

## **About the Authors**

### **October 2012: “God’s Plan of the Ages”**

by

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Rev Dr Tow Siang Hwa, who started the RPG (Read, Pray and Grow) Daily Bible Reading Guide in 1982, is the Senior Pastor of Calvary Pandan Bible-Presbyterian Church. Saved at the age of ten in 1935 during the revival meetings of Dr John Sung, Dr Tow (a gynaecologist by training) has founded more than twenty churches and related institutions in over ten countries. He is author of several books including “Beyond Versions: A Biblical Perspective of Modern English Bibles” and “Footprints in the Sands of Time.”

### **November and December 2012: “1 and 2 Samuel”**

by Rev Dr Daniel Ebert IV

Dr Daniel Ebert IV and his wife Sue served as missionaries in Asia for 21 years. For the past 13 years, Dr Ebert has been teaching at the collegiate and seminary level in the United States. He received a B.A. in Bible from Clearwater Christian College, an M.Div. from Asian Theological Seminary in Manila and a Th.M. from Biblical Theological Seminary in Hatfield, PA. Dr Ebert completed his Ph.D. in NT studies at Trinity in Deerfield, IL. In 2011, Dr Ebert’s book, “Wisdom Christology: How Jesus Becomes God’s Wisdom for Us” was published by Presbyterian and Reformed Publishers. Along with his adjunct work at a number of theological institutions, Dr and Mrs Ebert continue to be involved in missions, returning occasionally to Asia.

MONDAY, OCTOBER 1

EPHESIANS 1-3

PSALM 18:30, 32

*“As for God,  
his way is perfect...”*

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## GOD’S PLAN OF THE AGES

Welcome to the study of Paul’s Epistle to the Ephesians. This is such a glorious book! From Eternity Past, God had a plan. God’s Eternal Plan was “*purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (3:11) to “*gather together in one all things in Christ*” (1:10).

God’s Plan was to call for His children to be “*holy and without blame*” (1:4), “*created in Christ Jesus unto good works*” (2:10) so that “*in the ages to come*” (2:7), they should be to the “*praise of his (God’s) glory*” (1:12), to whom He had shown “*the exceeding riches of his grace*” (2:7).

And where could God get such holy and blameless children? No alternative! Except from amongst those who once were “*dead in trespasses and sins*” (2:1). To these God showed His “*mercy (and) great love*” (2:4), made them “*nigh by the blood of Christ*” (2:13) and “*hath broken down the middle wall of partition*” between man and his fellowmen (2:15-16), so that Jew and Gentile (non-Jew) could have similar access through our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father (2:18) and be built up into the same household of faith (2:19).

Isn’t it exciting to know that God had a plan and He intends to work it out in you and me?

**THOUGHT:** Am I aware of God’s Plan? Have I entered into God’s Plan? Or am I still outside of His Plan? Planning my own life? Is God in my plan? Or am I in God’s Plan?

**PRAYER:** O Lord, let me not miss any part of Thy perfect plan for my life.

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TUESDAY, OCTOBER 2

EPHESIANS 1:1-14

DEUTERONOMY 28:1-14

“...his ways (are)  
past finding out!”

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## SPIRITUAL BLESSINGS IN HEAVENLY PLACES

What sort of assets do you go chasing after in life? Is it the proverbial pot of gold at the end of the rainbow? Is it popularity, power, position, possessions, pedigree, pleasure, pomp, or padding for comfort? Have you thought through what you really want in life? Paul blessed (lit. eulogized) God because God has blessed us with “*all spiritual blessings*” (1:3).

What a precious thought! God’s blessings are primarily spiritual. Spiritual blessings are always available and never depleted. “*All*” or every spiritual blessing flows from “*heavenly places*” (1:3), planned by God in the heavenlies. And these blessings are in or through our blessed Lord Jesus Christ. No other way. God Himself is a Spirit (John 4:24), and men who “*walk in the Spirit*” (Gal 5:16) are pleasing to Him. The true worth in life are the spiritual, the eternal, the unseen (2 Cor 4:18). These refer to God, the soul, heaven and qualities such as faith (Heb 11:1, 6), hope and charity/love (1 Cor 13:13).

God promised the Jews material blessings if they obeyed Him (Deut 28:1-14). Egs: children, agricultural produce, increase in livestock (v 4), safety in travel (v 6), victory over their enemies (v 7), etc.

Praise the Lord for material blessings if they come our way. But let us be reminded: God’s blessings are primarily spiritual. May we be reminded also of Luke 12:15: “*Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.*” And 1 Timothy 6:6: “*But godliness with contentment is great gain.*”

**THOUGHT:** Which would I rather have: spiritual blessings or material things? Is the spiritual reflected in my prayers and aspirations?

**PRAYER:** Help me, Lord, not only to accept but also to rejoice in the fact that I have been chosen by Thee.

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## CHOSEN AND PREDESTINATED

Do you ever wonder why you are on earth? Do you ever get discouraged with life? Do you see your life as a mess and a problem?

Paul was so thrilled when he wrote of the wonderful truth that God has “*blessed us*” (1:3), “*chosen us*” (1:4), and “*predestinated us*” (1:5) that he wrote verses 3 to 14 as one long, long sentence. And should we not likewise get excited when we realise our existence on earth is not by chance, some fluke shot or some freak accident? Our being a child of God is planned of God!

We were chosen, elected or selected by God Himself, for Himself, to be His children. Not by chance, but by choice: God’s prior choice. Not by blind fate, but according to the pleasure of an all-wise Heavenly Father (1:3, 5). Not a spur-of-the-moment decision on an ad-hoc basis, but by God’s foreknowledge and predestination. To predestinate is to set the limits ahead of time, to mark out beforehand. When the right time came, we believed. Isn’t it amazing? Not that we chose God, but that He chose us first. Read also Romans 8:28-30.

God’s Plan was:       made in Heavenly Places (1:3),  
                              in Christ (1:3),  
                              before the foundation of the world (1:4),  
                              according to His good pleasure (1:5),  
                              a mystery now revealed (1:9),  
                              purposed in Himself (1:9),  
                              after the counsel of His own will (1:11).

Isn’t that humbling to know that we have been chosen by God Himself?

**THOUGHT:** (Read Romans 11:33.)

**PRAYER:** Help me, Lord, not only to accept but also to rejoice in the fact that I have been chosen by Thee.

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## HOLY AND WITHOUT BLAME

Do you sometimes wish you were somebody else? Of the opposite sex, of a different race, or nationality? Of alterable height, of a different hair texture or colour, of another complexion? In other words, are you dissatisfied with yourself?

Please don't be. In God's economy, it is not the external qualities (whether you are tall or short, fat or thin, good-looking or not so good-looking, male or female) that count. God planned for children to be “*holy and without blame*” (1:4).

To be “*holy*” (Greek: *hagios*) is to be separate from sin and set apart unto God. God desires His children to most closely resemble Him in holiness (1 Pet 1:15-16). Believers are called to be cleansed from defilement, to forsake sin and live as Christlike as possible.

“*Without blame*” (Greek: *amomos*) is to be without blemish, without shame or moral disgrace in character and conduct. God wants His children to be without internal blemishes, i.e. “*faultless*” (Jude 24) or “*unblameable*” (Col 1:22). The same word is used of the Church that our Lord is preparing as His Bride (Eph 5:27).

God is more interested in the inward character, attitude and nature resulting in good conduct He is not interested in the pleasing outward personality (as the movie stars) that are devoid of holiness and blamelessness.

Do not dwell too much then on the externals. Stop judging yourself or others based on the externals: looks, clothes, height, skin colour, etc. Stop giving our children the wrong emphases in life: pretty clothes, fancy make-up, intelligence, talent, health, strength, etc.

**THOUGHT:** “*For the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart*” (1 Sam 16:7b). God's standards are so different.

**PRAYER:** O, to be like Thee, Blessed Redeemer, pure as Thou art.

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## ACCEPTED IN THE BELOVED

As you read Ephesians 1:1-14 again, trace the number of times the terms “*in Christ*” (1:3), “*in him*” (1:4), “*in the beloved*” (1:6), “*in whom*” (1:7), “*in himself*” (1:9) appear. In chapter 1 alone, it occurs twelve times and in the New Testament, over one hundred and thirty times. Is there any doubt in your mind that God has actually based His plans “*in Christ*,” or “*by Christ*”?

Christ is the central figure, the key person, the focal point, the bedrock foundation of God’s Plan of the Ages. Do not ever lose sight of this.

“*By Christ*” all things began. He is the Creator (John 1:3, Col 1:16).

“*By Christ*” we are reconciled to the Heavenly Father. He is the Redeemer (Eph 2:14, Col. 1:20).

“*By Christ*” we are made acceptable to God. He is the Propitiator (Eph 1:6, 1 John 4:10).

And “*in Christ*” all things will converge one day (Eph 1:10).

Not only is the world’s history built on Christ, we are saved through Christ and all the believer’s resources are available in Christ.

The Cross of Christ stands out as a mighty tower which supports all of human history and the history of the universe spanning from Eternity Past to Eternity Future. How shortsighted are the world’s rulers when they leave Christ out of their computation. Even sadder still is when a person leaves Christ out of his life.

When God has chosen Christ to be the focal point on which all of the world’s history rests (Col 1:14, 17), and He is worthy, how dare we leave Christ out of our life?

**THOUGHT:** Is Christ the centre of my life? God only accepts sinners in the Beloved. Am I “*in the beloved*”?

**PRAYER:** Forgive me, Lord, for leaving Christ out of my life.

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## SEALED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

Praise God that the Blessed Triune God is involved in our redemption. The Father blessed, chose and predestinated us to be His children (1:3-5). God the Son redeemed us through His Blood (1:7), and God the Holy Spirit sealed us (1:13). How is that for security!

No wonder we Christians can rejoice and be confident. We are eternally secure! We are safe in the hands of the Father and of the Son (John 10:28-30) and we have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16).

The word “*sealed*” (Greek: *sphragizo*) conveys the idea of ownership, authentication, security and destination. When Satan sees the seal, he knows Who we belong to, that we are the genuine article, and God Himself is promise-bound to see to our protection, that we get to our ultimate destination.

The Holy Spirit is also the “*earnest of our inheritance.*” The word “*arrabon*” (Greek) is the deposit or down payment that God makes to demonstrate and secure His interest in us. “*Arrabon*” also translates as the engagement ring which a young man gives to assure his lady friend of his true intentions to marry her!

And when is the Holy Spirit given to a person? The clause in the King James Version, “*after that ye believed, ye were sealed,*” means when you believed, ye were sealed. Please make a note of this truth in your Bible right now. You were “*sealed*” by the Holy Spirit WHEN you believed. “*Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*” (Rom 8:9b). If the Holy Spirit did not come into a person’s life, he could not be a believer. Believers are called the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:19). He lives in the believer.

**THOUGHT:** When does a believer receive the Blessed Holy Spirit?

**PRAYER:** I thank Thee, Lord, for planning so comprehensively for my eternal salvation.

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## PRAY FOR ENLIGHTENMENT

What should I pray for? Do you ever wonder what you should pray to God for? Paul prayed for the believers that God would give:

1. the spirit of wisdom,
2. and revelation,
3. that the eyes of understanding be enlightened,
4. that ye may know ...

How important it is to pray for spiritual enlightenment that we may know:

1. what is the “*hope*” of God’s calling,
2. what are the “*riches*” of the glory of His inheritance in the saints,
3. what is the exceeding greatness of His “*power*” toward us who believe.

Oh, if only we could be made aware or could be reminded of our spiritual blessings (riches) in Christ, then we will not go around grovelling with our noses to the ground or dragging our feet in life. Our calling is to sonship in Christ, to be God’s own adopted children (John 1:12), heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ (Rom 8:17). Our inheritance is in Heaven. All the riches of Christ belong to us. Not just “a harp, a home, a mansion fair,” but much more: a name in the Lamb’s Book of Life (Rev 21:27). See also Ephesians 1:7; 2:7 and Philippians 4:19.

“I once was an outcast stranger on earth, A sinner by choice, and an alien by birth; But I’ve been adopted, my name’s written down, An heir to a mansion, a robe and a crown. I’m a child of the King, A child of the King. With Jesus my Saviour, I’m a child of the King.”

(Hattie F. Buell)

**THOUGHT:** Am I lamenting my lot in life? I must pray for spiritual enlightenment and wisdom to understand my eternal riches in Christ.

**PRAYER:** Help me, Lord, not to be so earth-bound in my thinking. Cause me to appreciate eternal spiritual truths early, even now.

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MONDAY, OCTOBER 8

EPHESIANS 1:15-23

EPHESIANS 2-3

*Jesus is God's appointed  
Head of the Church.*

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## THE HEADSHIP OF CHRIST

God not only has power to plan, He has power to execute His plan! Indeed, it is pointless to have a wonderful plan, if there is no power to carry it out.

God generated R-power, the Resurrection Power, when He raised our Lord Jesus Christ from the dead (1:20). Isn't that tremendous?

There are many forms of power in our world: horse-power, hydropower, steam-power, wind-power, manpower, electric power, atomic power, etc. Some forms are helpful, some are harmful. But praise the Lord, Resurrection or R-Power is always helpful and outdoes all others!

Resurrection Power overcomes death, the great enemy of man (1 Cor 15:26). When a Chinese meets an impossible situation, he says "Die." When a Malay is similarly confronted, he says "Mati." When you encounter a difficult problem, what do you say? Indeed death is a serious problem. But thank God our Lord Jesus Christ conquered death. Now, He is at God's right Hand "in the heavenlies," at the place where God originally blessed us (1:3).

*"Far above all principality, and power, and might and dominion"* (1:21) means that our Resurrected Lord is "super above" all angelic beings, good or bad, not only now, but also in the future. He is not only over the spirit world, but He is specifically Head over the Church which is His Body, and over all things past, present, and future. Hallelujah!

**THOUGHT:** How many "heads" are there in my life? How many can I have? Christ is God's appointed Head. Is He my Head? How many departments in my life is He head of? Do I acknowledge Him willingly?  
**PRAYER:** Lord, Thou art the head of the Church. May I submit my life to Thy headship.

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### “BUT GOD ...”

When God implemented His glorious plan for His children to be “*holy and without blame*,” the only candidates available were those “*dead in trespasses and sins*.” Here “*dead*” means spiritually inactive, unresponsive, indifferent, inert towards God, separated from God. “*Walked*” speaks of the whole realm of activities of the individual’s life. Physically, he is not dead at all. But how sad!

1. Responsive only to the course of this world (lit. the mode of the world system or the world’s lifestyle).
2. Responsive only to the prince of the power of the air (i.e. Satan himself).
3. Characterised by disobedience (2:2).
4. Whose conversation (or manner of life) was lustful, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind.
5. We were indeed the children of wrath! Or children characterised by wrath, God’s wrath! (John 3:18, 36)

What a sad commentary on an unbeliever’s life! Dead towards God but very much alive in sin! Wasn’t that what we were like?

