

KING DAVID

STUDIES IN 2 SAMUEL

© Rev. Andrew Klynsmith

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2Samuel 5:1–25

‘Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron, and said, “Behold, we are your bone and flesh. 2 In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you that led out and brought in Israel; and the LORD said to you, ‘You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel.’” 3 So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel. 4 David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. 5 At Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months; and at Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty–three years. 6 And the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who said to David, “You will not come in here, but the blind and the lame will ward you off” – thinking, “David cannot come in here.” 7 Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David. 8 And David said on that day, “Whoever would smite the Jebusites, let him get up the water shaft to attack the lame and the blind, who are hated by David’s soul.” Therefore it is said, “The blind and the lame shall not come into the house.” 9 And David dwelt in the stronghold, and called it the city of David. And David built the city round about from the Millo inward. 10 And David became greater and greater, for the LORD, the God of hosts, was with him. 11 And Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, also carpenters and masons who built David a house. 12 And David perceived that the LORD had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel. 13 And David took more concubines and wives from Jerusalem, after he came from Hebron; and more sons and daughters were born to David. 14 And these are the names of those who were born to him in Jerusalem: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon, 15 Ibhaz, Elishua, Nepheg, Japhia, 16 Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet. 17 When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over Israel, all the Philistines went up in search of David; but

David heard of it and went down to the stronghold. 18 Now the Philistines had come and spread out in the valley of Rephaim. 19 And David inquired of the LORD, “Shall I go up against the Philistines? Wilt thou give them into my hand?” And the LORD said to David, “Go up; for I will certainly give the Philistines into your hand.” 20 And David came to Baalperazim, and David defeated them there; and he said, “The LORD has broken through my enemies before me, like a bursting flood.” Therefore the name of that place is called Baalperazim. 21 And the Philistines left their idols there, and David and his men carried them away. 22 And the Philistines came up yet again, and spread out in the valley of Rephaim. 23 And when David inquired of the LORD, he said, “You shall not go up; go around to their rear, and come upon them opposite the balsam trees. 24 And when you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, then bestir yourself; for then the LORD has gone out before you to smite the army of the Philistines.” 25 And David did as the LORD commanded him, and smote the Philistines from Geba to Gezer.

In a previous series (*David and Saul*– NCTM Tuesday nights, 1998) the material in 1Sam. 1– 2Sam. 5:5 was covered. In that series we considered the contrast between David, a man of covenant faith, and Saul, a self-justifying contractual operator. This series picks up from when David ascended to the kingship and will follow through the outworking of God’s covenant grace to him. In so doing, we have in our minds echoing constantly that Jesus is great David’s greater Son and through the Gospel he is acknowledged as the Son of David. So through this series we will note also the ways in which the text of 2Samuel points us ahead to this coming Son, in whom the covenant of God is focussed and realised.

One of the things that come clear in David’s rule is that he is not a perfect man, but clearly a sinner. Some words from Tom Torrance’s book, *The Mediation of Christ*, are helpful. Torrance speaks of Israel, and these words about the people can be condensed in this particular person and leader of Israel, David:

“Israel was not chosen by God because of any special religious propensity or insight which it might have, for it was not different in this respect from any other people. Nor was it chosen because it was morally or spiritually worse than

any other people, for that was not the case either. However, within the covenant relationship in which God drew near to Israel and Israel was drawn near to God in an unprecedentedly intimate way, the innate resistance of the human soul and mind resulting from the alienation of man from God inevitably became intensified, so that again and again the rebellion of Israel appears to have been in inverse proportion to the favour of God lavished upon it.... Yet that is what the objective divine revelation had to do in opening up the way through all in-built bias against it for its realisation and actualisation within Israel, and in turning the soul and mind of this people inside out so that it was no longer self-centred but God-centred.”¹

What we have then in these chapters, is the outworking of God’s covenant promises with David who was conceived and born in sin, in such a way that David is not simply the receiver of things, but is himself brought deeper and deeper into the covenant grace of God and so the receiver of responding entry into the presence of God Himself. Anyway, to the text!

2Samuel 5:1–5

This event of the gathering of the whole people to David took place after a period of confusion following Saul’s death, in which Abner, the general of Saul’s army, had initially supported the ascension of one of Saul’s sons, Ishbosheth (2Sam. 2:8). So there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David. Seeing eventually that this would have no future, Abner made a treaty with David (2Sam. 3:12ff), but then was assassinated by Joab, David’s second-in-command (2Sam. 3:26ff). In very nasty circumstances the last vestiges of Saul’s descendants’ claims to the throne were dealt with (2Sam. 4) and David was free to take the kingship. Given this immediate history, the statement of the people to David – Behold we are your bone and flesh may seem a little overstated! There was in fact throughout his reign always an undercurrent of discontent with David’s rule, and this erupted into national division after his and

¹ Thomas F. Torrance, *The Mediation of Christ*, T&T Clark, Edinburgh, 1992, p. 10

Solomon's death. Yet in these words there is right recognition that David is king by divine appointment (v. 2b).

The statement is quite something—we are your bone and flesh—as a description of the relationship between king and people. The phrase could emphasise the fact of kinship (see also Gen. 29:14, 2Sam. 19:12); Brueggemann believes it means yours through strength and weakness. But it most pungently recalls the statement of Adam in the Garden, This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh (Gen. 2:23). The relationship of people to king and king to people was covenantal (v. 3) and close to marriage. So, the duties of king to the people were similar to the duties of husband to wife (Eph. 5:25–30) and the people had the reciprocal duty of respect and obedience (cf. Eph. 5:22–24,33). Certainly David had perceived that this kingship was given to him for the sake of his people (2Sam. 5:12). All this is brought to its head and fulfilment in the Lord Jesus, the Husband–King.

2Samuel 5:6–10

The taking of Jerusalem was a free act on David's part – not explicitly commanded by the Lord. The Jebusite inhabitants obviously thought their city impregnable–You will not come in here. Certainly Israel had failed in trying to take the city decisively previously (see Josh. 15:63, Judg. 1:8, 21). The taking of the city indicated the Lord's favour with him – from this base he grew greater and greater (v. 10) by the Lord's grace. The taunt of the Jebusites–The lame and the blind will ward you off – was turned back by David on their heads (v. 7) – where the lame and the blind, who are hated by David's soul is to be seen as a phrase figuratively speaking of his enemies. Later we will see the kindness of David to lame Mephibosheth (2Sam. 9) which indicates that this is not a literal phrase. In the Gospels it was blind ones who called out, Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on us. (See e.g. Matt. 9:27, 20:30–31.)

2Samuel 5:11–16

David's kingship was recognised as important by the surrounding nations, and for some this included them in the covenant blessings—I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves (Gen 12:3). Hiram was one such; David's receipt of his alliance was in David's mind for the people, and not for his own aggrandisement (cf. Deut. 17:20). The multiplying of wives on David's part was in contradiction of the law for the king in Deut. 17:17. Some of these concubines may have been part of political allegiance. In this action we see a doubleness in David that is being exposed by his success.

2Samuel 5:17–25

As well as those who sort alliance with David, there were those who were opposed to him and Israel (and so to the God of grace.) The Philistines had opposed Israel under Saul, and David's ascension prompted them to even greater efforts (all the Philistines – v. 17). David acted as general–under–God, seeking His direction in his military action. In these battles David was responding to attacks and threats made towards him, and was securing his position. (Later we will see that the military action developed into territorial expansion.) In the first battle, the idols of the Philistines were ineffective in delivering them – they were no gods. When David and his men carried them away (v.21), it was to burn them (see 1Chron. 14:12). That fact that David again inquired of the Lord at the second battle indicates that he did not take for granted the strategy from the previous battle – he needed to know the word of the Lord to him freshly and newly. The marching of the Lord of hosts was the sign for immediate obedience. Seeking the will of the Lord and obeying that will lay at the heart of David's success.

Study 2: 2Samuel 6:1–23

2 Samuel 6:1–5

The gathering of the chosen men had previously been for warfare, but on this occasion it was for worship. They with all the people were to accompany David in bringing the ark of the covenant up to Jerusalem. The last we heard of the ark was in 1Sam. 7:1–2, after it had been returned from captivity by the Philistines. It had been entrusted to the care of Eleazar, most probably a Levite, quite likely a Kohathite – the family responsible for the most holy things – at Kiriath-jearim. Kiriath-jearim was also known as Baalah [Josh. 15:9], and, as it was in the territory of Judah (about 9 miles from Jerusalem), it then may have developed this compound name that we find in 2Samuel. Certainly, the writer expects no confusion on this issue as he gives no explanation.) It was there for twenty years and this was a time of lamentation for the people of Israel, perhaps because the regular life of worship in Israel was disrupted (the tabernacle and priesthood seems still to have been based at Shiloh [1Sam. 4:4.]

Throughout Deuteronomy there is a recurring phrase – ...the place which the LORD your God will choose, to make his name dwell there... (see 12:11; 14:23; 16:2,6,11; 26:2). There was an expectation that the Lord would indicate a place for the centralisation of worship in Israel. This action of David shows that he believes that the place for the Lord's name to dwell is Jerusalem, and so the worship is clearly linked to the kingdom. Probably this came from his correct

understanding that the king was vice-regent to the LORD, the true king of Israel.

The placing of the ark on a cart (even a new one!) was contrary to the law of God. The ark was fitted with four rings, through which long acacia poles were to be slotted and then used to carry the ark on the shoulder [Exod. 25:10ff, Num. 7:1–9]. Carts were permitted for items other than the holy things. This command ensured that there would be no profanation of the holy items.

The worship of the people under David's leadership was ecstatic and joyous and unrestrained.

The word for making merry is related to the name Isaac, both being derived from the verb to laugh. There was much music and joy in this occasion. This manner of worship was in no way wrong (in fact it would have been wrong to not be so joyous) but it was combined with a forgetting of the holiness of the Lord.

2 Samuel 6:6–11

The action of Uzzah may seem to have been reasonable – his desire to not see the ark fall to the ground. However, the ark should never have been placed in the situation where such was possible. By placing his hand to steady the ark, Uzzah profaned it (i.e. treated it as a common object.) David's response was one of anger (v. 8) and of fear (v. 9). Perhaps the anger came because he was frustrated in an attempt to legitimise his kingship, or because he had lost face through this tragedy. His anger issued then a bitter kind of fear – he no longer wanted anything to do with such a dangerous item as the ark (v. 10). It remained with Obed-edom, probably a Levite living in a town associated with the former kingdom of Gath. But by its presence, this man and his household received blessing.

2 Samuel 6:12–15

Seeing this blessing on Obed-edom, David renewed his determination to have the ark in Jerusalem. Again the procession to Jerusalem is joyful and unrestrained, but this time done in proper

order – men bore the ark on their shoulders (v. 13) – and with due reverence for the Lord's holiness – sacrifice being offered at the beginning and the end of the procession (vv. 13,17.) David was also dressed in a linen ephod (priestly garb) rather than the robes of the king, and as king of a kingdom of priests he was entitled so to do. The verb to describe David's dance means whirling and is used only here in the OT. It was obviously energetic, fervent, enthusiastic – done with all his might (in the same way as the first procession's worship had been.)

2 Samuel 6:16–23

Michal was the daughter of Saul, the first king of Israel. She had been given in marriage to David following a great victory against the Philistines (1Sam. 18:20ff) – a battle in which Saul had hoped for David's death. Michal had loved David and had also helped him escape Saul at a crucial time (1Sam. 19:11ff), but then had been given by her father to another man during David's exile (1Sam. 25:44). When David was establishing his kingship over Saul's house he had reclaimed Michal as his wife, but this had caused much sadness (2Sam. 3:14–16) and may have been this action that had embittered Michal's heart against David.

Certainly in this passage there is enmity in her heart to her husband. Perhaps it was that she believed he had lost the dignity of the kingship in this worshipful cavorting before the ark of the Lord. She may have thought a true king would be distant from the people, aloof, inaccessible, dignified. The charge of uncovering himself may mean showing off. These thoughts seem to be the heart of her sarcastic rebuke to David in v. 20. David did not mince his words in response. He indicated that he saw that her rebuke was a denial of the LORD's choice of him over Saul. That is, she opposed not so much him, as the LORD who had chosen him. As to the charge of lowering himself to the level of common folk, he related his making merry to response to the LORD's covenant grace to him. If such response was seen as undignified, he would all the more gladly be counted as even less dignified.

(NB – in my eyes .) He would rather be honoured by those lowly maidservants who accepted God's choice and joyously celebrated it, rather than by a disdainful, dignified queen who opposed God's working.

Michal's childlessness may have resulted from the fact that her relationship with David ended at this point, or it may have been barrenness come as a divine judgment on her (and as a discontinuation of the house of Saul.)

This event is paralleled in many ways in the New Testament accounts of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem. In Matthew 21:1ff, we read of the absolute joy that the king was coming into Jerusalem. The crowds were crying out Hosanna to the Son of David! Jesus' action in this entry was to go to the temple and to clear it of all that interrupted the access of the people to the God of all grace. Those who came to him there in the Temple courts were the blind and the lame (cf. last week's study.) The rulers of Israel, the dignified ones were indignant and criticised the children for what they were saying. Jesus chose to be identified with the children rather than the chief priests and scribes. The next day as he went into the city he saw a fruitless fig tree which was cursed –“May no fruit ever come from you again!”– and that tree stood for Israel as it rejected God's provision of this king for them.

Study 3: 2Samuel 7:1–29

2 Samuel 7:1–3

Most commentators place these verses chronologically after the events of chapters 8, because of the seeming finality of the rest and victory of David (vv. 1 and 9). Yet it does seem from the start of 8:1 (After this...) that the editor of 2Samuel saw this event as prior to the following battles. 7:1 refers particularly to those enemies that sought to undermine his kingship whilst it was being established (which we saw in chapter 5). A palace (=house) has been built with the aid of Hiram of Tyre.

