

# **The Problems of Becoming and Being a King**

*Fifteen Seminars on Major  
Themes in 1 & 2 Samuel*

*David Gooding*

Myrtlefield Sermons



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## The Way God Rules

### *Aims, Context and Introduction*

I was remarking what a marvellously encouraging sight it is to see you all gathered here at vast considerable sacrifice of time, cost and energy, to take God and his word seriously. It is a fact, isn't it, that God has written a very large book? We claim, as Christians, to believe that that book is inspired throughout, but we do not always appear to show our belief in its inspiration. We do not always study it with the same rigour or intensity as we study our professional courses in banking or accountancy, or medicine or engineering or commerce. We are aware that the skills required and the knowledge demanded in our secular subjects requires hard, rigorous, constant hard thought; but sometimes we seem to think that God's word will yield its profit immediately and without that hard thought. We take it as a comforting word upon which to go to bed, a stimulating word in the morning upon which to go to work; and the rest as very much like Little Red Riding Hood—a story that will yield its meaning the moment we read it. But the God of the flowers and the trees and the human body is the God of the Bible, and his work in the Bible requires just as rigorous and intensive and hard thinking as all those other disciplines by which we study his 'secular' creation.

So it is a great encouragement for me to see you all here assembled and to be assured that you have already done a considerable amount of hard thinking on the books of 1 and 2 Samuel. Along with that preparation, you bring the experience and knowledge of the Lord, gathered over many years. I would like to thank the organizers for organizing the conference and for doing a tremendous amount of hard work and physical labour and secretarial preparation so that our studies may be as efficient as possible. And I thank too, those of you who have volunteered (or have been volunteered) to join in the conducting of the sessions from time to time.

### **Our aim in these studies**

As I see it, what we are primarily gathered to do in these days is to wait on God, to seek together his gracious illumination and self-revelation. It would, of course, be an impertinence on our part to expect God to show us his glory if we had not first worked hard to get into our minds the facts that he has told us, and to consider them in detail—what exactly they mean—and to have considered something about their interrelationships. But when we have done all we can do to prepare our minds to grasp the facts that he has given us, the significance of those facts will elude us unless the living God be pleased to speak to us, as we wait upon him.

Let us just make sure that in our prayers and preparations, we are looking in the right direction, not to any one teacher, but that we are looking to the living God that, as together we wait on him, he will graciously be pleased to let himself be known.

### **The big picture and two levels**

You will not need to be told that the scope of our studies is rather large. In these two books there are fifty-five chapters of holy writ, and we have to cover them in three and a half days. That proposition bears all the hallmarks of a certain madness for which I own total responsibility; but if you can't be mad about the word of God, I don't know what you could be mad about in life! Obviously, we shall not be trying to understand every detail. Rather, we shall be concentrating on looking at these two books as a whole and trying to see the main structure and composition of the books and the overall message that they are going to bring to us. If by God's grace we can see their overall message, then that will in itself be a tremendous help for us as we go away and continue to think about the relevance of the details, here and there in the book, to the overall message. We shall hardly interpret the details, and apply them correctly and efficiently and accurately, if we have no real concept of the major message to which those details are meant to contribute.

We shall be looking at these books, therefore, at two levels. I confess here and now that I have a butterfly mind and you must excuse me, and put it down to old age or other things creeping on me. I shall, from time to time, jump from one level to the other in a most confusing fashion. But if you remember that there are two levels and that we should always allow for both levels, it will help us in our understanding, and particularly in our application, of the book.

#### *Level one: the historical level*

We shall be looking at the first level, which is the historical: what these events meant to Israel in those far-off days, in their individual and national experience of God. The events of 1 and 2 Samuel are not merely there to be types for us, that is, as stories that had no particular significance to the Israelites in their day, but are somehow put in Scripture to be *types* for us in our day. They will serve as prototypes of the work of our Lord Jesus, but our first duty will be to examine their significance for the Israelites of that time and what they were led to know of God by the disciplines and the blessings of God that they experienced in their own day and generation.

#### *Level two: the prototypical level*

If we get that lesson moderately correct, it will not hinder but promote our study at the other level. We can see in these early histories *prototypes* that are ordered of God to point us to the Lord Jesus and therefore serve as *thought models* by which we may analyse the great gospel that God has given us through Jesus Christ our Lord.

It is a common practice amongst scientists to use thought models in the course of their studies, particularly those such as nuclear physicists and pure mathematicians who deal with abstruse matters. To help them grasp the shape and facts and significance of the results to which their experiments and their mathematical calculations point, they are apt to construct

these thought models, be it in the form of graphs or physical models, so that they might attempt to grasp visually the lessons that their experiments and calculations are beginning to teach them. They can then use them as a basis of further experiments as they go back to the evidence and consult again to see where the ideas that they have collected from their thought models are truly present in the reality that they are studying.

In his wisdom, God has given us in these ancient histories and in his ways with his people in ancient times, *prototypes* or *thought models*. Using those ancient histories as thought models we may be helped to analyse the great reality that has been put before us in the person of Jesus Christ our Lord.

So our studies will be at two levels. Let us keep them clear in theory, though of course in practice we shall constantly find ourselves, I suspect, going from one level to another level, maybe sometimes indiscriminately (though I hope not confusedly).

### **God's government of his people**

As we begin our study of 1 and 2 Samuel, our first duty is to ask what part these books play in the ongoing revelation of God in the Old Testament. There is a simple answer to it. These books tell of God's provision for the *government* of his people. These are the books that tell us of the provision of a king, provided by God, and established for the government of his people. That is a very important thing to grasp and carries at once its practical implications.

#### **Freedom under God's rule**

When God delivered his people from Egypt by dint of the Passover lamb and the miracle at the Red Sea, he did it certainly in order to set them free from their servitude to Pharaoh. But as you have often reminded your congregations, he set them free from bondage to Pharaoh, not in order that thereafter they should do exactly as they pleased, but that they should be brought under his own gracious government. And so, long before God brought Israel to their promised inheritance, he himself came down from heaven, stationed himself on Mount Sinai and offered the people his covenant, by the terms of which covenant he proposed to govern them. And as Moses held up before them the basin filled with the blood of the covenant sacrifice, he read before them in the book all the terms of that covenant and put it to them for their willing and voluntary acceptance. And the people cried aloud, 'All that the Lord has commanded us, we will do' (see Exod 24:3-7). And when the people then assented in this way to be governed by God, Moses took the blood of the covenant and, dipping hyssop into it, he sprinkled first the book of the covenant and then he sprinkled the people saying, 'This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord, your God, has made with you' (see v. 8). It was God's good pleasure then, in redeeming his people from bondage to Pharaoh, to bring them out under his own gracious government that they might learn to obey him.

That is true of us, is it not? Peter, in his first letter, reminds us that we have been elect 'unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ' (1:2 KJV). We are saved to obey. And still when our Lord hands to us the cup of wine at the Lord's Supper, he does it with the words: 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is shed for many' (see Matt 26:28). As we take it, we are assenting to stand by the terms of that covenant, and the first terms of

the covenant are as follows, 'I will put my laws into their minds, and write them on their hearts' (Jer 31:33; Heb 8:10). We too are delivered from bondage to Satan, not to please ourselves, but to be introduced into the new covenant, by which means our blessed Lord proposes to govern us for God.

We may expect therefore that these books of 1 and 2 Samuel will contain many lessons for us, even at their simplest level. They are the record of God's provision of a king to govern his redeemed people.

### **The direct rule of God**

Government by kingship was not the first form that God's government of his people took after they were brought out of Egypt. In fact, the first form of God's government was very different. It is what is known technically as *theocracy*, that is, the direct government of God of his people without the interposition or mediacy of any king. Throughout their wilderness journey, and for some hundreds of years when they first entered into the land, Israel had no king; God was their king. As Gideon later on was to tell the people when they offered him the chance to take kingship amongst them, 'I will not be your king when God himself is your King' (see Judg 8:22–23).

For hundreds of years Israel lived under a theocracy in which they sensed that God himself, immediately, was their king. Of course, in those days each family had its head; each city had its elders; and each tribe had its body of elders. Finally, in matters of grave importance that affected the wellbeing of the whole nation, Israel had an institution that scholars have called *the all-tribal assembly*, when all the tribes would meet to discuss a matter, and to take their decisions regarding it, before the Lord (see Judg 20). But in all those meetings, whether the father in the house or the elders in the city or in the tribe, or in the all-tribal assembly, there was no intermediary between God and man. God himself was thought of as reigning directly over his people through the various gifts of father and elder.

That, I suppose, was the ideal. Perhaps you might say, however, 'You haven't grown cynical as you maybe could, instructed by your knowledge of later history. Wasn't that bound to fail? I mean, to have every individual family, so to speak, autonomous—directly responsible to the Lord, to have every city autonomous—directly responsible to the Lord, to have every tribe autonomous and directly responsible to the Lord: wouldn't that end in chaos in the end?'

I refrain from drawing a parallel between that and more modern things. And don't I hear you saying, 'You must have some central organization or the whole thing will end up in chaos?'

I have to tell you that the whole thing did end up in chaos, such chaos that, in the end, God had to impose a king. But let's take some time at the beginning of our studies to put the book of Samuel into its previous context and to think for a moment why that direct theocracy ended up in chaos. If we could answer that question by reading 1 Samuel or other books, we should immediately have a practical lesson for ourselves, shouldn't we? Because, if nowadays we in church fellowship who believe in the autonomy of the church and its direct responsibility to the living God are going to find it works and doesn't end up in chaos, we

shall have to give heed to the lessons of ancient history and why the ancient theocracy in Israel eventually did come to grief and was replaced by a monarchy and a centralized government.

### **The time of the judges**

Of course, the Israelites were no more perfect than any of the rest of us and therefore, even during those centuries when the theocracy was in place, Israel got themselves into all kinds of difficulties and rebellions against the Lord and slippages and departures and backslidings and apostasies, and goodness knows what else. And, when they thus departed from the Lord, he deliberately handed them over into the hands of the Gentiles that were their enemies; and mightily did their enemies afflict them, and costly was the price that Israel had to pay for their disobedience to the Lord. But then the book of Judges tells us what happened when they cried to him.

Sensing the cruelty and misery of their bondage to which their sin had brought them, when they cried to the Lord, God was ready with a form of salvation, and he raised up judges for the people. They were not judges simply in the formal, legal sense of those who don their English wigs and pronounce penalty upon the people, but judges in the sense of saviours, judges who could come along and point out to the people where they had gone wrong, who could help the people judge themselves and repent of their sins and cry to the Lord to see whether he would have mercy. When the Lord would have mercy upon them, these were the sorts of judges who were saviours who could raise up and lead them to overcome their enemies and deliver them from the power of their enemies and set them back where they were before, with the freedom given them by God.

That happened many times. And so long as the judge survived, we are told, and was there to go around and help people keep to the right lines, then Israel's theocracy went well and was exceedingly successful. We should not forget the fact that it worked very well for centuries. I say we should not forget it, because some of us do, impressed by the dominant memory from the way the book of Judges ends its chapters with the repeated refrain, 'In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes' (21:25).

Yet there is no doubt it ended in confusion. So what went wrong? I preface our study of the books of Samuel by a brief thumbnail sketch of the history of the book of Judges, which precedes it in the Hebrew canon.



## A brief sketch of the book of Judges

There were seven major judges in Israel, raised up of God to deliver his people. I list them for you here.

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### The Two Introductions

1. 1:1 *And it came to pass after the death of Joshua . . .*
  2. 2:6 *Now when Joshua had sent the people away . . . another [third] generation . . . which knew not the Lord, and the children of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord . . .*
- 

### The Main Deliverers

3. 3:7 *And the children of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.*  
DELIVERER: OTHNIEL
  4. 3:12 *And the children of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.*  
DELIVERER: EHUD  
After Ehud: Shamgar
  5. 4:1 *And the children of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.*  
DELIVERERS: DEBORAH, BARAK, Jael
  6. 6:1 *And the children of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.*  
DELIVERER: GIDEON
  7. 8:33 *And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again and went a whoring after the Baalim . . . > ABIMELECH: KING.*  
DELIVERER: A WOMAN OF THEBEZ  
After Abimelech: Tola, Jair
  8. 10:6 *And the children of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.*  
DELIVERER: JEPHTHAH  
After Jephthah: Ibzan, Elon, Abdon
  9. 13:1 *And the children of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.*  
DELIVERER: SAMSON
- 

### The Two Epilogues

10. 17:1 Micah—a Levite—the Danites—and their idolatry
  11. 19:1 The all-tribal-assembly and its mishandling of a case of gross immorality
- 

There was, first, Othniel. And in the second place, Ehud. In the third place, Barak, supported and goaded by Deborah and Jael. In the fourth place there was Gideon. And the fifth, one who takes the apparent place of a judge and deliverer, was called Abimelech. Sixthly there came Jephthah. And, finally, there came Samson. All except Abimelech were deliverers. Many of them are mentioned as men of faith in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

## A descending spiral of behaviour

Though all of them were deliverers in some sense (as I say, except Abimelech), if you will look carefully you will find an interesting and very sad thing about this succession of saviours and

judges. Judges 2 and 3 point out to us in advance the pattern that would develop. The Lord's people would fall into sin and disobedience; God would deliver them into the hands of their enemies; and their enemies would oppress them. Eventually, Israel would repent and cry to the Lord. He would deliver them from their enemy through a judge, and then all the while the judge lived, Israel would do well; but when the judge died, they would depart from God again into disobedience, and once more the cycle would be repeated. They would go into the power of the enemy until they repented and God raised up another judge to deliver them.

But the historian also tells us that as the cycle was repeated it wasn't a mere repetition. Each time the people sinned against the Lord, they went deeper into sin and into worse trouble than they had before, until they went beyond recovery. And you may notice that if you give attention to the actual structure of the book of Judges.

### *The first and last judges*

The first judge and deliverer was Othniel, and there is no accident about God's choice of Othniel to be the first deliverer. The verses that precede the story of Othniel tell us why it was that Israel so frequently went wrong: they intermarried with the daughters of the Canaanites. They were so pretty. I mean, there *was* reason for it, though I don't stop to elaborate on it. They were charming; their hairdos were none such as Moses had instituted under the law; their make-up was very colourful and all that! There was reason for what these men chose, but it went strictly against God's commandment. They allowed their hearts to be taken away, and they married girls from amongst the Canaanite nations around them, and therefore fell into the value system of the Canaanites and their idolatry, worldview and religion.

If the trouble then was intermarriage with the Canaanite women, who would be better fitted to deliver Israel from such a bondage than the man called Othniel? For the secret of his success was nothing other than his wife.

Othniel's wife was the daughter of Caleb, and you will remember how Othniel came to get her as his wife. Caleb said, 'Whoever takes the city full of giants, I will give him my daughter as his wife' (see 1:12). Othniel looked around. He took one look at the giants; then he took one look at Caleb's daughter, Acsah, and said, 'I'd face any giant to get her'. And, stimulated and motivated to get Caleb's daughter as his wife, he went and captured the city and destroyed the giants and was given her hand. She was his stimulus to be victorious in this way for God and his people.

And even when Othniel had been given his piece of inheritance by his father-in-law, Caleb, it was Acsah who moved him to ask for more (vv. 14–15). One bright morning at breakfast she said, 'Do you know, Othniel dear, this is a nice piece of inheritance. I mean, I'm not complaining, but it is as dry as it could possibly be. What use is a bit of old gravel ground like this, down in the Negeb that never gets rained on in eighteen months? Useless. We can't grow cabbages here, or my favourite spinach. What about, you know, being a man and the next time Papa comes down, get at him and say, "Now look here, if you love your daughter, you'll do better for her than this"?' And Othniel says, 'Well, is that so?'

So when Caleb came down to dinner the next time, well, Acsah wasn't the first woman who, having instructed her husband to do something, did it herself. She got at her father and said, 'Papa, you were beautifully kind. Do you like that spinach? It's very difficult growing

spinach here. Did you like that soup? That's the last I've got, you know. Miserable place this is really, because it hasn't had any rain, or water for irrigation.' Then she asked her father for some bigger territory with springs, and he gave her the upper and lower springs.

Acsah was a good woman. Blessed indeed are the gentlemen who have Acsahs for wives, who are there to goad them and to put some ambition inside them, to explore and get as much of the divine inheritance as God is willing to give us! The key to Othniel's success was his wife.

Now look at the last judge; his name was Samson. His wives (if you can call them by that name) were of course the cause of his downfall. And it isn't just that. By the time you come to Samson, the ruler is now guilty of committing the very sin from which Othniel had to deliver the people, and only a few people would have questioned him (Judg 14). His godly father and mother questioned his decision, but for the rest of Samson's generation it was the accepted thing.

It can happen amongst God's people that things that in earlier generations would have been counted as sins and disobedience, from which men of God had delivered God's people, public servants of God can later on be found committing the same sins without questioning. In my day, preachers who stood upon the platform to teach God's word would have warned us younger people against marrying the unconverted, and they would have warned us against divorce. It is not uncommon nowadays to find men who occupy the pulpit to preach, who are themselves divorced.

#### *The second and second to last judges*

You will notice then the second judge. His name is Ehud, and one of the tactics that he adopted, in order to defeat the enemy was this. When the enemy came scampering back from Jericho to try and reach the safety of the land of Moab, Ehud stationed himself and his men at the fords of Jordan. As these Moabites came queuing up to run across the fords to get to safety, Ehud stood there with his sword and cut their heads off as they passed by. It was a tactic that worked (Judg 3:28–29).

Now look at the second to last judge, if you will; his name was Jephthah. He too wrought great victories for the people of God. He too took the fords of Jordan; and as the people came over, he said, 'Pronounce "Shibboleth".' And some of them couldn't, because it wasn't their dialect, and they instead said, 'Sibboleth,' at which he slaughtered them (12:5–6). His tactics were the same as the tactics of Ehud, but there was this painful difference. The people whom Ehud killed at the fords of Jordan were the enemy; the people whom Jephthah killed at the fords of Jordan were his own brethren, his fellow Israelites. What they said meant the same thing; it's just when they tried to express it their accent was a little different, and they said it in a slightly different sounding fashion, and for that they were slaughtered.

God's people have come to a very bad way, haven't they, when their deliverers can't distinguish between the enemy and genuine people of God and are prepared to slaughter their brethren, even if they mean the same thing doctrinally, but they happen to put it in a slightly different phraseology?

*The third and fifth judges*

Look at Barak, Deborah and Jael. Barak was a great warrior, but when the battle was won, the final mopping up was not done by Barak but by Jael. She was at her tent door one day when the enemy commander, a man by the name of Sisera, came running as hard as he could towards her tent. I cannot here discuss the morality of what the dear lady did, for I haven't the time, but eventually, as you know, she laid him down and covered him with a rug. And when he asked for a drink, she brought him a basin of milk; and when he was safely asleep, she took a tent peg and put it through his brain (4:17–22).

If you care to consider the character of Abimelech in his position in the book, he ranks as though he were a judge and deliverer. He was, in fact, an old tyrant. It wasn't the last time in history that there has risen up amongst the people of God men that have claimed to be deliverers, but are in fact carnal tyrants, like Diotrephes was in his celebrated church (3 John 1:9–10).

You will see things are going to the bad already with Abimelech. This story tells how, when he was besieging a city of the Lord, a woman got fed up with his nonsense, and when he came near the wall, she got hold of a millstone, heaved it over the wall—bang—straight onto the head of the enemy commander. It crushed his skull and put an end to his nonsense, none too soon. But then you notice a difference, don't you? In the third story the enemy commander had his skull pierced with a tent peg by a woman. And in the fifth, the commander also had his skull smashed by a woman. The difference is that in the one, the man whose skull was smashed was the commander of the enemy. In the other, the man who had his skull smashed was an Israelite, a supposed judge of the people.

Perhaps I've said enough to show that the thesis that the historian announces in the early chapters of Judges is exemplified in the actual history, indeed in the very structure of the book. The judges, good and glorious as they were, failed, and themselves eventually led people into sin. It was because the judges failed as an institution that eventually God had to bring in the institution of monarchy.

**The failure of the priesthood**

It wasn't merely the judges who failed, was it? Even if the judges had failed, suppose the Levites had remained faithful to the Lord. There would have been hope for Israel. But they didn't, did they? In the second introductory section of the book, the historian tells us how, from time to time and intermittently, Israel fell into idolatry, but there was hope for them, because idolatry was not yet institutionalized. But when you come to the first epilogue at the end of Judges, you'll meet a man by the name of Micah. He wasn't a Levite, but he got a Levite to be his parson. He was doing well, and when he got a Levite for his priest he remarked, 'Now the Lord will bless me, for I've got a Levite for my priest.' He obviously hadn't read his Deuteronomy, had he?

Then people of the Danites took up their tents and travelled looking for somewhere else to settle down. They came by and seized this Levite, and they conscripted him into their service. They offered him bigger pay, and the Levite felt he had a call to a higher post. The Danite tribe went north with this Levite and the old idols of silver they had stolen from Micah, and all this institutionalized idolatry nonsense. When they arrived up in the north of the

country they found a city called Laish that was full of idolatry from stem to stern. They slaughtered every inhabitant in the city and took it over as the headquarters of the tribe of Dan and put there, instead of the pagan idolatry, Israelite idolatry. And the gross sin of this Levite they had hired was that, being a grandson of Moses, he not only led part of Israel into idolatry, but actually institutionalized it. So not only did the institution of judges go wrong; the institution of the Levites went wrong as well.

### **The failure of the all-tribal assembly**

Israel had another institution. We call it *the all-tribal assembly*. It came together from time to time in order to decide things that were relevant and important to the nation as a whole. There is one example of its functioning in the very first section of the book of Judges. When it was a question of the tribes having to go off and enter into the particular inheritances that God had given them, then the whole tribal assembly met before the Lord and enquired of the Lord, 'Who should go up first to their inheritance?' Disbanding the army was a tricky job. You had to do it slowly, lest the old, wicked Canaanites got an advantage militarily. So who should go up first to his particular part? And the Lord answered, 'Judah shall go up first' (see 1:1–2). Here is the all-tribal assembly, functioning in a matter that concerns the whole nation; and a very good job it did.

When you come to the final story in the book of Judges, it once more concerns the all-tribal assembly. They met to consult over an exceedingly serious thing. The tribe of Benjamin, by its behaviour, had fouled and desecrated some of the leading sanctities for which Israel stood; and the all-tribal assembly met to decide how the tribe of Benjamin should be disciplined (20:1–7). And the story is that, in their attempt to discipline Benjamin for transgressing some sanctities in Israel, the all-tribal assembly committed worse desecration of even more important sanctities.

What a sorry lesson it is, isn't it? And how many times has it happened in the church of God, when churches have attempted to discipline behaviour that rightly should have been disciplined, that they have done it in such carnal fashion that they themselves, in the process of disciplining, have committed graver offences against the people of God than the people did who now were being disciplined? Oh, what a scandal throughout Christendom has been the supposed disciplines employed by our loved and longed for brethren known as exclusives.

### **The consequences of failing to help people know God**

So the institution of judges failed; the institution of Levites failed; the institution of the all-tribal assembly failed. And we are going to read how the great bastion that should have upheld theocracy failed as well. The early chapters of Samuel are about that.

Allow me to anticipate those chapters just to say this much. If a theocracy is going to work—if you are going to have God's people in autonomous groups, responsible directly to the Lord, and you are going to have it work—the *sine qua non* of it all will be a priesthood that leads the people of God into the knowledge of God, makes the people sense the reality of God, expounds to them the wonder of God and the glory of God and the majesty of God, until the people are so inflamed with the love of God and the worship of God that they *want* to obey

God! But suppose the priesthood fails, and the worship of God becomes a mere routine, as dead and dry as the Sahara desert. Suppose the priests lose the sense of the majesty and holiness of God and begin to live selfish lives, according to the standards of the world. Then I tell you that the principle of autonomy as direct dependence and obedience to God will go out of the window.

Still, today, in the question of the governing of God's people, the role of his priesthood is absolutely vital. We shall listen with all our ears to those who will be exhorting us on this topic later, because we too are priests. The mere laying down of the law of regulation has, of course, an important part to play. We must know the commandments of God, but if God's people are going to have a heart to obey them and keep them, it is upon you and me to fulfil our function as priests and, by that function, bring to the people a sense of the overwhelming majesty and wonder and wealth and holiness of God Almighty. If the people's hearts are inflamed with love and worship for him, they won't be too difficult to govern for God. Let them lose that because we as priests fail, and then you will hear clamour for other forms of government.

### **The failure of prophets**

As we think of the failure of priests we might think that, well, at least there was a backstop. Yes, there were the wretched old priests that failed in Eli's day, but at least God had a backstop. He raised up Samuel to be a prophet to rebuke the old priests and to bring the word of God to bear upon them. Here was an itinerant judge and preacher, and he made the people hear the word of the Lord, because here was a man who knew the Lord and heard the Lord speak; and he could help the nation hear the Lord speak! And it worked very well, but then original sin had its dastardly way. If Eli's sons were bad, alas, so were Samuel's. And with the failure of the sons of the prophets, as well as the sons of the priests, the thing came to such a pass that God eventually heard the cry of his people and appointed them a king.

### **God appoints his king**

You will say, 'The appointment of Saul as king was a mistake. It was somebody's mistake; if not God's then the people's.'

All right. I'm saying that when God appointed David, he appointed him deliberately.

You say, 'It didn't settle it. David was a half-decent king, most of the time. His son Solomon started off pretty decently and then went to the bad. The rest of the kings of Judah, and then of Israel, well some of them were good, some of them half-decent, some of them a third decent, and then in the end, they all went to the bad. Monarchies? They'll fail.'

That is the sorry story of the Old Testament. It reminds us all again that we are sinners. Adam sinned, but you haven't met the full course of sin and known it for what it is, until you've read the whole of Old Testament history. Every institution failed, and then God showed his final solution. He raised up Jesus Christ our Lord, of the seed of David according to the flesh, that he should be the supreme and perfect king, as he was also the supreme and unflinching prophet, as he will for all eternity be the holy priest whose holiness is untarnished.

And what a judge and a Saviour he is, isn't he? All of us here today celebrate him, thinking of the times when we wandered ourselves and got into difficult circumstances because of our waywardness, and we cried to the Lord and the Lord saved us and taught us to judge ourselves, so that we be not judged. Marvellous Christ! So will these histories point us inevitably to him, our perfect judge, priest, prophet and king. And therefore it is that in the first book of Samuel, we shall have the story of God's imposition of his king upon his people, and all the problems that relate to that matter.

### **How did God appoint his king?**

When God came to anoint David as king of Israel, there were a number of possibilities open to the divine wisdom. First of all, he had to consider that there was a certain Saul in place— anointed of the Lord; but Saul had gone to the bad and deliberately disobeyed God and proved himself incapable and unworthy of being God's king over his people, so God had decided to appoint David in his place. Well if he'd thus decided, he could have destroyed Saul there and then, and then anointed David, and there would have been no trouble. Or, if he didn't want to destroy Saul, he could have let Saul carry on until the end, and indeed he did. But he could have waited until Saul died and then anointed David king, and there would have been no trouble. God did neither. He let Saul carry on but went and anointed David while Saul was still king, and from that there came a whole host of trouble.

If one of these days when President Bush is abroad consulting with Gorbachev or with Margaret Thatcher, and someone goes and appoints a Democrat as president, will President Bush not have something to say when he comes back? I know that if our gracious Queen went on a visit to the West Indies or the continent of India and, in her absence, the Archbishop of Canterbury were to anoint the Labour Prime Minister as queen, when the Queen came back, she would have questions for the aforesaid Archbishop!

When God first proposed that Samuel should go and anoint David to be king, Samuel said to God, 'I can't do that, God. I mean, if Saul heard that I'd gone and anointed David to be king, he'd have my head off (understandably)'.

But God said, 'You'd better go and do it anyway.'

God had one other option. He could, having anointed David, put him on the throne by force, but he didn't do that. He just anointed him and didn't force him on the throne of Israel, but allowed him to be persecuted up hill and down dale by Saul and the establishment, until at length, despairing of his life, he went to the Gentiles and was lost to Israel for a lengthy period.

So far, the history. That is sheer history, but if you will forget that for a moment, I'll tell you something else. (If you don't forget the history, you'd think I am being fanciful, and I wouldn't like you to think that.) I can tell you what tactics almighty God has used to impose his Son upon our world as king. He could have destroyed all government, and then had the Lord Jesus born in Bethlehem and anointed king. He didn't do it that way. He could have waited until this wicked world has run its course to the end of the age and the antichrist and everybody else has come, and the beast and the false prophet, and destroyed them and then brought in the Lord Jesus and anointed him king. He hasn't done that either. He sent our blessed Lord into the world, had him anointed by the Holy Spirit and power, had him claimed

to be king as he rode into Jerusalem on a donkey: 'Behold, your King comes!' And then God has let the world reject, persecute, crucify and sling out the Son of God. And, by and large, the Messiah who was sent to Israel, since they were so obdurate in their rejection of him, has gone to the Gentiles while Israel still officially rejects him.

If you see any connection between the history in the book of 1 Samuel and the history of the New Testament, it is no accident. In the book of Samuel, we are in the presence of one of those prototypes that the wisdom of God constructed in history, as to how God himself would one day go about appointing his Son as not only the king of Israel, but the king of the world.



## The Loss and Return of the Ark of God

*1 Samuel 4:2–7:17*

Let's push on with our study of 1 Samuel and begin at chapter 4, where we have already raised many issues. There will be time to discuss them and time for other contributions. But we come now to perhaps one of the saddest events in the history of Israel's spiritual experience: their loss of the ark to the Philistines. For seven whole months, the ark was out of its tabernacle, out of the nation and in the hands of the Philistines. Put simply like that, it is obviously serious, but let's spend a little time considering the matter so that the full seriousness of it may come home to our hearts.

### **The ark of God**

What was the significance of the ark? It was first of all the place where the Lord of hosts sat upon the cherubim. It was his symbolic throne: the place of the presence where God, the living God, deigned to dwell and presence himself among the Israelites. It was therefore the presence of the living God, dwelling upon the cherubim of the ark in the tabernacle, that distinguished Israel from all the other nations around and distinguished their tabernacle and temple from the temples of the pagan deities.

### **God in relationship with his people**

Let's just try to let the significance of it sink down into our hearts. It is a story that I sometimes find difficult to accept and believe. As a backyard astronomer, I go out and look at the stars and the galaxies, the gigantic worlds upon worlds that whirl in space. And I'm asked to believe this fantastic story that the transcendent Lord, maker of heaven and earth, could have condescended to come down to our planet and presence himself on the cherubim that were upon the mercy seat upon the ark in the holiest of all of the tabernacle of Israel. All the laws of holiness with which God surrounded that tabernacle were surely none of them exaggerated, if it was true that the living Lord was present in the tabernacle.

It was this thing that distinguished Israel from all the nations around. Their gods were but idols, demons at best. The idols in their temple were but idols: having eyes they saw not, mouths they spoke not, ears they heard not. Here was the thing that distinguished Israel: their God was the living God, and his presence was livingly known among his people.

Thirdly, the ark was the ark of the covenant, and in the ark were the tables of the covenant that expressed the special relationship that God had set up between himself and Israel, and what a superb and marvellous relationship that was. It is sometimes said that the goal of

redemption in Israel was the land of Canaan, with its milk and honey blessed; but that is not true. The goal of Israel's redemption was not Canaan. Canaan was the destiny to which they were destined, but the *goal* of redemption was far different. It was so important that Israel should grasp what the whole goal of redemption was, and do so early on in their experience, that they had not got many months out of Egypt and along the desert way when the living, transcendent Lord came down from his heaven and stationed himself on Mount Sinai. So august was the occasion, so indescribably magnificent, that the living God, creator and upholder of the universe should come among them and stand on Mount Sinai, that Mount Sinai shook! It was a wonder that the whole planet wasn't consumed in that moment. Israel were so petrified with fear as the living Lord stood on the mountain, and they saw the whole mountain alive with flame, that they besought Moses that they might go and hide themselves. They said, 'You go and speak to him, Moses. We dare not come anywhere near' (see Exod 20:18–19). We lose our sense of the wonder of our salvation if we fail first to contemplate the majesty and the holiness of God.

What had God come down for? Moses was called to meet God, and God told Moses to go down and speak to the people and prepare them for this great thing. Eventually, having prepared the people, Moses led them out to meet God. There never was a ministry more wonderful than that a man, be he Moses or anyone else, should have the privilege of taking his fellow creatures and leading them out to meet God.

Later rabbis, indeed some of the prophets, refer to that situation under the figure of a courtship, do they not? When God came down to Sinai, he came to woo his people in the wilderness and win them to himself: their affections, their love and devotion. And Moses acted as the middleman and called upon the people and led them out to meet their would-be lover.

And Moses went up the mountain and received the offer that God made to his people. 'Moses, go and tell Israel: "You have seen how I dealt with the Egyptians and I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to . . ."'

You say, 'to Canaan, what else? I mean, why ever would you leave Egypt if it weren't merely for the benefit of having some free honey and milk to eat with your Rice Krispies in the morning? And another bungalow or two, and a farm of your own: that surely was the purpose of redemption. And perhaps a chariot or two, a Buick maybe or a Cadillac? What else is redemption about?'

If we thought that, we might even fall into the bigger mistake of thinking that the whole point of redemption was to take us home to heaven. That is not the goal of redemption. That is one of the incidentals that will form one of our destinies. The goal of redemption for us is as it was for Israel. As he stood on Mount Sinai, God said to his people, 'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to *myself*' (Exod 19:4). God is the goal of redemption.

Moses said, 'I exceedingly fear and quake' (Heb 12:21 KJV). The writer to the Hebrews doesn't diminish the awesomeness of that experience; he adds to it. He says, 'You *have* come,' not, 'will one day come.' 'You have already come to a mountain, not the mountain with gloom and darkness, thunder and lightning and the devouring flames of the glory of God, fit to scare even Moses out of his wits. You have come to the city of the great God, whose word then

shook the earth, but he has promised saying, yet again, "I will shake not only the earth, but the heavens as well". We have come to the mountain of God. That is what it means to be a believer. We have come to God. And one of these days, we shall face him whose voice shook Sinai and the little desert surrounding it; but one day, he says, he'll shake not only the earth but the heavens as well, and the whole universe will be convulsed as the living God shakes it, so that what can be removed shall be removed and the things that are eternal shall abide (see Heb 12:18–27).

Oh, my brothers, my sisters, God help us to get hold of the reality of redemption. The goal of redemption for us, as for them, is to be called to come and meet the living God, our creator. And when we have conceived a little of his majesty, how he is more important than all his universe and all heaven of heavens put together, then we are in a position perhaps to consider the wonder of the relationship he offers.

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (Exod 19:5–6)

### **Glory departed**

The ark symbolized the relationship; it carried the covenant that was the legal basis of Israel's special relationship with God, and they went and lost it. Losing the ark, their religion became but an empty shell like the superstitions and idolatries of the nations around them. If we have any reality of church life today, it is that we know the presence of the living, majestic Lord in our midst. Lose the sense of the living Lord in the church and you'll have nothing more than the superstition of the heathens around you.

With the loss of the ark, they not only lost the glory, they had to put up the noticeboard outside *Ichabod*: 'the glory has departed' (see 1 Sam 4:21–22). They lost the distinctiveness between them and the religions of the world. They lost their cohesion as well, because, as you know, the nation was composed of twelve tribes. They were a very loose congeries of tribes. They had no central control mechanism. As we have said earlier, they did have an all-tribal assembly to which they went to consider things that affected all the tribes. Otherwise, they had at this stage no king, no central committee, no headquarters, no nothing. What kept them together then? What kept them together was the tabernacle, but it would be inadequate to put it like that. What kept them together was the living Lord who presenced himself on the ark in the tabernacle. With the Lord gone, they lost the secret of their cohesion.

That is an incredible story that any nation so favoured, so redeemed, so privileged, would lose the very presence of the ark—the symbol of his presence; that they would lose the reality and thus lose their testimony to the world. As we answer that in our consciences, we should not forget to ask ourselves the same question.

It happened again later, of course. At one stage, Ezekiel was taken by the Holy Spirit and shown the secret of Israel's desolation and what it was that had brought them to captivity and destroyed the temple. He saw the desperate defilement of God's house by the unholiness and superstition that the Israelites had introduced into it. He saw the beautiful vision of the glory of God, seated upon his throne and upon the cherubim. And he had to stand by to see the

heartbreaking experience as the cherubim lifted their wings when the throne of God came out and stood at the threshold, left Jerusalem temple, and stood on the mountain and then was gone (Ezek 8–10).

What shall I say of Herod's temple in Jerusalem and the magnificent priests, with all their ritual and finery and traditions? One day, there came to them the glory of God incarnate who consented to walk the courts of that temple, and they had no time for him. Eventually, he left saying, 'Behold, your house is left unto you desolate' (Matt 23:38 KJV). Forty years after that, the Romans were allowed to destroy it, until one stone was not left upon another.

If there be a sadder story than that, it is to be found in the book of the Revelation, where Christ, coming to address the last church of the seven of Laodicea, is obliged to stand outside and knock for an entrance. And lovingly, but firmly, warning them, he says that if they will not repent, he will spew them out of his mouth (3:14–19). Glory departed.

### **When Israel lost the ark**

What were the circumstances then that led to this terrible thing? Well, chapter 4 says the Philistines came up.

Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines. They encamped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines encamped at Aphek. The Philistines drew up in line against Israel, and when the battle spread, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand men on the field of battle. And when the troops came to the camp, the elders of Israel said, 'Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD here from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies.' So the people sent to Shiloh and brought from there the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, who is enthroned on the cherubim. And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. As soon as the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel gave a mighty shout, so that the earth resounded. And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shouting, they said, 'What does this great shouting in the camp of the Hebrews mean?' (1 Sam 4:1–6)

### **The reason they lost it**

In that brief account you find the secret why Israel lost the ark. Defeated the first time, the elders got together and knocked their heads together as to the cause of the thing and how it should be put right, and they said, 'The obvious thing to do is to bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord that *it* may save us.'

In the first place, they couldn't have been reading the covenant very well just recently, could they? For the covenant had its terms. It was, as you may remember, a two-party covenant in which Israel were required to fulfil their part and then God would fulfil his, and their part of the covenant was to be loyal to God and to obey his statutes. They brought the ark out, and the sons of Eli: Hophni and Phinehas were there. 'Bring it out that it may save us,' they said. But 'it' never saved anybody. Without the Lord, it was but a box of wood with

a little gold around it and a couple of stones and other things inside. It couldn't save anybody. It was at best only a symbol. Only the Lord can save.

### **What it means to be a priest**

With the ark were the two priests: Hophni and Phinehas. You could guess what would happen, couldn't you? Hophni and Phinehas didn't *know* the Lord. He was never a living reality to them and never had been. All they knew of the Lord was a round of ceremonies and rituals, but as for knowing the Lord personally: 'they did not know the LORD' (2:12). When, therefore, the elders suggested that they bring the ark and it would save them, that suited Hophni and Phinehas very well. To them it was a magical box of works, to be kept in a safe place like your fire extinguisher, against emergencies and difficult situations, so that if the enemy came to victory, or threatened to, you could bring this magical box of works and say some incantation of a few words of some psalm or other over it, and a holy prayer, and it would do the job and save you. That, as you see, is the essence of paganism. It is nothing but superstition. They didn't know the Lord, though they supposedly lived near to him as priests in the very holy tabernacle of God, and supposedly ministered to God every day of the week.

How different was Hannah. She wasn't a priestess (there weren't such things in their day), but she knew the Lord. She knew the Lord in the ordinary, humble affairs of life. Quietly, where few other people ever knew about it, she knew the Lord. And it was not only because of the routine piety of her husband, which she shared in as they went up with their offerings to the Lord year by year to keep the Feast of the Lord. That was good; that was wonderful, but she knew the Lord beyond that: in the personal details of life, in the longings of her heart, in the desire to be a mother, in the shame she felt at being barren and suffering the taunting of Peninnah and that rather silly self-satisfaction of Elkanah (1:6-8). He'd been to the meetings, hadn't he? He'd been every year since he was a boy. He knew a lot of the priests there too. I mean, when Hannah was concerned because she had no child, he said, 'Oh, cheer up, Hannah. Am I not better to you than ten sons?' What a smug old, conceited, self-satisfied man he was. If it had been left to him and his ambitions, no Samuel would ever have been born. He was quite content. He surely didn't know what things they were getting up to in the priesthood at Shiloh, or how on earth could the man have rested content in bed and not found himself, like his wife, day after day and night after night, on his knees? For him it was being content with mere routine meetings and thinking that's enough, so long as you didn't rob a bank. But not Hannah.

You might say it was nature and instinct that compelled Hannah to seek a son. Well, it may have been at the beginning, but under God, as she took the whole matter of the ordinary everyday life affairs and her career as a mother to him out of her frustration, she got to know the Lord. And he brought her, in her longings, to the point where she saw that just having a child in itself was not life's acme and goal.

Why live? Why have a family? Why get married? Why have a career in the bank? What are you in it or? We are hardly priests if we are merely in our careers for our career's sake? Hannah took her natural career of motherhood and was brought to the place where she said, 'God, if you'll give me a son, I'll give him back to you.'

It's what a priest is meant to be, isn't it? It means that in all the affairs of life, our motherhood, fatherhood, business ability, profession, and whatever else, shall be laid at the feet of God, which is our reasonable priestly service (Rom 12:1).

Hannah knew God, and though her experience was at the humble level of a home, yet in her song we discover that she had been taught the principle upon which almighty God proposes to govern our earth. She celebrated the fact that he has blessed and visited the barren, and the woman that had borne a number of children he set aside. He sets aside the crowd. He sets aside those that are full and are perfectly content, and he takes the beggar off the dunghill that he may sit him with princes (2:1–10).

### **Relying on God**

I don't know what you've found, but oh, how difficult a path it is to walk when God has filled your lap with every conceivable joy, and nature has smiled on you. You've never felt bruised and hindered and wounded. You've had every satisfaction. You had a silver spoon in your mouth when you were born, and you went to the Ivy League universities, and you got a marvellous job and your car is the biggest Cadillac in the area, and you've never felt earth's hurt, and nature has never been unkind to you, and you've blessed God with all your heart, simply because he's filled your granaries with enough and to spare. Oh, how hard it is then to be spiritual! But multitudes of men and women manage to be spiritual in spite of it. It is the poor who are really blessed: men and women whose natural disadvantages or burdens or grief's or frustrations, in the end, bring them to the feet of the Saviour in their poverty and bankruptcy; and they find a God who hasn't made us to mock us, but brings us to our poverty that he may elevate us.

What is true at the literal is true at the spiritual level. How many religious people go about this world very self-satisfied, like the Pharisee in the temple? 'Oh, God, I do thank thee that I didn't have a disadvantaged childhood to be brought up in such a simple home as this rascal over the way. I've been diligent in my tithes and so forth and so on. God, I should think you're pretty well pleased with me. I am pleased with myself anyway, and I'm doing very well on the whole' (see Luke 18:9–12). Such a person is smugly self-satisfied, a little bit like Elkanah. It was a tax gatherer who, in the holiness of the temple was becoming conscious of his sinfulness, smote upon his breast and confessed himself bankrupt. He found a God who justified him, freely and by his grace (vv. 13–14).

This early song of Hannah's found its origin in the contention between her and Peninnah and in the way that God, in the end, exalted her. He not only gave her this child and other children, he used her firstborn, who became the great and famous Samuel, to bring in David: ancestor of Christ Jesus our Lord. Oh, what a glory is Hannah's! I look forward to visiting the dear lady in glory, to get her to tell me first-hand her wonderful exercise of heart and how she prevailed with God.

### **The immorality of the priests**

Hannah, then, knew the Lord, and she discovered the secrets upon which God proposes to rule our world. They are principles that we shall later find exemplified in David, and pre-

eminently in our Lord. But Eli's sons did not know the Lord. Supposedly ministering in divine things, their hearts were far from God and they were putting themselves first, before God. What a frightful thing for a mere lump of clay to do!

The law laid it down that when a person had brought his sacrifice, a certain part was to be offered to God, a certain part given to the priest and a certain part, if need be (if it were that kind of sacrifice), given to the people.

Not Hophni and Phinehas, I should think not. They would come to an offerer and say, 'Give us the meat.'

'No, no,' said the offerer, 'this has to go to God first and then you can have it.'

'Nonsense! What do you think we're in this business for? We don't take note of those old-fashioned rules and regulations. This is our job. This is our livelihood. It's where we get our bread and butter. What, do you think we're here doing it for nothing?'

They had a three-pronged fork, and they stabbed it into the sacrifice. The theory was that what one prong didn't bring up, the other two did. They said, 'We'll have it first, or we shan't offer your sacrifice for you' (see 2:12-17).

Here were little mortal men, not only putting themselves first in life, but having the effrontery to come between men and God, and when men would worship God, they turned them away and put themselves first. Let alone the heathen practice of cultic prostitution. They lay with the women that assembled to do service at the gate of the tabernacle, and turned the holy shrine of the thrice-holy God into a pagan temple, where men came to satisfy their lusts in the name of worshipping the goddess of love (v. 22).

Hophni and Phinehas had descended to the same practices as the heathens around them. Their idea was that their own satisfaction was the first thing and the last thing, and it was all that counted. Money, income, carnal satisfaction: that's what Hophni and Phinehas stood for.

It was a poetic judgment upon Eli and his sons when God said, 'I shall so judge you and your house that members of your house will come begging for bread, and beg to be put into the priesthood just to get a crumb' (see v. 36). It was ordained of God that they that served the altar should 'live off' the altar (see 1 Cor 9:13 KJV), of course it was. When they had served God, and God had had his portion, he would give some of his supplies back to the priests. But if priests demand their satisfaction first and let God take what is left, then, God says, 'There will come a time when you'll be so hungry that a mere crust of bread will seem a banquet to you; and to get it you'll go on your knees asking to be admitted to the priesthood.'

God is the author of all our joy and satisfaction, but he demands to be put first. And for men who, in their godless unregeneracy, pervert religion itself as a means to put themselves first and satisfy their own instincts and carnality and their careers, there will come a time when a drop of water shall seem a veritable banquet. Just as it was for the man who had attended the synagogue many times but didn't know God, and found himself on the other side of that terrible gulf, pleading for one drop of water to satisfy his instinctive desire (Luke 16:24).

### **The need for reality in our churches**

There are very big and broad lessons in these early chapters of Samuel, are there not? The idea of Hophni and Phinehas with the ark was almost a joke. 'That *it* may save us'? Well, it didn't

save them, and it has never saved anybody. And we are not above reading that lesson to ourselves, as Christian churches. Do we not claim, and do we not know, the wonder of that gracious greatest promise: 'where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I' (Matt 18:20)? What is a Christian church if it isn't that? The Lord's presence is there and known. Many times our hearts are cold and the Lord is there and we do not sense him, but if people live like the world and put their careers and themselves and their self-satisfaction first, until their attendance at church is a mere formality, then in time of need it is no good just quoting the formula 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name . . .' and supposing that because you quote the formula it's going to work! Formulas don't save anybody. If I don't know the living Lord in my day-to-day life, if I don't know what it is to yield my body and everything else as my reasonable priestly service, why should I suppose that just because I choose to come to a place, at perhaps eleven o'clock on a Sunday, and quote a formula, I shall know the living power of the living Lord?

The Israelites then went out to battle. They thought they had the secret of overcoming the Philistines, but it didn't save them; and, what was worse, God allowed the ark to fall into the hands of the Philistines. It was a bitter but very necessary lesson. Israel was distinct among the nations, but they had now lost their chief distinction. In practice, they were no different from the Gentiles.

### **The ark teaching the Philistines**

We must now follow the experience of the ark itself, for when it got into the hands of the Philistines, they put it into their god's temple.

Who were these Philistines? I shall have to be careful what I say because, as I said, I shall not shut out from my ears the sayings of the social anthropologists and the social scientists (God bless them). They say you shouldn't fall into the trap of grouping people in ethnic types. To dismiss a person and say, 'Oh, he's English', they say that is very false because there are millions of Englishmen, and they are all different. We mustn't categorize people into types, they say. People are individuals and must be treated so. Amen. But then, you see, when they have had their turn whispering into my right ear, then come another battalion of them, whispering in my left ear. Very often that's the same battalion actually, and they perceive me going out to some mission field to preach, and they say, 'Now, remember this, my good man. You must abide by the culture of the nation to whom you're going.'

'Oh, I thought you said these people were all different. Are you really telling me that they have a national culture, and I've got to be careful with it?'

Well, I say, 'Amen,' again. Of course, they've got a national culture. And cultures differ, don't they? They grow up through temperament, history, through whatever you like, and we should be foolish to deny the actual fact that national cultures differ. The average outlook of a Japanese man is very different from the average outlook of an Irishman. I, as an Englishman, can tell you it is so. At least, if we say to ourselves in England (and under our breath), 'That's typical American,' we know what we mean. And I expect you'd know what you mean when you say, 'Well, he's an Englishman; let him off.'

What is a typical Philistine, if you ever saw one?



### **A key historical difference**

The Philistines lived in Palestine at one stage and gave their name to the country. 'Palestine' is the land of the Philistines. As far as a lot of other nations knew, the people who lived in Palestine were Philistines. Actually, the Philistines were only on the fringe, on the sea border, the coastal plain in the southwest of the country. They were not Semitic, like Israel and her surrounding neighbours were. They were Indo-European in all probability, and probably came from Crete. Hence they came by sea and landed on the coast.

Not being Semitic, and certainly not Israelites, they were uncircumcised. Now, many nations were uncircumcised, but when God refers to the Philistines, he constantly and repeatedly refers to them as 'the uncircumcised Philistines', or sometimes just simply 'the uncircumcised'. What is the point of the epithet? What is its significance? Well, there was the historical side. Not being circumcised, they were not descendants of Abraham, nor had they been incorporated into the nation that came from him. As Gentiles they could, if they came by conversion to believe in Abraham's God, be circumcised and reckoned among the people of God. But these were uncircumcised. They were not part of the Abrahamic community therefore, and they certainly didn't know the living God as Abraham and his descendants were supposed to know him.

Abraham stood for what? Abraham had been called out of the nations, out of their idolatry, with an experience of the living and the true God; and all who joined him in that experience, and therefore became members of Israel, had to be circumcised. They were part of the covenant. Philistines, by definition, were not part of that covenant, nor part of that community. They didn't know the living God. They were *uncircumcised*.

### **A nation of big men**

The next thing to notice about Philistines, particularly in the book that we are now considering, is that they were the nation that were in the habit of producing very big men. The biggest hulk of a man that comes onto the stage of Old Testament history is a Philistine. Look at the fellow as he strides into no man's land and defies Israel and defies the living God of Israel: 'I defy the armies of God this day,' he says, 'and God himself as well. You stand there as Israelites, fighting for the living God? Well come and meet me then.' And look at the size of his brain; his head was so big he had a trashcan for a helmet. In his long arm he had a spear like a telegraph post. And a shield? Half of the moon would have hid behind it (see 17:1-10). This big man was a Philistine. We read, even late on in David's reign, of the survival of the sons of the giants. They were big men too (2 Sam 21:18-22).

You say, 'The Philistines are an interesting crowd. These are the boys that will produce the last great ruler, won't they? I mean, isn't this the key to the success of the world government: to be a big man?' Well, anyway, I'm just telling you about Philistines.

### **A lesson about the living God**

When the ark of the Lord came into the camp, Israel shouted, and these Philistines said, 'What's going on now?' They understood that the ark of the Lord of hosts was come, the Lord

who was seated between the cherubim. They said, 'We must pull up our socks. Equip yourself like men!'

Take courage, and be men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you; be men and fight. (1 Sam 4:9)

How's that for a nice thought? 'God has come into the camp, so you'd better be the biggest men you can!' Well you had better, I think, if you're going to fight the Almighty. You had better be a very big man and equip yourself like a man. You'll need it!