“*But God...*” (2:4). Two little words, but what a difference they make! But God, rich in mercy, great in love and liberal in His grace, saved us. He “*quicken*ed” us (2:1, 5), i.e. made us spiritually alive. He “*raised us up*” (2:6), i.e. resurrected us spiritually to sit together with Christ in “*heavenly places*” (1:3, 20). God picked sinful, lustful, rebellious ones as us to be His children, not because we were good looking, talented, healthy, strong, rich, well educated, courteous, etc. God saved us out of His mercy, love and grace. Nothing more, nothing less! And remember the KEY: “*in Christ Jesus*” (2:6).

**THOUGHT:** If I am not yet a Christian, still dead in trespasses and sin, why don’t I confess my sins to the Lord Jesus Christ, repent of my wickedness and invite the Lord Jesus Christ into my heart (life) to be my Saviour and Lord NOW?

**PRAYER:** Jesus, help me to believe in Thee.

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WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 10

EPHESIANS 2:1-10

ROMANS 5:12-21

*“Not by works  
of righteousness...”*

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## BY GRACE YE ARE SAVED

“Naught have I gotten by and what I received, Grace has bestowed it since I have believed. Boasting excluded, Pride I abase. I’m only a sinner saved by grace.” (James M. Gray)

I remember the acrostic for GRACE: **G**od’s **R**edemption **A**t **C**hrist’s **E**xpense. I also remember the earliest definition for Grace which I have learnt: God’s unmerited favour. But when I got to Bible school, the word took on an even deeper meaning when my teacher defined Grace as God’s unmerited favour when we deserve the opposite! Just dwell on that! As sinners, we truly deserved God’s undiluted wrath but we received God’s unmerited favour instead!

“Tears unavailing, no merit had I; Mercy had saved me, or else I must die. Sin had alarmed me, fearing God’s face; But now I’m a sinner saved by grace.” (James M. Gray)

*“...by grace...through faith”* (2:8). Some may think it is by God’s grace and through my faith. Not so! Paul clearly shows that both grace and faith are the gifts of God. And a gift is unearned, cannot be paid for, and unbeneficial unless received, *“lest any man should boast”* (2:9). How dreadful Heaven would be if anyone could get in some other way except through God’s grace. While others will be singing the praises of God and of the Lamb (Rev 4:11; 5:12; 7:10), he would be making his own boast how he got there!

Christian, may this truth sink deeply into our hearts. *“Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost”* (Titus 3:5).

**THOUGHT:** What must I do to be saved? (Acts 16:30)

**PRAYER:** Lord, save me from my sin and from ever boasting in anything as of myself. For all that I am, and have, or ever will be, is purely by Thy grace alone.

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## WE ARE HIS WORKMANSHIP

We are saved not to do nothing or to do as we like! We are saved to serve God (Heb 9:14, 1 Thess 1:9, Col 3:2), and to serve one another. (Gal 5:13). But most important of all, we are saved to be something. We are God's workmanship. The Greek is *poiema*, from whence we derive the English word "poem."

God is now expressing Himself artistically through our lives as in the writing of a poem to demonstrate what He can do with a life saved from the dregs and degradation of sin. Although we are not saved from sin by our good works, we are saved from sin unto good works. We are to be "*zealous of good works*" (Titus 2:14), "*to maintain good works*" (Titus 3:8, 14), and to be "*rich in good works*" (1 Tim 6:18). Good works can be a proof of our salvation (James 2:18). Good works will glorify our Father Who is in Heaven (Matt 5:16). And Paul reminds us to do good to all men, especially to those who are of "*the household of faith*" (Gal 6:10).

Just as a well-polished, intricately carved piece of furniture reflects the skill of the artisan, just as a piece of dirty, unshapely driftwood transformed into an artistic showpiece demonstrates the skill of the decorator, our lives which show change in character and conduct will reflect God's workmanship, to God's glory.

God is the Master-designer who delights to take broken, unworthy lives and turn them into trophies of His grace, that one day "*in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace*" (Eph 2:7) in us. A graduating son reflects all that the parents have invested in him. Likewise, when we arrive in Heaven, our condition then will reflect all that God's grace did for us on earth. Are you letting the Master-designer make a lovely "poem" out of your life?

**THOUGHT:** Which is correct? Good works = Salvation. Faith = Salvation. Good works + Faith = Salvation. Faith = Salvation + Good Works.

**PRAYER:** Lord, mould my character and conduct for Thy use.

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## HE IS OUR PEACE

Harmonious relationship with God can only come by acknowledging Christ's death on the cross as on our behalf (2:13-14, Col 1:20) for Christ was our peace offering (1 John 4:10).

*"In time past"* (2:11), we were Gentiles, uncircumcised, *"without Christ, being aliens... strangers... having no hope, and without God"* (2:12) and *"far off"* (2:13). What a dismal picture!

*"But now"* (2:13), we have been made nigh. Through Christ we have access to the Father (2:18). When Christ died, the veil in the temple was rent *"from the top to the bottom."* The veil was "a hand breadth in thickness, woven of 72 plaits, each plait of 24 threads . . . 60 ft long, and 30 ft wide . . . 400 priests were needed to manipulate it." ("All the Miracles of the Bible" by Herbert Lockyer, pg 244.)

Praise the Lord, the veil was rent, signifying that the way to God was now open without the need of a human mediator. Christ's death also broke down the middle wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles. There was a literal wall about 5 ft high separating the Gentiles from the Jews and the in-side wall of the Court of the Gentiles bore notices thus: "No man of another nation is to enter within the fenced enclosure around the temple. Whoever is caught will have himself to blame that his death ensues." ("Ephesians" by Walter Wright, pg 47.)

Thank God, that symbolic and actual wall is no more. The Cross of Christ is God's peace sign, reconciling man to God and man to his fellowman. Jews and Gentiles are now fellow-citizens, of the same household and of the same building (2:19-22).

**THOUGHT:** As I accept God's salvation, do I accept my fellowmen?

**PRAYER:** I thank Thee, Lord, that Thou hast give me peace with Thee and with man.

## THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST

Paul was thrilled at God's plan of salvation which included Jews and Gentiles (3:6). Both were to be fellow-heirs, fellow-members of the same Body and fellow-partakers of the promises in the Gospel of Christ. This glorious truth was in other ages concealed, "*hid in God*" (3:9), but now revealed (3:5).

Paul was humbled that he was now made a minister by God's grace (3:7) and through God's power (3:7) to preach the Gospel of Christ to the Gentiles, whereas Peter was an apostle to the Jews (Gal 2:7-8). Did not our Lord say he was to be a chosen vessel (Acts 9:15)?

Paul was so overwhelmed by God's grace upon him that he humbly considered himself less than the least of all saints. Quite a contrast indeed for this proud Pharisee who once esteemed himself a "*Hebrew of the Hebrews,*" etc (Phil 3:5-6). Paul's transformation had begun right after his conversion when he changed his name from Saul (probably after the first king of Israel) to Paul, meaning "little."

As his concept and experience of God's grace deepened, he referred to the Gospel as the "*unsearchable riches of Christ.*" The Gospel of Christ is for Jew and Gentile alike, for Easterner and Westerner, for every race and nation, for the religiously scrupulous as well as for those once considered the enemies of God. God did not just dispense something called salvation for the time being. He gives continuing grace in Christ to Jews and Gentiles, till we get to Heaven. No wonder the riches are "*unsearchable... past finding out*" (Rom 11:33).

Paul therefore gladly gave himself to God to proclaim the Gospel as a prisoner (3:1) as an apostle (1:1) and as a servant (bond slave) of the Lord Jesus Christ (Phil 1:1).

**THOUGHT:** The more Paul ministered the Gospel, the more unworthy he felt.

**PRAYER:** Lord, forgive my pride. I am unworthy of Thy love.

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## ROOTED AND GROUNDED

God confidently announced His plan regarding the church to the “*principalities and powers in heavenly places*” (3:10). Who can thwart the eternal purpose of the Eternal God (3:11)? Paul prays for enablement (3:16-19):

1. that the Ephesian saints be strengthened by the Holy Spirit (3:16),
2. that Christ may dwell in them by faith (3:17),
3. that they be rooted and grounded in love,
4. that they be able to understand the four-dimensional love of Christ,
5. that they might be filled with the fullness of God.

And wherein are the resources? “*According to the riches of his glory*” (3:16, Phil 4:19).

The Christian is compared agriculturally to a plant with roots firmly embedded in the soil (the love of Jesus), and architecturally to a house established with foundations resting upon the bedrock of the love of Jesus. What then can you expect from such a life? The love of Christ will no doubt exude from every aspect of that life.

Finally, Paul’s doxology:

1. God is able to do all that we ask.
2. God is able to do above (beyond) all that we ask.
3. God is able to do exceeding abundantly (or super abundantly) above all that we ask.
4. God is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think.

God is able to answer not only the prayer of our mouths but also of our hearts and beyond. Truly God deserves all the glory in the church to the end of the ages.

**THOUGHT:** Do I demonstrate by my life that I am rooted and grounded in the love of Christ? Or am I rootless and toppled over?

**PRAYER:** Help me to tap Thy limitless resources. Forgive me, Lord, when I belittled Thee by my unbelief.

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## WALK WORTHY OF YOUR VOCATION

We now pass from the doctrinal section (chapters 1 to 3) to the practical section (chapters 4 to 6) of the Epistle to the Ephesians.

To many, a vocation means a job or career. Here, Paul speaks of the divine call unto sonship in Christ and the practical outworking of that heavenly calling. This is far more important than any job.

God wants the believer to be guided by God-given men to grow in unity with other believers unto spiritual maturity, which is measured by likeness to the Lord Jesus Christ (4:13). The believer is to be “*fitly joined*” (4:16) into the Body of Christ so that it can function well, “*edifying of (building up) itself in love*” (4:16).

The believer must not walk like other Gentiles (4:17), but put off the old man or old manner of life (4:22), be renewed in his mind and put on the new man which is created after God (4:24) and be transformed in his attitudes, words, actions and reactions. He is to walk in newness of life, in love (5:2), in the light (5:8), and in the Lord’s will (5:17). He is to be filled with the Holy Spirit (5:18), which filling will affect his speech, his musical tastes and his character.

The Christian’s beliefs will affect his lifestyle, whether as husband or wife, as parent or child, as slave or master, as employer or employee. All of the Christian’s life is now to be under the Lordship of Christ (5:22; 6:1, 4, 7-9).

Finally, the believer is to put on the whole armour of God (6:11), because he wrestles not against flesh and blood but against spiritual wickedness in high places (i.e. Satanic forces). But, praise the Lord, through God’s grace he will not only withstand the Enemy but will stand steadfastly, even as Paul did (6:13).

**THOUGHT:** The true Christian will experience changes in his character and conduct. He will also face spiritual conflicts.

**PRAYER:** Lord, grant me Thy grace to be steadfast in my faith.

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## PRESERVING CHURCH UNITY

### Attitudes for Unity:

- (a) Lowliness or humility. Not considered a virtue by the Greeks, neither by many today. But our Lord was lowly (Matt 11:29).
- (b) Meekness is mildness, non-retaliation when wronged. Read the story of Moses (Num 12:3). Not to be confused with or mistaken for weakness.
- (c) Longsuffering is patience and endurance of irritation, suffering wrong without taking vengeance.
- (d) Forbearance is putting up with other people's weaknesses or faults. It is maintaining sweetness in the face of the disagreeableness of others.

All these qualities are the outworking of love (4:2) and are possible only if we are entrenched in the love of Christ (3:17).

Bases for Unity: Whereas some try to create or organise oneness, God's Word says we are rather to “*keep (preserve or guard) the unity of the Spirit*” (4:3). Paul's doctrinal bases for true unity are:

- (a) One God and Father
- (b) One Lord Jesus Christ
- (c) One Blessed Holy Spirit
- (d) One hope (of Heaven)
- (e) One body (i.e. membership in the true invisible Church of our Lord Jesus Christ)
- (f) One baptism (spiritual baptism into the Body of Christ, 1 Cor 12:13, and not the mode)
- (g) One faith (in God and Christ)

Beware false ecumenical unity (i.e. organisational unity). Beware charismatic unity. Beware also of basing unity on allegiance to a man or an organization. Unity must be in our LORD JESUS CHRIST.

**THOUGHT:** If a person professes faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord and is going to the same Heaven, he is my brother!

**PRAYER:** Lord, let me do my part to keep the unity in my church.

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## TOWARDS CHRISTIAN MATURITY

God not only expects unity amongst believers, He gave gifts to ensure that we grow unto Christian maturity as well as oneness in the Lord Jesus Christ. And these gifts are men.

### Agents for Maturity

- (a) Apostles were those who had seen the risen Lord Jesus and were sent out by Him (1 Cor 9:1). There are no such Apostles today.
- (b) Prophets were those who spoke on God’s behalf to the people (Rom 12:6). There are none today.
- (c) Evangelists were literally messengers of good. Today, they include missionaries and preachers of the Gospel.
- (d) Pastors and Teachers: These two gifts were probably in one person.

The pastor is the shepherd whose duty is to spiritually feed and protect the flock from spiritual danger. Pastors must not only be *“apt to teach”* (1 Tim 3:2), but also willing to protect the flock (1 Pet 5:2). Do you heed your pastor’s advice to attend Bible study and prayer meeting, and warnings to beware being unequally yoked with unbelievers in marriage? The true pastor always has your spiritual good at heart. He cares for you and will one day have to give an account before God (Heb 13:17). Learn to relate to him better. To ill-treat or ignore your pastor is to do so at your own spiritual peril.

### Goals of Maturity

The immediate goal of God’s agents is the strengthening of the saints, to fully equip and bring the saints into a fit condition so that they could reach the intermediate goal, which is to do the work of the ministry (i.e. practical or menial service in the church), until they reach the ultimate goal which is the edifying (or the building up) of the Body of Christ.

**THOUGHT:** Do I acknowledge my pastor as God’s gift to me for my spiritual good? Or do I reject his spiritual ministry in my life?

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to appreciate the ministry of my Pastor.

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## EVIDENCE OF CHRISTIAN MATURITY

One evidence of Christian maturity is unity in the church. True unity is only possible in the faith of the Lord Jesus. Relationships in the church based on any human will always bring conflict. But when Christians focus on the Lord Jesus, there is little room for disunity.

The second evidence of maturity is likeness to the Lord Jesus Christ. We must stop measuring ourselves by our spiritual leaders or anyone else. Let us measure our spiritual stature by the Lord Jesus Christ to see how much we are like Him.

