

## 2 Samuel 21:1-22

These final chapters (21-24) are sometimes regarded as a self contained section revealing different aspects of David's reign. Here in chapter 21 we are told the land has experienced famine on three successive years and God reveals to David that this is a consequence of Saul's behaviour towards the Gibeonites. (Joshua 9: The Gibeonites deceive Israel into making a covenant with them guaranteeing their safety. Saul ignores the covenant and kills many of the Gibeonites) David seeks to make atonement for the past sins of the house of Saul.

The Gibeonite demand is the execution of 7 of Saul's sons. Once again David is not ruling but reacting and he lamely complies with the request. This despite the clear instruction: *Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sins. (Deut 24:16)* In addition the Gibeonites initial response to David's question references money: *We have no right to demand silver or gold from Saul or his family.*(4) Was this not inviting some offer on that front? David's readiness to hand over Saul's grandsons stands in contrast to his unwillingness to act decisively in relation to Joab, Amnon and Absalom in his own household.

Particular stress is placed on the treatment of the bodies. *He handed them over to the Gibeonites, who killed them and exposed their bodies....(9)*. Not to be granted proper burial is regarded as a serious penalty. Jeremiah prophesied of King Jehoiakim: *He will have the burial of a donkey - dragged away and thrown outside the gates of Jerusalem. (Jer 22:19)*. The chapter focusses on the love and loyalty of a mother for her dead sons. (10) This courageous move seems to jolt David into action and he intervenes to grant proper burial to Saul and his family. It maybe this, rather than the executions that is being referred to in v14. *After that God answered prayer on behalf of the land.*

- Words matter and promises are important. God expects us to be true to our word. (Matt 5:33-37) Do we need to check our commitments large and small?
- There are places where judgment goes beyond individuals and affects families. (1 Sam 2:33-34, 1 Kings 14:10,11, 2 Kings 9:7-9) David's sin has undoubtedly affected his family. Should this be more of a factor in the way we assess our behaviour?
- Are we inclined to react to others or to take godly initiative?

## 2 Samuel 22:1-30

At the heart of this final section stand chapters 22 and 23. The first celebrates God's saving acts on behalf of David and the second the covenantal relationship between the Lord and the house of David upon which much of Israel's hopes rested. These are the keys to David's greatness. This chapter is reproduced almost exactly as Psalm 18.

V2,3

David's security is rooted in God. The images he uses are appropriate to someone who has experienced pursuit and attack; someone who has had to develop survival skills in the hills and caves of Israel's wilder country. But in reflecting, David sees beyond the various bolt holes that sheltered him to the Lord's protection, which proved decisive. *The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer.* (2) It was Martin Luther who said the Christian life was mainly the ability to use personal pronouns. Notice how often David uses the word 'my' and ask yourself whether you share his conviction.

V4-20

These verses recall God's saving intervention on his behalf. It may have been one of those occasions in which Saul was closing in on him or perhaps some other seemingly

catastrophic moment. Whatever, his life seemed to hang precariously in the balance. *The cords of the grave coiled around me; the snares of death confronted me. (6)* His prayer for rescue was answered by a huge display of heavenly force. (8-16) From one angle this may have been some terrifying thunderstorm that engulfed his pursuers but from another it was the arrival of his Lord who *'reached down from on high.... He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes who were too strong for me. (17,18)* David's 'memoirs' were full of brave deeds (eg Goliath) and great victories on the battlefield. He chooses though to celebrate the Lord's saving mercy towards him. What things are you careful to remember?

V21-30

These words seem difficult to reconcile with what we know of David from chapter 11 onwards. There are two things worth bearing in mind. The introduction refers specifically to Saul *when the Lord delivered him from the hand of Saul*. David's behaviour in relation to Saul was exemplary. On two occasions he has the opportunity to kill his enemy but on both he *'keeps the way of the Lord'*. So in this respect at least he can say, *The Lord has dealt with me according to my righteousness. (21)*

Secondly despite his sin David remains a 'First commandment' man. He stands in contrast to his son Solomon who *'did not follow the Lord completely as David his father had done' (1 Kings 11:6)*. Even in his sin David reveals how the Lords people are to repent. (see Psalm 51)

David knows where his help comes from and what is possible through the Lords enabling. *With your help I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall. (30)*

- Pick a verse from the first part of the psalm and memorise it.
- Take some time to reflect on your experience of the Lords help and mark his past mercies to you.
- What obstacles or opposition are you facing? (v30) Consider David's confidence and remind yourself that David's rock is your unchanging God.

## 2 Samuel 22:31-51

As David continues this review of his life the tone remains the same. This is not a man celebrating his achievements but rather someone acknowledging his indebtedness.

*For who is God besides the Lord? And who is the rock except our God. (32)*. To read the OT is to find yourself preoccupied with the nation of Israel. It fills the picture and seems to crowd out everything. This though is an extremely small country surrounded by much bigger and more sophisticated neighbours. Yet David declares the Lord their God is the one true God. At a stroke he dismisses the neighbouring rivals. In doing so he encourages us not to be fazed by threats and intimidation of our day. The Lord has no rivals and he provides us with a firm place to stand. *And who is the Rock except our God. (see v34,37)*

*You armed me with strength for battle; you humbled my adversaries before me. (40)*

David knows where victory comes from. This has been his consistent conviction all through his life. Whether as a teenager confronting Goliath or a King facing Philistine armies his confidence remains firmly located in his God. His words to Goliath are echoed in this chapter: *This day the Lord will deliver you into my hands, and I will strike you down and cut off your head. (1 Sam 17:46)* And the victories God gives are complete and final.