These verses introduce to us Nathan the prophet. As is often the case with the prophets we are given very little background information or history – here in fact, no information at all. What is decisive about the prophet is that he bears the word of the Lord. His authority comes from the word he bears and not at all from his history, education, lineage or status.

David had in mind to build a house for the Lord. It struck him as incongruous that he should live in the glorious cedar palace that had been built, whilst the ark of the Lord was housed in the Tabernacle. In a tent=in a curtain, referring to the inner covering of the Most Holy Place. Nathan gave his assent to David, sensing that what was in David's heart was good, and that the Lord was with him. Commentators here say that Nathan spoke from his own feelings and not from revelation, but I am not sure that such a judgment is

necessary. It is often in going ahead with what we believe that the Lord is calling us to that we find in fact He is not. But we could not find this out if we did not go forward in the wrong direction. He may send us in one direction in order to lead us to another. And what we find is that the desire to serve and honour the Lord (even though it is at that stage misdirected) is strengthened and made more resolute.

What also is shown up is if there is any degree of wilfulness in the pursuit of a particular path. We see this principle exemplified in Acts 16:6–10 where we have the account of Paul and Timothy's travels through Phrygia and Galatia. They had been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak in Asia – which must mean they had intended to go there; they were disallowed from going into Bithynia by the Spirit of Jesus – again meaning they must have attempted to do so; finally a vision was given to Paul calling him to go to Macedonia – and they concluded that God had called them to go there.

2 Samuel 7:4–7

That same night the word of the Lord came to Nathan concerning this matter. This word was a word of covenant grace and blessing. The first element that needed to be addressed was the matter of building the temple. In fact, the Lord had dwelt amongst His people in the Tabernacle, and had not required at any time in their history anything more. Whatever was to become of the Lord's dwelling, it was to be clear that the Lord was not given something He was lacking. He had glorified Himself amongst His people. (Right at the start then of the idea of the temple in Israel there is a clear understanding of its transience, and of the autonomy of the Lord over the Temple. Israel did not have God in a box at their disposal by the building of the Temple.)

2 Samuel 7:8–12

Rather than David giving to the Lord, the Lord now promised to give to David. In verses 8–9a He recounted His faithful dealings with David to this point: He took from humble origins to be prince in

Israel; He has been with him wherever he went; He has cut off all David's enemies. Then in 9b He began His promises to David:

9b – I will make your name great ...

10 – I will appoint a place for my people ... and plant them, that they may dwell in their own place and be disturbed no more ...

11b – I will give you rest from all your enemies ...

11c – Moreover the Lord declares to you that the Lord will make you a house ...

12 – I will raise up your offspring (seed) after you ...

The promises that continue to follow then relate more to the dealings of the Lord with the offspring of David.

The great name is more than fame—but rather renown as a person to whom God has conferred a share in His own glory. The only other place in the Bible where a person is promised a great name is Genesis 12:2 – in the promise of God to Abraham. There are many acclamations of the Lord's great name (e.g. Jer. 10:6, Psa. 76:1, 1 Kings 8:42, 2 Sam. 7:23, 1 Sam. 12:22). Moses found on the mountain that to know the name of the Lord is to know His glory—see Exodus 33–34. In Micah 5:4, the prophet sees one who is to come from Bethlehem (i.e. a descendent of David) who will shepherd the flock in the Lord's strength and in the majesty of His name, that is one whose name is synonymous with the Lord's. He will also dwell secure, which takes up the second and third elements of the promise to David. The promise of the place to dwell in security and rest also takes up the promises to Abraham, and captures also the covenant blessings in Deuteronomy 28. The promises of God to His people are now being focussed on the family of David. This is not to exclude Israel (and the world) from these promises, but indicates the particular way in which the promises are to be outworked in the flow of history. In the words, the Lord will make you a house... see that David's intentions, from a good heart, have now been all reversed by the Lord. What he planned to do for the Lord, the Lord has promised to do for him.

To build a house for David may mean: (i) to provide a palace; (ii) to provide a family; (iii) to ensure a dynasty; and (iv) to provide a

temple. In what follows the buildings recede into the background and the promises of God are centred on the offspring.

2 Samuel 7:13–17

Most naturally this offspring refers to David's immediate successor – but with what follows, it points obviously beyond him to all of David's descendants. But it seems also to look forward to a particular descendent in whom the promises are focussed. This descendent of David was to build a house for the Lord and to receive from the Lord an eternal kingdom. He was to undergo chastening for sins – all of the kings faced this for their sins. Yet Isaiah (52:13–53:12) looks to the servant of the Lord (cf. v. 5) who would be chastened and smitten for sins not his own. The discipline of the Lord to the sinful kings did not mean the end of the steadfast love of the Lord for them. This is an everlasting promise. Even more, this one to come will receive a great inheritance through his righteous suffering under the will of God. Through him David's house will be established.

2 Samuel 7:18–24

David's response to this gracious promise is one of worship before the ark. His prayer begins with a recognition of the utter grace of the Lord in what He has done for David even up to this point (v. 18) and then expresses wonder for this grace upon grace that has come to him (v. 19). The RSV (...and hast shown me future generations...) is an amendment of the text and contrasts with the NIV (...Is this your usual way of dealing with man...?) and indicates that there is an unusual phrase here. Literally it is the law for man. David goes on to deduce from the word to him through Nathan that what he has received is entirely consistent with the Lord's own heart (v. 21) – i.e. this promise to him springs out of the love and grace of God alone. This makes the Lord unique – the greatness of the Lord is measured by His grace. No other gods can even be compared to Him. No other nation has been graced by their gods as the people of Israel have been graced by the Lord. The purpose of this grace was that the Lord would become their God (v. 24).

2 Samuel 7:25–29

Now David makes a request to the Lord. Firstly he asks that the Lord will confirm his promise, by doing as He has spoken (v.25). Such a request presumes the trustworthiness of the Lord to His Word (see vv. 26–28). Then secondly he asks for the Lords blessing on him and his household.

Study 4: 2Samuel 8:1–9:13**2 Samuel 8:1**

The whole of this chapter deals with David's success in the military and diplomatic spheres of the kingdom. When he came to power his kingdom was set in the midst of a host of threatening powers and nations who were accustomed to take advantage of any weakness and to invade at will. (Hence, Saul had early on in his reign dealt with the Philistines 5 – with David's help – but when he was distracted by his mad hunt for David, the Philistines had again become a power and threat to Israel – to the extent that Saul was killed by them.) Gods saving plan for the world involved the continuation of the distinct people of Israel, and so David s military action must be seen in that light.

David's defeat of the Philistines had begun in 1Sam. 5, but here involved reclaiming territory from them. No one is sure where Methegh–ammah is; quite possibly it is the mother city of the Philistine territory. (*Methegh* = bridle, and hence control; *ammah* = mother.)

2 Samuel 8:2

Moab also was subdued by David. Before and during Saul s reign, Moab had been a continual thorn in the flesh to Israel – 1Sam. 12:9; 14:47. David had sent his parents to live under the protection of

the Moabite king during Saul's persecution of him (1Sam. 22:3–4). He let the king assume his allegiance against Saul (though in fact that was never the case.) David's ancestor Ruth was a Moabitess who had aligned herself with the God and the people of Israel (Ruth 1:16–17), and so who had become a sharer in the covenant blessings. However the rest of Moab, by their opposition to the people of God had come under the curse of the covenant (Gen. 12:1–3). This severe dealing with Moab recognised this inherent enmity in them towards Israel. Yet Moab was not destroyed – but note that they now bring tribute.

2 Samuel 8:3–8

Zobah is far to the north of Israel's territory. Saul had had cause to fight against Zobah (1Sam. 14:47) who is there listed as an enemy. He took advantage of a weak moment for this king – as he went to restore his power at the river Euphrates. Could it be that this was a religious ritual (cf. 2Kings 5:11ff.)? If so, then this is the triumph of the LORD over the idols. The Syrians were another great power, and they sought to aid Hadadezer against Israel, but again this resulted in their being made vassals to David. The booty that David took was (we see later in v. 11) dedicated to the LORD. Garrisons were established to prevent later rebellion if military presence was removed. Key to this section is verse 6b – And the LORD gave victory to David wherever he went. This action is not simply the megalomania of an autonomous king; this is the outworking of the plan and will of God for the nations of the world.

2 Samuel 8:9–14

The action of **Toi** were then in line with the promise to Abraham that those who blessed Israel would be blessed. Hamath was one hundred miles north still of Syria. (The attached map indicates the various areas mentioned in these verses.) On his return to Jerusalem David also went further south to subdue the Edomites, again establishing garrisons to guard the situation. Again the formula of v. 6b is repeated in v. 14 – the LORD gave victory to David wherever he went. The writer is not building up a hero-cult; his interest is in establishing faith.

2 Samuel 8:15–18

This vast expansion of David's kingdom meant that there had to be an expansion also of the administration and organisation. We see God-given wisdom in David's dealings here. Key personnel were appointed to responsibilities, although David kept the matters of justice in his own hands (v. 15). This was wise as it ensured that justice and equity would be dispensed without discrimination along tribal lines. David was no longer general of the Israelite army – this was handed over to Joab. A guard of Cherethites and Pelethites – mercenaries probably from Crete and beyond – were David's personal bodyguards and were not under Joab's direction but rather Benaiah. Having foreigners as his bodyguard was a wise move, again protecting him from rivalry amongst the tribes, which may have led to an assassination attempt. Not having Joab in charge of his bodyguard also gave David a degree of protection against him, should he decide to attempt to take over the kingship. The appointing of dual chief priests meant that the descendants of Eli (Shiloh/Moses) and the descendants of Aaron (Hebron/Aaron) needed to work together and not in rivalry. The recorder, Jehoshaphat (v. 16) had the role of informing and advising the king, and communicating the king's commands (he could have been the herald.) The duties of the secretary may have been that of recording the decisions and decrees of the king for proclamation. David's sons were said to be priests – but quite likely this means that they deputised for David in the worship responsibilities that he had.

2 Samuel 9:1–8

The events in this section show David to be a man of his word. In 1Sam. 20, David and Jonathan had pledged covenant faithfulness to one another – see especially vv. 14–17: If I am still alive, show me the loyal love of the LORD, that I may not die; and do not cut off your loyalty from my house for ever. When the LORD cuts off every one of the enemies of David from the face of the earth, let not the name of Jonathan be cut off from the house of David. And may the LORD take vengeance on David's enemies.” And Jonathan made

David swear again by his love for him; for he loved him as he loved his own soul. Now that David had rest from his enemies, the time had come for the fulfilment of this promise.

Mephibosheth was 5 years old when Saul and Jonathan were killed in battle (2Sam. 4:4) and at that time, when he would have been a target for assassination, he was made lame in an accident.

In his speaking to Ziba, David threw open the promise wider than it had originally been given – letting any descendent of Saul be included in this faithfulness. The politics during the establishment of the house of David over the house of Saul meant that the descendants of Saul had made themselves scarce, and so David needed advice in this matter. Mephibosheth's expectation when David summoned him was not of grace, but rather was fearful. David's words to him must have been almost unbelievable – they were words of grace and generosity. It is hard to know what to make of Mephibosheth's response. It seems morbid and joyless and so it is hard to discern that the grace of David's action has come through to him. We know that later he will turn against David. So perhaps this grace has come to him while he is still an enemy.

2 Samuel 9:9–13

Ziba was obviously a man of some standing himself, having 20 servants to serve him and his 15 sons. He and his household are now to be devoted to serving Mephibosheth. That such a large household is required to manage Mephibosheth's properties indicates how generous David's action was. Mephibosheth was to be part of the life of the court (again cf. the lame and the blind – 5:8). The kindness of God that David had received (9:3) was shown by David in like measure, freely giving in free grace to those who are undeserving and who actually pose a threat to him.

Study 5: 2Samuel 10:1–19

2 Samuel 10:1

The king of Ammonites here is Nahash (see v. 2). Israel's relationship to the Ammonites was somewhat complex. This nation was descended from one of the daughters of Lot who were by child by their father when he was drunk (Gen. 19:30–38). In the exodus from Egypt, Israel was instructed by the Lord to neither harass nor contend with the Ammonites, for none of their land was to become Israel's (Deut. 2:19) – an instruction which they followed (Num. 21:24). During the time of the judges, the Ammonites sided with the enemies of Israel. In Judges 3:12ff, Eglon, king of Moab gathered the Ammonites and the Amalekites against Israel. In Judges 10–11 we see Ammon ranged against Israel who were led by Jephthah against them. The complaint of the Ammonites was that Israel had taken land from them (Jdg. 11:13), to which Jephthah could clearly respond that they did not take any Ammonite or Moabite land (Jdg. 11:15–27). During the time of Saul's reign the Ammonites, under Nahash, had continued to be opposed to Israel – 1Sam. 11:1; 14:47. In fact this had been the 'prompt' for Israel to have a king over them like the nations – 1Sam. 12:12. (The capital of the Ammonite kingdom – Rabbah – is now known as Amman, the capital of Jordan.)

2 Samuel 10:2

David responded to the death of Nahash by extending covenant loyalty to Hanun his son. Obviously David and Nahash had

established good relations, although we are not given any indication of how this came to be in the narrative of 1–2 Samuel. It may be that following the defeat of Nahash by Saul, there had been peace between the two nations, based on Ammon's subservience.

'I will deal loyally' = 'show kindness in 9:1,3 – and the word for kindness is *chesed*. This is 'steadfast love' or covenant love. Whether a particular covenantal agreement between Israel and Ammon is signified here, or whether David is simply acting in line with the faithfulness and kindness of God is not clear. Certainly his action of sending a delegation to console the new king was more than simple diplomacy on David's part – it was an action of faith.

