathan is a man who finds a true friend in David.

David's character

It is interesting that the Bible nowhere glosses over the sins or character defects of any of the children of God. Surely the apostle Paul was right when he wrote in Romans 15 that whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction. So, it is with that in mind

that we come to look at the life and times of David. As I have said before, we learn not only from his triumphs but also from his disasters. Of course, the sin of David is a matter of common knowledge – we see the murder of Uriah the Hittite, we see the adultery with Bathsheba, we see the family breakdown with Absalom – we find before us a man with many flaws. However, David's accomplishments were many and varied – he was indeed a man of action, a poet and a tender lover of his people. It is to David, and not Saul, that the people of God looked back as the one who established the kingdom of Israel; and as people gazed upon David they saw the kingly ideal to which their minds would stretch forward as they looked for the coming of a Messiah. This Messiah would be the one who would deliver his people and who would sit upon the throne of David forever (Psalm 110). So I hope that in these studies we will find a rich vein of biblical truth that will resonate within our own lives and teach us much about how we can live for God in this current time.

COMMENTARIES

The commentaries on 1 Samuel have been growing in recent years. There are some that are very technical that I would not recommend, but many have helpful insights into the text and will supplement the notes. I would, however, hope that the notes would be sufficient to help you lead a study along with a good concordance. I would like to recommend the following commentaries to you to consider:

Focus on the Bible - 1 Samuel by Ralph Davies published by Christian Focus

Ralph Davis brings cultural and historical colour to the task of interpretation and adds a pastor's heart for personal application. You

will find a point of contact with the lives of Samuel, Saul, Jonathan and David as Davis answers the question 'What does God seek when he looks on the heart?' Davis presents simple exposition of the literary and theological character of the text in a bright and fascinating way.

1 and 2 Samuel (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries) by Joyce Baldwin published by IVP

Recipient of a 1990 Christianity Today Critics' Choice Award! The stories of Samuel, Saul and David are among the most memorable in the Old Testament. Yet the lives of these individuals are wound up in the larger story of God's purpose for his people. Looking beyond the well-known surface of these stories Joyce Baldwin explores the meaning of the biblical history of Israel's vital transition from a confederation of tribes to nationhood under a king. Bible students at all levels will find that this commentary provides an excellent introduction to the critical issues of authorship, date, composition and structure of Samuel, as well as an able discussion of its theological themes. Written in a clear and straightforward style, here is a worthy addition to the acclaimed Tyndale Commentary series

The Message of Samuel: The Bible Speaks Today Series (This book may not be available in the UK)

The books of 1 and 2 Samuel witness the transition of Israel from tribal confederacy to established monarchy. As such, questions of identity and power are unavoidable. In the aftermath of the decline of the judges, priests abuse their priestly privileges, a people covers the centralized authority of its impious neighbours, and a throne is won, forsaken, redeemed, lost and found again. It is a readable book with some technical points.

STUDY 1 – David & Samuel: 1 Samuel 16:1-23

Introduction

When David stepped out to be anointed as the second King of Israel, the Bible recalls an amazing contrast for us. In verse 13 we read that the Spirit of the Lord came upon David. This verse is then immediately followed by the opposite statement that is startling and shocks us: *“Now the Spirit of the Lord had departed from Saul and an evil Spirit from the Lord tormented him”* (verse 14).

The chapter opens with God reminding Samuel that he had rejected Saul as King. Saul was chosen as King because the people had longed to be like the nations around them (1 Samuel 8:1-15). The people had been warned by God that a man on the throne would bring problems (1 Samuel 8:7-21). Yet when Saul was chosen to be King, the people were full of joy and celebration. He appeared outwardly to be everything a King should be: he was physically tall. But though tall, he was in fact spiritually small – he was jealous and lived for the praise of his people and he was often disobedient to God's commands. God's verdict was chilling: He rejected Saul as King of his people.

Verses 1-5 God's sovereign plan

God now makes the decision to choose a young man called David, an unlikely candidate for such a lofty and important position. What we see here are the loving ways of grace. The Lord never fails to raise up someone to save; even as he rejected Saul God was secretly preparing David. The nation was about to face another emergency.

In chapter 16 God reveals to Samuel who the new King shall be as he goes to Bethlehem. Though the people had disobeyed in wanting a King, God would turn this disobedience into a blessing. The King who would be chosen by God would be a forerunner of the Messiah that the nation longed for. In verse 2 Samuel was fearful of Saul's reaction. Once more we see that Saul's jealousy is feared by the people and also

by the prophet to the nation. But in Saul's nervousness we find that God is gracious and he leads Samuel to Bethlehem under the guise of offering a sacrifice. Here the Lord helps the prophet Samuel to fulfil this important task even in the face of his fears.