The Lord extends the scope of David's rule across nations. *He is the God who avenges me who put the nations under me. (48)* God's throne is not restricted to one nationality. It

embraces the nations. And although the language of this psalm is confined to battlefields and warfare better things are planned for these nations.

David's life points us forward to the coming of his descendent, the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the one true God who rules over this planet. *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. (Matt 28:18)*. He is the one who achieves complete victory over all our enemies on our behalf. V38 - 43 with its strong verbs: pursued, crushed, humbled, pounded and trampled comes to life when we consider the victory of the Lord Jesus over sin and Satan and hell. And he is the one who will win the nations and bring them under his authority and care. Well might we join in David's song of praise. (47)

- When we are tempted to be intimidated by the powers of our secular age David would remind us who is the one true God. Read Isaiah 40 with its recurring question: *To whom will you compare me or who is my rival?*
- Are we as quick as David to acknowledge where all our success comes from? Like him do we direct our praise to God?
- Are we committed to alerting the nations to the benefits that await them under the rule of Christ?

## 2 Samuel 23:1- 39

These final chapters take us to the heart of David's life and ministry and at the centre of everything stands Gods covenantal relationship. *If my house were not right with God, surely he would not have made with me an everlasting covenant...* (5) These words take us back to chapter 7 and the Lords promise to David. *Your house and your kingdom shall endure for ever before me, your throne shall be established for ever. (7:16)* David's response at the time was sheer amazement that God would make such a promise to someone as insignificant as him. *Who am I Sovereign Lord and what is my family, that you have brought me this far? (7:18)* And this preceeds David's evil behaviour over Bathsheba, all known ahead of time by his all-seeing Lord. Like all of us, David and his house are right with God because God has taken the initiative to put him and us right with himself.

David is right that when one rules in the fear of the Lord '*he is like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning...*'(4) As we have seen David's rule didn't always deliver health and life to his people. The OT will end by announcing the coming of another king one described as '*the sun of righteousness*' who will rise '*with healing in its rays*'. (Mal 4:2)

The chapter goes on to list David's special forces, men who fought bravely on his behalf.

- They challenge our timidity. We are not being asked '*to go down into a pit on a snowy day and kill a lion*' (20) But we are called to engage in the spiritual struggle (Eph 6:10ff) with its call to be unashamed.
- They question our loyalty. David's desire for a drink of water from behind enemy lines leads three of his men to risk their lives to quench his thirst. It says much about the loyalty David inspired. We have a better king, but how far would we go in meeting his desires.

And for those mathematically concerned: the chapter ends, '*there were 37 in all.*' There are in fact only 36 names in the section Five are mentioned in v8-23 and there are 31 names in the Thirty(8-39)

The list may assume the inclusion of Joab who was the commander of the entire army.

## 2 Samuel 24: 1-25

The chapter begins by stating the Lord incited David to take a census of the people. The parallel passage in 1 Chronicles (21) lays the blame at Satan's door. We are in mysterious territory here similar to the opening verses of the book of Job. At its simplest God grants Satan permission to tempt David. It proves an invitation that the King is unable to resist.

The sin of counting the fighting men relates to pride. Nebuchadnezzar expressed himself in these terms: *"Is not this the great Babylon I have built ... by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty."* (Dan 4:30) David is in danger of entertaining similar thoughts. The victories listed in 22:35-43 are no longer simply 'the Lord's'. Self sufficiency is a beguiling location which for the Christian needs to be avoided at all costs. The language of spiritual health begins, "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5)

There are 3 turning points in this sad chapter.

The first is when David is conscience stricken at what he has done. (10) This comes before the arrival of the seer Gad with the painful options. David's hope is that in wrath the Lord will remember mercy and that his judgment will be moderated by compassion. His faith is vindicated to a degree by what takes place in v16.

The second is the change in David. He moves from proud self interest (how great is my army) to behaving as the Shepherd King who cares deeply about the plight of his people. *When David saw the angel who was striking down the people, he said to the Lord, 'I have sinned; I the shepherd have done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? Let your hand fall on me and my family.'* (17) Was David offering to die for his people?

The third turning point centres on the location. The plague stops at the threshing floor of Araunah. David buys the site, builds an altar and offers sacrifice. 1 Chron 22:1 identifies this as the site of the temple. The temple will serve as a reminder of the day when Gods wrath was turned away from his people by means of sacrifice. It will also point ahead to an even greater day.

- Finishing well is a huge challenge. Later years are full of temptations to self sufficiency. It is taking time to consider passages like this that can protect us from heading in the wrong direction.
- Failure is not final. Gods mercy is not only seen in the altar and the place of sacrifice but in the Spirit wrought change in David. It's never futile to confess our sin and turn to God for grace.