Another evidence of spiritual maturity is stability. We are not to be like “*children*” (4:14), i.e. infants incapable of speech. This is indicative of spiritual babes, unskilled in God’s Word (Heb 5:13). Do you see the importance of Bible study?

The spiritually immature will be tossed to and fro by every wind of doctrine (4:14). They will be influenced by every new doctrine that blows into town, and be victims of spiritual “dice-players” who gamble with their souls. “*Sleight*” is trickery and fraud associated with deceptive hand movements in dice-playing, akin to the English word “sly.” Such spiritual crooks are crafty according to the wiles of their error. They themselves are doctrinally wrong and so they in turn trap others. For your own spiritual good, get into God’s Word, join a sound church and be guided by the pastor! There are lots of false doctrines and false teachers around nowadays (2 Pet 2:1-3). Beware!

The fourth evidence of Christian maturity is cooperation, or the ability to work together. Christians are not just to seek their own individual spiritual growth, but the growth of the whole Body. Just as limbs on a body cooperate with the head, Christians rightly united to Christ must work together for the good of the Church.

**THOUGHT:** Am I a spiritual infant? Or am I growing in unity, stability, and cooperation with my church members?

**PRAYER:** May I study Thy Word that I may mature spiritually.

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FRIDAY, OCTOBER 19

EPHESIANS 4:15

PSALM 1

*Spiritual food is needed  
for me to grow spiritually.*

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## “GROW UP INTO HIM IN ALL THINGS”

*(by Charles Spurgeon)*

Many Christians remain stunted and dwarfed in spiritual things, so as to present the same appearance year after year. They exist but do not “*grow up into him in all things.*”

But should we rest content with being in the “green blade,” when we might advance to “the ear,” and eventually ripen into the “full corn in the ear”? Should we be satisfied to believe in Christ, and to say, “I am safe,” without wishing to know in our own experience more of the fulness which is to be found in Him. It should not be so.

We should, as good traders in heaven’s market, covet to be enriched in the knowledge of Jesus. It is all very well to keep other men’s vineyards, but we must not neglect our own spiritual growth and ripening.

Why should it always be winter time in our hearts? We must have our seed time, it is true, but O for a spring time — yea, a summer season, which shall give promise of an early harvest. If we would ripen in grace, we must live near to Jesus — in His presence — ripened by the sunshine of His smiles. We must hold sweet communion with Him. We must leave the distant view of His face and come near, as John did, and pillow our head on His breast; then shall we find ourselves advancing in holiness, in love, in faith, in hope — yea, in every precious gift.

As the sun rises first on mountain-tops and gilds them with its light, and presents one of the most charming sights to the eye of the traveller; so it is one of the most delightful contemplations in the world to mark the glow of the Spirit’s light on the head of some saint. As the saint is filled with the Spirit, he begins to mature in his faith.

**THOUGHT:** How is my faith growing?

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I not neglect my spiritual growth.

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## PUT OFF ... PUT ON

Paul uses the figure of dress to convey the immediate and complete change that should take place in a believer's life after conversion. The old man is the old sinful Adamic nature within us. The former “conversation” is the old manner of life which is polluted, putrid and progressively perishing. Those pre-conversion days were characterised by lustful desires that were self-centred, not God-centred. Lusts are deceitful: they promise pleasure and profit but do not fulfil. Isn't that what we experienced before we became Christians? We did what we like, but in the end, we did not like what we did.

We are to “*put off*” (4:22) the old man by a decisive act of our will, like taking off one's dress. How bad was the old way of life?

4:17: The unregenerate mind dwelt on nothing of value, that which brought no good result. How sad! Vanity of the mind!

4:18: The understanding was darkened and we were cut off from the life of God through ignorance and the hardening of our hearts.

4:19: “*Being past feeling*” speaks of being insensitive, ceasing to feel, reflecting the deadness in the conscience. “*Given themselves over*” is to abandon themselves to lasciviousness, lust, licentiousness. “*Greediness*” is covetousness, the desire for more and more.

A true Christian can no longer live to the hilt in unbridled passion and sin. Such behaviour is foreign to the believer because “*ye have not so learned Christ*” (4:20). We must continuously be rejuvenated in the spirit of the mind. Change of action is preceded by change of mind. The Christian must then “*put on,*” as the wearing of new garments, the new man (4:24), which is created by an act of God through the new birth, and characterised by “*righteousness* (quality of being right) *and true holiness.*”

**QUESTION:** Am I still wearing the old clothes of sin?

**PRAYER:** Forgive me, Lord, for my continued sins. Help me to “*put on the new man,*” always.

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FROM OLD TO NEW

New life begins the moment we are born again “*of water and of the Spirit*” (John 3:5). With God’s Spirit working in us, that newness will soon change us. Prayerfully consider what has changed in your life.

**THE OLD (to put off)**

A. Attitudes

- walk in vanity of mind
- given unto lasciviousness

B. Words

- lying
- corrupt communication, vulgar speech, foul language, putrid, rotten, defiling words, profanity, cursing and swearing.

C. Actions

stole

D. Reactions

- bitterness (resentful, refusing to be reconciled)
- wrath (anger)
- clamour (self-assertion, wanting to be heard)
- evil speaking
- malice (viciousness, active ill-will, bad feelings)

**THE NEW (to put on)**

A. Attitudes

created in righteousness and true holiness

B. Words

- speak truth
- speak what is “*good*” (pleasing to God), “*edifying*” (for spiritual growth), “*minister grace*” to the hearers

C. Actions

steal no more but give

D. Reactions

- be kind (gracious)
- tenderhearted (compassionate, full of pity)
- forgiving one another (bestowing a favour without condition as God for Christ’s sake forgave you)

“*Be ye angry, and sin not*” (4:26). Make sure your anger is of the righteous kind, to put right what has been wrong, and not due to personal irritation. Do not keep anger overnight, or Satan the slanderer will have occasion to occupy our thoughts with evil.

**THOUGHT:** No one is guiltless before God.

**PRAYER:** Lord, as Thou forgave me, let me forgive others.

**“GRIEVE NOT THE HOLY SPIRIT”**

*(by Charles Spurgeon)*

All that the believer has must come from Christ, but it comes solely through the channel of the Spirit of grace.

Moreover, as all blessings thus flow to you through the Holy Spirit, so also no good thing can come out of you in holy thought, devout worship, or gracious act, apart from the sanctifying operation of the same Spirit. Even if the good seed be sown in you, yet it lies dormant except He worketh in you to will and to do of His own good pleasure.

Do you desire to speak for Jesus? How can you unless the Holy Ghost touch your tongue? Do you desire to pray? Alas! What dull work it is unless the Spirit maketh intercession for you! Do you desire to subdue sin? Would you be holy? Would you imitate your Master? Do you desire to rise to superlative heights of spirituality? Do you want to be made like the angels of God, full of zeal and ardour for the Master’s cause? You cannot without the Spirit. *“Without me ye can do nothing.”*

O branch of the vine, thou canst have no fruit without the sap! O child of God, thou hast no life within thee apart from the life which God gives thee through His Spirit! Then let us not grieve Him or provoke Him to anger by our sin. Let us not quench Him in one of His faintest motions in our soul; let us be ready to obey every prompting.

If the Holy Spirit be indeed so mighty, let us attempt nothing without Him; let us begin no project, and carry on no enterprise, and conclude no transaction, without imploring His blessing. Let us depend alone upon Him.

**THOUGHT:** Why do I grieve the Holy Spirit?

**PRAYER:** Open Thou my heart and my whole being to Thee. Uphold me with Thy Spirit, and control my whole life.

---

## IMITATORS OF GOD

Christians are to keep on being or becoming followers of God (literally: imitators of God). We are to reflect our Heavenly Father. As God is love, we are to walk in love, demonstrable in our giving and forgiving. Though we will never be perfect on earth, we must keep trying to be like our Heavenly Father in purity. Sexual sins or sins of thought which hinder the scriptural principle (one man, one wife for life) are not even to be mentioned amongst the believers. This includes covetousness which is unbridled desire for more and more.

Christians, beware your speech. Immoral, filthy, obscene talk is out! Unintelligent, moronic, senseless, unprofitable childish talk is out. Even jesting which is irreverent and draw attention to one's self. Let us rather give thanks to God. This is doubtless one of the best uses of our lips!

Three types of persons will not be in God's Kingdom:

- (1) a whoremonger (one who indulges in fornication, or a sex pervert),
- (2) an unclean or impure person, and
- (3) a covetous, greedy man.

They cannot be because there is no change in their life, showing that they were never truly converted! Instead, God's wrath and judgment will surely come on them!

As Christians we must not join unbelievers in sin or fellowship with them in their shameful, unfruitful lifestyle. Rather, let us be imitators of God, walking in love and walking in the light.

**THOUGHT:** To give thanks is always in order.

**PRAYER:** Lord, let me be Thy true follower in my total lifestyle. Do not let Satan blind me to think I can be a Christian and yet live in my previous sinful lifestyle.

## WALKING IN THE LORD’S WILL

The Christian’s walk or daily life must measure up to his beliefs. Christians are called to walk in God’s will. This is to live right, in a way that is acceptable and well-pleasing to God (5:10, Rom 12:1-2). To “*walk circumspectly*” (5:15) is to live accurately or exactly so that we do not need to keep on making corrections.

“*Redeeming the time*” (5:16) literally is to buy up the opportunity for oneself, to capitalise on opportune moments because opportunities once lost can never be recovered. In so doing, we will save much time. Christians are to walk accurately because the days are evil. All around us are non-Christians living according to their self-centred lusts, under God’s judgment and heading for Hell. We are called to be witnesses to them. So, let us live right.

To walk in God’s will is only possible if we keep on being filled to the fullest extent with the Holy Spirit, and let Him permeate our lives and control us. This is God’s command. Stop being “*drunk with wine*” (5:18). This is another command. Intoxication is sin as it reflects “*excess,*” uncontrolled, reckless, wasteful living, resulting in broken health, homes, heads, hearts, vessels, vehicles, virtue, etc. This is inconsistent with the Christian life.

What are the evidences of being Spirit-filled? First, spiritual music will emit from us, not rowdy, raucous, worldly music, so incongruent with the Spirit’s pure, gentle nature. Secondly, giving of thanks to God is always in God’s will (1 Thess 5:18). Finally, mutual submission in the fear of the Lord. Don’t always insist on your way. No one is right one hundred per cent of the time, except God!

To walk in God’s will then is to walk accurately, buying up every opportunity, and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

**THOUGHT:** Do I want to be filled with wine or with the Holy Spirit?

**PRAYER:** “Fill me now, Fill me now, Jesus come and fill me now, Fill me with Thy Holy Spirit, Come, O come and fill me now.”

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## DUTIES OF HUSBANDS AND WIVES

The stress is on duties rather than privileges and rights. The command is first to wives: “*submitting yourselves*” (cf Col 3:18, 1 Pet 3:1). This military term means to “arrange oneself under the leadership of.” If the woman thinks her lot difficult, think of the husband having to love his wife as Christ “*loved the church,*” i.e. with a self-sacrificing type of “agape” love. The husband’s unconditional duty is to love and give himself for the wife’s benefit! Just as the Lord Jesus gave Himself for the Church! Loving one’s wife is comparable with loving one’s self (5:33) or with loving one’s body (5:28).

The wife is further enjoined to “*reverence*” her husband. This is “fearing to displease” or “offend,” not the fear that comes from encountering some frightful object. Do not belittle your husband or make him the butt of your jokes. Remember: he is your head.

The husband enhances his headship by sanctifying (5:26), nourishing and cherishing his wife (5:29). To “*sanctify*” is to keep pure, to retain her love for yourself always. To “*nourish*” is to nurture or provide sustenance for physical and emotional needs. To “*cherish*” is to foster with care, as a bird tenderly covers her young with her feathers. How then can a husband beat his wife or be unfaithful to her when he is vow-bound to protect her?

Furthermore, the bridegroom represents our Lord while the bride represents the Church (pure, without spot or wrinkle, “*holy and without blemish*”). Remember Ephesians 1:4? How then can a Christian couple engage in premarital sex?

Finally, both are to leave father and mother to form one new home. This minimises adjustment problems.

**THOUGHT:** Do I take my duties in marriage seriously?

**PRAYER:** O Lord, keep me true to Thee and to my life-partner now and in the future.

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## DUTIES OF PARENTS AND CHILDREN

The command to the children is: “*obey your parents.*” Not just listen, but submit and do as told. Obedience must be “*in the Lord,*” and not contradict the Scriptures, “*for this is right,*” in accordance with God’s rules. We ought to “*obey God rather than men*” (Acts 5:29).

Children are to honour their parents, to esteem them highly, think and speak well of them, be respectful, be considerate and support them (Matt 15:4-6). Do good to your parents whether Christian or non-Christian while you have them and not try to make amends by building expensive monuments in their memory after they are gone. This is the first commandment with specific promise of long life on earth. A simple rule is to love your Heavenly Father best of all, your earthly father (or adoptive father) next and your father-in-law, when married. Fathers are not to be ill-treated or despised. Remember, as long as father is alive, you are your father’s child.

What are parents’ responsibilities to children? Besides to provide, protect, guide, correct and control, parents are not to provoke or arouse their children to anger. Eg: playing favourites, unjustified punishment, picking on a child’s mistake or weakness in the face of peers, venting frustration on a child, bringing up past sins already dealt with, nagging, etc. Can you add to the list?

The positive is to bring them up tenderly, to nourish (5:29) or “*nurture*” (6:4) them (i.e. instruct and discipline, train by rewards and punishment); while “*admonition*” of the Lord refers to training by use of words (whether instruction, command or reprimand). All these are to be done “*in the Lord.*”

A well-trained child obeys his parents out of love, not fear. Lead your child early to faith in Jesus and save yourself many headaches!

**THOUGHT:** What improvements can I make as parent or as child?

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to be an obedient child to my parents. And, as a parent, to live a good Christian witness before my child.

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## EMPLOYER-EMPLOYEE RELATIONSHIPS

There are 12 attitudes enunciated for a good Christian employee:

1. Obedience (same as in 6:1): listen, submit and carry out orders.
2. *“With fear and trembling”* (6:5): not terror that debilitates or paralyses, but with caution, not to offend or displease the master.
3. *“In singleness of your heart”*: simple, whole-hearted, sincere, honest effort and undivided loyalty.
4. *“Not with eyeservice”*: i.e. do not work only when the master is watching. Our real Master above sees all (Ps 139:1-3).
5. Work not just to please men only.
6. Work as servants of Christ, not just servants of men.
7. Count our job as God’s will.
8. Serve out of our heart: i.e. from the depths of our being, not just with superficial effort.
9. Work with goodwill: i.e. work with our mind on our work.
10. Doing service: i.e. serving as slaves. Doing actual work, not just being on the job or at the office. We are paid to work.
11. Serve as unto the Lord, and not to man.
12. Knowing that whatsoever good we do, the same (good) we shall receive of the Lord. Look to God for our ultimate reward, even if earthly bosses fail to see our good work.