It is against rebellion and rejection that God begins the process of choosing a new King. We need to see that his choice involves sovereign planning. Samuel has been told where to go (Bethlehem), and the King will be chosen at just the right time for the nation. David is part of the sovereign planning of God, for one of David's ancestors is Rahab (Judges 2). We need to see that none of these events is happening by accident; these are all part of a perfect plan formulated in eternity and now worked out in time.

There are lessons: firstly there are no accidents in life, rather the hand of God is at work. Secondly God is well able to bring his plans to pass, God is working all things out for his purpose and his glory. Thirdly, all this is part of God's plan to bring his Son into the world from the line of David. For some of us we may find the notion that God is absolutely in control of life disturbing; however, I think on deeper reflection we should find it comforting and reassuring.

Verses 6-13 God's choice is surprising

In verses 6-13 we see God's choices are sometimes surprising. Samuel does not know who the new King will be. He only knows that he will come from the house of Jesse. Each of the sons now passes before the prophet. In this process God will now make his choice known. The first of Jesse's sons, Eliab, is a fine physical man; Samuel thinks that he surely must be the one, but God tells him it is not him. Other sons also pass before Samuel; each one has merits, but is rejected by the Lord. In verse 7 we see that God does not look at the outward appearance, he looks at the heart. For God sees man in a way that we never see him. When we look at people we look for those who have influence, power and intelligence. However, God looks for people who love Him

and have integrity and character. We, too, can make the same mistake when thinking about a minister for a church. Yes, the person may be a fine preacher, they may be excellent with young people, they may be great at organising events and activities, they may have a wild and vivid imagination, but God looks on the heart – he sees the true character.

In verses 11-13 we see the choice and consequences. All the sons of Jesse have been rejected. Samuel discovers the youngest son is in the fields. It appears that this son is insignificant, for he was not summoned to meet Samuel. When he arrives his name is not even mentioned – he is merely described as the youngest. David is described as a handsome young man who is bright eyed and God tells Samuel to anoint him. No doubt at this moment Jesse and his other sons are absolutely astonished. But here we see that God's choices are special. We can see that God had a plan – he had sent Samuel to a specific town, to a specific family at a particular time to anoint a particular person. The one he had chosen was David, and David would be the next King. In verse 11 we find that God chooses those who are reliable – David is doing his job.

It is also important for us to realise that as David is chosen he is redeemed. God not only saves and redeems his people but he will also call out from them those who will lead. Today God is still looking for people he can call and use for his glory. Do we have the kind of character that God is looking for?

Verses 14-23

David had been anointed and endowed with the Holy Spirit (verse 13). He now goes through a time of preparation. He is prepared in secret and through a time of struggle. During this time Saul occupied the throne until his successor was fully ready. God could even use the madness of the King to train David for his future role.

The way David is trained and prepared for his work by God will often be echoed in the way we are trained by God for our service. For God did not save us to leave us as he found us – no, God calls us to be transformed to become like our King, the Lord Jesus.

To accomplish this transformation, God uses various ways to make us more like Christ. David learns some basic lessons. The first of these is **solitude**: (verse 19) – David is on the hills of Judah with his sheep. He learns how to be alone with God and himself. This is a characteristic that is missing from modern life. The Lord Jesus Christ would take time out to be alone with his Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 6:12). Therefore it is good to reflect on our own lives and maybe the need for us to make time to be alone with God.

Second God uses **secrecy** to prepare David (verse 18). Before David would rule the nation of Israel, he would first spend countless hours alone, unacknowledged and unappreciated. As a shepherd he learned obedience, humility and watchfulness as he cared for his father's sheep. Here is God shaping him for his future role as King.

In verses 21-23 we find David at the court of Saul. Do not see him as standing in the wings about to come onto centre stage. To our minds that would be the logical progression, but we have yet to fully understand the ways of God. The Lord Jesus was driven by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness to be tested and tempted by the devil! The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of conflict (Galatians 5:17), and this is what is happening to David. David nearly loses his life at court and presently becomes homeless, hunted and an outlaw.

So, what can we learn? As David was being prepared by life itself, God was shaping the boy to become a man. This man would become the King of Israel. God may well have you in his sights as a project to work on. He wants to develop your life so as to bring him honour and glory in this day.

Saul and the evil spirit (verses 14-23)

In these verses are the tragic consequences for Saul that has come about because of his rebellion against God. The word, evil, here should be read in terms of injurious (verse 14), namely a spirit that would cause him great angst. Isaiah says: *"I am the Lord, and there is no other. I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things."* (Isaiah 45:6-7). The origin of suffering is one that is very baffling to us, but the people of God are encouraged by the Bible to take adversity of all kinds direct from the Lord's hand. In this case, Saul shows the early signs of mental illness occur when he is confronted by Samuel over the question of obedience to God's commands. So I think it is right to suggest that his illness, which develops as the story progresses, is a consequence of his rebellion against God. We need to remember that a step backwards in rebellion to God often leaves us open to further steps away from God. However it is interesting that God brings comfort to Saul through the ministry of David (verse 23).