2 Samuel 10:3–4

As is often the case with advisers to kings in the Scriptures (e.g. Rehoboam's advisers following Solomon's death – 1Kings 12:6–11), the king is encouraged to deal harshly and suspiciously with David's delegates. Perhaps they thought they were in a position to throw off the shackles of Israel's supervision. David's consoling act may have been interpreted by them as weakness. Hanun subjected the men to a form of humiliation, denigrating their manhood. In so doing, it was to represent a mocking or shaming of David. David's kindness was met with opposition and antagonism.

2 Samuel 10:5

The first action of David when he heard of this was to think of the delegates. He sent a sensitive, consoling word to them, giving them time to recover their signs of manhood before reappearing publicly in Jerusalem.

2 Samuel 10:6–8

This action by Hanun had its effect of making the Ammonites 'odious to David' – and they took steps to secure themselves against his wrath. They hired mercenaries from the Syrian nations, and from the Maacathites (with their king) and the Tobites. This is a

formidable alliance! It is only in response to this gathering of forces that David then acted, by sending Joab (the general) and 'all the host of the mighty men', that is the special force of the best troops. What met Joab then was an enemy before and behind.

2 Samuel 10:9–14

Joab showed himself to be brilliant military tactician in the ensuing battle, as well as a man of some faith. He led the battle against the Syrians (and the Maacathites and Tobites) – the more daunting of the tasks – and his brother Abishai led a force against the Ammonites near Rabbah. Both forces were to come to the aid of the other should they be overwhelmed in battle. Joab's words of encouragement indicate some doubleness in his faith: 'Be of good courage, and let us play the man for our people, and for the cities of our God; and may the LORD do what seems good to him (2Sam. 10:12).' He is fighting for our people and the cities of our God., yet he seems to be unsure of the outcome of the battle, whether God is actually with them or not. There is not the note of David's assurance against Goliath (1Sam. 17:26) in Joab's words. He may have been more a fatalist than a believer in the sovereign Lord God.

Certainly, there is no doubt about the outcome of the battle – immediate success to Israel! Yet Israel did not enter Rabbah to take it – the Ammonites were able to retreat there – in line with the promise of God concerning the Ammonite territory. (This changes in the next chapter.) Israel's desire here is to have a peaceable neighbour.

2 Samuel 10:15–19

The Syrians now saw themselves under threat from Israel, having been involved in this alliance. This federation of Aramean states was too powerful to take this defeat as decisive. They gathered reinforcements from their territories, and under Shobach their general they gathered to march against Israel. David did not wait for them to arrive, but led the army himself out to engage them. Again the army

of David had immediate and total success. Shobach the general was mortally wounded in the battle. The little city-states in the region recognised that the Syrians were no longer the dominant power and made peace with Israel. Syria also withdrew its help from Ammon. Peace was freshly established on David's terms.

This chapter shows David's gracious dealing with Ammon rejected. It is clear that David's covenant faithfulness is not to be mistaken for cowardice or softness, and that to take advantage of his *chesed* results in fierce retribution and decisiveness. As we pointed out last week, we must not judge the nation Israel by the standards of the church. What was required of Israel as a political-military nation is different to the actions required of the church in the world. The survival of Israel as a distinct nation was essential in God's salvation history plan. We also must not lose sight of the fact that the judgments of God were working out amongst the nations of the world, particularly in line with the Abrahamic promise in Genesis 12.

All this is a preface to the sharp contrast we see between David's response to his enemies, and Jesus Christ's. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught,

'You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' But I say to you, Do not resist one who is evil. But if any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if any one would sue you and take your coat, let him have your cloak as well; and if any one forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.... You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust... (Matt. 5:38-45).'

When the *chesed* of Christ was rejected by Israel and the world, love still came to us through him. 'And you, who once were estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him... (Col. 1:21-22).' 'But God shows his

love for us in that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we are now justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life (Rom. 5:8-10).' For all this, we must see too that the New Testament is clear that there comes a time when the enemies of Christ, who refuse to be turned by his love for them, will be made to submit to him – see Luke 19:27, 1Cor. 15:25, Heb. 10:13,27, also the many references to Psalm 2 throughout the New Testament.

Study 6: 2Samuel 11:1–27

2 Samuel 11:1

The matter of the Ammonites is again introduced here (and only finished with in 12:26–31). Winter was customarily not a good time for warfare, as travelling was difficult. The Hebrew behind the phrase ‘...when kings go forth to battle...’ is a little problematic. As it stands, it could indicate that David has begun acting in the ‘usual way’ of kings, without regard to the rightness or wrongness of the actions. However it is possible that the phrase could better be read as meaning ‘...at the (same) time (of year) as the envoys [i.e. the messengers who had gone to console Hanun] had marched out...’ In that case the stress is on the resuming of a battle that had a hiatus due to winter. David remained in Jerusalem during this time – perhaps again indicating an adoption of a kind of *droit de seigneur*.

2 Samuel 11:2–5

David’s act of adultery is recounted in very short and objective manner. The placing of David on the roof is mentioned twice – indicating his own growing self-exaltation. What follows is the action of a man who assumes he is lord of all he surveys. From David’s point of view all that important is that this is a very beautiful woman. The information from the servants with regard to her name and her marriage is not considered by him of any importance. This information should have stayed him from this course of action. Verse 4 spells out the adultery in very short verbs – ‘he sent ... he took ...

she came ... he lay ... she returned’: this is an act of lust. The mention of her purification makes clear that she is not pregnant at this time. The next verse holds a terrible verb for this irresponsible act of David’s – ‘she conceived.’

What see of David in this action is that he has become a taker (v. 4). That this would typify Israel’s kings was spoken of by Samuel in 1Sam. 8:11–19. Until this point David had been a receiver, and not a taker/grasper. This action indicates that his mind is no longer grasped by the grace of God. David has become a man of power – but not the power of God.

2 Samuel 11:6–13

David acted decisively to cover his tracks. His sending for Joab could well have been an opportunity for confession, but there is no hint in the text that this thought has crossed his mind. Uriah is a Hittite – not an Israelite, but one who has come to inherit the Abrahamic blessing through faith. The questions of David in verse 7 are a kind of small talk: each area of enquiry involves the word shalom – the welfare of Joab, the welfare of the people, the welfare of the war. Note that Uriah’s answer is not recorded – subtly indicating that David is not at all interested in the answer. He is trying to appear to be a genuine and concerned person. He speaks of peace, but his words harbour warfare. (In Psalm 28:3, David himself prays these words: ‘Take me not off with the wicked, with those who are workers of evil, who speak peace with their neighbours, while mischief is in their hearts.’) Whatever Uriah has said has no consequence for David; what matters to him is in verse 8 – he dismisses Uriah that he should go to be with his wife. David cannot even bring himself to mention Uriah’s wife, but speaks of his seeing her euphemistically (cf. v.11.) The gift that followed was a hidden bribe.

The only problem with David’s ploy is Uriah, who is a man of integrity and faith. He does not go to see his wife, for it seems

incongruous to him that he should do so. The ark of the Lord dwells in a booth, the army is camping in the field – and so Uriah sees it not right that he should enjoy the comfort of his wife and home. His final affirmation is one of loyalty to David – ‘as you live and as your soul lives’ – perhaps even calling on David’s example as the basis for his action. David himself had been concerned that the ark dwelt in a tent when he had the comfort of the place (2Sam. 7:2)

This promise based on loyalty must have cut like a knife into David. But it seems that David recognises only that this is a man of integrity, and that another solution will be needed. Even when David has calculatingly entertained Uriah, and made him drunk, Uriah will not go down to see his wife. Acts of intimacy, communion, peace and friendship have become in David’s hands the weapons of war.

2 Samuel 11:14–21

The first action of David in the morning is to secure the cover up by another means – the death of Uriah. Whilst there must have been courtiers who knew of the involvement of David in adultery, the only person who is a threat to him is this loyal Hittite. The action that David calls Joab to undertake will bring Joab under a degree of condemnation. This may well be why David commits the matter to paper – a dangerous thing to do in a cover up! Joab then has ‘evidence’ should he be left to carry the can for the actions that follow; David provides him security. His command to Joab concerning the placement of Uriah in a fatal situation is very explicit and clear; he wants Uriah dead. Not only will he take this man’s wife, he will take his life. Uriah will give his life in loyalty to David and the Lord; but David does not receive it as a gift of love, he takes it in an act of greed.

Joab acted obediently to David’s command. The ‘valiant men’ of v. 16 are Ammonites: Uriah is placed in a very difficult place. Others also are killed in battle with Uriah. A report is sent to David concerning the battle. Joab ensures, carefully so as to not give too much away to the messenger but more than enough to David, that

David is clear that he cannot blame Joab for the casualties. Undoubtedly David, wishing to cover his tracks, would react with some outrage to this battle report. His reminding of David about the death of Abimelech at Thebez by the hand of a woman may indicate that he has guessed, or heard on the grapevine, what the issue is that has caused David’s action. His one sentence – ‘Your servant, Uriah the Hittite is dead also’ – would ensure that no further investigation of the battle losses would be undertaken.

2 Samuel 11:22–25

As he listens to the messenger, David is really interested in one matter only – the fate of Uriah. Joab need not have bothered with trying to cover himself, as the messenger hardly needed to elaborate on the events. David must have heard of Uriah’s death with relief – his tracks are covered, the pregnancy will now be reassigned to Uriah, he is free from the burden of fearing exposure, the monarchy is saved! His message back to Joab is terribly cynical: ‘Do not let this trouble you...’ is literally ‘Do not let this thing be evil in your eyes...’ and so stands in contrast with v. 27 – ‘But the thing that David had done was evil in the Lord’s eyes...’ David is trying perhaps to console himself with his message to Joab – ‘Such is the nature of war – it is a bloody business, and men die. Be encouraged Joab, continue the good fight.’ But this was not a matter of war – this was a matter of murder.

2 Samuel 11:26–27

What follows is that Uriah’s wife (note that this phrase is used right up until 12:24, after David’s repentance – David has not changed the reality, even if he has covered his tracks) mourns her husband and then marries David. (Note that even in Matthew’s genealogy she is still called ‘Uriah’s wife.’) The child that was conceived is born, and so ends the tale – all covered and dealt with.

But not so – the thing David had done displeased the Lord. The eyes of the Lord will outsee the eyes of David.

Study 7: 2Samuel 12:1–31

2 Samuel 12:1a

The thing that David had done in his adultery with Bathsheba and the arrangement of the death of Uriah, and which he thought he had covered over, ‘was evil in the Lord’s eyes.’ The response of the Lord to this evil action was to send the prophetic word through Nathan. The sending of the prophets to sinners is always an act of grace and love, even though it may issue in judgment. Through the prophet word of the Lord comes into the situation – and that word is the word of Him who is holy love. Received as such it is a word which gives repentance and assures of forgiveness. Where it is not received, it brings judgment and discipline.

2 Samuel 12:1b–4

Given David’s growing arrogance and self-exaltation, we may be amazed that Nathan could even get a hearing. Yet the Word of God creates its own audience; it commands that it be heard (even by those who detest its message.) Nathan began his ministry with what we know to be a parable, but which David clearly understood to be a real case, perhaps one that the local courts had not handled well. The case involved a rich man and a poor man – and such cases always arouse the interest of guilty human beings. A great anger lives in the hearts of those who (even unknowingly) are caught in sin and guilt, and expresses itself at injustice.

The rich man’s description is very brief – he had everything (and what he had would self-perpetuate.) The poor man occupies the attention of the parable though. He had one female lamb, which he had had to buy. It was his whole property, he treasured it and he cared for it dearly and with tender love. The rich man needed lunch to entertain a visitor, but did not want to bear the cost himself, and so he stole the poor man’s lamb, killed it and fed his visitor. The rich man is portrayed as a taker.

2 Samuel 12:5–6

David’s erupted in anger. He believed the case to be real (and in a sense it was!) but his anger is finally a self-judgment. He swore an oath – ‘As the Lord lives!’ – to bring this man to judgment. He recognised that such greed and self-obsession was worthy of death, and insisted that the reparation of the wrong be generous. All this may seem to be the action of justice, but as James tells us, ‘the anger of man does not work the righteousness of God (Jas. 1:20).’ In fact, what it is in this case is self-justification. The irony is that as David justifies himself by this ‘righteous anger’ in fact he pours down judgment upon himself! A similar thing happened when Jesus told a parable to some chief priests and scribes in Matthew 21:33–41. There, the angry leaders did not recognise that they themselves were those who rejected the heir. In their anger they judged themselves (v. 41.)

2 Samuel 12:7–12

The response of Nathan was direct, bold, and penetrating. It was the word of the Lord, living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, penetrating to divide soul and spirit, joints and marrow, judging the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. ‘You are the man.’ What David had thought was buried – perhaps even in the secret places of his heart he had buried deep enough that it would not visit him in those lonely hours of the night – was now shown to be known to the Lord.

At this point now the direct word of the Lord to David could be spoken. Firstly, the Lord recounted his own gracious dealings with David. That dealing is marked by the Lord's constant giving to David. 'I anointed you ... I delivered you ... I gave you ... and gave you ... and if this were too little, I would add to you as much more.' There is no sense of the discontinuing of grace in this last phrase, but exactly the opposite. Grace has not been earned by David's faithfulness.

The Lord then indicted David on his behaviour. At the heart of it all is David's despising of the word of the Lord – that is, he has seen himself as autonomous, not responsive to the Lord's word. The particular way in which this has happened has been through the breaking of three of the commandments – killing, adultery and coveting. This is a violation of the relationship that the Lord had established with him in His sovereign grace.

Yet the relationship still stood – even though it now involved the element of discipline or judgment. Judgment begins at the household of God. That judgment for David meant that the sword would never depart from his house (v. 10). David's dynasty will continue, but through great danger and troubles, warfare and bloodshed. Moreover, evil for David will arise from his own household. His harem, partially inherited from Saul as a sign of the transfer of power, will be taken by David's 'neighbour', i.e. one close to him, and lead to David's humiliation. What David had done was hidden, but his humiliation would be public.