Who would not employ such a 12-attitude worker? And what is the ideal Christian employer?

1. *“Do the same things unto them”* (6:9): i.e. operate along the same principles. Do good to our employees as we expect good from them. Care for their welfare as they care for ours.
2. Stop threatening (6:9, Acts 4:29): Don’t frighten the worker into doing good. Use the positive approach: the carrot, not the stick.
3. *“Knowing that your Master also is in heaven”* (6:9): God is the Lord of both employer and employee and He is no respecter of persons. He will judge equitably.

**THOUGHT:** Am I a good employee? Am I a fair employer?

**PRAYER:** May I be ever conscious of my Master up above, O Lord.

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## SPIRITUAL WARFARE – OUR RESOURCES

Satan seeks to deceive unbelievers into Hell and believers into ineffectiveness for God. But God gives us a comprehensive panoply.

We are to “*be strong in the Lord*” (6:10). Our strength and resources are only “*in the Lord.*” Beware trusting self-effort, own intelligence, strength, stamina and resources which are no match for the Enemy. Remember, man was made “*lower than the angels*” (Ps 8:5).

“*Put on*” the whole armour of God (cf 4:24). Wear it and keep it on, because there is a war raging! We are to stand against the wiles or craftiness (cf 4:14) of the Devil. We wrestle (personally struggle) not against flesh and blood (i.e. humans, Gal 1:16), but against spiritual forces. Therefore our whole armour (panoply) is spiritual.

Note the pieces and resources:

1. Belt of truth: Truth is the effective weapon against our diabolical Enemy who is a liar and the Father (or originator) of lies (John 8:44).
2. The breastplate of righteousness: The Christian must live a holy, moral life, keeping God's commandments so that he will not succumb to the accusations of the Enemy (Rev 12:10).
3. Sandals of the Gospel of peace: Wherever we go, let us proclaim the Gospel of Christ which brings peace.
4. Shield of Faith: The Roman shield 4 ft long, 2½ ft broad, oblong and leather-covered was no “dustbin cover.” We need faith to effectively douse and blunt all the fiery darts of Satan.
5. Helmet of salvation: Satan likes to make a person doubt his salvation so as to leave him ineffective for God.
6. Sword of the Spirit, the Word of God: Learn to wield your Bible well against the Enemy.
7. Prayer: Because the Enemy is unseen, we need prayer all the more. Are you a prayer warrior?
8. Utterance: i.e. to proclaim the Gospel.

**THOUGHT:** Christians are not just sons and sheep, but soldiers too.

**PRAYER:** Impress on me the seriousness of the spiritual battle.

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## SPIRITUAL WARFARE – OUR ENEMY

Christians must realise Satan is real. His very name means adversary, or opponent. Devil or “diabolos” means slanderer. He is full of wiles (cf 4:14), deceit, or cunning craftiness. He is the fallen angel of God, (Isa 14:12-15), disguising himself as an angel of light (2 Cor 11:14).

One-third of God’s angels fell with Satan (Rev 12:4) and became demons or evil spirits. They are ranked variously, eg: principalities (rulers), powers (authorities), and rulers of the darkness of this world.

They are not flesh and blood, but spiritual hosts of evil infesting the heavenlies (6:12; cf 1:3-20; 2:6; 3:10). They are the power (authority) of the air, and now circulate in the atmosphere over our earth, seeking to thwart God’s purposes regarding man.

Satan’s weapons are:

1. Lies. He seeks to deceive people (Rev 12:9):
  - (a) by idolatry,
  - (b) by cultism to believe they can work part of their way to God,
  - (c) through occultism to seek powers from Satan through horoscope, palmistry, fortune-telling, black magic, white magic, the ouija board, spirit of the ink-cap or of the coin, etc,
  - (d) by fetishism, to wear talismans/charms, to trust in superstitions,
  - (e) Satan tries to damn people’s souls into Hell, because he is going together with his hordes of fallen angels (Matt 25:41b).
2. False gospel, to deceive
3. Doubts to make the believer unsure of his salvation
4. To attack the Holy Bible, the sword of the Spirit
5. To discourage prayer and attendance at prayer meeting
6. To hinder the proclamation of the Gospel

Are you a victim of Satan’s attack? BE ON GUARD!

**THOUGHT:** Don’t fall for Satan’s tricks. Keep within God’s Word.

**PRAYER:** Keep me alert, Lord, to the tricks of the devil.

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**“PRAYING ALWAYS”**

(by Charles Spurgeon)

What multitudes of prayers we have put up from the first moment when we learned to pray.

Our first prayer was a prayer for ourselves. We asked that God would have mercy upon us, and blot out our sin. He heard us. But when He had blotted out our sins like a cloud, then we had more prayers for ourselves. We have had to pray for sanctifying grace, for constraining and restraining grace. We have been compelled to go to God for our souls, as constant beggars asking for everything.

Bear witness, children of God, you have never been able to get anything for your souls elsewhere. All the bread your soul has eaten has come down from heaven, and all the water of which it has drunk has flowed from the living rock — Christ Jesus the Lord.

Your soul has never grown rich in itself; it has always been a pensioner upon the daily bounty of God; and hence your prayers have ascended to heaven for a range of spiritual mercies all but infinite. Your wants were innumerable, and therefore the supplies have been infinitely great, and your prayers have been as varied as the mercies have been countless.

Then have you not cause to say, “I love the Lord, because He hath heard the voice of my supplication”? For as your prayers have been many, so also have been God’s answers to them. He has heard you in the day of trouble, has strengthened you, and helped you, even when you dishonoured Him by trembling and doubting at the mercyseat. Remember this, and let it fill your heart with gratitude to God, who has thus graciously heard your poor weak prayers. *“Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.”*

**THOUGHT:** For how long can I go without praying?

**PRAYER:** I thank Thee, Father, for always hearing my prayer when I pray. Keep me praying.

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## EPILOGUE

Paul has just lifted us up to show us it was in heaven that:

1. God's blessings were given (1:3),
2. Christ has been enthroned beside the Father (1:20),
3. believers are positionally seated with their Lord Jesus Christ (2:6),
4. God's Plan of Salvation for mankind has been announced to angels good and bad (3:10), and
5. Satanic and spiritual resistance also are working against us (6:12).

What wonderful revelations! That God had a wondrous plan to redeem lost humanity, including you and me, unto Himself. How sobering to realize that there was nothing good in us when He found us. Out of His great love and mercy, He sought us and now He is making poetry out of us to reflect Himself. Praise His holy name!

Imagine us, unworthy humans, lost and undone, called to be His adopted children! What grace! Thank God for Jesus who willingly died on the cross to reconcile us to the Father; and for the Holy Spirit who sealed us. And now He wants us to be as a HOLY BUILDING for His habitation, as HIS BODY the Church for His use and be prepared as His BRIDE, holy and without blemish for His fellowship. Thank God for the life of Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit within us to change our attitudes and our lives to be like Jesus.

Thank God for the new insights into old relationships as husband and wife, parent and child, employer and employee. Thank God for revealing to us the spiritual warfare so that we can be on guard.

By God's grace, may we faithfully grow to be like Jesus in the knowledge of God, of God's Word, of God's will and of God's way. Being effective in God's work and warfare, may our lives be pleasing to God now and in eternity future, all be to God's glory.

**THOUGHT:** Am I, like Paul, also an ambassador for Christ?

**PRAYER:** Father, help me not to live for self, but for Thee.

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## THE PROPHET'S BIRTH

The account of Samuel's birth reminds us of other birth narratives in the Bible, such as that of Moses and Jesus. The first king of Israel would be Saul and most of 1 and 2 Samuel is about King David, but the birth of neither of these is recorded. Why is the birth of Samuel given such prominence?

Samuel is a critical figure in the Old Testament because it is through this prophet that God would establish the kingship in Israel. This helps us to understand why these books are called 1 and 2 "Samuel." Though the greater portion of these books is about David, the prophet's role was of paramount importance. The kingship in Israel was not to be like that of other nations. It was always to be subject to the prophetic Word of God. 1 and 2 Samuel (along with Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Kings) stand in that part of the Hebrew canon called the Former Prophets. Though these books are mainly historical and strictly prophetic, the prophetic word was crucial to Israel's history.

Thus Samuel's work was to be very important. To give evidence of God's hand in his life, the unique nature of his birth is recorded. We are reminded of the Apostle's words: "...when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb..." (Gal 1:15). Like Paul, Samuel was being separated by God for a special work. Through the difficult circumstances of Hannah's life, the Lord was ordering Samuel's life. At the end of chapter 1 we read Hannah's vow, "...as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD" (1:28).

Not only in Israel's history, but also in our lives, the Word of God should be determinative. His Word should rule our lives.

**THOUGHT:** The affairs of our lives are arranged by the Lord.

**PRAYER:** "O that my ways were directed to keep thy statutes!" (Ps 119:5).

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**HANNAH'S PSALM**

Hannah's prayer is a testimony to God's grace in her life. Hannah had been childless because the Lord had closed her womb (1:2, 5). She was afflicted and troubled by her rival Peninnah (1:6). But when Hannah humbled herself before the Lord, He rescued her (1:10, 27). As she returned the child to the Lord in fulfillment of her vow, she celebrated God's goodness with this psalm (1:11, 28). At the center of her composition is her personal testimony: "...*the barren hath borne seven...*" (2:5b). The number seven here symbolizes the perfection of her role as a mother.

Unlike much modern Christian music and prayer, Hannah's psalm goes beyond her own personal situation. It celebrates the ways of God and points to the coming Messianic king. Behind Hannah's testimony lies the great truth that God is the true deliverer (2:1-2, 9), that He delivers the humble and destroys the arrogant and rebellious (2:3-8a). These truths expressed in Hannah's song are the themes of 1 and 2 Samuel. The Lord opposes the proud (eg: Eli's sons, the Philistines, and Saul). The Lord exalts the humble (eg: Hannah, Samuel, and David). In the lives of each of these God performs great reversals, bringing down the proud who oppose Him and lifting up the humble who trust in Him.

Hannah began her prayer by a testimony to what God had done in her own life: He had exalted her "*horn*" (strength, 2:1). She concludes her prayer by a prophecy concerning the future king: the Lord would "*give strength unto his king, and exalt the horn of his anointed* (i.e. the Messiah)" (2:10). This prophecy points ultimately to Christ, the Son of David (Phil 2:8-11; 1 Sam 2:8a).

**THOUGHT:** "*Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up*" (James 4:10).

**PRAYER:** "Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to Thee."

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## THE WAY OF THE WICKED

In Hannah's prayer she proclaimed this important truth: "...*the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed*" (2:3). Now this principle is applied to the lives of Eli's sons (2:12-36). These privileged young men are introduced as the priests of the Lord (1:3). They served at Shiloh where the Tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant had been located (Josh 18:1). Despite these rich spiritual blessings, Hophni and Phinehas were "*sons of Belial*" or wicked worthless fellows. They did not truly know the Lord (2:12).

A series of indictments are brought against Eli's sons. First, they abused their office by forcefully taking the unburned fat from the worshippers (2:13-16). This portion belonged to the Lord (Lev 3:16). This is an indictment against all those in the Church today who would misappropriate the gifts of God's people for their own personal gain.

Secondly, Eli's sons were conducting themselves immorally at the entrance of the Tabernacle (2:22). The shame of what they were doing was known by all Israel (2:23). What a terrible blot on the testimony of the Lord's people! Yet how often is this same blight seen today when so called ministers of the Gospel are shown to be men of gross immorality.

Finally, Eli's sons rejected their father's correction (2:25). Their sin and apostasy had gone beyond the point of return. Now the Lord's judgment would come upon them (2:27-36).

Yet even in this terrible account we see evidence of God's grace. There is the rising testimony of Samuel (2:11, 18-21, 26; 3:1a). And there is the promise of a faithful priest (2:35). Despite the sin of some, God will not forsake His people.

**THOUGHT:** What does the Lord see in your heart today?

**PRAYER:** Lord, Thou "*knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish*" (Ps 1:6).

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## GOD'S GRACIOUS WORD

The child Samuel was a testimony to God's grace. He was given by God to Hannah in response to her prayer. This is why she called him "Samuel." The name sounds like the Hebrew words for "heard of God" (1:20). Samuel's entire boyhood had been one of service to the Lord (2:11, 18, 21, 26; 3:1). However, Samuel "*did not yet know the LORD*" (3:7a). That is, though he feared the Lord and loved Him, he did not yet know Him in the special way that a prophet does. But now God began to reveal His Word to Samuel (3:7b).

How gracious God was to His people in raising up Samuel! In those days, God's Word was very rare, and there were hardly any visions (3:1; 2 Chron 15:3). Furthermore, Eli's sons, who should have been leading and teaching God's people, were wicked. Even Eli had been negligent (3:13), and he himself was now very old (2:22; 3:2). Who would lead Israel? God had the answer. It was Samuel (1:20; 4:1a).

Even the Lord's first "vision" to Samuel, though one of judgment against Eli's house, was actually a word of grace (3:15). This prophecy had already been given by "*a man of God*" in chapter two. Thus when Eli heard it again from young Samuel, he knew that the Lord had truly spoken to the boy. The gracious nature of the prophecy lay in the fact that in judging Israel's leaders God promised to raise up new leadership (2:35).

Samuel's establishment as the prophet of the Lord points, however, to an even greater promise. Through Samuel God would one day establish the kingship in Israel. Samuel would then anoint Saul and David. And out of the seed of David would come the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ.

**THOUGHT:** "*How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation...*" (Heb 2:3).

**PRAYER:** Lord, let me be like Samuel and not like Eli's sons.

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## THE ELDER'S MISTAKES

One of the literary devices by which the inspired writer ties these early chapters of Samuel together is “alternation.” That is, two themes are interwoven together in an alternating sequence. Here the wickedness and fall of Eli’s sons on the one hand, and the rise of Samuel on the other, are treated alternately. (For Eli’s sons, see 1:3; 2:12-17, 22-25, 27-36; 3:11-18. The rest of these chapters relate to Samuel.) Samuel is mentioned in 4:1. The “Ark Narrative” concerns Eli’s sons (4:4b, 11, 17). Samuel is not mentioned again until the Ark is restored in Israel (7:2-3).

The Israelites had been defeated by the Philistines (4:2). Hoping for victory in the next battle they placed their trust in the Ark rather than in God Himself (4:3). This misplaced trust led to Israel’s second defeat at the hands of the Philistines and to the capture of the Ark (4:10-11).