Questions on 1 Samuel 16:1-23

1. What precise instructions does the Lord give Samuel for anointing a new king (verses 1-3)? Why was there so much secrecy?
2. Who did Samuel originally think would be David's replacement and what did God say about that man (see 1 Samuel 16:6-7)? Why did Samuel suppose that Eliab was the Lord's anointed (verses 6-7; see also 17:13)?
3. Why are external qualities an untrustworthy way to judge a person (verse 7)?
4. If the group had been given the job of finding the next king of Israel, why would David have been an unlikely option? And in what sense was he also a good option (verses 14-23)?
5. The Lord tells Samuel, "*Man looks at the outward appearance*" (verse 7). What kind of "external" things do we tend to look at in people? How does our culture reinforce our emphasis on appearance? What lessons should we learn?

STUDY 2 – David & Goliath: 1 Samuel 17:20-58

Introduction

It is interesting to consider how many years David was hidden away by God before he would emerge into public. The Bible simply does not tell us how many journeys he made to court or trips to the army, but what we do learn is that his skill and expertise was soon known (verse 38). And now David had grown tall enough to be considered able to wear Saul's armour. It is interesting to speculate on how much had passed into his heart during these hidden times. Remember that the skillful musician has his roots in diligent practice, and when the big moment comes all the years of being the lonely shepherd, facing both the lion and the bear, would no doubt have stood him in good stead. It was the shepherding years that gave him skill and knowledge of God and equipped him for the great test (verses 32, 50). It is interesting to reflect on whether, if David had failed in secret, he would have triumphed in public.

The Bible makes no secret of the forces that are ranged against us as Christians. Often we will face fearsome trials and odds will seem stacked against us. Sadly we tend to forget that this world will always be an area of conflict. We are all too often wanting a cosy and easy life. Often the conflicts and opposition we face is something that both shocks and surprises us.

David's confidence

In verse 1 we learn that, just west of Bethlehem, the Philistines have come with a large force which contains Goliath, the giant. The Philistines are ready for battle; they are ready to destroy the people of God. Think of Goliath's size (verse 4), the equipment for protection (verses 5-6), the attack (verses 6-7) and the strength that he had to carry this all. Here was Goliath who stood before the people of God, confident in his own strength (verses 8-10). It is little wonder then that

he called himself the Philistine, for he saw himself as invincible before the people who seemed so weak and feeble. What, then, is David's response? We see that David has confidence in God's love: Goliath may well vaunt himself as the Philistine but to David he was an uncircumcised Philistine, one who was not sealed with the mark of divine ownership. Goliath had defied the armies of the living God with idols who were both dead and useless. This man, therefore, could make no claim on God's protection or aid; the Lord had made no promises or commitment to the Philistine. David, by contrast, could look to God with confidence (verse 26).

David's motivation

David is not looking for reward (verse 26), but he has a determination that the defiance offered against the Lord by the uncircumcised Philistine should be overturned and defeated. The Lord's name was precious to him, and David was ready to speak up for the Lord when his Name was challenged. We should remember today that the Lord's name is our security and strength.

David's life was one which honoured God by his faith in God. David was ready to speak up for the Lord; he was supremely concerned for God's reputation. I wonder how we would match up? Are we ready to stand up and speak for Christ this week, whether at home or at work, with friends or with family? Though the circumstances of people living today are very different from those living in the Old Testament times, the outlook of David and Goliath represent the outlook of people at any given moment in history. It is the contrast between the believer and non-believer, between the Christian and the non-Christian. If Saul represents the backslidden Christian, who is in open rebellion to God, then Goliath stands before us as the man or woman who does not know God personally. Such a person's faith is in himself and that is what made Goliath both proud and arrogant. It is interesting to ask

ourselves whom we are trusting. Are we trusting in our own work or effort, or are we looking to God?

Surely one of the things that this passage teaches us as Christians is that we must not only be ready to live as Christians but to speak out for Christ. For as long as God's people are silent before the taunts of the world, our silence will only produce fear and not faith. The story of David and Goliath tells us that we need to change. So then, let us be a people who speak up for the Almighty and bring glory to his Name.

Questions on 1 Samuel 17:20-58

1. When you are faced with a situation that seems outside your abilities or alarms you, how do you tend to react? Can you give any examples?
2. Why do think the Israelites were justly frightened of the giant Goliath (verses 1-11)?
3. Why does David come to the battlefield? And when he is with the army, what does he learn about their situation (verses 12-27)?
4. Why was David an unlikely choice as the champion of Israel (verses 15, 33, 38-40)? However, why does God see the situation differently (1 Samuel 16:13)?
5. What impresses you about the conversation and battle between David and Goliath (verses 41-49)? What lessons might be taken from this encounter?
6. Usually, we choose people who are qualified to do a job. Similarly, we only take on jobs for which we feel qualified. Does faith remove the need for qualifications? Why or why not? And when is it proper to trust God to triumph over our limitations?