2 Samuel 12:13a

David's response was a direct and simple confession – 'I have sinned against the Lord.' The word of the Lord had been truly received by him – and so there was no attempt to justify or excuse his actions, nor to tone it down, nor to wheedle out of the judgment. And so David showed that he was a justified man. 'As long as we flee God's judgment and are angry at Him, we are not righteous before Him.

(Melancthon, *Apology to the Augsburg Confession*)' Note too that David saw his action in its relation to the Lord – 'Against thee, thee only, have I sinned and done that which is evil in thy sight, so that thou art justified in thy sentence and blameless in thy judgment (Psa. 51:4).'

2 Samuel 12:13b–15a

The confession enabled Nathan to announce the forgiveness of the Lord to David – 'The Lord has put away your sin.' The death penalty which David had pronounced on himself – rightly – was removed – 'You shall not die.' Yet the elements of judgment and discipline continue – and they are expanded. This deed has been one by which David has scorned the Lord – and a consequence is that death will come to the child conceived by the act.

2 Samuel 12:15b–25

The word of the Lord came to pass – and the child became sick. David, who had heard the word of judgment, now came to pray and fast to the Lord for the child. How could he not, knowing that God was the God of all grace (see v. 22)? He did not resent the judgment, nor did he resent the Lord. When the child died, his advisers, seeing his care for the child, were afraid to tell him. When finally he perceived their unease and asked them directly and discovered the child's death, his response surprised them. He responded with worship and return to full life. Again, he did not resent the Lord's dealings with him. He accepted His judgment. That the Lord has truly forgiven him is seen in his care and devotion to Bathsheba, now his wife. He comforted her. A child was conceived and born to them – Solomon. The Lord sent word via Nathan concerning this child – He loved him and so his other name was to be Jedidiah – 'loved by the Lord.'

2 Samuel 12:26–31

The war with the Ammonites is now concluded with a great success – David himself leading the troops into battle at Rabbah,

conquering the stronghold, claiming the crown of that city, and subjecting the inhabitants to slavery in his capital works programme. This victory is a sign of God's covenant favour resting on this forgiven sinner who had received forgiveness and turned from his sinful ways.

Study 8: 2Samuel 13:1–39

2Samuel 13:1–2

Absalom and Amnon are mentioned in 2Sam. 3:2–3. Amnon was David's firstborn son, and so the natural successor to the throne when David was to die, and Absalom was the third. The issue of the succession to the throne lies in the shadows in the events of this chapter. The second son, Chileab, born to Abigail, is not mentioned anywhere else in the Scriptures (except in the parallel passage in 1Chr. 3:1 – where he is called Daniel) and so we can perhaps presume that he had died. Absalom's sister Tamar was very beautiful, and Amnon loved her. The word there would indicate true love – but whether this is the case is revealed by the actions. Amnon's love–desire for Tamar was not right – she being his half–sister (a relationship prohibited by the law of God – see Lev. 18:9,11; 20:17; Deut. 27:22), and the torment that Amnon felt was not the sickness of love felt by the woman in the Song of Songs (2:5) but rather is closer to the wasting away of the body that David knew in his sin (Psa. 32:3–4). Amnon wanted that which he knew was forbidden him by the law and by social convention but couldn't see his way clear to getting it.

2Samuel 13:3–6

Jonadab is described as a friend of Amnon, and as a very crafty man. Proverbs 18:24 – 'There are friends who pretend to be friends...' – his craftiness (the word used here normally indicates a

kind of ethical element to shrewdness which is absent here) is exposed through this chapter to be a strong self-interest so that his friendship is not at all trustworthy. The truly trustworthy friend is the one who remains faithful to the Lord and His word and who will even speak that word in rebuke when necessary: Proverbs 27:6 – ‘Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.’ No true friendship ever encourages a person to walk outside the way of the Lord.

Jonadab had noticed the haggard look that Amnon had developed through his torment. His advice was clever in that he did not explicitly tell Amnon to force himself on Tamar, but simply set up a situation of intimacy that made the act of rape possible. Jonadab’s ruse was also clever in implicating David in the event – even though unwitting.

David is remarkable absent in this chapter – although he does seem to have shown an interest in his sons when they were ill, visiting Amnon as he did. It may well have been that David had Amnon as his favourite, being as he was the natural successor. Amnon’s request is devious, but even on the surface it should have appeared to David to be petulant – that Amnon would eat only from the hand of Tamar. David displayed weakness in dealing with his sons – and perhaps this flowed from his own compromised integrity.

2Samuel 13:7–14

David followed Amnon’s request and sent Tamar to him. Amnon’s desire is obsessive—he watched her make the cakes. The word for cakes is *lebiboth*, which comes from the word *lebab* – ‘heart’, and this may have referred to their shape. Probably they were a kind of dumpling as they were boiled (not baked). Having been served the food, Amnon refused to eat – ill as he was (or rather, was pretending to be) he could not bear to have so many people around, and he sent all out except that he recalled Tamar to bring him the food.

At this private point, Amnon now made clear to Tamar his lustful intent – ‘Come, lie with me, my sister.’ The statement is accompanied by his seizing her. Her response to him was direct – no, such an act would be against the way of Israel (I believe that she means the law of God), that it would be folly (foolishness – linked with disobedience to the law), that it would only bring shame to her, and that it would only bring shame and disgrace to Amnon. One thing that he did not do was cry out for help – and so she was partially culpable in this matter (see Deut. 22:23–29). She pleaded that Amnon approach David for her to be given to him in marriage. Whilst such a union was against the law of God, she was arguing that it would be better than rape. She was looking for some way out of the situation. Amnon’s so-called love for Tamar was finally shown to be an exercise of power and lust and self-interest – he would not listen to her, and he used his strength to overpower her and to rape her.

2Samuel 13:15–19

Amnon’s guilt at his action – though not spoken of – must have lain behind the sudden change of heart he had concerning Tamar. Following the rape he was repulsed by her – ‘hated her with very great hatred.’ His hatred was greater than his desire. To even see Tamar would be a confrontation with himself: his utter self-obsession, sinfulness and foolishness. And so he dismissed her – not even calling her by name. (Note how the chief priests dismissed Judas when he tried to return the silver he had received for betraying Christ – Matt. 27:3–10.) Tamar knew the law regarding virgins and rape, and she knew that what Amnon was doing was compounding the sin – it was worse because he was not accepting the responsibility that was his (see Deut. 22:28–29, Exod. 22:16–17). She became ‘this woman’ and the door was bolted after her departure. Tamar lamented her shaming, which ended any hope Amnon had that he could simply cover up the matter. The robe that Tamar tore was a robe worn by virgins – her action would have indicated very clearly that her virginity was lost.

2Samuel 13:20–22

Absalom's response indicates that he may have suspected Amnon prior to this – or that he had heard on the royal grapevine what had happened. His advice to Tamar seems to be light. He even called Amnon by a diminutive name (Aminon) – like a nickname or pet name within a family – and reminded her that he was her brother. His advice was that she hold her peace – and that she not take this to heart. Yet Absalom was going to carry this outrage in his own heart. Perhaps he was conveying this to her in his words.

His words did not bring any real comfort to Tamar however, and she dwelt a desolate woman in his house. – isolated from society, disqualified from marriage, violated, used and disposed of. This desolation would have been compounded by her own failure to cry out. The wounds of rape or of sexual abuse are deep – especially where there is some complicity in the act – but they are not beyond healing. He who cried out the terrible cry of desolation has balm for the healing of all the wounds of soul. He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.

Absalom himself held his anger within himself – but did not speak to Amnon. This anger festered and grew in hateful strength, waiting for an opportune time. David's oblivion to the dynamics in his sons' relationship seems irresponsible.

2Samuel 13:23–29

The time of waiting took a full two years. The festivities associated with sheep-shearing and David's inability to attend gave Absalom an opportunity. David's question – 'Why should he go with you?' – and initial reluctance to send Amnon indicates a suspicion in David about Absalom's action, but he did not interfere. His refusal to restrain his children was a weakness in him, as in others (e.g. Eli). Absalom had his men strike Amnon down when he was drunk. Following this act, they fled. (This word occurs also in vv. 34, 37 and 38 – speaking there of Absalom. Emphasis is placed in the rift within the royal house.)

2Samuel 13:30–39

'The report of this event to David was highly exaggerated – disaster! – and David's response was quite in order. Note how Jonadab was still playing his crafty game, now appearing to be on David's side. His complicity in the situation gave him an insight into how Absalom's mind would work. When events turn out as he had spoken he wanted the king to know that it was as he had said – he was still positioning himself.

David mourned for his son day after day – this is ambiguous in that we don't know which son: Amnon who had died or Absalom who was cut off. Yet verse 39 seems to indicate that it was the latter. David was a realist, and knew that nothing could be done to restore Amnon to him, but he still held out hope for reconciliation with Absalom.

Study 9: 2Samuel 14:1–33

2Samuel 14:1

This chapter begins after the three year exile of Absalom in Geshur. Joab was a man of some discernment, and he recognised the longing in David for reconciliation with Absalom his son which wrestled with David's knowledge too that Absalom's action (murder) needed to be judged. The phrase 'the king's heart went out' seems to parallel 13:39 'the spirit of the king longed to go forth' – but the word used for 'went out' called also mean 'went against' – indicating the dilemma in which David found himself to be. Perhaps Joab pursued the course of action that followed because he also could foresee a division in the kingdom if David and Absalom were not reconciled. Again, this indicates that he was a man of some perception. However, his action did not avert the events that he could foresee, and proved not only to be ineffective but perhaps even contributory to the rebellion of Absalom against David that was to come later.

2Samuel 14:2–3

Joab decided on a course of action that seems devious. His thinking must have been that he had to help the king come to a decision that he (the king) wanted to make (i.e. reconciliation with Absalom) but was unable to because of royal pride. However, as we will see, this proves to be unwise in the long term. Joab in fact had become a meddler, and rather than letting the Lord sort matters out,

he was attempting to do so himself, without any commission from the Lord to do so.

Tekoa was close to Bethlehem, and so Joab would have known it well, and may well have known this woman. She is described as a wise woman – the woman remained unnamed. Joab persuaded her to act as though she has been mourning and gave her a story to tell the king. 'So Joab put the words in her mouth.' – this stands in contrast with the story that Nathan had told the king in chapter 12, where the Lord sent Nathan to David. Nathan had gone with prophetic authority and power, and had effected a true change in David, leading him to repentance. Joab went only with his own authority and so finally was powerless to effect a true reconciliation between king and son.

2Samuel 14:4–7

Much as with Nathan, the woman had a story which involves a real (supposedly) situation, but this time involving the woman herself. She was asking for personal intervention from the king her case. Her case involved the killing of one her sons by the other. Justice was being demanded by the family. The death of the remaining son would mean that the family name would die out, and that this woman's last 'coal' of hope would be taken. We must remember in all this that the story is not true – but David was being led to believe that was a real case.

With the parable of Nathan, the point had been to expose to David the truth about himself and his standing before the Lord. Nathan had been fearless and had not surrounded his tale with deferential obeisance. He brought the word of the Lord. Here the purpose was to change David's action, not to confront him. It was manipulation and not prophecy. The stress was on the emotion of the event and not on the morality of it. In fact the emotion was played against the morality.

2Samuel 14:8–11

David obviously believed that in this case the position of the woman did make the case a little more difficult to judge. He dismissed the woman, saying that orders would be given to deal with the matter in due time. The woman pressed for a more decisive action from David. Certainly, the point that has been intended in this charade could not be made if things were left at that! The woman pressed David to the point of making an oath that her son be spared – and so David says, ‘As the Lord lives...’ Again the similarity is there between this event and the prophecy of Nathan. Freely David had sworn an oath on himself concerning the death penalty (12:5). Perhaps Joab and the woman had felt it necessary to press David to this point to give their plot more ‘authenticity.’ In fact what they had done was acted prophetically without being prophetic.

2Samuel 14:12–17

As with Nathan’s prophecy, the oath became the opportunity for confrontation, although the woman tried to soften the blow as much as possible. ‘Why then have you planned such a thing against the people of God?’ The comparison that she gave to the king’s situation (v. 13b) was little overdrawn – for example, Absalom was not the last hope of the king for a continued dynasty.

Her words in verse 14a reduced the death of Amnon to a simple death (and did not refer to it as murder.) She was oversimplifying the issues here – ‘We all die; it’s sad, but what can you do about it? We have to get on with life.’ Yet at the death of Abel, the earth did not simply receive his spilt blood like water poured out, but the blood cried out from the earth for vengeance (Gen. 4:10). Her words in verse 14b – ‘God will not take away the life him who devises means not to keep his banished one an outcast’ – seem to be words of grace and mercy, but can only be true if verse 14a is accepted uncritically. In fact, the law concerning murderers and mercy in Deuteronomy 19 was quite clear. Certain cities were provided so that those who caused

accidental death could flee and find mercy. However, Deut. 19:11–13 make clear that if the killing was by one who hated his neighbour and waited for the opportune time, even the city of refuge was not refuge for him. The people were told quite clearly, ‘Your eye shall not pity him, but you shall purge away the guilt of innocent blood ____ from Israel, so that it may be well with you (Deut. 19:13).’ Her grace was greater than the Lord’s, and so actually less.

In verses 15 to 17 the woman seems to have gone back to her own (imagined) situation, perhaps as a way of avoiding confrontation with the king.

2Samuel 14:18–20

David saw through the ruse – he discerned the hand of Joab behind this. He does not recognise that this is from the Lord. This must have been a devastating moment for the woman! Her explanation – ‘In order to change the course of affairs Joab did this’ – gets to the heart of the unwise meddling that Joab has perpetrated. With a flattering finale (v. 20b), the woman’s audience with the king ended.