Israel’s misplaced trust in the Ark, rather than in the Lord, serves as a preface to the same error in their desire for a king. The next time we hear about “*the elders*,” they were asking Samuel for a king (8:4-5). Instead of trusting the Lord Himself to lead them and deliver them from their enemies, they looked to the political institution of the kingship. Their lack of sensitivity to God’s unique covenant with them is made clear by the type of king they would request for: “*a king...like all the nations*” (8:5b).

How important this lesson is for us! We must trust in the Lord Himself. We must see to it that above all else, we stand in a proper relationship with Him through Jesus Christ. If this is true in our lives, then we can properly use the institutions which He grants to us.

**THOUGHT:** Do I trust in the Church and the sacraments or in the Lord Himself?

**PRAYER:** Lord, preserve me from a misplaced trust.

---

## GOD'S HEAVY HAND

Because of the Israelites' misplaced trust in the Ark, God disciplined them. They were defeated by the Philistines and the Ark was captured. To the surrounding nations it may have appeared as a defeat of the Lord Himself. Perhaps even some of the Israelites lost confidence in God. But it soon became apparent that the Lord was not defeated, that He remained all-powerful.

The Philistines placed the Ark of the Lord in the temple of Dagon (5:2). Dagon, whose name probably means "grain-god," was worshipped widely in antiquity. The custom of placing the idols of a defeated people in the temple of the victor was common in the Ancient Near East.

God, who had not acted to deliver the disobedient Israelites from the Philistines, was now about to act. He would reveal His power over the nations and their false gods. He would illustrate to His people that He could protect and deliver them.

Twice when the Philistines entered their temple they found the idol of Dagon fallen over. The second time its head and hands were broken off, symbolizing the impotence of Dagon before the Lord (5:3-4). Though the hands of Dagon were helpless, the hand of the Lord was mighty to act. As the Ark was moved from Ashdod to Gath to Ekron, we repeatedly find the phrase "*the hand of the LORD was heavy upon them*" (5:6, 7, 9, 11).

God wants to manifest His power on behalf of His people. What hinders the Lord from doing this is unbelief and rebellion. When God's power is not manifested in our lives, it is not because He is no longer powerful. But God will only work in His own way.

**THOUGHT:** Am I under God's good hand of blessing or His heavy hand of judgment?

**PRAYER:** "*Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done...*"

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## THE RETURN OF THE ARK

Through their relationship with the Ark both the Philistines and the Israelites learned what it meant to fear the Lord. Both came to a point of humility and submission before God. After seven months of affliction, the Philistines pleaded, “*What shall we do to the ark of the LORD?*” (6:2). The Israelites, after God had punished them for their irreverence, cried out, “*Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God?*” (6:20).

The Philistines made a trespass offering to appease the Lord. On a cart next to the Ark they placed golden replicas of the tumors and mice that had infested them. These symbols of their repentance were intended to “*give glory unto the God of Israel*” (6:5). Two cows, never trained to carry a yoke, pulled the Ark. Contrary to nature, these cows left the young to whom they had just given birth. Without a guide they led the Ark directly to Bethshemesh. God had providentially overruled the circumstances as an indication that He was lifting His judgment from the Philistines.

The Israelites rejoiced to see the Ark (6:13). They had last seen it during defeat in battle. But they, too, had to learn a lesson. Though they offered sacrifices to the Lord, they failed to reverence Him properly. Contrary to the law, they treated the Ark as a common thing, peering curiously into it. God’s judgment struck (6:19). Realizing their error, they sent the Ark to Abinadab and Eleazar for proper keeping (7:1).

What an important lesson this chapter contains! Those who are God’s enemies need to be reconciled to Him. The New Testament presents Jesus as the sinner’s reconciliation (1 John 2:2). Furthermore, we who know God must not treat Him lightly or irreverently. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb 12:28-29).

**THOUGHT:** Is the presence of the Ark a blessing or a curse?

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I understand that to obey is better than sacrifice!

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## REVIVAL AT MIZPEH

The Scripture has been setting the scene for the establishment of the kingship in Israel. Hannah's song set forth the truth that God is the Sovereign ruler who abases the proud and exalts the humble (1 Sam 1-2). This principle was then illustrated in the call and rise of Samuel and the demise of Eli and his wicked sons (1 Sam 3-4). The account of the Ark taught the people that their trust must be in God Himself (1 Sam 5-6).

Israel had plenty of time to think on the implications of their defeat by the Philistines. God used Samuel's ministry during this time to cultivate the hearts of His people (7:15-17). At the end of twenty years, the seeds of revival began to sprout "*and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD*" (7:2).

True repentance requires a change of conduct. So Samuel commanded the people to put away the foreign gods which they had been worshipping. Baal and Ashtaroah were two major male and female gods in the ancient Near East. At Mizpeh the people poured out water before the Lord. Perhaps this symbolized the pouring out of their hearts to the Lord in repentance.

Often after revival there is a time of testing. So it was on this occasion. The Philistines were preparing an attack. But this time Israel did the right thing. No more misplaced trust as in chapter 4. The Israelites turned to the Lord saying, "*...he will save us out of the hand of the Philistines*" (7:8). Samuel's prayers for Israel were heard and a great victory followed (7:9-11).

As a monument to this victory Samuel set up a stone and called the place Ebenezer, which literally means "a stone of help." When Israel has a right relationship with the Lord, God can and will guide and protect them. So it is with you and me.

**THOUGHT:** Who are the 21<sup>st</sup> century Baalim and Ashtaroah?

**PRAYER:** Lord, may my life reflect Thy reign as King of kings.

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## “WHO WILL REIGN OVER US?”

The last time we saw the elders of Israel they were placing their trust in the Ark rather than in the Lord (4:3). It is sad that the lesson of the Ark had not made a lasting impression. The Lord had been graciously judging and protecting His people. Yet when they faced the future they still did not trust Him. The elders asked Samuel to appoint an earthly king for them (8:4-5). Samuel was quick to see the implication: they were rejecting God’s reign (8:6-7)!

The misplaced trust in the Ark and the misguided trust in an earthly king were similar. Both had an air of plausibility. The Ark had been given by God and had led Israel into battle. It was the symbol of His presence. Likewise, the request for a king could be justified. God had promised Israel a king, even as early as the time of Jacob (Gen 49:8-10). In fact, the regulations for the kingship had already been given (Deut 17:14-20). The kingship was to be an incarnation of God’s reign, a symbol of His presence!

The elders’ error lay not in the idea of having a king, but in their lack of trust in the Lord. They were, in effect, breaking their covenant with Him. They wanted to be like the other nations, having their own earthly king to fight their battles (8:5, 19-20).

Though the people were acting sinfully, God would overrule and accomplish His own purpose. God told Samuel, “*Make them a king*” (8:22). The Lord would, in His grace, grant their request and at the same time teach them His way of the kingdom.

We need to be careful in our relationship with the Lord! How easy it is to allow our confidence to shift from Him to something else.

**THOUGHT:** Even that which is in itself good can be misused.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to count all things but loss for Christ.

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## SAUL: WHOSE CHOICE?

Israel in principle rejected God and His reign. They desired instead an earthly king like the other nations. This king would be one that they themselves would choose (8:18; 11:15). Nevertheless, even when His people acted in rebellion against Him, it is still the Lord who sovereignly overrules. Though it is a man such as Saul that Israel desired as king (9:20b), it is the Lord who actually chose him, and through His prophet anointed him as king.

This is what makes Saul such an enigmatic character. He started out well: from a good family (9:1), physically impressive (9:2), conscientious (9:5), humble (9:21), and capable of delivering Israel from the Philistines (9:16). Yet, as we know, Saul's career ends in apostasy and defeat. It appears that God chose Saul because he would best illustrate the disastrous consequences of Israel's sinful desire for a worldly king (8:11-18). At the same time it would allow the Lord to begin to teach Israel about the proper way of the kingdom within the context of His covenant (10:25).

It is clear that Saul's encounter with Samuel is by God's appointment. All the events indicate God's providential arrangement: the wandering of the family's donkeys to the land of Zuph (9:5), the servant's idea to contact the man of God for help (9:6), and the Lord's forewarning of Samuel (9:15-16). After Saul's anointing, the three signs which Samuel prophesied came to pass, further confirming that Saul's anointing was of the Lord (10:1-10).

God could have abandoned the Israelites. Instead He overruled their evil desire for a king, that in the end He might accomplish His own good purpose. In this same way God has brought you and me to redemption, overruling our wicked hearts, and leading us to Christ, our Saviour and King.

**THOUGHT:** Who chose Saul to be king?

**PRAYER:** Lord, order my path according to Thy perfect way.

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### “GOD SAVE THE KING”

The rise of Saul to the throne of Israel, took place in three stages: the private anointing of Saul by Samuel (9:1-10:16); the public identification of the king by lot at Mizpeh (10:17-27); and the installation of Saul as king within the covenant of the Lord at Gilgal (11:14-12:25). This last stage took place after Saul's victory against the Ammonites (11:1-13).

The public identification of Saul as king at Mizpeh was preceded by a rebuke (10:17-19a). The prophet reminded Israel that their worldly desire for a king was a rejection of the Lord. What added to their guilt was the fact that the Lord had been such a faithful King. He had brought them out of Egypt, defeated Pharaoh and every kingdom that opposed His people (10:18). He had repeatedly rescued them from their difficulties (10:19).

Nevertheless, the Lord was granting Israel a king. On this day He would identify the man. The lot fell gradually on Saul. When Saul hid, the Lord exposed his hiding place. Then Samuel proclaimed, “*See ye him whom the LORD hath chosen!*” (10:24). This is important. Israel must understand. Though they desired an earthly king, it was still the Lord who reigned supreme. He would appoint their king! Not only that, but the whole “*manner of the kingdom*” in Israel was to be regulated by the Lord through His prophet (10:25).

Now that God had granted a king to Israel, this king was to be treated as the Lord's anointed. Immediately, we see a division of people: those who went with Saul, represented by those “*whose hearts God had touched*” and those who opposed Saul, described as “*the children of Belial*” or “*wicked and worthless men*” (10:26-27). Perhaps these men had their own candidate for king. The people still had much to learn about God's way of the kingdom.

**THOUGHT:** Who reigns in your heart and life today?

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to do things Thy way, for Thy glory.

---

## SAUL AT HIS BEST

Israel wanted independence from the Lord with an earthly king who could fight their battles for them. God wanted a people and a leadership who would trust in Him and walk in faithfulness to His covenant. For one bright moment in the early history of Saul's reign, a picture of what God wanted was visible.

Nahash, the Ammonite king, had set himself in battle against Israel to the east. It was this particular threat which had motivated the elders to ask for a king in the first place (1 Sam 12:12). Now the men of Jabesh-Gilead in the area of Mannaseh were in terrible danger. When Saul heard of the threat, *"the Spirit of God came upon (him)...and his anger was kindled greatly"* (11:6). Saul demanded that all Israel answer the call to arms. They were to follow not only Saul the anointed king, but also Samuel the Lord's prophet. Saul's leadership was effective and *"the fear of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out with one consent"* (11:7). The Israelites soundly defeated the Ammonites (11:11).

Saul did not allow the victory to become an occasion to destroy those within Israel who had opposed his reign. He did not use the victory for his own political gain. Instead he gave the glory to the Lord saying, *"...today the LORD hath wrought salvation in Israel"* (11:13).

This entire account reveals Saul in his best light, functioning as the Lord's anointed, subject to the Word of God, and valiant for Israel. How blessed God's people are when they do things in God's way! The Lord will bless us and our churches if we will just trust and obey as Israel did on this happy day.

**THOUGHT:** Was Saul a man after God's own heart on this occasion?

**PRAYER:** Lord, prepare me to do battle for Thee.

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MONDAY, NOVEMBER 12

1 SAMUEL 11:14-12:25

DEUTERONOMY 28:1-19

*Are you longing  
for the Lord's Day?*

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## THE RIGHT WAY TO HAVE A KING

The Israelites' victory against the Ammonites provided the right occasion for a renewal of the kingdom. This was not a renewal of Saul's kingdom but a reaffirmation of the Lord's reign. It was, however, attended by the confirming, or official inauguration, of Saul as God's vice-regent.

Samuel's speech indicates that recognition of the Lord's kingship was the primary issue. The event did not focus on Israel's responsibilities to Saul, but rather on Israel's and Saul's obligation to the Lord.

Samuel rehearsed the wonderful deeds which God had performed for Israel. The exodus, the conquest, and the period of the judges were all evidence of God's right to reign over Israel (12:6-12). Nevertheless, the Lord was going to institute the monarchy in Israel (12:13).

Samuel stated the covenant conditions which would continue to exist and bind Israel to the Lord as their true Sovereign (12:14-15). This is a restatement of the covenant arrangement of Deuteronomy 28, only now it is repeated within the new economy of the monarchy.

The sign from heaven impressed on the people the seriousness of their rebellion in asking for a king (12:16-18a). After the people confessed their sin, Samuel charged them to be faithful to the Lord (12:18b-22). The ceremony concluded with a description of Samuel's continuing role as prophet, a reminder to the people of their covenant obligation (12:23-25).

Perhaps today would be a good day for us to pause and renew our commitment to the Lord and to be grateful for the New Covenant which is ours in Christ Jesus.

**THOUGHT:** What are my covenant obligations before the Lord?

**PRAYER:** I thank Thee, Lord, for the kingdom which cannot be shaken (Heb 12:28).

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## A LOST DYNASTY

The selection, anointing, and establishment of Saul as king in Israel are described in 1 Samuel 8 to 12. We read of his fall in 1 Samuel 13 to 15. The Lord's king must be, above all else, obedient to the Word of the Lord. When Saul was confirmed as king, this need for obedience was stressed (12:14-15, 24-25). When he was privately anointed as king by Samuel, the prophet had given a simple test: "When you are king and you gather the people at Gilgal (to battle the Philistines), wait seven days till I come to sacrifice" (10:8). This was a simple straightforward test, like the test of Adam and Eve in the Garden. Both tests had terrible implications.

Saul did not pass the test. When he should have exhibited faith and courage, he faltered. When the people were trembling in fear, he, too, panicked (13:7). Instead of waiting for Samuel's arrival in order to sacrifice and give further instructions, Saul took things into his own hands, as any earthly king would do (13:9).

The Lord's judgment upon Saul is found in 13:13-14. The judgments on Saul in chapter 13 and in chapter 15 are very similar. There is, however, this difference. In chapter 13 his royal dynasty is terminated, his son will not reign after him. In chapter 15 his own personal reign is rejected by the Lord. The key clause in chapter 13 is: "*the LORD hath sought him a man after his own heart*" (13:14). This points, of course, to David who will be privately anointed king in chapter 16. God desired a king who would reign over His people in faithfulness and righteousness. David would be a better example of this than Saul. But David, too, would falter. Only in the "*Son of David*," not Solomon but Christ, would the ideal king be found (cf Heb 1:8-9).