STUDY 3 – David & Saul, Part 1: 1 Samuel 18:6-30

In our last study you will recall that David had killed Goliath. This great victory immediately took David into the limelight! The quiet days outside Bethlehem had now come to an end. In one giant leap, David achieved both fame and honour. David could well be forgiven for thinking that all his troubles were now behind him – he was off on a life of triumph and celebration. Surely this is a mistake that we can sometimes make as Christians, when we first come to believe in Christ. We need to recall again that after the mountaintop always comes another valley and another mountain. This was precisely the lesson that David would now have to learn – and if anything the next valley would be darker and deeper than the one before.

In the early verses of 1 Samuel 18, the writer skips ahead to show how the victory over Goliath had given a number of very positive blessings for David. Now, in the rest of the chapter, he backtracks to show us one important result that is far from pleasant. We need to recognise that though the result is unpleasant, it is still part of God's plan to mould and shape David to be the true King of Israel.

David, along with Saul and the Israelite armies, has returned from battle. They are greeted by women singing about the great triumph and victory that has been won over the Philistines. In their song the women take some poetic licence exaggerating both Saul's and David's contributions. Since David is the young man and the hero of the hour, he comes into the spotlight. They say, *"Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands"* (verse 7). You can imagine at once that the praise of David is not sweet music to Saul's ears; what he sees is a young man stealing away the hearts of his subjects.

Saul's jealousy

A black cloud of jealousy soon came upon the horizon. Saul could not stand to have his new champion praised more than himself, so he

began to brood on his feelings. I imagine he wondered, if this was what the young man could do in one day, might he not one day replace me as King? He probably also wondered if this was the person that God had chosen to replace him as King. We read Saul's words in verse 8: *"What more can he get but the kingdom?"* From that day onwards, the Bible tells us, Saul kept a close eye on David. He is straightaway suspicious of David and begins to work clandestinely against him. We are told that Saul then has another attack of this distressing spirit that has come from God. The effect of jealousy is still the same today – it eats away at our hearts.

David humbly takes up his former role of playing the harp to soothe the troubled king, but Saul in his madness now tries to kill David with a spear. We need to realise that the sight of God's approval will always provoke a reaction. Sadly the spiritual state of Saul only led to his decline, both physically and spiritually, becoming more rapid. Next he tries to see David killed in battle. As we reflect and think about Saul, we see a man who is being consumed by jealousy, hatred and mistrust. This in turn leads him to become cruel, gloomy and crafty. The effects of this are no less certain today.

Saul's violence then turns to fear: *"When Saul saw how successful he was, he was afraid of him"* (verse 15). What is clear is that Saul, even with all his anger, can see that David is different – the King saw that everything that David did prospered. It is a reminder of how God was also with Joseph in Potiphar's house. I am sure that Saul knew that the source of David's power was the Spirit of God. The anger within Saul grows and we find that he demotes David to command a small military unit. Perhaps he is hoping to take David from the public eye, or hoping that David will be killed in battle. Clearly David continues to find the favour and blessing of God and the people's adulation and praise of him only seems to increase.

David was loved

In the second part of the study, we look at David. David, a young man, has just overcome a strong enemy in Goliath. Straightaway if we look carefully we can see a link to Jesus. At the beginning of his public ministry Jesus had to confront a very powerful enemy in the devil in the wilderness. We need to realise that, just as Jesus had to endure much, so did David to reach his throne. So, during his time of suffering, Jesus, like David, knew both the spiritual love of God his Father but also the hatred and bitterness of men.

The life story of David certainly tells us that he was loved by the people. Both his bearing and his character seemed to attract both the ordinary people as well as the soldiers who served him. On one occasion three of them are willing to dash through the Philistine lines to get him a jug of water. I am sure that during the days when David became a hunted man, it must have been a great comfort to him to know that he was loved.

Yet, although this can be said of David, it can also be said of Jesus, whom David foreshadowed. For did not Jesus, the Son of David, have the admiration of the crowds? Did Jesus, by his love for men and women, know that many would follow him whatever the cost? And are there not thousands upon thousands who love him and yet have not seen him?