But Israel, who stood for the living God, didn't know the Lord; and now the Lord disowned the thing that had become a mere box, and he let the ark fall into the hands of the Philistines. But while God disowned it amongst Israel, to teach Israel a very necessary lesson, he didn't disown it when it got among the Philistines, did he? Because the ark was a symbol to the Philistines of the living God, and though they had apparently defeated the forces of the living God, now the Philistines had to be taught a lesson.

So they put the ark in the temple of their god, Dagon. When it came the morning, Dagon was fallen over. And these wise Philistines pondered the situation and stroked their beards and scratched their Philistine heads to come up with an answer: 'What do you do when your god falls over? Gods oughtn't to do that kind of thing, surely? What do you do?'

So they called upon the profound depths of their wisdom. They said, 'The thing to do when your god falls over is to lift him up and put him back again.' So, combining brain with brawn (and they had a good deal of each) they got hold of their god and they heaved him up and set him down on his pedestal. And such was their wisdom that, having done that, they got down and worshipped him again.

May I ask you, what or who were they worshipping?

They came the next day and worse had happened now. Dagon had not only fallen, but his head was cut off! So much for his wisdom. And his hands were cut off! So much for his power. 'Tut-tut,' they said, 'that oughtn't to happen. Gods that lose their heads aren't much help; and gods that lose their hands can't be any help!'

So, using once more their brain and their brawn and their scientific skill (and having analysed the situation with their computers), they put his hands on again and they put his brains back on. Then they lifted him up and put him back in his position and got down and worshipped him.

They didn't know the living God. And if you don't know the living God, well I'd advise you to use the best substitute you can, which is your brain and your brawn. And you know, when people lose the reality of the living God, they may still mouth the phrases of worshipping God; but actually they fall to such methods, which, as you immediately perceive, are mere expressions of their own brains and their brawn.

God had to teach them a lesson. I think the living God must enjoy humour now and again. Here were these big men with their brains and their brawn, and God would teach them a little lesson.

'What would he use?' you say. 'What would be suitable?'

Well, they're big men, so he'll have to send something pretty big, I should think, to teach them a lesson.

'Well, what about an earthquake or two, or a comet coming sailing perilously near the atmosphere of the earth? That ought to shake them up!'

'No,' says God, 'I wouldn't go to that extreme; you wouldn't need that. But what about a little mouse perhaps, or maybe something as small as a little virus?' And along came the mice and then along came the little virus and caught these great men in very delicate places, and laid them low.

What little, weak creatures the biggest of men are, aren't they, when you work it out? 'Oh, look at us big men, as we parade around commanding the troops in their millions.'

And a tiny little virus is enough to see the end of them.

They got alarmed. They couldn't find a cure for the terrible situation and began to think there might be something about this ark after all. It dawned on them that perhaps this claim of the Israelites that there was a living God could possibly be true. But how would you know? You can't take things on trust, can you?

They said to themselves, 'Now let's do an experiment. How do you find out if this living God is a reality?' And, being good scientists of the day, they thought up an experiment that would give them a clear answer one way or the other. They said, 'What we'll do is this. We'll take a new cart; it had better be a new one, so there's no danger of pollution or anything to make the experiment go wrong. Then we'll take two *cows* that have just recently given birth to calves, while they're still in milk; and we'll put the cows in the shafts of the cart and we'll put the ark in the cart. We'll turn the old cows round and put their nose in the direction of Israelite territory, shoo them off, and see what happens. If they go straight to the Israelite territory and take the ark back, that will be proof positive that there's something in this ark, and God is real. But of course, if they turn round and come back, well, we can conclude there's nothing special about this ark. The old plague, the virus, the mice, that was just an accident of nature.'

They were wise men, weren't they? Don't you think so? And what was the point of choosing milk cows?

'Well,' you say, 'cows don't all have that wisdom, do they?' (And English cows at the moment are very suspect in this year 1990. They're suffering from mad cow disease, so don't you eat any meat that comes from England just now.) Cows have a modicum of intelligence, though they have been much maligned. They are quite intelligent really; though not so much as Philistines, maybe. But anyway, the point was they were in milk. There were their calves back in the stall. And you can take the most placid cow you like, but if it's just been in milk and you take its calves away, they don't like you very much. And the point was this: here were cows, driven mostly by instinct. Their calves had been taken away, what the Hebrew quaintly calls 'their sons'. Well, they were as much sons to them as Hannah's Samuel was a son to her anyway, only they were cows and their sons were calves, but they were sons, weren't they? Hebrew calls them *sons*. And naturally all their instinct at that stage of life would be to be with their sons. Said the Philistines, 'If they leave their sons and take the ark back, here is a force that is bigger than nature, bigger than instinct. That will be of God.' They put the ark on the cart; they put the cows between the shafts, and the cows started down the road. As they went they mooed and they lowed. Somewhere in the dim recesses of the bovine mind, there was instinct calling them back to the calves that they were leaving behind.

Tell me what power it was. It was not just the Philistines. What power was it that dared those humble creatures to go against instinct and leave their sons to take back the ark of the Lord to start recovery in Israel? What power was it? Had you been there, what would you have done? What honour those cows had! I don't know whether they called them Pansy or Flossie, like they do in England, but the dear old cows had the honour of serving their creator and taking the ark back, all against nature, of hearing the call of the creator. And, in the end when they got there, the Israelites chopped the cart up and used it as the wood, took the cows, killed them and offered them as a sacrifice to God.

And you're jealous, aren't you? Aren't the lot of you jealous? You say, 'If I could have been alive to fit in the shafts of that cart, human though I am, I would have become an animal to pull it there, to take the presence of God back to his people, and if in the end I was offered as a living sacrifice on the altar, so what?'

The deepest satisfaction a human can know is to live and die as a living sacrifice to bring God's presence back to his people.

Oh, poor old Hophni and Phinehas, they hadn't got the sense of a cow. They could have led the choirs of Israel, and the people of Israel, into an all overwhelming glorious worship of the living God; but they put themselves and their own instincts first, and satisfied their carnal instincts and ambitions, and the glory departed. And two poor mother cows, under the influence of the power of God, left their calves behind and took the ark back and yielded their lives as sacrifice to God.

Which will you choose?

### **Mothers, their instincts and their sons**

Cows and their sons: that's an interesting little thing, isn't it? There are three sets of *females* (mark my guarded language). There is Hannah and her sons, and Phinehas' wife and her son, and the milk cows and their sons. And Hannah left her son at the temple, didn't she? What a wrench against instinct that was. And Phinehas' wife left her son and went home to glory, well, I hope that's where she went. She went saying, 'If the ark of God is taken, I'm not interested in living any further.' And the two milk cows left their sons to bring the ark of God back. Why all this emphasis on females who left their sons? Do you think it has got anything to do with the stories in the context?

### **A throne not to be trifled with**

One more observation. When the ark got back, the men at Beth-shemesh saw it coming, and they were those who took it down off its cart and made the sacrifice, of course. They looked into the ark, they took the lid off and looked inside, and God smote them. Seventy thousand died.

You say, 'Why that severity? Surely that was only a minor thing? Why all that terrible sort of severity?' Well, because the ark of God was after all real, wasn't it? It did represent the transcendent Lord of the universe. This was his throne. May I point out to you that God is very dangerous?

You say, 'What on earth do you mean?'

Well if it were a mere question of dealing with electricity, you'd be watchful, wouldn't you? You'd be very careful how you handled electricity, or atomic power. You'd learn to have respect for these forces and what are they. And what are they but mere physical forces of the universe that God has made? 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God' (Heb 10:31). God give us grace that we may serve him acceptably and with godly fear. God isn't a nice little box of magical tricks that you can pull out when you are in danger, to use and put back on the shelf again when you no longer need it. God is the living God! We approach him, if we do, with our shoes off our feet, with the sense of his holiness and awe in our hearts that we have been forgiven, but surely never forgetting his thrice-holy majesty, his limitless power. We take our shoes off our feet and tremble in his presence.

## Questions and Contributions

### *Session One*

To make the best use of our time, let's see to it that our questions are dealt with clearly, as best we can, but on the other hand, let's remember that there may be a number of questions that people have, and not insist on necessarily carrying on the answer to one question beyond due limits and proportions. For now, I believe there is already one question on the slate.

### **Knowing the Lord**

This first question came out from the interesting paper read to us this afternoon.

*What does it mean to 'know the Lord'?*

We came across the phrase in 1 Samuel 2:12, 'They did not know the LORD.' I think we then decided that, in their case, it meant what we in our terminology would mean when we say they were not converted men. They had no personal relationship with the Lord.

Then the phrase came up again in chapter 3: 'Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him' (v. 7). The question there was: did it mean that he wasn't yet converted, that he wasn't yet a believer, and that night when the Lord called him, he got converted and everything else? Or, is it to be read immediately in its context, that he didn't know the Lord in this particular way? And then it adds, 'and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.'

And what does it mean when it says, 'And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD' (v. 21)? And that raised a further question. Does the Lord here reveal himself to us now and, if he does, how does he do it, and what is this experience of having the Lord reveal himself to us?

So it is open to you, brethren. Considering one another, let's make good use of the time.

AUDIENCE: Just before we get started on the answers, I wonder if you could comment on the text? In my margin, it translates the word 'know' in 3:7 as 'understand'. Could you give us some comments on the text there?

DWG: In 3:7 it is the ordinary word for 'know', and I suspect that your translator is indicating that, in his opinion, the Hebrew word 'know' carries many connotations. Therefore, in English, to represent its particular connotation in any one place, he felt it necessary here to say, 'Did not yet understand the Lord,' but it is the same basic word that would be translated 'know'. That is what the word means.

AUDIENCE: In light of that, we have also at the end of verse 21, possibly a partial answer to your question, where it says, 'revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh,' but goes on to say, 'by the word of the LORD.'

DWG: Yes.

AUDIENCE: I think we all acknowledge that the ultimate authority, the perfect expression of God, is in his holy word. Nothing that he says contradicts it or will add to it in its ultimate scope or fulfilment. Anything else can be debatable when it comes to God directly communicating. I think our problem is that, as brothers who are involved in varying degrees of leadership, we have questions come to us about specific areas of life. A person that is considering a job, or a car, or a house, or other major decisions in life, we oftentimes fall to saying, 'Well turn to the word of God for your answer', or, 'Pray about it,' and unfortunately, I suspect at least, there is some confusion on the questioner's part. I find in mature Christians it is also a confusing issue. How do you discern the Lord's mind? We know his general will for our lives, but in discerning his mind, how does he speak through his word, or does he have other avenues of communication? I've studied that for myself and for the people of the Lord who are in some degree of responsibility under me. I've tried to encourage them that the Lord also speaks through his people. He also speaks through fervent, lengthy prayer that is spent in time with him, and through a certain degree of peace that it is common to speak about. But in those areas, they must all be weighed in the balance of how it holds up to the word of God and how it holds up to spiritual counsel from those who have spent much time in the word.

DWG: Thank you very much, yes. Guidance that comes to us with circumstances or other means must always be controlled and considered and evaluated by our moral judgment. 'The Spirit of Jesus', says the Acts of the Apostles, didn't allow the apostles at one stage to do this, that and the other (16:7). By naming the Spirit there 'the Spirit of Jesus', it is surely saying, among other things, that the Holy Spirit will never guide you to do anything that is morally contrary to the character of the Lord Jesus. And the Holy Spirit will, having indited<sup>1</sup> the word of God himself, will never lead us to do things against the word of God. He doesn't contradict himself.

On the basic question of *knowing the Lord*, does the phrase refer simply to conversion? Do all believers, therefore, *know* the Lord? Or, if you know the Lord as a believer, are there other ways in which you might not know the Lord, or are open to know the Lord more? What would you say about that?

AUDIENCE: You had mentioned about John 14:21. There are two other verses in John that have come to my mind along the same line. In 17:3, the Lord Jesus is praying to his Father, and he says, 'And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.' Now, obviously that is conversion, and there is a sense in which we come to know the Lord: we have a relationship with the Lord. Comparing that with Matthew 7 where he says to the wicked who say they have eaten and drunk in his presence and prophesied in his name, etc. 'Depart from me, I never knew you' (see vv. 21–23), obviously, he knows all

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<sup>1</sup> That is, to be composed or written.

things, but he had had no relationship with these individuals. So, to have a relationship with the Lord, to know him like that, is true conversion.

Now, there is a sense in which we go on beyond that, I believe, and that is what we are speaking of in John 14, and also in 17:7. In 14:21 he says, 'I will . . . manifest myself to him', but that's predicated upon the fact that we loved him and demonstrate that love by keeping his commandments. In 7:17 it says that 'if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself' (KJV).

Going back to our text in 1 Samuel, Hophni and Phinehas not only did not know the Lord by relationship, and they demonstrated that in their lives, but they also were disobedient to the Lord and therefore did not know the Lord, nor was he manifest to them because they were living in disobedience. Samuel, on the other hand, being a child, as we have found in chapter 2, was obedient, ministering to the Lord in Eli's presence, etc. the Lord reveals himself to Samuel, and he comes into a relationship with the Lord. And then in the last verses of chapter 3, as Samuel is obedient to the Lord in speaking forth the word of God, God continues to reveal himself to him. I think we have that comparison.

DWG: Surely, surely. Yes, two people down this end, please.

AUDIENCE: I was just wondering if it's significant at the beginning of chapter 3 where we read that the child Samuel ministered to the Lord under Eli, and the word of the Lord was precious in those days, there was no open vision (v. 1). And then at the end of the chapter we find the Lord appearing in Shiloh and revealing himself to Samuel in Shiloh by the word of the Lord (v. 21). The chapter begins with the fact that there was no open vision, no revelation of the Lord through his word, it seems, at the beginning. Verse 20 says that, 'all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the LORD.' This, I believe, is the beginning of the prophetic office as such within the nation of Israel, as far as what I would call the prophetic office. That office ends, if I'm correct, with John the Baptist.

I find similarity in the first verse with the four hundred silent years between the two testaments. We speak of them as the four hundred silent years when the word of the Lord was not heard from the mouth of a prophet, at least not a prophet of God. And here we find that time of silence in verse 1, and then the Lord establishing Samuel as a prophet in verse 21. There was a period of time when Samuel grew, as it says in verse 19, 'the LORD was with him'. So it seems that he certainly knew the Lord in a fashion at that time. And then the Lord revealed himself by the word of the Lord through Samuel. This is at least similar to John the Baptist, who was in the desert until his showing unto the nation of Israel, until the time came when he began to preach the word of the Lord. I'm just asking if those similarities are there.

DWG: Well yes, I understand what you are now doing is treating Samuel as what I would call a *classical* prophet, like Isaiah, like Jeremiah, like Ezekiel. And certainly he was like John the Baptist, the greatest of them. And the Lord appeared to him by the word of the Lord in the sense that the Lord gave Isaiah to preach his word, and holy men of God spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Pet 1:21), an experience that none of us are going to have in that same sense because we are not classical prophets, nor apostles either, and are therefore never going to write a letter that is in that sense inspired. Yes, I take that point. I



wonder, is that the only sense, however, in which the Lord appears to his people and makes his word live? There are two people here who want to talk.

AUDIENCE: I was just thinking about what it says here in verse 21: 'And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD.' I'm just remembering what it says in Genesis 49: 'The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be' (v. 10 KJV). Shiloh is speaking there of the Lord Jesus. And I thought it was significant that God revealed himself in Shiloh to Samuel. My understanding of that is related to what it says in Hebrews about 'God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son' (1:1-2 KJV). And so all that we know of God is through the person of the Lord Jesus, and as we study the word and as we read, he reveals himself to us on a daily basis, and our knowledge of him, our knowledge of God, grows.

In other words, the day that I was saved I *knew* God to a very limited extent. Before that, I did not yet know God. But the moment I realized he was my Saviour and my Lord, and I accepted that, I began to *know* him. And for the rest of my life, and for all eternity, I know him more and more on a daily basis. And so he reveals himself to me through the Lord Jesus, just as he revealed himself to Samuel in Shiloh.

DWG: Thank you very much indeed. And someone here had something to say?

AUDIENCE: John the Baptist has a very interesting thing to say about knowing the Lord and manifesting him. In the Gospel of John it says,

The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water. (1:29-31 KJV)

It would seem that knowing him has more to do with having a relationship with him on the terms that he revealed to us rather than just acquaintance, and being manifest seems to be much more than just having his presence made known. We read in our chapter that we just finished that when the five lords of the Philistines saw what happened to the ark, after it returned with the cattle to Israel, that they returned to Ekron, and that was the end of it. And we sometimes forget that there's that other part of responding to the Lord on his terms, rather than just following a set of rules. Having that personal relationship with him, a man says, 'Oh if we were only innocent'. God tried that; God demonstrated it. 'If only we had law.' God demonstrated that. 'If only we had human government.' Or, 'If only we just had grace, we just could come to him.' And now men say, 'If only he were here right now, if we could see him.' And of course we know that he will be here on this earth, and men will still reject him again.

DWG: Surely. Thank you very much for that. If then I might, so as to give time for other questions, just add one little thing to that. I would myself say, 'Yes, certainly' to the basic idea of Samuel as a classical prophet. And here we are in the presence of the revelation of God;

such as later was made in fuller extent to men like Isaiah. I would say yes, the greatest of all apostles was John the Baptist.

I want to say however that there might be further reaches of knowing the Lord. The famous one that was always preached to me in my youth (and still is, and rightly so) is what Paul says in Philippians 3: 'that I may know him' (v. 10). Surely Paul already knew the Lord? Here is another avenue of knowing the Lord. And when he talks about it he says,

that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own. (vv. 10–12)

He says that he has not yet obtained it, but 'I follow on to know'. So here there is a deeper sense of coming to know the Lord. And it is noticeable that the knowledge that is thus obtained seems to be also through personal experience, sharing in a sense in the Lord's sufferings, the power of his resurrection and so forth. So it isn't just theory.

These are the further reaches of getting to know the Lord. It seems to me that it is worth observing if we are to know God as a living God. And because he is a living God, he will want constantly to lead us on in the knowledge of the Lord.

If I were to say, 'Yes I know the Lord.'

'Oh do you, Gooding? You know the Lord? How is that?'

'Well, I trusted the Lord fifty-five years ago, and then I got to know the Lord.'

Well yes, surely I did, but please God I may have progressed a little bit and know the Lord in an ongoing way.

Secondly, when it comes to knowing, I agree with it one hundred per cent that we know God basically through his word. We must check all other claims to know him, or be led by him, through his word. But then I can't forget the two on the road to Emmaus and their marvellous Bible readings. The Lord took them through the Scriptures that they had read many times. They had never seen the Lord like that before, and their hearts began to burn because this was the Lord manifesting himself to them.

Now, that doesn't happen to me every time I open Scripture. I have to go on in faith, and learn Scripture, and try to obey it. And no visions come, so to speak, and I must work hard at it. But surely there do come times for us all when the Lord fulfils his promise: 'I will manifest myself to you.' We don't see visions and things like that, but am I not right? Do you not have the experience from time to time? It may be a simple verse you've read a thousand times, or a new insight into Scripture, and you know it in your heart that it is the Lord that has spoken. The Lord has showed himself to you; he has manifested himself to you. So it has been a different thing from studying your Ford car handbook that you can understand through and through without any clouds of glory descending upon you. Through Scripture, maybe, the Lord has drawn near and spoken to you.

But now let me not take that discussion any further, if I may.

## Church government

*We discussed earlier the various forms of government that God has used with his people. What is the appropriate form of government for his church today?*

DWG: I'm tempted in my heart to say, and I'm not meaning to be facetious, it is that form of government that the New Testament laid down. I mean that seriously, in answer to your question. There is a large view in Christendom that the pattern that we find in the New Testament was not meant to be obligatory upon us. They think it was the pattern of things that God used, and the early Christians used, because it was convenient to that time; but God leaves us free to adapt our methods of church government and suit them to the particular age in which we live. I myself would hold that the way God led the early Christians to do it in the New Testament was the best way then, and is the best way still. That would be my answer to the question.

## Three sets of sons

*What is the significance of the three sets of sons?*

DWG: If you're asking me what is the significance of the sets of sons in the early chapters of Samuel, I should fall back upon the simple observation that the trouble was Eli and his sons. So, even at the superficial level, God's answer to it was Hannah and her son, perhaps also Phineas' wife and her son, but finally the milk cows and their 'sons'. Certainly Hannah and her son and the milk cows and their sons were the means, in God's hands, of bringing back Israel from the terrible state they got in because of Eli's mismanagement of his sons.

AUDIENCE: Would you say that down the road there would be a relation, then, to the ultimate solution of God?

DWG: Oh surely so. Amen, my good man! When we come out of those chapters, do please put your oar in and help us there. It's going to be one of the major themes of the book. After Samuel's wonderful reign, then chapter 8 is going to tell us that when he was old he made his son's judges, and the sons went bad. That is why Israel opted for a king. It was a rather funny solution that Israel proposed. The problem, as you now see, had always been the sons: Eli and his sons, and Samuel and his sons. It's been a problem for centuries, ever since Adam had a son, you know, because we come of a fallen race. And as they say, grace doesn't run in the blood, and even if father gets converted the children are still born under the taint of sin, aren't they? This is the problem of sons in humankind and in the human race.

The issue at stake with Saul eventually is going to be: will God maintain his dynasty? What do I mean by that? God appointed Saul as king. God didn't destroy Saul; the Philistines destroyed him. Actually, he destroyed himself. But what Saul was anxious about was: was his son going to reign after him? In other words, was he going to have a dynasty that was dependent on having a son? And when we observe what Jonathan the crown prince did, no wonder Saul swore at him because it ruined all the hope that Saul would have a son that would succeed him on the throne.

As I say, when the problem was sons it was a very funny solution that Israel proposed that now you should have a hereditary monarchy. You tell me how that would solve the problem, if the problem were sons! Why would you institute a hereditary monarchy where the king's son automatically rules? What a daft solution.

But then you say, 'Wait a minute. David was a king and chosen of God, wasn't he?'

Yes, and in spite of his failures, God maintained David's dynasty and said, 'Now I will not cut off your son and your house as I cut of Saul's house. I will set up your dynasty after you. When you have fallen asleep then your son that comes out of your body shall be your heir; and I will set him on your throne. I will maintain your dynasty. If he sins, I will chastise him, but I will not take my mercy from him. I will maintain your dynasty and I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son' (see 2 Sam 7).

You say, 'That promise was not kept, was it? I mean, eventually David's sons, the kings of Judah, became so bad that God wiped the lot off the scene, didn't he?'

He did, yes. And the psalmist of Psalm 89 writes down the problem he had: 'Oh God, you promised to David to set his son on his throne, that there would never be missing a man on his throne. How on earth is it that the throne of Judah has been utterly destroyed? Where is your promise, Lord?'

And the answer, of course, is to be found in the New Testament. Listen to the Epistle to the Hebrews, how God has solved the problem: a son—David's son (1:1–14)! The gospel is concerning God's Son, of the seed of David, according to the flesh (Rom 1:3). Really human, son of a human being, and yet, because he is divine, he is sinless and has broken the ugly entail of the fall. He is God's anointed sat on the throne of David.

So this matter of sonship is one of the keys to the book, isn't it? It enters into the very foundations of our Christian gospel.

## **Spoiling your children**

AUDIENCE: I have a practical question that I'd invite any of the men in here with children to help me out with. I take a look at our portion of Scripture that we've been studying with Hophni and Phineas, and them taking their portion and drawing many of the things to themselves. I guess I can't help being concerned in my life as I raise two young boys (four years and 2 years old; and may the Lord bless me with more) as they begin to see in my life or in our family too many of the resources that God has given us and blessed me with, drawing those things to themselves maybe in the form of always having the best house, the best car, the best golf clubs, the best clothes, you know, all of those things. I see this passage where it turns people away from the Lord. And if you have a ministry in relation to speaking God's word, maybe at your assembly, yet the people at the assembly seeing that side of things as well (and not only your children). But I'm concerned about what kind of a result that will bring about and, I realize there's no line to specifically draw, but I'd be glad for what help you might bring.

Then the other question is what to do when you come to the conclusion that your children need to learn sacrifice. That needs to be taught within the household, and that's done on a very practical basis. And if you're exercised as a man to bring your family in this direction

and for them to experience that, how would you implement that? Because you see it as so necessary, would you implement that as the spiritual leader in the house and simply say, 'This is the direction that we need to go' and begin doing this? It's going to affect the children; it's going to affect your wife when you begin sacrificing your resources for God in a very real way. And so do you take the spiritual leadership position and just begin to go in that direction, or do you wait and pray with your wife, and look for her to be in agreement with you as you depart from past experience, or what? I look to men who know more than I do. So here is my question:

*How can you keep material blessings from spoiling your children? And how do you best lead by example in these things?*

AUDIENCE: Well, I don't know that I have many words of wisdom, but we have seven children. I'll just say two things. The first thing is that I think one has to practice constantly to keep their needs very simple; never complicate their lives with the best, so to speak, because the good is many times just as good as the best, in its functional qualities and so on. For example, many of you know that I'm a general surgeon, and not a very wealthy one, but I drive a very generic car. The other day I had a car phone put in, and I told the installer what kind of car I had. He said, 'Wow, you should be driving something a little better than that.' And he said that because my medical partner has a much nicer car, so it's quite a contrast there. But I think I do this primarily because it's a lesson to my children that they should not seek the best, necessarily, as far as their material possessions are concerned.

The second thing is to teach them to be thankful. Gratitude is so lacking in our families, and in our assemblies. We need to teach them gratitude and thankfulness. Now, I can't say that I've done very well on this chart with my children. A few of them, I think, have learned it, but I think they all have a long way to go. And I look at my own heart when I say that too.

Those are two basic things that I think we need to instil in our children, and that has to be on an ongoing, daily basis. Keep the needs very simple, never complicate it, and teach gratitude by the example of our own lives.

AUDIENCE: I'm just looking at that verse in the Epistle to the Ephesians that says, 'Fathers, do not provoke [that is, don't irritate, exasperate, chafe or annoy] your children'; which most of us as parents have found a very real possibility. Then says the apostle, 'Do not provoke them to anger, but bring them up . . .'. And the idea there of 'bringing up' is, I understand, to nourish and cherish. It may be that the idea is like a bird with its young, protecting and loving. I'm sure my brother has encompassed that as well in what he has said, but our children need to know that we love them very much, and that they are important to us, and that we are concerned with them, deeply concerned. And then it says, 'bring them up in the nurture [the disciplining, the training] and the admonition [that is, the instruction] of the Lord' (see 6:4 KJV).

DWG: Thank you so very much. And now our time is gone, but there will, of course, be repeated opportunities for questions and further contributions. Thank you very, very much indeed. Let's just close with a word of prayer.

## The Word of the Lord Through Samuel

### *Section One (1:1–7:17)*

Let's think together about the way in which the author of Samuel constructs his narrative. If you care to take the rough table of contents that I have prepared, you will notice the way that the writer constructs the flow of his narrative, bringing it to minor climaxes first, then merging the minor climax with the greater climax, coming to the biggest climax in that particular part of the narrative.

### **Section 1 (1:1–7:17)**

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#### *Movement 1 (1:1–4:1)*

##### **Part 1: Birth of Samuel (1:1–2:11)**

- a. Eli's sons. The two rivals and their sons: Hannah's vow
- b. Birth and dedication of Samuel
- c. Hannah's psalm of praise

THE LORD WILL EXALT THE HORN OF HIS ANOINTED

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##### **Part 2: Samuel Recognized as Prophet (2:12–4:1)**

- d. Eli attempts to reprimand his sons: they refuse to listen
- e. Man of God denounces Eli and his house. A faithful priest is to take his place
- f. God calls Samuel and announces judgment on Eli's house

VOICES IN THE NIGHT. SAMUEL RECOGNIZES GOD'S VOICE FOR THE FIRST TIME

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#### *Movement 2 (4:2–7:17)*

##### **Part 1: Israel Loses Ark of Covenant (4:2–5:12)**

- a. Battle with Philistines
- b. Ark brought into battle is taken by Philistines. Eli and sons die: Ichabod, the glory has departed
- c. Ark brought into Dagon's temple

DAGON FALLS FLAT ON GROUND BEFORE ARK. ITS HANDS AND HEAD CUT OFF

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##### **Part 2: Return of Ark: Restoration of Israel (6:1–7:17)**

- d. Lords of Philistines in distress: debate: send back ark
- e. Israel judged for looking into ark
- f. Israel's self-judgment. Samuel's intercession and sacrifice

LORD THUNDERS: PHILISTINES DEFEATED: EBENEZER

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**Movement 1 (1:1–4:1)***The birth of Samuel (1:1–2:11)*

The story begins with the domestic affairs of Elkanah's two wives and the fact of their rivalry. Not by Hannah's intention, but by the ill behaviour of Peninnah, the two women were rivals. Hannah's 'rival', her adversary, 'used to provoke her grievously', says the simple story in the text (1:6). The grief of Hannah gives way to prayer, and eventually prayer is answered and Hannah is given a child. And you come to the first minor climax in that particular part of the narrative as Hannah dedicates her child to the Lord and then sings her song of personal praise to the Lord.

*Samuel recognized as a prophet (2:12–4:1)*

As you read it, you feel that now the movement of thought that began with Hannah's distress and the rivalry has now been solved, and what a glorious climax it is, set for a burst of inspired song. But that isn't where the movement is going to end. That is a climax, the first climax, but it's not going to be the major climax in this particular drift of the story. That is because little Samuel, now put into Eli's house, is contrasted by the historian in a long series of backwards and forwards comparisons and contrasts with the evil ministry of the sons of Eli.

That start of the story now proceeds to its climax, where first of all the iniquity of Eli's sons is highlighted by the brilliance of the innocent purity of little Samuel. It is then denounced by the senior man of God, personally to Eli; but serious as that warning was, it was as nothing compared with that solemn, hair-raising, heart-stopping word of God that came to Eli from the mouth of that innocent child to whom the Lord had appeared. And you notice how the narrative goes on the details of it. It was Eli, a man of great experience, high priest in the tabernacle of Israel, that had to tell the innocent child, 'That's the Lord you know. If you hear that voice again, you say, "Speak Lord, for your servant hears."' What a marvellous narrative it is, fit to make your flesh creep on your bones, isn't it? Here is Eli instructing the innocent little Samuel, because Eli's a man of big experience. He knows, does he, what it is to have the Lord speak? And he tells the boy how to listen and hear the message, which, when it comes to Eli, is absolutely devastating.

Oh these are marvellous stories, even if they were only stories and nothing else they'd be worth being the world's best sellers. Whoever wrote it was not only inspired, he was a genius.

So now we have come to another climax, and a big climax it is, as God appears by the word of the Lord to Samuel for the first time, and all Israel came to know. There had been a poverty of the word of God in those days, and now not only is the judgment pronounced on Eli and his sons, but Israel comes to see that there is a living God, and he has spoken to Samuel. Samuel, though a child, is a marked man.

In that way, it has become a bigger climax to Hannah's earlier exercise, hasn't it? That her exercise vindicated her personally against her rival, for which she gave thanks in her song, is one thing, but now it had a far bigger effect; her prayers have produced the nation's deliverer.

**Movement 2 (4:2–7:17)***Israel loses the ark of covenant (4:2–5:12)*

You might say that now we have reached the climax, and in one sense that is the climax of the story so far, isn't it? We are going to move on to other things, such as great battles with the Philistines. But if you are following what the historian is doing, you will say, 'Right, we've finished with that first story about Hannah and her son. That's gone, and now we're going to turn to something else. And it's a different story, is it?'

No, no, it's the same story, because now the Philistines come up. The story is ongoing. We have had a minor climax, and a bigger climax, but we haven't come yet to the full and complete climax that will end that movement in the narrative. For now it turns to Israel's battle with the Philistines, and you see at once how that is connected with what has gone before. The historian reminds you that when Israel was defeated and they brought the ark into the camp, Hophni and Phinehas were with the ark (4:4). It is an ominous remark that throws us back to the behaviour of those two gentlemen, as previously described.

Then Israel is defeated. How could they not be? And now you see the next connection, that in that battle, Phinehas and Hophni are slain, both of them, and the judgment of God announced through Samuel to Eli takes place. And the news being brought to Eli, he falls back and breaks his neck. So this is the ongoing story, with God's judgment now descending, as previously announced. But not only that.

*Return of the ark: restoration of Israel (6:1–7:14)*

In the final part of that great movement we have the return, the recovery, and the ark comes back. Then we have the final revival some many years later. But though chronologically it is many years later, and the time was long until the revival eventually came, it was Samuel, of course, who led it.

And here finally is the major climax in all this story. Not only has Hannah been vindicated in her praying over her rival but, as a result of her prayers she sees the major climax: here is God's deliverer for his people now grown to manhood, leading them in the appropriate spiritual exercises of repentance, prayers, confession and expression of weakness and dependence on God, that enable God to show his divine power and overcome the Philistines.

*A key narrative marker (7:15–17)*

With that you get a summary statement. I call your attention to that. It is an important technique in Hebrew narrative form. At the end of chapter 7, after the excitement of this major victory, this turning point in the war with the Philistines, you get three verses of a generalized statement.

Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. And he went on a circuit year by year to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah. And he judged Israel in all these places. Then he would return to Ramah, for his home was there, and there also he judged Israel. And he built there an altar to the LORD.  
(vv. 15–17)



You will notice how that is descriptive and generalized and covers a whole lot of years in a few phrases. It not only serves as a summary but it serves as a *narrative division marker*. After this, the story is going to turn to something else very different.

### The climax of section one

With that, I wonder now whether we may come back and notice one or two other things from the point of view of literature; in particular how the historian marks his great sections. In the first story of Hannah, as it comes to its first minor climax, Hannah remarks,

They that strive with the LORD shall be broken to pieces; against them shall he thunder in heaven. (2:10 RV)

You will see how the whole movement comes to its climax at the end of chapter 7 with the story of the battle of the Philistines, and how at the crucial point God thunders and throws the Philistines into confusion (v. 10).

Notice then, if you will, the simple point that at the next climax when God reveals himself to Samuel, it is told us very carefully that it happened at night. It was in the night that God came and spoke to Samuel these hair-raising intimations. So, first we have thunder and then the voices in the night. You will notice that in the next piece, when the ark is taken to the Philistines, the turning point in the whole business is that when they put the ark into Dagon's temple, the idol of Dagon fell over; his hands and his head were cut off. It marks the turning point. And then you come to the final victory over the Philistines.

We are going to find similar things now as we move on into the second great section.

## Section 2 (8:1–15:35)

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### *Movement 3 (8:1–12:25)*

#### **Part 1: People Reject God: Demand King (8:1–10:16)**

- a. God consents but under protest
- b. Samuel warns them what a king will be like: 'He will take your sons' (1 Sam 8:11)
- c. Erring donkeys lead Saul to Samuel: Saul's selection and training in God's guidance

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#### SAMUEL SECRETLY ANOINTS SAUL AS PRINCE AND KING

#### **Part 2: Samuel's Acclamation and Vindication Before the People (10:17–12:25)**

- d. Saul presented and acclaimed: but some disapprove
- e. Saul's victory over king of Ammon saves the eyes of Jabesh-Gileadites
- f. Re-affirmation of kingship

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#### THUNDER BY DAY CONVICTS ISRAEL OF WICKEDNESS IN DEMANDING KING

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*Movement 4 (13:1–15:35)*

**Part 1: Saul's Sin and First Rejection (13:1–14)**

- a. Jonathan's successful initial skirmish. Saul provokes the Philistines
- b. Philistines gather for attack: Israelites panic and begin to melt away
- c. Saul foolishly sacrifices without waiting for Samuel

SAMUEL TELLS SAUL HIS KINGDOM WILL NOT CONTINUE

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**Part 2: Saul's Sin and Second Rejection (13:15–15:35)**

- d. Jonathan's initial success through God's guidance
- e. Jonathan's eyes enlightened: but Saul's absurd interpretation of God's guidance would have executed Jonathan. The people overrule Saul
- f. Saul, under pretext of sacrifice, rejects God's word and does not destroy God's enemy, the king of Amalek, when in his power

VOICES IN THE NIGHT (1 SAM 15:10–11). GOD REJECTS SAUL FROM BEING KING

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### **Movement 3 (8:1–12:25)**

This second section begins with the people demanding that God gives them a king. When they demand a king, Samuel is upset. God is even more upset, and he says to Samuel, 'they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me' (8:7). Whatever the reason proves to be why God says that, God took this demand for a king as a rejection of himself. The next movement is going to end with the reverse, where God rejects Saul from being king.

And Samuel said to Saul, 'I will not return with you. For you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel.' (15:26)

That is a very simple device, but this is a natural way of telling the story: from the people's rejection of God in demanding a king to the story of God's rejection of Saul from being king.

In Saul's appointment there were two stages, as the historian is now going to tell us.

*People reject God: Demand king (8:1–10:16)*

There is the stage that led Saul eventually to Samuel, who secretly anointed him as king over Israel without Israel knowing it.

*Saul's acclamation and vindication before the people (10:17–12:25)*

The next simple stage in the movement is when Saul is presented to the nation. They acclaim him, but some disapprove. There follows a battle that, in the eyes of the nation, vindicates the choice of Saul, and therefore the kingship is finally reaffirmed. And in chapter 12, Samuel delivers his great oration to the people on the state of the nation (after the manner of an American president) and tells them what they are to do now that they have a king.

To bring home to them their wickedness in demanding a king, he says, 'Is it not harvest time at midday, but let the Lord thunder!' And the thunder comes (see v. 17). We've had the theme of thunder before, haven't we? And we've had it marking another climax.

#### **Movement 4 (13:1–15:35)**

You say, 'Is that the end of the story?'

Well, it's a climax so far, isn't it? The first minor climax was Saul being anointed secretly. The next big climax is Saul being accepted by all the nation without exception, and the great speech of Samuel, and the thunder marking the occasion. It is not the end of that section, is it?

##### *Saul's sin and first rejection (13:1–14)*

Now Israel have a king, and the king is going to be tested. He fails his examinations at the end of what I have numbered as Movement 4. That comes at the end of chapter 13, when God announces that Saul's dynasty will not continue.

##### *Saul's sin and second rejection (13:15–15:35)*

At the end of chapter 15 that is reinforced finally and made absolute: God has rejected Saul. But notice now, before that final judgment is pronounced on Saul, God communicated it to Samuel. And the text explicitly tells us that God spoke to Samuel in the night.

The word of the LORD came to Samuel: 'I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments.' And Samuel was angry, and he cried to the LORD *all night*. (15:10–11)

You say, 'That is an exceedingly innocent thing.'

Well, it could be just a coincidence, couldn't it? But thunder by day, and voices by night, is one of the recurring details of the stories. Notice how it comes at the major and minor climaxes of the passage. We are in the presence of a very deliberate writer, let alone an inspired writer. If you will, let your mind roam as a Hebrew mind would have done, and enjoy all the images that the metaphors and the descriptions evoke—voices quietly talking in the night: voices between God and his servant announcing judgment; thunder by day: God publicly advertising his great displeasure against his enemies.

### **General themes in the book**

With that, let us turn, not now to structure and proportion, but to general themes. Let's see how the first section is bound to the bigger sections that follow, and how the theme that started in chapter 1 will reoccur later in the book at a higher level.

#### **Rivalries**

The story of Hannah, to come back to it for a moment, is the story of two *rivals*. Her 'rival', her 'adversary', provoked her sore (see 1:6). It is doubtless not high national politics that went on in the domestic quarters of a private family in Israel; it was nonetheless very real to the two women concerned. In fact, it was even more real than the high politics of the nation, as these

two women were rivals for the family honour, that they could produce the most children; that was the game. And Peninnah was Hannah's rival and provoked her sore. When the child is born, and Hannah dedicates him to the Lord and gives her song, you will notice how much of that song, though couched in general language, springs out of her own experience of this rivalry: the woman that had sons had the apparent success; the woman that was barren had no sons and would be despised in Israel and feel ashamed at her barrenness. And she sings of how God reversed the position of those two rivals and put down the woman that had many sons and raised up the barren that hitherto had been in shame, and gave her the place of dignity, not only in the family but (as we subsequently see) in the nation (2:5). It was her son Samuel that became such a vast political success. What did Peninnah say about that, I wonder, if she ever lived to see it?

From that, Hannah extrapolates into the ginormous subject of how God does in fact rule the world, for God is sovereign and takes notice of the world's struggles and its rivalries. And God is a God of judgment, and 'by him actions are weighed' (v. 3). And now you get the principles applied to the very government of the whole world! How delightful Hebrew storytelling is. It will take up a simple, innocent little narrative of a private, domestic situation. Here is the woman proving God at that level and seeing the principles of God work out in the contest between two potential mothers in the home of Elkanah. And, presently, the Holy Spirit will take that vivid inspiration and point out that the same principles of God's dealing apply with his universal government. He exalts the weak and he puts down the mighty; he exalts the hungry and puts down those that were full (vv. 4-5).

See how the historian is already weaving in front of your eyes the big story he is going to tell you. He started with a minor rivalry inside a domestic family; he is now going to introduce to you an enormous rivalry. Well, later on you can count up, if you care to, all the pairs of rivals that you will find in this book. There is Saul and David, isn't there? Eventually one day there will be David and Absalom. And we might think of all the others, the minor characters that rival each other: Abner and Joab, jostling each other for position as commander-in-chief of the forces of Israel, and so forth, and so on. You will find the theme of *rivals* that begins in the very first paragraph running as a leitmotif through both the books.

## **Infiltrations**

Finally, for the moment, I want to point out another literary device. It is more than a literary device, for it is an historical thing. Notice how the writer himself, as he is inspired to tell his story, manages to use the similarities to get your mind engaged.

The house of Eli was desperately wicked. God would eventually have to destroy it root and branch. But before he destroyed it, God infiltrated into the house of Eli his own man for the occasion: the little lad, Samuel. He got him right into the heart of Eli's house and ministry, and got him into the temple before the judgment eventually fell upon Eli and his house. Now we are going to have another story of that sort. Saul, the king chosen by the people, proved to be an unqualified disaster. In the end he was eliminated; his dynasty never was founded. But what happened before the judgment was executed? Yes, I can see how the storyteller has got hold of you! You begin to see the point, don't you? God infiltrated his own man into Saul's house. Even from the point of view of narrative this is very clever writing. It is also inspired.

It is also historical. Observing the way the writer has compiled his narrative, and how the themes are taking your mind along, will be one of the helps the Holy Spirit gives us in the interpretation of this very ancient document.

Now, I mustn't say more along that line else I shall bore you completely, but we ought to be aware of the existence of these kinds of themes. This is a highly sophisticated narrative, supplied with pointers all the way along the line as to where we should read the minor climaxes and the major climaxes. They show where the big movements run, where they begin and where they finish, and how one movement is related to another movement by the inclusion of a leitmotif all the way along. All of it is in the interest of history, but more than history: they help us grasp the great problems that were being dealt with in that far-off day; problems and their solutions which will, of course, reverberate through the rest of Scripture and come reverberating down to our own day.

### **The trouble with sons ruling after their fathers**

I said I wasn't going to mention it but I can't help it now. The trouble with Eli was his sons, and the great deliverer was Samuel. When we start the second movement, mark how it begins:

When Samuel became old, he made his sons judges over Israel. The name of his firstborn son was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba. Yet his sons did not walk in his ways but turned aside after gain. They took bribes and perverted justice. (8:1–3)

We are back with the old story of bad sons. I meant it seriously before, and I mean it so when I repeat it now: that is humanity's problem. Here you will see it in history. If you want to see it put theologically you should read the second paragraph of Romans 5 where we are told what it means to be a son of Adam (vv. 12–21). We are a fallen race, and godly fathers redeemed by God's mercy do not necessarily have godly sons. We are a fallen and a broken race. Rebellion is, so to speak, built into our very genes.

Here now is the problem. Samuel's sons perverted justice and took bribes. Now, that is wrong, and everybody could see it was wrong. What we are now to face is the matter that Israel, seeing this was wrong, came to Samuel and demanded a king. This is a matter that has been much debated, has it not? Why was it wrong for Israel to demand a king?

#### *The argument that kingship was not God's intention*

Some people have said it was *essentially* wrong, that is, God had never intended his people to have a king. His intention was that they would remain as a theocracy. Each tribe and family was to be directly responsible to God, with God ruling them without any monarchy as an intermediary. That was God's ideal, and God had never intended Israel to have a king, so the whole institution was misconceived, and it was a total disaster. That is a view that certain sections of Judaism have held and still hold.

I was in Spain some three or four years ago at a Bible camp, and one of the young Christian girls went out on the streets in the intervals to invite the tourists in to the Bible studies. And she hauled in a Jewish astronomer. There he was on holiday, wandering Europe. He worked in the observatories in Mitzpe Ramon in Israel, and he was a theoretical astronomer. So he

came, and to our surprise he stayed a night with us. He attended the Bible studies, and they were on the Gospel of Luke. And naturally, we fell to a great discussion afterwards. And he told me, 'My name is Zvi.'

I said, 'Yes, that's very interesting.'

He said, 'My rabbi told me that if I took the special consonants of my name Zvi, it is the initials for 'justified by faith': 'the just shall live by faith.'

I said, 'How very interesting.'

'Yes, that's my principle in life. I go by that: the just shall live by faith.'

I said that was excellent.

'I mean faith in myself,' he said. 'That's what my rabbi taught us. You've got to have faith in yourself and your own potential: "the just shall live by faith". We don't need any mediator between us and God. That is the mistake that Israel made. In the early days they had direct contact with God, and from that they went and substituted a mediator coming in between them and God. It was completely unnecessary and an absolute disaster in Israel's history that they should have had a Messiah and a king. And I am glad we don't have one now, because the whole business is the just shall live by faith in himself.'

I said that was a very interesting way of proceeding. It sounded to me in some sense excellent that we should have confidence in our abilities. Then I said, 'But what happens when you don't live up to your potential, old chap? Do you always?'

'Well, no, I don't always.'

I said, 'What do you call it when you don't live up to your potential? I think I should call it like your Hebrew prophets called it: sin. Do you hold that it matters or not whether you live up to your *potentials*, as you call them? You see, what impresses me about your Jewish law is that it lays down the tremendous standards, in the law of Moses. I, as a Gentile, admire that tremendously. Here is somebody taking morality seriously in a pagan world and telling us that sin matters, and it matters absolutely. My difficulty is that I, like you, haven't lived up to my potentials either, and I have sinned. And it matters; your Bible tells me it matters because God says it matters, and God will have to deal with my sin. I'm very interested that along with your law of Moses, you have a system of sacrifices. And when you had sinned God allowed you to bring an animal as a substitute for you, and thus the gravity of sin was emphasized. Thus did God maintain his holy standards; thus was he able to offer forgiveness to those who had sinned and not live up to their potentials.'

'Ah,' he said, 'we don't need that nowadays. Our rabbi pointed out to us that after the fall of Jerusalem we didn't need sacrifice anymore. The temple was gone and the sacrificing was gone. We don't need that kind of thing. And the famous rabbi told us to be people of the book who just study Scripture. We don't need sacrifices.'

'That's very interesting to my mind. Yes, your famous rabbi who did the deal with the Romans, and allowed you to survive the sack of Jerusalem and establish yourself at Jamnia as the people of the book, he just scrapped the sacrifices, didn't he?'

'Yes,' he said. 'Why not?'

I said, 'There's this difference between him and Jesus Christ, whom we count our Lord. Your rabbi scrapped the sacrifices; our Lord fulfilled them.'

And I quoted him the passage in Luke when our Lord sat down to keep the Passover: 'I shall not eat it again until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God' (see 22:16). I said, 'If I borrowed a lot of money from you, and I gave you what in England we used to call an *IOU*, that is, a signed statement that I owe you ten million dollars that you have lent me, you would know that the bit of paper I gave you was only a bit of paper; it wasn't the money; it was only a pledge. It didn't pay you, but you were prepared to take the statement from me, an *IOU*, for the time being, imagining that one day it would be honoured. It seems to me your God-appointed sacrifices didn't pay for sin, did they? They were a form of *IOU* that one day would be honoured and literally paid for. Your rabbi seems to me to have taken the whole of the *IOUs* and torn them up and said, "Well, we'll forget that; we'll go to something else." What Jesus Christ claims to have done is to have taken the *IOU*, to have honoured it and paid it in real money. He has fulfilled your Judaism. We don't need the sacrifices now, we don't need the *IOUs* now, but there is a difference between just scrapping them and fulfilling them.'

We need a mediator, which is what I was arguing to this good Jewish astronomer. I was arguing that perhaps we do need a mediator, and God's appointment of David was not God making the best of a bad situation. Perhaps, after all, God intended to have a king in Israel at last.

#### *Kingship was God's intention*

Now for all I know, we would be divided on the issue if I took a vote at the moment. We will probably be divided on it if I take a vote tonight. Was kingship in Israel a bad thing? I would argue that kingship in itself was not a bad thing. What made it bad was the way Israel came to God and demanded it. Moses, as I believe, wrote Deuteronomy; and in Deuteronomy, God gives directions as to what Israel are to do if they should come to the stage when they make a king over them (17:14–20). Moreover, I would find it very difficult to accept that David, appointed and anointed by God as king, ancestor of our blessed Lord Jesus as God's anointed king, was after all only a second best that God never did intend to have. Did he never intend to have David and great David's son, and have our Lord appointed king of the universe? I, therefore, would argue deferentially before you that what was wrong was not having a king, but the way that Israel went about it.

Suppose we have a father here, and his boy is fourteen years old, and father is looking ahead to the time when his boy will be eighteen. And father has a beautiful motorcycle, a real big Japanese brute of a thing, as long as a table. And he intends to give this to his boy one day, but at the moment it's in the garage under lock and key. The boy knows of it, and can't wait to get it. So, one day when his parents are gone, he breaks into the garage and gets the machine out and fills it with petrol and rides off on it, and crashes both it and himself. Now, what is the situation? It isn't that the father never did intend him to have a motorcycle. The father intended one day it should be his, but the father was determining the time for it, when the boy should be ready for it. The sin of the boy is to go against his father's wisdom, to reject his father's temporary prohibition, and to take the motorcycle in rebellion against his father. So what the boy could have had as a gift given graciously by his father, and enjoyed along with his father, he is demanding to have, and taking it has become an expression of the boy's rebellion against his father. There was nothing wrong, in itself, with having a motorcycle.

The situation was that Israel saw that Samuel's sons were evil. Anybody could see they were evil; that was not difficult. The mistake was to think that now that Israel could see it was evil, they had enough brains to put it right. And impatient of anything else, they are now found demanding a king immediately. They don't come to Samuel and say, 'Dear Samuel, we're afraid we have to tell you your sons are evil: they are perverting judgment; they are taking bribes. Look, Samuel, we don't know what to do but can you not do something for us? Can we not have another occasion, as we did earlier, when together with you we waited on God for God to deliver us? Ask the Lord. Enquire of the Lord for us, Samuel. What does the Lord want us to do in this situation? It can't be allowed to go on, but what will God do to save us?'

No. 'The thing is evil,' they say. 'We are not prepared to put up with it any longer. Proceed, Samuel. Now we are going to have our solution to the problem. Please will you appoint us a king, and that's that.'

And in so doing, not only did they grieve Samuel but God says, 'they have rejected me' (8:7). Let's ponder that a moment.

#### *God's way of putting down evil*

It is easy enough for us all to recognize evil, to see that there is something massively wrong with our world. Bribery has not disappeared, not from the western nations and governments and policies, or from the others. It is easy to see that things are wrong, and very easy for us to fall into the mistake that because we see they are wrong, we think we can put them right. It is easy to see that things are wrong in the church, and easy to fall into the trap that we can see how they should be put right. The problem of putting evil right, however, is not that simple. Witness God Almighty himself. If there is a God in heaven who cares for justice, allow me to ask you, why hasn't he put it right centuries before this?