**THOUGHT:** Have I kept what the Lord commanded?

**PRAYER:** Teach me, Lord, to "trust and obey for there's no other way."

## THE KING WHO MIGHT HAVE BEEN

Saul's dynasty is rejected by God in 1 Samuel 13; his personal reign is rejected in 1 Samuel 15. The intervening chapter is an integral part of the description of Saul's failure as a theocratic king (1 Sam 14). It shows, on the one hand, Saul's weakness as a leader. It also shows the boldness of his son, Jonathan. Had Saul been obedient to the Lord his dynasty would have been confirmed; Jonathan would have sat on the throne (13:13). This chapter illustrates what an effective leader Jonathan would have been.

Notice Saul's failures. He did not take the initiative in battle, but waited in Gibeah under a tree (14:2). When he heard of the battle, he sought a word from God. But he grew impatient and proceeded without an answer (14:18-19). In the heat of the conflict, Saul placed a severe restriction on his soldiers, not allowing them to eat (14:24). His attitude in battle was wrong; he sought his own vengeance rather than the Lord's glory (14:24).

Saul built an altar to the Lord on this occasion, but it was noted that *"the same was the first altar that he built unto the LORD"* (14:35). It appears as if Saul had been neglecting acts of worship. Finally, Saul made a rash vow (14:39). As a result, only the people's intervention prevented Saul from executing his own son (14:45).

In sharp contrast is the conduct of Jonathan. He initiated the battle with boldness (14:1; 13:3). Jonathan's speech reveals his dependence on the Lord for victory (14:6, 10). As a result, the Philistines suffered a resounding defeat (14:14-15). Jonathan surely would have made a good king!

It is sad when we are robbed of future blessings because of disobedience. What might have been is lost forever when we sin.

**THOUGHT:** Are the children punished for the sins of their parents?

**PRAYER:** Lord, may my life be a source of blessing to my descendants.

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## SAUL'S REBELLION

In Hannah's song she warned against the proud and arrogant (2:3, 10). The Lord brings down the self-sufficient and raises up the humble (2:4-9). God gives the poor a throne of honour (2:8). These truths are illustrated in the life of king Saul. He was once "small in his own eyes," and God had anointed him king over Israel (15:17). But now he was seeking his own honour (15:12); he had become arrogant (15:23). Even in his repentance he was still concerned for his own honour (15:30). Saul had rejected the Word of the Lord, and God had accordingly rejected him as king over Israel (15:26).

The Lord "*repented*" that He made Saul king (15:11, 35). However, we are told that God would not "repent" about making David king (15:29). We must recognize that the word translated "repent" has two meanings. On the one hand, the Lord is a dynamic, not a static, God. He lives and reacts in relationship with men. His feelings are real. Thus the Lord repents or sorrows over His choice of Saul (15:11, 35). However, the Lord is not one to change His settled plan or purpose. We are told of His granting of the kingship to another, i.e. David (15:28). This is a part of His sovereign counsel. The permanence of this choice will be emphasized in the Davidic Covenant (2 Sam 6).

How good it is to know that the Lord does not change (Heb 13:8). Saul had changed. As a result he was rejected as king. Yet the Lord remained faithful. He did not abandon His people. One writer expressed it this way: This account "does not express any changeableness in the divine nature, but simply the sorrow of the divine love at the rebellion of sinners" (Keil and Delitzsch).

**THOUGHT:** Will God ever "repent" that He saved me?

**PRAYER:** Lord, teach me to obey Thy Word.

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## THE SHEPHERD KING

In the pronouncements of judgment against Saul's reign, the Lord promised a better king (13:14; 15:28). Though the actual rise of David to the throne of Israel would take many years, in God's eyes Saul's reign was now finished (16:1).

When God sent Samuel to anoint the son of Jesse, He instructed the prophet to tell Saul only that he had come to offer sacrifice. If he had known the full reason for Samuel's visit, Saul would have surely slain the Lord's prophet (16:2). Samuel did not lie to Saul, he merely withheld knowledge. Another indication of Saul's wicked and rejected condition is found in the change of spirits in his heart (16:14). This "*evil spirit from the LORD*" does not suggest that God is the author of sin. However, God is sovereign over the powers of darkness. In judging Saul for his rebellion, God permitted the evil spirit to afflict him. How dreadful are the consequences of sin!

At this point the account shifts attention to David, the shepherd boy (16:11). The shepherd theme is an important one in the election of David as king (2 Sam 7:8). Kings were often described as shepherds in Israel and in the Ancient Near East (Mic 5:5b; Isa 44:28). As David had faithfully cared for his father's sheep, so he would faithfully lead God's people as a servant-king (see Ps 78:70-72). But it must be remembered that David is but a type of Christ. It is Jesus as God's servant who is ultimately the Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14). He feeds us, guides us, and protects us. Jesus is our Shepherd-King (Heb 13:20).

**THOUGHT:** How is a shepherd like a king?

**PRAYER:** "Saviour, like a shepherd lead me!"

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## A CONTRAST IN LEADERSHIP

We will better appreciate the well-known story of David and Goliath if we understand it in the light of what God was doing in Israel. The elders had improperly requested a king to rule over them. This was an implicit rejection of God's reign. Nevertheless, in His goodness God had granted them their desire, instructing them that the king in Israel must rule within the Lord's covenant. Israel's experiment in an earthly kingship under Saul was a failure. In him God had shown Israel what a theocratic king should not be like. Now God was raising up David to show the nation a better picture of what He desired in a king. A contrast between Saul and David is set forth in the story of Goliath.

Saul, as God's vice-regent, should have been the chief example of trust in the Lord, especially during times of crisis (Exod 23:22; Deut 20:1-4). Instead Saul led the people in fear (17:11). Saul's doubt was reflected in his words to David, "*Thou art not able to go against this Philistine...*" (17:33).

Saul was acting exactly as Samuel had predicted a king "*like all the nations*" would act (8:11-17). Saul promised "great wealth" to the victor over Goliath, as well as exemption from taxes (17:25). This suggests that Saul had acquired wealth by taxing God's people.

David, on the other hand, exhibited great confidence in the Lord (17:26). He reflected on God's deliverance in the past and rested in that for renewed victory (17:37). It was in the Name of the LORD that David did battle (17:45). David was concerned for the Lord's glory (17:46-47).

David was able to slay Goliath because he trusted in the Lord, sought His glory, and walked in the ways of His covenant. Christ, the greater Son of David, would do the same thing in destroying Satan, sin, and death.

**THOUGHT:** How was Saul's conduct aiding the enemy?

**PRAYER:** Lord, give me a heart like David's.

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## REACTIONS TO DAVID'S VICTORY

God had rejected Saul as king. Now, in His grace, He was raising up David. The Lord's prophet had already privately anointed David as king (1 Sam 16). And the shepherd boy's victory over Goliath was an illustration of David's ability to lead God's people (1 Sam 17). However, it would be some years before David actually reached the throne. The history of David's rise is recorded in 1 Samuel 18 through to 2 Samuel 5, and revolves chiefly around the conflict between Saul and David. While Saul's wickedness becomes more and more apparent, David's innocence becomes equally manifest.

1 Samuel 18 relates the reactions of various people to what God was doing in David's life. First of all, Jonathan, Saul's son, recognized God's blessing upon David. Jonathan himself had once fought valiantly for Israel (1 Sam 14). His heart was stirred by David's trust in the Lord. Jonathan's covenant of friendship with David may indicate that Jonathan already sensed God's intention to make David king. Jonathan did not selfishly cling to his own natural claim to the throne. He submitted to God's way.

The people in general were very impressed by David's military success (18:5). An example of this popularity is found in the praise which the women gave David: "*Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands*" (18:7). The women's error lay in their not giving glory to the Lord. Their praises of David provoked Saul's jealousy (18:8-9).

Saul became suspicious of David (18:9). Instead of submitting to the Lord's will, Saul stubbornly fought against it. Twice he tried to kill David with his spear (18:11). Twice he sent David to battle hoping he would be killed (18:17, 25). But the Lord was with His anointed. Saul's efforts were futile.

**THOUGHT:** How can I respond properly to what God is doing today?

**PRAYER:** "*If God be for us, who can be against us?*"

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## SAUL'S CHILDREN DEFEND DAVID

Three important themes are skillfully interwoven in 1 Samuel 19: Saul's irrational hatred of David; Jonathan and Michal's protection of David; and David's innocence.

When a person rebels against the Lord, and is in turn rejected by God, there is no restraint to that man's wickedness. Saul began by suspecting David (18:9). His suspicion turned to fear (18:12, 15, 29). Several times Saul threw his spear at David in irrational fits of rage (18:11; 19:9-10). He sent David into battle, hoping for his death (18:17, 25). Finally, he gave his servants explicit instructions to kill David (19:1, 11, 15, 20).

While Saul viciously pursued David's life, Jonathan and Michal, Saul's own children, loved and protected David. Jonathan's relationship with David has become the classic example of godly friendship. Here Jonathan successfully interceded with his father for David (19:1-7). Michal, Saul's daughter, also loved David (18:20, 28). Saul had given her to David in marriage, though even in this Saul hoped to eliminate David (18:25). Michal saved David's life by helping him escape from her father (19:11-17). All that Saul tried to use against David turned to David's advantage.

Both the irrationality of Saul's hatred and the depth of Jonathan and Michal's love serve to highlight David's innocence. Jonathan pleaded with his father, "(David) *hath not sinned against thee...wherefore then wilt thou sin against innocent blood, to slay David without a cause?*" (19:4-5). It was God who had rejected Saul and anointed David. David, himself, had not done a single thing to threaten Saul's throne. When David fled from Saul, he went and stayed with Samuel, the Lord's prophet (19:18). When Saul sent messengers to take David, both Saul and the messengers were overcome by God's Spirit (19:19-24).

**THOUGHT:** Was Michal right to deceive her father?

**PRAYER:** (Use Proverbs 16:7.)

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## FRIENDSHIP IN THE NAME OF GOD

David wept when Jonathan was killed in battle against the Philistines. He cried, *“O Jonathan...I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan...thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women”* (2 Sam 1:25-26). Why did David love Jonathan so deeply? What kind of man was this Jonathan?

Certainly he was a brave man. We first met him initiating battle against the Philistines (13:3). Later when his father hesitated, it was Jonathan who trusted the Lord and sought God’s glory (1 Sam 14). Had not Saul’s dynasty been rejected by the Lord, Jonathan would have made a valiant king. He had won the hearts of Israel (14:45).

But more than a mighty warrior and a wise leader, Jonathan was a man with spiritual perception. When David was brought into Saul’s court after his victory over Goliath, Jonathan immediately recognized the youth as one upon whom God’s blessing rested. Not only did they become intimate friends, but Jonathan’s gifts to David seem to indicate that Jonathan already perceived that David was to be God’s anointed (18:4).

Jonathan’s character was selfless. When he saw that God purposed to make David king, Jonathan did not rebel. Instead he aligned himself with God’s plan and worked to protect David. Jonathan interceded for David (19:1-7), and helped him escape (1 Sam 20). Finally, in a very touching scene, Jonathan visited David while the latter was hiding in the wilderness *“and strengthened his hand in God”* (23:16). This was the last time they ever met. Such friendship is rare indeed.

Jonathan had requested that David be kind to his descendants (20:14-15). Later, David remembered his promise and showed kindness to Mephibosheth (2 Sam 4:4; 9:3, 7; 21:7).

**THOUGHT:** *“...there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother”*  
(Prov 18:24).

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I be someone’s Jonathan.

### A COSTLY MISTAKE

Though David was innocent of plotting against Saul's throne, he did fail in his personal conduct. Though David was a type of Christ, he was not a perfect type; he was not sinless. In 1 Samuel 21, we find David relying on subterfuge, rather than on the Lord.

David had apparently gone to Ahimelech the priest many times in the past. Perhaps he had even gone there on official business for king Saul (22:15). Now David used this connection in order to secure guidance, food, and weapons from Ahimelech (22:10). David needed these to aid him in his escape from Saul. But David was not forthright with the priest. He pretended to be on the king's business (21:2).

Perhaps David's motives were right. Perhaps he felt that Ahimelech would be implicated as an accomplice if he knew David's real situation. Nevertheless, David's method was wrong. It is never right to lie. God's children must trust in the Lord and not in deceit.

While visiting the priest, David had access to the Word of the Lord. He was also able to eat of the shewbread. This was normally restricted for use by the priests, but here it is mercifully extended to David (Matt 12:3-8). David also received Goliath's sword, a poignant reminder of God's deliverance in the past. Despite all this, David failed on this occasion to fully trust the Lord.

When Saul heard that Ahimelech had helped David, the king had the priest and everyone in the city of Nob put to death (21:7; 22:18-19). David had to bear part of the blame for this dreadful outcome (22:22). As God's children we must "...walk in the light, as he is in the light..." (1 John 1:7). There can be no place in our lives for deceit and subversion.

**THOUGHT:** The end does not justify the means.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to walk in integrity.

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## LEARNING THROUGH ADVERSITY

When David left the priest at Nob, he fled to Achish the king of Gath. Gath was one of the five major Philistine cities. Unfortunately the servants of Achish recognized David. Hoping to escape execution, David “*changed his behaviour*” before them, i.e. he pretended to be insane (21:13).

David was in deep trouble. He was being hunted down like an animal by Saul. He was feeling guilty for having taken advantage of the priest Ahimelech. His life was being threatened by the Philistines in Gath. From all outward appearances David had gone mad.

But there is another side of the story. David, in the midst of his conflict, was learning to trust in the Lord. Some of the inner struggle which David experienced at this time is recorded in Psalms 34 and 56. The titles of these Psalms indicate that they are reflections on David’s experiences while at Gath. Note: Abimelech in the title of Psalm 34 is Achish’s dynastic name.

David testified, “*This poor man cried, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles*” (Ps 34:6). And again, “*The LORD is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit. Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the LORD delivereth him out of them all*” (Ps 34:18-19). He cried, “*What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee*” (Ps 56:3).

We, too, are often encompassed by the difficulties of life. Let us also find comfort and deliverance in our God, for “*the LORD redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate*” (Ps 34:22).

**THOUGHT:** Adversity is often the shortest road to maturity.

**PRAYER:** When trouble comes, Lord, teach me to meditate on Thee.

## A ROYAL ENTOURAGE

From the despair of his feigned madness before Achish we find David rising up to establish his own power. Having left Gath, he escaped to the cave Adullam and gathered together his family and a band of about 400 men. The cave served as his first military stronghold. The beginning was humble and obscure. But the sovereign hand of the Lord was evident. Perhaps in the cave some of the women remembered the words of Hannah's song, "*(The LORD)...raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory...*" (2:8).