It is at this point, in verses 17-19 that Saul now broaches the subject of marriage (love, once more). David reacts with humility, he is amazed at the honour that is being given to him; yet this great honour at the last moment is taken from him, in a way to bring him to the point of humiliation. For the girl, Merab, that is promised to him is suddenly promised to another. Once again the character of both David and Saul come into sharp contrast. Now in verses 20-30 we find that Saul once more looks for an opportunity to make good the promise of marriage to his daughter. But this time David receives word that the second

daughter, Michal, has fallen in love with David. Saul readily decides to allow the two to marry, but not because he has any desire to do good for David, or even for his daughter – he is still hoping to draw David into danger and he is using his daughter as a weapon by which he plans to make this happen. He is expecting his daughter, Michal, to take his side and so to be a snare to David; he also expects David to be drawn into further military exploits to gain the hand of his daughter in marriage. Notice how in verse 22 the servants of Saul speak sweet words to David which are actually full of deceit: *“Look, the King is pleased with you, and his attendants all like you; now become his son-in-law.”* Yes, the payment for the hand of Saul’s daughter is the killing of Philistines but this is something he feels that even as a poor man he can do with God’s aid. So, David and his men kill 200 Philistines and bring this grizzly dowry of foreskins to Saul.

Once again, Saul is made very much aware that it is God who is very much with David. And now to make things worse, David has stolen his daughter’s heart. Yes, it was an honour for David to marry into the King’s family. As the writer, Matthew Henry says, *“If David thus magnified the honour of being the son-in-law to the King, how should we magnify the honour of being sons of the King of Kings!”* We, too, have been adopted by God. Rejoice in that truth and praise God for our adoption.

So, what can we learn for today? I guess firstly we need to ask ourselves what our reaction is to Jesus when he comes to make his stand. His Name is steadily being proclaimed across the world, as the only Name by which men and women can be saved – do we welcome him and accept him as the only Saviour? Sadly, in many homes in our county we will find that people resent and reject his claims. They envy the assurance which a Christian can know; they reject the challenge that Jesus brings! Even today men and women will try to bring Jesus down. Surely that attitude is like Saul. Surely we should remember that people are either like Saul in that they love darkness rather than

light, because their deeds are evil, or they are like David, wanting to serve, to know and to love God.

Questions on 1 Samuel 18:6-30

1. How do you feel when someone or something important to you will be taken away?
2. What do you think was the cause of Saul's antagonistic feelings? What specifically was Saul afraid of (verses 8, 12, 15, 28)?
3. Saul felt bitter, so how had he allowed this bitterness to grow within himself? Is there a difference between anger and bitterness?
4. What evidence is there that the problem became not only an emotional but a spiritual battle (verses 10, 12, 28)? What were the consequences for Saul and others about the destructive nature of his bitterness?
5. What can be the reason in us feeling bitter or resentful today? What was the cause of this bitterness? How did this affect your relationship with others and with God?

STUDY 4 – David & Jonathan: 1 Samuel 18:1-5; 19:1-7; 20:1-9, 20-36

Introduction

I guess each of us has met and know many different people in our lives. Most of them may simply be acquaintances, while others we might consider friends. Yet of these friends, some will become close friends. Such a friend is surely a person who is there with us not just in good times but also in bad, through the thick and thin of life – someone who will never desert us when the going is getting tough. David had such a friend in Jonathan.

With the victory over Goliath, David now moves into high esteem throughout the country. He becomes a trusted commander for the King; he takes up residency in the court of Saul. It seems that not only the King holds him in high honour but also Saul's other servants, even the general public, seem to think well of David. Yet, interestingly, the person who holds him in highest honour is Jonathan, Saul's son. This is how the chapter opens: *"After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself"* (1 Samuel 18:1). Up until this time David had no doubt been seen simply as a hired servant, yet Jonathan now becomes aware of the character of Jesse's son. This love for one another is made all the more poignant by the fact that Jonathan could easily have seen David as a rival and an enemy, as Jonathan is in all respects the crown-prince of Israel. Yet, at this stage it is almost certain that Jonathan is unaware that David has been anointed by Samuel and will in fact become the next King.

These two men seal their friendship by making a covenant to provide mutual support and aid to one another. Jonathan takes off his own robe and places it upon David, and afterwards he gives David his armour, sword, bow and belt. It is interesting to notice that David now stands dressed as the crown-prince himself. Could it be that Jonathan,

acting under the direction of the Holy Spirit, is acknowledging David as the true King and is willing to humble himself before the will of God?

As we arrive in chapter 19, verses 1-7, we find that the plots against David have backfired. Saul is now frustrated and tries to undermine and destroy David once more. He commands all his servants and his son, Jonathan, to kill David. Jonathan's reaction is given to us in verse 2, when he warned David saying, *"My father Saul is looking for a chance to kill you. Be on your guard tomorrow morning; go into hiding and stay there."* Strangely, by Saul giving this order to both his servants and to Jonathan, he wildly overestimates their loyalty and obviously underestimates the esteem in which David is held. In all likelihood, it seems that Saul thought that when it came to the crunch his servants and Jonathan would be loyal to him and follow his orders.