Let me press it home on you. You may say I've now gone on one of my flights of fancy. ('The man has gone off again as he does now and again. He's a decent chap but he goes off now and again. He'll come down.') Well, all right, I started with little Israel in centuries gone by, with their problems of bribery and injustices, and they think they have the solution to put it right. And I'm now observing that their solution was rejecting God. But I'm turning the tables and saying, 'Why doesn't God deal with it, then?' If you put it like that, that is a problem that has haunted us, and haunts us still now.

I have a Jewish friend in Belfast. He just about managed to escape the gas chambers in Hitler's concentration camps. He had managed to flee to Belfast, of all places on earth, and there has lived safely ever after, believe it or not. And now, in his old age he comes and attends some of my lectures. We talk and have lunch together. How often the man has said to me, with tears coming down his eyes: 'You tell me there's a God? I don't know whether to believe in God or not.'

He says this though he is a Jew, and a regular attender at the synagogue.

'How can I believe in God? Where was God when Hitler was gassing six million of my fellow Jews? Where was he? Gone on holiday or something?'



And he wasn't meaning to be irreverent, but speaking out of the anguish of his heart. How can you still believe in a God who cares for moral justice if God allows evil to continue? That is a very big problem. But then, how would you put evil right if you were God?

We are now beginning to face the problem here, at this level in history. Samuel's sons are bad. Israel can see it can't go on; but instead of coming to God for his solution, they have their own solution that practically rejects God and takes the matter out of his hands. And Samuel proceeds to tell them later on in chapter 12, which we shall come to presently, 'When you were under the judges and your enemies came against you, then you cried to the Lord and the Lord raised you up a deliverer. But now at last you got tired of that method, and you can see the evil that's bothering and pestering you, and instead of crying to the Lord for the Lord to solve the problem, you take the matter out of God's hands. You've got your solution; you demand to have it. You are going to solve the problem' (see vv. 6-19).

Samuel was very upset when he heard that and so, in a sense, was God. So what will God do when his people come like spoilt teenagers who know better than their father, and they have the solution, and they are going to have it done. What will God Almighty do?

Well, we shall have to see that in our next session.

## [From Rejecting God to the Rejection of King Saul](#)

*Section Two (8:1–15:35)*

### **The choosing of a king**

The situation we find here in the narrative is that the people have seen the problem of evil that confronts them in the form of Samuel's sons who, being judges, took bribes and perverted justice. And at this point the people decide that they must have this matter cured. Instead of waiting on God graciously, to ask him if he could intervene and solve this problem for them, they come to Samuel and *demand* a king. And God takes exception to it, as he says to Samuel, 'They have not rejected you, but they have rejected me' (8:7). Now what will God do? What God does is to tell Samuel to appoint them a king.

And the LORD said to Samuel, 'Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them. According to all the deeds that they have done, from the day I brought them up out of Egypt even to this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are also doing to you. Now then, obey their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them.' (vv. 7–9)

### **The true cost of having a king**

So next comes the protest. To my mind it is a magnificent exhibition of the character of God that God did not go and then smite Israel and destroy them for their impertinence, but God went along with them saying, 'All right, if you think you have the solution to the matter, you have your go then. You solve it. But just understand from the start, will you, that I don't myself think it's a pretty decent solution. But what is the problem?'

They said, 'These sons are taking bribes. That never ought to be. Do you know how much that's putting on our income tax? It's a whole four per cent every year. We can't put up with all this bribery business any longer.'

God says, 'So your solution to that is what?'

'Well we've got to have a king!'

'Oh. Have you worked out how much the king is going to cost you, how many percentages that would put on your income tax?'

He says to Samuel, 'Make them know the manner of a king.'

He said, 'These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen and to run before his chariots. And he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plough his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his servants. He will take the tenth of your grain and of your vineyards and give it to his officers and to his servants. He will take your male servants and female servants and the best of your young men and your donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take the tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves. And in that day you will cry out because of your king, whom you have chosen for yourselves, but the LORD will not answer you in that day.' (vv. 11–18)

I should think you will cry out! If you couldn't put up with the odd bribe now and again, how will you put up with this? Even in sheer terms of finance and income, the solution was a bit questionable.

There is another thing that we might add if we were thinking theologically. If the trouble is sons, and the fact that good men don't always have good sons, how is the solution to that to ask for a *hereditary* monarchy? Suppose the first king was good. Would you guarantee all the others would be? It seems to me like institutionalizing the problem.

After this protest, God says, 'Go ahead.' And God now arranges for Samuel to anoint Saul.

### **How God gave Saul to the people**

Now we have to ask ourselves a question (and again I suspect we shall diverge in our opinions). What are we to make of the story that follows through chapters 9 and 10? What are we to make of the fact that God proceeded to choose Saul and then show him to the people? I read it not as God being snide and tantalizing his people. I read it that when God chose Saul and presented him to the people, he chose a man that the people themselves would immediately recognize as someone answering to their ideal. He would be their choice; he was their concept of the kind of king they wanted.

In addition, I read it that God himself did God's own best to train that man to be king over his people. God did not abandon his people, as he is about to tell them through Samuel in chapter 12: 'I will not abandon you so long as you will cooperate with me and obey me.' And Samuel says at last, 'I will not sin against you by ceasing to pray for you. God and I will cooperate with you so long as you and your king are obedient to the Lord' (see vv. 19–25). God was not tantalizing them. He was taking their solution seriously and doing his very best to train their man Saul to be a king.

### **The training of a king**

How would you train a man to be king? How would you train Saul, in particular, to be king? Well, now we come to the simplicities of Hebrew narrative, because we are not talking of the White House and choosing a President and all the tremendous training that goes into preparing a man for that high office. We are back in Hebrew simplicities.

Saul's father had some donkeys. It was quite common in those days for farmers to have donkeys. These donkeys went astray: 'Now the donkeys of Kish, Saul's father, were lost' (9:3). They represented quite a bit of family investment and capital. You couldn't afford to have donkeys getting lost. And the trouble with donkeys when they get lost is they don't have any homing instinct. A horse will, but a donkey won't. Anybody could see that donkeys ought not to go astray. Stupid things: they'd gone astray and got lost. And Saul is commissioned by his father, Kish, to go and seek the donkeys and bring the stupid beasts back again.

'It is a simple problem,' you say. And if you know what's coming, you will add, 'And if he can't bring lost donkeys back, how does he propose to deal with all those other donkeys that walk on two legs?'

He goes to seek the donkeys. 'It's a simple task,' he tells himself. 'Any man of intelligence could do it.' But somehow, just when he thought he was going to find them, he didn't. And in the end, he began to get lost himself. It was a bigger problem than he thought.

When they came to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant who was with him, 'Come, let us go back, lest my father cease to care about the donkeys and become anxious about us.' (v. 5)

So now he was at the end of his tether, and admitting to himself that he couldn't solve the problem or cure it. Just at that moment, the servant said to him,

Behold, there is a man of God in this city, and he is a man who is held in honour; all that he says comes true. So now let us go there. Perhaps he can tell us the way we should go. (v. 6)

What a fortunate coincidence it was that when Saul got to the end of his tether it brought him to a place where there was a man of God who could ask God's wisdom on the matter. Saul said, 'That's a very good idea, my boy. Wait a minute. We shall have to give the man something and, do you know, I came out without a penny in my pocket. I changed my trousers this morning, and I forgot to bring my wallet. I haven't any money. What an embarrassment' (see v. 7).

'Well,' said the servant, 'I happen to have in my hand a fourth part of a shekel of silver. That should be enough to give to the man of God to tell us our way' (see v. 8).

How perfect. You would almost be tempted to say 'providential'. Anyway, there it was. So then Saul said to his servant, 'Well said, my man. Come let us go.' So they went and came to the city where the man of God was.

Now, where do you find him? Well, they could enquire. And as they went up to the city they found young maidens going out to draw water and said unto them, 'Is the seer here.' 'Oh,' they said, 'how interesting you should enquire. Yes, he happened to be here last night. He is up ahead of you. Make haste now, for he has come to go into the city. How fortunate you came just today, because the people have a sacrifice today in the high place. As soon as you have come into the city you shall find him, before he goes up to the high place to eat, for the people will not eat until he comes' (see vv. 9-13).

This is beginning to get more than coincidental, isn't it? When he feels he's lost, now comes the advice to consult a seer. There happens to be a seer just at this place. When they need money, there's the money ready that Saul hadn't got himself. They come to the city and

enquire where the seer is. 'Oh,' say the ladies, 'he's right here; you've come just at the right moment. He's now going up, you know.' And they add, 'The people have a sacrifice today, but they won't eat the sacrifice until the seer comes.'

I taught in a university for some years and, as you know, in universities one has to set exams for students. It's a bit of a cruel sport, but there it is; it has to be done. And naturally the papers have to be set long in advance of the examinations, and so it happens that you find yourself lecturing on the topic. And at a certain juncture in your year you'll be lecturing on a topic, and you know that you have set the question on the examination on that topic. It's a delicate moment. You can't tell the students, 'Now, this is the question that's going to be asked in the exam.' On the other hand, you want to make sure that everything is fair, and the student has had an explanation of this matter and the problem, and how to answer it. And you are using the most basic English to put it across in words of one syllable to make sure that when the exam comes the students have already been given the answer fully and fairly and clearly.

How many times have I been in that situation, and as you go to explain it you say, 'Now the problem is this. And if you ever came across that problem, the answer would be this and this and this.' You look up and there is Mr Jones. He isn't looking, he isn't listening, he isn't writing a note. He's watching the birds in the trees, or perhaps he's watching something else out the window. And you can't say, 'Jones, you fool, listen man!' It's not a surprise if Jones fails the examination.

You feel like shouting to Saul here, don't you? He's told, 'The people will not eat until he comes.' You say, 'Saul, listen!' For his first big examination was going to be, what? That you wait. Wait until the seer comes. God is fair; he never put a man through an examination for which he hadn't prepared him. It was God doing his level best to train Saul. Yes, it is at the lowly level of a farmer's daily life, but consider the marvellous providences that were now going to solve his problem for him. God would bring the donkeys back and let Saul have the credit for bringing them back, but God had had to solve it by his wisdom. He is training Saul. Saul has come to enquire of the Lord through the seer, and there is the seer, and the people are *waiting*. They wouldn't begin to eat until the seer comes. I hope Saul was listening. The fact is that when he came to the examination he fluffed the thing completely, and couldn't wait (13:13–14).

So he went up to the high place and Samuel said to the cook, 'I want you to be ready with the shoulder of the beast. There will be a man coming, and I want him to have the biggest piece in the feast, to honour him.' So when Saul at last came to the seer, Samuel said, 'Yes, come and sit down. I knew you were coming. Come and sit, and here is the piece that we've prepared for you.'

'You knew I was coming? How did you know I was coming?'

And then Samuel anointed him and said, 'Now when you go from here you will find these three things happening, and at those three stages, God will supply your need. When you come to Rachel's sepulchre, you will find people saying your father has stopped worrying about the donkeys and is now worried about you. You should then go forward and you will come to the Oak of Tabor. There you'll meet these three men going up to God to Bethel: one carrying three young goats, and another carrying three loaves of bread, and another carrying a bottle

of wine. They will salute you and give you two loaves of bread, which you shall accept from their hand.'

Saul's resources were exhausted because of his long trip. Now God is meeting his need and telling him in advance, 'When you come here, the need will be met; when you go there, the need will be met.'

Then Samuel said, 'You will come to a garrison of the Philistines, and when you do and you're in great need, then the Spirit of the Lord will come mightily upon you. So you go and I will come down to offer burnt sacrifices. Seven days you shall wait, and I shall come unto you and show you what you shall do' (see 10:2-8).

I maintain, or at least I suggest to you, that what God was doing was genuinely trying to train Saul. To train him in what? If you are ever going to reign for God, and guide other people in the ways of God, the necessary condition, the *sine qua non*, of your training will be that you yourself first learn what it is to be guided by God, that you have your own first-hand experience of the government of God in your life, so that you know what it is to be led of the Lord. You need to have developed a confidence in the Lord's leading, so that if you got in a situation you wouldn't run headlong into the solution but say, 'No, pressing as the circumstances are, I must wait confidently upon God, and trust God for his guidance and leading.' And if we have not experienced the leading of God in our own lives, and dare not trust the commands of the Lord in our own lives, how shall we ever lead anybody else for God or solve the basic problem?

What is the basic problem? The basic problem is man, in his independence of God, thinking he knows good and evil and therefore can decide for himself without the Almighty, and solve life's problems, even the problems of evil, without the help of the Almighty. How shall we ever be trained to get back people like that, to get them to submit to righteousness, by our own wisdom, unless we have developed a keen sense of trust in God, and his wisdom, and his ways, and his guidance? We need both the written guidance of holy Scripture, and his guidance in the affairs of our daily lives.

### **Prepared to reign**

You must allow me now to extrapolate from this particular lesson. I'm not going into typology at this stage, not but what I believe in typology, as you know. I am just coming to this, reading it straight off the text. If Saul was ever going to reign, he must be taught himself to be led of the Lord, and to trust God's guidance and command.

There is a pretty strong rumour going about that your destiny likewise is to reign, isn't it so? It's a very strong rumour. Do you really suppose one of these days Christ is going to put the sceptre into your hand, and you rule the nations, and shepherd them with a rod of iron, and you reign with Christ? By what moral right will God put you over other men and women so that you reign for him? And by what training will God prepare us to reign with Christ? Is this an easy thing that one can do, having been an electrician, to wake up one morning and think, 'I'll change my job. I will now be in the government'? Or do we have to be trained for that high honour?

As I read my New Testament, it suggests to me that we have to be trained for the position, occupation and tremendous responsibility of reigning with Christ. 'The one who conquers

and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations,' says our blessed Lord to the church at Thyatira (Rev 2:26). It is done in the humble affairs of life. And here we come back to Hebrew simplicity. There was Hannah in her home with the daily running of the house and the matter of the birth of her children, learning to see life in the context of God's great plans and purposes, and knowing God's guidance and provision. It is in the ordinary affairs of life that we learn to trust God; it is in the affairs of the church that we learn to look for God's wisdom, and dare to trust God's wisdom in his government of the church, as we are being repaired for those greater responsibilities when the Lord Jesus comes and we reign with him.

### **The presentation of Saul**

So there was the provision as well as the guidance. Eventually, there was the presentation of Saul. From 10:17 onwards, Samuel once more reminds them that they have rejected the Lord, 'who saves you from all your calamities and your distresses, and you have said to him, "Set a king over us"' (v. 19). Then he continues:

'Now therefore present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes and by your thousands.' Then Samuel brought all the tribes of Israel near, and the tribe of Benjamin was taken by lot. He brought the tribe of Benjamin near by its clans, and the clan of the Matrites was taken by lot; and Saul the son of Kish was taken by lot. But when they sought him, he could not be found. So they enquired again of the LORD, 'Is there a man still to come?' and the LORD said, 'Behold, he has hidden himself among the baggage.' Then they ran and took him from there. And when he stood among the people, he was taller than any of the people from his shoulders upwards. And Samuel said to all the people, 'Do you see him whom the LORD has chosen? There is none like him among all the people.' And all the people shouted, 'Long live the king!' (vv. 19–24)

Now comes the presentation. I want to say this is genuine on God's part too. He wasn't mocking his people. He had chosen a man that the people would themselves acclaim as the ideal kind of man that they felt could solve their problem.

Notice his one attribute that we are told about, that when he stood among the people he was a tremendously big fellow: he was head and shoulders above all the others. And if you had nasty enemies about the place that need to be smitten hip and thigh, perhaps you might be tempted to go for a man that's obviously a prize fighter. The people said, 'Yes, exactly. God save the king! Now, this is the type of man that will solve our problems.'

How do you react to that? There have been many nations that have felt that, have there not? The Russians feel it still. They don't like Gorbachev, so I gather. They admire a strong man. Some of them secretly hark back to the days of Stalin. He at least kept the country together; he was a strong man and didn't stand any nonsense. Big men, big strength, big power: is that the solution to the problem of evil? Again, I mustn't fall into typology, (goodness me, no), but I am talking about the problem that has haunted the universe from the year dot onwards. Is sheer power the answer to the problem of evil?

When it comes to sheer power, God has no rivals, does he? Couldn't he solve the problem of evil tomorrow? Well, he could have solved it when Adam sinned, actually: he could have

blotted him out. Would that have solved the problem of evil? No, hardly. There is a very real sense in which if God's response to the fall, the rebellion, of man had been to blot them out, Satan would have laughed his way all along the road and said, 'There you are, God. Almighty, aren't you? Marvellous! We knew that before you started. You're almighty to create, but you are not almighty to keep the loyalty of your creatures, are you, God? You're lost there. You made creatures to love and serve you and obey you. You couldn't keep them, could you? You lost them, and all you could do was to obliterate them.' That's not victory; that's defeat, isn't it? Sheer, naked power never was in the running to be the answer to the problem of evil.

There were some who objected to Saul, as we see from the end of chapter 10. They used naughty names about him. "'How can this man save us?' And they despised him' (v. 27). There follows the Ammonite incident where Saul beat the enemy, by which tactics you can see (they weren't altogether gentlemanly).

And the Spirit of God rushed upon Saul when he heard these words, and his anger was greatly kindled. He took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by the hand of messengers, saying, 'Whoever does not come out after Saul and Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen!' Then the dread of the LORD fell upon the people, and they came out as one man. (11:6-7)

I should think they did come out! By the time they'd handed that joint of beef around, dripping with gore and now stinking, they didn't need any further compulsion. They came out, to a man, to follow Saul, for he was a colossal great man; and if they had have refused to obey him, he'd have cut them up like he cut the ox up.

You say, 'It says the spirit of God came upon him.'

Yes. The exercise of sheer power can be a right thing, can't it? For all I said, God himself will use his almighty power to clear up the universe. I mustn't deny the rightness of the use of power. And in saying that the spirit of God came upon him, presumably the historian is not speaking about the manifestations of the fruit of the Spirit that we read of in the New Testament, but is indicating that this emotion, the exhibition of naked power, for the moment, can be seen to have the approval of God.

But is power the *final* solution? We ask the question again. Is the big man using power that frightens the daylights out of people, and they obey willy-nilly, the final answer to this universe? Well if it were, please picture to yourself what kind of a universe it would be. It isn't going to be the final solution, is it?

Well, Saul isn't going to be the solution through his sheer power, for the people welcomed him as a big man, but we are going to read another story soon. Of course you can't help anticipating, because you've cheated and you've read the story before! But it would be exciting if you hadn't read it before, and you'd only come to this point. You'd say, 'Now at last the problem is solved, for here is Saul—a big man. What a wise choice on the part of God!' And then to find the historian telling you the next story. There came forth a champion out of the camp of the Philistines, and he was a colossal man! And big man Saul is so tiny by comparison that all he can do is to hide in his tent in a panic of fear. The problem is going to be man. The problem, not the solution, is man: big man in his rebellion against God Almighty. 'Big man' is not the solution; big man is the problem. If a man like Saul is going to be entrusted



with power, how much more he will need to be under the control of God, lest using that power he misuses it and abuses it to the destruction of God's people.

We only have to think of the tyrants of this world who have attained to great power, and then to think of what they did with it, to see the point of what the historian will now tell us. Why had God taken the trouble to train Saul to wait for God, to seek God's leading and control? Because if you put a man in charge, with enormous power to control the lives of others, and that man himself is not controlled by God's guidance, then you are on the way towards a hell, not a paradise.

The use of power is a very serious and solemn matter, surrounded by all kinds of dangers. It is not for nothing that when the choirs of heaven hear the final solution, and they are told that it has been solved by a lion, they turn around and see to their immense relief that the lion is a lamb, as it had been slain (Rev 5:5–6). One day, God shall entrust the infinite power of deity to the man Jesus Christ, because he has been fitted and is worthy to take the book, and to have the power, and to use the power, and to be relied upon not to degenerate into an almighty tyrant.

At least that is how I read these chapters. Here we see God's cooperation with the people to let them have their way, to do the best he can to make their way succeed, to give them the man that they would think, 'Yes, we agree, that's the kind of man we want', and to do his best to train him. And yes, to give him power to overcome the enemy. Let it be demonstrated that God's Spirit has entrusted to this man power to overcome the enemy. Everybody is glad, and they say, 'This confirms it! Let's put to death all the objectors.'

'No,' says Saul, 'we don't put anybody to death.'

Saul is now ensconced, but then will come the examination. How will he use the power God has entrusted to him? We know, of course. We know enough of the story in advance to know that when God took Saul through his examinations, he failed the lot so disastrously that God had to bypass him and appoint his own man as king.

## Questions and Contributions

### *Session Two*

We come now to questions and further contributions. You may remember that in the preliminary literature that went out to you it was suggested that people might like to use these sessions not merely to ask questions but also to make contributions. You have all been studying this part of Scripture in these past months. Some of you indeed have been studying it all your lives, for the last seventy-five years perhaps, and you will have thought about these things much longer than I have had opportunity to, and I thought it would be a good thing if we didn't simply make these sessions for questions, but a sharing together of insights that the Lord has given one another on these matters. Necessarily the time is limited, but I wonder if anyone would care to make some positive contributions and further insights into the chapters that we have already covered. We are very roughly come to the end of chapter 11, and there is much that has not been commented upon, and if you have insights to share, the rest of us will be very grateful. When we've done with these further contributions then let's turn to questions.

### **Eli sitting**

AUDIENCE: Just one thing that I saw yesterday, dealing with the topic of Eli's priesthood. It's interesting to note that Eli is always mentioned as *sitting* in the tabernacle. And the only seat that was mentioned in Moses' law was the mercy seat. It's not for the high priests to be sitting; there was much work to be done. I would submit that perhaps that is one of the reasons why Eli's sons were so evil. Coming from the other side, and from a large family of seven children, I can testify to the fact that it was my father's prayers for me that brought me through many rough waters. Perhaps if Eli had taken a more active interest in his sons before the throne of grace, there may have been a different result as far as the priesthood was concerned.

DWG: Thank you very much. Now this brother here.

### **God gave Saul another heart**

AUDIENCE: I'd just like to make a comment on a verse, and then maybe some others might have some thoughts on it. First Samuel 10:9 says, 'When he turned his back to leave Samuel, God gave him another heart.' We know that various parts of the body are used in Scripture, and the heart particularly is used as the seat of affection. And it must have been a traumatic experience for Saul that day to be anointed king, because he no doubt knew the

responsibilities of a king from the other nations that had kings. Probably up until this point, Saul was concerned about himself, but now he needed the capacity to be concerned about all of God's people, and so God had to change his heart.

Now, we know that when we come to the Lord Jesus Christ in salvation he gives us new life, he gives us the spirit of God to dwell within us, and he changes our heart. But very often we just continue on with a heart for ourselves. To be a true leader we need a heart for God's people; and if we spend our time and our energy doing things for others, we won't need to do anything for ourselves. I find it very interesting that it says here specifically that, as he turned to go back from Samuel, God gave him another heart.

DWG: Thank you very much indeed. There's a good man behind you.

### **Waiting for God's solution**

AUDIENCE: I just am going over the questions that were sent out, specifically the question about the fact that, as brother Gooding has pointed out, the Lord mentions in the book of Deuteronomy the fact of a king, and also why God was angry when Israel asked for a king. Among the things that we've already had brought to our attention, it's good to notice the timing of when they wanted a king, because it was not God's timing. I think God was also angry because he knew what they wanted in a king was not necessarily the type of man that God wanted to be king.

The other thing that I noticed was that in chapter 8, when the people make the request to Samuel, there is an emphasis upon the fact that they say, 'Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations' (v. 5). We see their desire to be like the nations around them. And God specifically, very forcefully, was attempting to instruct them that they were to be *different* from all the nations around them. And I think that's been brought out to us by the fact of the presence of the ark, and its significance that the living God was in the midst of those people. That was the uniqueness of that nation. They were different from the nations around, and now they want a king so they can be like all of the other nations around.

To me, these things that we find recorded here have such application for us today. I find that there is the same problem now that they were confronted with. There are many problems that confront us in the assemblies in which we are in fellowship, throughout our country and around the world. Many people are offering solutions. Some of those solutions are an attempt to cause us to become in many ways like all of the others around us. And I know, on a more personal level, in the early years when dealing with problems (and I'm still not many years being in the Lord's service), many times I came up with a lot of quick solutions to deal with what were very complex problems. As I look back on that now, I'm sure that, in many cases, I didn't wait on the Lord enough and seek his solution. I don't think it's any good to hide our heads in the sand and not confront the problems that some of us may have, but certainly we need to learn a lesson. Let's be sure we seek God's solution to the problem, and not just a solution that is what the other people around us are doing. There is a very clear warning there, that we need to try to do that, and I'm just noting that for myself, and sharing with you how that has come across to me.

DWG: Thank you very much. The good gentleman right at the back there has something to add.

### **The process of the glory departing**

AUDIENCE: I had noticed this back in chapter 4. It has often grieved me, as I have gone through the book of Ezekiel, to see that scene again of the departure of the glory of God, and to bleed inside as I'm sure Ezekiel did because the only thing that had marked Israel as distinct and holy was no longer to be claimed. But I'm sure even Ezekiel had realized that much of the glory of God had been compromised long before he saw that scene. But we are seeing the contrast of that magnificent scene in the sky and then to see his departure must have dealt a tremendous blow to him.

I was thinking in reference to the departure of the glory that came with the loss of the ark. The observations of the daughter-in-law of Eli really spoke to me.

And she named the child Ichabod, saying, 'The glory has departed from Israel!' because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband. And she said, 'The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured.' (vv. 21-22)

I take it from her words here that she linked everything together. And so I want to say that the departure of the glory of God was a process that began with her husband. It began with her father-in-law. The removal of the ark was only a last action that sealed the fate, or seemed to close the door. And yet the process had begun a long time ago.

What I see from that is that often we tend to have certain earmarks of God's departure or lack of blessing in our lives, and we say, 'Well, this is where it happened', but we often fail to see the progression that takes place in our life, or in the life of our assembly, that marks a departure from seeing his glory, from being a reflection of who he is. The departure comes, whether it comes from preaching on what we call practical areas, or just a lack of adoration and the worship meeting becomes stale. And it takes a progressive period of time. If it happened instantaneously, like the loss of the ark, well then, we would say, 'We've got to get the ark back, and then we'll have the solution', but oftentimes when we lose our sight of the glory of God it has been over such a long period of time. It can start with compromises in our families that lead to this ultimate act of losing the ark; but we don't see it before it's almost too late.

DWG: Thank you for the observation.

### **Going up to high places to worship**

AUDIENCE: This is a question I had when I was reading through this a few weeks ago. In chapter 10 we see that it says, 'When [Saul] had finished prophesying, he came to *the high place*' (v. 13). In chapter 9, you see that phrase again where they went to eat, and they waited for Samuel.

He has come just now to the city, because the people have a sacrifice today on *the high place*. As soon as you enter the city you will find him, before he goes up to *the high place* to eat. (vv. 12–13).

Later on in the kingdom, the role of the high place, evidently, was as a place of worship of false gods, but I'm wondering if at this point, when the ark was at Shiloh and before it was in Jerusalem, if there was a difference. Was this a weakness? Was it sin to go up to the high place? What was the role of these high places? There seems to be no censorious attitude about it, given by the historian at least. So I'm looking for clarification on that for myself. Maybe the rest of you understand that.

DWG: Did you come to a decision yourself?

AUDIENCE: No, I haven't.

DWG: Well now, here is a contribution by way of a question. Can we have some answers? The question, as I understand it, is that in later parts of Scripture certainly, God forbids the use of high places. Israel was not to worship on any old high place, or under any old green tree, lest Israel go into idolatry like the other nations among whom they lived. They were to bring a sacrifice to the place where God should choose to set his name there. Against that background we simply read here that Samuel went up to a 'high place'. It seems to have been normal practice at this time. Solomon eventually went up to a high place, and so forth and so on. The historian records it. He doesn't make any comment for good or ill; he just says it happened. The question is therefore, how would you reconcile that with the commands elsewhere not to worship on high places? If it had been Ahab worshiping on high places, I suspect our good questioner would have added, 'Well dear me, that's Ahab, but look what wife he has and her religious influence on him.' But when you find people like Samuel going up to a high place, it does beg the question, doesn't it? That is the point, I think, of the question.

I don't know if what I have to say is the full and final answer, but I shall make this remark. At the beginning of Samuel the tabernacle is in Shiloh and the ark is there, and a man like Elkanah is found going up to the tabernacle regularly at the set feasts of the Lord, as was his duty. But the story is telling that eventually the ark was lost to the Philistines, and when it came back it did not appear to go back to the tabernacle at Shiloh, but was in a private house (7:1–2). That in itself would have caused great problems, wouldn't it? Was there any sense in going up to the tabernacle at Shiloh, when the ark of the Lord wasn't there anyway? How did you perform the rituals of the Day of Atonement if the ark wasn't in the tabernacle, and all such like things? And if the ark wasn't in the tabernacle, that tabernacle was desolate indeed, for it lacked the whole thing for which the tabernacle was built. And therefore, in that state of disorder, it isn't perhaps surprising to find Israel going up to various high places here and there.

The patriarchs, of course, hadn't been under the rule relating to the tabernacle. They had made an altar wherever they pitched their tents for the time being. The rule against going up to high places, as I remember it, was specifically to stop Israel engaging in idolatry in such situations, and copying the Canaanites. Abraham had been in no danger of doing any such thing, but the Israelites would have been. Now, when the tabernacle itself was dismembered

and almost unusable because of the absence of the ark, then I daresay that quite serious and godly people who were in no danger of idolatry were reduced to the habit of going up to high places. Samuel did anyway.

If you come right on to the time of David, he brought the ark to Jerusalem (2 Sam 6). I don't think you read that he brought *the tabernacle* to Jerusalem. And he put the ark in a tent in Jerusalem. That was highly unusual, so to speak. I almost said 'irregular', though it was a very important stage in the establishment of David's dynasty.

Solomon, in his early days, went up to the high place of Gibeon because there was an altar there (1 Kgs 3:3). It was only when at last the temple was built, it seems to me, that things returned to normality, as they should have been. If you ask me what were God's people supposed to do in a time of such confusion, when the ark was not in the tabernacle but in somebody's private house, and the tabernacle was virtually unusable, I don't know that I have any answer. The time was long. I should hope they did their best, as they could, before the Lord, within the circumstances.

AUDIENCE: This may be a little bit nit-picky, but it is something that occurred to me yesterday. In 2 Samuel, as David mourns for Jonathan, on two occasions in his lament he mentions 'the high places'. He begins in 1:19, 'Your glory, O Israel, is slain on your high places!' In verse 25 he says, 'How the mighty have fallen in the midst of the battle! Jonathan lies slain on your high places.' My question as I read that was: is that good or bad? I don't know whether you have any comment on that.

DWG: I should answer it, I think, by another question. The poem there talks about Jonathan's 'high places'. Is it talking about his religious high places, or is it talking about the high places of Israel? Jonathan was slain on the sides of Mount Gilboa. Is it now merely talking geographically, of where he was killed? Or, thirdly, is it using it metaphorically? Jonathan was a great warrior, he was one of the leading single combat heroes in Israel in a day when single combat heroes were in fashion, and therefore these high places might be used metaphorically of the military field where he had once so much renown and had been famous in Israel. He at last came to grief. He died, not in his bed, because he died ingloriously on the military high places where hitherto he had wrought so many victories. I don't know. It could be all of the above, I suppose.

My first line of approach, I think, was to say, 'Well, where was Jonathan slain?' It might carry an undertone that Jonathan had engaged in unworthy religious practices, and they were the undoing of him. But if you say that I think you would need to point to some particular, and there is no known reference of Jonathan engaging in any nefarious, idolatrous practices, at least not any known to me.

AUDIENCE: The first time that the Lord mentions a high place in an unseemly light is in 1 Kings 11.

Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. And so he did for all his foreign wives, who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods. And the LORD was angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had

appeared to him twice and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods. (vv. 7–9)

And so it seems that that would be the real problem with the high place, the fact that he was offering to another God.

DWG: Yes, surely.

### **A question of humility**

AUDIENCE: I wonder if we can go from high places to high people again. In chapter 9 we have Saul answering and saying to Samuel,

Am I not a Benjaminite, from the least of the tribes of Israel? And is not my clan the humblest of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then have you spoken to me in this way? (v. 21)

And if we turn over to chapter 10, we read this:

So they enquired again of the LORD, 'Is there a man still to come?' and the LORD said, 'Behold, he has hidden himself among the baggage.' Then they ran and took him from there. And when he stood among the people, he was taller than any of the people from his shoulders upwards. (vv. 22–23)

And I would submit that, as we have been talking about this morning, with big men there is a tendency towards false humility, which is later uncovered. Their blind ambition that lies underneath comes to the surface, and very often a situation helps to determine the true characteristics of the big man.

AUDIENCE: The verse that I have been thinking about is right along the line of what our brother just shared, and that was the contrast in 10:22, where they had enquired of the Lord, 'Has the man come here yet?' And the Lord answered, 'There he is hidden among the equipment.' And the fact of that false humility, or something of a very negative character, seems to be reflected there. And of course they ran and brought him from there, and when he stood among the people he was taller than any of the people from the shoulders upward. So what a contrast with the inner character versus the outer character.

DWG: Very good. And the man behind you has a comment.

AUDIENCE: Just one question, tying in with the same thing I had been thinking about. It is easy to get down on Saul, but I wonder if it really is false humility. Later on in chapter 15, Samuel says to him, 'Though you are little in your own eyes' (v. 17). It seems to me as though it probably was genuine humility on his part. He didn't feel he lived up to his own side, maybe, but then when the Lord anointed him king, maybe evil took over. I just throw it out as a question.

DWG: Yes, that is a very interesting point to make. You are calling on our good brothers here to say why they thought it was false humility. Anybody remember any other reluctant heroes, reluctant servants in scripture?

AUDIENCE: Gideon.

DWG: Wonderful, my good man. Gideon in the early days of the judges had hid and protested, didn't he, to the angel of God that would appoint him?

AUDIENCE: Moses.

DWG: Yes, Moses was another one. Were they all falsely humble? That is where the question arises: whether this was genuine on Saul's part at the time, and that later on he went bad, or whether he was absolutely bad from the word go and a bit of a hypocrite.

AUDIENCE: I look at those verses in chapter 10 a little bit differently. This was a coronation: King Saul had already been anointed king, but it wasn't known to the people. It was the people that wanted a king, and so if you look at 10:17, we see the methodology that Samuel uses to introduce God's choice in a manner that appears as though it's really the people's choice. He brings all the people together; then he brings all the tribes and singles out the tribe of Benjamin, you'll notice. And then the people are going to search for the king, and they begin to look for him. And I don't think he was hiding because he was scared. I think he was hiding because he had to be revealed. And I think that's important in the way we introduce change. I think what Samuel was doing was getting a buy-in from the people, so that it wasn't Samuel's choice but it really was their choice, and most of them then were willing to recognize Saul as the king. I think the methodology that Samuel uses here is very interesting and very unique.

I'd like to ask a question, though. Just before Samuel sent the people away at the conclusion of the coronation it says that he wrote in the book. In 10:25 it says, 'Then Samuel told the people the manner of the kingdom, and wrote it in a book, and laid it up before the LORD' (KJV). He didn't write about the king, he wrote about 'the manner of the kingdom'. What did he write?

DWG: I imagine that the kind of thing he wrote was the kind of thing he later expounded to them, according to chapter 12: what the manner of the kingdom should be, and setting before the people clearly what now were the issues at stake. Since they had asked for a king, and been given a king, what was the serious defect in the business of having a king, but nevertheless how they could, if they were wise, get around that defect. He was warning them in advance of the actual situation: 'the manner of the kingdom', just as God had told him to in chapter 8: 'you shall solemnly warn them and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them' (v. 9).

### **Determining goodness or evil in a biblical character**

AUDIENCE: Thinking of Saul and his character and whether he was a self-centred man or a proud man at the start, and if it was really false humility, I don't think particularly that it was false humility. I agree with our brother and what he said when he pointed out what the Scripture says: 'When you were little in your own eyes.' I think Saul's great problem was that he was not a spiritual man. I think you brought that out earlier, Dr Gooding. He didn't know how to follow God's guidance. When you look closely at what the man was like, when he went hunting for the donkeys, it was his servant who had to tell him where Samuel lived, and



he lived actually very close to Ramah, but he did not even know that the most famous man of God in all of Israel lived there. It was his servant who had to provide the gift to give to Samuel; and in fact, when he walked into the city and met Samuel he did not even know God's most famous prophet in the land. He was in ignorance of it. And then later on Saul wins a victory over the Philistines, and we read a little comment that says, 'Saul built an altar to the LORD; it was the first altar that he built to the LORD' (14:35). The man was not a spiritual man. And surely when he was living in his father's home and carrying on the responsibilities there, he was able to carry them out and fulfil them. Perhaps he was a humble man, not an overly outstanding individual one way or the other, but when the true pressures of kingship and leadership came upon him, then his real leanings showed. And instead of following the guidance of the Lord and leading the people, his true character came out, and he was not a spiritual man, and he looked to his own means to carry on with things, and that was easily shown in his early character, how little he was interested in spiritual things.

DWG: If I might say so, that is a very interesting observation, both for itself and for the principle it raises. I'm glad this has come up. You see, when it comes to interpreting historical books it is easy, is it not, to jump to conclusions according to our prejudices? Some of the rabbis of old Judaism, when they came to interpret Old Testament characters, developed a rule of thumb, and it went like this. If a man was a good man you should interpret everything to his credit. If the man was a bad man, you should interpret everything to his discredit.

According to the Midrash, the Babylonian Talmud, after they'd made the decision, one chap spent six months, expounding the text that says, 'There was none who sold himself to do what was evil in the sight of the LORD like Ahab' (1 Kgs 21:25). According to the story, when he had spent six months expounding it to Ahab's discredit, Ahab appeared to him in a dream and said, 'What are you doing, my good man? Why don't you start expounding the second half of the verse which says "whom Jezebel his wife stirred up"?' So for the next six months the learned rabbi expounded the second part of the verse to say that it was all Jezebel's fault, and she stirred up Ahab. And he came to interpret the whole thing to Ahab's credit. It wasn't his fault: he was a good man; the trouble was Jezebel.

Now you smile at such absurdities of exegesis and explanation, but sometimes we jump to conclusions, don't we? We have our ideas of a character, and we tend to excuse him on every side. Another notorious example in Scripture is David. Some of the rabbis wouldn't hear anything against David at all. You might say, 'What about his adultery with Bathsheba?'

They would say, 'No he didn't commit adultery whatsoever.'

'How do you know?'

'Well,' they say, 'it was the custom in those days for men who went to war to give their wives a bill of divorcement in case they got killed. So actually Bathsheba had been divorced by her husband before he went to the war, so it was okay for David to take her.'

You can follow that kind of exegesis if you like. It comes about by saying, 'David is such a good man that I'm not prepared to take anything that goes to his discredit and says he was bad.' You can do the inverse, you can say, 'So-and-so was a bad man, so everything he did must have been bad.' The question that arises is, by what guidelines do you go about deciding? And as preachers I think that is important that we search the surrounding context and the greater context, for the plain straight indications of the text, and the historian as to

whether this is bad or not. And if the historian doesn't say, and if there are no indications, perhaps we ought to leave it to as an open question.

### **A challenge to remain humble**

AUDIENCE: I've a question as a follow on to the same thought. Could this not be projected as a warning to each of us, as servants of the Lord, that we might stay little in our own eyes, but the Lord might become greater in our eyes? As John said later, 'He must increase, but I must decrease' (John 3:30). And then also maybe we see a parallel in the church. Often when thinking of what we've seen of these great principles of the New Testament church, we could go one of two ways. We could either get proud of what we have, of what we've seen. On the other hand we could be humbled by what's been entrusted to us. Maybe it could be a projection to us today.

DWG: Yes, surely. And we should remember perhaps what we are going to read in 2 Samuel. When God sent Nathan to rebuke David, he reminded David of his past when he was being persecuted by Saul. In those days he was desperately dependent on God because there was no other hope of survival than to be desperately dependent on God. But alas, David grew to be a powerful monarch, not to say an emperor. And in those days, he forgot, didn't he? He yielded to temptation, because now the power to do what he wanted to do was in his hands as monarch and emperor. All of us can be spoiled by our successes, can't we? All of us can find that in our early days we were dependent on the Lord, and the Lord used us. We got projected into situations of prominence before the public, and to some success. It is desperately easy then for us to fall and go astray, and come to grief, and dishonour the Lord and ourselves and the Lord's people, and be a cause of contention and warfare among them.

### **Maintaining God's standard of communication**

AUDIENCE: Right along that line I found a verse that seems to be very significant in terms of keeping the standard, notwithstanding how much we might grow. It says that Samuel grew. We too might grow in stature. It says,

And Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was established as a prophet of the LORD. And the LORD appeared again at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD. (3:19-21)

I find that Samuel talks, he reasons with, the people. That is his means of communication with God's people. But then when you read about Saul in 11:6, it says the Spirit of God came upon Saul when he heard the fighting, and his anger was kindled greatly. And I take it that that is referring to Saul's anger.

He took a yoke of oxen and cut them in pieces and sent them throughout all the territory of Israel by the hand of messengers, saying, 'Whoever does not come out after Saul and Samuel,

so shall it be done to his oxen!' Then the dread of the LORD fell upon the people, and they came out as one man. (v. 7)

This is a very different way of communicating. Samuel's communication seems to be characterized by his understanding of the word of God. And I think I'm speaking to people that have a lot of respect for, and will go on and be messengers to, God's people. And we are all aware of certain movements that are about that tend to de-emphasize the word of God, and I think it's very significant, particularly in this context, that we not only realize the obvious, as it says in Scripture, but that we encourage one another to hold that standard; that no matter what place God puts us, no matter how elevated we might become, the standard is still the word of God. And if we read the communication that we have for God's people it's in his word. And if we let anything else substitute for that, we are going to get in trouble.

DWG: Thank you very much.

### **God's permissive will**

AUDIENCE: If I could just further comment on that good thought on the standard being the word of God. One lesson I have learned in studying Samuel and other Scriptures is that as we learn about our God, we learn he has a directive will for his people, and he has what we could call a permissive will. By *directive* we mean that God has communicated his perfect will in his word about the way he wants things done. But in working with people, because he's gracious, he also has a *permissive* will. He permits people to do things even though it's not his direct will. You learn that with the children of Israel. You see them in the desert and they lust after flesh, and Psalm 78:29 says he gave them their desires, and then it adds that he killed the strongest of them. Psalm 106 says, 'He gave them their request; but sent leanness into their soul' (v. 15 KJV). And I say this because we need to remember that it is not everything we say we are praying for and we put energy into, which we can then look at and say 'there's the blessing,' and then say, 'Well God answered.' And sometimes young people around will say, 'Oh, it has to be of God because, look, there was blessing, there were answers.' We saw in chapter 11 the blessing of the victory in the battle. In his permissive role, he'll not only permit you, he'll sometimes, as we see, work with you. But as Galatians 6:7 says, 'Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.' And in his permissive will, he'll permit you to do it that way, but you'll reap human wisdom and eventually fall apart.

That will bring us back to the original thought of this standard of the word of God. We have a God who will permit you, but we want to stay away from looking at results as a proof of blessing. They got their request: they're progressing. Maybe that is of God, maybe not. What makes it of God is, 'Thus says the Lord'. And so it's an encouragement that his permissive will should not be interpreted, always, as his directive will. We have his directive will in the word of God.

DWG: Allow me for a moment to expand on this feature in the government of God to which you call attention. Let me confess it has appealed to me as a marvellous demonstration of the nature of God's government.

I have often wondered how God manages to take us seriously. We are so minute compared with God. How does he ever get around to taking us seriously? If a little child goes to put his hand out to seize some electrical equipment, his parent will quickly pull the child back. That's not perhaps always the treatment that the father will deal out to a teenager. If a teenager is about to do something harmful, sometimes the father will let him, not because the father is unkind, or because the father approves, but to exercise a downright prohibition would turn the father into a tyrant in the eyes of the teenager. And one of the ways, therefore, that the father will educate the aforesaid teenager is to let the teenager have his way, and cooperate. It is not in order so that when it goes wrong the father can say, 'I told you so', but in order to let the teenager learn by experience, which in the end will be the best way of learning that the father's way was right after all.

### **The failure of human government**

DWG: I have a question before me, and it is a long question that I couldn't possibly answer now. It says,

*The Bible has much to say about government. Mankind failed in his responsibility to rule and to be subject to rule in the days following the flood, the deluge. Israel failed to follow the law of Moses. The empires of Nebuchadnezzar's dream demonstrate the failure of government to solve the problem of rebellion against the heavens. The final result against Christ's reign mentioned in the Revelation reinforces this truth. Would you care to comment on the progression of presentation of these truths in Scripture, which leads to the final Messianic reign?*

Well, yes, I would like to, but I haven't the time to, because that's a long story. But to come immediately to the Revelation, whatever else it says or it doesn't say, it appears to say that before the Lord Jesus comes and destroys the beast and the false prophet completely, God will let the devil go to the end of his tether. God is not a tyrant. God could have wiped the devil out who knows how many centuries ago. God could have wiped out humanity in the garden of Eden. God didn't. God had mercy. God, in fact, allows man's rebellion. Though compassed with many a warning and many an offer of salvation, God lets man's rebellion go. And we are advised through Scripture that he will let it go to the very end of its tether before he will step in and use his almighty power to put it to an end. And what that seems to me to demonstrate is that God is not a tyrant. He'll have us in heaven, not because he has frightened us there simply by his almighty power, but because we have learned by experience how evil sin is, how wrong our own way is, how it will lead to disaster. And, having found that, we want to be saved; we want to receive God's Son. We receive God's Son because we love him, because we want to be like God; we want to obey God. Before God eventually takes over, the whole universe will be taught the lesson of where the creature's rebellion against God will eventually lead. Not because God says, 'Well if you're going to do that I shall put my spanner in the spokes and make sure you don't succeed,' but because sin is sin, and eventually, automatically and inevitably, it leads to that harvest. I think therefore it doesn't give us excuse to sin, but it at least tells me volumes about the nature and character of God, and his use of

his divine power. How did he ever get around to conceiving the notion that he would love the sinner enough to nail his own son to Calvary? What a God that is, who will be patient with humanity and let sin go to that length, and then turn it not to our destruction but to our salvation. A magnificent God, surely!

We are learning here in these early chapters of Samuel the principles that lay behind God imposing a king on Israel in that far off day, but it is only an early and small example of the problem that God has had, and does have still. How will the almighty God impose his Messiah on our world? Will he just do it as a tyrant and put him there? How will he do it? And the method God has chosen, in my estimation, not only reveals the character of God but is an answer to the primeval slander that God is against us and wants to keep us down. That is not so. But that is a long story and the time is now drawing to an end.

### **Was Israel right to desire a king?**

I had hoped to get time to put a question to you myself, and it was a simple question. You have heard my interpretation of the chapters about Israel's desire for a king, and what God's answer to them was. I cannot believe that all of you accept my interpretation. That would be extraordinary if you did. I would have liked to have heard your comments, particularly those of you who hold the opposite view, that God never did intend Israel to have kings, and that the whole thing was a misconceived notion, and all God did was to come up with the best he could to salvage something out of the situation. Some folks think it was a complete disaster, and kingship is a bad concept anyway, like my friend the Jewish astronomer who I mentioned before. I was hoping there would be the chance for those of you who hold that view to come back and put that side of the case.

But all is not lost. We must now come to an end, but let none of you hide yourself among the stuff, for you will be hauled out by our good friend here, and his accomplices, and made to face the music. There will be another session of contributions, and perhaps at that time I shall be allowed five minutes just to hear your answers and your point of view to take the opposite view over God's attitude to kingship.

Let's pray.

Our Father, we thank thee for thy holy word, for wisdom given to us to take thy word seriously. Even though it comes to us sometimes in the form of humble, domestic stories of an age long since past, we thank thee for the grace to believe it is the inspired word of God. And if thou could open heaven and talk to us at this moment direct, thou would say nothing other than what thou hast said in thy holy word, written in this page. Be pleased Lord as we seek thee in thy word to continue to illuminate us by the wisdom of thy Holy Spirit. Lead us to right deductions about thy word, and give us careful exposition and even-handed criticism of the biblical characters, that in ourselves we might apply thy word humbly to our hearts. And that we in our day may be those who expound thy

word correctly to thy people, to the end that we may be built up and guided, that we may be increasingly the more loyal to Jesus Christ our Lord, thy Son and our anointed King. Grant, Lord, that in the details of life, even the humblest of them, we may be encouraged like Samuel to seek thee, to seek thy guidance, ever to remain conscious that thou art not merely a sum of words upon a page, but a living God, a living person.

So in these moments we turn from thy word to thee thyself. Oh Lord, grant us in thy lovingkindness to learn well the lessons thou hast set for us in our present circumstances in life, that our early desires to serve thee, implanted by thy Spirit, may not be mislaid and caused to deviate by all that has since happened; but as some of us go towards old age may we be more like Samuel, deepening ever in humility, and in the knowledge of God, always learning further, nor to be satisfied until we are finally conformed to the image of thy Son. Help us, we beseech thee, so to live in the light of his gracious promise that if we suffer with him we shall reign with him, so to live under thy guidance and thy government, that it may under thy hand prepare us for the vast responsibilities that lie ahead when it pleases thee to elevate us to share the government of thy Son. For his name's sake. Amen.

## Saul's Sin and First Rejection

*1 Samuel 13:1–14*

### **Our studies so far**

When Samuel first indicated to Saul that he was going to be king, Saul replied, 'But I am a nobody, and my family are nobodies' (see 9:21). And of course, the reply was, 'Yes, I know you are a nobody, but God is prepared to train you and give you all the necessary resources.'

We went on after that to consider the training that God put Saul through. The aim was to teach Saul that he could not solve his problem of the straying donkeys by himself, and he would get impossibly lost if he continued to try to do so, but that if he turned to God, and sought the guidance and the wisdom of God, then not only could the problem of the straying donkeys be solved but, by that same principle, Saul himself could be trained to be king and leader of God's people. But the *sine qua non* of leadership would be this: that Saul himself would first come to have complete faith in God's own providential guidance, and he was given that, not according to his merits, but by God's own grace. He was given lessons in God's providential guidance of affairs as he approached the seer and prophet. He was made aware that God knew him through and through, knew all the workings of his heart, knew where he was today and where he would be tomorrow, and was allowed to discover that God had great purposes in mind for him. And not only so but when he was anointed by Samuel, then Samuel describes a set of happenings in which Saul would successively discover that God had anticipated his needs, both physical and spiritual, and would supply those needs at critical junctures in the progression of Saul's journey home.

Eventually, of course, there had to come a test. Courses are normally followed by examinations. But before God put Saul to his examinations, God gave him and the people of Israel, a revision course, so to speak, on the training so far. This revision, or review, course is to be found in chapter 12. So let's notice briefly what Samuel was saying to Israel in that chapter.

### **Samuel's farewell address**

#### **Samuel's self defence**

First of all, Samuel points out that he has gone along with them.

And Samuel said to all Israel, 'Behold, I have obeyed your voice in all that you have said to me and have made a king over you. And now, behold, the king walks before you, and I am old and

grey; and behold, my sons are with you. I have walked before you from my youth until this day.' (12:1-2)

So Samuel isn't going to be a dog in the manger. He has been instructed by God and is prepared to go along with their requests to have a king. But now he appeals to them to witness against him, if they can, about all the years that he has been judge.

Here I am; testify against me before the LORD and before his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Or whose donkey have I taken? Or whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? Or from whose hand have I taken a bribe to blind my eyes with it? Testify against me and I will restore it to you. (v. 3)

He is making the earlier point that his own ministry over Israel has not been burdensome to them. He has not been covetous and used his position to steal away millions of German marks, the way one recent politician did, all the while theoretically supporting the theory of Marxism, but privately lining his own pockets. And for that individual, read any other name in history who has done similar things. Samuel is saying that he has acted honestly, and he has not corrupted justice, so would they please witness against him if they can.