2Samuel 14:21–24

David capitulated to the scheme that Joab had devised. Joab’s response was unusual – he saw it as a personal vindication. The restoration of Absalom to Jerusalem was not a true reconciliation however, and Absalom still did not have access to the king, his father, but dwelt alone.

2Samuel 14:25–27

Absalom was obviously an impressive, compelling and significant person. These verses make clear how it was that he could grow in stature to the point of being a rival to his father. David might not see him, but certainly everybody else was aware of him!

2Samuel 14:28–33

Absalom spent two years in this limbo in Jerusalem. At that time he began pressing in to force a reconciliation with his father. He recognised that the way in was through Joab, but Joab also stood aloof from these attempts. It was finally out of self-interest (Absalom was burning Joab's crops to get his attention!) that Joab acted. Absalom's words – 'Let me go into the presence of the king, and if there is guilt in me, let him kill me' – bring the issue to a head! Certainly it had been difficult for Absalom to be in this in-limbo position, but surely this was better than exile and banishment. In fact, Absalom is not really concerned with reconciliation – this becomes clear in the coming chapter – but with controlling David. He forced the issue, knowing that David was fairly well in an unwinnable situation – and this was so because of his failure to act properly when the whole issue of Amnon's rape of Tamar rose its ugly and disastrous head.

Study 10: 2Samuel 15:1–37**2Samuel 15:1–6**

Absalom's purpose in getting the king's audience was to validate himself, and give himself a position in which he could 'steal the hearts of the men of Israel.' He showed himself to be an adept and cunning political operator. His means of usurping David's position consisted in this very shrewd plan:

- (1) he established a 'profile' for himself (15:1) – people would have had to have notice him in this ostentatious display!
- (2) he (wrongly) criticised David's system of justice (15:3), actually undermining it both by diverting people from it – 'there is no man deputed by the king to hear you' (so far as we know an untrue claim) – and also pronouncing judgment ahead of time – 'your claims are good and right.' His seeming cry for justice (15:4) – 'Oh, that I were judge in the land! Then every man with a suitor cause might come to me, and I would give him justice' – was manipulation – he was decrying a problem that did not actually exist! As is seen by the access to the king given to the woman of Tekoa in the previous chapter, there is access to the king for matters of justice. His placing himself at the gate early in the morning (15:2) ensured that all had to pass through him.
- (3) in this process he curried favour with those who were coming to the city for justice, both by his premature judgment of the matters, but then also in the manner of his dealings with these

people. Whilst he had established profile for himself with the chariot and runners, he did not act ‘high and mighty’ with people in his dealings with them, but rather treated them as equals, not allowing them to bow, but rather embracing and kissing them (15:5)

It is hard to understand why David did not act to deal with this subversion – especially given the ostentation with which it was carried out. David must have been aware of all that was happening. Joyce Baldwin’s suggestion – that David felt secure in the affection of the people and so could tolerate the play-acting of his son – seems to me to be unlikely, particularly given the decisiveness of David’s action when the rebellious intent of Absalom’s action was unveiled. I believe that what is governing David at this point is willing submission to the disciplining word of judgment that came through Nathan.

2Samuel 15:7–12

Absalom worked in this undermining and deceitful manner for four years – patiently building his power base. His excuse to go to Hebron seems far-fetched, given that he has had six years since he had returned to Jerusalem to keep this vow. Certainly even if this excuse were true, he should have been quicker to fulfil it (Deut. 23:21: ‘When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not be slack to pay it; for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin in you.’) David’s dismissal, ‘Go in peace’ may indicate that David knew the possibility of the rebellion that lay in Absalom’s heart.

The trip to Hebron – with two hundred innocent guests – appeared to be innocent, but the secret action with it was that messengers were spread throughout Israel to announce simultaneously the *coup d’etat*, thus making resistance seemingly impossible and pointless. Even Ahithophel was won over to Absalom’s plot. He was grandfather to Bathsheba (see 2Sam. 11:3, & 23:34), and had become a counsellor to David. With this growing band of supporters, Hebron became a

rival capital, a base from which Absalom, through his increasing popularity, could finally come against Jerusalem.

2Samuel 15:13–18

Whilst Absalom had stolen the hearts of the men of Israel (probably key figures on the military and political scene), there were those who remained faithful to David, including the messenger who brought tidings of Absalom’s revolution. David’s action was immediate and decisive – to withdraw from Jerusalem. He recognised the power that Absalom had, and knew also the word of Nathan concerning the one who would rise up out of his own house, and so knew that at this time resistance would be foolhardy and fatal. Furthermore, resistance would see the destruction of Jerusalem. Note in these verses that the writer refers to David consistently as ‘the king’ – passing his verdict on the action of Absalom which he had called a conspiracy (v. 12). Only ten concubines were left of the court in Jerusalem to manage the palace in David’s absence. (Indeed, they must stay for the fulfilment of Nathan’s prophecy.) Note that the withdrawal of David and his men from Jerusalem was not a blind flight of panic, but an orderly and stately royal occasion. David ‘inspected’ the troops on the way out. What we see is that the strength of the Israelite army has gone with Absalom, and that David was reliant on foreign mercenaries.

2Samuel 15:19–23

David refused to take for granted the voluntary allegiance of Ittai the Gittite, an exile from Gath (and so, a Philistine), recognising that the way ahead for him and those with him would be uncertain. Ittai would seem to be the commander of the Gittite force, given that David encouraged him to take his brethren with him. David gave the Lord’s blessing, speaking of the Lord’s steadfast love and faithfulness (*chesed w’emeth*). David’s ability to speak these words make clear that he has not given in to despair, but rather is still a man of faith. His acceptance of the judgment was not fatalism but an action of obedience and faith. In the light of the truth of the Lord’s covenant and free faithfulness, then Ittai responded to David in like measure, so proving himself to be a man of faith. His words were

much like Ruth's words to Naomi (Ruth 1:16–17). David welcomed this pledge of loyalty, and later would reward Ittai with co-leadership in his army. Note that the whole community was affected by this rebellion – even the little ones. The sorrow over the departure of David and his household indicates that not all have followed in the faithlessness of Absalom.

2Samuel 15:24—29

The arrival of the pair, Abiathar and Zadok, and the Levites indicate the faithfulness of the priests also to the covenant kingship of David. They came with the ark of the Lord, an action appropriate when the people were going out to battle when in the wilderness. The people passed by the ark of the Lord and so received the blessing of God in their fleeing. However David did not accept that the ark should come with them into the wilderness, but sent them back into Jerusalem with it. His words indicate that, firstly, he did not wish to presume upon the Lord, and would not use the ark as a kind of talisman against the Lord. David knew that 'deliverance belongs to the Lord' – Psalm 3:8 He was going to entrust himself fully into the will of the Lord and would accept his dealings with him. Psalm 3 – ascribed to David at this time – indicate that David was not lacking faith or assurance at this point, but rather was assured that the Lord was His protection and help (despite what was being said of him by others). David also gave a charge to Zadok and Abiathar, knowing that they would be able to serve him in the city better than out in the wilderness, by sending messages to him of developments there through their sons Ahimaaz and Jonathan.

2Samuel 15:30–31

The departure of David from Jerusalem was one of intense sadness for him, and this sadness was also borne by the people who accompanied him. As they ascended the Mount of Olives on the way into the wilderness, Jerusalem would have been visible. (It was coming into Jerusalem that Jesus wept also on this Mount – Luke 19:41–44.) Perhaps the last straw was to hear of the treason of Ahithophel. David's response was to ask the Lord to intervene and to

turn Ahithophel's wisdom into folly. There is not a note of personal revenge in this request.

2Samuel 15:32–37

The next encounter on this road of tears out Jerusalem was with Hushai. He too had joined in mourning David's departure. David again requested him to remain in the city, this time with the purpose of counteracting Ahithophel's counsel to Absalom. This encounter was timely – coming as it did on the tail of the news of Ahithophel's treason. Hushai was to become an undercover agent, with messages to be sent from him to David through the priests. Note that Hushai is called 'David's friend'. His entry to Jerusalem coincided with Absalom's – again emphasizing the providential nature of this action.

Study 11: 2Samuel 16:1–23

2Samuel 16:1–4

The next person to meet David on this procession into exile was Ziba, servant of Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the friend of David and son of King Saul. We first met Mephibosheth in 2Sam 4:4, where we learned of the way in which he became a cripple. In 2Sam. 9:1ff we learn of David's determination to show loyalty to Jonathan being worked out in his blessing of Mephibosheth, and it is in vv. 9–11 we meet Ziba, who was formerly Saul's servant but whom David provides to be steward of the house of Mephibosheth.

When Ziba arrived, then, with an extravagant gift, David questioned him about his motive – 'Why ...?' (v. 2). He is probing_____ to see if this gift is from Mephibosheth or from Ziba and what either is saying in the giving. Ziba's answer was not direct – he simply describes how the gifts can be used – implying it to be a simple and guileless gift. Yet there was no pledge of loyalty in this answer either. In David's situation, loyalty and covenant faithfulness was of paramount importance. He was right to view this situation with some suspicion, given Ziba's connection with the household of Saul. When he probed further and asked the question of Mephibosheth's whereabouts, he was inquiring really about his political sympathies. Ziba tells that Mephibosheth's hopes are that this disruption to the Davidic kingship will lead to the restoration of the line of Saul to power in Israel. (Later we will see that Mephibosheth disputed this accusation.) In a decisive act – necessary to stress the utter importance of loyalty and

faithfulness at this time – David reversed his order which gave the land to Mephibosheth and handed it over to Ziba (who finally responded in a statement of loyalty.)

Is this action of David's, in taking the land away from Mephibosheth, a denial of his promised faithfulness to Jonathan? – I think not. It seems to me to be in line with the sure saying in 2Tim. 3:11–14:

11 If we have died with him, we shall also live with him; 12 if we endure, we shall also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; 13 if we are faithless, he remains faithful – for he cannot deny himself.

Here the covenant faithfulness of the Lord to His people is linked to His own essential faithfulness, which expresses itself in judgment on unrepentant faithlessness.

2 Samuel 16:5–8

The final person that David met on the procession out of Jerusalem was Shimei, the son of Gera. He met him at Bahurim, which was the p___-lace to where Michal (Saul's daughter) was followed to by her weeping husband before Abner turned him back, when she was restored to David (2Sam. 3:16). Perhaps it was a town where loyalty to the dynasty of Saul ran deep. Certainly Shimei was a 'Saulite', actually from the house of Saul and his concern in mocking and cursing David is to get some kind of vengeance for the house of Saul. We see how deeply and firmly hurts and disappointments may be held even under seeming loyalty or peacefulness, and how such can erupt in bitterness when a point of weakness is sensed.

Shimei's accusation of David is that he is a 'man of blood' and that the Lord is judging him for these bloody acts. David had no part in the death of Saul and Jonathan, and clearly was innocent of the deaths of Ishbosheth and Abner (see 2 Sam. 2–4). Bitterness breeds 'conspiracy thinking' and Shimei seems to have put together an explanation of events that is internally consistent (to him) but not in line with the actual facts of the case.

2 Samuel 16:9–14

Abishai – David’s cousin and a key soldier in his army – was enraged by this taunting. He was one of David’s most difficult loyalists, quite a blood thirsty man always ready for an execution (he had been involved in the death of Abner.) Perhaps Shimei’s taunts provoked him at a point of guilt and he was out to justify himself. He dressed his desire to kill Shimei in loyal language, but there was more under the surface than that.

David distanced himself from the sons of Zeruah – knowing full well the history of their blood–thirstiness. Such blood–thirstiness was completely incompatible with David’s approach of covenant loyalty (even when such covenant loyalty had to issue in judgment.) This section reminds us of Luke 9:51–56, where a village of the Samaritans did not welcome Christ____’. James and John asked whether they should call down fire from heaven to destroy them. Jesus rebuked them. Some manuscripts add, ‘You do not know what manner of spirit you are of; for the Son of Man came not to destroy men’s lives but to save them.’

David’s answer to Abishai was that it may possibly have been that the Lord had sent Shimei to curse him. This is not an admission of guilt to Shimei’s charges, but rather an expression of that submission to the Lord’s judgment coming to him for the affair of Uriah and Bathsheba. Shimei may unwittingly be a further contributor to the prophecy of Nathan. Further, David entrusted himself to the Lord, even though the Lord be cursing him. ‘It may be that the Lord will look upon my affliction, and that the Lord will repay me with good for this cursing of me today.’ David must have been deeply conscious that nothing can separate us from the love of God (and we have this truth made more certain in Christ Jesus His Son.)

Yet for all that, it was a time of humiliation and was emotionally draining. The abuse continued all along the way, Shimei on one side of a ravine, David and his army on the other, being pelted by abuse

and stones and dirt all the way along. No wonder there was weariness when they arrived at the Jordan – David’s safety zone – weariness not just physical but also emotional and personal. The taunting of God’s servant is part of the suffering of the kingdom. It is mentioned in the Psalms (44:16, 55:12, 79:12, 89:50–51, 119:42) and is clearly there a significant part of the suffering. It is not simply dealt with by reciting ‘Sticks and Stones’! When Christ entered his suffering, he bore the full taunting of God by the human race as firstly his arresters accused him and then the passing crowds mocked and ____jeered at him. In fellowship with Christ’s suffering, there will be taunting and cursing and false accusation. Jesus said,

22 “Blessed are you when men hate you, and when they exclude you and revile you, and cast out your name as evil, on account of the Son of man! 23 Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven; for so their fathers did to the prophets.... 26 Woe to you, when all men speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets. (Luke 6:22–23, 26)

Further our response is not to be one of self–defence, but rather we are to ‘Love your enemies, do good to those that hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. to him who strikes you on the cheek, offer then other also...’