We can see Saul has made a critical mistake in asking Jonathan to raise his hand against David. Rather than lying in wait for David, Jonathan goes to him with a warning. We then find that Jonathan goes one stage further – he places himself in danger by going to Saul to plead David's case: *"Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, 'Let not the King do wrong to his servant David; he has not wronged you, and what he has done has benefited you greatly'"* (verse 4). Jonathan tells his father that sin is crouching at his door, for surely the killing of David would be the taking of innocent blood. Jonathan goes even further, for not only has David not sinned against Saul, he has done good for Saul especially in killing Goliath.

At this point it appears that Saul heeds the words of his son. He rescinds his order with an oath and brings David back to court. Yet we have to ask whether this change of heart is sincere.

By the time we get to chapter 20, we discover that once again David has to run for his life, and he goes to see his great friend, Jonathan, to ask, *"What have I done? What is my crime?"* Jonathan finds it hard to believe this accusation that has come from David's lips, for he imagines

that Saul, his King and father, would always consult with him. Jonathan is wanting to say to David that he has nothing to fear; his panic is unwarranted. Yet David responds with oaths to convince Jonathan of Saul's evil intent: *"But David took an oath and said, 'Your father knows very well that I have found favour in your eyes and he has said to himself, 'Jonathan must not know this or he will be grieved'"* (verse 3). It is at this point that David asks Jonathan to do a bit of detective work, while reminding him of the friendship they have one with another. David asks Jonathan to find out from Saul whether or not he wants him killed and if that is the case for Jonathan then to inform him. This is a way for Jonathan to honour the covenant and promise that he has made to David. They make an agreement for David to hide in the field until news can be brought.

It is during the preparations for the New Moon festival that Saul notices David's empty place, but he reasons that David must have some legitimate excuse for such a major violation of court etiquette. But when, on another day, David's is absent once more, Saul can bear it no longer. Jonathan attempts to present an alibi for David (verse 6-7), that David is away attending a family sacrifice in Bethlehem. On hearing this story, the King explodes and his anger and frustration fall on his son, Jonathan. The accusation that the King makes against Jonathan is that he is not acting as his son! He is seen as rebellious and a traitor and this is why Saul's rage winds itself up into threats of murder and death. This is what we see in verses 30 and 33: *"Saul's anger flared up at Jonathan and he said to him, 'You son of a perverse and rebellious woman!'... Saul hurled his spear at him to kill him. Then Jonathan knew that his father intended to kill David."* It is at this stage that Saul demands that Jonathan brings David into his presence so that he might be killed but Jonathan insists that Saul provide justification for such a sentence. It is remarkable to see such a striking contrast here between Saul and Jonathan: Saul is grasping, ambitious and unsubmitive to God and in contrast Jonathan is giving, content and

yielding to God's will. In Jonathan we have a picture of Jesus Christ, who made himself of no reputation (Philippians 2:7). It is good to ask, then, which example should we follow?

In the final section from verses 35-44, having learned the truth that Saul does indeed intend to murder David, Jonathan follows through without hesitation his commitment to his friend. Along with a small boy, he ventures early in the morning to the field where David is hiding. After shooting his arrows and sending the boy to seek him, he cries out saying, *"Isn't the arrow beyond you? ... Hurry! Go quickly! Don't stop"* (verses 37-38). Of course the young land picking up the arrows knew nothing of the coded message that this statement contained. It is at this moment that David rises from his place of hiding and he falls on his face before Jonathan and bows to him three times. David is only too aware that he owes his life to Jonathan and Jonathan's love for him. Indeed, Jonathan is going to pay a heavy price for his aid and support of David; but he does not lord it over David as a master, rather he embraces him as a brother. They weep as friends, and they must suffer as friends.

What we learn is that David realises that he can no longer stay with Jonathan and there is a final reminder of the goodwill that they share together when Jonathan says, *"Go in peace"* (verse 42). Interestingly Jonathan calls on God to keep a watch over them both to see that they are faithful to what they have promised to do through the covenant that they have made with each other. So David flees while Jonathan returns to his father. They will meet once more in 1 Samuel 23:16, but these great friends will be separated by the hostility and anger of the King, Saul.

David and Jonathan are brothers, they are united by a common faith in God and they hold together the promises of a future redeemer. These two men are in union with one another because they are in union with Christ, and surely if we, too, are in Christ we are brothers with them.

Were David and Jonathan lovers?