Yes, someone will say to Samuel, 'But your sons have begun that way.'

And perhaps Samuel would have said, 'I know, but what about me? I'm still here, am I not? Witness against *me*, if you can.'

And they reply, of course:

'You have not defrauded us or oppressed us or taken anything from any man's hand.' And he said to them, 'The LORD is witness against you, and his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand.' And they said, 'He is witness.' (vv. 4-5)

He is establishing that there is no cause in him, or his ministry as judge among them, to justify their having demanded a king. It puts the historical record straight, therefore.

### **Samuel's defence of the Lord**

Now in verse 7 he begins to plead the Lord's case with them, and recites their history so far, while they were under a direct theocracy. The point of his remarks is this: that all throughout their history Israel has from time to time come into difficult situations, and thus far whenever they have cried to the Lord to deliver them out of their difficult situations, the Lord has raised up deliverers for them. For instance,

When Jacob went into Egypt, and the Egyptians oppressed them, then your fathers cried out to the LORD and the LORD sent Moses and Aaron, who brought your fathers out of Egypt and made them dwell in this place. (v. 8)

When next they forgot the Lord, they cried to him again, and again.

But they forgot the LORD their God. And he sold them into the hand of Sisera, commander of the army of Hazor, and into the hand of the Philistines, and into the hand of the king of Moab.



And they fought against them. And they cried out to the LORD and said, 'We have sinned, because we have forsaken the LORD and have served the Baals and the Ashtaroth. But now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, that we may serve you.' (vv. 9–10)

And the Lord obliged and heard their prayer and theocracy worked, and God raised up a deliverer when they were in their distress.

And the LORD sent Jerubbaal and Barak and Jephthah and Samuel and delivered you out of the hand of your enemies on every side, and you lived in safety. And when you saw that Nahash the king of the Ammonites came against you, you said to me, 'No, but a king shall reign over us', when the LORD your God was your king. (vv. 11–12)

He was pleading, as he says in verse 7, 'the righteous deeds of the LORD'. He was saying, in other words, 'Whenever did you cry to the Lord in any of your distresses, even those that were brought upon you by your sinfulness, and the Lord has ignored you and left you to your own devices? Has it not always been that in the time of your trouble, when you cried to the Lord in genuine repentance, the Lord answered your plea and the Lord came through for you, and delivered you? Witness against me, is that not so? If that is so, then perceive the impertinence of what you did. In the early days of the campaigns of Nahash the Ammonite against you, you came to me and said, "No, we are going to have a king. No, but a king shall reign over us," when the Lord, your God, was king.'

Presumably this question of Nahash coming up against them must be an earlier battle, an earlier campaign, than the one mentioned in chapter 11. At the same time, Samuel is pointing out that their request for a king was not simply motivated by the corruption of Samuel's sons. There was a bigger issue at stake. Compared with the threat of the Gentile nations around them, the corruption, the bribery of Samuel's sons was a comparatively small matter, wasn't it? Threatened by invasion and domination by the Ammonites, they turned now to Samuel and demanded a king.

What do they mean by a king? Well, presumably they mean this. They were no longer content with the system as it had been until now. Previously, when they came into trouble they cried to the Lord, and he raised up a judge and a deliverer to deal with that particular situation, and then that person judged the people perhaps through his lifetime, but after that they reverted to what they had always been and still were under the judge: a theocracy. What they now demanded was that there should be put in place a permanent institution of a king, so next time they got in trouble they didn't have to bother about the whole business of crying to the Lord. They felt that was a little bit dicey. Suppose he didn't answer. It could be a little bit, sort of, nail-biting and hair-raising, when the enemy started to attack, if the Lord didn't answer your prayers at once! I mean, really, that was a bit frightening. So now if you had a permanent institution in place, when you were next in trouble you could switch on the old institution and the king would work automatically. Wouldn't that save you a lot of time wasted in prayer meetings and things, and waiting on the Lord, and taking the risk that he wouldn't answer and all that kind of thing?

If you put it that way, you begin to see the absolute monstrosity of what they were proposing, which was to substitute organization for living dependence upon the living God.

They were proposing to institute a monarchy that in their mind would be different from the system of the judges, where each time they had to wait on God to raise up a deliverer, the deliverer would already be there installed and fixed, and you could look to him, and he would do all you require. It was such a monstrosity that Samuel felt led to call upon God to demonstrate what the Almighty thought of their impertinence and their folly, by causing the thunder and rain to come unseasonably in the middle of harvest time, that they might see that their wickedness was great, which they had done in the sight of the Lord, in asking for themselves a king (v. 17).

Why the fuss? Why the thunder? What was so wrong about it? Now we begin to see God's estimate of sin. Anything that encourages me to independence of God is a cardinal sin. Here is the story of Eden all over again. 'You take of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and you shall know good and evil. You won't need to be dependent on God anymore. You shall be as God' (see Gen 3:3-5). Or here: 'If you put in this organization, you won't have to be, in that sense, immediately dependent on God.' That is disastrous.

Having demonstrated that this was a veritable evil and a grievous wickedness, nevertheless, Samuel goes on to say that he and the Lord will not forsake them at this point. God and Samuel will go along with this institution of kingship. So the people come to see their evil.

And all the people said to Samuel, 'Pray for your servants to the LORD your God, that we may not die, for we have added to all our sins this evil, to ask for ourselves a king.' And Samuel said to the people, 'Do not be afraid; you have done all this evil. Yet . . .' (vv. 19-20)

And now he lays down, in the third place, the terms under which it will be possible for their new type of organization, their king, to work well and actually serve them as they hope it shall. And these are the terms.

Yet do not turn aside from following the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. And do not turn aside after empty things that cannot profit or deliver, for they are empty. For the LORD will not forsake his people, for his great name's sake, because it has pleased the LORD to make you a people for himself. Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you, and I will instruct you in the good and the right way. Only fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you. But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king. (vv. 20-25)

### **The nature of idolatry**

If I ask you what an idol is, you will say, 'An idol is a thing that we put in God's place and love more than we love God. Therefore, of course, covetousness is idolatry.'

Your definition is true, but it isn't the total definition, is it? There were very few people in the ancient world that loved their idols, but they feared and trusted them. An idol is not merely a something that you *love* instead of loving God. An idol is a thing that you *trust* instead of trusting God; you put your trust in it instead of putting your trust in the Almighty.

This is a besetting sin of us all, isn't it? How easily do we come to put our trust in our own abilities, in our own organization, not only in the secular world but in the spiritual. How soon we come to trust our gifts instead of constantly maintaining a trust in the Lord. How soon, if we are not careful, we come to trust our organization instead of trusting the Lord.

The Pharisees got themselves into a perilous situation (do be careful to understand what I now say) when they put their trust in the Bible instead of their trust in the Lord. In John 5, our Lord said to the Pharisees,

You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. (vv. 39–40)

You think it's enough to go to your Bible study. You search the Scriptures. Yes, so the Pharisees did, with a rigour of research that is absolutely breathtaking. But alas, their attitude to Bible study was completely false. They thought in actually studying the Bible there was merit, and that they were piling up spiritual merit for themselves in proportion to the quantity of time they had spent in their minute and rigorous examination of Scripture. But our Lord said, 'The function of Scripture is not an end in itself. The Scripture is a pointer given of God to point you to me, gentlemen. And your attitude to Scripture is nothing short of idolatrous. You study Scripture because you think that in it there is eternal life but, *in that sense*, there is not eternal life in Scripture.' Eternal life is in the Son of God, and Scripture is a pointer to the Lord Jesus.

If you found me one of these days along the roadside clinging to a signpost, you would say, 'Gooding? Nice to see you here, my boy. What are you doing?'

'I'm enjoying New York.'

'What do you mean, you're enjoying New York?'

'Well, I say, 'look, the sign says: New York. And this is New York. I always wanted to get to New York. Now, here at last is New York. And I can tell you (because I just measured it) that New York is three metres that way and four metres this way. And it's got two words, and three letters in the first and four in the second, and I'm just weighing up the order of the words.'

You'd say, 'Well Gooding, there's a hospital down the road. If you are not feeling too well, we can take you to a very useful doctor, old boy.'

To confuse the signpost with the reality is sad indeed. The Scripture is given to us, let me hasten to add, by inspiration of God. And the Lord Jesus tells us in John 6, 'The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life' (v. 63). I am not seeking to degrade holy Scripture; but holy Scripture, though it be inspired, is a pointer to the Lord Jesus: 'it is they that bear witness of me.' We must never allow even our Bible study to turn into a form of idolatry when we put our work and effort into Bible study, and think Bible study will save us. It is only the blessed Lord who will save us.

Hence Samuel's exhortation. Yes, God will go along with your new organization of a king, but, please notice, not according to your first formulation that you'll have a king to make it unnecessary for you to wait on God when your next time of trouble comes. Let you and your king constantly be aware of the living God and determined to wait on him and serve him, and obey him in all living reality.

That then is the situation. Now we come to the second half of this long movement. Saul has been trained; he has had his examination. Samuel is giving them the revision paper. Now the test must come. What was being tested was not *whether* Saul was going to be king or not, for he was already anointed king. He was being tested as to whether he was a suitable person to continue being king and to have a dynasty formed from him.

So let's look at what the first test was.

### **Saul's sin and first rejection (13:1-4)**

There is a textual difficulty in 13:1, and we'll pass over it, unless you want a lesson in textual criticism, but it could be long and boring. Anyway, Saul chose three thousand men of Israel.

Saul chose three thousand men of Israel. Two thousand were with Saul in Michmash and the hill country of Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan in Gibeah of Benjamin. The rest of the people he sent home, every man to his tent. Jonathan defeated the garrison of the Philistines that was at Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. And Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, 'Let the Hebrews hear.' And all Israel heard it said that Saul had defeated the garrison of the Philistines, . . .

(I think the TV got it wrong that night on nationwide news: it was Jonathan who smote the garrison. But never mind. I don't know who reported it to the press.)

. . . and also that Israel had become a stench to the Philistines. And the people were called out to join Saul at Gilgal. And the Philistines mustered to fight with Israel, thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen and troops like the sand on the seashore in multitude. They came up and encamped in Michmash, to the east of Beth-aven. (vv. 2-5)

That put Saul to a very severe test, didn't it? With his comparatively tiny forces, the Philistines had now been provoked to come out to battle by what Jonathan had done, apparently, and they came out with their massed thousands, with their latest armoury and tanks and what have you. And when Saul gathered his army and faced them, his army, of course, took panic and fright and they began to run off! Then the people hid themselves in caves, and in thickets, and in holes, and in pits; and indeed some of the Hebrews had gone over Jordan, even, to the land of Gad and Gilead to get clear out of the way.

As for Saul, he was yet in Gilgal and all the people followed him (vv. 6-7). But he was under rule and orders to wait for Samuel to come, and the time seemed now to have been passed and Samuel hadn't come. The waiting for Samuel to come was testing Saul severely. It was, of course, testing his military principles. If the enemy has large forces and your army is comparatively small to start with, you might be very wise (so the textbooks say) to start the engagement. For if you let your men stand there idle, surveying the massed might of the enemy on the other side, they will become full of panic, and they will desert. If you can bring on an engagement, you have a chance to save your men from panicking, because they'll get so thrust into the battle that they won't have time to panic. And here was Saul waiting and

waiting, and the people were chattering and panicking, and deserting and going off. It was a severe test by any military standard. And Saul failed it.

Earlier, we saw one of the early lessons he'd been given in that wonderful series of events of providential guidance. They told him, 'The seer is going up to the banquet, and the people will not eat until the seer comes' (see 9:13). The timing had been perfect. Saul has now been asked to wait until the seer should come, and he couldn't wait. And he offered the sacrifice, and as soon as he'd done it, Samuel appeared.

And Samuel said to Saul, 'You have done foolishly. You have not kept the command of the LORD your God, with which he commanded you. For then the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel for ever. But now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you.' (13:13-14)

### **The severe punishment for failure**

Now we have a problem. Why was God so severe the first time Saul failed a test, when subsequently in history David could be guilty of outrageous sins such as adultery and murder, and yet God will forgive him and allow him to continue, and maintain David's house and dynasty? Why can David be allowed to get away with such disgraceful things, when the very first time Saul fails he is told his dynasty will not continue? Is it that God has double standards? Is it that David was God's blue-eyed boy, that is, it didn't matter what wrong he did, God forgave him; but he never did like Saul, who was the ugly duckling, and God was looking for an excuse to bash him on the head? Which way around is it? Doubtless, in our question time, you will tell me later on.

The way I read it is this. First of all, consider Saul's attitude to God. He said to Samuel,

When I saw that the people were scattering from me, and that you did not come within the days appointed, and that the Philistines had mustered at Michmash, I said, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favour of the LORD.' So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering. (vv. 11-12)

Do you perceive what a misconception of God was in Saul's mind? Here was Saul, appointed by God to be king to save Israel from the Philistines, and he was told exactly what to do by God through his prophet Samuel. He was to wait. 'I dare not wait,' he said, 'for the Philistines might come down and attack, and I haven't sought the Lord's favour.'

So what, then? Well according to that argument, if the Philistines came down before he'd sought the Lord's favour, the Lord would ditch him. Would he have done? So Saul feels compelled to offer the sacrifice in disobedience to God, in order to make sure that God is going to give him his favour.

That shows a pagan concept of God, that God isn't going to be for you unless you have offered the appropriate sacrifice at the present moment. Here is a man who couldn't believe that God meant what he said, that God would be *with him*. He didn't have to go and disobey the word of the Lord and offer a sacrifice in case the Lord wouldn't be with him on the

occasion. The Lord was going to be with him; he'd promised to be with him. Hadn't Samuel told him that when Israel cried to the Lord in her distress, the Lord proved to be a deliverer to them? Why wouldn't the man *trust* the Lord?

I don't know about you, but sometimes in my very prayers I catch myself praying like an old pagan. Feeling that the world is hard enough to convert, I feel I'd like the help of the Lord, but I'm not quite sure about the Lord either. He doesn't seem to spring to the task as quickly and as sprightly as I'd like him to, so I'm pleading with the Lord as if I have to twist the Lord's arm to be interested in the conversion of the lost, and in the edification of the saints. And I have to 'catch myself on', as they say in Ireland, and read myself a sermon and say, 'Don't be such an old pagan!' If you are in the Lord's service at all it is because the Lord is determined to bless his people. That is what he puts you there for. You don't have to persuade God to be interested in saving his people. Talking of ordinary, everyday affairs, our Lord said, 'Your Father knows what you need before you ask him' (Matt 6:8). You don't actually have to inform God as though he didn't know. It's nice to tell the Lord, and make known your request to the Lord that he knew in advance. What a God he would be if you had to twist his arm before he would consider saving and delivering you. It isn't so. That is an old pagan concept.

But then there was another consideration. What Saul was afraid of was that the enemy, with their gigantic forces, were now about to attack him, and therefore he felt he must commit his troops to the battle before they had so run away that there were not enough left to fight. So he decided to commit his troops to the battle by offering the initial sacrifice, which generals would get their prophets or priests to offer in the ancient world just before the battle was joined. The high priest, or whomever, would offer the sacrifice and then they would join the battle. Saul was so concerned that the battle should be joined before the Israelites all ran off to the other side of Jordan somewhere, that he was prepared to disobey the prophet and join the battle.

Now, did the Philistines actually come against them? I'm not sure that I've understood exactly what the following verses are saying, but I've read them many times, and for the life of me, as far as I can see, the Philistines didn't come and attack. There was no battle. Actually, there never was going to be a battle at that particular moment. Consider the absolute disaster that it would have been if Saul had committed his handful of troops to a battle against those overwhelming odds. The Philistines would have made mincemeat of them! What a fool he would have been to have committed the precious lives of his troops to such an unequal contest.

I grant you, it looked as if the Philistines were going to attack, but they didn't. And Saul might have been saved from what he intended to do if he'd listened and then said, 'Well, I don't know if the Philistines are going to attack, but the Lord has said wait, so I'll wait.' It would have taken a lot of nerve and courage, but in the end it was the safest thing, wasn't it? What a mercy Samuel came just as they were offering the sacrifice, for if Saul had in his folly committed Israel to battle, Israel would have been annihilated and almost wiped out. How important it was that he should have waited God's time and dared to trust God.

You say, 'Why was God so severe on him when he made a mistake like that?'

I don't know, but sometimes my medical colleagues in the university would tell us just how they went about examining their students, and what their standards were, and how they

would decide. I remember one man telling me, 'You know, when it comes to finals, well really, with finals at that level, we say to ourselves about any student that comes before us, "Would this man be safe to be let loose on the public?"' They don't necessarily know the last word of medicine when they come to qualify as doctors for the first time. They could make a lot of mistakes, but are they safe to let loose on the public? A student that could think a man has got a cold when he's got influenza; well that's not going to be fatal is it? He could be forgiven. The student that proposes to give someone an injection of five ounces of morphine had better not be let loose on the public. If he's about to administer an absolutely lethal dose, and it doesn't occur to him instinctively to think: "But what am I doing? This is lethal!" that's the kind of mistake that you couldn't let go through.'

Why is that? Because it would kill the patient! And God loved his people. A commander who wouldn't be dependent on God and could have annihilated the Israelite army by causing it to join battle with the Philistines is not safe to be let loose as a commander of the people. It's no good saying when the army has been absolutely annihilated, 'Oh I made a mistake, I'm sorry about that.' Well, it's too late, old boy. For his people's sake, God had to tell Saul, 'Your dynasty will not continue.'

### **Looking for God's guidance in battle**

Test number two is given in chapter 14 at great length, and I don't propose to read it now in detail. But Jonathan went out and brought a minor victory. Jonathan, as I said before, was one of the best single combat heroes that Israel had. And while his father was dithering about the place, there fell a day that Jonathan said to his armour bearer,

'Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised. It may be that the LORD will work for us, for nothing can hinder the LORD from saving by many or by few.' And his armour bearer said to him, 'Do all that is in your heart. Do as you wish. Behold, I am with you heart and soul.' Then Jonathan said, 'Behold, we will cross over to the men, and we will show ourselves to them. If they say to us, "Wait until we come to you", then we will stand still in our place, and we will not go up to them. But if they say, "Come up to us", then we will go up, for the LORD has given them into our hand. And this shall be the sign to us.' (vv. 6-10)

### **Jonathan's trust in the Lord's guidance**

So now we are still in the area of guidance in battle, aren't we? Saul was led to his mistake by considering the people who were going from him, and instead of trusting in the Lord he was trusting in his troops; and as the troops began to melt away, Saul got the jitters, and in the end he disobeyed and offered a sacrifice. Whereas Jonathan is convinced that if the Lord is with you it doesn't matter whether you've got many troops or few troops! The Lord is able to save by many or by few. The man's trust was in the Lord.

What is more, capable warrior though he was, and knowing all about tactics in Israel as very few knew, yet in the actual battle this experienced warrior was constantly listening for the voice of God's guidance, and was prepared to trust the guidance of the Lord in a tight corner. And here were two crags, and the Philistines were on top. How on earth would you

ever have a hope of assaulting a crag with the garrison of the Philistines on top? Jonathan says to his armour bearer, 'Now what about this, my boy? You stand here and we'll announce ourselves: "Philistines, are you up there? It's us, come with the morning mail!" And then we'll see what the Philistines say, and whatever they say we'll take it as the guidance of the Lord.'

You've got to be real strong in your faith in the providence of God to put it that way, haven't you? 'If they say come up, we'll go up. If they say wait down there, we'll wait down there. And we'll be dependent on the Lord to guide and control the circumstance.'

Yes, marvellous. So they made themselves known to the Philistines. The Philistines said, 'Come up here,' and up they went. Now just you imagine, here they were, coming up the face of the rock by a difficult path. I confess to you I wouldn't have dared to do it, for the tactics seemed absurd. For there were the Philistines waiting, and when the neck appeared above the precipice, he might well have swallowed the lump in his throat. It was an absurd tactic, unless God happened to be in it. God was in it, and it was his guidance; and Jonathan gained a notable victory. It was only over a small outpost; it wasn't a major battle of course, but it set going a great battle. And Saul hearing of it (not to be outdone, though he hadn't got such faith to do any such thing), he wanted to be in on it.

### **Saul's attempt to be spiritual**

Now watch Saul.

Then Saul said to the people who were with him, 'Count and see who has gone from us.' And when they had counted, behold, Jonathan and his armour bearer were not there. So Saul said to Ahijah, 'Bring the ark of God here.' (vv. 17–18)

What for? Well to consult the Lord, normally. But then he heard the commotion. And he said to Abijah, 'Oh I see, it's a commotion. Well withdraw your hand; we'll get going.' So off they went (see vv. 19–20).

Then Saul and all the people who were with him rallied and went into the battle. And behold, every Philistine's sword was against his fellow, and there was very great confusion. Now the Hebrews who had been with the Philistines before that time and who had gone up with them into the camp, even they also turned to be with the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan. Likewise, when all the men of Israel who had hidden themselves in the hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines were fleeing, they too followed hard after them in the battle. So the LORD saved Israel that day. And the battle passed beyond Beth-aven. And the men of Israel had been hard pressed that day. (vv. 20–24)

That is, they were very hungry and weary; the battle had exhausted their powers. But Saul (the dear man) said, 'Cursed be the man who eats food until it is evening and I am avenged on my enemies. So none of the people had tasted food' (v. 24). Wasn't it nice and religious? Didn't it sound good? 'This is a great occasion, and now I issue an edict that all of us fast.'

What, in the middle of a battle, when you needed all the glucose and everything else you could get to sustain your energy? Fancy prescribing a fast on that occasion! Stupid man. And he put everybody under a curse.



Well Jonathan wasn't there when Saul gave his curse, and coming upon some honey in the field he dipped his rod in it, took the honey, and he was refreshed: 'his eyes became bright' (v. 27), that is, with recovered energy. And as a result, the battle was pursued to its successful conclusion.

Two things followed. When the battle was over the people were so ravenously hungry, because they had fasted, that they pounced upon the spoil and ate the meat with the blood. Saul's stupid ordering of that fast when it needn't have been done, brought the people so that they could endure it no longer, and they actually broke a commandment of the Lord concerning eating the flesh with the blood (vv. 31–35).

You know, if you will lay down rules and regulations out of season, and make life more rigorous than God would make it, you mustn't be surprised if the people, in reaction, revolt in the other direction and break genuine commandments.

And finally Saul started to enquire of the Lord, and the Lord wouldn't answer him. And so they found out it was because somebody had eaten food when they were under the curse. Saul went through the rigmarole of the Urim and the Thummim, and it was eventually discovered that Jonathan was the offender. Jonathan had eaten the honey when Saul had pronounced the curse. And Saul was ever so godly, wasn't he? He said, 'I'm sorry, Jonathan, I know you're my son, but you've broken the law, and I'm afraid you must be executed, so stand out Jonathan, so that you may be despatched.'

At which point the people said to Saul, 'Don't be so daft, Saul, don't. Clear out.' So Saul cleared out, and Jonathan wasn't executed. What a fantastic figure the man cuts, doesn't he? Trying to wait on the Lord and guide the people, and all he manages to do is to interfere with the Lord's leading of his people and cause that the battle should be less of a success than it would otherwise have been. Had he had his way, through this supposed waiting on God, he would have destroyed the very man who was responsible for the victory!

I suppose you can begin to see surely why God had, in the end, to say, 'Saul, I'm sorry; you can't be king.'

### **A warning for the church**

Perhaps you say, 'That's a fantastic story, how can you believe it? What's it got to do with everyday life?'

Have you never known, in the course and history of Christendom, men that put themselves up as leaders among the people of God, the results of whose leadership has been that they would have stopped the man that God was using both in evangelism and in the building up of the church, and all in the name of their super-duper holiness and insistence on the rules, as they understood them? Whereas all the people can see that these are the men that God stands with, and that he is using them? 'Look at the blessing! Look at the converts! Look at the building up of the believers!' But here comes Mr Diotrephes and he says, 'No.' And actually it's because he isn't doing it all. He wants it as his job and his business. Then he finds rules and regulations that make offenders out of the very men that God has anointed and is using in his work. Well, if a man is going to get in the way of God's work like that, and in the way of the victories that God is procuring through his servant, God won't stand it forever. And the Diotrephes will have to be dismissed.

Two tests taken, both of them failed; and one to go. One of you will be leading us through chapter 15 and Saul's further failure recorded there.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The session referred to, which was led by one of the other participants, is not included in this transcript.

## Overview and Major Themes of Section Three

*1 Samuel 16:1–22:2*

In 1 Samuel 15 we are told how Saul, under pretext of sacrifice, rejects God's word and does not destroy God's enemy, the king of Amalek, when he was in Saul's power. The end of this sad story seems to me to be the end of another major section of the narrative in this first book of Samuel. Not only does Saul's final disobedience in refusing to destroy Amalek lead to the final rejection of him by God, but when the story has reached that desperate climax, then notice how the narrative contains once more a summary and general remark.

Then Samuel went to Ramah, and Saul went up to his house in Gibeah of Saul. And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death, but Samuel grieved over Saul. And the LORD regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel. (vv. 34–35)

Notice that timespan remark: 'And Samuel did not see Saul again until the day of his death'. So now that episode comes to its climax and close, and with chapter 16 we move in a new direction. Samuel is instructed to go and anoint one of the sons of Jesse to be king over Israel. It is now a brand new story. We must now attempt to cover the third section of the narrative that opens up before us.

### **The movements in section three**

How long, we say to ourselves, does this third section last? I have suggested to you on the rough table of contents I have provided, that it proceeds from the beginning of chapter 16 down to the point where David runs away and goes down to the Philistines, and then into the fortress cave at 22:2. That is where I would put the end of this third section.

In support of that view (though of course, naturally, you may contest it) I would appeal to the fact that at the beginning of the movement in chapter 16, David is anointed. Then, in chapter 17, he comes to his fame by the victory over Goliath, killing him with Goliath's own sword. From those heights you come at the end of this section to David, at what is until this point an all-time low. He comes with the sword with which he killed Goliath the Philistine in his hand, which is explicitly mentioned, and gives himself up to the court of Achish the Philistine. And finding it so dangerous in that court, and with no haven of rest, he pretends to be mad in order to escape from that desperate impasse. So I want to say that, just as the previous section began with the people rejecting God and asking for a king, and ended with God rejecting the king, so here, by contrast, we begin with David anointed and successfully

destroying the Philistines, and we end with David virtually in the power of the Philistines. More than that, you may notice the minor and major climaxes through this section.

### **Movement 1 (16:1–18:30)**

#### *David secretly anointed king (16:1–18:4)*

After David's glorious defeat of the giant, he comes with the head of Goliath in his hands back to the royal tent where Saul is, and where Jonathan is now standing. And David stands before His Majesty and the crown prince to be questioned by Saul, and as he stands there we are told that the soul of Jonathan is knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him.

Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, and his armour, and even his sword and his bow and his belt. (18:3–4)

Here is the first climax in this section.

#### *Saul grows jealous of David (18:5–30)*

Then you move on to Saul's growing jealousy of David. In spite of that, and in spite of Saul's attempts to have David destroyed, all Israel comes to love David. Saul's daughter Michal loved him; the officers and people loved him. Then we are told that David behaved himself more 'wisely' (v. 14 KJV) than all the servants of Saul, so that his name was much regarded. That is to say, *wisely*, presumably here in the sense of military ability; and that in spite of the fact that Saul tried to destroy him by giving him various commissions in fighting the Philistines. David was so expert in his warrior's ability and acted so wisely that he became renowned among all the servants of Saul. Here is David's wisdom, therefore, and that comes then to the end of the second climax.

#### *Saul's overt attempts to kill David (19:1–24)*

As you will see, the third climax in section three is Saul's attempt to have David arrested and then destroyed. You come to that vivid scene where Saul chased after him, and David fled to Samuel. And as Saul pursued him he came and saw David standing with Samuel, and the Spirit fell upon Saul and overcame him. He stripped himself naked and lay down all that day and night before Samuel.

Notice then the vivid contrast between the two climaxes. Jonathan loved David and stripped himself; Saul opposed David and tried to arrest and slaughter him. But Saul was made to strip himself whether he wanted to or not. One did it out of love; the other did it out of irresistible compulsion.

#### *David, the messiah, must go (20:1–22:2)*

If the second climax in this series has reminded us how wise David was in dealing with the Philistines so that his name was highly regarded, look at the terrible contrast when, in the end, in the last of the four climaxes of the third section, David goes down to the Philistines and has to pretend to be mad among them in order to escape. Here again is wisdom and folly.

Those at least are some of the reasons why I would suggest that the third major movement in the narrative is as I have laid it out here. It comes in two halves: David's success on the field and David's success in the court and in the army, followed by two sections of Saul's overt attempts (the previous attempts had been secret) to have David slain, and then David's departure.

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### Section 3 (16:1–22:2)

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#### *Movement 5 (16:1–18:30)*

##### **Part 1: David Secretly Anointed King (16:1–18:4)**

- a. Samuel anoints David. 'Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart' (1 Sam 16:7)
- b. David taken into Saul's house to play before him
- c. David defeats Goliath with a sling and stone and cuts off his head with his own sword

JONATHAN LOVES DAVID: STRIPS HIMSELF: GIVES ROBE AND WEAPONS TO DAVID: MAKES COVENANT WITH HIM

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##### **Part 2: Saul Grows Jealous of David (18:5–30)**

- d. On return from fight, women praise David more than Saul
- e. Saul tries twice to spear David: but the people love David
- f. Saul tries to use his daughters to get David killed. But Michal loves David; David kills two hundred Philistines

DAVID BEHAVED HIMSELF MORE WISELY THAN ALL SAUL'S SERVANTS

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#### *Movement 6 (19:1–22:2)*

##### **Part 1: Saul's Overt Attempts to Kill David (19:1–24)**

- a. Frustrated by: Jonathan's logic
- b. Michal's love
- c. Samuel and the Holy Spirit

SAUL STRIPS HIMSELF NAKED AND LIES DOWN BEFORE SAMUEL ALL THAT DAY AND NIGHT

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##### **Part 2: David, the Messiah, Must Go (20:1–22:2)**

- d. Jonathan's arrows point out the distance. The oath between them
- e. David comes to the priest Ahimelech; eats the showbread; is given Goliath's sword
- f. David falls into hands of the Philistines . . . Madness!? Escapes to the caves of Adullam

CONQUEROR OF THE PHILISTINES IN THE POWER OF THE PHILISTINES

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## How God will impose his king

Now we have finished the second major movement of 1 Samuel. As we begin the third, God has rejected Saul, and in chapter 16 he has Samuel anoint David. The interesting question, therefore, will be: how will God impose David as king upon the people? And what, in

particular, will he do with Saul? So, at the risk of some weariness, just notice again what God has done and said about Saul, and what he has not done and not said about Saul.

God does not destroy Saul. Saul does that eventually himself as he falls on his own sword, and then asks an Amalekite to destroy him. Saul is driven to that by the Philistines, admittedly. Yes, but he needn't have been driven to that, for God provided Saul a saviour. Saul proved able to deal with the Ammonites, but he did not manage to deal with the Philistines and would have been defeated ignominiously by Goliath had not God provided him a saviour who rescued the man, and Israel at the same time. Saul need never have been driven by the Philistines. David would have stood by him all his days, and protected him, if Saul had allowed him.

God did not even push Saul off his throne by force, and impose David on it. All God had said was that Saul's rule could not continue, his throne could not continue in the sense that his *dynasty* was doomed. Saul was rejected from being king, but God was not against Saul as a person. If now the man had humbled himself, owned himself a failure, accepted God's man as the leader of the nation and gratefully acknowledged the salvation that God had provided for him, Saul would have been welcomed, and David would have heaped on him every imaginable honour.

I suppose it's very hard, once you've been a king, to leave off being a king. That applies, I suspect, in every walk of life, from the monarch on his throne to us individuals who like to be kings of our own lives. And once we've imagined ourselves king, it is hard to stop being king and accept God's saviour as our Saviour and Lord.

The question therefore will be: how will God present David, and how will he eventually impose him on the throne of Israel? These are going to be the questions that are dealt with now in the many chapters that follow.

## **The anointing of David**

First comes the matter of anointing. God instructs Samuel as follows:

How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go. I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons. (16:1)

And Samuel protests that this is a very risky thing to do, for Saul would interpret it as high treason against himself: 'If Saul hears it he, will kill me' (v. 2). But Samuel nevertheless did what he was told, under cover of going to offer a sacrifice. He did actually offer the sacrifice, of course. He went down to Jesse and anointed David eventually.

### **Saul invited David**

Let's immediately follow the narrative and notice what happened when God had anointed David. Do you know who invited David into the palace? Three times over, it was Saul who invited David into the palace. The second half of chapter 16 is going to tell us that the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit came from the Lord to him. The servants suggested that they look out for a man that could play the harp and soothe all his nightly

terrors. They suggested they knew somebody, and they brought David to court. He played in his youthful innocence before Saul, and Saul was soothed and felt better. And so glad was he of David's ministry that Saul sent to Jesse.

And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, 'Let David remain in my service, for he has found favour in my sight.' And whenever the harmful spirit from God was upon Saul, David took the lyre and played it with his hand. So Saul was refreshed and was well, and the harmful spirit departed from him. (vv. 22-23)

It was Saul who invited David into his home. In chapter 17, as Saul is in his tent on the battlefield, skulking in terror at the challenge of the giant that he is not able to go out and meet, he hears a rumour that some private or other has volunteered to meet the giant, and Saul 'sent for him' (v. 31). And finally, when David came back with the head of Goliath in his hand, we read, 'And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house' (18:2).

So, first of all, it wasn't that Saul thought of the anointing as treason. Perhaps he'd never heard of it, or of the claim implicit in that secret anointing; but in the early stages he found David's ministry so delightful with the harp, and himself the most effective on the battlefield, that he invited him home.

### **God sent Saul a saviour**

Wasn't it kind of God, with Saul now tormented? Wouldn't you have been tormented? Imagine the thought that you had now ruined everything, ruined every prospect; and God must be against you, and God has rejected you. Look at that torn robe, as he tried to hold on to Samuel (15:27). So God must be against him, he thought. And God sent the poor man a saviour to come and play a harp to him.

I wonder what tunes David played. Had he written his Top of the Pops ones? You know, 'The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want' (Ps 23:1). You can imagine David saying, 'Your Majesty, let me play you this new thing I recently composed. See how you like it, Your Majesty.' And singing to the words of it. Or, 'The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?' (27:1). Oh what words to sing and preach! Here was God's gospel, from his anointed, to Saul.

When God sent his anointed, our blessed Lord, to his nation centuries later, eventually the high priests began to fear him. They became envious of him. They thought they would lose their positions, and in the end, they had him slaughtered. But the early days of his ministry on earth, were they not a sheer delight? Oh the crowds that came and had their lunacy healed, their epilepsy healed, their demonism healed. What delightful words he spoke as he pronounced the blessings of God in his Sermon on the Mount to the people, and they wondered at the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth. How opposite of fear-provoking was the approach of our Lord as he was sent as God's anointed into our rebellious world. But, more of that anon.

## The selection of David

When Samuel was sent to choose from the sons of Jesse, God didn't say in advance, 'Ask for the one that's called David.' No, Samuel had to ask Jesse to cause his sons to pass before him in order. And the firstborn came.

When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, 'Surely the LORD'S anointed is before him.'  
But the LORD said to Samuel, 'Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him. For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.' (16:6-7)

With that, we are back with what now is the central problem. It is the central problem in the first book of Samuel. We are now at the midpoint in the book, and at the midpoint we shall find visibly demonstrated what the problem to be overcome is in governing Israel for God. From God's side, what is the problem of imposing his king on Israel? More than that, we shall eventually find what the problem is of God imposing his government on the world. What is the problem? And why did Saul so recklessly fail? And why did David succeed?

'Don't take him because he's big of stature,' God said. Of course not, because when the problem was eventually manifested in all its stark reality, Eliab's stature would have been useless, as Saul's evidently was. The problem was: man—big man, super-inflated man. Soon they would face a man so big in brain and brawn and technology and armour, that he could stride onto the stage of history and defy the armies of the living God. It is *big man* that is the problem, and if it is the problem, big man is not going to be the answer to the problem.

Let us ponder that for a moment, then. Here is this great hulk of a Philistine. No wonder they were called 'uncircumcised Philistines'. As Paul would put it: 'For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh' (Phil 3:3). Well if that is what the circumcision is, the uncircumcision is the reverse. Here is man, with confidence in man, defying the armies of the living God, man in rebellion against God, man in outward opposition and defiance of God. *Man* is the problem.

### Confidence in the Lord of the church

Let's transpose that melody (if it is a melody) into a different key, shall we? Let's pass on many centuries to an altogether different battlefield and see that the problem has remained the same. The battlefield now is the church at Corinth, as we see in 1 Corinthians 3.

And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto babes in Christ. I fed you with milk, not with meat; for you were not yet able to bear it: nay, not even now are you able; For you are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you jealousy and strife, are you not carnal, and walk after the manner of men? For when one says, 'I am of Paul'; and another, 'I am of Apollos'; are you not men? (vv. 1-4 RV)

Notice the last word in that sentence of verse 4: 'Are you not men?' If your translation reads differently from that and obscures from you the fact that the Greek says, 'Are you not men?', well, take your translation back to the shop that sold it to you, and ask for your money back.



Don't think too highly of translators that doubted your intelligence and thought you wouldn't know what it meant if they just translated the Greek as it was. Some of these modern translations make life more difficult for the serious student. Paul wanted to say, 'Are you not *men*?'

They are thinking and behaving as men, of course, in the bad sense. In what way were they showing this regrettable feature of behaving 'like men'? It was when they were putting their confidence in man! And they were doing so in the church, if you please, and all the time they were meant to be redeemed believers in the Lord Jesus, and crucified with Christ. But so far have they forgotten the basic principles of the gospel that now, little by little, their confidence has been transferred from being utterly in God, and they were now beginning to put their confidence in men.

Paul has to rebuke them in the name of God, quoting part of the Old Testament passage from Jeremiah.

Thus says the LORD: 'Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.' (Jer 9:23–24)

Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord. (1 Cor 1:31)

Let his confidence be in the Lord! The whole cause of man's ruin is man breaking loose of his confidence in God, and seizing independence, and putting his confidence in man. 'Cursed is the man', says God, 'that makes man his confidence' (see Jer 17:5). It is such a perversion of the actual state of affairs. We are not self-created; our fellow human beings didn't make us. We are creatures of God, and unless we maintain that basic, absolute confidence in God, we are freaks of humanity; we are living in contradiction of the facts. If we would be whole personalities—confidence being such an important thing in our psychological makeup and our human spirit—if we would be whole men and women, then our confidence must be placed in the proper place, and the only place for confidence in that ultimate sense is God himself. And God has designed our salvation to that end, as we shall presently see, so that it will destroy our confidence in man and will transfer our confidence to God.

### **A big man to come**

Let's transpose the whole message to another key altogether, and to another battlefield. As a question in the note on my desk reminded me this morning: 'How is this age to end up?' Consider his wily, satanic majesty who first tempted man to seize independence of God, who broke man's confidence in God's word saying, 'Oh don't take note of that old-fashioned stuff. Anybody around here knows that's nonsense anyway. You shall not surely die. Take the fruit, woman! And you shall be as God. You won't have to be dependent on God anymore for knowing good and evil' (see Gen 3:4). Where will his tactics end up? By God's permission, it shall end up when, under the influence of satanic impulse and guidance, there will stalk onto the stage of the world a mere man. He will do such fantastic wonders by the power of Satan

and by his deceit that in the end vast portions of the world will go after him with mad excitement saying, 'Who is like unto the beast?' (Rev 13:4 KJV).

The phrase, 'Who is like unto' is used in the Old Testament to express the fact of God's uniqueness. The prophet Micah's name in Hebrew, *Micayahu*, means, 'Who is like unto Jehovah?' It is a rhetorical question. The answer to it, of course, is presupposed in the question: 'There is none like unto Jehovah!' God says, 'I don't know any other God. I've been looking about the place, but I don't know any. Who is like me?'

'Who is like unto Jehovah' is a powerful statement of the absolute uniqueness of God. But at the end of this age a figure shall arise, inspired of Satan, with all his panoply and publicity, and his spectacular, demonic miracles; and the world shall be induced to say, 'What a man! In fact, this man is God. Who is like unto the beast?' He shall oppose all that is called God and exalt himself above all that is called God (2 Thess 2:4). Here is *big man*. And the prophet of the apocalypse is then given a clue as to this character. He says, 'The mark of the beast is 666.' And what is that? It is the mark of a mere *man* (see Rev 13:18)? That is the enemy, the enemy that God has finally to displace in order to bring in the millennial reign of Jesus Christ our Lord. Man, therefore, is the great enemy.

With that, we turn to the story of God's provision of a saviour who delivered Israel from that enemy.

## **Textual issues and understanding 1 Samuel 17**

At this point I ought perhaps to rehearse before you some of the textual difficulties that are found in the Old Testament at this position. I'm afraid it might well be irksome for you, but for me it is safe, for I shall acquit myself of having hidden anything from you.

### **The question of whether Saul already knew David**

In the ancient Greek translation of chapters 17 and 18 of the first book of Samuel, the story is much shorter than it is in the majority Hebrew text, that is, the Masoretic text. By being shorter it avoids certain apparent contradictions in the Hebrew text as it stands. The most notable of those apparent contradictions is in chapter 16. There, as we have said, David is summoned into Saul's palace as his musician and armour bearer. Saul comes to like him so much that he sends a note to Jesse and says, 'I don't want him to go home again. Let him stay with me.' So Saul knew David very well, surely. And yet in chapter 17, when Saul sees David striding out to meet the giant, Saul says to Abner, his *aide de camp*, 'Whose son is this youth that goes out to meet Goliath?' And when David returned with the head of Goliath in his hand, according to the end of chapter 17, Saul said unto him, 'Whose son are you, young man?'

And people say, 'Well there's a straight contradiction, surely, for if Saul had known him, because he had been in the palace, and he'd been his armour bearer and his musician, surely he would have known who David was and wouldn't have had to ask Abner and then ask David himself.'

The interesting thing about the Greek translation is that it lacks the second of those passages that I have mentioned, and so does not have these apparent contradictions. It lacks

a good deal else as well that removes other minor contradictions, but I will not now worry you with a rehearsal of those points.

Therefore scholars argue the case. Some say the Greek is better, that the Greek translation was founded on a Hebrew text that hadn't evolved so far, and therefore the Greek translation, having been made at an earlier stage, on a better Hebrew text, is superior. Later on, they say, the Hebrew was added to in some quarters and introduced the contradictions, unfortunately. So the Greek, therefore, is nearer the earlier stage of the Hebrew.

Recently, four scholars (three from Europe, and one from Jerusalem in Israel) worked upon these matters. They disagreed when they started their correspondence and conversation, and by the time they finished they still disagreed. I was one of them; that's how I happen to know. And these matters have been published, and if you are interested in those things, you can read the detailed discussion.<sup>3</sup>

I would hold that there isn't any contradiction, and I'll tell you why at once, though you may not agree with me. It isn't true to say that Saul didn't know who David was. He didn't know who *his father* was. He said, 'Young man, whose *son* are you?' And that's what he said to Abner: 'Whose *son* is he?' And there was a reason why Saul was concerned to know whose son he was, because Saul had promised (somewhat rashly) that any one of the soldiers who went forth and killed Goliath, Saul would make his father's house free in Israel, to raise him to the nobility, in other words (v. 25). And Saul was about to take David into his own home. Saul also promised that whoever killed Goliath would be given his eldest daughter as his wife. And in those far-off days, when a king had many sons and many wives and many daughters, and the elder son didn't necessarily succeed to the throne, a man who was married to one of the king's daughters thereby had a certain claim to be a legitimate successor to the king. So at this stage when David came back and Saul was about to bring him into his own home, it was very important to know what family in Israel it was that he would thus be promoting to the nobility.

### **The question of the Greek translation of 2 Samuel**

But we are hastening too quickly. What about the argument that the Greek translation is better than the Hebrew? If you look carefully at the story in Samuel, simply as story, you will see that you are in the presence of a military institution that has been found elsewhere in different civilizations and at different periods. I refer to the institution of *single hero combat*. And if you think this is very tedious to hear about these things, as no doubt it is, have courage; it will pay you some minor dividends later on.

#### *The conventions of single hero combat*

Single hero combat is to be found, for instance, among the Greeks whose exploits Homer records. There is many a story in *The Iliad* of a time when the Greeks were fighting the Trojans, and then one side or the other would put forth a single warrior to fight in single hero combat. The Greeks at one stage put forth Menelaus, and with much trepidation the Trojans put forth Paris, but he didn't last long. Then at another stage the Trojans put forth Hector, and the

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<sup>3</sup> Dominique Barthélemy, David Gooding, Johan Lust and Emanuel Tov. *The Story of David and Goliath*. Gottingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1986.

Greeks were in a terrible panic and a sweat, and took a long while before they could find a suitable man to volunteer to go out and meet the great and famous Hector.

You will find that same system amongst the Irish, though centuries later (we in Ireland always get out of bed later than other people in Europe). You will find this form of warfare celebrated in the famous Irish epic called *The Táin*. Now here you have it in Hebrew literature, and it is a very interesting thing to notice that when this phenomenon appeared among the nations, of whatever period, it gathered to itself certain conventions as to what was to happen.

If one side put forth a hero, then first of all that side would make its army sit down, and the other side would make their army sit down. You must have a truce; else it wouldn't be single hero combat, would it? Then when the heroes had been selected they would leave their respective camps and move forward towards each other. When they got within shouting distance they would stop.

One hero would then abuse the other chap up hill and down dale. He would abuse his mother, his father, and the opponent himself, and threaten to give him to the birds for supper, and everything else that had to be said. When the first hero had had his say, then fair is fair, isn't it? The second hero would have his go in the mudslinging contest and abuse the other chap, in gentlemanly fashion, of course, for it was all part of the sport, you know, like American football. He would abuse the first hero in similar terms. Sometimes they would have two goes each. That got a bit monotonous in the end. And when they had finished denouncing each other, then up they got again and went to the combat.

Thirdly, in this combat, what was very important was the choice of weapons. Sometimes it was left to the contestants to choose what weapons they liked. Then the art was of course to choose a weapon that you thought gave you an advantage over the foe. At other times, particularly amongst the Irish (for they are very good at fighting and know a thing or two about it), you had to agree what weapons you would use. Sometimes amongst the Irish the contest lasted for three days. I mean, you didn't get it over too quickly, because it was a sport. You didn't kill your man until the third day, but on the first day they would meet in the morning when the hour came for fighting, and they would say, 'Now what weapons do you choose today, my good fellow?' And they would fight with those weapons that day, and the next day when they met, the other chap chose the weapons so that they fought with equal weapons. The choice of weapons was a very, very important thing.

### **Criticisms of the David and Goliath narrative**

Why mention all this to you? Because when you reach the story of David and Goliath you will see how true it is to their history, and even to the conventions of the times. As we wrote our several papers, and circulated amongst ourselves the papers of our colleagues, several arguments were put forward against the longer Hebrew version in 2 Samuel.

#### *Were the Israelites afraid to fight?*

One critic said, 'You can see that the Hebrew has got it wrong. It says that when Goliath came out the Hebrews were scared stiff, and yet in the very next breath they are fighting the Philistines, and they had been fighting the Philistines up to this point. How could they have been scared of the Philistines?'

That was to miss the point, wasn't it? The Greeks weren't afraid to fight the Trojans so long as they were to fight as one army against the other. What frightened the Greeks at one stage, says Homer, was that Hector stood forward out of the army of the Trojans and challenged them to provide a hero to meet him in single hero combat. Fighting with your fellows in an army is one thing. Going out as a single hero to meet a giant is another. That had the Israelites absolutely scared stiff! And of course the Hebrew story is very true to life.

#### *Goliath walking around freely*

Another dear critic said, 'Look at that nonsensical Hebrew story. It says that Goliath came up every day towards the camp of the Israelites. Well, that's daft. No hero would have done that.'

That too was a very unenlightened comment, for the convention was that when you had single hero combat, those armies had to agree to a truce, and during that truce any one of the two heroes was free to walk where he would.

Homer has the story that when Menelaus was fighting Paris in single hero combat, Paris' favourite goddess whisked him away and took him back to the safety of the city, and Menelaus, being a dull-witted Greek, couldn't see what had happened, and he went about saying, 'Where on earth has Paris got to?' and he wandered right up to the walls of Troy. Nobody dared shoot him. Why? Because they were in a truce, that is, until one witless fellow on the walls of Troy went and aimed an arrow at Menelaus, and that spoiled it.

The Hebrew is absolutely true to the convention. So long as there was a truce, and the one man had challenged, and the other side weren't prepared yet to put forth their hero, the hero was free to walk where he wanted. He could have come up right to the tents of the Israelites, if he wanted to, and nobody dared to set on him, because they were under truce.

#### *Duplication in the text*

'Oh, look at that,' said one critic. 'The Hebrew has an unnecessary duplication. It says that David went to meet the giant, and then it stops and tells you all sorts of things, and then it says a second time that David went to meet the giant. That's an unnecessary duplication, and the Greek doesn't have it, so it wasn't in the original.'

That was coming near to being an ignorant comment. It was, as I have explained to you, the manner of single hero combat that they would first leave their respective camps and rise up to come meet each other. When they got in shouting distance, they would stop and abuse one another. Then, having had their fill of abuse, they would rise up again. That's not a duplication, that's true to the convention of that type of warfare. The Hebrew is giving you a marvellously exact account of what went on.

### **How the combat unfolded**

#### *Trading abuse*

Then there was the question of the abuse. It's holy Scripture, I know. Should you enjoy stories in the Bible, or shouldn't you? I don't know if it's holy to enjoy this bit or not, but I enjoy it immensely! When Goliath caught sight of David, then he abused him up hill and down dale, and threatened he'd give him to the birds of the heaven for dinner. That's standard amongst such heroes; it's what heroes did. And when Goliath had had his go, David had his go, and

told Goliath what he would do to him. It is, of course, very significant when we come to consider what they actually said.

### *The choice of weapon*

Finally for the moment along that line, there was the choice of weapon. It is exceedingly important in any record of single hero combat, but now it will bring us to the very heart of this contest, in the biblical sense. If the trouble is a man, a big man, the choice of weapon and the question of how you are to deal with him will be all important, won't it? What will God's tactics be for the defeat of the big man?

Well one tactic can be dismissed at once. Saul is sulking in his tent. When he was presented to Israel he was head and shoulders bigger than anybody else. He was a big man; but the trouble is, he's met a bigger man. And is it so that the answer to earth's problem is going to be finding the biggest man, men so big that they can afford to be independent of God?

Goliath is a self-confessed rebel against the God of heaven: he defies the God of heaven. But alas for Saul, he'd been put through three examinations. And where had he failed? He couldn't trust God; he hadn't developed that utter confidence in God, which was the sole tactic that could have helped him overcome the enemy.

David went into Saul's tent, much to the disgust of Eliab (17:28), who also was a big man. You can see why God bypassed Eliab, can't you? 'No, no, Samuel, we've had enough of big men. Don't choose him' (see 16:7). What use would he have been, a little thing like him going out to meet Goliath? But David was summoned to Saul. 'Now, look, young man,' said Saul, 'you're really stellar, of course you are, but you can't go and meet the giant. I mean to say, you're but a youth, and he has been a man of war from his youth' (see 17:33).