Later, David found refuge for his parents in Moab (22:3-4). The king of Moab assisted David because Saul was their common enemy. Furthermore David's great-grandmother, Ruth, had been a Moabitess (Ruth 4:13, 22). The Lord was working all things together for good (Rom 8:28).

Two very important officials joined David in this chapter. They formed David's first royal court, though it was a court on the run. These officials were Gad the prophet and Abiathar the priest, both formerly of Saul's administration. Gad would later play an important part in David's reign (2 Chron 29:25; 1 Chron 29:29; 2 Sam 24:11 ff). Here, he gave David military advice (22:5).

Abiathar joined David after Saul had put the priestly family to death. Though David was partly to blame for this tragedy, the Lord overruled and in this way brought the priesthood into David's camp. Now there were three in the forest of Hareth: Gad the prophet, Abiathar the priest, and David the king.

**THOUGHT:** Better in a forest or a cave with the Lord, than on a throne without Him.

**PRAYER:** Lord, let me see things as Thou seeth them.

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## SECURITY IN THE WILDERNESS

Saul believed that the Lord was on his side. When he thought David was trapped Saul said, “*God hath delivered him (David) into mine hand*” (23:7). Later when spies came with news about David, Saul said, “*Blessed be ye of the LORD*” (23:21). But “*God delivered him not into his (Saul’s) hand*” (23:14). There was no blessing for the pursuers of David. Instead, there was every indication that the Lord and His blessing were with David.

First of all, the priest’s special Ephod was with David (23:6, 9). The Ephod contained the Urim and the Thummim which were used for making decisions for the Israelites (Exod 28:30). These were sacred lots used in times of crisis to ascertain God’s will. Saul, as king, had neglected the Word of the Lord, but David continually depended on God’s guidance. Through direct revelation the Lord gave David and his growing army, now numbering 600, both victory over the Philistines and a safe escape from the ungrateful inhabitants of Keilah.

Further evidence of the Lord’s favour was found in Jonathan’s visit with David (23:16-18). Jonathan prophesied, “*Thou shalt be king over Israel.*” After reaffirming their covenant, these godly friends parted, never to see each other again.

God’s providential control over the movements of the Philistines also worked in David’s favour. Saul was pursuing David in the wilderness of Maon. David and his men were on one side of a mountain and Saul and his men on the other. Just when Saul was about to catch David, the report arrived of a Philistine invasion to the north. Saul had to break off his pursuit in order to engage the Philistines. That place was renamed, Sela Hammahleth, which means “The Rock of Parting,” as a testimony to God’s timely help.

**THOUGHT:** How can I be sure of God’s favour in my life?

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I rest in Thy perfect providence.

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## CASTING ALL YOUR CARES UPON HIM

A worldly king relies on his own strength and seeks his own vengeance. But the Lord's anointed must operate on a different principle. Hannah's prayer had made this clear: "...by strength shall no man prevail...the LORD shall judge the ends of the earth..." (2:9-10).

Chapters 24, 25 and 26 of 1 Samuel relate three separate incidents. However, David's innocence and his reliance on the Lord bind these chapters into one unit. In these chapters we are told how David twice spared Saul and once the ungrateful Nabal.

From the human point of view, David would have been justified in killing Saul. But when David had Saul trapped in the cave, David rested his case with the Lord, saying, "*The LORD avenge me of thee: but mine hand shall not be upon thee*" (24:12-15).

David's advisers had encouraged him to kill Saul, but David knew better (24:4, 10). Though God had providentially delivered Saul into David's hand, this did not justify David harming him. Later, when David had Saul trapped once again, Abishai volunteered to slay Saul (26:8). But David again spared Saul (26:9).

Because of his innocence and reliance upon the Lord, David's enemies were defeated. When Nabal died, David thanked the Lord (25:39). David believed that the Lord would also deliver him from Saul (26:10).

David's conduct here reminds us of Christ, the greater Son of David. When wicked men led Jesus to Calvary, He did not avail of His own power to strike back. He rested in His heavenly Father. And by His resurrection the Lord was vindicated. Now He reigns in heaven till His enemies be made His footstool (Ps 110:1).

**THOUGHT:** Am I resting my case with the Lord?

**PRAYER:** Father, help me to walk in innocence.

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## THE WISDOM OF ABIGAIL

While living in the wilderness David's men had protected Nabal's sheep (25:16). When the time came to shear the sheep at Carmel, David sent messengers to Nabal to receive their due portion (25:4-9). Nabal, however, treated David's men with insults and contempt (25:10-11). With his men armed, David set out to take vengeance on Nabal (25:13, 21-22). The Lord's anointed was about to commit a grievous sin by using his military strength for personal vengeance. Samuel, the Lord's prophet, was dead (25:1). Who, then, would intervene to spare David's innocence?

Abigail, like Hannah, was "*a woman of good understanding*" (25:3). Hearing of David's plan to attack Nabal, she set out to appease David (25:18-20). The Lord was at work through Abigail to restrain David from evil (25:25, 32-35).

In her wisdom she recognized and acknowledged the guilt of Nabal. She called him a "*man of Belial*" or a wicked person. His name itself meant "fool" (25:25). Abigail understood something deeper: Nabal was but a picture of Saul, David's greater enemy. Saul, too, had acted foolishly at Carmel, setting up a monument to himself (15:12). In fact, Samuel had accused Saul of acting foolishly (13:13). Abigail prayed that Nabal's defeat would also be the fate of all David's enemies (25:26). She was doubtless thinking of Saul when she told David, "*Yet a man is risen to pursue thee, and to seek thy soul*" (25:29).

Abigail perceived that God's blessing was upon David. She recognized that he would be appointed king one day (25:30). She also had insight into the abiding nature of David's dynasty (25:28, 2 Sam 7:13).

Godly women like Hannah and Abigail played an important role in Scripture. The Church today needs such women.

**THOUGHT:** Where did Abigail get her wisdom from?

**PRAYER:** Help me, Lord, to listen to wise counsel.

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## TWICE INNOCENT

One of the striking features of 1 and 2 Samuel is the repetition of certain similar narratives. For example, Samuel anointed Saul privately, later he anointed David privately (10:1; 16:13). Saul was twice rejected as king: his dynasty was rejected in chapter 13 and his personal reign in chapter 15. Liberal commentators have explained this feature as the result of the merging of two or more different traditions in Israel's history. They said that the merging of such traditions into one document has often resulted in the fabrication of two separate events. Such a view dishonours God's Word.

The explanation for the repetition of similar events lies in another direction. All these events are historically reliable. Nothing is fabricated. It is in the nature of human history that events repeat themselves. Since Saul had an evil temper, then it is not strange that he would more than once throw his spear at David (18:11). Furthermore, in selecting the events to include in the biblical account, the author, under inspiration of God's Spirit, appeared to be guided by the literary device of arranging his narrative in couplets. In this way the Scripture communicates certain truths with the emphasis which comes through repetition.

Now we can better appreciate the chapter before us. Here David again spared Saul's life. Chapter 24 and chapter 26 are very similar, yet they record two distinct events. The repetition emphasizes Saul's persistent wickedness in pursuing David. It also confirms David's innocence in refusing to harm the Lord's anointed.

How effective the biblical record is! It causes us to pause and reflect on the nature of our own spiritual lives. Are we repeating the sins of yesterday, like Saul? Or are we growing in holiness, like David?

**THOUGHT:** What is the direction of my life?

**PRAYER:** Lead me, Lord, in the way of spiritual growth.

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## DID DAVID BETRAY HIS PEOPLE?

Saul's standing army consisted of 3,000 men (24:2; 26:2). David's men numbered a mere 600 (23:13; 27:2). Saul's superior forces had already made two attempts at trapping David. Although Saul had failed in both attempts, David reasoned that sooner or later Saul would catch up to him. David decided to leave the borders of Israel and seek refuge among the Philistines.

Some commentators have judged David very harshly for this. One writer declares that turning to the Philistine king was actually a betrayal of God's people. But the issue is not quite so clear-cut. We must keep in mind the state of warfare that existed. During a state of war manoeuvres, spying and other acts of deceptions are quite justified. By pretending to go over to the Philistine side, David was able to escape Saul's evil intent. He was also able to launch successful attacks against Israel's enemies to the south (27:8-11). Furthermore, David was able to repossess the city of Ziklag. This city had originally been given to the Simeonites during the time of Joshua (Josh 19:5). Not long before David's time it was taken by the Philistines. Now it was back under Israel's control (27:6).

However, David's faith did falter. This is evident from the doubt that had arisen in his heart. He said, "*I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul*" (27:1). Weary from being constantly hunted, frustrated by his own convictions which would not allow him to kill Saul, David's faith wavered. He forgot the encouraging words of Jonathan, Abigail, and even Saul himself (18:4; 20:13-16; 23:16; 24:20-21; 25:29; 26:25). David's tactic in deceiving the Philistines may not have been wrong, but his motives sprung from doubt, and that was wrong.

**THOUGHT:** Have the difficulties in my life caused me to question God's promises?

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to trust Thee fully.

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## THE WITCH OF ENDOR

As we approach the final chapters of 1 Samuel, it is important to keep in mind the great military danger that surrounded Israel. The Philistines were massing their forces to the north for a campaign against Israel (28:1). The Amalekites, whom Saul had failed to wipe out, were taking advantage of the Philistine threat and raiding Israel in the south (30:1). Samuel, the Lord's prophet, was dead (28:3).

To make matters worse, Israel's king was nearly paralyzed by fear (28:5). Saul's downfall had begun many years before from a similar fear of the Philistines (13:11-12). A true covenant king would have trusted in the Lord (Deut 20:1-4). But Saul's leadership had been increasingly characterized by fear (17:11). He was a rejected king, and his fear worked like a self-fulfilling prophecy. Now in his darkest hour, the Lord would not hear him (28:6).

Under Samuel's guidance, and in obedience to God's Word, Saul had once rid the land of "*familiar spirits*" and "*wizards*" (28:3; Lev 19:31). But now in his despair Saul seeks out a medium to communicate for him with Samuel. This incident has been explained in various ways, but it seems best to take it at face value.

Though God does not approve of necromancy, He overruled Saul's involvement with the witch of Endor to confirm the message previously given through Samuel (28:16-19; 15:28). Earlier we saw that God sent an evil spirit to Saul. This revealed God's sovereign control over the spirit world (18:10). So it is here, though God is not the source of evil, He can overrule even that realm for His own purpose and glory.

**THOUGHT:** The Word of the Lord is the only valid source of spiritual guidance.

**PRAYER:** Lord, teach me to fear Thee, and not the Philistines.

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### A TIMELY RETREAT

Because David had outwardly aligned himself with the Philistines, he now found himself in a very awkward situation. The five Philistine princes were mustering their troops to do battle against Israel. David had committed himself and his men to fight alongside of Achish (28:1-2). For three days David marched northward side by side with the enemies of God's people (29:1-2, 29:11-30:1). What inner conflict David must have felt. If only he had believed the promise of God and remained in Israel!

But the Lord had not forsaken David. He provided a way of escape (1 Cor 10:13). Though Achish had come to fully trust David, the other four Philistine princes had not. They remembered the song which the Israelite women had sung when David had slain the Philistine hero, Goliath (18:7). They remembered how once before Hebrew residents had turned on them in the midst of battle (14:21). Consequently, Achish was compelled to send David back to Ziklag (29:6, 7, 10). Actually, it was the Lord who was overruling circumstances and the hearts of men, making a way to extricate David from his self-imposed dilemma.

One commentator well described David's reaction to this deliverance: "David returned the next morning...no doubt very light of heart, and praising God for having graciously rescued him out of the disastrous situation into which he had been brought...rejoicing that he had not committed either sin, i.e., had neither violated the fidelity which he owed Achish, nor had to fight against the Israelites" (Keil and Delitzsch).

How patient the Lord was with David! He desires to deliver us from our hardships as well, if we will but trust Him.

**THOUGHT:** Despite my frequent faltering, God remains faithful.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to see Thy way of escape.

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## VICTORY AND DEFEAT

At the very time that the Philistines were initiating an attack against Saul's forces in the north, the Amalekites were invading Judah to the south. When David reached Ziklag he found it sacked and burned (30:1). David's wives, as well as the wives and children of all his men, had been carried off captive (30:2, 5).

When Saul was faced with such a crisis he responded with fear (28:5). How would David react? The sense of loss was very great, David and his men wept until they were exhausted (30:4). To make matters worse, David's men were threatening to kill him. Though greatly distressed, David did the right thing. He "*encouraged himself in the LORD his God*" (30:6). This was the difference between Saul and David; it was a matter of their heart relationship with the Lord.

When Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him (28:6). But when David sought guidance, the Lord not only answered, but assured him of victory (30:8).

In His providence the Lord provided a forsaken Egyptian slave through whose aid David's men found and gained the victory over the Amalekites (30:9-20).

David's qualification to serve as king in Israel is not only illustrated by this military victory, but also by his subsequent diplomacy. The two hundred exhausted men who had been left behind at the brook Besor were given a share in the spoil, despite the ill advice of certain worthless men (30:21-25). Furthermore, David shared the spoil with all the elders of Judah in the various areas where David's men frequented (30:26-31).

**THOUGHT:** If God be for me, who can be against me?

**PRAYER:** Lord, teach me to encourage myself in Thee.

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## THE DEATH OF SAUL

1 and 2 Samuel were originally one book. It was divided into two parts out of convenience probably about the time that it was first translated into Greek. Dividing the narration at the death of Saul found precedence in other Old Testament works which concluded at the death of great leaders, such as Joseph in Genesis 50, and Moses in Deuteronomy 34. The death of Saul marked an important transition in the kingship of Israel. Saul had reflected Israel's worldly concept of a king, while David would better represent God's desire for the kingship.

This contrast is emphasized by the difference between the events taking place in southern Israel with those taking place in the north. In the previous chapter we saw David strengthened by the Lord, calling upon the Lord for guidance, receiving help against the Amalekites, and ruling wisely. But to the north we see Saul filled with terror, unable to inquire successfully of the Lord, consulting the medium, defeated in battle, and finally fallen on his own sword.

The best commentary on the Bible is the Bible itself. In 1 Chronicles 10:13-14 we read the Holy Spirit's interpretation of these events: "*So Saul died for his transgression which he committed against the LORD...and also for asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to enquire of it; and enquired not of the LORD: therefore he slew him, and turned the kingdom unto David the son of Jesse.*"

This surely was a tragic day in the history of Israel. The king and his sons were dead. The Israelites were scattered, and a very large part of their territory had fallen into Philistine hands (31:7). But the Chronicler has pointed us to a promise: the Lord had "*turned the kingdom unto David.*" God had not forsaken His people.