It is unfortunate that many people link sex with love. Of course, any two people can be involved in sex, but do not necessarily have to love each other. Such people are the ones who promote the idea of homosexuality between Jonathan and David. Let me say straightaway that Jonathan and David are not gay. This cannot be true as both David and Jonathan were both married, had children, and at least with David we know that he loved women so at the worst he would have been bisexual, not homosexual. We know from 1 Samuel 18 that Jonathan loved David. We also know from 2 Samuel 1:26 that David's lament after Jonathan's death that he said that his love for Jonathan was more wonderful than that of women. These two passages are used as the key to build the argument that David and Jonathan had a homosexual relationship. This interpretation and understanding should be rejected for 3 clear reasons:

1. The Hebrew word for 'love' used here is not a typical word for sexual activity.
2. David's comparison of his relationship with Jonathan with that of a woman is probably a reference to his experience with King Saul's daughter. The love that David had received from Jonathan was greater than anything he could have received from Saul's daughter because there had always been conditions on that relationship. This was not so with Jonathan.
3. The Bible clearly and consistently denounces homosexuality (Genesis 1:26-27; Leviticus 18:22; Romans 1:18-25). Extolling a homosexual relationship between David and Jonathan would be in contradiction to the rest of the Bible's

teaching. What we do know is that friendship between David and Jonathan was based on covenantal love as seen in 1 Samuel 18. It is this agreement between Jonathan and David that was at the heart of their relationship. Clearly these two men were good friends and there were three key qualities that made up their friendship:

- a. They sacrificed for one another (1 Samuel 18:4)
- b. They were loyal to one another (1 Samuel 19:1-3)
- c. They were free to express their emotions with one another (1 Samuel 20).

So, in conclusion, rather than being evidence for a homosexual relationship in the Bible, the account of David and Jonathan is a fine example of true Biblical friendship. True friendship, according to the Bible, will always involve loyalty, sacrifice, compromise and an emotional link.

Questions on 1 Samuel 18:1-5; 19:1-7; 20:1-9, 20-36

1. Why do we value friendship and what makes a good friend?
2. In 1 Samuel 18:1-5 David and Jonathan make a covenant with one another. Can significant experiences (the battle with the Philistines) bind us to people who were previously strangers to us? What do you make of Jonathan's gifts to David? Why could Jonathan become one in spirit with David?
3. Look at 1 Samuel 19:1-7. What did Jonathan say in defence of David? Why did Jonathan defend David? What were the risks that Jonathan took to defend and protect David (verses 3-7)? How did Saul respond to Jonathan's defence of David?
4. How hard was David's life as a fugitive (1 Samuel 20:1-3)? What help did David ask from Jonathan (verses 4-9)? How much did David trust Jonathan?
5. What was the purpose behind David seeking out Jonathan? What did Jonathan seek from David and so show what he had learnt?
6. What can we learn about true friendship from Jonathan and David? How can we have such friendships in today? Do we risk anything for our friends and if so what?

STUDY 5 – David & Saul, Part 2: 1 Samuel 24:1-22

In the closing chapters of 1 Samuel we find that David flees from Saul and takes up a fugitive's existence. David at first shows little trust in God's provision for his safety, instead he wants to rely on his own wits and skills. But what 1 Samuel shows to us is that he grows to a point where he is able to refuse, not one, but two, opportunities to kill Saul. David prefers instead to let God work out his will in his way. There are still failures that come to the fore in David's life: on one occasion David becomes enraged over an insult and is ready to kill, until God intervenes.

When trouble comes the one thing that we tend to look for is a way out. Certainly that was the attitude and outlook of David's men. We would not blame them for seeing themselves under pressure and facing death every day. If only they could rid themselves of Saul, the King, all their hardships and dangers would also disappear. In contrast, David could be patient, at least about his future destiny. He was not placid but he was prepared to wait – this kind of patience is a great Christian virtue which too many of us lack. We believe that God has a purpose for the next stage of our lives, but we are often too impatient to wait for it to happen. As the joke goes, "*God grant me patience, and grant it now!*" It is interesting to spot that a common theme in the Psalms is David's patience, mostly expressed as waiting (Psalm 37:7; 40:1). We need to remember that David knew that he was anointed as King but he was prepared to wait for God's timing for his enthronement.

Verses 1-4: God's way out

It appears that God had given King Saul on a plate to David and his men. All this seemed quite apparent to David's men for two quite obvious reasons: (1) God's plan – there is no record in the Bible of God making a specific promise of verse 4 to David, but they all knew full well that David was to replace Saul as King. So obviously Saul had to be

disposed of! (2) God's opportunity – it was certainly no accident that Saul chose to relieve himself in that particular cave at that particular moment, completely alone and vulnerable. Surely God's hand was in this situation?

What happened in the cave has its funny side; if it was going to be shown on TV it would no doubt be a comic scene where the bad King is caught with his trousers down, and there would probably be laughter that night in the camps of David and amongst Saul's own men. If David did find it funny he did not seem to express it in feelings of humour but rather, as we see in Psalm 57, in seriousness and climaxing with the boundless love of God. David saw this whole event as the hand of God at work. The enemies of God had fallen into their own trap. So there is a lesson here for us: if we are looking for a way out of a tricky and difficult situation, we should certainly look before we leap. David refused to go the easy way, rather he was looking for God's way, God's solution and in God's time.