The critics get that wrong as well. They say that in chapter 15 David is described as a man of war, but here David comes as a little shepherd boy from his father's home, and Saul says to him, 'You can't go and meet Goliath: you're a shepherd boy and he's a man of war.' But sometimes critics don't read the text very accurately. Saul doesn't say, 'You are but a shepherd boy and he is a man of war.' He says, 'You are but a youth and Goliath has been a man of war from his youth.' David was already a man of war, though a shepherd still, but he was a very youthful man of war. Whereas old Goliath, he'd once upon a time been a youth and man of war, but he was now a very experienced and mature warrior. And for a youngster like David; should he dare go out and fight with such a mature and wily old veteran? Saul says, 'No, David. It can't be done.'

So, when David persisted he said, 'Well now David, look, at least take my armour.' What a pathetic man was Saul. He dare not take it himself. When David put it on, he said, 'Oh I can't go with this!' What a mercy. Saul's armour was pretty big, but if David had dared take Saul's sword and spear and gone towards Goliath, he wouldn't have got within a metre or two of him. Before he got anywhere near using his sword on Goliath, Goliath's enormously long spear would have transfixed him and held him up to the birds to eat. It is foolish in the extreme to try and beat the big man with the big man's own tactics.

What tactics will David use? What tactics will God's saviour of Israel use against the big man? He went to the brook, and he took five stones out. I suspect Goliath couldn't see what he was doing at that stage. And he took a staff in his hand. I suspect the sling was behind his

back, because when he got near enough for Goliath to see what weapons David had, all Goliath mentioned was the staff.

The Greek text has got it wrong again and talks about the sling. That's the Greek being silly once more, and hasn't understood the matter. All Goliath mentions is the staff: 'Here's this youngster with a staff' (see 17:43). And Goliath went purple in the face, and nearly had a stroke forthwith. His moustache wobbled up and down furiously! He was enraged over two things. He saw that David was a youth! Then, horror of horrors, David was coming not with armour (he had not a bit of armour on him) but with a bit of a stick! He said, 'What do you think I am, a dog or something? Are you coming to me with a stick such as a man takes to drive a little dog out of his back yard?'

Oh, he was furious, for that's not the way to treat an experienced single hero combat man. It's as if you put me in the ring with Cassius Clay<sup>4</sup> of former fame, in a prize fight for the championship of the world. What would he say if he saw me get into the ring? Well, he'd feel so insulted that not even he would find words to describe the situation! Goliath felt so insulted, both because of the fact that the man was a youth, and because he was coming with the weapon that David had deliberately chosen, so he abused David. When he'd finished, David used his heroic privilege to abuse Goliath back again. You notice what David said, and why he chose the particular weapons he had.

You come to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. And I will give the dead bodies of the host of the Philistines this day to the birds of the air and to the wild beasts of the earth, that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel, and that all this assembly may know that the LORD saves not with sword and spear. For the battle is the LORD'S, and he will give you into our hand. (vv. 45-47)

The issue of the choice of weapons is absolutely true to the record of such a fight in those far-off days, but do notice now what a tremendous spiritual lesson it is conveying. For here is the very heart of the thing. How will you overcome the big man syndrome, the man whose confidence is in himself and in his armour and his bigness, and defies the living God? It will not be by producing another big man, but by the deliberate choice of weapons— absolutely, impossibly weak in themselves. Says David, 'God will give me victory to demonstrate, not only that there is a God, but that God doesn't have to rely upon sword and spear. For the battle is the Lord's.'

So David slung his stone, and the giant was killed. That is, he was mortally wounded. And David ran up to him, stood on him, and took the sword out of Goliath's sheath and decapitated him with Goliath's own sword. Yes, this is about the choice of weapons.

Where did David get the courage to do it? 'You can't go against him,' said Saul. 'You haven't got the armour. He'll make mincemeat of you. How do you dare to go?'

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<sup>4</sup> Cassius Clay changed his name to the more commonly known: Muhammad Ali.

'It's all right,' said David. 'When I was a shepherd lad, there came a lion against the sheep; and then there came a bear. I went out against them without any weapons, and the Lord delivered them into my hand' (see vv. 34–37).

What counts in battles like that is your experience of the Lord, the times you've had in trusting the Lord. Just like Hannah learned to trust the Lord in her simple, domestic affairs, so David in the quietness of his shepherd's job on his father's farm, had learned the basic secret of government for God, which is absolute and implicit trust in the Lord. In that way he was prepared, when the crisis came, to deliberately choose weak weapons so that the victory might be seen to be altogether God's.

### **God's tactics**

What about God's tactics? I refer you first of all to the famous passage in Revelation 12–13, that prophecies there will come a time when the dragon will bring up his man, his big, big man. He's so big that he will defy the living God and proclaim that he himself is God. But you will remember how God prefaces that with another vision, of a woman, the sun and the moon beneath her feet; and the woman is with child, and the child is destined to rule the nations. And who is the child? Forgive me for saying it without proving it to you learned prophetic experts. The child is the child that always had been promised since the devil, the old serpent, was in the garden tempting Eve (Gen 3:15). It is our blessed Lord.

See the relevance of the situation. Here on earth is the sum total and harvest of Satan's efforts: a man aping God. How will God deal with him? 'All right,' says God, 'I know how to deal with him. If he's trying to be God, I will go down and become man.' He was born a wee, helpless babe. He was in the womb and then in the arms of the virgin, Mary. Did you ever see such a story? Here are God's tactics against the devil's device. Here is man trying to be God and to shut God out of his universe. 'Right,' says God, 'I'll answer that: I will become man.' And he who was in the form of God thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but humbled himself, became a servant, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross (see Phil 2:5–8).

I finally refer you to Paul's great exposition of the tactics of the cross. Why, when our Lord died for our sins, did he have to die impaled upon a cross? Why couldn't there have been a much more acceptable kind of ceremony when, surrounded by his admiring disciples, he somehow or other laid down his life in a genteel way? Why the brutality of the cross? Paul explains the deliberate tactics of God.

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. (1 Cor 1:20–25)



Here God is seen choosing tactics that, to the world, are weak and the extreme of folly. And why is he doing it? It is to break our trust in man.

Paul says to the believers in Corinth: 'What are you doing putting your trust in man, organizing yourself around men, making parties around men (good men as they are)? Have you not observed that the very tactics of God in your salvation were designed to break your confidence in man, in that sense?'

We watch the Saviour on the cross, taking our place, and we see that the only way God can save us is through a crucified Christ. See the wisdom of the Greek and the power of the Roman and the religion of the Jew that put the Saviour on the cross, and come to your right conclusion as to the religion of this world, and the wisdom of this world, and the power of this world! All are exposed for what they are apart from God, in that they crucified the Saviour. And was I myself so bad? Was my wisdom so inadequate? Was my strength so impossibly weak that in the end all God could do was to crucify me? Yes, so it was, and I should have been crucified, except it was for this: the blessed Saviour came, and in weakness and apparent folly, allowed men to put him on a tree and be crucified. And when he died, I died; and when he was crucified, I was crucified. And now my only hope shall be in God who raised him from the dead.

'How did you actually get in Christ, anyway?' says Paul to the Corinthians. 'Did Paul put you in Christ?' (see 1:9–13). That's a point I'd like to ask you. How did you get into Christ? Who put you in Christ?

You say, 'Well I was a sinner of deepest dye (I don't know what dyeing has to do with it, but it seems most who give their testimonies are "deep-dyed" sinners), and there came a preacher to our place, and oh how he could preach! How he could hold your attention, and what a master he was of telling a story, and he put me in Christ.'

Well you poor thing. Be careful that another day you're not somewhere else where another preacher comes and takes you out of Christ, because he happens to be more eloquent than the first one! How would any of us be safe if it were some man who had put us in Christ? 'No,' says Paul. 'Of God, by God's own action, are you in Christ Jesus, who by God is made unto you wisdom and righteousness and redemption, so that, as it is written, he that glories, he that has confidence, shall glory solely in the Lord' (see vv. 30–31).

In the central story of the book of 1 Samuel, we have met what is the central problem when it comes to God imposing his king upon the world, to deal with what the real trouble is. Oh yes, God could have solved the problem, in a way; by destroying the whole lot of us long since, but that would scarcely have been a victory, would it? What God had to do was to overcome what Satan had effected, and bring back man's confidence solely into God. God has decided to do it, and thank God he has already done it with millions, and done it with you who sit here in front of me tonight. God has broken your confidence in man, in yourself, and put your confidence solely in God. That is where you are safe for all eternity.

So let's pray.

Father we thank thee for thy word; we thank thee for its accuracy over many centuries, but we thank thee more for the principles that were embodied that day when David, in reliance on thee and on thee alone, went forth with those weak weapons to fight the great giant, that all might see that the Lord is not dependent on man's weapons and spears. The battle is the Lord's, and he will save those that put their trust in him.

Help us to understand it, Lord, we pray, and at all those levels where it should be applied, help us in thy grace to be consistent in our life's work and always consistent in the attitude of our hearts, that our hearts might set thee always before them, and in matters big and great, and small and apparently insignificant, our trust may always be in thee. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## The Thought Flow of Section Three

### *1 Samuel 16:1–22:2*

What I want to attempt to do now is briefly to sketch in a few scattered thoughts on the rest of this particular section. We haven't the time to spend long on this section because we have only two days left in which to try and cover, in some fashion, the whole of 1 Samuel and the whole of 2 Samuel. And therefore I must content myself with sketching in now how I conceive the thought flow of this third section.

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### **Section 3 (16:1–22:2)**

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#### *Movement 5 (16:1–18:30)*

##### **Part 1: David Secretly Anointed King (16:1–18:4)**

- a. Samuel anoints David. 'Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart' (1 Sam 16:7)
- b. David taken into Saul's house to play before him
- c. David defeats Goliath with a sling and stone and cuts off his head with his own sword

JONATHAN LOVES DAVID: STRIPS HIMSELF: GIVES ROBE AND WEAPONS TO DAVID: MAKES COVENANT WITH HIM

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##### **Part 2: Saul Grows Jealous of David (18:5–30)**

- d. On return from fight, women praise David more than Saul
- e. Saul tries twice to spear David: but the people love David
- f. Saul tries to use his daughters to get David killed. But Michal loves David; David kills two hundred Philistines

DAVID BEHAVED HIMSELF MORE WISELY THAN ALL SAUL'S SERVANTS

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#### *Movement 6 (19:1–22:2)*

##### **Part 1: Saul's Overt Attempts to Kill David (19:1–24)**

- a. Frustrated by: Jonathan's logic
- b. Michal's love
- c. Samuel and the Holy Spirit

SAUL STRIPS HIMSELF NAKED AND LIES DOWN BEFORE SAMUEL ALL THAT DAY AND NIGHT

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##### **Part 2: David, the Messiah, Must Go (20:1–22:2)**

- d. Jonathan's arrows point out the distance. The oath between them
- e. David comes to the priest Ahimelech; eats the showbread; is given Goliath's sword
- f. David falls into hands of the Philistines . . . Madness!? Escapes to the caves of Adullam

**Saul grows jealous of David (18:5-30)**

We come to a tremendous climax as David returns from the field of battle with the head of Goliath in his hands. He stands there in front of the royal tent, still on the battlefield of course, and speaks with Saul the king and with Jonathan the crown prince. Then come those exceedingly significant words that begin chapter 18.

As soon as he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. And Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. (vv. 1-2)

We have already commented a great deal on the theme of father and son. We now meet another example, and a very poignant one, of that theme. Here stands Saul: king of Israel, and Jonathan his son: crown prince and, in Saul's eyes, destined to take Saul's place upon the throne when Saul departs. Saul's hope, therefore, is in his son. This time, however, the theme is unlike it has been before when the sons are bad. Here is a bad father, you might say, but the son, how delightful he is. Humanly speaking he is crown prince, heir to the throne, but as he sees David standing there, he loves him.

The world *love* in Hebrew has many connotations. It can be used, as it is later used, in a semi-political sense, that all the people 'loved David' (see v. 16). He was their hero; he was a hero of the pop songs of the day. But I suspect Jonathan loved him, in the first place, out of sheer admiration for a genius. As we read this afternoon, Jonathan, until this point, had been supreme in Israel as the single hero combat man. It was he who had gone out with his armour bearer and challenged the garrison of the Philistines, and said to his armour bearer, 'The Lord can save either by many or by few.' He was the man that initiated the first rout of the Philistines in chapter 13. He too, therefore, had been a single hero in combat with the enemy. Now Jonathan had met the man who perhaps only he could appreciate. It takes an expert to appreciate an expert, and as he saw the tremendous brilliance of the tactics David had used, weak though they had appeared to be, Jonathan loved him, and stripped himself.

Surely it was symbolic. Jonathan may not at the time have known exactly the full implication of what he was doing, but here was the initial stage of that process by which Saul's dynasty was doomed. Jonathan, the crown prince, fell in love with David and eventually surrendered all of his rights to him.

How does God impose his saviour as king? Oh what a delightful story it is. What was done there at that lowly stage has been the tactics that God has employed, and still employs, to this day. One day the Lord Jesus shall come in power, just like David eventually returned in power, but in this time when our Lord is 'still rejected and by the world disowned', the omnipotent God is doing his marvellous work in his well thought out strategy for putting his Son on the throne of the universe, and on the throne of the earth. He imposes him in the hearts of men and women that have come to love and admire the Lord Jesus, and turn over their rights to him because they want to, and because they love the Lord Jesus. That is how God wins his battles.

Saul took him to his own home and would no longer let him go to his father's house. And that of course, again, for those that are reading the story as a bit of literature, was a most significant theme. At the moment, perhaps, Saul didn't realize exactly what he was doing. But just as when Eli's house went wrong and God put Samuel right in the middle of Eli's house, so now God takes David and puts him in the middle of Saul's house, though Saul did it of his own free will. David, the one who would eventually take the place of Saul and Jonathan, is now brought into the house.

Then we are told how Saul began to be jealous and envious, because the songwriters of the day wrote their songs in favour of David rather than Saul. He tried twice to spear David, but in spite of it, David's popularity with the people was growing. The people 'loved David'. So Saul set him over the men of war. Then later Saul removed him to a further distance from the palace. Then, trying to get him to fall by the hands of the Philistines, Saul thought he had a great scheme. First of all, he should have given Merab to David, according to his promise to give his eldest daughter to the man who defeated Goliath, but he didn't. Then he said he was going to give Merab to David, if only David would fight the Philistines. David fought the Philistines, but he gave Merab to somebody else. Then it was told Saul that his younger daughter, Michal, had fallen in love with David. Saul saw the opportunity (wretched man) to use the love of this daughter to get David slaughtered. But he'd reckoned without David's ability as a warrior, and his trust in the Lord. David more than fulfilled the impossible task Saul had given him and Saul, therefore, was obliged to give him his daughter, Michal.

That further strengthened David's claim to the throne. It was bad enough for Jonathan to fall in love, how embarrassing that Michal fell in love as well! And everybody was falling in love with David. This is God with his tactics.

So now in chapter 19 we come to our third small portion of this third section.

### **Saul's overt attempts to kill David (19:1-24)**

Saul comes into the open and gives orders. He has the orders of the day written up in the court, so to speak, that any of his servants, or all of them together, should now slay David. It now becomes not surreptitious behind the scenes, but palace policy, publicly enunciated. Any or all of Saul's servants were to kill David. It has become official.

That stupid move by a man who was beginning to go mad was now opposed by three obstacles put in his way. First of all, it was Jonathan's logic, and then it was Michal's love, and finally, it was the Holy Spirit of God himself who stood in the way of this foolish man, determined to destroy himself, determined now to kill the very saviour that God had sent him. Oh, but you don't reject God's salvation without God going to an immense amount of trouble to stop you. See what a man has to do in order to be lost. Some people say you have to do nothing to be lost. Well there's truth in that, but if a man actively seeks destruction, watch God put the obstacles in his way.

#### *Jonathan's logic (19:1-7)*

First consider Jonathan's logic as he appeals to Saul. 'But father,' he says, 'this is absurd. The man took his life in his hands to save you, Dad. It makes no sense. Why on earth are you trying

to kill him?' (see 19:4–5). And Saul professed to repent but, being the neurotic he was, his repentance didn't last very long.

#### *Michal's love (19:8–17)*

There was war again. Saul tried to assassinate David. David ran away, off to his house. Michal suggested to David what he should do. She let him down by night so he escaped and made up an old model of him and put it in the bed. And when the officers of Saul were sent around to Michal's house to arrest David she said he was sick. And when the officers reported that back to Saul he said he was to bring him anyway, sick or not sick. And when he got there, of course, it was only a straw model in the bed, and it wasn't David at all. For now it was not Jonathan's logic but Michal's love.

Saul eventually is prepared to pass by logical reasoning, and to stamp into the ground his own daughter's affections towards David in pursuit of his own jealous career. What a king the man is becoming.

#### *Samuel and the Holy Spirit (19:18–24)*

David runs away, and Saul follows him. As Saul came he saw Samuel standing and David was there with him. Saul came under the power of the Holy Spirit, so powerful and irresistible that he stripped himself and lay down all that day and night naked. If ever a man knew that it was the Holy Spirit that was now speaking to him, warning him, restraining him, it was Saul, wasn't it? And he got up the next day, put his clothes on, went back home and continued with his deliberate campaign to have David killed.

You can persist in rejection of God and his warnings so far, can't you? God will put the hurdles in your way, be they hurdles of logic or hurdles of love. Finally, there came the direct impact of the Holy Spirit upon him to stop him murdering David. Saul got up, went away and persisted in his murderous attempts. There would come a time when in his distress, faced with his mortal enemies, and having rejected his God-appointed saviour, he would confess to Samuel, who had been called from the very grave: 'I've enquired of the Lord, but God won't speak to me!' (see 28:15). What a voice to come from a man on the very brink of death and eternity: 'I've pleaded with God to give me guidance, but God won't speak!' That is hell begun.

We have thought a lot about the word of the Lord, how Saul disobeyed the word of the Lord time and time again and lost his dynasty through it. Even so, God was merciful and sent him a saviour, and Saul could have been saved from the Philistines; but he went past the last warning. There would be many another warning after this, but none of them, in the end, moved Saul. They went off him, like water off a duck's back. And in the end, when he faced disaster at the hand of the Philistines, and he went to God for guidance, God would not speak. That is a very solemn story. But let's come to the final part of this third section.

### **David, the messiah, must go (20:1–22:2)**

David eventually came from Naioth and spoke to Jonathan.

Then David fled from Naioth in Ramah and came and said before Jonathan, 'What have I done? What is my guilt? And what is my sin before your father, that he seeks my life?' And he said to

him, 'Far from it! You shall not die. Behold, my father does nothing either great or small without disclosing it to me. And why should my father hide this from me? It is not so.' But David vowed again, saying, 'Your father knows well that I have found favour in your eyes, and he thinks, "Do not let Jonathan know this, lest he be grieved." But truly, as the LORD lives and as your soul lives, there is but a step between me and death.' (20:1-3)

So now David is certain that the establishment, in the person of Saul, has officially decided to kill him. And he comes to Jonathan, and Jonathan says, 'Oh no, David. I don't like the sound of that. My father is a funny old boy and he loses his temper sometimes, but really, he's not going to harm you. Not really.'

'He is,' says David.

'Well if he was, he'd tell me.'

'No he won't, you see. He will seek means of getting round you, Jonathan.'

Jonathan couldn't believe his father really meant to slay David, just like some others of a later century. For when our Lord said, 'The Son of Man goes to Jerusalem to be handed up to the chief priests and the scribes, and they shall reject him, crucify him and put him to death' one of them said, 'Never, Lord. No, no; they're not going to do that to you; they're not as bad as all that, are they?' (see Matt 16:21-22). But yes, they were, and for similar reasons as Saul. Even Pilate could see that it was 'out of envy' that they had delivered our blessed Lord up (27:18). They were afraid to lose their position. That was what the problem was.

So Jonathan and David hit upon a device, and because you have read it very carefully you will be able to explain it to me so that I can understand it a little more clearly than I do. Jonathan was to go to the banquet where David was supposed to be. David wouldn't be there. If Saul said, 'Why is the son of Jesse not here?' Jonathan was to say, 'He took leave of me to go to his parents' house for a celebration,' and see what happened. If Saul said, 'That's reasonable enough,' that would be okay; but if Saul flew into a temper then Jonathan would know his father was determined to kill David. And that was indeed what happened. The scheme was that if Jonathan found that his father was determined to kill David, then Jonathan was to come out into the field. He was to bring his boy as an assistant. He was to play at archery, and he was to tell his boy to go the distance and pick the arrows up. And if Jonathan shot an arrow on the near side of the boy, David would know that he was accepted at court. If he shot the arrow on the far side of the boy, David would know that he must flee.

The thing need not have been known at all. David need not have come out of hiding and gone to consult Jonathan. Curiously enough, when the arrows were shot, and the boy had been sent home, David did come out and have a word with Jonathan.

Well, you can explain that to me when you have a moment. Being one of simple mind, I can't resist the marvellous evocations of the image. As Jonathan puts the arrow to the string and lets fly, and it deliberately goes beyond the boy, and Jonathan shouts out to the boy so that David can hear (though the boy doesn't know David is there), 'Is not the arrow beyond you?' And in that moment the speeding arrow tells God's anointed that he must go!

How could you read those words without thinking of another scene? The blessed Lord, in the early days of his ministry was popular with the people; they came in their multitudes.

And the people would still have come, but officialdom turned against him, and there came our blessed Lord's statement:

The Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! (Matt 26:24)

'The arrow is beyond you, David!' The Lord's anointed must go.

Tell me, how far must the Lord's anointed go? David ran to the tabernacle and to the priest and made up a story that he was on the king's business and asked for the showbread, and the priest gave it to him and to the young men that were with him. It is a very interesting thing that our Lord quoted this very story (Matt 12:1–8). Not only is it interesting what he quoted it for, thus establishing his claim that the Son of Man himself is Lord of the Sabbath—Son of the Father, Son of the house greater than the temple—but according to Matthew, the context in which he said it was around about the time the high priests had been warned that they were in severe danger of committing the unpardonable sin against the Holy Spirit (vv. 22–32).

David went from there, and he took the sword of Goliath (curious story) and went to the Philistines. Well fancy that. I think I'd have gone to the Philistines without the sword of Goliath, if I'd have been him, wouldn't you? Go to the Philistines in Gath with the sword that had cut the head off their chief warrior? I'd say the thing was madness.

Why, so it was: it was madness to go. And when Achish saw what was happening, David became afraid, and the only way he knew of escaping was to feign madness. He let the spittle come down on his beard, and he scrabbled on the wall (21:10–15). I wish the historian had drawn a veil over that bit of David's history, don't you? What a sight; the great conqueror of Goliath now feigning madness among the Philistines. He came up, and went into the cave, which was a fortress, and thus we come to the end of a section (22:2).

Now, at the risk of being fanciful, think what this has to do with other things. There came a time when our Lord in his ministry saw what he already knew: that the Son of Man must go. And he who had done amazing miracles so that the crowd wondered at the tremendous power of God told his disciples, 'The Son of Man must be handed over into the hands of men', as though he were some helpless victim. He told no lies, of course not. He didn't have to feign madness to get himself out of the difficulty, of course he didn't. It would be nice to forget that story about David's feigned madness. But tell me, when the Son of Man went, how far did he go? How far did he have to go? The Son of the omnipotent Lord of heaven: taken by the hands of lawless man and tied to a tree?

I wonder what Michael the archangel thought of it as he saw the darling of Jehovah and the anointed of the Lord, rejected by Caiaphas and the establishment in Israel and forsaken at last by his disciples, and handed over to the Gentiles and nailed to a tree. I wonder what Michael thought of it! I wonder what he thought of God for allowing it. Did he think, if it be not blasphemous to mention the word, 'What *folly* on God's part'? And I don't know if it would have helped for God to explain to Michael why God was doing it. I don't know if Michael would have been much relieved to hear God say, 'Well, I have allowed my Son to be abandoned at Calvary because he has to die for such a one as Gooding, the sinner!' He did not let his own spittle run down upon his beard, but he suffered the filthy spittle of men, upon the face of God's Son. Rather than that I should perish, the anointed of the Lord himself would



suffer Calvary. Tell me how far he had to go, and I will tell you what is the secret of the devotion of your heart to God's dear Son that has bound you as his loyal citizens, subjects and soldiers for all time, and all eternity. For not only is the weakness of God stronger than men; in the strategies of Calvary, the sheer folly of God (as the world counts it) is *wiser* than men.

These are God's tactics for overcoming big man—rebel man, and imposing his Son as crown king of the world. That at least is how I read it, and if Samuel provokes such thoughts in the mind of an elderly man, you'll find it in your heart to forgive him, fanciful though they be.

Someone lead us to the Lord in prayer.

## Understanding Section Four

*1 Samuel 22:3–31:13*

What are we to make of the stories in this fourth section? I suspect the problem that most of us have with them is that they are long and detailed stories without any accompanying explanation. Some of the details, of course, appeal to us immediately and are from time to time the text upon which we hang our sermons. Saul's famous remark, 'I have played the fool, and have erred exceedingly' (1 Sam 26:21 KJV), has often been rightly used by evangelists as a warning to the unconverted who have heard the gospel many times and have rejected it. They are warning them, by means of Saul's example, what a foolish course they have taken. But then it is sometimes notoriously difficult to be sure what we ought to make of some of the other stories, and how we ought to understand and apply their detail.

I suspect it is a problem that confronts us in many other historical books. For instance, in 2 Kings 5 we find it very easy to isolate the story of Naaman the leper. Generations of evangelists have done so. We say, 'Leprosy is a picture of sin, and Naaman in the end was healed, but not before he had made many mistakes as to God's methods of healing him; but eventually he learned the truth and was healed.'

Yes, God has blessed that interpretation of the Naaman story, but it may serve us as a little example of the difficulties of these narratives. Having preached to the congregation heartily that Naaman was healed of his leprosy by simply repenting and forsaking his pride and washing himself in the Jordan, the evangelist normally stops before dealing with the story of Gehazi, Elijah's servant, who himself at the end of the story contracted leprosy from head to heel!

Then there are other stories in the context of 2 Kings 5. What are they saying, and have they anything to do with Naaman, or are these history books merely like photograph albums with all sorts of individual photographs put in: some of them in order, some of them not? It's like the family photograph album, and when you show it to a visitor you say, 'Well this is us on our holiday in Hawaii. And oh goodness me, who is that scruffy looking chap there? Oh, well that's the man who came up to sell us something just as we were packing up. Well, it's nothing to do with us at all, but we hadn't got anywhere else to put it, so we put it there. It has nothing to do with our holiday, but there it is.' Sometimes we are inclined to treat the narrative books of Scripture like that. Here is Naaman, but what the other stories are about, we don't know, and perhaps it isn't important that we know. Perhaps they are just a lot of isolated stories anyway.

### Getting the story right

Some stories are obvious. The story of David and Goliath is obvious, though sometimes a little bit difficult to get into focus. If we are following the actual narrative, the battle was not against the devil, it was against man—big man. That has been the theme.

If you say, 'How can you be sure about that?'

Well, listen to the whole book. Saul was a big man, head and shoulders above all the others. He found Goliath too much for him because Goliath was a bigger man. Eliab was not chosen as the Lord's anointed from among Jesse's sons. He was a big man, but 'big man' was useless against 'big man'. The story develops and shows us the tactics used; it shows us David deliberately choosing the weakest of weapons, on purpose, against this big man. He did not choose the big man's armour for himself, but the staff and the stone, because here was an opportunity for God to display his strength in the very weakness of the weapons that David used.

If you want confirmation of that interpretation, I suggest you go to 1 Corinthians, where the tactics of the cross are aimed, not so much at Satan, but against man. The message of this man crucified, that to the world is folly and weakness, is calculated to humble the pride of man and demolish what is the basic difficulty in God's way, and indeed in man's way. Think of the tactics. God says, 'He catches the wise in their craftiness' (3:19). The weakness of God is wiser than men.

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? . . . For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, 'He catches the wise in their craftiness'. (1 Cor 1:20; 3:19)

That is David using Goliath's own sword to cut off Goliath's head. Both in the New Testament and in the Old, God's tactics against man with his great brain and his great brawn, are the same.

But now, as we come to this last section, what shall we make of these stories? They are often recorded without any explicit accompanying interpretation. For instance, it is said of David that when he was in Ziklag he used to go out raiding the Geshurites and the Amalekites and other such peoples, but when he came back to the Philistines he said he'd made a raid upon the southern cities of Judah; and the Philistines clapped their hands and said, 'Well, if he carries on like that he'll make Saul, his previous master, absolutely loathe him, and all Israel will loathe him, and therefore that will drive David to become our loyal servant forever!' But David was telling lies, was he not? He hadn't been raiding the southern cities of Judah (1 Sam 27:8–12).

I don't know what you think of the technique, whether it is good or bad. How would you interpret it? The narrative itself doesn't attempt to interpret it for you. It raises a problem, like when the British in the last war did a lot of things to deceive the Germans. Of course, the Americans never thought of doing anything like that, did they? But if they had done so, and you had read it in the newspaper, what would you have said about it?

Anyway, quite apart from that, the question arises therefore in this long list of stories: how are we to interpret them, and how can we begin to be sure that we have the interpretation that

the Holy Spirit intended? Is it, in the end, that we give up in despair and say there is no way of knowing what the lesson is that we should gather from them? Well, I would be the first to say how far off I am from coming to a full and proper understanding of these stories, but there are things we can do, at the beginning at any rate, to help ourselves in the interpretation of these narrative portions of Scripture.

The first is, of course, to consider as we have been trying to do, the literary structure of the book. We want to try to determine how the historian, under the inspiration of God, has selected his material, and how he has put that material together. That will lead us to take this section and say first of all, 'Why would you think it is a section?'

We have noticed that up to this point the sections have been marked out by simple devices: vivid similarities or contrasts stationed at the beginning or the end of each section. So in section one, at the beginning, there was Hannah's song, in which she says the Lord will thunder from heaven (2:10). And at the end of the section, the Lord thunders against the Philistines, against his enemies. In section two, the people reject God in demanding a king, and at the end of that section God rejects their king. In section three, we notice David being anointed. We follow him through his great victory over Goliath down to that sorry incident where he allows himself to fall into the hands of the Philistines, with Goliath's sword in his hands! Notice that detail that ties the early stories together with the final stories in that section.<sup>5</sup> And now we come to the fourth section.

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## Section 4 (22:3–31:13)

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### *Movement 7 (22:3–26:25)*

#### **Part 1: David Reappears in Israel (22:3–23:29)**

- a. David comes up out of cave. Saul has Doeg slay God's priests
  - b. David saves Keilah from Philistines. Enquires of Lord and escapes Saul
  - c. David at Ziph: saved from Saul by coming of Philistines
- JONATHAN COMES SECRETLY TO DAVID: RECOGNIZES DAVID AS FUTURE KING:  
MAKES COVENANT WITH HIM
- 

#### **Part 2: David's 'Justification' (24:1–26:25)**

- d. David spared Saul's life in the cave, but shames him. Saul recognizes David will be king
  - e. David restrained by Abigail's wisdom from vengeance of the fool, Nabal
  - f. David spares Saul's life in the stockade, but removes his security
- VOICES IN THE NIGHT, SAUL KNEW DAVID'S VOICE. SAUL SAYS 'I HAVE PLAYED THE FOOL' (1 SAM 26:21)
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<sup>5</sup> As you will notice in the notes in the Appendix, the outline of each of the eight sections in 1 and 2 Samuel is presented side by side in vertical columns.

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*Movement 8 (27:1–31:13)*

**Part 1: Israel Lose their Messiah (27:1–28:25)**

- a. David departs to Philistines: given Ziklag to live in
- b. David's behaviour in Ziklag: spoils . . . Amalekites. Keeper of Achish's head
- c. Saul gets witch to bring up Samuel who announces his doom

SAUL FALLS FULL LENGTH ON EARTH: EATS AT WITCH'S TABLE

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**Part 2: God's Judgment on Saul (29:1–31:13)**

- d. Lords of Philistines sent David home. David does not fight against Israel
- e. David recovers women and spoil of Ziklag from Amalekites
- f. Philistines defeat Israelites; slay Saul's sons; Saul's suicide

SAUL'S ARMOUR IN IDOL'S TEMPLE: HIS HEAD CUT OFF: BODY NAILED TO WALL: RESCUED AND BURIED BY JABESH-GILEADITES

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Notice one small matter in this final section. It begins with David coming up out of the cave, and Saul commands Doeg to slay the priests of the Lord. Summoned from their tabernacle, they arrive and Saul accuses them, and then commands his soldiers to slay them. The soldiers are not prepared to do it, but what they wouldn't do, Doeg the Edomite did. It is no wonder that Saul went to the witch, because when subsequent to slaying God's priests he tried to enquire of the Lord, but God wouldn't speak to him. And finally, you end up with Saul himself slain, his armour put in the Philistines' idol's temple, his head cut off and his body nailed to the wall. Saul then, from slaying the Lord's priests from the tabernacle of the Lord, to ending up slain himself.

**David reappears in Israel (22:3–23:29)**

Of course, there's more to it than those simple devices of beginnings and endings. Let's consider the situation, then, and this matter of 'the hold' that now begins. David comes up out of the stronghold (22:3), from the cave of Adullam. Whether it was the same stronghold or not, and whether he made this or that cave his headquarters in different parts, the interesting and significant thing is that now at this juncture, for the first time, David becomes a leader of a force of men. While he was in Saul's service, although Saul persecuted him up hill and down dale, there is no record that David tried to amass a body of troops around himself. That would have been straight treason against Saul, wouldn't it? Within the country, to have raised a body of troops would obviously have challenged the authority of Saul and the standing army. And David was one of Saul's generals within the army. But when Saul officially commanded that David be executed, and to save his life David was obliged to flee, that action historically put David into a different position. It was now that he must protect himself, or else be assassinated and murdered, that he first goes to the Philistines, but coming up from the Philistines he does not go back into the service of Saul anymore, and he accepts around him a body of men. They

were desperados indeed; you can call them marauders if you will, but now there are two centres of loyalty in the nation.

That in itself is exceedingly significant because it forced a choice upon the nation. If there are two centres of loyalty, people have got to make up their minds to which centre they give their loyalty. And this is stating the reality in political and military terms. Many of the bankrupt came to David, for obvious reasons: to escape their debts and responsibilities. So he welded them into a very powerful military force that was to win some spectacular victories. It was a force that, even in these next chapters we read, had opportunity from time to time (had they cared to use it) actually to kill Saul. This is a matter therefore of great significance that in this section, once more, David made no attempt to kill Saul.

## **The significance of history**

### **The significance to the original readers of 1 Samuel**

Why is all this related at such length? Well, one reason could be seen if we put ourselves in the place of the first readers of this book. We don't know exactly in what century 1 and 2 Samuel was written, but the first readers would have been Israelites. And you would have had, in the earlier days and right up to the time of Absalom's rebellion against David, people in Israel who disputed David's right to the throne. Saul, after all, had been God's anointed, and even when Saul perished by his own suicidal hand there were still people that said that Saul and Saul's house had the right to the throne in Israel.

We read of Saul's son Ishbosheth. (He surely was never christened that name; it means 'a man of shame', but never mind, that's what the propaganda boys on the other side called him, like people used to call Hitler 'the wallpaper hanger', and things like that.) Ishbosheth tried to hang on to the throne of Israel for many long years, and he was supported in that by the powerful figure of Abner, commander in chief of the armies of the ten tribes. True, Abner suffered a conversion, for what reasons we needn't at this moment discuss, and proposed to bring over the ten tribes to David, but at first Abner with his military power maintained the right of the house of Saul.

Also, you will remember that many years later, when Absalom rose against David and practically the whole of the nation defected, even the tribe of Judah defected from David and went over to Absalom. When David was fleeing, there came out a certain Shimei. He was a very powerful man with much land and property in the area. And he cursed David up hill and down dale: 'You bloodthirsty wretch!' he said. 'Man of war that you've been, soaking the land in blood and cutting your enemies to pieces! God has brought the blood you shed back on your own head. It's for your wickedness against the house of Saul' (see 2 Sam 16:5-8). Shimei was not unprejudiced at all, for he was himself a Benjamite, just as Saul was.

There were, then, elements in the nation that, right to the end, said that David was an upstart and had no right to the throne of the nation: 'God's anointed, my foot!' And such people read in Absalom's rebellion God's judgment against David, and the demolishing of David's claim to be the Lord's anointed, the rightful heir to the throne, the rightful beginner of a dynasty.

The book was written to the nation first, and when they got hold of it, they would not have been thinking of it like we are: of prototypes of our blessed Lord and lessons for ourselves today. They would have been interested in the politics of the whole situation. What will the historian do? Even in the days recorded in this final section of 1 Samuel, you will hear mutterings of this kind of thing. At harvest time David sent some of his bright lads on a courtesy visit to Nabal who owned great ranches. He was a kind of a Texan with a big hat on, and he owned a lot of cattle in the south. At sheep shearing time, David sent his men, saying, 'Now, we've been a wall of protection to you from all sorts of raiders in these uncivilized parts: Amalekites and Geshurites and other such things, and God has blessed you, Nabal. And well, you know, times are a bit difficult, and sometimes the troops are hungry. What about it, Nabal?'

Nabal said, 'And who are you? And who is David? There are a lot of chaps these days that ride out against their masters. I want nothing to do with this scum of rebels that break away from their masters and refuse true loyalty to the master that God has appointed them' (see 25:1–11).

Perhaps there were many in Israel that felt like that about David. What would you have felt? Are you sure that even when David had defeated Goliath and given you a chance to breathe again, you would have joined David in his stronghold and gone over to him from Saul?

I am therefore going to suggest to you that, whatever else it is or isn't, this last section of 1 Samuel has to do with what I would call *the justification of David*, setting out the case (first and foremost for those in Israel that eventually read it) that David had been fully justified in his claim to be God's anointed messiah. David was on the throne by God's own wish and purpose and appointment. David had been justified in his treatment of Saul and the people. And Saul had lost the throne (and here's the other side of the story) *justly* under the judgments of God.

You may remember that Abigail, wife of the aforesaid Nabal, saved David from taking immediate vengeance upon Nabal, and she did so with the word that, 'When the Lord has finally put down your enemies, and you sit upon the throne as most surely you will, then it will not be a reproach of heart to you that you took vengeance yourself upon your enemy' (see vv. 30–31). She was pleading with David so to behave in this period that, when he came to the throne, his reputation would be without reproach, either to himself or to the people around. This, then, is David's justification. It answers the question of David's justification as God's anointed sitting on the throne of the nation.

### **The significance for the history of Jesus the Messiah**

If that is what the stories were originally to the Israelites who first read the book, of course it immediately has a parallel with David's greater son, Jesus Christ our Lord. He was the anointed of God, though officialdom in his nation denied it. As Peter put it, when Jesus Christ, God's holy servant and Messiah, stood before the Gentile, Pilate, Pilate was of a mind to let him go. 'But,' says Peter, pointing straight to the crowd, 'you and your rulers denied the holy and the just and asked for a murderer to be granted to you' (see Acts 3:13–14). The nation

denied that Jesus was the Christ, the anointed, and to get rid of him they asked for the murderer, Barabbas.

That immediately gives us an interesting historical question. Who was the Messiah, and how would you see that he was the chosen of God? Here was the establishment, in the person of the high priest. Barabbas was a thief and a robber, not a petty house burglar; he was a political activist (Luke 23:19). That is, he was one of the extreme right wing in Israel who was irritated beyond endurance by the policies of the high priest who collaborated with Rome.

The high priests were indeed appointed by Rome; it was the Romans in those days that appointed the high priests in Judaea, because the high priesthood was a semi-political office. And of course, if you were the political rulers and had the priests on your side, you had a great chance of getting the bulk of the nation on your side as well. If the high priest could be persuaded to pray for the emperor, and get the people to pray for the emperor, that consolidated the emperor's rule over the people. So the Romans appointed the high priest.

The right wing in Israel said that this was evil and apostasy and all that was bad, and they gathered bands of desperados around them and attempted to engage in guerrilla activities, spreading subversion around the place to weaken the power of Rome in the hope that eventually the whole nation could be instigated to rise against the Romans, drive them out, and take over the land like the Maccabees had done in previous generations when they, through guerrilla warfare and then open battle, eventually forced the Seleucids out of the country and gained independence. Of course, the high priests who had collaborated with Rome and were all for stability in the country and claimed to be God's anointed priests, they said that people like Barabbas were bad. But wait a minute. When it came to a choice, and Jesus Christ stood before them, the high priest levelled the accusation against Jesus Christ that he was a *political activist* and ought to be put to death on that account by the Roman authorities. The irony was that in order to force Pilate's hand to execute Jesus (for Pilate could see he wasn't a political activist and wasn't claiming to be a messiah, in that sense), the priest had to persuade the crowd to choose Barabbas, who was a political activist! But then life is never simple, is it?

The same question, therefore, arises with our blessed Lord. He was put to death as an imposter, as a supposed political activist, and he had to be *justified*. Now do not mistake the term. When I talk about our blessed Lord being justified, I am not suggesting he was a sinner like we are who had to be justified by faith through a genuine conversion, repentance and belief; of course not. I am using the term in the forensic and the legal sense such as you find in Isaiah. The Messiah says prophetically through the mouth of the prophet, 'He is near who justifies me . . . Let us plead together' (see 50:8). The Messiah is putting his case before the nation; the nation officially reject him and have him condemned as a sinner and imposter; the Messiah looks to God to be near him, and to *justify* him.

Our Lord said to his disciples before he left them, 'Now, gentlemen, I must go away, but don't let that upset you, because if I go not away the Holy Spirit will not come. But if I go away I will send the Holy Spirit to you and he will . . .'; what will he do? He says, 'he will convict the world of sin' (see John 16:5-9).

You say, 'They jolly well need it. I mean, look at all this excessive watching of TV. He will convict the world of watching TV!'



Well not quite. Well, he might do that even, but there are bigger things wrong with this world.

'He will convict the world of sin because they don't treat their maiden aunts too well.'

No, do get things in historical proportion.

He will convict the world of sin '*because they do not believe in me*' (v. 9). That is the cardinal sin of our planet: that the son of the owner of the vineyard has been here, and they who were entrusted with looking after the vineyard and yielding its produce to God, that is, the leaders of Israel, they have taken the heir and slung him out of the vineyard, and have joined with the Gentiles in so doing. This is the fundamental sin of refusing to believe in Jesus.

The charge stands against this planet still. Of course, it is finally the thing upon which men will be condemned: 'Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because . . .'. Because of what? Because he's been such a vile sinner? That is not what the verse says. It says, 'because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God' (3:18).

But how will the world be brought to *believe* that Jesus is the Son of God? In other words, how will the claim of Jesus of Nazareth, crucified at Calvary, be justified? The Holy Spirit has come to do that very thing.

And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgement: concerning sin, because they do not believe in me; concerning righteousness . . .  
(John 16:8-10)

'Ah,' you say, 'this is a marvellous truth, the assurance of every believer that, once they have put their faith in Christ, they are justified from all things. Isn't that marvellous?'

That isn't what the verse says, is it? It is perfectly true that they who believe are justified, but that is not what our Lord is talking about. He is talking about two things that are related as two sides of one coin. He is saying that the Holy Spirit will convict the world of sin, because they wouldn't believe in him. He'll convict the world of righteousness, 'because I go to the Father' (v. 10).

And what does that prove?

Christ says, 'Well, that proves I'm right, and they were wrong. God has justified me before the world by raising me from the dead.' He is declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead (Rom 1:4).

The third thing it proves, to which the Holy Spirit witnesses and of which he will convict the world, is this. If the world was wrong in crucifying Jesus, and Jesus is right, and so his claim is true and God has vindicated him by raising them from the dead, then his resurrection spells the inevitable end of the chief opposition: 'of judgement, because the prince of this world has been judged' (v. 11 RV). Behind Caiaphas and the establishment's attitude of persecution towards Jesus and his claim to be the anointed of God, stood the prince of this world who engineered the rejection of Christ by his nation, and Christ's crucifixion.

Ah, but God joined the battle: he raised Christ from the dead and justified him. Now let us see the wonder of it! The Holy Spirit has come down from heaven to conduct the case to justify the Lord Jesus. His very presence is a declaration of the fact that Christ is risen, and God has made him both Lord and Messiah.

*Peter's preaching at Pentecost*

See the point of what Peter says in Acts 2. When the crowds at Pentecost say, 'What is this phenomenon of the people speaking with tongues?' Peter says, 'This is the Holy Spirit poured out as Joel said it would be.'

What has that to do with Jesus Christ? Well it is this: that being by the right hand of the Father exalted, he has received this promise that was promised of old in holy Scripture. Jesus of Nazareth has received the Holy Spirit of God and it is Jesus that has poured it out. Then observe the logical deduction and conclusion and implication. If Jesus has poured out the spirit of God, who then is Jesus? The Holy Spirit of God is not so much stuff, not a few pulses of electrical power or something. The Holy Spirit is the third member of the Trinity; the Holy Spirit is divine; he is God. If Jesus has poured out the Holy Spirit, who is Jesus? 'Well,' says Peter, 'let all the house of Israel know assuredly that in giving Jesus to pour out the Holy Spirit, God has declared him and demonstrated him to be both Lord and Christ. He is Lord in the supreme sense; he is the supreme Lord. He is, of course, God, God incarnate, able to dispense the spirit of God, and he is Messiah.'

This is the vindication of our Lord. And what does that show? Peter says, 'I'll tell you what it shows. You say David was the great anointed of the Lord, do you? Well David said, "You will not leave my soul in hell, neither will you suffer your holy one to see corruption", but, gentlemen, you can see that David wasn't talking about himself, was he? If you take the lid off his tomb in Jerusalem that will smell pretty bad for he saw corruption. The words of his psalm were a prophecy, pointing to him who saw no corruption. And being a prophet, and knowing that God would raise up out of his loins one to sit upon his throne, he prophesied beforehand of the Messiah himself who was now risen and seated at the right hand of God: heir to the very throne of David. It is the justification of Jesus Christ to sit on the throne of David as the Messiah.'

**The need to justify God's anointed**

The two things—the justification of David's claim and the justification of our Lord Jesus' claim, run parallel, don't they? I am maintaining, as you see, that this last section of 1 Samuel is by way of being a justification of David. And if you want any further evidence let me just refer at the moment to David's treatment of Saul in the two incidents that we must look at later: the incident in the cave, and the incident in the stockade. He pleads with Saul, 'Saul, I could have killed you. If people have slandered me to you, and told you I am against you, see the evidence in my hand that I am not against you: I am for you, Saul! That's why I spared your life' (see 24:8–15; 26:17–20). Here is David pleading his case before Saul.

The historian had a delicate task to do in this section, didn't he? I am coming back to the historian addressing himself to his first and immediate audience: those in Judah and Israel that would have picked up this book and read it when it was comparatively recent history. It wasn't only that even within David's reign his son Absalom rebelled against him, but when David came back from that rebellion, the ten tribes had another little minor rebellion on their own, and split off under the leadership of a certain Sheba, and had to be put down by force (2 Sam 20). Years later, when David's son Solomon had scarce breathed his last and Rehoboam come to the throne, the question arose again. When all Israel came to make him king they said,

'On conditions, master Rehoboam. We are not putting up with this anymore, my boy. Your father made our yoke intolerable. Now, Rehoboam, if you make your father's yoke easier we will serve you, but if you don't then bye, bye, Rehoboam' (see 1 Kgs 12:3–4).

And Rehoboam took counsel with the old men, and they said, 'Yes, you'd be very wise to make your regal yoke lighter. You know that Solomon, well, we mustn't say anything against his late majesty, your father. He was a marvellous man, but don't you think just now and again he did take an excessive wife or two? He didn't need thousands of wives, did he? I mean to say, he could have done with one less. And were all those temples necessary, that he built for Molech and all those other gods for those fancy ladies? It did involve a lot of work, didn't it? And do remember how he had to put the taxes up on freeborn Israelites in order to fund his building program, and it was a bit miserable for them. If we were you, Rehoboam, we'd make their load a bit lighter; and if you do it the people will serve you forever!' (see vv. 6–7).

Then Rehoboam consulted the young men, and they said, 'Nonsense, nonsense! You want to make it absolutely more rigid! Make it harder!' (vv. 8–15). Well he followed the counsel of the young men, and the ten tribes said, 'Very good, God bless you, Rehoboam. Goodbye!' (see vv. 16–18). And from that moment on, the nation was split in two once more.

Was David (and his house) the legitimate ruler to sit upon the throne of Israel? How important this history would have been in *those* times in the nation. They weren't thinking about us Christians, were they? They had their own problems.

### **Did God's anointed forsake his people?**

The historian had a delicate task to do. You can imagine the other side in the debates that took place over the coffee in the homes and hotels of the land: 'Isn't it a fact,' the other side would say, 'I mean, didn't *Time* magazine carry an article at one stage saying that David had actually gone over to Israel's enemies? Didn't he go and become a commander in the army of the Philistines? And isn't it true that when the Philistines marched in their great battalions and went through the land, that David marched with his band of cutthroat soldiers from Ziklag and marched with the Philistines? Isn't that true? My great, great, great grandfather was there, and I heard it through the family, anyway. And you're saying, are you, that this marvellous man who was prepared to march with the Gentiles and slaughter Israelites and massacre them, he was the anointed of the Lord, was he?'

And what would you say about that? He did go to the Gentiles, didn't he? How would you argue his case, if you had to, and prove that this general was not an opportunist who didn't care which side he fought on so long as he could seize the throne?

Well, forget that for the moment, but if you have any Jewish friends, and you should think about talking to them about the gospel, you might have a little arguing to do on that account as well. As I said, I have a Jewish friend who is elderly now, and so, like elderly men do, he can't get certain ideas out of his head that were burnt into his brain because of the sufferings of his youth. He just managed to escape the gas chambers of Hitler. His many friends, relatives and associates were blotted out in the Holocaust. He will say, 'You say Jesus is the Messiah? You Sunday school teachers and preachers for generations have told the Gentiles that it was the wicked Jews that crucified the Son of God; and you have sown hatred in the hearts of

Gentiles against the Jewish nation, the result of which is that Christendom has persecuted the Jews!

Catholic (and supposedly Christian) Spain did it, didn't they, under the *autos-da-fé*? The autos-da-fé were instituted first of all, not to deal with Protestants but to eliminate Jews. And England did it under King John. And Russia did it in the pogroms. And Hitler did it. And now in Russia, as they are looking around for scapegoats to explain how their marvellous Marxism has failed, there is a noticeable rising of sentiment in the nation that says, 'It is all the fault of the Jews. The early communists were Jews!' They are looking around for scapegoats, aren't they?

What do you say, faced with a Jew, and the record of Christendom in persecuting Jews? It is the fact that the Roman pagan emperors from Julius Caesar onwards crafted special legislation to protect the Jews throughout the Roman Empire. Actually the Romans didn't like Jews. They heartily despised them and what they thought of as their nasty little prayer houses down side streets, and their silly, lazy habit of keeping one day in seven as a day when they wouldn't work. And as for that monstrosity of mutilation called circumcision, that was a barbarity, according to the Romans and the Greeks. But though the Romans didn't like them, from Julius Caesar onwards they passed special legislation to protect the Jews, and renewed it constantly over the time of many emperors. When did they start being persecuted, then? It was when the church joined up with the state. And first of all the church used its influence over Constantine to restrict the privileges of the Jews. And then, little by little, more and more legislation came that eventually led to the positive discrimination against, and then the persecution of, the Jews. What a record Christendom has over the Jew.

How would you argue the case? It isn't quite so simple as it might first appear, is it? When Paul arrived in Jerusalem city, according to the end of the book of Acts, there was an almighty riot in the temple. They said he had brought Gentiles into the temple. He tried to explain to the maddened crowd at the foot of the castle steps that he hadn't brought any Gentiles in, and explained what he was doing. He told them of his conversion: how once he had been mad against the Christians, but then he got converted, and he tried to stay amongst the Jews. He said, 'But the Lord appeared to me in the temple, and told me to go to the Gentiles, and I said, "Lord, Lord, but I'd like to stay in Jerusalem and tell your lovely message to my fellow Jews in Jerusalem." And the Lord said to me, "No, they won't listen to you. They'll sling you out, so go to the Gentiles."' And at that point, the crowd that had been listening to him absolutely erupted: 'You evil beast! Taking our glorious Jewish privileges and giving them to the Gentiles' (see 22:1-22).