2 Samuel 16:15–19

Back in Jerusalem, Absalom had taken control. The first act we note there is that he questioned Hushai (David’s loyal secret agent!) as to why he was still there – obviously his loyalty to David was well–known. Hushai was brilliant at winning Absalom over without saying too much for his conscience to bear! He did not name the king in his greeting (v. 16) nor in his pledge of loyalty (v. 18). Even his pledge of service to Absalom was couched in terms of his faithful service to David (v. 19).

2 Samuel 16:20–23

The chief counsellor for Absalom was Ahithophel, and Absalom sought his advice as to what to do. (We get the sense that things had

moved to fast even for Absalom. Perhaps he had been prepared for war but not for victory!) Ahithophel's advice was that Absalom completely burn his bridges, making the break between himself and his father absolutely clear to the nation. This was to be done by publicly taking the concubines of David who had remained to tend the palace as his own concubines. Setting up a tent on the roof of the palace and sleeping with the concubines there was a public humiliation of David and assertion that Absalom controlled all that had been David's. Ahithophel's purpose in this provocative act is to force all Israel to take sides, and so to strengthen the loyalty of those who had sided with Absalom. He was an astute political operator, so much so that his advice was considered to be as if one had consulted the oracle of God. Note that the writer does not credit him with being prophetic, but rather that he is 'pseudo-prophetic.'

Study 12: 2Samuel 17:1–29

2Samuel 17:1–4

The second piece of counsel that Ahithophel gives to Absalom concerned the military action to be taken against David. He proposed that he should lead a strike force against David, with the express purpose of killing David. He recognised that the troops with David were discouraged and weary, and so vulnerable to attack. He recognised too that without David, the people would quickly accept Absalom's leadership. His plan would not escalate social conflict. The sense and intelligence of the plan appealed to Absalom and his elders.

Again it is important to note that whilst Ahithophel is clever, cunning, intelligent, persuasive, and brilliant strategically, yet he does not have wisdom. Wisdom is related to the fear of the Lord and so it always connected to true action in line with the covenant of God.

2Samuel 17:5–14

Despite the obvious sense of Ahithophel's plan, Absalom surprisingly sought also the counsel of Hushai the Archite (David's double-agent). Hushai had been given the express mission of frustrating the advice of Ahithophel (15:33ff) and so when Absalom declared to him what Ahithophel's plan was, Hushai knew what he had to do. This we read at the end of verse 14 was so by the will of

the Lord, so that He might bring evil (Heb: ra' – 'evil, disaster, calamity') upon Absalom.

Again Hushai showed himself to be the master of double talk, thinking here on ___his feet. This whole piece of advice is full of double meanings, vaguenesses and emotional rhetoric. So, in verse 7 he did not indicate explicitly for whom the advice was not good (undoubtedly he had David in mind, for from Absalom's point of view it was good advice as the writer himself concedes in v. 14.) After this general conclusion about Ahithophel's plan, Hushai then showed why the plan would not work and suggested another course of action. Firstly he reminded Absalom of David and his army's legendary military prowess – they are 'mighty men', 'he is expert in war': see vv. 8, 10. (Note how he managed to work a tribute to David into his advice while he passed no comment on Absalom and his ability.) In their current situation, he argued that David and his men would be angry – like a bear robbed of its cubs – and also that David would not be so foolish as to make himself vulnerable by being with the people, but rather would have hidden himself. Further he argued that possible failure – or even misrepresentation of victory through a false rumour – would lead to dreadful consequences (vv. 9b–10). Thirdly, Hushai whole description of the scene was one of possibilities and vague chances – 'some other place' (v. 9), 'some place where he is to be found' (v. 12), 'a city' unnamed (v. 13), but through his careful presentation these possibilities seemed certain as opposed to Ahithophel's careful and matter-of-fact presentation in vv. 1–4. Finally, he appealed to Absalom's pride, by picturing as head of the whole of the tribes of Israel, who are inspired by his presence with them in battle against David and his whole army – a grandiose vision of Absalom's success. Absalom fell into Hushai's trap, and this by the will of the Lord.

2Samuel 17:15–22

David needed to be informed of these developments, and the two sons of Abiathar and Zadok – Jonathan and Ahimaaz – were waiting

outside Jerusalem for news to carry to him. David was to be warned to cross over the Jordan as this was a more secure place. However Jonathan and Ahimaaz's departure was seen by a lad, and reported to Absalom. At Bahurim (a Saulite city, where Shimei had cursed David) there was a family faithful to David who hid them until the danger passed. What David was being warned about was Ahithophel's plan, and not Hushai's (v. 21) – indicating the extreme fluidity of power bases in situations of war and rebellion.

2Samuel 17:23

Ahithophel's response to the outcome is very telling. He saw that his counsel was not followed. He recognised that with the ___ & escape of David into Transjordan that the days of Absalom's rebellion were numbered. His preemptive strike against David was the only way that this rebellion could have succeeded. In this recognition, Ahithophel showed that he understood the covenant promises that had been given to David. Only the removal of David could ensure Absalom's kingship. Ahithophel's great failure was his refusal to deal loyally within the covenant of God.

The action of Ahithophel is one of man who wished to be in control of his life – and so he set his affairs in order and then took his life. The taking of his life is an attempt to preempt the judgment of God. It is the action of one who believes that he has no God Who is for him. Schlatter says, 'The annihilation of one's own life is always in conflict with the faith that apprehends God. For it is a refusal of God's help, a grasping at the unrestricted power to dispose of oneself, a rebellion against one's allotted destiny.' Perhaps more accurately, Ahithophel's action (as also Judas') was a rebellion against the possibility of grace. Karl Barth says of this passage, 'Ahithophel stands before us as the man whose whole cleverness is not wisdom, since he fails to recognise the elect of God and sets his talents in the service of a rebel whose cause is lost from the outset.... All three men [he includes Saul and Judas in this discussion] are representatives of the sin of the elect people of Israel and even of the "twelve apostles, namely, the flouting of the faithfulness and mercy of God.... Those

who refuse God's grace and try to exist as their own lords and masters are on the way at the end of which they can only fall on their own swords like Saul or hang themselves like Ahithophel and Judas. So great, incisive and fateful is man's guilt before God! – the guilt which Jesus did not ignore but which He took on Himself, paid for with His own life, and thus removed. In this sin whose nature is finally disclosed in suicide, man resists the mercy of God. But the mercy of God for its part as it has appeared in Jesus, has resisted and victoriously defeated this sin.'

2Samuel 17:24–29

The concluding verses of this chapter begin by setting clearly the situation in which the war between David and Absalom would be fought. Amasa, the man appointed to be general of Absalom's army was related in some way to David, though with Ishmaelite blood, and so this heightened the tension between him and Joab, the commander of David's army.

At Mahanaim, David was greeted by three important men in the region who through kindness showed him loyalty. Shobi was an Ammonite (of a different order to Hanun who had fought with David and humiliated his envoys). Machir had been host to Mephibosheth before David had invited him to Jerusalem. Barzillai was the head of a Gileadite family. With their coming, the Lord spread a table for David in the presence of his enemies! Note again that it is the nations – Gentiles – who are most supportive of David at this point.

Study 13: 2Samuel 18:1–33

ANDREW KLYNSMITH

2Samuel 18:1–5

David recognised that battle was inevitable, and so he set himself to the task of setting his men in order for war. It is notable that David had three commanders to whom he could entrust his men – Joab, Abishai (both fierce and loyal sons of Zeruiah), and Ittai (the foreigner who had recently sworn allegiance to David – 15:21), whereas Absalom had only one – Amasa. As in the past David showed himself to be a master strategically, and also to be both brave and wise in his leadership. Whilst his intention was to go into battle with his men, he was prepared to listen to the advice of his generals who argued that since David was the obvious target of the attack, it would be better for him to give support to his troops from a position of safety. His parting command to his generals was that Absalom was to be dealt with gently – a command that was known by all the troops. No indication is given as to what they thought of this command – whether they respected David's concern for his son, or if they thought him weak. Much the same can be said of the commentators on this passage!

2Samuel 18:6–8

All the preparation and build-up for the battle (16:15–18:5) is ___> much longer than the description of the battle itself. David showed his strategic brilliance by ensuring that the battle took place in the forest where the ability of the individual soldier would count for

more than the weight of numbers of the army as a whole. The very brief way in which the battle is recounted, with simply a record of the resounding victory of David's men, highlights that God himself was the determiner of the outcome of this battle. Note too that 'the forest claimed more lives that day than the sword' – it seems as though creation itself was a participant in this battle for David.

2Samuel 18:9–18

The general statement of 18:8 is now particularised by the narrator in the events surrounding the death of Absalom himself. Absalom, who had dethroned David, was caught by his hair or his head (the Hebrew text is not exactly clear about this) and unseated from his mule by an inanimate oak tree. (Absalom's hair had been a source of pride to him, but this had become a literal snare for him.) The mule moved on and Absalom was left dangling, and unable to defend himself. A man of Israel saw this, and mindful of David's command to the generals he did not slay him, but reported the matter to Joab.

Joab was angry that this man had not acted decisively in slaying the rebel king, indicating Joab's own rejection of David's command. The man made his defence – (1) Absalom was the king's son; (2) he had heard the command of David to the generals; (3) had he so acted it would have become known to the king; (4) in that case, he was sure that Joab would have distanced himself from him. Joab's response was one of anger – 'I will not waste time like this with you.' We get the sense that the man had seen accurately into the dynamics of Joab and that Joab did not like this probing disclosure. He had been shown to be self-concerned, self-protecting and, so, untrustworthy. He had no answer, and no repentance.

Previously it had been Joab who had urged David to restore Absalom to relationship following his exile after Amnon's death. Yet that had been a political decision, and Joab must have been disappointed with the outcome. From his political point of view there was little to be gained from sparing Absalom's life now, and perhaps only danger.

Joab's decision was to kill Absalom, and his act was finished off in a blood-thirsty manner by his ten armour bearers.

Joab then (wisely) restrained the Davidic army from continuing the slaughter of the Israelites. A cairn of rocks was erected over the burial site of Absalom. The only (lasting?) reminder of Absalom's time was the column he had raised in honour of himself.

2Samuel 18:19–23

Ahimaaz again desired to bring news of the victory to David. He had good news to tell, and he longed to tell it. Joab recognised that the death of Absalom would not be welcomed by the king, and so he sought to restrain Ahimaaz from running to David. Instead, a Cushite – a foreigner, and so perhaps more expendable if David should react violently to the news of Absalom's death – was told to take news of what he had seen. Ahimaaz was determined to go, knowing that there may be bad consequences for him in this. Joab in this section was really acting in self-interest, and revealed a mercenary spirit – 'Why run seeing that you will have no reward...?' – but could not dissuade Ahimaaz, and so allowed him to go. Ahimaaz went in covenant loyalty to David. His enthusiasm and determination flowed out of this, and this made him a faster runner than the Cushite.

2Samuel 18:24–33

David was sitting between the two gates, where he could get immediate reports from the watchmen. A runner was seen approaching, and David knew that some tidings would be coming. When the next runner was seen, David must have been wondered just what news these two runners were bringing, but his expectation was that it would be good news (*basurah* – Isaiah 40!). When the first runner was identified as Ahimaaz, David's statement reveals the covenant faithfulness to the king that must have been obvious in this son of Zadok: 'He is a good man, and he comes with good tidings.'

Ahimaaz's words of greeting were 'Shalom!' verified David's belief that good news was coming. The peace that Ahimaaz pointed to was the well-being of the kingship; the Lord had dealt with those who had rebelled against the king. David's pressing concern however was with Absalom's wellbeing (shalom) and that is seen at the speed that he came to the point on this matter. Ahimaaz's nerve failed him at this point, and he feigned a lack of knowledge about Absalom's fate, but indicated that something of great moment had happened. David didn't want to know any more, if Ahimaaz could not speak to him about that matter.

The Cushite brought the same news as Ahimaaz, and when David asked him about Absalom he gave a tactful and loyal answer: 'May the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise up against you for evil, be like that young man.' As with Ahimaaz, the Cushite now became irrelevant – David's whole being was focussed in his son _____, and the news of his death moved him greatly. The events of his death were irrelevant – a father had lost his son. His lament is an outpouring of grief and sorrow of loss and broken relationship which is also mixed with the terrible sadness of knowing that this whole scenario has come as a judgment on him for his own sin. This is at the heart of his cry – 'Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!' David did not desire the death of this sinner-rebel-son, but rather that he would have turned from his ways and lived. Five times he cries out 'My son!' We see in David here something of the heart of God who spared not His own Son but gave Him up freely for us all – it is essential that we know the deep love of the Father for the Son, for then we see the deep wounds of grief that His determination to bring grace to us cost him and we see too the enormous love of God for the world and for us personally in the giving of His Son.

Study 14: 2Samuel 19:1–43

2Samuel 19:1–8a

David's mourning was reported to Joab. What could have been a day of great rejoicing became a day of mourning for all the people – they put aside their joy and shared in the king's sorrow for his son. Romans 12:15 says, 'Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.' The people were right to honour David by sharing in his sorrow – David's grief was a timely and right grief: there is a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to weep and a time to laugh.

Joab however had no time for David's sorrow, which seems to him to be utter thanklessness for the risks that had been taken by David's men in securing the kingdom for him. 'You love those who hate you and hate those who love you.' In Joab's estimation, Absalom did not count; he had been disposed of, and the matter of the kingship needed to move forward. He could not understand how David could get his priorities so mixed up and be so soft towards a traitor. He commanded David to put aside his sorrow and to go out and speak kindly to the men – that is, to encourage and thank them for their service. He warned David that failure to do this may well result in the rebellion of the army that very night.