In verses 5-7 David recognises that this opportunity, though appearing to be 'golden', was in fact a sign for him not to act at all. For everyone looking for God's way through it was obviously wrong to murder someone; and clearly it was even more wrong (if that is possible) to murder a King, one whom God himself had anointed (1 Chronicles 16:22)! We need to realise that sometimes a door may well be open, but it does not mean that if the door is open we should necessarily step through it – it can sometimes be a test of our faith: will we trust God to meet with us in the situation and allow us to be maintained in our faith. David knew that God's plan could never involve him doing something that went against God's word, and that should be the litmus test for our own situations when we are tempted by the circumstances to act in a way that is clearly contrary to the word of God. So, if the situation involves us doing something, even something small, that is contrary to God's word, then that is surely not God's way. I guess we are all the more vulnerable when we feel desperate about a particular

situation and we are scrambling around looking for a way to get out of what is a situation where we feel great pressure. It may well be worth reflecting on what is gripping our life, a passion to do God's will or a longing for an easier life? Surely we again see here an example of Jesus when the cup of suffering is before him: will he take it or will he seek to pass it by?

In the story what we discover is that though David is not to touch Saul physically, he does have the opportunity to speak to his King. When Saul is some distance away, David follows him out of the cave and calls out to him. David refused to take matters into his own hand when Saul was in his power, yet he did not shrink from confronting Saul with his own sin. David, in calling to Saul, is speaking to turn him from his sin and evil ways. David addresses Saul very submissively, calling him his Lord, the King and 'my father'; he even bows before him. So he asks an important question – why the King is listening to such wicked counsel, to those who suggest that David wants to harm him (verse 9)? It is at this moment that David plays his crucial card, he presents proof that he has no ill intent against Saul by informing Saul that the Lord had delivered him out of his hand while he was in the cave (verse 11). As proof of these claims David presents a bit of cloth that he had cut from the corner of Saul's robe, and David makes his appeal to the highest throne of all, the throne of God. He declares that he will let God judge between himself and Saul; David is confident that God will find for him (verse 12). David concludes his speech by reminding Saul that he is chasing after someone who should be of no concern to him, like a dead dog or a flea.

This story shows us David's willingness to submit to God's will. However, that did not stop him from confronting Saul with his sin. Though some may endure persecution, and that without retaliation, it does not bar them from confronting the oppressors with their wickedness. What we must be careful of is not to take vengeance, for that surely is in the hands of God.

In verses 16-22 we find that Saul is now reduced to tears, as he has heard David's speech and realises that David has spared his life and has promised not to do him harm. The words of David have cut deep into his heart. In verse 17, Saul recognises the right living of David and I guess by implication his own poor and wicked treatment of David. Saul is indeed prompted to a change of heart; he, too, speaks of God and of David's destiny as King (verse 20). What we cannot be certain of at this moment is whether Saul means what he says. It seems that repeatedly in Saul's life he has periods of deep conviction and repentance but all too often they are short-lived, and David is wise enough to know that. He promises not to harm Saul's family, but he does not go home with Saul, instead returning once more to the isolation of the desert.

As this chapter closes, Saul asks David to swear an oath that when he becomes King, he will not take vengeance on Saul's descendants, and David willingly does so. Jonathan's line is already protected, as we have seen in an earlier study (1 Samuel 20:15), but now all the descendants are safe.

Saul and David are not reunited. What we witness here are two men, who both will be rulers of Israel, going their separate ways – Saul to his home and David to his stronghold. David is not willing to trust Saul completely; he wants to see the fruit of this repentance, and so he goes away seemingly having gained nothing. David does, however, have the satisfaction of knowing that he obeyed God in what was a difficult and testing situation. He has also received further assurance that he will indeed take up the throne of Israel. And Saul, though his conscience was disturbed for a few moments, was not prepared to give up his evil ways and return to the Lord. So we see that his repentance was not real repentance but merely sorrow without surrender.

Questions on 1 Samuel 24:1-22

1. We often rely on circumstances and the wisdom of friends when making significant decisions. To what extent are these trustworthy guides when making important decisions?
2. In verses 1-4 what did Saul do? What did David do? What factors might have convinced David that it was God's will for him to kill Saul (verses 1-7)?
3. In verses 5-7 what more do you learn about David? Why do you think David places such importance on respecting the Lord's anointed (verse 10)? How do we feel about those who have been appointed to lead us in the church and in society?
4. In the section verses 8-15, how would you retell this part of the story in your own words? In verses 8-15 what opinions does David use to encourage Saul of his innocence?
5. In the final part of the passage (verses 16-22), how does Saul respond to David's advice? What do David's actions force Saul to conclude about David? What do you learn about David? How can we know when to take matters into our own hands and when to leave them in God's hands?
6. What have we learnt from our studies about David on his journey to becoming the next King of Israel?