Here, even the Apostles had a good deal of arguing to do, to show that they were not being traitorous to the Jew in now going to the Gentile. They were not being traitorous to the Jew as they were now forming religious groups called Christians, composed of Jew and Gentile, and not demanding the Gentiles to be circumcised and become Jews.

What I am saying is this, that historically this last great section of 1 Samuel is very important, understood in its historical context, as justifying David before the nation, and it even provides a justification of his going to the Gentile Philistines. The historian cares to get the facts right. Its parallel in New Testament times is the vindication of Jesus Christ our Lord: personally, and the vindication of the tactics of his apostles to take the gospel to the Gentile,

and admit the Gentiles to becoming the people of God without having to be circumcised and to become Jews.

You say, 'That doesn't worry me.'

No, but if you have any Jewish friends, that worries them. And 1 Samuel was, in the first place, written to Jews. We shall only understand it and apply it rightly, therefore, if we try to put ourselves in the position of the Jews, and the Israelites to whom this book was first written. That at least is the kind of context that I would see this book in.

We started out with the literary observations. We have proceeded to the historical: both Old Testament and historical New Testament. In our next session we shall have to sketch in the smaller details of the individual stories. Of course you will in your wisdom discard a lot of all this wordy stuff that I have been talking, I'm sure you will. But that is how one blundering student goes around these things, trying to put the individual stories first of all into their literary context of the book, asking what their function is within the major story of the book, then trying to see it historically before, finally, we apply it practically to ourselves.

## Overview of Section Four

*1 Samuel 22:3–31:13*

If in my previous talk I have confused you more than usual, there is a sense in which I am glad for that. We naturally take David as not only the ancestor of our Lord, but in many respects the prototype of our Lord. Therefore, if we are not careful, we could shut our eyes to the facts of his life that for many a Jew in earlier times would have been the basis of mistrust, if not positive disbelief. If at least I have shown you that there were things in David's behaviour that call for explanation and justification, then I have done well indeed, not in order to shake your faith in the fact that he was God's anointed, but in order to show that if there were things to be explained, the historian now sets himself seriously to explain them.

If we have not seen that there are problems to be explained, we shall not see the point of God's word when it explains the problems. It is so often so that we can come to Scripture, and expound its stories, without having seen the problem that they are directed towards explaining. It is important to see the problem first, therefore. I have maintained historically that, for many years people would still have needed to be convinced that David, and David's house, had a legitimate right to the throne. And here is an historian doing his inspired best to answer the criticism and to justify David in regard to both his personal claim and the claim of his house.

### **Literary features of the narrative**

At the risk of wearying you excessively, observe now again some literary features of the narrative. Would you notice how section four answers to section one? Section one, in its first two major parts (1:1–2:11 and 2:12–4:1), is all about the priesthood, is it not? The first big element that meets us in section four is Saul's attitude to the priesthood. We have noticed before that section one, in its second half (4:2–5:12), is how God allowed Israel to lose the ark and it went among the Philistines. The second half of section four (27:1–31:13) is going to raise this whole big, thorny problem that David went over to the Philistines and was lost to Israel. That cannot be accidental; the historian has deliberately selected his material and put it together very carefully.

## Minor and major climaxes in section four

Then we have noticed before what I have called the minor and major climaxes in the progress of the thought of any one section. And I have put here what I judge to be the minor and major climaxes in this final section four.

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### Section 4 (22:3–31:13)

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#### *Movement 7 (22:3–26:25)*

##### **Part 1: David Reappears in Israel (22:3–23:29)**

- a. David comes up out of cave. Saul has Doeg slay God's priests
  - b. David saves Keilah from Philistines. Enquires of Lord and escapes Saul
  - c. David at Ziph: saved from Saul by coming of Philistines
- JONATHAN COMES SECRETLY TO DAVID: RECOGNIZES DAVID AS FUTURE KING:  
MAKES COVENANT WITH HIM
- 

##### **Part 2: David's 'Justification' (24:1–26:25)**

- d. David spared Saul's life in the cave, but shames him. Saul recognizes David will be king
  - e. David restrained by Abigail's wisdom from vengeance of the fool, Nabal
  - f. David spares Saul's life in the stockade, but removes his security
- VOICES IN THE NIGHT, SAUL KNEW DAVID'S VOICE. SAUL SAYS 'I HAVE PLAYED THE FOOL' (1 SAM 26:21)
- 

#### *Movement 8 (27:1–31:13)*

##### **Part 1: Israel Lose their Messiah (27:1–28:25)**

- a. David departs to Philistines: given Ziklag to live in
  - b. David's behaviour in Ziklag: spoils . . . Amalekites. Keeper of Achish's head
  - c. Saul gets witch to bring up Samuel who announces his doom
- SAUL FALLS FULL LENGTH ON EARTH: EATS AT WITCH'S TABLE
- 

##### **Part 2: God's Judgment on Saul (29:1–31:13)**

- d. Lords of Philistines sent David home. David does not fight against Israel
  - e. David recovers women and spoil of Ziklag from Amalekites
  - f. Philistines defeat Israelites; slay Saul's sons; Saul's suicide
- SAUL'S ARMOUR IN IDOL'S TEMPLE: HIS HEAD CUT OFF: BODY NAILED TO WALL: RESCUED AND BURIED BY JABESH-GILEADITES
- 

#### *Minor climax one: Jonathan comes to David*

Look at the first minor climax. Jonathan comes secretly to David, and now, for the first time explicitly, recognizes David as future king and makes a covenant with David.

'Listen all you members and descendants of the house of Saul!  
(Isn't this what the historian is pointing out?)

‘You say David slaughtered the house of Saul and came to the throne illegitimately. He grabbed it and robbed Saul’s children of the throne that was rightfully theirs. Oh did he, really? But the facts are otherwise, aren’t they?’

David would have been a loyal servant of Saul to the end of his days. It was Saul that drove him out! By many times trying to assassinate him privately, and then get him executed officially, or destroyed by the Philistines in battle: it was Saul that drove him out and forced David, in order to protect his own life, to take to the fortress and gather around him men that were prepared to fight for him and protect him. When that happened, let it be put down in history that the crown prince, rightful heir to the throne of Saul, came over to David, made a covenant with him and acknowledged David as king.

Who were the rightful representatives of Judaism when the whole case of Jesus of Nazareth came up for decision? The priests? The theologians? There was no rightful king at the time. Or was it the people? Do you regard Christianity as a splinter group of Judaism, or is Christianity mainstream Judaism? Says Paul, before Felix, ‘I stand here, Your Honour, and these men accuse me of being a ringleader of a sect. All right, call it a sect if you will. I happen to believe everything that is written in Moses and the Prophets. That’s more than the Sadducees believe’ (see Acts 24:10–21).

Wasn’t that so? The Sadducees were not prepared to take as authoritative the second and third divisions of holy Scripture. And in Israel they weren’t all like Caiaphas, were they? There was Saul, the most brilliant junior candidate for the rabbinate that Israel possessed. He came over to Jesus Christ. There was Nicodemus, and there was Joseph of Arimathea, members of the Sanhedrin. And even Gamaliel sat on the fence, at the best, and warned the Sanhedrin not to persecute the Christians, didn’t he? I fancy if you had asked Peter, he’d have told you that he wasn’t a member of a sect; he was mainstream Judaism.

Now look if you will at some of the minor climaxes. Look at the one that stands in the first part of section three (16:1–18:4). Jonathan strips himself and gives his robe and weapons to David, surrendering his regal paraphernalia, and makes a covenant with him. Now in section four, he comes secretly and acknowledges David as king.

#### *Minor climax two: Voices in the night*

Look at the next minor climax at the end of the second part of section four: voices in the night. Saul knew David’s voice and Saul says, ‘I have played the fool.’ You can’t help but compare that with some of the other minor and major climaxes, can you? ‘David behaved himself more wisely . . .’, says the paragraph that is counterpart in section three. So we have the contrast between David’s wisdom and Saul’s folly.

You may say it’s a long cry from that to the New Testament, but in some senses, it isn’t. You listen to our blessed Lord arguing with the Pharisees and claiming to be the very wisdom of God incarnate. ‘The Queen of the south came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and a greater than Solomon is here. Therefore, says the wisdom of God, “I will do this, this, and this, and wisdom is justified by her children”’ (see Matt 11–12). This is our Lord in argument with the Pharisees. The theme of wisdom and folly so marks these chapters in 1 and 2 Samuel, and the chapters that are to follow, that many a scholar would classify some of the big passages in these books as *wisdom literature*. We are going to meet *wise women*, and all kinds of wisdom,



and Ahithophel is a *wise* counsellor. And these and other such things lead many a scholar to classify it all as wisdom literature. And although we don't need to go to that extreme to classify it in that way, yet it will raise a very important point in our minds. Where lies wisdom? And what is wisdom? Our blessed Lord claims to be the wisdom of God incarnate: 'A greater than Solomon is here . . .'. How will you decide in this fallen world, what is wisdom, and therefore what is folly? In the end, of course, wisdom is self-evident, as folly is. God has made 'Christ . . . to us wisdom' (1 Cor 1:30).

*Minor climax three: Saul falls full length on the earth*

Look at the third minor climax. Saul falls full length on the earth, and he eats at a witch's table. Look at that whole row of similarities in those four sections. In section one, part three (4:2–5:12), we see old Dagon fallen flat upon the earth. Now Saul has fallen flat upon the earth. In section two, part three (13:1–14), we have the first time that Samuel tells Saul that his kingdom will not continue because he has not kept what the Lord commanded him. Now in the third section, part three (19:1–24), Saul strips himself naked and lies down all night under the compulsion of the Holy Spirit, but gets up and defies the Holy Spirit and continues his attacks on David.

*Major climax of section four: Saul's armour in an idol's temple*

Now see him at last, gone beyond all hope, fallen full length on the earth because he has brought up Samuel again, only to have him repeat the message that he had given Saul in earlier days. Finally, Saul's armour is to be found in the idol's temple. His head has been cut off, and his body is nailed to the wall. There is a progression, isn't there?

Therefore we have two things to think of in this great section. There is David's justification, but the other side of that coin will be the interpretation of the judgment that fell upon Saul and his house. What did it come for? And was the judgment just?

Historic Christianity tells us that Christianity came out of Judaism; Christianity went to the Gentiles. Millions of Gentiles have been converted and come to own Jesus of Nazareth as Messiah. It was Gentile Romans that destroyed the temple, wasn't it? It was Gentiles that eventually turned Jerusalem into a Gentile city. What will we say about the disasters that have fallen on Judaism? How has it been that Christianity has been so successful among Gentiles, and Judaism has had such a rough time among Gentiles? Would you put it all down to the evil of Christendom and their anti-Semitism, or were there serious reasons why God allowed Judaism thus to be afflicted by the Romans, to destroy both city and temple?

So there are these two things going on at the same time in this final section, and some of the answers to those questions. I cannot now deal with them, but I shall reserve for myself some time before we get on to the opening chapters of the second book of Samuel to deal with some of the matters that are raised in this final section.

## **How to win loyalty**

One thing I start with now is the initial step that Saul took against David. Saul had heard it said that Jonathan, his son, was in a conspiracy with David. And for Saul, of course, that was a very frightening thing.

Now Saul heard that David was discovered, and the men who were with him. Saul was sitting at Gibeah under the tamarisk tree on the height with his spear in his hand, and all his servants were standing about him. And Saul said to his servants who stood about him, 'Hear now, people of Benjamin; will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards, will he make you all commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds, that all of you have conspired against me? No one discloses to me when my son makes a covenant with the son of Jesse. None of you is sorry for me or discloses to me that my son has stirred up my servant against me, to lie in wait, as at this day.' (22:6–8)

That was a terrible situation for Saul to be in, wasn't it? He not only had what he thought was a mortal enemy in David, but now his own son had, so he'd heard, gone over to David and made a conspiracy with him against Saul. He was losing the loyalty of his darling son, Jonathan. What a tragedy and a pain for a father, and for a king. How would Saul reclaim the loyalty of Jonathan, and the loyalty of the priests? What would he do, and what would he be prepared to do, to reclaim that loyalty?

You will remember the words of the fourth Gospel when, after the resurrection of Lazarus, the Sanhedrin met and said, 'You fools! Can't you see what stares you in the face? If we let this man go, the whole world will go after him! They'll rise in revolt, and the Romans will come and take away our city and nation.' And Caiaphas the high priest said, 'It would be expedient therefore that one man dies for the whole people' (see John 11:47–50). They were feeling the ground slipping under their feet. Caiaphas was losing the loyalty of the people to this Jesus of Nazareth, and he had to reclaim their loyalty at any cost.

And poor old Saul is sitting there, and not only is he losing the loyalty of some of his army commanders, who are rumoured to rather like David, but now that of the crown prince as well. If he loses Jonathan, he'll lose all hopes of a dynasty. So Doeg speaks up. 'I saw David the son of Jesse' (they all called him 'the son of Jesse' when they wanted to be rude). 'I saw him go to Ahimelech the priest, and he consulted God for him' (see 22:9–10).

What moved Doeg to report on David? Well, Saul knew something about the human heart, didn't he? How would he retain loyalty? He said, 'Now gentlemen, I put it to you. Will this upstart, David, give you fields and chariots of the finest brands, and houses? But none of you tells me anything. I mean, gentlemen, after all, consider the realities of life. Under me you could have material prosperity. What has this David to offer you?' And none of them would say anything until Doeg piped up. He said, 'I saw him come to Ahimelech, and Ahimelech enquired of the Lord for him.'

'Did he really?' asks Saul. So Saul summons Ahimelech and all the priesthood. And there they stand; look at them in their white robes: a massive wall of white representing what is sacred, what is given to God, what is spiritual, what is holy. There they stand. Saul says, 'I could offer you fields; I could offer you material prosperity if you stay loyal to me. What I want you to do is to slaughter the priests of the Lord. You take your choice. You sacrifice the spiritual; you will be rewarded with the material.'

Of course it was politics in those days, wasn't it, like it used to be in Britain in the days of the Reformation. The king or the queen wanted the archbishop of Canterbury to be on their side, because if the church came on the side of the king they brought the nation with them. So

in the great arguments between English monarchs and the pope, the English monarchs took the church out from under the pope, and they put up the monarch as the head of the church. And to be an Archbishop, you had to be prepared to be loyal to the king. If as an Archbishop you went and spiritually ministered to one of these horrible non-conformists, you could have your head cut off outside the Tower of London for ministering spiritual sustenance to the rebels. Saul looked at it that way; that was his concept. Here was Ahimelech the high priest giving spiritual comfort and consolation to this rebel, David. He said that was high treason.

What would you say about that? Would you have been happy with an American that acted as a priest for Germans under Hitler? Would you have been happy with an American that went and tried to evangelize the Germans? With whom would you side in this kind of dispute? Would you have sided with Saul against Ahimelech? Life is it a bit complicated, isn't it?

What Saul in the end demanded was that they slaughter the priests, every single man of them, and wipe out the priesthood completely. The only man that was prepared to do it was Doeg, and he was an Edomite. There have been other Edomites in history. Herod of Matthew 2 was an Idumean (that is, from Edom). He wasn't even a Jew, but to retain his kingdom against the claims of this newborn Messiah, he was prepared to massacre all the babies from one year old to two years old in order to retain the loyalty of his subjects.

What interesting questions these are, aren't they? And ultimately, of course, the choice that Saul enforced upon the people was that they choose the material goods, or they choose the priesthood, ministering in its function to put people in touch with God.

Let's leave it there and give you time to think over what you would advise the people to have done when Saul threw out the challenge.

## Questions and Contributions

### *Session Three*

#### **David going to the Philistines**

AUDIENCE: You mentioned that David spent some time in the land of Ziklag, a year and four months. It was always my belief that he was backslidden at this time, that he was out of fellowship with the Lord. The Bible says that Ziklag was attacked by the Amalekites and the women, the great and the small, were taken. The city was burned, and David's men wanted to stone him. And the phrase that struck me was that he 'encouraged himself in the LORD' (1 Sam 30:6 KJV). There was a turning point back to the Lord, and we mentioned that as David was rejected by Israel, he was accepted by the Gentiles, as our Lord was rejected by Israel and accepted by the Gentiles. I'm not sure if David was in proper fellowship with the Lord when he was at Ziklag. I have always thought that it wasn't so, and that when he 'encouraged himself in the LORD' he was going back to the Lord. So I am wondering if anyone would like to comment on that.

DWG: Yes, now the question before us is whether David was doing right or wrong in going to the Philistines, whether his going to the Philistines was an expression of the fact that he was out of fellowship with God and doing wrong. And is it also so that the historian means to tell us that he was out of fellowship with the Lord until that point where the Amalekites had taken Ziklag, and the people talked of stoning him, and David 'encouraged himself in the LORD', and that was, so to speak, his coming back from his backslidden state? Would people care to comment on that, you preachers, for instance, who have preached on it many times? And would you then proceed to support your decision by arguing the evidence from the narrative here?

AUDIENCE: A risky venture at best, but I have preached on that in the past and I have always taken that position, but the context that I put it in always had a sort of middle of the road characterization. I compared it in my mind to the time that Rahab the harlot lied to save her family. Now, at the time she did that, I take it that her faith must have been fledgling at best, in its infancy. It had not developed to the point that she could completely trust God. And how many times have we done that? We have done things that are out of character, that are inconsistent with what we otherwise would hold to be true, and we do something that is expedient; and it works and it gets us by. Someone made a reference in a previous session to the directive versus the permissive will of God. Perhaps we could say we get off into the far reaches of his permissive will.

I have taken the position in the past that David, in this particular context when he goes down to the Philistines, is doing the very best he knows to do, just to survive. It is critical that he survive; he is the anointed. He does something that is expedient. It may not be the thing that we would agree with. If we'd been in the same position perhaps we'd not have done it in the same way. But in the context of his particular situation, and through the exigency of the moment, he goes and in effect joins up with the enemy in order to survive. And I must agree with the first person who raised this question just now that at some point he substitutes whatever help he had obtained from the enemy with the encouragement that there is a higher road that he can take, that there is a way out of this particular dilemma, by encouraging himself in the Lord and doing things in a Christ-like way. He comes out from among those whom he first had to feign madness in front of in order to come among them. He now stops acting like a madman and sets about acting like a king. And that's quite a contrast.

In light of the teaching we've had, I'm rethinking this (and I'm getting some askance looks here). Obviously if we compare David with Christ in whom there is no sin, then this doesn't quite fit. Christ, out of love, went to the Gentiles. His own rejected him, and he went to the Gentiles and grafted them in; and it was an expression of his great grace and mercy. If you interpret it in that context, David perhaps had designs on obtaining the Philistine camp and incorporating them into the nation of Israel at some future point. And if he could have accomplished that purpose, that would have made his own nation that much stronger and larger. I had never considered that before, but I suppose that is a possibility. Things didn't work out. He had to get out of there. He feigned madness and abandons the idea. He eventually becomes king in Hebron and later on makes his capital in Jerusalem and maintains the kingdom intact with the twelve tribes.

That's my best shot, anyway.

DWG: Thank you very much indeed.

AUDIENCE: I'd just like to make a quick comment about one thing that David does here that he didn't do before he went to the Gentiles. We don't read that he enquired of the Lord until we come to this portion we're discussing, and here he asks if he should pursue the troops (30:8). I just wonder if that shows something of this lack of dependency on the Lord before that time. Now David enquires of the Lord, and perhaps that's what he should have done before he made his move to Ziklag.

DWG: Thank you very much.

AUDIENCE: I'd just like to make two observations without really commenting on the question. In 1 chapter 30 we read this:

And when David came to Ziklag, he sent of the spoil unto the elders of Judah, even to his friends, saying, 'Behold a present for you of the spoil of the enemies of the LORD.' (v. 26 KJV)

And I'd like to also point out that several times David enquires of the Lord while he's at Ziklag. When the Lord answers him, there's no reprimand. The text doesn't support the idea that there was a loss of fellowship. You can see that Saul was out of fellowship, and the Lord didn't answer him, but it never says that of David.

DWG: Thank you very much. Now, someone else over here.

AUDIENCE: I'm going to step into waters that are above my head. If we look at this passage through the eyes of a Jewish person living in the days of David, as we have been encouraged to do in our last session, then the historian who is writing this is bringing before us a man who has been rejected by Israel and the establishment. He is a fugitive; he is an impostor, from the establishment's point of view. Now when he leaves Israel and he goes down into the land of the Philistines, that is, into the land of the Gentiles, he behaves himself in such a fashion that while he is at first accepted by Gentiles, he is nevertheless at the same time loyal to the Jewish nation, because while he is being accepted by the Philistine, Gentile nation, he is at the same time making inroads against the time when he will be king. And he is actually helping the Jewish nation at the same time that he is being accepted, after a fashion, amongst the Philistine nation. So here is a man who is being shown walking a tightrope between being loyal to the Jewish nation while in the process of being rejected by that nation. And he can, as we've had it suggested to us, come back with the spoils of that acceptance, back into the Jewish nation, when they will receive him later on as their king. And I throw that out as a suggestion as to what we might learn from this passage historically before we make too many applications.

DWG: Very good. I think that is very important, and our contributions have been very helpful. First of all, a morality question. We do have to be careful in premature judgments about morality. When I have been in various countries around the world, the missionaries have counselled me that one of the great difficulties has been getting believers to tell the truth all the time. It is a great weakness amongst some of our fellow believers, brought up in their particular cultures, to learn to tell the truth all the time, and even as mature believers they will sometimes tell you lies, so that of course the missionaries have to insist on truth telling. 'Do not lie to one another,' Scripture plainly teaches (Col 3:9). And therefore some of the stories of the Old Testament are a bit of an embarrassment, to say the least. But we must be careful, as has been said here, not to condemn Rahab too quickly, because in the Epistle to the Hebrews the Holy Spirit says she is a woman of faith: 'by faith' she received the spies (11:31), though it was in connection with those spies that she told a bit of a lie to the authorities in Jericho.

Similarly, the Gibeonites have been chased, not only by their fellow Canaanites but by many a preacher, for enacting that tremendous lie and dressing up as though they were belonging to a city afar off. And Israel have been castigated for not enquiring of the Lord, for if they'd enquired of the Lord they would have found out the falseness of these wicked Canaanites that had so wretchedly deceived them.

I don't know what the preachers would have the Gibeonites do. According to their record they had heard what Moses said, and Moses had said if you were a city afar off there was mercy for you, suppose only you were prepared to surrender and be servants to Israel. But if you were a city near at hand you had to be destroyed (Josh 9:24-25). If you had been a Gibeonite and heard what Moses said, what would you have done? Would your response be, 'Well I would have just sat there and said, "What a pity I'm not from a city afar off. I must now have my throat slit, so here's my throat. I do wish I'd been from a city afar off but I'm from a city near at hand, so I must."'

Well, if you say that you're obviously more spiritual than I am, because if I had been a Gibeonite, I'd have said, 'Well if there's a chance to prove to anybody by hook or by crook that I'm from afar off I'll do it!'

If we were to transpose the whole story to your experience, what a mercy you were afar off when Christ came, because that's how you got saved, isn't it? But then you *were* afar off, you wretched lot, very far off! Anyway, that's beside the point.

I think that it is an important observation that God looks upon the motivation of the heart. It doesn't mean he condones lying, necessarily. We shall come across the same thing later on in 2 Samuel where I shall ask you to decide for me the rights and wrongs of deliberately deceiving people by using double talk, deliberately choosing your words so the person you are talking to will take one meaning out of them when you mean the very opposite. Is that a right thing to do?

But now to come back to the question of David being amongst the Philistines, and whether that was an unworthy thing to do. I would have thought there are two matters of prominence here. One of them has been mentioned: if David going off to the Philistines to save his life is an unworthy thing, what would you say of Jesus of Nazareth who, when they took up stones to stone him, withdrew out of the temple? During the last week before his crucifixion, when the crowds came to the temple, he came and preached because the crowds were there all around him and the authorities could not arrest him in the absence of the people, as they wanted to. And at night when the people went away he went to a secret location on the Mount of Olives. Was that cowardice too? Was that lack of faith that God would protect him? Was it lack of faith on his part when, after having raised Lazarus he went off into a city called Ephraim into some obscure village, because he knew the authorities were determined to crucify him (John 10:40–42)?

You wouldn't dare to say so, would you? So on that ground, we shouldn't too readily jump to the fact that David had a lack of faith. Having many times come within an inch of his life over long months, and only just escaping by a hair's breadth, and finding Saul finally absolutely unrepentant, he said, 'Now it's better I go to the Philistines.' I would find it very difficult to argue that this was some lack of faith on his part, some worldliness, some lack of trust in the Lord.

But to come to, what seems to me, the major point that was made. If you take not the one detail of his lies from time to time, but the whole tenor of the Philistine episode, and you are considering the case that will be made against David by some of the people subsequently in Israel, that he couldn't possibly be the Lord's anointed, then see how it would come across. Such people might have said, 'Who said he was the Lord's anointed? Oh, you say he was anointed by the prophet? Really? We never heard of that. When was this? Oh, it was done in secret? I should think so. And how could that have been of God? If God had anointed Saul he wouldn't go and anoint anybody else, would he? Samuel must have been out of fellowship with God, then, if he anointed another. And how could David have been the rightful king? He never was presented to the people. The people didn't acclaim him like they acclaimed Saul, did they? And how can he be the Lord's anointed if he went off to the Philistines and fought with them against Israel?'

What would you have said in answer to that charge if you had been writing the book of 1 Samuel? Did David fight against Israel among the Philistines? Let's pass over for a minute any lies he told. What were the facts? What is the historian telling you? In that whole episode among the Philistines, was David disloyal to Israel? What are the big facts? No. He never once fought against Israel.

You say, 'He came within a whisker of doing it.'

Yes, he did indeed. The historian isn't trying to hide the fact. When the Philistines finally assembled to march against Israel and stage a very big invasion that went right through the centre of Israel to Mount Gilboa in the northeast, David went with them.

You say, 'There you are. He was being disloyal to Israel. If he hadn't been before, now he was. He goes with the Philistines against Israel.'

Can you tell me why he didn't succeed in going and actually fighting along with the Philistines? Do tell me. What is the historian's case?

You say, 'They wouldn't trust him.' And why wouldn't they trust him? Give me the reasons. Yes, his background. He was a Jew. And what did the lords of the Philistines *actually say* about David? Somebody read the actual words. What did they actually say?

As the lords of the Philistines were passing on by hundreds and by thousands, and David and his men were passing on in the rear with Achish, the commanders of the Philistines said, 'What are these Hebrews doing here?' And Achish said to the commanders of the Philistines, 'Is this not David, the servant of Saul, king of Israel, who has been with me now for days and years, and since he deserted to me I have found no fault in him to this day.' But the commanders of the Philistines were angry with him. And the commanders of the Philistines said to him, 'Send the man back, that he may return to the place to which you have assigned him. He shall not go down with us to battle, lest in the battle he become an adversary to us. For how could this fellow reconcile himself to his lord? Would it not be with the heads of the men here? Is not this David, of whom they sing to one another in dances, "Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands"?' (29:2-5)

That's a pretty powerful case, in my book at any rate. The lords of the Philistines heard that David had been appointed 'the keeper of the head' of Achish (see 28:2 KJV). They couldn't believe it. What on earth was Achish thinking about? David hadn't a great reputation for respecting Philistine heads, had he? And Achish appointed him the keeper of his head? The lords of the Philistines objected most strongly. It was all right when Achish put David in Ziklag, that funny little place out in the desert. Now Achish was proposing that David lead a contingent of Hebrew troops among the armies of the Philistines? They said, 'What utter nonsense! You can't rely on the man's loyalty to us. His loyalty is with Israel, and in the middle of the battle he'll turn around against us and take our heads off!'

The Philistine lords knew David's character. They said he would never be disloyal to Israel. 'Oh, he'll grasp the opportunity,' they said. 'He wants to reconcile himself with his nation and with his lord.'

Was that true? Did David long to get back to Israel? Oh, do see the major case being put forward in the text. You can bring up the question of lying if you like, or that due to his lack of faith he went under the Philistines, but the major case that the historian is urging is the



right of David to be king! The people would have heard he'd gone among the Philistines. Yes, he went among the Philistines. Let me tell you why he had to go among the Philistines. Whose fault was it he went among the Philistines? The establishment drove him out.

'Ah,' you say, 'but they didn't know how loyal David was to Israel.'

Didn't they? Wait a minute. Who killed the giant Goliath? And who was the insane person that drove out the man that had delivered Israel from the Philistines? Who will you blame for David going to the Philistines? And when he got to the Philistines, what is the historic fact? Was David ever disloyal to Israel among the Gentiles?

Surely, that is the big case that the historian is arguing. And in my book, it is a very powerful case. It's not only saying, 'Yes, well, at heart David never wished Israel any harm.' That sort of argument might not get very far. Here we have it, on the testimony of the Philistines themselves, that they wouldn't allow him to bring his Hebrew contingent to fight against Israel. They didn't trust him. The loyalty of David to Israel is established, even among the Gentiles.

If we can settle at the historical level that that is the major thrust of this bit of the narrative, then we can think of it at another level. Of course it is the fact that the Lord Jesus himself personally remained in Israel and only once did he step outside its borders. But he commanded his apostles to go to the Gentiles, didn't he? At what point in the history of the Acts of the Apostles did the apostles go to the Gentiles? 'Your blood be on your own heads,' they said. 'It was right that the gospel be preached to you first. But when you stoned Paul, and left him for dead, and tried to murder him time after time after time, and you judged yourselves unworthy of eternal life, your blood be on your own head, then. Now we turn to the Gentiles' (see Acts 13). Let's come to the very big, grievous question that has come to the fore in all sorts of writing. Surely, you have come across it. It fills the pages of even evangelical books on the topic.

There are some that say it would be a thing of very bad taste for Christians to try and convert Jews. Yes, some evangelicals say it. Why? Because evangelicals ought to remember the terrible anti-Semitism for which Christianity is responsible. We ought to remember the gas chambers of Auschwitz and Dachau, and we ought not say anything against the Jews that couldn't decently be said when you were standing inside those gas chambers.

I'm sure you won't go to the position of saying, 'We ought not as Christians to try to convert Jews.' Liberalism is now saying, 'Judaism is a valid alternative way to God, just as valid as Christianity is. You don't have to convert Jews to Christ. Their way is just as valid a way to God as ours is.' You don't accept it, do you? You want to say that there is no other name given amongst men whereby you must be saved, except the name of Jesus (Acts 4:12). The liberals will turn around on you and say, 'Yes, you're the kind of person, you narrow minded bigot, that has taught your children that the wicked Jews murdered Jesus, and sowed in their hearts anti-Semitism against the Jews!'

Surely, you've read it. You can't move in certain circles without meeting this kind of thing all the time. What is your answer? In sending the gospel to the Gentiles, has Jesus and his gospel been responsible for anti-Semitism? Has Jesus provoked Gentiles to be against Israel? You know your history. What do you say to the charge? What do you say to your Jewish friends? It is a very big historical question, is it not?

The answer is that Christendom has been guilty of the most appalling anti-Semitism. Christendom got it into its head early on that the church is Israel and that God has abandoned and forsaken Israel forever. Is it true that God has abandoned Israel? No, it is not, and we want to get up on our hind legs and say it. Christianity does not teach that God has abandoned Israel. Christianity says, 'Yes, they are in a grievous state because they rejected their Messiah—enemies, for the gospel's sake, but beloved for the fathers' sake' (see Rom 11:28). And God will yet restore Israel. All-Israel will be saved. That is true Christianity. You want to preach it, don't you? I do!

And has Christianity taught the church to join up with the political state and, in the interest of church politics, to persecute Jews? Christendom has done it over many centuries, but is that what Christianity taught? It is a very important part of our gospel to plead the case of Christ and to justify the Lord and his message. It is not true Christianity that was responsible for the hideous effects of the autos-da-fé in Spain, backed by the church. Nor is true Christianity responsible for the gas chambers in Germany, instituted by Hitler, who when he went to Spain to support Franco was blessed by the pope. But what shall we say about Luther and his fearful persecution and denunciation of the Jews?

Some true Christians have cause to repent, haven't they? When Hitler came to power in Germany he demanded that small, evangelical groups associate in a *bund* and so the so-called assemblies, along with Baptists and Pentecostals, were all put into one *bund*, the appointed leaders of which were responsible directly to the government. And on those conditions, these churches were allowed still to function. But there was another condition. It was that the churches that were allowed to function under this system must agree that they would not admit Jews into their fellowship. How many open assemblies signed and agreed to the conditions? They will say that they didn't know what Hitler was doing or was about to do. It's not my place to judge them before God, but I can tell you there are men of my age and older, who now live with a very troubled conscience. Exclusive brethren, so called, refused to sign such a thing and went underground.

These are real issues, but as our friend here said, our wisdom surely, first of all, is to take the history in its historical context. What was the writer doing for the public for which he was immediately writing? If he was trying to justify the claim of David and his descendants to the throne of the nation, as the anointed of the Lord, he had to answer some of the objections that had been levelled against them on this ground, amongst others, that David at one stage went among the Philistines.

AUDIENCE: Just as you put the argument about people who would sign a document, refusing to allow the Jews to celebrate the Lord's Supper or to worship with them, there is something in us that wants to say, 'Why don't you stand up and behave like a man? Be a king; act like a king, act like you're an ambassador of God under his power.' And yet we realize that to do so would certainly lead to someone taking off your head. And in this context, when we talk about David going to the Philistines, we say, 'Well David, if you behave yourself like a king, you're going to get your head cut off,' and we blink when he goes to the Philistines. Somehow we ascribe to that behaviour akin to what we would ascribe to the person who stands up and behaves like a man, and the two are just not the same. And I cannot, without some misgivings,

reconcile those two behaviours in David. I understand why he did it; I've done the same thing myself. I'll not go into the details, but notwithstanding that fact . . .

DWG: We won't cut off your head, anyway.

AUDIENCE: Thank you. But notwithstanding that fact, having it to do over again and encouraging myself in the Lord, there is something in me that would want to behave like a king. But I graciously accept any apology you wish to make for me consorting with the enemy as David did.

DWG: You hear the case, gentlemen, a very good case. We are learning our job, which is to argue the case for the Lord Jesus, to be the mouthpiece of the Holy Spirit as he vindicates him. We are learning it by transposing ourselves to this ancient historical situation. And the historian is urging the case for David, and vindicating him from some of the slanders that have been brought against him. But as we do that, now there is a very powerful case coming up here on my left that says, well, if David had been a bit better and more like a king he wouldn't have gone to the Philistines in the first place. So yes, I shall have to let that stand. Anybody want to answer that?

AUDIENCE: I didn't know that you were going to ask another question just before I stuck my hand up! One passage that has been coming back to me as we've been discussing this is in reference to our Lord where the prophecy was, 'Out of Egypt I called my son' (Matt 2:14-15). God has often used the armies and the protection of the government of an enemy to protect his anointed, or to protect his people: through Babylon, through Egypt and through many situations where the 'whip' became initially a source of protection, and then God said, 'I will whip the whip. I will correct those who were initially your enemies but became a source of protection, and then finally judgment will fall.' And it's ironic that David never turned his back on Israel; he went over and found protection among his enemies, as Christ did initially at his birth when his father took him to Egypt. And out of Egypt he brought his son and was able to protect him in that environment when I might have said, 'Why didn't God protect Joseph and just send him to Galilee, when he could have been preserved very easily there?' But I didn't mean to open that up.

One question we probably won't have time to answer, but just maybe to consider for a later discussion, is a different matter. After a monarchy has been established, how do you go back to theocracy? Is it possible? We are not saying the monarchy was wrong, but in the confines of the church we see monarchies established. Is the only way to go back to a theocracy to totally destroy or walk away from the monarchy? Because God's ultimate design for government was to have a theocratic monarchy. So he allowed the theocracy to stay to a certain point and be dominant, then he allowed monarchy to take over when Israel was thinking that was the only form of government; and yet, eventually he allowed the monarchy to recede in prominence, and to ultimately combine the two in Christ as the perfect theocracy and have God reigning as king over Israel. And that's his ultimate design. I believe that this was all a part of a progressive development that God wanted to ultimately see fulfilled in his time. But in the church, we have adopted the monarchy as man ruling, over the prominence of God implementing his rule. I'm curious because I'm involved directly in an area that is presided over by monarchy, and I would like to know how to practically bring in a theocracy.

DWG: Well, that second point is very interesting. I'd like first of all to thank you for putting forward a very strong argument in answer to my learned friend here on the left. You have asked why God didn't protect the infant Christ and Joseph and Mary, and do a few miracles, instead of having Joseph and Mary take the infant child away from Herod's barbarous intentions, and take him down to Egypt; but God chose at that stage to shelter the infant Christ and his parents among the Gentiles.

I would like to add at that point that there would have been an alternative for David to stay in the land, but it wouldn't have involved God putting a hedge of miracle around him; it would have involved David in using his sword. Saul was so determined to slay him that there was no way that David could have stayed in the land without raising his army against Saul and slaughtering Saul. That was the alternative. David tried to argue the case: 'I am not against you! Why do you keep chasing me around the place like this?' The only alternative would be to stay in the land and fight it out with Saul. And the historian will tell you why David didn't take that course. David did not take that course because of respect for Saul.

Our Lord could have called, not for Goliath's sword, but for the swords of twelve legions of angels (Matt 26:53). He could have dealt with Caiaphas; he needn't have been on a cross. Why didn't he use that method? I want to say that David's escape to the Philistines when he could so easily have got into the palace and taken Saul's head off is worth noticing. After you've taken off the head of Goliath it isn't so difficult to take off Saul's head, you know. Why didn't he do it? I want to argue that his refraining from killing Saul when he had him in his palm and could have killed him many times, but took the alternative of getting out of Saul's way, was not weakness but tremendous respect and love. And if there is a true analogy I would want to ask, 'Why did our Lord not use his power as Messiah and bring his legions down, and deal like a king would with Caiaphas, the corrupt politician-priest, and Annas and all that crowd that were abusing their temple authority, and turning the very temple of God into a robber's den? Why didn't he use his sword? Well the answer to that is the Christian gospel.

Then I'll just reply to this good man here, because he asks a very big question. You say that in your part of the world the church has gone over to monarchy instead of keeping to theocracy, if I've got you right. And what ought we to do? I think, sir, in answering that question (though I myself raised it right at the beginning in our first talk) I want to say that first of all we always have to go very carefully if we draw lessons from Old Testament to New, because Israel was a religious people under a priesthood, and they were also a political nation. It was at that political level that we talked about there being a theocracy. If you come to the church, as I understand it the church is not a political institution; it is a spiritual one. It is only by *analogy* therefore that we would talk about 'the government' of the church, and say that the government of the church should be a theocracy. Yes, I grant you that immediately.

If people have departed from that pattern in the government of the church, what should we do? Well I would draw a contrast between the church and Israel. When Israel demanded a political monarchy, God agreed, and God had Saul anointed, and God had David anointed, and so forth, as political men. Saul and David never were priests in the tabernacle. If it is true, and I know what you mean, that in Christendom instead of being happy to remain, so to speak, as theocracies in direct responsibility to the Lord, they have added institutions of

Church government that are not countenanced in the New Testament, then I would want to say the first step is to ask what authority they have for introducing these systems. A monarchical bishop, for instance, was an invention of the late first, or perhaps early second, century. Have they any biblical authority for it? Has God ever anointed any of these men as monarchical bishops? That is what I would want to ask.

Some people would reply, 'Oh yes, Timothy was an incipient, embryonic, monarchical bishop.' But the case could be disputed, couldn't it? I would want to say therefore, that there is a very big contrast here: Saul was anointed; God agreed with the system and went with it. So was David. I would myself take a bit of convincing that God himself anointed the first monarchical bishop, and he had authority to anoint all others after him. And if he doesn't have authority from God to do it, then I would say that our obedience to the Lord must make us stick to what God has authorized. And I would want to say that it is not, therefore, schismatic if we say we must be free to obey Scripture. We are not being schismatic, if in our hearts we retain love for all God's people.

But now there is a question here, and the mic needs to be transported. I don't know who's got it now. Someone has swallowed it.

AUDIENCE: I feel almost like the first time that the Lord got me to my feet at the breaking of bread, because I just want to scream out. I want to thank you for this wonderful concept of *prototypes*. It seems to me that all of these prototypes find their fulfilment, and all of these questions seem to find their answer, in Romans 13.

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgement. For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. (vv. 1-4)

And then it tells us to render unto all their dues. And the concept here in all of these situations is the same; that even though Saul was in authority, Saul was under authority. He was under the authority of the Lord. And so David, being under Saul's authority, as long as Saul was under the authority of the Lord, David had a responsibility to obey Saul. When Saul moved away from the Lord, David's responsibility was still to be under the Lord, where Saul should have been. It wasn't David departing from Saul, but Saul taking his protection away from David. The same thing is true in the local church. We have a responsibility to the elders in the local assembly, and if the elders in the local assembly depart from the Lord, we still (as much as we can) have a responsibility to the Lord to be under that authority, but only as they are under the Lord's authority. So what a beautiful picture you gave us yourself when you mentioned this question of 'By what authority?'

DWG: That is true, and if I might add this. To come across now and transpose it into another key, when our Lord was amongst his disciples and it was so evident that many of the religious authorities in Judaism during our Lord's life were corrupt men (others were very sincere men,

but some of them were very corrupt and cynical). Our Lord said to the disciples, 'The scribes and the Pharisees sit on Moses' seat, so practise and observe whatever they tell you—but not what they do' (Matt 23:2–3). Our Lord was not a religious rebel; he was not a religious anarchist. And when after Pentecost our risen Lord commanded his disciples to go out and preach in his name, you will remember how they got in trouble very soon with the Sanhedrin (Acts 4). And this whole question of authority was at the very heart of the two investigations of the apostles before the Sanhedrin.

The Sanhedrin contained the high priest. They were 'the builders', so to speak, and Peter had to defend himself against the charge that he had defied the religious authority of the land. His answer is what our good friend here has given. 'Gentlemen, God laid the foundations, but you builders have rejected it' (see v. 11).

Where did he get that? He is quoting Scripture. The Scripture had said there would come a time when the very builders would reject the chief cornerstone that God would lay, and in spite of that God would make it the head of the corner (Ps 118:22). The context of the Psalm is the temple. Peter is saying, 'And look gentlemen, God has indicated that Jesus is the Messiah by raising him from the dead. You see the implications. You've rejected that chief cornerstone. By the resurrection, God has made him the head of the corner. He told us to preach. If you now use your authority and say we are not to preach, well we leave you to judge. Shall we obey God or man?' (see Acts 5:27–32). Peter and company were not religious anarchists. That is a very important point.

## Conclusion

We have not got so far this morning in our thinking and discussions, but there might be some truth in the original contention that the final section in 1 Samuel was probably written originally to vindicate David and the house of David. It was addressed of course to the Israelites: the Judahites and the Israelites. And it is arguing the case that, yes, David was the legitimate ruler even though Saul had been anointed of God. Yes, it is true David went to the Philistines. He did certain other things as well, and you could try and make a case against him that he wasn't really the Lord's anointed because he was disloyal and went to the Philistines. And I am suggesting, and I think perhaps I have partly converted you, or at least led you to line up on my side, that the historian is justifying David, and in this particular: he is pointing out to you very carefully that David was never disloyal to Israel. He came very near it, but he never was. Though he told some lies now and again, and said he had been raiding the southern cities of Judah, when all the while he had not been raiding the southern cities of Judah; he'd been raiding the Amalekites and others. He said to the Philistine king, 'Yes, I was raiding today.'

'Where have you been raiding today, old boy?'

'The southern cities of Judah.'

And the Philistine king said, 'Marvellous, he'll make himself so disliked by the Judahites that he'll never be able to go back, and he'll be my loyal servant forever.'

Well, you may decry David telling the untruth, but the very untruth underlies the point that he had not been raiding Judah! Indeed, the opposite was true. He'd been raiding these

other nations like the Amalekites and the Geshurites and people like that, and taking the spoil and sending it to the princes of Judah. That is what he'd been doing.

Of course, you may come back to me and say that was bribery. Well, before you object too strongly, let me transpose the thing into another key and come to another bit of history. Our blessed Lord, being rejected by his people, has won the battle, 'taken captivity captive, and given gifts to men' (see Eph 4:8). I'm not altogether persuaded that the Lord hasn't bribed you, for by the sound of your prayers this week you seem to have received I don't know how many gifts from him as a result of the battle he has fought. Would you have me now believe that he's bribed you by his magnificent gifts? Some of you admit the case, so case dismissed!

Very good. Would somebody now commend us to the Lord in prayer?

## Why Literary Questions Matter

### *Understanding Narrative History*

This morning, I was not able to cover all that I had intended to cover and so I am now a little bit out of place. Perhaps you may well think that I've been out of place for a long time, but that is another matter. I ask your permission now to alter slightly the advertised program. I wish to remain with some of the questions that arose this morning, before I eventually proceed to the next topic. And what I do not get done then, I shall do, God willing, in a session to follow.

### **Why focus on literary questions?**

I would like first of all to say again, and in a little more detail, what some of you have questioned in the interval, namely, what on earth am I doing with all this supposed literary stuff? Isn't this a strange way of treating holy Scripture?

### **Seeing verses in their context**

I don't know whether it is strange or not, but I would like to say in the first instance that I am doing very little different from what I suspect most of you do in the serious study of an epistle, like for instance the Epistle to the Romans. It is the fact that some of you (all of you I suspect, and certainly I) will from time to time take an individual verse of Scripture, such as John 3:16, 'For God so loved the world . . .' and we shall preach it just as a verse, as it stands, completely out of its context. For the purposes of our sermon it wouldn't make any difference whether the verse was written in Genesis, Leviticus, Thessalonians, the Revelation, or the Gospel of John; it would still be valid in its own right. And I suspect millions of preachers have done so with John 3:16. They have been right in doing so, of course, and God has blessed their sermons immensely. I say nothing against it. On the other hand, if you would see the glory of John 3:16 fully, one of the things you should do is to read it in its context, and see what it is doing within its context.

### **A logical flow of thought**

As I say, you would consider the context when studying a serious epistle like the Epistle to the Romans. If I were to ask you what is the function of chapters 6, 7 and 8 in Romans, I suspect I should meet an immediate reply: 'The function of those chapters is to announce and describe to us God's position for making us holy. It is about sanctification.'



But if I should then say, 'Why are chapters 6, 7, and 8 not at the very front of the book? Is sanctification not the need of the hour? Why does he bother with all that stuff at the beginning? Why doesn't he get straight to the practical things? These tiresome preachers do go around the earth before getting to the main thing.'

Well, wait a minute, if you want to preach Romans 6, 7 and 8 on sanctification as the front part of your message, go ahead and do it. There's no sin in doing it. It might be appropriate. But within the Epistle to the Romans you have a sustained, logical setting forth of the Christian gospel. And therefore chapters 6, 7 and 8 stand where they do, and not elsewhere, because of what their function is, and that function is best exercised there. The early chapters are devoted to showing that all are sinners and stand under the wrath of God. The second half of chapter 3, chapter 4 and the first half of chapter 5 are devoted to saying how we can be delivered from the wrath of God, that is, in a word, how we can be *justified*. And then come chapters 6, 7 and 8 showing how the justified can also then be *sanctified*. They are in that order because it is a logical order. They are in that order because we need first to be justified—the action of a moment, before we are fit to go on to the question of sanctification. They are in a logical order.

You would not be upset with me, or think I was being strange (or at least not more strange than usual), if I suggested to you, as I have done, that chapters 6, 7, and 8 of Romans are not a collection of isolated verses. The verses all contribute to this overall theme that is our sanctification, and you will happily compare those chapters with the preceding chapters. The verses in the second half of chapter 3, chapter 4 and the first half of chapter 5 are not isolated verses either. Those verses stand together in a logical flow of thought, serving the function of explaining on what terms we are justified.

### **Seeing stories in their context**

If then we rightly say that the verses in Romans in any one place are best and fully understood if we first look at them in their context, and then ask ourselves, 'What function does that major context fulfil, and how does the individual verse help that context to fulfil its function?', then there should surely be nothing extraordinary if someone suggests that the stories in an historical book, interesting as they are as individual stories, do not however finally stand merely as isolated stories. The stories are very often arranged as part of a larger context, and each story contributes its part to the major theme, or themes, with which that context is concerned. And therefore if we would come at the true exegesis and then exposition and finally application of any one story, we shall be on safer ground if, first of all we ask, 'Now where does this story come, and in what context, and what is the major theme running through the stories that stand side by side in that context?'

That is all I'm doing, actually, which is nothing profound, is it? At least, I am attempting to do it.

### **The historian's use of formal summaries**

You say, 'But wait a minute, what evidence have you got for this claim that stories are not meant to stand as isolated stories, and that there are these contexts, or what you call *movements* of thought? What evidence is there?'

Allow me to point out once more what I have been pointing out in Samuel as we have proceeded, because it is of practical importance. There are indications from the historian himself how he is dividing up his narrative. We noticed at the end of chapter 7 the matter of the formal summary. You come to the very great climax of a tremendous victory over the Philistines, after the earlier horrible defeat. Now you come to the great climax and the glorious triumph over the Philistines, the erection of the stele, the stone, in memory of the occasion. It was called *Ebenezer*: the stone of help, 'hitherto has the Lord helped us'. It is a glorious climax. And then, as we saw, the historian enters three verses of general formal summary. It is not another story but a simple summary, giving you a summary of Samuel's life and ministry (vv. 15–17). We saw the same thing after we reached that terrible climax in chapter 15 when Saul was finally rejected; then there is a formal summary (vv. 34–35). So this is one of the devices a historian will use to indicate how he himself groups his stories into groups.

### Identifying major and minor climaxes

You say, 'All right, but what's all this you talked about minor and major climaxes? Isn't that rather odd?'

Well, I don't think it is, in particular. Do you? Have you never had the experience of sitting by the fireside or the radiator, or wherever you sit, and your friend starts to say, 'Oh let me tell you this story'? And he says, 'I was here and there, and then the plane took off, and I said something to this and that person.'

And you are listening to them and thinking, 'This is going to build up presently to something really exciting.'

Then your friend stops.

And you say, 'Well, yes? Go on. So what?'

'No,' he says, 'that is the story.'

You say, 'Oh well, yes, that's a very interesting story. I thought it was going to lead somewhere, up to some sort of very interesting point.'

You mean a *climax*, don't you? And when it didn't, or according to you it didn't, and just petered out, you say, 'Well there wasn't much to that.' And you say to your wife later, 'What did you think of that whole palaver?'

And your wife says, 'Well I couldn't make any head or tail of it.'

You say, 'No, that's right. It seemed to be all about nothing, because it didn't lead up to a climax.'

There are minor and major climaxes in any sensible story, or in most stories. And what is more, this is not a matter for the head only. Or at least, it is not a matter just to say interesting literary criticism on the Bible. If you are expounding a passage of Scripture, be it reasoned argument like Romans, or historical narrative like Samuel, and you are preaching it, well it is not wrong to take a story out of its context and do your best to apply the story. But the best thing of all is to say, 'Now, what climax is the Holy Spirit aiming at? Because, if I am going to use this story for the purposes for which it was *primarily* given, I shall have to see to it that my sermon, or my final sermon, comes to the climax. You know, so that you can really thump the pulpit when you get there, so everybody realizes you've come to the climax!'