It is hard to read Joab's motives clearly in this matter. Joab was a pragmatic man, a man of immediate action, what Brueggemann calls 'a public man' who knows what to do and steps in when others are

made impotent by grief. Perhaps he read the scene more clearly than David did. But was there really an immediate threat of mutiny? To me it seems unlikely, as when David went out to the gate to speak to the men, they needed to be summoned to appear before him – they weren't milling about ready for action. Still at this point we are given no clear indication that David was aware that Joab had taken Absalom's life and so perhaps there was an element of self-justification or self-protection in Joab's action here. There is even a hint of threat in Joab's warning about mutiny – it would have taken the leadership of a man like Joab to bring such an action to a head.

2Samuel 19:8b–15

Israel the nation was in a state of confusion about the future of the nation. They knew two things – (1) that David was in exile from Israel following Absalom's rebellion; and (2) that Absalom whom they had chosen was now dead. There were those among the nation who were calling for the proper restoration of David to the throne. Others seem to be waiting to see what will arise in the leadership of the nation, before they declare any allegiance.

In sending a message to Zadok and Abiathar the priests, David was sending to men whom he knew to be loyal. His instruction was that they were to address the elders of Judah about their slowness in seeking to bring the king back. It has to be recognised that it was David's own house, the tribe of Judah that had been most involved in the rebellion. The fact that the other tribes were speaking of bringing back David was a cause of shame to the Judahites, who were David's bone and flesh. David in fact dealt graciously with these rebels in these words, affirming his relationship and tie with them and overlooking their sin.

In fact, he went so far as to promise leadership to Amasa, Absalom's general in David's army in the place of Joab. We see here the first real indication that David was aware of Joab's action in the death of Absalom. Perhaps Amasa was honoured for his loyalty to the king's

son. Certainly this promotion must have been seen as an action of trust by David to those who had supported the rebellion. This action 'swayed the heart of all the men of Judah as one man' – they were won over not by force but by grace – and they sent for the king to return and went to meet him at Gilgal to escort him back into the Promised Land.

2Samuel 19:16–23

Shimei (who had cursed David at Bahurim – 16:5ff) 'made haste' to meet him along with the men of Judah. The enemies were gathering in repentance! The thousand men of Benjamin with him were promise of military allegiance to David. So also, Ziba, Mephibosheth's servant, 'rushed down to the Jordan' to meet the king. (Ziba had met David on the way out of Jerusalem with provisions and the story of Mephibosheth's treason (16:1–4) and had been rewarded with the land that he had formerly been steward of for Mephibosheth.) Note that it was only when David had begun to return that these two sped off to greet him – their eagerness to see David was governed more by self-interest and self-protection than by genuine loyalty. They knew that David's return was a threat to them.

Shimei's approach to the king was one of confession and of seeking mercy. Abishai sought (again! – 16:9) to slay him for his cursing of David, but again David stayed his hand and actually separated himself from the sons of Zeruah. He heard in Abishai's voice, the voice of the adversary (Get behind me, Satan!) and chose rather to insist on the showing of grace. He swore to Shimei that he would not die while the king was alive.

2Samuel 19:24–30

The reason behind Ziba's urgency in getting to see David was exposed by Mephibosheth's arrival. On arrival he was clearly a man who had been in mourning since David's exile: he had not 'dressed

his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes' since the king had departed from the city. These actions were all associated with mourning at a death. David asked why he had not left with him in exile, and Mephibosheth claimed to have been deceived by Ziba, who deserted him, which gave him no way of leaving the city. He entrusted himself to David's judgment, knowing that David was a man of grace. It seems that David felt either that this issue was too difficult to adjudicate or that it was expedient to show grace to Ziba, and so he divided the property between Mephibosheth and Ziba, to which Mephibosheth's response was, 'Oh let him take it all, since my Lord the king has come safely home.' David's response would have assured the members of Saul's household that there would be no vengeance against them.

2Samuel 19:31–40

Barzillai the Gileadite had sustained David and his men in exile across the Jordan, and he and his men escorted David back to the land of Israel. Barzillai was quite clearly a man of substance and independence, and in this encounter we see that he and David stand somewhat as equals, not as king and subject. He would not put himself in the position of being beneficiary of David's largess, and so remains free of direct involvement in David's sphere of power. His decline of the offer however was couched in very diplomatic terms, and the relationship between the two was solidified by the sending of Chimham, Barzillai's son, as his representative. So David has the benefit of Barzillai's alliance signified in his son. The parting of David and Barzillai is one of friendship – a kiss and a blessing.

2Samuel 19:41–43

The bringing of the king home by Judah became a cause of offence to the other tribes of Israel (and we see here the seeds which finally would lead to the disintegration of the nation after Solomon). This action is portrayed as a 'stealing away' of David by Judah. The answer Judah gave was to say that David had not shown them any

favouritism in provision or gift for this act. However this did not allay the anger of the men of Israel, who claimed 10/12ths of the king as theirs! They felt as though they were being excluded as of no consequence in the matter of the kingship. 'But the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel.'

Study 15: 2Samuel 20:1–26

2Samuel 20:1–2

The restiveness amongst the people of Israel and the possibility of rebellion which had been present in the events leading up to this chapter now spilled out in the rebellion of Sheba, a Benjaminite (and hence probably loyal to Saul.) He drew on the resentment of the Israelites concerning the return of David to Jerusalem by the men of Judah, and blew that up into a complete distancing from David himself. The resentment had ___ initially come because they had felt excluded from David by the actions of the men of Judah, but in that resentment they had become embittered about David. [Hebrews 12:14–15 – ‘Strive for peace with all men, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fail to obtain the grace of God; that no “root of bitterness” spring up and cause trouble, and by it the many become defiled...’] The men of Judah remained steadfastly faithful to David at this time.

2Samuel 20:3–4

On arriving at Jerusalem, David’s first act was to deal with the issue of the concubines. He separated them and put them under guard in a house where they were provided for, and no longer went to them. A number of threads seem to meet in this action. Firstly, these concubines had been taken by Absalom, and so had been defiled. However, it may also be that David was making a concession to concerns in the north about the nature of his kingship. Brueggemann argues that the north was probably more ‘traditional’ and would have

found the fact of concubines to be closer to Near East royalty ideologies than the covenant tradition. In making this move then David distanced himself from his former practice and also the behaviour of Absalom.

His second action was to entrust Amasa (whom he had appointed his general in place of Joab) with the task of gathering the army of Judah within three days to deal with the rebellion of Sheba.

2Samuel 20:5–13

Amasa set about the task, but not with the urgency that David recognised it required. ‘He delayed beyond the set time which had been appointed him.’ What this delay indicated was that Amasa had a deep policy disagreement with David; it was disobedience, and possibly was the beginning of treason. David responded immediately by sending Abishai to accomplish what Amasa should have done. David saw that to leave the matter of Sheba’s rebellion as it stood would lead to greater damage than Absalom’s rebellion. Under Abishai’s command David sent Joab and his crack troops (the Cherethites and Pelethites). In the course of their pursuit of Sheba, Amasa came and met them, belatedly joining the attack, perhaps trying to undo the personal damage he had caused himself by his initial reluctance.

Joab dealt summarily with Amasa, feigning friendship and concealing his determination to execute him. In one swift blow Joab disembowelled him, and then without blinking proceeded onto the next important matter of pursuing Sheba. Undoubtedly Joab saw Amasa as a terrible liability for the king – let alone his own grievance of being demoted in favour of this man who was clearly not going to be helpful to the king. As decisive and determined as Joab was, mostly he seems to have been motivated by loyalty, to the covenant kingship if not for David precisely (see the message in v. 11).

The pursuing army was aghast on meeting the sight of Amasa’s body lying in the road. Joab had appointed a man to stand over the body

and to make sure that all who saw it got the message that – even though David did not yet know it – he, Joab was in charge of the army again. Abishai, whom David seemed to have favoured, compliantly disappeared from the leadership struggle – quite wisely given Joab’s history!

2Samuel 20:14–22

Sheba’s rebellion led him to the far north of Israel, until he found refuge in Abel of Beth–Maacah, a fortified town. His support seems to have been limited to his family group, the Bichrites. To this fort came Joab and the army of Judah, and a siege began. The goal of the siege was the destruction of the city wall. A wise woman within the town recognised what lay ahead for them all if this continued – destruction and possible death – and she intervened by seeking an audience with Joab. Her words to Joab began with a history of Abel as being a place where wisdom could be found in Israel, especially where there was dispute between parties. The woman herself was one of those who was able to bring these peaceable and faithful words. If Joab was to persist in the siege, ‘a city which is a mother in Israel would be destroyed,’ part of the heritage of the Lord would be swallowed up.

Joab strongly disavowed any desire to swallow up or destroy. His concern was not with the town of Abel nor with any power play, but rather with the rebel Sheba who had lifted his and against the king and who had sought refuge in the town. ‘Give up him alone and I will withdraw from the city.’ The woman had wisely allowed Joab to set the terms for the saving of the city. His request was reasonable, and the woman promised the head of the rebel would be thrown over the city wall. She would not let Joab and his men into the city – that may well have become uncontrolled. The people of the city executed Sheba, and the men of Judah withdrew back to their own homes. Joab returned to the king in Jerusalem, having done once more what was necessary to save the throne, but perhaps also having learned some wisdom from the woman at Abel.

2Samuel 20:23–26

These verses end the narrative which has extended from chapter 9 to here. As though to signify that the action is over and the king is safe and well, the royal bureaucracy is reviewed, and counterpoints the list at 2Sam. 8:15–18. In verse 24 we have the first mention of the overseer of forced labour. Overall, the second list has a strong weighting towards the military strength and power of David, and lacks the phrase which introduced the bureaucratic list in chapter 8 – ‘So David reigned over all Israel; and David administered justice and equity to all his people.’ Now there has been a concentrating of focus on Judah and on the subduing of the rest of Israel under the Davidic kingship.

Study 16: 2Samuel 21:1–22

Chapters 21 to 24 Many scholars believe that the narrative thread that ends at chapter 20 begins again at 1Kings 1–2, and that these chapters in between are an appendix representing different periods of David's kingship. They contain six distinct sections, the central two being poems written by the king, surrounded by two lists of great warriors, and they in turn embraced by two disasters which struck during David's reign (ABCC1B1A1 – this pattern is called chiasm; the heart of the chiasm is its focus.) They show us David as a man who inherited problems and created his own problems as king, who fought and achieved victory with the help of many others who stood beside him, and above all (the centre of the chiasm) as a man whose joy and strength was the Lord, whom he praised wholeheartedly because everything that he had achieved came to him through the faithful love of the God of all grace.

2Samuel 21:1–14

This section begins by mentioning an event which is not recorded anywhere else in the narrative, and which is introduced here without any time frame reference other than that it was during David's reign. A three year famine would have been a devastating event nationally, and caused David to seek if the Lord had brought this to them as judgment. The Lord answered that it was judgment, for an oath made by Israel with the Gibeonites when they were possessing the land (an oath obtained through a clever ruse – see Joshua 9) and kept by them

(see e.g Joshua 10) until it was broken by Saul. (There is no other record of this broken oath, and Brueggemann treats this whole account with suspicion – as an invention of David – but his cynicism is not justified, especially in light of the structure of these chapters, which pairs this inherited problem with a self-created problem in chapter 24.)

Verse 2 sets out for us just what manner Saul's breaking of the oath took – in his zeal for the people of Israel and Judah he had sought to slaughter the Gibeonites, despite the fact that Israel had sworn to spare them when they took possession of the land. Oaths and vows made before the Lord are binding on God's people. Even rash oaths are not escapable (Lev. 5:4) – and we see this work out terribly clearly in the affair of Jephthah's daughter (Jdg. 11:29–40). [Note that the daughter's ready compliance with the terms of the oath mark her as a daughter of faith.] The oath made by the people of Israel was a rash one, made without consulting the Lord, and obtained by the Gibeonites through a clever deception, but an oath which was binding all the same. Saul's zeal for Israel would better have been zeal for the honour of the Lord, by whom the oath was made. His breaking of the oath incurred _“blood guilt, and the judgment of the Lord was upon the people in the form of famine.

David approached the remaining Gibeonites to see what could be done to appease the situation (to make atonement, kipper.) Talk of atonement shows that David's action is primarily with a view to renewed relationship between Israel and the Lord. However, this right relationship involves the Gibeonites; the Lord's blessing of Israel would come through this people (v. 3). Initially (v. 4) the Gibeonites indicated that no money could undo this wrong; the second part of their reply indicated that they believed some kind of blood shed was necessary, but that they could not impose this penalty themselves. David had to take responsibility for this action, which he did. ‘I will give them to you,’ he answered when they gave their request that seven descendants of Saul be handed over to them for execution and exposure. Seven descendants may have been requires

being a symbolic number representing the whole of Saul's progeny. David remembered his oath to Jonathan and did not include Mephibosheth in the company for execution. Seven grandsons of Saul were chosen and their execution took place during the barley harvest, obviously a time which was long remembered in connection with this event in Israel.

Rizpah, the mother of two of those killed set herself the task of guarding the corpses of those killed, ensuring that no carrion birds or animals could defile their bodies. (This was the point of exposure – further humiliation by defilement after death.) This honourable action inspired David to honour Saul, Jonathan and these who had died recently and he sent men who gathered their bones and had them buried in Saul's father's grave. After that act, the Lord heeded the prayers that had been made for the land, and rain came; the famine was over.

2Samuel 21:15–22

This section gives us a little more detail about David's wars against the Philistines, which had been summarised in 2Sam. 5:17–25 and 8:1. Four particular incidents are recorded here, with a kind of honour list for outstanding acts of bravery. The first incident is notable because (a) it is not repeated in the passage parallel to this one in 1Chron. 20:4–8; and mainly (b) because in it we see that David grew weary in battle and needed to be rescued by Abishai (who had remained faithful to him, despite David's distancing himself from him as 'a man of blood.')