And if you were telling the story of the miserable days in the time of Eli and his sons, and the terrible departure from God that there was, you wouldn't want to underestimate the departure, would you? But in telling that story, where would you put the climax? Well, the minor climax would be perhaps God's message to Samuel of the terrible judgment. You'd have to rub that minor climax in, wouldn't you, if you were a preacher? But even if they hadn't given you another night you'd ask for one, wouldn't you? You'd say, 'I mustn't leave them there, because the great climax, the Holy Spirit's climax, is that God recovered his people!' And you would have had that it mind right from the start: 'This is the climax I should be driving at!' And in so doing you would not be preaching your own sermon but the Holy Spirit's sermon, and you would be driving at what the inspired historian was driving at. And it would come across with all the more authority and power because it wouldn't be your sermon; it would be the Holy Spirit's sermon, so to speak. You are making the climax what he made the climax. That is very important.

### **Themes going through sections of the book**

You say, 'How do you prove that there is a theme going through what you are pleased to call, *sections*?'

Well, how do you understand that there is a theme going through the first movement of one of Haydn's sonatas? How do you distinguish one movement from another in a symphony? Can you? It would be a bit odd if you were rendering a symphony or a sonata, or whatever it was, and you played the first movement; and at the end, instead of coming to a graceful pause, you added on a few bars of the next movement and started the next movement halfway through the slow movement, and got the slow movement mixed up with the fast movement. That would make a kind of chaos of what the composer was really getting at.

How do you decide which movement is which? Well, I don't know, except listening to it, and watching the different tempos, and watching the recurrent themes, and so forth. But they who read music tell us that in big works a writer will start a theme in one place and he will develop it and develop it and develop it, and that is one movement. Then he will go off to the next movement, and he's got the same theme but he's turned it upside down. Then he comes to a third movement where he's added something else, but he reintroduces the first, and it isn't just a series of isolated notes. And the various movements within the whole are of course related to each other; they are not just arbitrarily stuck side by side.

As in music, so it is in literature. The book of 1 Samuel is a very carefully constructed whole. Not only was it written by a brilliant historian, it was inspired by the Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit knows how to write. There are indications, of course, of relationships between one movement and another, as there would be in music.

There are indications of relationships of themes. I've underlined some of them in the notes so that you may see recurrent themes, and that they are not just little artistic additions. We noticed Jonathan's progress across the sections: Jonathan's devotion to David, then Jonathan stripping himself in loyalty and love to David, and giving him his royal insignia gladly. That is followed by Saul stripping himself reluctantly, and being forced to do it to his shame. There is a gospel sermon in that just by itself. You'll strip yourself willingly. It will be your very glory to strip yourself of every bit of kingly insignia you ever had and gladly give it to your

'greater than David!' Or else you will strip yourself one day, for God himself will strip you and land you naked, to your shame and prostrate. These things are not just little icings on the cake, little fairy decorations. They are an integral part of the message. But then what enormous, great, evocative ideas they are.

That is how I have been arguing. You may disagree with what I have suggested to you about this particular section, and, yes, different people have different ways of interpreting the same piece of music don't they? But here in the fourth section of 1 Samuel I suggested to you that in that final section, one of the major ideas is the justification of David. Similarly, it is the account of Saul's end and the judgment that came upon him. Was that judgment on Saul justified? Let me therefore run through this section four, just briefly indicating how these different stories could be understood as being strung, like beads in a necklace, on this particular theme.

## **The stories of section four**

### **David reappears in Israel (22:1-23:29)**

What better right had David to the throne, than Saul? Why was Saul justly put aside, if it was justly? We'll forget our types for a moment and go back to the Old Testament period when an Israelite would read this, perhaps in the disturbed age of the division between the ten tribes and the two, under Rehoboam.

What did Saul do? He forced David out of the land. This was David, the one that could deliver them from the Philistine, Goliath. And Saul drove him out? Was that not crazy? In driving him out he forced David to set up another centre of loyalty, which he did, in his stronghold. Then to gain the loyalty of his subjects, Saul took the steps of slaughtering the priests of the Lord.

How would an Israelite read that? These were men who pointed out their utter innocence, with the high priest as their spokesman: 'David is your son-in-law. I've not now begun enquiring of the Lord for David; I've been doing it for years! What is wrong in asking of the Lord for David?' And Saul bids Doeg to commit what any sensible Israelite must confess to be outrageous sacrilege. Saul was God's anointed and mustn't be touched. Wasn't a high priest the Lord's anointed? And Saul is not afraid to put out his hand against the Lord's anointed, all seventy of them, and commit the most outrageous sacrilege. And that is just on the surface of the story. Its spiritual implications and what it led to, is a higher matter, and I haven't got time to go into it.

Look at the next two stories. David came to these different places. He came to Keilah, enquired of the Lord, and delivered the men of Keilah from the Philistines. Do tell me what was wrong with that. Why would Saul persecute him for that? And the next day he went to Ziph, and as he was there on his mission of mercy, Saul came to get him, and would have got him and destroyed him, but there came a messenger unto Saul saying, 'Hurry and come, for the Philistines have made a raid against the land' (23:27). So Saul returned from pursuing after David and went against the Philistines, and David owes his very preservation to the Philistines.

Tell me what you would think if you were a Jew reading this. Here is David, the great conqueror of the Philistines, deliverer of Israel, now demonstrating himself as a saviour of the cities of Israel from the Philistines, and while they are in the very process of doing it, Saul comes to stop it.

You can't help thinking in your mind (at least I can't) of the attitude of the high priests to the apostles. They were in the temple having just healed the lame man, and they were preaching to the people the glorious salvation that there is in Jesus, and here is the evidence of that salvation, when along comes the high priest and puts them in prison!

Luke tells us of the way that our Lord Jesus, in that last week before his crucifixion, was in the temple preaching the gospel. Oh, how many people he had delivered from the bondage of guilt, from physical disability, from mental instability and from the power of the demons themselves! While he was in the temple preaching the gospel, it was then that the Sadducees came to oppose and then arrest him.

This stands on the very surface of our narrative, doesn't it? And so it was with the blessed Lord. The Gentiles themselves would have been prepared to let our Lord go. It was the priests that insisted on the murder of the Messiah.

### **David's justification (24:1–26:25)**

Come to the next group of stories that I have headed on the list: 'David's justification'. We see him justified twice before Saul. And there is the intervening story about Abigail. They form a nice trilogy, because they are all on this same theme of David's justification. He pleads his innocence twice before Saul, demonstrating before him that he's not against Saul, that he could have destroyed him but would not because he respects Saul as the anointed of the Lord. And anyway David loved him in spite of his persecution. But Saul persists.

Likewise, when David was pushed to exasperation and would have avenged himself, Abigail persuaded him not to avenge himself. She tells him, 'When the Lord God has given you victory over all your enemies it won't be a grief of heart if you did not avenge yourself (see 25:28–31). What an exasperation old Nabal was, the unreasonable chap, making all sorts of stupid excuses; but what a lovely story of David who did not avenge himself.

You would want to preach the counterpart in the New Testament, wouldn't you? You would indeed.

When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly. (1 Pet 2:23)

Blessed be God for the Messiah who, suffering innocently, did not threaten, let alone retaliate, by whose innocent suffering we are healed. Wouldn't you get up on your hind legs and want to justify the Saviour before men? This is what the Holy Spirit has come to do as he interprets the tactics of Calvary: he has come to vindicate the Lord Jesus, to plead his cause in this unbelieving world to the very men who murdered him and to all the rest of us. And you have the supreme privilege, as we would say in England, of being junior counsel for the defence, with the Holy Spirit leading the case, and you being his mouthpiece to plead the vindication and the justification of the claims of Jesus of Nazareth. And I know you know how to do it.

*Saul in the cave with David and his men*

I can't just leave this next bit alone, because it isn't just dry stuff, is it? Think of those stories of David's pleas to Saul. I like that one about the cave, and the one about Saul in the stockade. Saul was persecuting David, and at last he arrived one day with his troops. There he was in his royal armour, with medals galore, and a beautiful royal scabbard. His uniform was three times better than any other in the army, of course. What a great man. You won't forget he was a *big man*, will you? The big man, standing head and shoulders above everybody else, making them all look small, and they saluted and said, 'Yes sir, yes sir, yes sir.' He was the boss. He was the true king, wasn't he; not this scruffy chap running around like a flea or a partridge upon the mountains with a little throng of rather thuggish looking men? But then he had to go to the lavatory. Well, even big men have to do that. Being a more or less civilized man, he withdrew to the darkness of a cave. And unbeknown to him, David and his men were in the back of the cave.

Poor old Saul, in that somewhat, you know, humiliating position. David and his men saw the lot. And Abishai said, 'This is of the Lord, David! Let me go. I'll kill him; I won't have to hit him twice. I'll kill him right now.'

David said, 'You'll do no such thing. He is the Lord's anointed.' He loved him and respected him, didn't he? And then David crept quietly forward, got out his sharp knife and cut off the bottom of the man's skirt, or his trousers, and retired to the shadows of the cave.

Presently, Saul got up and adjusted his uniform. On went his crown and helmet, and out he went, and the soldiers saluted as he came out. Then a snigger went all down the line of troops, for half of the man's trousers were cut off at the bottom! Oh he did look a sight, didn't he?

What on earth did David do it for? He had shamed the great big man in front of his troops. He didn't do it to make a fool of the king; he did it to show the king how much he loved him.

Forgive me, for I have not left us in the immediate context of what our next speaker is now going to talk about at the start of 2 Samuel. I'll try and do that later on. I'm still out of phase somewhat.

Let's just look to the Lord as we close.

Lord, give us wisdom in thy holy word, we pray. Give us an ever-deepening conviction that this is the inspired word of God. Give us, Lord, the grace to work hard at it, to use every means at our disposal of understanding it, to start and continue with the conviction that this is the word of the all-wise God. Help us to be good expositors, not snatching things out of their context but labouring to see the whole message that thy Holy Spirit is saying, and how the parts relate to the whole. Give us not only good sense of history, but Lord give us thy divine wisdom in seeing how thy word applies and can be rightly applied to the ends to which thy Holy Spirit designed it, that we in our day may feel the impact of thy word, and by thy grace may be used of thee to cause thy people to see not only what it

says, but the wonders of its inspiration, and the sheer wealth of the glory of thy grace.

So help us and bless us as we continue before thee this afternoon. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## Overview and Major Themes of Section Five

### *2 Samuel 1:1–8:18*

We come now to the first section of the second book of Samuel. As I understand it, the boundaries of this second section go from the first verse of chapter 1, to the last verses of chapter 8. I say that because of the progression of the events within those chapters and their connection.

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#### **Section 5 (1:1–8:18)**

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##### *Movement 9 (1:1–4:12)*

#### **Part 1: Relations Between David and the House of Saul (1:1–2:32)**

- a. David executes Amalekite who brings him Saul's crown. He teaches Israel the song of the bow
- b. David, anointed in Hebron; blesses those who buried Saul
- c. War games between Abner and Joab

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#### **Part 2: The Long War between House of Saul and House of David (3:1–4:12)**

- d. Abner, king-maker in Israel, opens negotiations to transfer kingdom of house of Saul to David. A question of wives!
- e. Joab murders Abner; David disapproves
- f. Two captains assassinate Ish-bosheth. David executes them

ISH-BOSHETH'S HEAD CUT OFF; DAVID BURIES IT

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##### *Movement 10 (5:1–8:18)*

#### **Part 1: Establishment of David's Kingdom (5:1–6:23)**

- a. All Israel anoint David as king. David takes Jerusalem. Is recognized by Hiram. Takes more wives and sons
- b. Two attempts by Philistines to destroy him are defeated by God's guidance
- c. David brings up ark to Jerusalem

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#### **Part 2: God Builds David a House (7:1–8:18)**

- d. God promises to build David a house and maintain his seed and throne. David's response
  - e. David's two sets of victories over enemies
  - f. DAVID EXECUTES JUDGMENT AND JUSTICE FOR ALL HIS PEOPLE
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### **The major events in section five**

In chapter 1 David hears of the death of Saul, laments over it and teaches Israel the 'Song of the Bow'. Then in chapter 2 we read,

After this David inquired of the LORD, 'Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah?' And the LORD said to him, 'Go up.' David said, 'To which shall I go up?' And he said, 'To Hebron.' (v. 1)

There David begins his return. Driven out of Israel by Saul, he now returns first from Ziklag to Hebron, and thereafter from Hebron to Jerusalem. In stages he is received as king, first over the tribe of Judah in Hebron, and then over the rest of the nation with whom he eventually goes to Jebus, and takes it and turns it into his capital, Jerusalem.

With that, he is recognized by surrounding powers. Hiram of Tyre recognizes him. The Philistines attack him twice, sensing the threat it will be to them if a powerful king is established over a united Israel, and under the guidance of the Lord, David deals with them. Then David consolidates his power by bringing up the ark of the Lord to his capital city.

Finally, upon his suggesting that he should build a permanent dwelling place for the ark of the Lord in the form of a temple, God intervenes and explains that that isn't his will at the moment, but that he has not only established David's house for the time being, but will establish David's dynasty in perpetuity. That being done, David goes and worships the Lord, and gives his thanksgiving for those tremendous promises of God.

Chapter 8 then follows with what looks like a rather dull list of David's conquests. If dwelt over carefully it will be seen to be a list of David's conquests that made him not only king over Israel but emperor over many of the surrounding states. So that by the time you come to chapter 8, David, having started out as an exile in Ziklag among the Philistines, has now come back again, and by degrees has become king of the united nation and is now emperor over the surrounding nations. Because of the weakness of the big Gentile powers around at that stage in history, Israel seemed as if it might from this point have blossomed forth and become one of the leading empires of the world, fit to rival Babylon and Assyria. But it wasn't to be. The early promise did not come to fulfilment, and after Solomon the kingdom declined. But we have reached a high point, so to speak. By the end of chapter 8, David is king and emperor—king over Israel and emperor over some of the surrounding Gentile states.

Notice now how chapter 8 ends in one of these formal lists.

So David reigned over all Israel. And David administered justice and equity to all his people. Joab the son of Zeruah was over the army, and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder, and Zadok the son of Ahitub and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar were priests, and Seraiah was secretary, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites and the Pelethites, and David's sons were priests. (vv. 15–18)

### **The problems of being king**

This then, I argue, is the first major section of the second book of Samuel. In its subject matter, from the one point of view, it completes the history given us in 1 Samuel, at least from the

middle of 1 Samuel onward. The third section of 1 Samuel (16:1–18:4) begins the story of David's anointing, and follows him through his rejection by the establishment, and his leaving Israel to go among the Philistines. Now, however, comes the section that is going to tell us how God eventually put David on the throne of the nation. And we shall be very interested therefore in the questions that now arise, and the principles that are involved, in *the takeover of power*. What were the principles behind God actually putting David on the throne? What tactics and strategies did David adopt for taking over the power of the nation, first of Judah and then the rest of the tribes?

In another sense this section five is indeed not only the conclusion of the story of David's anointing to the time he was established as king and emperor (and rightly follows on from first Samuel), it is also the first section of the book of 2 Samuel, judged as a literary unit. For if the first major section of 2 Samuel is David's return, so of course the last major section of the book of Samuel is also David's return. The first section of 2 Samuel is David's return from his exile from his flight from Saul and his initial rejection (1:1–8:18). It is his return to Israel, his return as their king, and being established on the throne. But the final section of the book is David's return from his exile caused by the rebellion of Absalom (19:9–24:25).

It will be of some importance for us to compare and contrast those two returns, as indeed we shall have to compare and contrast the two situations. On the first occasion David fled from Saul, but then Saul was the Lord's anointed. On the second occasion he fled from Absalom, but Absalom never was the Lord's anointed. What were the similarities and what were the differences in those two flights? And what were the similarities and the differences in David's return each time? In section 5, the first return was to establish his rule, and in the final section to re-establish his rule.

### **Governing for God**

Now, because the first section of 2 Samuel is about the establishment of David's government and some of the principles involved in establishing it, we shall meet in this first section problems and situations that we meet again in the middle of the book. For some people they can be very disturbing at first sight. Many Christians have grown up to look upon David as the Lord's anointed and therefore as a prototype of our Lord Jesus, and have enjoyed all that information that 1 Samuel can give us by reason of the fact it is indeed a prototype of the blessed work of our Lord. But when, after having their expectations raised in 1 Samuel, they come at last to consider the actual story of David's government, they find it full of perplexing disappointments. The man after God's own heart, when he at last comes to the throne, seems to make so many mistakes and not to be quite the man that you might have expected, so that sometimes, for some people, David forms somewhat of an anti-climax.

The problems of *becoming* king may be large. The problems of actually *being* king, and governing, are much larger. And the problems of government (let any parent tell you, let any elder in any church tell you) are complicated indeed. How simple the basic gospel is: 'Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved' (Acts 16:31). The question of governing for God is far from simple. I cannot speak to you on the matter of governing for God within the family. Most of you are experts, and I have no experience, but standing on the touchlines and watching and listening, I observe the report that constantly comes that in this modern world,

governing, bringing up children for God, is a difficult thing. I'm not an elder either (in God's mercy) but let any elder tell you that getting folks converted is nowhere as difficult as governing the people of God for God.

*The problem of delegated authority and those who wield it*

It is not only that governing is a complicated thing in itself, but what is sometimes involved in governing makes it even more complicated. One big area where we see this is over the question of delegated power. In governing, normally power has to be delegated to others, and there your troubles can begin. It was so in David's case, wasn't it? It wasn't just David reigning and doing everything. David had to rely upon the services of a certain Joab, to go no further. And if David was a saint, then Joab would be a runner up, I should think, to the chief of all the sinners! Though in some things he was remarkably loyal to David, but certainly at times he was a great embarrassment and did things that David disapproved of with all his heart. Yet David seemed to be powerless to do anything about it.

For instance, Abner was in the process of bringing over the ten tribes to David's obedience, and Joab disapproved of it. And Joab drew Abner aside in the gate and assassinated him. David showed his displeasure at this crime, and publicly denounced it as a crime as he attended Abner's funeral. All the people understood that David was displeased, but for some reason or other David seemed to have been incapable, or unwilling, or something, to demote Joab. And so Joab had his own way (ch. 3).

David still had a bad conscience about Absalom's return. It was Joab who forced David to do it, through introducing that wily old wise woman, the woman of Tekoa (ch. 14). David didn't want Absalom killed, and gave strict orders to that effect. Joab ignored them, and killed Absalom (ch.18). Joab, it seems, was beyond David's power to control.

There was one occasion when David insisted on his own way against Joab. David said, 'Joab, go and number the people.'

Joab coughed into his hand and said, 'Did you mean that Your Majesty? Have I got you right?'

'Yes,' said David.

'But surely this is a thing that shouldn't be done,' said Joab. And Joab was not renowned for his godliness, but he could see that this would displease the Lord and advised His Majesty against it. David insisted on having his own way against Joab, and it was an utter disaster (ch. 24).

When David came back to Judah, and Judah was dragging its feet about bringing him back after Absalom's rebellion, David thought to make things easy for the Judahites to surrender their arms and come back to his loyalty, and he sent a message to Amasa. Amasa of Judah had been commander in chief under Absalom and led the rebel forces. David sends a message over saying, 'Amasa, I will make you commander in chief of my army now, if you will, in the place of Joab.' What, when David owed his return from exile to Joab? And David owed his victory over Amasa and Absalom to Joab? It was a curious thing to do, but anyway he did it. And Amasa, commander in chief of the rebel forces whom Joab had so successfully defeated was now made commander in chief of David's army in the place of Joab, until the king sent Amasa on a job to bring back the ten tribes of Israel from the revolt instigated by Sheba. Amasa

diddled and dawdled about the place and wasn't getting on with the job, so the king commissioned Abishai, the brother of Joab, to do it. Abishai was joined by Joab who saw Amasa coming down the road and put a sword through his middle. And that was the end of Amasa. And Joab resumed the position as commander in chief.

Now, you owe me something, don't you, for all this week of sessions with you? I must, before I go, hear from you an answer to the question: 'How then do you persist in your belief that David was a king after God's own heart?' There are certain problems in the second book of Samuel, but you have pondered them closely and have the answers to them.

One of the avenues perhaps on which the question has to be faced, and possibly partly answered, is of course this question of delegated authority. It is to be noticed that God himself doesn't rule everywhere directly but delegates authority. And with that have come problems. God doesn't come down from heaven every day and tie the shoelaces of your children, does he? God has delegated to you as parents the task of governing your children for God. What happens if a father and a mother abuse their power and by sinful laxity or unwarranted severity give a child the wrong idea of God? As has often been noticed, parents stand for a small child in the place of God, and children get their ideas of *the* Father 'from whom every family . . . on earth is named' (Eph 3:15), from their natural father. What happens in the world, if parents to whom God has delegated his power, abuse their position and power? Does God strike them dead at once? God delegated power to the great spirit whom now we call his satanic majesty. When his satanic majesty abused that power, did God obliterate him there and then?

There are big questions related to this matter of government, and I mention them now because already in this first section we shall eventually come across one or two of them. The biggest cluster, of course, comes in the centre of the book in what I will call sections two and three of the second book of Samuel.

### **An overview of section five (1:1–8:18)**

Now we come to the first section of 2 Samuel. Let us follow briefly a bird's eye view of some of the principles involved in David's taking over power and becoming, first the king of Judah, and then the king of the united nation.

#### **David executes the Amalekite who brings him Saul's crown. He teaches Israel the Song of the Bow (1:1–27)**

First there is a long story on the source from which David consented to take the crown. After the death of Saul, there came a man out of the camp from Saul with earth upon his head, and he came to David and told him 'many of the people have fallen and are dead, and Saul and his son Jonathan are also dead' (v. 4). And David enquired how the young man knew.

And the young man who told him said, 'By chance I happened to be on Mount Gilboa, and there was Saul leaning on his spear, and behold, the chariots and the horsemen were close upon him. And when he looked behind him, he saw me, and called to me. And I answered, 'Here I am.' And he said to me, 'Who are you?' I answered him, 'I am an Amalekite.' And he said to

me, 'Stand beside me and kill me, for anguish has seized me, and yet my life still lingers.' So I stood beside him and killed him, because I was sure that he could not live after he had fallen. And I took the crown that was on his head and the armlet that was on his arm, and I have brought them here to my lord.' (vv. 6–10)

And he offered the royal bracelet and the royal crown from the head of Saul to David, and David executed him for his trouble (vv. 11–16).

Now, I shall doubtless hear from you at some time or other on the morality of such an action. How could it be just for David to slay the Amalekite for this? And I shall rely heavily on your moral judgment.

*Lesson one: it matters who gives the crown*

One of the questions that the story raises is: from whose hand will David accept the crown? Does it matter? Well yes, in the framework of the story it matters immensely. It is no accident, perhaps, but of the providences of God, that though Saul himself committed suicide and so was responsible for his own death, yet he made a poor job of it and was not able to despatch himself at once. Therefore, as he was there in his anguish with his sword through him, he saw this young man and called him and asked him to deliver the *coup de grâce*. The young man was an Amalekite. When Saul said to him, 'Who are you, young man?' he said, 'I am an Amalekite.'

In those last moments of his life, what thoughts coursed through Saul's mind? How did he not remember, in his last lucid moments, when the Lord had told him to go and smite the Amalekites and he'd refused to do it, and he lost his kingdom and he lost his crown? And in the end he lost his life to the sinners, the Amalekites. But here comes an Amalekite offering the crown to David. 'No thank you very much,' he said, and executed the man. David will not take a crown from one of that tribe whom God had declared must be destroyed.

Does it matter from whom David will accept the crown? Well let me transpose the thing to a completely different key. Our blessed Lord was born Messiah; he was anointed by the Holy Spirit; he was driven by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness, and there came his satanic majesty and offered him the kingdoms of the world. Taking him up a high mountain he showed him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them and said, 'To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours' (Luke 4:6–7). And of course our Lord refused, for it matters from whom, and with whose assistance, you take the crown.

If it matters at that level, it matters at every level. It would be important, gentlemen, wouldn't it, that you are not carried to the eldership of the church by the influence of men whose spirituality is doubtful, even if their power and their money is big. For if you receive the power from the worldly, you will be obliged to dance to the tune of those that gave you the power. That is lesson number one.

*Lesson two: it matters what is said about the opposition*

Saul and Jonathan were dead. David now knew that he was the anointed of the Lord and would eventually take over the kingdom. How not? It would be important to now feed the public with the right information and put them in the mind to accept David, and call to the

public attention all those inadequacies of their previous rulers, and how they'd made a terrible mess of it, and point out all the wrongs of Saul. And there being no radio or TV, David used the means then available. He composed a song and set it to music and taught Israel this song that it might be taught to all the little kids from the word go, and to all the people. I suppose modern pop songs do a similar thing: they get the views of the writer across to the masses.

What was the view David put across to the masses about Saul and Jonathan in this song? Well, it was not like the things campaigning presidential candidates put across to the public about their rival candidates. I doubt whether it's true, but some of the press in Britain say that when two men are campaigning to be the American president, some of them resort to smear tactics when talking about the other side. It can't be true, surely?

In any case, in establishing his kingdom, what did David teach the people about Saul and Jonathan? He said, 'Oh, sing it, Israel. Sing it! Oh, they were lovely in their lives, and in their deaths they were not parted. Praise God for all the benefit that they conferred upon you. Look at the clothes they gave you! Look at the blessings they've brought you. Oh how I loved them, and Jonathan in particular' (see 1:17–27). And he had this song taught to Israel.

Was there ever such a king again? From time to time, I think he could even teach us a lesson or two, couldn't he? It ought never to be done, but sometimes there are struggles within the church—for its leadership. Some have been known to try to consolidate their power by spreading evil reports about their fellow brothers, sometimes even *false* reports, instead of doing what David did here to teach Israel and instil in their memories all the good they possibly could about Saul and Jonathan.

### **David, anointed in Hebron, blesses those who buried Saul (2:1–7)**

*Lesson three: it matters how conscience is treated*

We see a third lesson when David came to Ziklag. David was told, 'It was the men of Jabesh-gilead who buried Saul' (2:4). Did they indeed? They were plucky men, weren't they? If David had been different from what David was, and he had heard that certain gentlemen had given Saul an honourable burial, he would have interpreted it as sheer treason against himself and would have sent a squad of his soldiers and had them eliminated. Even burials can have political connotations, can't they? Many a man in David's place would have interpreted this as treason and executed the people who did it. When David was told it was the men of Jabesh-Gilead that buried Saul, he sent messengers to them and said,

May you be blessed by the LORD, because you showed this loyalty to Saul your lord and buried him. Now may the LORD show steadfast love and faithfulness to you. And I will do good to you because you have done this thing. (vv. 5–6)

Saul was a sinner against the Lord, but the men of Jabesh had been loyal to him.

Is not loyalty a good thing? It may be misapplied, but isn't it a good thing in itself? If you break somebody's sense of loyalty, and encourage people to be traitors in order to get an advantage over your rival whom these people support, be careful, lest what you teach them to do to others, eventually they turn around and do to you. We must be very careful with things like conscience and loyalty, even where we see them misapplied, lest by our methods

in the mad scramble to come out on top we destroy qualities in the human heart that were put there by God. They may need redirecting; they don't need ruining.

### **War games between Abner and Joab (2:8–32)**

Now we come to another matter.

Abner the son of Ner, commander of Saul's army, took Ish-bosheth the son of Saul and brought him over to Mahanaim, and he made him king over Gilead and the Ashurites and Jezreel and Ephraim and Benjamin and all Israel. (2:8–9)

Abner chose to support the crumbling house of Saul, and Abner, if you please, made Ish-bosheth king. Those were ominous words for Ish-bosheth, for the man that makes you a king can unmake you if he wants to. Poor old Ish-bosheth: Abner 'made him king'. He certainly didn't make David king, but he made Ish-bosheth king. And so Abner became commander in chief of the armies of the ten tribes, whereas Joab was the commander in chief of the army of the two tribes. So that is one of the little stories, which we see in chapter 2.

Abner the son of Ner, and the servants of Ish-bosheth the son of Saul, went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon. And Joab the son of Zeruah and the servants of David went out and met them at the pool of Gibeon. And they sat down, one on one side of the pool, and the other on the other side of the pool. (vv. 12–13)

Well it wasn't a pool exactly; it was a big shaft that the early Canaanites had built to make access to the water supply down under the walls of their city, but that's beside the point.

Here is the scene. The two army commanders with their brightest, select, handpicked troops, have come out and they are sitting looking at each other from opposite sides of the pool. Abner said, 'Joab, why not let the young men arise and play before us.'

'Good idea,' said Joab from the other side of the pool. 'Wouldn't it be fun?'

So they commanded the young men to arise, twelve from each side. And as they met each other they each took the other man by the beard and put their swords through the middle, and they fell down, all twenty-four of them, dead.

Marvellous *play*, isn't it? How many times it has been done. Oh, what war games this sorry world has seen—the great, powerful, army commanders, taking their troops out to play war games: Alexander and Napoleon and all the rest of them. And what for? Do they suppose they are campaigning for justice, or wanting the Lord's will? It is nothing but *war games*, and millions of the lovely young men of earth have fallen dead, to satisfy the lust for power and glory on the part of great, commanding generals.

Well it led to a fracas, and in the end Joab got quite upset. Why is that? Was it because he'd lost twelve men of his troops? No, that was part of the game, like two players playing chess would lose an odd pawn here and a bishop there. That's part of the game, isn't it? And when you've finished your game of chess you go off to the club and have lunch together; and Joab and Abner would have gone off to the club and had lunch together after this pretty little game, only one of the stupid chaps on Joab's side took it a bit too far, and he followed Abner and chased him down the road. He was a young man with not much sense in his head but a

lot of brawn, and Abner shouted over his shoulder back to him, 'Clear off now. Why should I smite you and get at odds with Joab your brother?' But the young man wouldn't leave off running, and Abner, being a wily old boy, got his spear in his hand, and the young man hadn't seen it, and suddenly Abner stabbed behind him, and the spear went backwards and right through the young man's belly, and that was the end of him.

Then Joab got upset, and chased Abner up hill and down dale, and Abner was obliged to cry, 'Will you not call the troops off, Joab? Don't you know it will be bitterness in the end?' (see v. 26). Oh what a thing. War games: bitterness in the end.

Would you suppose that David approved of it? What is your impression, as you read the story of the historical David? Does he come across to you as a man that engaged in warfare for the sake of war games? Because, if he is, of course now you'll have a little extra apologetics to do.

Our Lord, by definition, will execute the wrath of God, leading the armies that are in heaven when he puts down evil and takes over the world and governs it. Yes, but Revelation has faced the problem. Is he worthy? How is he worthy to take the book, to loose the seal that shall deluge this world with blood, gore, pain, suffering and death? How is he worthy to do it? It is because he won't be playing war games! He is worthy to do it because he first was slain. Not a man shall be in hell under the judgments of God but what could have been saved, for Christ died for him that he might be saved.

You say, 'I can see you are not a Calvinist, sir.'

You have seen correctly. But it is late, and the clock tells me I must desist. Do remember just where we are. We are considering some of the problems that arise when considering the takeover of power and how it should be taken over.



## [A House Established by God](#)

*Section Five (2 Samuel 1:1–8:18)*

### **Life's sanctities**

The section we are considering is concerned with David's takeover of power in Israel. We come now to chapter 3, and in particular to verse 6 onwards. Abner, as we have already noticed, made Ish-bosheth king. Although he was Saul's son, Ish-bosheth depended for his position on the throne of the ten tribes, all together and solely, on Abner as military commander. And you will see the effects of that when now the story tells you that Saul had a concubine whose name was Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah.

And Ish-bosheth said to Abner, 'Why have you gone in to my father's concubine?' Then Abner was very angry over the words of Ish-bosheth and said, 'Am I a dog's head of Judah? To this day I keep showing steadfast love to the house of Saul your father, to his brothers, and to his friends, and have not given you into the hand of David. And yet you charge me today with a fault concerning a woman. God do so to Abner and more also, if I do not accomplish for David what the LORD has sworn to him, to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan to Beersheba.' And Ish-bosheth could not answer Abner another word, because he feared him. (vv. 7–11)

What use was Ish-bosheth's power when he was altogether dependent upon Abner the king-maker with his military divisions?

Now Abner, feeling the slight of Ish-bosheth's rebuke, determines to bring over the ten tribes to David and make David king over the ten tribes as well. And he sends a message to him saying,

'To whom does the land belong? Make your covenant with me, and behold, my hand shall be with you to bring over all Israel to you.' And he said, 'Good; I will make a covenant with you. But one thing I require of you; that is, you shall not see my face unless you first bring Michal, Saul's daughter, when you come to see my face.' (vv. 12–13)

Why must he have it so? David was not prepared to have himself made king by Abner, for if Abner made him king, Abner could unmake him as king. David was saying, 'All right, we'll come to a negotiation, but first I establish the principle that I have a right to the throne of Israel, and you will acknowledge that right by bringing me Saul's daughter, Michal, whom I gained and whom I was given. And therefore, as son-in-law to Saul, and there being no other

people in Saul's house capable of ruling, I claim the right to rule. Until you cede that right and make it evident by bringing my wife, I shall not open negotiations with you.'

I am not a politician, but even I can see it was important. I'm sincerely sorry for the poor gentleman to whom Michal had been given. When now they came to take his wife from him, who was really David's wife, the poor man followed her down the road until Abner, hard-hearted, cold-headed politician and military man that he was, turned around and said, 'Get home.' And the poor man went home (see vv. 14–16).

Once more we are facing the question of how you take over power. Now David is insisting he has a right to it by his own prowess, because that was how he had gained Michal. Our Lord doesn't become king because we or anybody else on this earth make him king. He has the right to be king.

Then Abner came and had negotiations with David. And it so happened that Joab had been out on a foray, and then he came back and found that Abner had been with David and David had made him a banquet and sent him away in peace, and Abner was going to bring over the army and submit them to David's rightful command. When Joab heard of it, he went and called Abner, and Abner came back to the city to talk to him, and Joab assassinated him in cold blood (vv. 22–27).

I must leave you to make up your minds as to why Joab did it. The text before us says that he did it because of Asahel his brother, whom Abner had slain. That isn't the view that David took. Asahel had been slain in plain, straightforward warfare. They had agreed to a military game. Joab had slain Abner in cold blood. As David later on told Solomon when he commissioned Solomon to have Joab executed, 'He shed the blood of war in peace' (see 1 Kgs 2:5). It was an unlawful killing.

We might be tempted to conclude that there was another motive in hand. Until this point, Joab was David's commander, the commander over the armies of one tribe. Abner was commander over all the others. Joab's army would have been a tiny little thing compared with the massed thousands of Abner's army. And if Abner brought over that great army to David, David might consider making Abner commander in chief, mightn't he? And then what would happen to Joab's rank? Joab saw it didn't happen, anyway. There was nothing David could do about it except to protest at the public funeral (see vv. 28–39).

### **The king's attitude to the sanctity of life**

This is one incident among many from the stories of the book of 2 Samuel that raises the issue of David's attitude to the sanctities of life. There are certain sanctities in life that any government that wishes to be regarded as a civilized government must defend and uphold. And perhaps the first sanctity that they must uphold is the sanctity of the life of their subjects. David showed his great displeasure at what Joab did for shedding innocent blood—the blood of war in peace—an unlawful killing. It surely is the major number one task of government to protect the lives of its citizens. That they haven't always done so is obvious, isn't it? How much innocent blood has been shed in wartime by the very governments that were supposed to protect it? It is a measure by which you can measure a government: its attitude to the blood and life of its citizens.

Matthew has some interesting things to say about our Lord in that regard. He proclaims our Lord as king, but at the beginning of his gospel, he introduces us to Herod the king. Let's judge Herod by his use of the power of life and death, which his position as king had put into his hand. How will he use it? Well, I suppose often it was for the good of his citizens, but it happened once that there came some wise men from the east and they said, 'Where is he that is born king of the Jews?'

He said, 'What! Born as what?'

'King of the Jews.'

'Where did you get that idea from?'

'Oh, we've seen a star in the east.'

'Oh, how very interesting,' he said, checking his immediate reaction. 'I'd better call my experts to find out where the Messiah is to be born.'

And he called the experts, and they informed him that it would be in Bethlehem, according to Scripture.

'I'd very much like to know the house where you find him,' he said. 'I'd like to worship him myself.'

'Really?'

And he went and murdered all the children under two (2:1-18). Here was a man that would use his power for the benefit of his citizens if he could, but if he couldn't, he would slaughter innocent blood to maintain himself on the throne.

In the middle of the Gospel of Matthew, there is a story about another Herod. He was living in an adulterous union with his brother's wife; and John the Baptist, in the name of the Messiah, put his preacher's fist metaphorically in the face of Herod, and told him to repent. And Herod didn't like it, and his wife liked it even less, and the result was that John the Baptist was put in prison.

Herod didn't intend to kill John the Baptist. He had enough political sense to see it would be a daft thing to do, because the people thought John was a prophet. But putting him in prison would do no harm, would it? It would shut him up for a time until the public fervour surrounding John had died down. So that was a very good compromise. He didn't intend to kill him; he had no intention of going to such extreme lengths. Oh, but wait a minute; one night his birthday came around and they had a party. And of course it was a regal party, and the daughter of his wife came in and did a dance. It was an eastern kind of a dance, it goes without saying. And Herod was already a little bit tipsy, and so were his guests, and when they saw this flimsily clad girl doing that kind of dance, it so inflamed their passions that Herod was taken away, and he said, 'I'll give you, on oath, anything you ask, up to the half of my kingdom!' And she went to mama to enquire what she should ask. And mama said, 'Oh nothing much, just the head of John the Baptist on a plate.' And when Herod heard it he was sorry, but for the sake of his oath, and not to be embarrassed in front of the guests, he gave the command and the head of the greatest prophet that ever lived was dished up as the final dish at the banquet for the entertainment of the guests (see 14:1-12).

That's even worse than the first Herod, isn't it? He didn't intend to take his citizen's life, but he so lost control of himself through drink and sex, that he took it nonetheless in a moment of horrible irresponsibility. What a man to have the power of life and death in his hands.

There was at Jerusalem the high priest and the other priests with him, and one day Judas came to them and, wringing his hands, said, 'I have sinned by betraying innocent blood.' And with stony cynicism they said, 'What is that to us? See to it yourself' (27:4). It wasn't Judas' job to see to it. That was the high priests' job, as priest in the land, to keep the land free of the charge of the shedding of innocent blood! Read your Old Testament law. It was a cruel dereliction of duty to turn around to a Judas, now repentant in his fashion, and say, 'You see to it; that's not our job.' How could they do anything else, for they were implicated in the blood?

The case came before Pilate, the great Roman governor, and he saw that Jesus was innocent, and he ought to release him, but then there was the crowd before him. When he saw that there was such an uproar, he took a basin and washed his hands in water and said, 'I am innocent of the blood of this just person. You see to it' (see v. 24). Oh, I say! Handing over an innocent man to a raving mob, when it is his responsibility as governor of Judaea to decide such matters of life and death? Some rulers they were.

Then Matthew tells you his story, showing the attitude of Jesus the Messiah, the King, to the blood of the people. He too shed blood, didn't he? But he handed the cup to his subjects, and he said to them, 'This is *my* blood, shed for many, for the forgiveness of sins' (see 26:28).

Peter drew his sword, meaning to cut the head off the opposition. The Saviour restrained him. 'I could do it if I wanted, Peter, through the assistance of twelve legions of angels.' Then with infinite and divine self-control he said, 'but how then should the Scripture be fulfilled that it must be so?' (see vv. 52–54). And then, in utter command of the situation, he went to Calvary and shed his blood, innocent as he was, for his guilty subjects. Oh, what a king!

You judge a power by its handling of the final authority over the life and death of its citizens.

#### *David's attitude toward the life of his rival*

Let's come back to the story that takes up chapter 4. Ish-bosheth is hanging on desperately, or trying to now that Abner has deserted him. Being very weak anyway, his hands become feeble. He was lying in bed one hot, sultry afternoon when two of his captains came into the bedroom and, without further ado, took his head off and brought it to David, thinking David would be glad to see them and promote them to honour. And David said,

As the LORD lives, who has redeemed my life out of every adversity, when one told me, 'Behold, Saul is dead', and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and killed him at Ziklag, which was the reward I gave him for his news. How much more, when wicked men have killed a righteous man in his own house on his bed, shall I not now require his blood at your hand and destroy you from the earth? (vv. 9–11)

And he slaughtered them there and then. The deed they did was the foulest of treachery. Do you suppose David was going to give them a welcome when they had been guilty of such gross, foul treachery to their king and master? If David is prepared to countenance that kind of thing in order to get himself into power, how shall he stop those same men one of these days practising the same treachery against him?

You say, 'Oh, but it was in a good cause. I do believe these two gentlemen did it in a good cause.'

Does the cause justify the means? It is a sorry thing when sometimes one hears of disputes even amongst believers. Sometimes believers, in the cause of truth, will be guilty of such outrageous behaviour that would shame even a worldly man. And they will justify it because they are sticking up for the truth. It will not do, will it? When such a case comes before him, David indicates his hot displeasure.

### **The establishment of David's kingdom**

With those preliminaries out of the way, we come now to the second half of this first section of 2 Samuel, and the actual establishment of David's kingdom. How did he become king over the rest of the tribes? I have no need to repeat what we were told by another so eloquently this afternoon. Just let's skate over the surface once more to remind ourselves of the detail.

Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, 'Behold, we are your bone and flesh.' (5:1)

Meaning, 'We are one with you.'

In times past, when Saul was king over us, it was you who led out and brought in Israel.' (v. 2)

In other words, when Saul had nominally been king, when it came to the actual fighting in the battles, it was David that led the people out. David was in front of the armies. It was David whose strategy it was and whose victory it really was. 'It was you that actually led us to victory; you brought us out and you took us in. You did the work.' They come now, recognizing that David had been their leader and risked his life for them in countless battles, and brought them victory. On that strength they came, owning his achievements.

And the LORD said to you, 'You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel.' (v. 2)

And now they recognize that the Lord has appointed him anyway, and what they were now doing was simply recognizing what God had done. God had made David king. They were therefore in their turn prepared to come and make him their king as well. That puts the whole authority question the right way around, doesn't it?

David then took Jerusalem to unite the nation and made it the capital and built the city up, and his family began to grow (vv. 6–16). Then twice over the Philistines came against him, because they would have recognized that with a leader like David, who was a very good military man (they had occasion to know that), now being welcomed by the united tribes of Israel, the threat of a united Israel to the Philistine power was very considerable. They tried to nip the whole thing in the bud historically and smash it before it got any further.

How did David overcome them? The two stories emphasize that though now king, David excelled in what Saul failed in: he was guided by the Lord for each of the two attacks. The first time, the Lord guided in one way, and then David didn't say, 'Well I know how to do it now,

and I don't need to be guided a second time.' The second time he waited on the Lord, and the Lord's guidance was different on that occasion (vv. 17–25). And it was the Lord's guidance that led him to victory over the Philistines.

He who himself knows what it is to be guided by the Lord best governs and guides other people. Think back, if you have been paying attention, to the stories of Saul, and remember why Saul came unstuck when he was put to the test.

## **Bringing up the ark to Jerusalem**

Now we come to two major items that must concern us for the rest of this session. One is the bringing up of the ark of God. This is an exceedingly important element in the establishment of David's kingdom. Obviously, the kingdom and the city where the ark of the Lord was present would have an authority before the people that could not possibly be attained to if the ark of the Lord was not there.

### **The relationship of the ark to the king**

You will see that point when we come to the story of David's exile. David, hearing Absalom had been accepted in Hebron, made haste to get out of the city of Jerusalem, and he was going along the road into exile when friends of his came bearing the ark down the road. They said, 'We brought you the ark, David.' What had they done it for? Well, for this reason. If only Absalom could have captured the ark, the common man who had to make up his mind would have said, 'Yes, God is obviously with Absalom because Absalom's got the ark.' And David's friends had seen that if they could get the ark out of Jerusalem and bring it to him, that would authenticate David by showing God was on his side.

And David said, 'Take it back.'

'Take it back? David, what are you saying, man? You've got the chance to authenticate yourself, and show that God is on your side because you've got the ark.'

'Ah, but you see,' said David, 'this is the very matter in dispute. Once I ruled a nation that accepted that I was their appointed king, but now the nation as a whole stands in doubt. Am I the appointed king or not? I will not try to preclude their judgment and decision. Should the Lord in fact delight in me in spite of all the charges the nation has brought against me, well then, he'll bring me back. But if it is that I have sinned and the Lord no longer delights in me, I'm not going to prejudice the case. Let the Lord show it, and put the ark on neutral ground to give the Lord free hand to show whose side he supports' (see 15:24–29).

It takes some courage to do that, but the point that incident illustrates for us is that where the ark was, there, as far as the common people were concerned, would be the authoritative king.

### **The wrong way to carry the throne of God**

In chapter 6, David takes the ark, and he brings it up to Jerusalem; understandably so. And it was God's intention that his ark should be eventually in Jerusalem. God had indeed appointed David, and when David went about bringing up the ark, David had to learn a very important and very painful lesson. Wanting to bring up the ark he took a new cart (just like the Philistines

had done) and put the ark on the cart, and he meant it very reverently. He didn't bring an old farm cart that had one day been full of manure, and the next day had been roughly cleaned out for the ark to be put in. I should think not. He had a brilliant, new, bright, spic and span cart, and the oxen dragged it along. He meant to be very reverent. But it wasn't God's way of transporting the ark, indeed it wasn't.

As the cart was going down the road with the ark on it, the oxen stumbled. And one of David's servants called Uzzah put forth his hand to steady the ark, so that the ark shouldn't fall over. And in that minute God smote him dead.

You say, 'What a thing to do. I mean, the man meant it well. He was doing it out of kindness and honour of his heart, wanting to honour the Lord and stop his throne falling over. Isn't that unspeakably severe of God, when the man meant it so well, to smite him dead and let a lot of old sinners he might have known in Judaea (such as Joab) carry on living?'

Why did God smite the man dead? Well, I suppose for a number of reasons. I pause here to give you some personal advice. If, when you get home to heaven and, after the first few eternities, you should be walking around and one day you notice that the throne of God is beginning to fall over, I'll tell you what to do. Turn around at once and run as hard as you can run! See if you can get to the end of the universe before it crashes to the ground! Whatever you do, don't go and try to hold it up! If almighty God cannot keep his own throne up, and you try to keep it up, well, it will crush you to powder. And what is more, it will all be in vain, for if God can't keep his own throne up, there's no point in being in heaven anyway.

What David was doing, and what Uzzah was doing, was the absolute heart of idolatry. Through Isaiah the prophet, God says that it is the mark of idolatry that if you are worshipping an idol, you have to carry your idol (46:1-2). The mark of the true God is that he carries you. The mark of idolatry is that you have to keep your idol from falling.

Have you read something like that anywhere in the books of Samuel? I hope you've been listening. When the Philistines brought the ark of the Lord into the temple of their god, old Dagon fell off his perch, and the wise and brawny Philistines had to knock their heads together and use all the muscle they could muster to put their god back on his perch. God isn't a god like Dagon! He doesn't have to be held up, nor does his throne have to be held up.

I don't know about you, but sometimes I go about things as though I had to hold up God and his work; and what a weight it becomes. It will wear you out very soon if you've got to hold God up. Whether in salvation, or whether in serving the Lord, the truth is the other way around. You don't have to hold the Lord up; he holds you up. You don't even have to hold his throne up in the church, you know. He does that through you, and there is a mighty difference between the two.

### **Doing things God's own way**

The second time, David got it right, and when he brought the ark up the second time it was carried on the shoulder of God's own Levites according to the law of Moses (6:12-15). The king didn't bring it up; the Levites brought it up. They were God's chosen phalanx, and they walked into the city with the ark. It must have been a spectacular moment because, as you see from the description given here, Israel believed that upon the cherubim sat the transcendent Lord of heaven and earth! As the crowds lined the streets, and they saw the phalanx of Levites

coming with the ark upon their shoulder, the crowd would have believed it was a coming of the Lord. The Lord was coming to Jerusalem!

What should the appropriate attitude be? The people bowed down, and then gave vent to their praise and homage in ecstatic worship. And what about David?

You say, 'David lined up in front of the ark, crown and all on his head, sceptre in his hand, and he conducted the Lord and he said: "Lord this is the way."'

No, he didn't. He stripped himself of all his regalia, and danced before the ark of the Lord just like one of the common people!

Michal hadn't been at the ceremony; she was looking out of the window. 'Oh,' she said, 'what a vulgar beast the king, David, is making of himself today, humbling himself like one of the common people.'

And David said, 'I shall be more humble than ever, then, but in the eyes of the people I shall be held in honour' (see vv. 16–23). For if it comes to the question of the Lord coming to the city, then King David will take his place among the ranks of the ordinary people. Who is David compared with the Lord?

Oh, how important this is. The difference between those who rule amongst God's people and the people themselves is as nothing compared with the vast chasm that separates the highest king from the Lord himself. Did it lose David any authority over the people, that when the Lord came he joined them like an ordinary citizen and stripped himself, and danced before the Lord? Did it lose him any authority? Of course, it didn't. Nor will it lose us authority in whatever sphere we are called upon to rule if we show those whom we are supposed to be ruling that we stand with them under the power and authority of God.

### **God's covenant with David**

David's throne was eventually established in a way that David could never have expected, beyond his wildest dreams. The story is given in chapter 7.

The ark was dwelling in its temporary tent in Jerusalem. And David was thinking one night of how he himself was dwelling in a fine house. He said, 'This won't do, David my boy. You're living in comfort in this permanent dwelling house, this bit of a palace. Wouldn't it be nice to have a permanent temple at last? I mean, the tabernacle has wandered around the land, and things have got disorderly. Now that I'm settled on the throne, wouldn't it be nice to have permanent house to put the ark of the Lord in, and build him a beautiful stone temple?'

So the next time he saw the prophet, he said, 'Nathan, I've been thinking how nice it would be to build God a permanent house here in the form of a stone built temple to put the ark in. What do you think of it, Nathan?'

And Nathan said, 'Your Majesty, it's an excellent idea.'

And that night, God had to have a word with Nathan and tell him what to say to David (see vv. 4–17). 'Go and tell my servant David, "Thus says the LORD: Would you build me a house to dwell in?"'



### The Lord builds the house

The substance of what God now began to say was this. 'How very nice of you to come up with the suggestion. But wait a minute, David. Whose plan is all this? Did I ask you to build me a house? I don't remember asking you at any time to build me a permanent house. Did I?'

'Oh no, Lord, I mean, you didn't actually ask for it. I thought it would be a good idea.'

'Oh,' said God. 'Do you know, David, I've been on the move for centuries, ever since I brought your fathers out of the land of Egypt. That's hundreds of years ago, David. And I have been in the tent, in the tabernacle, all these days in all these places where I have walked with all the children of Israel, and never once did I speak to anybody, commander or prophet, to tell my people, "Why didn't you build me a house?" I've been contented to walk in a tent.'

Oh, what marvellous imagery. I've been talking like a hard-old grindstone, haven't I? Don't let that obscure the imagery. What magnificent imagery! Almighty God, dwelling above all heavens, let alone the palaces of the heavens he has created. He came to redeem his people, and he sent a few flunkies to get them out, did he? No, he didn't. *He* came down, the transcendent Lord of space and time; he came down and he was content with a tent. And of the days when Israel foot-slogged it over the desert, God says, 'I walked with them and walked with them and walked with them, and I've never grumbled yet, so that my people might at last attain the final purpose I had in mind for them. I walked with them across the desert; and through all their circumstances I walked with them all the way, and every step right until now, and never have I complained about the need to walk and make progress.'

Oh the magnificent grace, just ponder it! To get you from the slaveries of sin and Satan, and get you home to the palaces of heaven at last, almighty God has come down, and as you have walked, so has he walked and will walk with you every step of the way until he gets you home to glory.

'And David,' God said, 'I've not got you there yet. You think you've arrived, because you're sitting on a throne in Jerusalem?'