This weakness of David became a cause of concern for his men, and they did not want David to die in battle, so they requested that he no longer go out to battle with them. The second event recorded notes the man Sibbecai the Hushathite for his defeat of one of the 'giants.' The third event is difficult because it seems to deny David the honour of killing Goliath. Elhanan may be from a town called Jaare-oregim, but most likely is the son of man bearing that name. Quite likely it is David himself who is referred to here by a family name rather than his royal name, and that Jaar =

Jesse. The last incident recorded here tells of the heroics of Jonathan, David's nephew in the slaying of another giant. The final verse includes the phrase '...they fell by the hand of David and by the hands of his servants' which lends weight to the thought that it is David under the name of Elhanan in verse 19.

Study 17: 2Samuel 22:1–23:7

This section forms the centre of the chiasmic appendix to the books of Samuel, and is composed of two songs or psalms of David. The first (22:1–51) also stands alone in the book of Psalms as Psalm 18; it is ascribed to the time when David was delivered by the Lord from all his enemies and from Saul, and so seems to precede the events of David's adultery. The second song (23:1–7) is introduced as David's last words, quite clearly following that event. Yet even as we read the first song, we know of all the events of David's life, as does the editor in bringing this psalm in at this point. So, words which may be incongruous to us in the psalm because we know this history – for example, David's affirmation that he has kept to the ways of the Lord and kept himself from sin – need to be interpreted in the grace and covenant faithfulness of God. The heart of David's knowledge of God is being given to us here.

The compiler of the books of Samuel has given a foretaste of this at the start of his work, in Hannah's song in 1Sam. 2:1–10, which very closely lines up with the psalms we read here at the end. 22:1–51 The first of the two songs is David's free and joyous celebration of the Lord's deliverance; it is a song based in the knowledge of the covenant faithfulness of the Lord. 2–3 are an extraordinarily personal list of ascriptions concerning the Lord. Firstly David names the Lord – YHWH – and then affirms that he is my rock, my fortress, my deliverer, my God, my rock, my shield, my refuge, my saviour! He who is high and exalted and ruler of all things is also intimately involved with and active for his servant, David. So closely bound is

the Lord to his person, that there is in fact a kind of mutual possession of each other. It is beyond question that David belongs to the Lord, but He, in His covenant grace to David, has also given Himself to him. My Beloved is mine and I am His; His banner over me is love. David had found this to be so in the events of the Lord's deliverance of him. 4–7 recall the entreaty that David made to the Lord in his trouble. When he was assailed by his enemies all that could be seen was death and defeat – the waves of death swirled about me, the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me; the cords of the grave coiled around me, the snares of death confronted me. Yet David trusted in what could not be seen – the gracious favour of the Lord to him – and from this distress (straits, tight corner) he called out to the Lord.

As we read these verses, we know that David has been rescued from more than the hands of Saul and the hands of his enemies; he has been rescued by the Lord from his own folly and sinfulness. This appendix surrounds this psalm by telling us of two disasters – one inherited by David from Saul, and the other of David's own making – and gives us an interpretive key to the psalm. Key amongst the enemies that David has been saved from is sin, his own sin, and the wrath of God on that sin. 8–16 then speak dynamically and poetically of the Lord's rescue of David. When this one to whom He had bound Himself in covenant love was under threat, the Lord became indignant; he was aroused to holy jealousy. The poem speaks of God's wrath being aroused by the enemies, and so the wrath of the Lord actually becomes David's rescuer and not his destroyer. The whole of creation had to make way, and also become involved, as He came in determination to rescue His beloved one. 17–20 speak of the Lord's rescue very personally – of the Lord reaching down and lifting David out of his troubles. Certainly without the help of the Lord, David knew that his enemies were too strong for him. Yet the Lord proved to be his support, so David was rescued out of his tight corner into a spacious place. Verse 20 clarifies for us the motivation of this rescue

He rescued me because he delighted in me. David did not earn this delight; the Lord's delight is an expression of His grace which then leads us to seek to delight Him. 21–25 are David's reflection on his behaviour before the Lord. Joyce Baldwin in her Tyndale OT commentary on this passage believes we should hear here the words of David before the event of his adultery and the arranged death that followed it; yet no reader of Samuel could reasonably be expected to do this! In his commentary Walter Brueggemann points out that these words sound odd and incongruous on the lips of David, and encourages us to hear them ironically. But perhaps David knows something stronger of the grace of God than that. Psalm 32:1–7 says: 1 Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. 2 Blessed is the man whose sin the LORD does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit. 3 When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. 4 For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. 5 Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD" – and you forgave the guilt of my sin. 6 Therefore let everyone who is godly pray to you while you may be found; surely when the mighty waters rise, they will not reach him. 7 You are my hiding-place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance.

This psalm lines up with David's own acknowledgement of his sin in Psalm 51. Note in Psalm 32:1–2, that having spoken of the blessedness of forgiveness of transgressions, and of the covering of sins, and of the non-accounting of sin by the Lord against the man, David also speaks of the blessedness of a spirit with no deceit. The gifts of forgiveness and repentance bring a new righteousness, the gift of sharing in God's own righteousness. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our sins from us. Though our sins were as scarlet, they (i.e. the sins) shall be white as snow! It is from all this that speaks this Psalm and why this Psalm can be read knowing all we know about David without cynicism or objection, but rather gratitude and joy. 26–28 From this David is able to give this

teaching to the readers. The faithful, the blameless, the pure are those who have received the grace of God – they are humble; the crooked are those who are opposed to God and the way of grace – they are haughty, proud. The former find the faithfulness of God and the latter find themselves opposed by God. This is precisely what verse 28 says in summary. 29–51 As one who has been graced and rescued by the Lord, David now affirms that this gives him vitality and power for life.

This picks up from verse 20, and speaks of the effect of God's rescue in David's life. Whilst the action is described as David's (vv. 30, 38–39, 43) this is clearly only by the Lord's help (vv. 29–30, 31–37 esp., 40–42, 44). The psalm ends with an affirmation that all this is the action of the Lord who shows his unfailing kindness to his anointed... – i.e. that it is by God's covenant faithfulness that David has had this victory.

23:1–7

The introduction of this psalm speaks of David in four ways. It introduces him (1) by name and family; (2) as an oracle-prophet, exalted by the Most High; (3) as the man anointed (messiah) by the God of Jacob (i.e. the God who is able to transform men's lives from fleshliness to godliness); and (4) as the singer of Israel's songs.

2–3a makes clear that this song is prophetic, a word addressed to David to learn, but also for the people to hear. 3b–4 teaches that a king is to rule in righteousness, in the fear of God. This is a rule which is primarily about obedience and not about power or prestige; the fear of God consists in hearing His will and doing it. Such a rule is a blessing to the people, a great and lovely experience, comparable to first light, or sunshine after rain. 5–7 shows David reflecting on this word to him. He sees that his house is ordered aright, that he enjoys the covenant blessing of God. He entrusts himself to the Lord, believing that he will know the covenant blessing. He sees too that engagement with wickedness is harmful and dangerous, and that partnership with evil is to be avoided.

Study 18: 2Samuel 23:8–24:25

2Samuel 23:8–39

This section parallels 21:15–22 in the chiasmic arrangement of this closing appendix which includes chapters 21 to 24. It also has an edited (?) parallel in 1Chronicles 11, where it stands at the head of the David narrative, not at the end as we find here. This section here consists of three units – the first (vv. 8–12) indicates the characters of the Three, the second (vv. 13–17) deals with a particular event involving the Three and David, and the third (vv. 18–39) indicates the characters who were members of the Thirty. The Three and the Thirty were key fighting men in David's army.

2Samuel 23:8–12

The Three were a clearly identified and specific group of men who were noted for their courage and loyalty in David's army. Amongst them, the chief was Josheb-basshebeth, but alongside him in honour were Eleazar and Shammah. What is most notable about these men is that their victories are not recorded as personal victories but rather as the Lord's victory (see vv. 10 and 12). Apart from verse 9, David is not mentioned in this listing and so we see that in David's kingdom not all victory had to be centred around him. This stands in contrast to many state records of other nations around about; in the Assyrian histories for example the great king is the only named warrior. State absolutism cannot stand credit being given to either God or to others than the ruler. The kingdom of God is not of this world.

2Samuel 23:13–17

In the midst of this listing of David's fighting men comes this narrative, and it too serves to show the radical relationship that David had with his fighting men, and the otherness of God's kingdom to the kingdoms of this world. We hear of three men (the Three – see v. 17c) of the Thirty chief men who give a great gift to David in the middle of a battle. Again here we have no historical signpost to say when this event happened, although in 1Chronicles 11 it is placed early in David's reign.

In the midst of battle, David expressed his human yearning for water from Bethlehem, his home town. David was obviously close to his men, and not needing to be high and mighty and removed from them, or unable to express his yearnings and weaknesses with them. He was also still close to his village and family roots. David's men who were utterly devoted to him hear his yearnings as an opportunity to serve him; his wish is their command. Risking their lives they broke through the Philistine forces and got and brought to David what he had so longingly desired. David's response is extremely moving. He showed that he understood something very deep about the loyalty and devotion these men. His pouring out of the water was to the Lord – it was an act of sacrifice and worship. The sacrificial element of the Three's action had made the water holy – in fact the water stood for their blood! – and for David to drink it would have profaned it. In David's action then he bound himself to his men in this worship of the Lord. (There are connections in this story of the anointing of Jesus at Bethany by the woman for his burial; the assessment of Judas (and the disciples) was that her gift (and Jesus' reception of it) was a wasteful extravagance in the face of the need of the poor. Yet her worship was honoured by Christ, and she is spoken of wherever the Gospel is preached.)

2Samuel 23:18–39

This next list of mighty men records those who were of a lesser rank in honour than the Three, but still of great honour in Israel. The

formal name of this group is the Thirty – even though thirty seven are named. It seems to me for this reason to have been a position or office open to a number of people, not simply an honorific name given to specific men for their valour. The commander of the Thirty was Abishai, the son of Zeruah, one of David's most ruthless and loyal aides. Benaiah was loyal – and so could be set over the body guards – and that loyalty continued in the jostling for position that took place for the succession to the throne after David (1Kings 1:5ff). Asahel is named despite dying early in David's reign (2Sam. 3:22–23). Tellingly the last name on the list is that of Uriah the Hittite. Notable for his absence from this list is Joab. Perhaps he stood in a position of power and authority that made his being mentioned unnecessary. We see that his armour-bearer is amongst the Thirty. Joab even in his absence is present!

2Samuel 24:1–25

This chapter is a counterpoint to 21:1–14. Like that narrative, it tells of a hidden affront against Yahweh, the judgment that comes on the whole people for that affront, and an act of the king to avert the judgment. It differs from the first in that in this case the affront is caused by David himself.

The narrative begins by telling us that again (linking us with chapter 21) the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel. The action of his anger is to incite David against Israel, by sending him to take a (military) census. In 1Chronicles 21 it is Satan who is said to be set against Israel. Putting these two introductions together we can say that this sin of David in census taking (as we will see, sin it is) came as a judgment of God on Israel because of sin. The judgment of God is firstly to let sin become sinful, to hand us over to our sins. Behind all sin is the Evil One, Satan who is energising the sons of disobedience. And yet in his rebellion against God, he is only able to accomplish the judgment and purposes of God. In fact, God sends him to do his work – Job 1–2, 1Kings 22:19ff – knowing it will be part of the accomplishment of His own great work of salvation.

In David's census the purpose was to make an assessment of the available military strength in Israel. At times in Israel's history census taking was commanded – see Numbers 1 – and Exodus 30:12 made provision for the taking of the census, and commanded Israel to make a monetary ransom of all those numbered that there be no plague among them when you number them. Joab's response to David's command was to try to dissuade him, as he recognised the evil and the foolishness of the act. His response – May the Lord your God add to the people a hundred times as many as they are... was a call to David to remember that all his victory and security came not from his own strength but from the hand of the Lord (just as Eleazar and Shammah of the Three could testify.) This gets to the heart of the sinfulness of David's act – that it was a refusal of faith in the covenant Lord. Psalm 20 – one of David's – speaks of this faith, and we read especially in vv. 7–9: Some boast of chariots, and some of horses; but we boast of the name of the LORD our God. They will collapse and fall; but we shall rise and stand upright. Give victory to the king, O LORD; answer us when we call.

Immediately on having completed the census, David's heart smote him. He recognised the dreadfulness of what he had done. This is part of what makes David such a strong, attractive character: his readiness to confess. I have sinned greatly in what I have done. His trust was that the Lord remained merciful to him, and he called on the Lord for mercy. So serious was David's sin that it had to be worked out in a form of judgment – which was actually the outflow of the forgiveness which precedes the judgment (as was the case in the judgment following the adultery with Bathsheba – 2Sam. 12:13b–14).

In this case David was given the choice of three judgments – famine, invasion, or plague in the land. The options became shorter in duration but more intense in effect. David's sin had ramifications for the whole land and the whole people. David's response to the choice was to entrust himself to the judgment and to the mercy of God, and to plead to not be given up to the hands of man. This eliminated the first two options and so the plague came upon the land for three days.

As the destroying angel (Satan?) brought the plague toward Jerusalem, the Lord actually cut short his terrible ministry: It is enough; now stay your hand. His mercy limited the judgment on the people and David, and that mercy was focused particularly by the approach to Jerusalem, His beloved city. Yet behind this divine act of mercy, there was also human participation in worship and sacrifice.

We are told that David specifically saw the angel, and that he prayed for the Lord to spare the people, and to bring judgment solely on him and his family. It seems that this prayer was elicited by the Lord's mercy, and was part of the enacting of that mercy. Gad the prophet came that day to instruct David to build an altar and worship at this very spot – this preceded David's going and seeing the angel. When he informed Araunah of his intention to buy the land and build an altar, Araunah offered to give the animals for sacrifice and the wood for the fire. David recognised that it would be wrong for him to worship at another's expense, and insisted on buying the provisions also. And so he worshipped sacrificially, and so the Lord heard the supplications for the land, and the plague was averted from Israel.