David thought Jerusalem was the last word of a city, of course. He hadn't seen New York yet, so he thought Jerusalem was some place. And being king over a few tribes in the Middle East, he thought you couldn't imagine anything bigger. Now he had arrived, and so God could have a permanent dwelling place and needn't walk anymore.

God said, 'Thank you David, but I must tell you, you haven't arrived yet. This may seem marvellous in your eyes, but I have something more wonderful still! And David, you know, you must let me call the tune. And anyway, when you were a shepherd boy, was it your idea that you should be king of Israel? I don't seem to remember it, David. Was it that you got so fed up with tending a few sheep in the field there that you came to me one day and said, "God, I've got an idea. I've got so fed up looking after these sheep. I propose, God, if you don't mind, that you would consider making me king of Israel." Was it your idea, David? No, it wasn't, was it? I took you from that lowly occupation. That was my idea; and I've exalted you so far, David. And if it was my idea to start with, you must let me call the tune, because I haven't finished with you yet. I'm now going to tell you that I am going to build you a house! Let's just get that straight first. I am going to build you a house, so that when your days be fulfilled and you sleep with your fathers, I am going to set up your seed after you, with him that will proceed out of your own body; and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build me a house.'

Oh, David, I'm not going to establish your house merely in the sense that I put you on the throne. I am going to establish your house in the sense of your dynasty after you, and I will not take my mercy away from your son as I took it from Saul and his son. I guarantee it to you David. I am going to set up your whole dynasty for centuries to come! And the son that comes out of your body, he will build me a house; and when he builds it, of course, it will be magnificent.'

We know from the subsequent history how magnificent it was. The thing that David would have built would have been but a shadow of the magnificence that Solomon eventually built, which was seen to inaugurate the great age of peace and plenty that dawned with the reign of Solomon.

'What is more,' God said, 'I'm telling you now, David, that I shall be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. If he commits iniquity I will chastise him with the chastisement of a father, but I will not take my mercy from him. I shall be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son.'

And David was so overwhelmed he went and sat in the presence of the Lord to try and take it in. And he said, 'Oh God, what am I, and what is my father's house? When I think of my humble beginnings, and you have not only brought your servant so far, but you have spoken of me for a great while yet to come' (see vv. 18–29).

He had indeed, and even then I wonder whether David fully realized at the time what God really meant when he said, 'I will be to him a father and he shall be to me a son.' It was spoken first of Solomon, but you have got a very tiny God if you think that's all God meant when he gave the promise to David! For, as God gave the promise he was thinking of Solomon, and way beyond Solomon. He was thinking of days when David's earthly monarchy would apparently be at an end, to the perplexity of the faithful in Israel, but he was looking forward to the time when King David's greater son should come. And the son of David should be of such sort that, in the words of God, but now elevated to an infinite degree, God should be to him a father and he should be to him a son.

What was a little stone building of a temple in Jerusalem compared with this? God had spoken of David for a long time yet to come, and out of David's loins would come God incarnate, to build God a house, a spiritual house, an eternal house that shall adorn the very heavens of God for all eternity! I don't know if David realized it then, but he knows it now, doesn't he? He knows it now. David is one of 'the spirits of just men made perfect' (Heb 12:23 KJV). I fancy if he could hear us talking he'd go into the temple of the Lord again, if there is one up there, put his feet up, and contemplate God's magnificence: 'You have spoken of your servant for a long time to come.'

### **The Lord builds the house**

What about you? Was it your idea that God should send his Son to save you? Did you suggest that to God?

What raised the wondrous thought,  
Or who did it suggest,

That blood-bought saints to glory brought  
Should with the Son be blest?<sup>6</sup>

Did you go to God in your sin and suggest to him reverently the idea that he send his Son to die for you? You didn't, did you?

Being saved, did you go along to God and say, 'I am grateful Lord, and I don't want to appear to be criticizing, but I could think how this salvation business could be improved. Why don't you consider at the end of it all taking us home to heaven and letting us reign with Christ and be part of his royal house?'

Was that your idea?

'Well, no,' you say, 'it wasn't my idea really.'

You mean to say, God blessed you himself, conceived of all that, and did it?

'Yes, it's true.'

Well, if that's God's idea, we shall have to let God call the tune, shall we not? We shall have to let God tell us when it's the time to settle down, because he has reached his goal. But it isn't yet. He has spoken of you for a great while yet to come. Already he has intimated that you have been included in the house of great David's greater son. You are part of the royal house, princes of the royal house, aren't you? Aren't you on your way to reign with Christ? Hasn't God, in his plan, set you above principalities, powers, mights, dominions, and every name that is named, not only in this world but in that which is to come (Eph 1:21)? Go home one of these days, sit down on your settee and put your feet up, and just think of it. God has spoken of you for a great while yet to come.

And is it so—I shall be like Thy Son?

Is this the grace which He for me has won?

Father of glory (thought beyond all thought!)—

In glory, to His own blest likeness brought!<sup>7</sup>

We are not quite there yet, are we? And who shall know the walking, and the wanderings, and the hard journeys that lie between us and that glory? And sometimes our hearts would want to settle down and tell the Lord we've had enough, and if he'd please ease off the trials and the progress, we'd like to settle down now because we are holy enough and don't need any more. And God will say, 'But you must let me call the tune, and I am prepared to walk with you still, a pilgrim myself, and walk with you until I have got you home to the glory that I intended.'

The establishment of David's house: what a gigantic thing it was that God purposed in his heart when he put David of Bethlehem on the throne of the Lord in Jerusalem. The results of it are not yet seen, but you shall see it one day! Overwhelmed with what God had revealed to him, David went into the house of the Lord and he prayed, and he said, 'God, there's not another God like you! And there's not another people like your people. Oh God, do what you say. You said it in your word. And, no, I'm not making extra suggestions to you, God, I'm

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<sup>6</sup> George V. Wigram (1805-1879), 'What Raised the Wondrous Thought?'

<sup>7</sup> John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), 'And is it so, I shall be like thy Son?'

done with that. But what you said is so marvellous, Lord; I just want to make sure. Do what you said, won't you, Lord? I've said it only because I found it in your word.'

We are wisest when we take our prayers and pray primarily, at the beginning and at the end, for what God has said he's going to do with us anyway. And if we ask according to his promise, then shall we have the things that he has promised us.

Forgive the haste with which I have skated over these great things.

Shall we pray.

We feel, O Lord, like David, and what can we say to thee? For the revelation in thy word and what thou hast promised staggers our imagination. The glories are such, and our faith is so tiny that it sometimes is stumbled by the sheer weight of glory that thy word says thou hast designed for us. But now as we sit before thee, advanced compared with David, for now, we can see and we know the Son of God has already come, has died, been buried, and has been raised from the dead. And thou hast fulfilled thy promise magnificently, and more than any one thought in that thou has raised Jesus, David's son, from the dead and seated him at thy right hand in glory, and us too.

Therefore we too pray, in light of what thou hast promised for us for a great while yet to come, O Lord, do as thou hast said! Keep us from wanting to settle down until thou hast brought us to the goal that thou hast designed. Be the pathway never so difficult and never so rough, we would like to trust thee. Give us courage so to do.

And our prayer is: do what thou hast said thou wilt do. Then all our ambitions shall find themselves fulfilled, and fulfilled above all that we can ask or think. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## STUDY QUESTIONS 1

### 1 Samuel 1:1–6:21

1. Compare the life of Hannah and the life of Peninnah. Why do the godly suffer, while others have the external/physical benefits so often perceived in our day as a sign of God's blessing and a right?
2. How do you think this comparison between Hannah and Peninnah parallels the struggles between spiritual and carnal relationships that appear later in 1–2 Samuel?
3. How should a true priest live? How does Hannah's exercise and attitude give us guidance?
4. Describe in your own words the general tone of the following portions concerning Eli and his sons: 1 Samuel 2:12–17, 22–25, 27–36; 3:12–14.
5. What are the key words in the following verses concerning Samuel? 1 Samuel 2:11, 18–21, 26; 3:1, 10–11; 3:19–4:1
6. In 1 Samuel 2:12–17, what words, phrases or clauses spoke to you personally, and why?
7. Why do you think the Lord had to send 'a man of God to Eli' (the priest / judge of Israel)? 1 Samuel 2:27
8. What do you think was so badly wrong with Eli's sons and with the way Eli brought them up? In what way could we ever be guilty of the same wrong attitude of life?
9. First Samuel 1–4 is about the failure of the Israelite priest. How and why is that relevant to us? Consider Exodus 19:5–6; Isaiah 61:4–6; 1 Peter 2:5, 9–10; Revelation 1:4–6.
10. How important do you think was the theocracy/priesthood/judgeship governmental order to the purposes of the sovereign Lord God?
11. Today, what pattern of church government in the evangelical community most closely follows the theocracy / priesthood / judgeship order? What are its advantages? What are its disadvantages?
12. Why do you think the ark had no power to help Israel in the battle, though it had power to throw down the Philistine god, Dagon?
13. What do you think was the significance of Israel losing the ark to the Gentiles?
14. Hannah left her son in the temple; Phinehas' wife died and left her son; the milk cows left their calves (Hebrew: 'sons') and took the ark back to Israel. Why all this emphasis on sons?

## STUDY QUESTIONS 2

### 1 Samuel 7:1–12:25

1. How much time passes between 1 Samuel 7:1 and 8:2? Why do you think the word of God records so little during this prolonged period of time?
2. In 1 Samuel 7:2 why do you think 'all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD'?
3. What was the secret of Israel's victory and revival under Samuel?
4. In 1 Samuel 4:3, when the elders of Israel faced the Philistines, they brought in the ark of the covenant of the Lord. In 1 Samuel 7:9, under similar circumstances, Samuel brought in a lamb. Why? What significance does this have for us when we face our enemies?
5. In 1 Samuel 8:1–9:20 what reasons did the children of Israel state for desiring a king? Suggest some parallels that apply today if the local church moves away from the priesthood/judgeship order?
6. What was the cost to the children of Israel when they chose a king to reign over them (1 Sam 8:10–18)? What warnings did Samuel present to the people in 1 Samuel 12:13–25 after they chose the king 'whom you have desired'? What do you think is the cost to a local church when a 'big man' is appointed to lead the fellowship?
7. Considering Israel's subsequent history, what is implied in the solemn phrase 'the Lord will not hear you in that day' (1 Sam 8:18 KJV)? Comment on the thought: is rejection of the Lord readily reversible? What are the implications for the evangelical community today?
8. The Aaronic office of high priest in Israel was surely an institution set up by God to be a prototype of our Lord's priesthood. Similarly, Moses as a prophet was a prototype of our Lord (Deut 18:15; Acts 3:22). Was not kingship in Israel meant similarly to be a prefiguring of the kingship of Christ? If so, then why was God angry when Israel asked for a king? Did God unfairly prejudice the outcome of the kingdom by selecting for the throne such an unlikely candidate as Saul?
9. Saul was a man of promise. From 1 Samuel 9–11 list his attributes under the following headings:
  - a. Rich in natural endowments:
    - (1) Physical
    - (2) Disposition
    - (3) Other
  - b. Equipped by what was divinely conferred
    - (1) Honours
    - (2) Titles
    - (3) Rights
10. How did the Lord ratify the authority of Saul's appointment as king?
11. What hints of spiritual/character weakness in Saul can you discern from 1 Samuel 9–11?
12. What instructions are associated with the words 'stand still/and see' in 1 Samuel 9:27; 12:7, 16?
13. The kingdom under David, Solomon and others was highly successful. Does this apparent success mean that God eventually, or even reluctantly, approved of Israel seeking a king (see Hos 13:9–11)? Why, or why not?

## STUDY QUESTIONS 3

### 1 Samuel 13:1–16:23

1. What should Saul have learned just prior to his first meeting with Samuel (1 Sam 9:12–13) that would have enabled him to pass his first test (13:8–13)?
2. What evidences of spiritual/character weakness do you observe concerning Saul in 1 Samuel 13:1–15:35?
3. What direct and indirect reasons does the word of God record as to why God rejected Saul as king?
4. What do you think was so wrong with the sins that Saul committed that God had to reject him? When David committed adultery and murder, God did not reject him, but forgave him.
5. First Samuel 14:15–16 and 1 Samuel 7:10 are similar. What is man's role and what is God's role in battle? Did Saul give evidence that he understood the answer to this question? How does 1 Corinthians 3:6–9 relate to it?
6. The offering, the priest, the ephod and the ark figure prominently in the story of the early days of Saul's kingdom (1 Sam 13:9; 14:3, 18–19, 36–37). Specifically, what influence did the above have or not have on Saul's behaviour? In what ways could our behaviour as individuals and as local assemblies be similar today?
7. 'Whatever one sows, that will he also reap' (Gal 6:7). What examples to this law can you cite from the story of 1 Samuel 15?
8. What is God's response to partial or incomplete obedience by his people to his word?
9. Define rebellion. Suggest how it may be manifested today.
10. How do you think the local church today can apply the profound principles of 1 Samuel 15:22–23?
11. In 1 Samuel 16:7 our Lord tells us what he is looking for in his servants. List some of the things about Saul's repentance in 1 Samuel 15 that explain why God rejected him.
12. Since Saul remained king after his rejection by God, can overseers be rejected by God and yet remain in office? How could this be so? Suggest some consequences.
13. In 1 Samuel 16 what are the recorded evidences that Samuel, the man of God, was astray from the purposes of God? Is potential spiritual character readily discernible in a person?
14. What are the attributes of David recorded in 1 Samuel 16 as to (a) his appearance, (b) his reputation? What other hints of spiritual/character strengths of David do you observe in this chapter?
15. What major spiritual transaction takes place in 1 Samuel 16?

## STUDY QUESTIONS 4

### 1 Samuel 17:1–22:2

1. In what way did Saul fulfil the request of the people, and how was the very strength of the first king of Israel demonstrated inadequate in fighting in the Lord's battles (1 Sam 8:19; 9:2; 10:23–24; 17:4)?
2. Goliath was a very big man (so was Saul, 10:23), and as such he was an enemy of God and his people. What New Testament epistle forbids putting our confidence in man? Why, and in what connection?
3. What were the issues at stake in the battle between David and Goliath? How did those issues govern David's choice of weapons? Do you find any connection of thought between this and 1 Corinthians 1:25?
4. What are the meanings of 'Saul' and 'Paul'? Why do you think Saul of Tarsus allowed his name to be changed to Paul? (See Matt 23:7–12)
5. From 1 Samuel 17:28–40, what obstacles did David have to overcome before he faced the adversary? How, specifically, did he overcome in each instance?
6. Who or what do you think David, Saul and Goliath represent?
7. When God rejected Saul, he could (a) have destroyed Saul immediately and anointed David in his place; or (b) have let Saul live on and waited until he died before anointing David. He did neither. He anointed David, but let Saul live on. Why do you think God did things that way? What similarity do you see between God's tactics here and the way in which God has presented his Son to the world as Messiah?
8. In 1 Samuel 18:1 what principle does Jonathan display that is so imperative for believers to grasp today? Why is this so?
9. In the following portions of 1 Samuel, what emotional crutches did God remove from David?
  - a. 18:9–13
  - b. 19:10–12, 18
  - c. 19:12–17
  - d. 19:18–20:1
  - e. 20:1–42
  - f. 21:1–10
  - g. 21:10–15
10. In the following portions of 1 Samuel, how did Jonathan demonstrate his affection for David?
  - a. 18:3–4
  - b. 19:4; 20:32
  - c. 20:41
  - d. 23:16–17
11. Jonathan was a complete coward, compromiser and failure. Would you agree?
12. In 1 Samuel 19:18–24 how would you account for Samuel's silence when he had David and Saul basically under the same roof?
13. Read 1 Samuel 20:1–2 and Matthew 16:21–23. What similarities do you see?
14. In 1 Samuel 21:1–6, why do you think David resorts to lying to the priest, Ahimelech, to explain his presence? Are there times in a believer's life when lying is justified?
15. 'The Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul' (1 Sam 16:14). Was God unjust or unfair in this? List several instances of the Spirit's continuing mercy to, and pleadings with, Saul. How does this situation apply to the Spirit of God in his dealing with believers today?



## STUDY QUESTIONS 5

### 1 Samuel 22:3–31:13

- 1 Being rejected by Israel, David, God's anointed messiah, fled into the hands of the Philistines (1 Sam 21:10–15). He escaped to the cave of Adullam, then came back and presented himself to Israel as saviour of their cities. Finally and officially rejected by Saul, he went to the Gentiles, and was virtually lost to Israel. What similarity do you see between these events and what has happened to the Lord Jesus as God's Messiah?
- 2 First Samuel 22:1–4 presents a remnant leaving all and following David, the rejected messiah (anointed one). What parallel do you see from the New Testament instructions to the believer in 2 Corinthians 6:17–18; and Hebrews 13:12–14?
- 3 Doeg, Saul's chief shepherd, is presented to us as a spy, a betrayer and a killer (1 Sam 21:7; 22:9–19). What does Doeg teach the New Testament believer today regarding the hireling (John 10:1, 10–13); the Judas (Mark 14:10–11); and the wolf (Acts 20:28–30)?
- 4 Jonathan's prophecy in 1 Samuel 23:17–18 did not come to pass. In what way do you think Jonathan failed (1 Sam 22:1–4; Mark 10:35–38; Luke 9:23)?
- 5 Is there a 'forerunner' parallel between Samuel and John the Baptist? Suggest several similarities between them.
- 6 Some people say Abigail behaved wrongly in calling her husband a fool. Would you agree? Was her advice to David correct (see 1 Pet 2:21–23)?
- 7 Compare Saul's refusal to kill Agag and the best of the sheep and oxen (1 Sam 15:3, 9) with his visit to Endor (28:7–25). Explain how this illustrates 'rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft' (15:23 KJV).
- 8 Compare Saul's treatment of Agag, etc. with his willingness to destroy Nob (1 Sam 22:19). Explain how this illustrates 'stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry' (1 Sam 15:23 KJV).
- 9 What connection of thought do you see between 1 Samuel 15; 28:18; 30:1–19; 2 Sam 1:1–16? See also Exodus 17:16; Deuteronomy 25:17–19.
- 10 What were the consequences for David and his remnant of Saul not destroying all the Amalekites (1 Sam 30:1–4, 16–20)? What does this teach the New Testament believer today about:
  - a. The consequences of our failure to destroy Amalek, who is a type of the flesh?
  - b. Our recovery, having already failed in this area?
- 11 David faced many tests (e.g. 1 Sam 17:34–37, 45–46; 24:2–10; 25:10–13; 26:7–11; 27:1–12).
  - a. What principles did David practise that resulted in victory?
  - b. What principles did David fail to practise that resulted in failure?
- 12 Often Saul's disobedience was in marked contrast to, and in spite of, clear lessons taught by the Lord, either to Israel or to himself directly. List some examples and the corresponding previous instructions. What spiritual applications can you discern from these illustrations?

## STUDY QUESTIONS 6

### 2 Samuel 1:1–5:25

1. Did the Amalekite kill the already dying Saul (compare 1 Sam 31:3–6 and 2 Sam 1:6–10)? Why do you think David was so severe in his treatment of the Amalekite? Comment on ‘mercy killing’.
2. The Amalekite gives a reason for his presence on Mount Gilboa in 2 Samuel 1:6. Would you buy a used car from this man? What do you think his real purpose was in being there? Similarly, what can be lurking in the believer’s life and in the church today?
3. What are some of the implications in our own lives of the fact that Saul’s corpse was robbed of its crown and bracelet by an Amalekite whom he had failed to kill? (See 1 Sam 15:2–3, 18.)
4. Why do you think David would not accept the crown from an Amalekite?
5. What does David teach about the character of God in the way he taught others to remember Saul and Jonathan? (See 2 Sam 1:17–27; compare Matt 5:43–45.) Was David wise to teach Israel to respect their memory?
6. In 2 Samuel 2:8–11, why do you think Abner rallied all the tribes except Judah to Ishbosheth, a son of Saul, and not to David?
7. In 2 Samuel 3:17–18 what does Abner’s use of a quotation from the Lord reveal about his character? In 2:8–11, why did he not follow his own advice, ‘Now, then, do it’? In what similar circumstances should the New Testament believer beware today?
8. What does Ish-bosheth’s name mean? In what ways was it descriptive of the man?
9. What did David accomplish (and fail to accomplish) for God during the seven and a half years of his reign in Hebron? In what ways does a divided kingdom impede the work of God today?
10. In 2 Samuel 5:1–3 the elders of Israel anointed David king of Israel. What reasons did they give for choosing David? How do these reasons compare with the New Testament believer choosing Jesus Christ as Lord?
11. In 2 Samuel 5:6–10 and 1 Chronicles 11:4–8 why do you think David moved his capital from Hebron to Jerusalem? Reference is made to the blind and the lame. Who were they? What does the clause ‘the blind and the lame shall not come into the house’ mean?
12. Good government and justice were essential foundations of David’s kingdom. Cite examples of David insisting on them in 2 Samuel 1–5. What lessons are to be learned from these for our lives and assemblies today?

## STUDY QUESTIONS 7

### 2 Samuel 6:1–12:16

1. In 2 Samuel 6:1–7, what was the error? See also 1 Chronicles 15:11–15. Why do you think David, Uzzah and others did this? Suggest how New Testament believers might commit similar errors today.
2. What was the significance of David bringing up the ark to Jerusalem?
3. Why do you think the Lord refused David's personal desire to build a permanent dwelling for the ark of God? In refusing, the Lord offers David a better plan—the Davidic covenant. From 2 Samuel 7:12–16 and 1 Chronicles 17:11–14, list the prophetic clauses which you think have:
  - a. short term fulfilment through/in Solomon
  - b. long term fulfilment through/in Jesus Christ the Lord
4. From 2 Samuel 7:18–21 and 1 Chronicles 17:16–19 describe David's attitude and response to the Lord's alternative proposal (see 2 Sam 23:5). From 2 Samuel 7:22–29 and 1 Chronicles 17:20–27 list and comment on the perceptive observations David declares concerning the Lord God.
5. What was the significance of God's promise to build David a house (dynasty)? How would you answer the problem expressed in Psalm 89? How does the New Testament answer it?
6. In 2 Samuel 8–10 David's kingdom is extended to its zenith. What motivated him? Cite evidences of David's:
  - a. generalship
  - b. governorship (justice)
  - c. generosity (love and loyalty)
7. Second Samuel 8–10 portrays David as an invincible emperor. At this point, how many more years does David have to live? Why do you think his kingdom extends most rapidly at this stage and never extends much further?
8. From 2 Samuel 11:1–5 list the evident wrongs, and suggest how David might have escaped each test/temptation? What previous evidence of character weakness predisposed David to this sin concerning Bathsheba? Cite Scripture references.
9. From verses 6–27, list the evident wrongs and how David might have escaped each test/temptation. What previous evidence of character weakness predisposed David to this sin concerning Uriah, and how successful was his cover up? Again, cite Scripture references.
10. A kingdom is sustained by loyalty: how did David's loyalty to Saul and Jonathan strengthen his kingdom? And how did David's disloyalty to the Lord and Uriah weaken his kingdom?
11. In the light of David's sins (2 Sam 11–12), how would you answer an unbeliever who sneered at the description in Acts 13:22?
12. In 2 Samuel 12:1–16 David is confronted with his sin. How and why was the Lord's approach through Nathan effective?
13. Compare David's repentance in 2 Samuel 12:13 and Psalm 51 with Saul's repentance in 1 Samuel 15:13–31.
14. In the light of 2 Samuel 12:13–14 compare the difference between the penalty of sin and the consequence of sin. Will any of the consequences of sin be eternal?

## STUDY QUESTIONS 8

### 2 Samuel 12:15–19:30

1. We read of David's fall in 2 Samuel 12. List some foolish and sinful actions David tolerated in his life prior to these events, which preconditioned and desensitized him to his sin in the matter of Bathsheba and Uriah.
2. In 2 Samuel 12:15–31 we observe David's behaviour during the reaping of the first consequence of his sin with Bathsheba. What successive practical steps are recorded that reveal how David coped?
3. From 2 Samuel 12–20, list with references the consequences of David's sin concerning Bathsheba and Uriah as it affected:
  - a. David's family
  - b. David personally
  - c. the nation of Israel
4. What was the relationship between Absalom and Talmai (13:37)? Why did Absalom flee to him? How far back can David's problems with Absalom be traced? (Use your concordance.)
5. What was wrong with the wisdom from the mouth of the wise woman of Tekoa? What should David have learned from the story of Cain and Abel? What is the difference between God's provision at the cross for the return of his banished (1 Cor 15:3), and David's 'means' for the return of Absalom (2 Sam 14:14)?
6. Contrast the return of Absalom with the return of the prodigal (Luke 15). What was lacking in Absalom's repentance? What was lacking in David's administration of justice?
7. What elements of truth are found in Absalom's claims in 2 Samuel 15:1–6? What lessons for the New Testament assembly can we learn from Absalom identifying certain problems and David failing to deal with them?
8. Contrast Absalom's quest for power and the throne in 2 Samuel 15:1–12 with the ways and means David used to be crowned king of Judah and then Israel. What lessons can you see for New Testament church leadership?
9. Second Samuel 1–15 shows that David insisted upon justice in his kingdom but not in his family. What possible explanations can you give for this failure? What were some of the consequences?
10. Why did David send the ark back to Jerusalem (2 Sam 15)? Would you have done so?
11. Which advice was better, Ahithophel's or Hushai's? Why? And why do you think Absalom followed Hushai's advice?
12. How was David right and/or wrong to grieve over Absalom?
13. Read 2 Samuel 19:11–30. Would you agree with everything David did to win his way back to the throne?
14. Do you think Solomon learned some wisdom from his father? Compare 2 Samuel 19:29–30 and 1 Kings 3:25–26 and give reasons for your answer. How should New Testament believers learn wisdom?

## STUDY QUESTIONS 9

### 2 Samuel 19:31–24:25

1. From 2 Samuel 19:31–37 analyse the many reasons Barzillai gives for not accompanying David to Jerusalem. Similarly, what may hold back the New Testament believer from full devotion to the Lord? Contrast the attitude of Mephibosheth in 2 Samuel 19:24–30.
2. Read 2 Samuel 19:40–20:26. Was it love and loyalty to David or some other factor that made the nation fall out over the right and wrong way to bring back the king?
3. Read 2 Samuel 20:16–22. Describe the counsel of the wise woman of Abel and explain Joab's folly (see Deut 20:10–12).
4. Read 2 Samuel 21:1–14. What was so wrong with what Saul did? Was David right to let the Gibeonites set the punishment? Why, or why not?
5. What secrets of outstanding personal life and church government do you learn from the last words of David (2 Sam 23:1–7).
6. In the context of David's mighty men, what does the story of 'the three' in 2 Samuel 23:13–17 teach about worship and its value?
7. Why was Joab not listed as one of David's mighty men, although he is identified three times in 2 Samuel 23:18–39?
8. Study David's relationship with Joab throughout 2 Samuel. If David was in fact the Lord's anointed, why did he so frequently let himself be overruled by Joab? Would you agree that:
  - a. David often disapproved of Joab's behaviour?
  - b. David seems to have been helplessly dominated by Joab?What conclusions do you draw from the facts? Is God responsible for all the sins and scandals committed by his servants?
9. What was wrong with David's numbering of the people?
10. David does a better job of governing in the first half of 2 Samuel than in the second half. Cite examples. What lessons for the New Testament believer and the local church are illustrated here?
11. The books of 1 and 2 Samuel are parallel to 1 and 2 Corinthians in that they all deal with problems of disunity among the people of God. Cite some truths on church unity taught or illustrated in 1 and 2 Samuel.

## STUDY NOTES 1

### Table of Contents for the Book of Judges

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#### The Two Introductions

1. 1:1 *And it came to pass after the death of Joshua . . .*
  2. 2:6 *Now when Joshua had sent the people away . . . another [third] generation . . . which knew not the Lord, and the children of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord . . .*
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#### The Main Deliverers

3. 3:7 *And the children of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.*  
DELIVERER: OTHNIEL
  4. 3:12 *And the children of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.*  
DELIVERER: EHUD  
After Ehud: Shamgar
  5. 4:1 *And the children of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.*  
DELIVERERS: DEBORAH, BARAK, Jael
  6. 6:1 *And the children of Israel did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.*  
DELIVERER: GIDEON
  7. 8:33 *And it came to pass, as soon as Gideon was dead, that the children of Israel turned again and went a whoring after the Baalim . . . > ABIMELECH: KING.*  
DELIVERER: A WOMAN OF THEBEZ  
After Abimelech: Tola, Jair
  8. 10:6 *And the children of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.*  
DELIVERER: JEPHTHAH  
After Jephthah: Ibzan, Elon, Abdon
  9. 13:1 *And the children of Israel again did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord.*  
DELIVERER: SAMSON
- 

#### The Two Epilogues

10. 17:1 Micah—a Levite—the Danites—and their idolatry
  11. 19:1 The all-tribal-assembly and its mishandling of a case of gross immorality
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## STUDY NOTES 2

### The Major Captivities and Deliverers in the Book of Judges

1:1–3:6; 17:1–21:25

<b>Two Introductions</b>		<b>Two Epilogues</b>	
<p><b>1. After the Death of Joshua</b> <i>Who shall go up first against the Canaanites?</i> Covenant, Bochim, weeping</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">↑</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>	<p><b>11. Benjamin's Immortality</b> <i>Who shall go up first against Benjamin?</i> Bethel, weeping, ark of covenant</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↑</p>
<p><b>2. When Joshua had Sent the People Away</b> Intermittent idolatry</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↙</p>	<p><b>5. Deborah, Barak, Jael</b> Enemy: Canaanites Tactic: Skull pierced with tent peg</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↑</p>	<p><b>7. Woman of Thebez</b> Enemy: Abimelech Tactic: Skull crushed with millstone</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>	<p><b>10. Micah's Idolatry</b> Institutionalised idolatry</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↑</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">↘</p>	<p><b>4. Ehud</b> Enemy: Moabites Tactic: Killing the enemy at the fords</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↑</p>	<p><b>8. Jephthah</b> Enemy: Ammonites Tactic: Killing one's brethren at the fords</p> <p style="text-align: center;">↓</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">↘</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">↘</p>	<p><b>3. Othniel</b> Enemy: Mesopotamians Secret of success: his wife</p>	<p><b>9. Samson</b> Enemy: Philistines Secret of failure: his wives</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">↘</p>

## STUDY NOTES 3

### The Two Introductions and the Two Epilogues of the Book of Judges

#### **The Introductions**

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**1:1–2:5** AFTER THE DEATH OF JOSHUA: the all-tribal assembly and the second phase of the conquest. *Who shall go up first against the Canaanites?—and the Lord said, Judah (1:1–2).*

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**2:6–3:6** THE THIRD GENERATION AFTER JOSHUA: Israel's recurrent lapses into, and rescues from, idolatry.

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#### **The Epilogues**

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**17:1–18:31** THE GRANDSON OF MOSES AND HIS POSTERITY BECOME PRIESTS IN THE DANITES' SYSTEM OF INSTITUTIONALIZED IDOLATRY (18:30).

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**19:1–21:25** THE ALL-TRIBAL ASSEMBLY AND THE BOTCHED DISCIPLINE OF BENJAMIN. *Who shall go up for us first to battle against the Benjamites?—and the Lord said, Judah (20:18).*

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## STUDY NOTES 4

### [A Structural Overview of 1 & 2 Samuel](#)

The following four pages provide a bird's eye view of the whole of 1 and 2 Samuel. Laid out side by side, they give a structural breakdown of the entirety of both books in eight sections, comprising sixteen separate major movements, with two parts in each movement.

If you would like to see these charts with fewer page divisions, please visit:

<https://www.myrtlefieldhouse.com/en/resource/1605/the-parallel-structure-of-12>

## STRUCTURE PAGE 1 — 1 SAMUEL

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### Section 1 (1:1–7:17)

#### *Movement 1 (1:1–4:1)*

##### **Part 1: Birth of Samuel (1:1–2:11)**

- a. Eli's sons. The two rivals and their sons: Hannah's vow
- b. Birth and dedication of Samuel
- c. Hannah's psalm of praise

THE LORD WILL EXALT THE HORN OF HIS ANOINTED

### Section 2 (8:1–15:35)

#### *Movement 3 (8:1–12:25)*

##### **Part 1: People Reject God: Demand King (8:1–10:16)**

- a. God consents but under protest
- b. Samuel warns them what a king will be like: 'He will take your sons' (1 Sam 8:11)
- c. Erring donkeys lead Saul to Samuel: Saul's selection and training in God's guidance

SAMUEL SECRETLY ANOINTS SAUL AS PRINCE AND KING

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##### **Part 2: Samuel Recognized as Prophet (2:12–4:1)**

- d. Eli attempts to reprimand his sons: they refuse to listen
- e. Man of God denounces Eli and his house. A faithful priest is to take his place
- f. God calls Samuel and announces judgment on Eli's house

VOICES IN THE NIGHT. SAMUEL RECOGNIZES GOD'S VOICE FOR THE FIRST TIME

##### **Part 2: Samuel's Acclamation and Vindication Before the People (10:17–12:25)**

- d. Saul presented and acclaimed: but some disapprove
- e. Saul's victory over king of Ammon saves the eyes of Jabesh-Gileadites
- f. Re-affirmation of kingship

THUNDER BY DAY CONVICTS ISRAEL OF WICKEDNESS IN DEMANDING KING

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#### *Movement 2 (4:2–7:17)*

##### **Part 1: Israel Loses Ark of Covenant (4:2–5:12)**

- a. Battle with Philistines
- b. Ark brought into battle is taken by Philistines. Eli and sons die: Ichabod, the glory has departed
- c. Ark brought into Dagon's temple

DAGON FALLS FLAT ON GROUND BEFORE ARK. ITS HANDS AND HEAD CUT OFF

#### *Movement 4 (13:1–15:35)*

##### **Part 1: Saul's Sin and First Rejection (13:1–14)**

- a. Jonathan's successful initial skirmish. Saul provokes the Philistines
- b. Philistines gather for attack: Israelites panic and begin to melt away
- c. Saul foolishly sacrifices without waiting for Samuel

SAMUEL TELLS SAUL HIS KINGDOM WILL NOT CONTINUE

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##### **Part 2: Return of Ark: Restoration of Israel (6:1–7:17)**

- d. Lords of Philistines in distress: debate: send back ark
- e. Israel judged for looking into ark
- f. Israel's self-judgment. Samuel's intercession and sacrifice

LORD THUNDERS: PHILISTINES DEFEATED: EBENEZER

##### **Part 2: Saul's Sin and Second Rejection (13:15–15:35)**

- d. Jonathan's initial success through God's guidance
- e. Jonathan's eyes enlightened: but Saul's absurd interpretation of God's guidance would have executed Jonathan. The people overrule Saul
- f. Saul, under pretext of sacrifice, rejects God's word and does not destroy God's enemy, the king of Amalek, when in his power

VOICES IN THE NIGHT (1 SAM 15:10–11). GOD REJECTS SAUL FROM BEING KING

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**Section 3 (16:1–22:2)**

**Section 4 (22:3–31:13)**

*Movement 5 (16:1–18:30)*

*Movement 7 (22:3–26:25)*

**Part 1: David Secretly Anointed King (16:1–18:4)**

**Part 1: David Reappears in Israel (22:3–23:29)**

- a. Samuel anoints David. ‘Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart’ (1 Sam 16:7)
- b. David taken into Saul’s house to play before him
- c. David defeats Goliath with a sling and stone and cuts off his head with his own sword

- a. David comes up out of cave. Saul has Doeg slay God’s priests
- b. David saves Keilah from Philistines. Enquires of Lord and escapes Saul
- c. David at Ziph: saved from Saul by coming of Philistines

JONATHAN LOVES DAVID: STRIPS HIMSELF: GIVES ROBE AND WEAPONS TO DAVID: MAKES COVENANT WITH HIM

JONATHAN COMES SECRETLY TO DAVID: RECOGNIZES DAVID AS FUTURE KING: MAKES COVENANT WITH HIM

**Part 2: Saul Grows Jealous of David (18:5–30)**

**Part 2: David’s ‘Justification’ (24:1–26:25)**

- d. On return from fight, women praise David more than Saul
- e. Saul tries twice to spear David: but the people love David
- f. Saul tries to use his daughters to get David killed. But Michal loves David; David kills two hundred Philistines

- d. David spared Saul’s life in the cave, but shames him. Saul recognizes David will be king
- e. David restrained by Abigail’s wisdom from vengeance of the fool, Nabal
- f. David spares Saul’s life in the stockade, but removes his security

DAVID BEHAVED HIMSELF MORE WISELY THAN ALL SAUL’S SERVANTS

VOICES IN THE NIGHT, SAUL KNEW DAVID’S VOICE. SAUL SAYS ‘I HAVE PLAYED THE FOOL’ (1 SAM 26:21)

*Movement 6 (19:1–22:2)*

*Movement 8 (27:1–31:13)*

**Part 1: Saul’s Overt Attempts to Kill David (19:1–24)**

**Part 1: Israel Lose their Messiah (27:1–28:25)**

- a. Frustrated by: Jonathan’s logic
- b. Michal’s love
- c. Samuel and the Holy Spirit

- a. David departs to Philistines: given Ziklag to live in
- b. David’s behaviour in Ziklag: spoils . . . Amalekites. Keeper of Achish’s head
- c. Saul gets witch to bring up Samuel who announces his doom

SAUL STRIPS HIMSELF NAKED AND LIES DOWN BEFORE SAMUEL ALL THAT DAY AND NIGHT

SAUL FALLS FULL LENGTH ON EARTH: EATS AT WITCH’S TABLE

**Part 2: David, the Messiah, Must Go (20:1–22:2)**

**Part 2: God’s Judgment on Saul (29:1–31:13)**

- d. Jonathan’s arrows point out the distance. The oath between them
- e. David comes to the priest Ahimelech; eats the showbread; is given Goliath’s sword
- f. David falls into hands of the Philistines . . . Madness!? Escapes to the caves of Adullam

- d. Lords of Philistines sent David home. David does not fight against Israel
- e. David recovers women and spoil of Ziklag from Amalekites
- f. Philistines defeat Israelites; slay Saul’s sons; Saul’s suicide

CONQUEROR OF THE PHILISTINES IN THE POWER OF THE PHILISTINES

SAUL'S ARMOUR IN IDOL'S TEMPLE: HIS HEAD CUT OFF: BODY NAILED

TO WALL: RESCUED AND BURIED BY JABESH-GILEADITES

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**Section 5 (1:1–8:18)**

**Section 6 (9:1–15:6)**

*Movement 9 (1:1–4:12)*

*Movement 11 (9:1–12:31)*

**Part 1: Relations Between David and the House of Saul (1:1–2:32)**

- a. David executes Amalekite who brings him Saul's crown. He teaches Israel the song of the bow
- b. David, anointed in Hebron; blesses those who buried Saul
- c. War games between Abner and Joab

**Part 1: Kindness—True and False (9:1–11:27)**

- a. Kindness to Mephibosheth of house of Saul for Jonathan's sake
- b. Kindness to King of Ammon's son leads to rebuff and war
- c. David's self-indulgence leads to abuse of power, adultery and murder

**Part 2: The Long War between House of Saul and House of David (3:1–4:12)**

- d. Abner, king-maker in Israel, opens negotiations to transfer kingdom of house of Saul to David. A question of wives!
- e. Joab murders Abner; David disapproves
- f. Two captains assassinate Ish-bosheth. David executes them

ISH-BOSHETH'S HEAD CUT OFF; DAVID BURIES IT

**Part 2: Forgiveness but Discipline (12:1–31)**

- d. Nathan denounces David's sin. David repents and is forgiven. But consequences and discipline
- e. God refuses David's plea. Bathsheba's child dies. But Solomon is born and the Lord loves him
- f. David's final victory over Ammon

CROWN TAKEN OFF AMMON'S KING'S HEAD AND SET ON DAVID'S HEAD

*Movement 10 (5:1–8:18)*

*Movement 12 (13:1–15:6)*

**Part 1: Establishment of David's Kingdom (5:1–6:23)**

- a. All Israel anoint David as king. David takes Jerusalem. Is recognized by Hiram. Takes more wives and sons
- b. Two attempts by Philistines to destroy him are defeated by God's guidance
- c. David brings up ark to Jerusalem

**Part 1: Questions of Love and Punishment (13:1–14:24)**

- a. Amnon loves, rapes and dismisses Tamar. Absalom hates him
- b. Absalom murders Amnon and flees to Geshur
- c. Persuaded by Joab and wise woman of Tekoa not to punish, David allows Absalom to return to Jerusalem but not to see the king's face

**Part 2: God Builds David a House (7:1–8:18)**

- d. God promises to build David a house and maintain his seed and throne. David's response
- e. David's two sets of victories over enemies
- f. DAVID EXECUTES JUDGMENT AND JUSTICE FOR ALL HIS PEOPLE

**Part 2: Justice, True and False (14:25–15:6)**

- d. Absalom's beauty, head of hair, and vanity
- e. Absalom defies the king's justice and demands to see the king's face: 'let him kill me, if iniquity is in me' (2 Sam 14:32). David kisses Absalom
- f. ABSALOM CHAMPIONS 'JUSTICE' AND KISSES EVERYONE IN ORDER TO STEAL PEOPLE'S HEARTS FROM DAVID



**Section 7 (15:7–19:8)**

*Movement 13 (15:7–16:14)*

**Part 1: Questions of Loyalty (15:7–29)**

- a. Under guise of honouring a vow to God, Absalom starts a rebellion against God's anointed
- b. David flees, but allows Ittai free choice
- c. Zadok brings ark, but David sends it back

**Section 8 (19:1–24:25)**

*Movement 15 (19:9–20:26)*

**Part 1: Israel and Judah Bring Back the King (19:9–30)**

- a. Israel's discussions and David's appeal to Judah to bring him back. Amasa commander in chief!
- b. Shimei comes to Jordan to plead for mercy
- c. Mephibosheth comes to Jerusalem to explain his behaviour

**Part 2: On the Use of Deception, Reward and Violence to Gain Support and Suppress Critics (15:30–16:14)**

- d. Commissioning Hushai's double-talk
- e. Believing and rewarding Ziba's slander of Mephibosheth
- f. Refusing to suppress Shimei's abuse of criticism

TAKE OFF SHIMEI'S HEAD? NO.

**Part 2: Division Over David's Return (19:31–20:26)**

- d. The foreigner Barzillai declines the reward of accompanying David to Jerusalem. His son goes
- e. Dispute between Israel and Judah over protocol of return, leads to secession
- f. David returns to his house. Puts end to secession

SHEBA'S HEAD CUT OFF AND THROWN TO JOAB

*Movement 14 (16:15–19:8)*

**Part 1: Wisdom—True and False**

- a. Absalom, Hushai and Ahithophel. Ahithophel's advice to concentrate on killing David at once
- b. Hushai's counter-advice appeals to Absalom's vanity
- c. Secret informers get word to David, who escapes. Ahithophel hangs himself

*Movement 16 (21:1–24:25)*

**Part 1: Attitude to Power (1)**

- a. Saul's blood-stained house. Tries to annihilate the Gibeonites. Seven of his sons executed
- b. David's two sets of deliverances from Philistines and from sons of giants
- c. David's long psalm of deliverances

**Part 2: Compassion—True and False (17:24–19:8)**

- d. David and Absalom take up positions. David helped by non-Israelites
- e. The battle: Absalom killed. David laments: 'would God I had died for thee' (2 Sam 18:33)
- f. DAVID'S MOURNING FOR ABSALOM RISKS LOSING THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE SUFFERED FOR DAVID

**Part 2: Attitude to Power (2) (23:1–24:25)**

- d. David's house right with God
- e. Rank and reward of two sets of David's mighty men
- f. DAVID'S PRIDE CAUSES DEATH OF SEVENTY THOUSAND PEOPLE. DAVID OFFERS TO SUFFER HIMSELF TO SAVE THE PEOPLE AND PAYS THE COST OF SACRIFICE





## STUDY NOTES 5

### A Synopsis of 1 & 2 Samuel

#### Historical Setting

1. First Samuel records the changeover in Israel  
From: rule by judges (raised up by God from time to time to meet emergencies in particular tribes)  
To: rule by permanently established, hereditary monarchs
2. The people's demand for a hereditary monarchy was occasioned by:
  - a. the failure of the judges
  - b. the failure of the Levites
  - c. the failure of the all-tribal assembly
  - d. the failure of the priesthood
3. The hereditary monarchs also turned out in the end to be failures
4. These failures cry out for the coming of God's perfect Judge, Levite, Counsellor, Priest and King

#### The Scope

1. The first king was a disaster and God rejected him. But 1 Samuel ends with 'the king after God's heart'; though anointed by God, still rejected by Israel as a whole, and in exile among the Gentiles. The major theme of 1 Samuel therefore is: **THE PROBLEMS INVOLVED IN BECOMING KING.**
2. Second Samuel tells how David eventually returned from the Gentiles and became king, first of Judah, and then of all Israel. The major theme of 2 Samuel therefore is: **THE PROBLEMS INVOLVED IN BEING KING.**

#### Points for Special Notice

1.
  - a. Near the beginning of 1 Samuel, Israel, through the sin of the priests, lose the ark to the Gentiles.
  - b. Near the end, Israel, through the envy of the king, lose the 'messiah' to the Gentiles.
2.
  - a. The central chapters of 1 Samuel record Saul's sin against God in regard to Amalek.
  - b. The central chapters of 2 Samuel record David's failures and sin with Bathsheba.
3.
  - a. The central chapters of 1 Samuel record certain love stories, e.g. 18:16, 20.
  - b. The central chapters of 2 Samuel similarly record certain love stories, e.g. Amnon for his sister (ch. 13), David for Bathsheba (chs. 11-12).

**Section One: 1 Samuel 1:1–7:17**

**General Theme (1):** The corruption of the priesthood under Eli and his sons, viewed against the background of the true 'priestly' attitude of Hannah and Samuel.

- A. Hannah's motivation in praying for a child
- B. Hannah's song, expressing God's principles of government
- C. The denunciation of the sins of Eli's house by a man of God
- D. Voices in the night: God announces to Samuel his judgment on Eli's house

**General Theme (2):** Two contrasting battles with the Philistines: one leading to defeat, the other to victory.

- A. Israel's superstitious attempt to use the ark in the first battle as a means of religious magic is disowned by God. Israel loses the ark to the Gentiles
- B. The nature of Philistine religion and the power of the God of the ark among the Gentiles
- C. The miraculous return of the ark
- D. In the second battle, repentance, self-judgment and utter dependence on God, lead to Israel's victory

**Something to Ponder:** Remarkable females!

- A. Hannah leaves her son in the tabernacle at Shiloh
- B. Phinehas' wife leaves her son and 'goes home'
- C. The two milk cows leave their 'sons' and take the ark back

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**Section Two: 1 Samuel 8:1–15:35**

**General Theme:** The problem of hereditary evil. Israel's false solution: the appointment of a Big Man who should set up a hereditary monarchy, and put down evil by sheer force. The falsity of this solution demonstrated. God rejects their king.

1. Israel's demand for a king: the rights and the wrongs of it. God's selection and training of Saul, and presentation to the people
2. Saul's apparent vindication as king. Samuel's representation of the true situation. Thunder by day
3. Saul fails his first and second tests
4. Saul fails to destroy Amalek and is finally rejected by God. Voices in the night

### Section Three: 1 Samuel 16:1–22:2

**General Theme:** The Problem of Evil; the Problem of the Big Man, rebellious and God-defying. God's solution is to anoint as king a man whose deliberate choice of weak weapons allows God's power to overcome the enemy. But Saul rejects and tries to kill God's king; who then falls into the hands of the Gentiles, and goes into a cave.

1. God's strategy for replacing Saul with David. David's victory over Goliath and its result
  2. Saul determines to kill David. Saul's sin against the Holy Spirit. 'Messiah must go'. Messiah and the showbread. Messiah allows himself to fall into the hands of the Philistines. Messiah goes down into a cave
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### Section Four: 1 Samuel 22:3–31:13

**General Theme:** David reappears to Israel and offers himself as saviour. Saul's opposition involves sacrilege against priesthood. David's 'justification' of himself. Under persecution from Saul, God's messiah eventually 'goes to the Gentiles' and is largely lost to Israel, though a remnant is faithful to him. God's judgment descends on Saul and Israel

1. David's 'reappearance' to Israel and his 'justification'
  2. Israel lose their messiah to the Gentiles. But he remains loyal to Israel and successfully deals with Amalek; while, for refusal to destroy Amalek, Saul is himself destroyed, by an Amalekite (2 Sam 1:1–16)
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### Section Five: 2 Samuel 1:1–8:18

**General Theme:** The return of God's anointed messiah to Israel as king, first in Hebron and then in Jerusalem. Principles in the takeover of power. The establishment of his kingdom and God's promise to build a dynasty (house) that should include the Messiah (2 Sam 7:14; Heb 1:5)

1. David's attitude to the house of Saul and to the sanctities of life
2. David's unification of Israel and his capture of Jerusalem: its significance in history, in theology (e.g. Gal 4; Heb 12), and in prophecy
3. The bringing up of the ark to Jerusalem
4. David's desire to build God a house and God's promise to build him one

### **Section Six: 2 Samuel 9:1–14:33<sup>8</sup>**

**General Theme:** The problems of government (1). In this section and the next David suffers, through his own fault, a grievous rebellion, which nevertheless brings him nearer to understanding the heart of God, who also has suffered a vast rebellion.

1. Kindness, true and false; love, true and false
  2. Forgiveness of the penalty of sin, but not of its consequences
  3. Is punishment inconsistent with love? What is the purpose of punishment?
  4. David's failure to deal properly with Absalom's crime, leads to Absalom's rebellion against David
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### **Section Seven: 2 Samuel 15:1–19:8**

**General Theme:** The problem of government (2): David's reaction to the rebellion of the people, contrasted with Absalom's motives and methods in serving power, helps us to see who has the better claim to be the true king.

1. Absalom's false attitude to justice
  2. David takes practical steps but meekly leaves the verdict to God
  3. Absalom's vanity leads to his own defeat
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### **Section Eight—Movement 15: 2 Samuel 19:8–20:26**

**General Theme:** The return of the king from exile: David's questionable methods used to pacify the rebels and regain their loyalty

1. Was David right:
  - a. To appoint Amasa to replace Joab?
  - b. In favouring the Judahites more than the Israelites?
  - c. In refusing to execute Shimei?
  - d. In his treatment of Mephibosheth and Ziba?
  - e. In the method used to end Sheba's revolt?
2. David's uneasy conscience over some of these issues is shown in 1 Kings 1–2, which many scholars think was originally a part of 2 Samuel.

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<sup>8</sup> Note: the breakdown of this section and the next differ from the one Dr Gooding notes in his structural overview. There it is Section 6 (9:1–15:6) and Section 7 (15:7–19:8).

## **Section Eight—Movement 16: 2 Samuel 21:1–24:25**

**General Theme:** The secret of David's power to command the love, loyalty and obedience of his nation, of his mighty men, and of his widespread Gentile empire. A prototype of Christ's universal reign

1. Saul and David contrasted their attitude towards Gentiles in Israel
2. David's last words
3. David's sin in numbering the people, and his offer to bear the judgment

## About the Author

**DAVID W. GOODING (1925-2019)** was Professor of Old Testament Greek at Queen's University, Belfast and a member of the Royal Irish Academy. He taught the Bible internationally and lectured on both its authenticity and its relevance to philosophy, world religions and daily life. He published scholarly articles on the Septuagint and Old Testament narratives, as well as expositions of Luke, John, Acts, Hebrews, the New Testament's Use of the Old Testament, and several books addressing arguments against the Bible and the Christian faith. His analysis of the Bible and our world continues to shape the thinking of scholars, teachers and students alike.