**THOUGHT:** The wages of sin is death!

**PRAYER:** "Lord, turn our eyes to Thy anointed One."

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## KNOW THY ENEMIES

The role which the Amalekites played in King Saul's life highlights the tragic nature of his career. Earlier in Saul's reign God had commanded him to destroy all the Amalekites. But Saul had spared Agag, the Amalekite king. For this direct disobedience, the Lord had rejected Saul's reign. And Samuel, the Lord's prophet, had to execute Agag (1 Sam 15). Now, ironically, on the occasion of Saul's death, a wicked Amalekite (an alien resident in Israel) preyed on the fallen king. Seeing Saul slain in battle, the Amalekite stole his crown and bracelet, and then tried to ingratiate himself to David. This time it is David, the Lord's anointed, who must execute an Amalekite.

The Amalekites were not only Israel's enemy, they were the Lord's enemy. The Amalekites are described in Psalm 83, among other Israelite enemies, as hating the Lord. They take "*crafty counsel against thy (His) people*" (Ps 83:3). They desire to see Israel cut off from being a nation (Ps 83:4). It is for this reason that the Lord's enemies had to be dealt with in strict accordance with God's Word. In this regard Saul's reign was a failure.

David, on the other hand, was careful to obey the Lord. He had just come from defeating the Amalekites in the south (1:1). When the scavenger came with the false report concerning the manner of Saul's death, David clearly saw the evil in the Amalekite's conduct. Though David grieved over the loss of Saul and Jonathan, he did not fail to keep his guard up against the Lord's enemy.

David's victories remind us of a greater victory: Christ's victory over Satan, death, and sin on our behalf. The Lord will soon win the full victory. Psalm 110:1 says that Christ will sit at the right hand of God until His enemies are made His footstool.

**THOUGHT:** A person's character can be measured by his relationship to his enemies.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to fight in a way that is pleasing to Thee.

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## A TIME TO CRY

The Bible teaches us that *“to every thing there is a season...a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance”* (Eccles 3:1, 4). Jeremiah devotes an entire book, Lamentations, to mourning. On the occasion of Saul’s and Jonathan’s death, David not only wrote a “lament,” but taught it to the children of Judah, and recorded it in Scripture (1:17-18). Yes, there is a time to cry.

It is time to cry when final judgment comes from God. Saul’s death was a result of God’s judgment upon him for his disobedience. How true is the principle of Scripture: *“the wages of sin is death”* (Rom 6:23) and *“the soul that sinneth, it shall die”* (Ezek 18:4). Jesus Himself said that at the final judgment there would *“be wailing and gnashing of teeth”* (Matt 13:42). Such sorrow can only be avoided by finding salvation in the “Man of Sorrow,” the Lord Jesus Christ. Isaiah tells us that *“he (Jesus) hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows”* (Isa 53:4). It is He that can give us the *“oil of joy for mourning”* (Isa 61:3). When a person has been converted, one of the first evidences in his life is a tremendous sense of joy (1 Thess 1:5-6).

Even when a person is saved from the great sorrow that comes from God’s judgment, there are still occasions in the Christian’s life for mourning. None of these occasions is more difficult than the loss of a loved one. Jonathan had been so dear to David. And so we hear David cried, *“O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thine high places. I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan”* (1:25-26). But for the Christian such sorrow is limited, for in Christ we have great consolation. Our union with Christ has turned death into sleep (1 Thess 4:13-14). There is a time for mourning, but one day for the believer every tear shall be wiped away (Rev 21:4).

**THOUGHT:** Is Jesus the joy of my living?

**PRAYER:** Turn my eyes upon Thee, Lord Jesus, that the griefs in my life may grow strangely dim.

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## THE LORD’S STEPS

In today’s account we find David at a very critical stage of his life. Through Samuel the Lord had already in private anointed David to be king (1 Sam 16). Now, with Saul’s death, the throne was vacant. Should David forcibly seize the throne? Would that be running ahead of the Lord? What should David do? In these verses we see that *“the steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD: and he delighteth in his way”* (Ps 37:23).

David was very careful to seek the Lord’s guidance (2:1). Not only did he ask for general guidance (*“Shall I go up?”*), he asked more specifically, *“Where shall I go up?”* It was only when the Lord instructed him to go to Hebron that David took people into Judah (2:2-3). God’s people recognized David’s leadership. They publicly anointed him as king over the house of Judah (2:4a). Leadership is not something that needs to be forcibly seized. God’s people can recognize those that the Lord has gifted and called to leadership.

Next, we see David dealing diplomatically. It was reported to him that the men of Jabesh-gilead were the ones who had rescued Saul’s body and buried him (1 Sam 31:11-13). Surely these were the men most loyal to Saul and jealous for the Lord’s anointed. David was truly grateful to them. He used this occasion to send them his blessing and to announce to them that he had been recognized in Judah as Saul’s successor. This is perhaps a veiled invitation for them to recognize him as well.

But Abner, Saul’s military commander, had other plans. He anointed Ishbosheth, Saul’s son, to be king (2:8-10). For this reason David’s reign was limited to Judah for the next seven-and-a-half years (2:11). A time of civil war would precede his rise to the united monarchy. The way to victory is often long and difficult, but if God is in it, the victory will surely come. We must simply walk in His steps.

**THOUGHT:** God’s time-table is the best time-table.

**PRAYER:** Lord, teach me to trust in Thy timing.

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TUESDAY, DECEMBER 4

2 SAMUEL 2:12-3:5

2 TIMOTHY 4:9-18

*Am I on the  
Lord's side?*

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## WHO IS ON THE LORD'S SIDE?

When we study the historical narratives of the Bible, a knowledge of names can be very helpful. In today's account of the civil war after Saul's death, the names of both people and places are important.

There are two groups of people involved. The first was led by Abner, the son of Ner. Abner was Saul's uncle. Abner and Saul's father, Kish, were brothers (1 Sam 14:50-51, 1 Chron 8:33). Abner had been the commander of Saul's army. Saul's son was Ishbosheth, "Son of Shame" (originally, Eshbaal = "Son of Baal," 1 Chron 8:33). These men were Benjamites and had an interest in Saul's dynasty.

The other group was led by Joab, the son of Zeruiah. He was David's military commander. Joab was David's nephew, Zeruiah being David's older sister (1 Chron 2:16). Joab's two brothers were Abishai and Asahel (2:18). These men, of course, were all from Judah and had an interest in David's ascension to the throne.

Now let us consider some of the key geographical locations. Judah was securely controlled by David. But large sections of northern Israel were controlled by the Philistines. In fact, Abner's men had taken refuge in the Transjordan city of Mahanaim. David's men were actually better situated. Abner's men had to come from Mahanaim, cross the Jordan into central Benjamin, and finally come to Gibeon. They hoped to prevent David's influence from spreading northward.

In essence we have here two families struggling over the control of Israel. But in God's providence, David's family was destined to win. This is already manifested in the difference between the number of Abner's men who are killed, 360, and the number of David's men, only 20. Though the civil war would continue for several years, "*David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker*" (2 Sam 3:1).

**THOUGHT:** Do I belong to the family of God?

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to stand in the godly line.

---

**“ALL THINGS WORK TOGETHER FOR GOOD”**

The civil war between the house of Saul and the house of David was nearly over. God’s hand was apparent in the historical circumstances. He was preparing the way for David’s reign. Three things were necessary to expedite David’s rise to the throne: a neutralization of the military threat, evidence of David’s legal right to Saul’s throne, and the consent of the tribal elders in the north.

First, Saul’s commander-in-chief, who was the real power behind Ishbosheth, went over to David. Abner had been ambitious for his own power. But he could see that David’s rise to the throne was inevitable. He decided to cut his losses and perhaps hoped for a powerful position in David’s new government. Abner took advantage of a squabble with Ishbosheth over Saul’s concubine Rizpah to break with the Israelite king (3:7-8). Abner even cited the Lord’s promise to set up the throne of David over all Israel and Judah (3:9-10). With Abner’s defection, the military danger was effectively neutralized.

Second, Saul’s daughter, Michal, was restored to David (3:12-16). Though originally betrothed to David, Saul had given her to another man after David fled (1 Sam 18:27; 25:44). Her restoration to David at this point had important political implications. It reinforced David’s legal claim to Saul’s throne.

Finally, through Abner’s influence, the elders of the north gave their consent to David’s reign (3:17-18). This included Saul’s and Ishbosheth’s own tribe of Benjamin. It is apparent from Abner’s words that this had been the desire of many for a long time. They recognized the word of the Lord that David would deliver them from the Philistines (3:18).

David did not need to seize the throne. God had called him to be king, and God was working in the affairs of men to bring this about.

**THOUGHT:** (Read Galatians 4:4.)

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to see Thy hand in the affairs of my life.

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### “THE ARM OF FLESH WILL FAIL YOU”

David’s hopes must have been high as he sent off his former enemy Abner in peace. Soon, with Abner’s help, all Israel would recognize David as king, and God’s promise would be fulfilled (3:21). But in the midst of success, trials come. And so it was here with David.

The trouble came at the hand of David’s own commander, Joab. Hearing of the agreement between David and Abner, Joab treacherously murdered David’s new ally (3:27). Joab did this in revenge for the death of his brother Asahel (3:27; cf 2:18-23). But Joab killed Abner in time of peace, without the knowledge of David. It was clearly murder. Abishai was also implicated (3:30). Perhaps Joab and his brother feared that Abner would be a threat to their own powerful influence in David’s government.

Suddenly, David’s hopes for a united kingdom were threatened. But David himself was innocent (3:28). In his integrity, David took steps to minimize the danger. First, disclaiming any involvement in the plot, he placed the blame squarely on Joab (3:29, cf 1 Kings 2:5-6). David then publicly mourned for Abner. Though uncertain of his political strength to bring Joab and Abishai to justice at that time, David entrusted their judgment to the Lord (3:39). When the people of Israel saw how David conducted himself, they were pleased (3:36-37). David’s reputation was not destroyed and the hope for a united kingdom was still alive.

When we live for the Lord, we can expect trouble (2 Tim 3:12). Sometimes such trouble can even come from those we thought we could trust. Under such conditions we must continue to trust the Lord and to preserve our own innocence and integrity.

**THOUGHT:** Innocence is the best defence.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me not to compromise my own integrity.

## THE END NEVER JUSTIFIES THE MEANS

From the human viewpoint, only one thing stood between David and the throne of Israel: Saul's son, Ishbosheth. Saul did have another heir, Mephibosheth (Jonathan's son), but he was crippled and not suitable for the throne (4:4). So, once Ishbosheth was removed, the way would be clear for the Davidic dynasty. All else was ready.

Two of Ishbosheth's officers, leaders of raiding parties, saw in their circumstances an opportunity to elevate themselves in the coming government. Though they were of Saul's tribe, Benjamites, they deviously assassinated Ishbosheth (4:5-7). Like the Amalekite scavenger in 2 Samuel 1, they hoped to ingratiate themselves to David. They brought the slain king's head to David (4:8).

David would have no part in their plot. He had long since learned that the Lord's purpose must be accomplished in the Lord's way. David, in rebuking the murderers, said that it was the Lord who had redeemed his soul out of all adversity (4:9). David did not need the impatient and evil devices of men. He saw through the evil motives of Baanah and Rechab. As one writer has well put it, "they presumed to spread the name of God and His providence as a cloak and covering over their own villainy, as the wicked are accustomed to do."

Instead of rewarding them as they expected, David promptly had them executed and publicly displayed. This was a sign to all that David's reign would be one of justice.

We would do well to pattern our lives after David's example. We should seek God's will in God's way and not accept the evil devices of man, even if they are presented as being for our own good.

**THOUGHT:** Are my methods of service pleasing to the Lord?

**PRAYER:** Lord, may my godly goals be achieved in a godly way.

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## DAVID BECAME KING

2 Samuel 5 describes one of the great forward movements in redemptive history. Several key events are set forth in quick succession. David was anointed as king in Hebron over Israel (5:1-5); Jerusalem, the city of David, was captured and made the capital (an event pregnant with meaning for the future); Hiram, the king of Tyre, built David a palace which was the symbol clearly recognized in the ancient Near East for royal status (5:11-12); David had more sons born in Jerusalem, including Solomon (5:13-16); and finally, in two separate campaigns, David resoundly defeated Israel's arch enemy, the Philistines (5:17-25).

These were God's gifts to David: a throne, a capital, a palace, an heir, and a double military victory. The long years of David's struggle were amply rewarded. What must not be overlooked is the sovereign hand of God in these events. When David was anointed king, it was done in fulfillment of the Lord's promise and "*before the LORD*" (5:2-3). When David took Jerusalem, we are told that David "*grew great, and the LORD God of hosts was with him*" (5:10). When Hiram built a palace for David, David interpreted the event properly: "*the LORD had established him king over Israel...for his people Israel's sake*" (5:12). And, of course, in his military battles, David sought the Lord's guidance, and gained the victory with the Lord's help (5:19, 23).

Such a wonderful account should fill our hearts with hope. God will, indeed, bring His purposes to pass and fulfill all His promises to His children.

**THOUGHT:** Always follow God, not run ahead of Him!

**PRAYER:** Father, help me to patiently wait for Thy promises to be fulfilled.

---

## PROPER WORSHIP

Proper worship of the Lord consists not only of sincerity, but also of truth (John 4:24). We must not only worship God with pure motives, but we must worship Him according to the instructions of His Word. This was the lesson which was impressed upon David as he endeavoured to move the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem.

David's desire to move the Ark to the new centre of government was praiseworthy. The Ark was the sign of God's ruling presence with His people. David clearly understood that it was the Lord who was the true Sovereign in Israel. How fitting, then, it would be for the Ark to be brought to the nation's capital where David had prepared a place for it (1 Chron 15:1).

But, in his first attempt to transfer the Ark, David's procedure was contrary to the Word of God. He transported the Ark as the Philistines had done, on a new cart (6:3; cf 1 Sam 6:7-10). The Law of God stipulated that the Ark be carried on the shoulders of the Levites (Exod 25:12-14; Num 4:15). Furthermore, the whole procedure was done in a careless manner, as seen in the improper handling of the Ark by Uzzah (6:6).

When the Lord's judgment came, David was displeased and afraid (6:8-9). As a result, the Ark was temporarily left in the house of Obededom. However, soon it became apparent that God's wrath had passed, for Obededom's house prospered (6:11). David now moved the Ark to Jerusalem with gladness. But more importantly, he moved it in the proper way. David commissioned the Levites to carry the Ark (1 Chron 15:2). He confessed that the first attempt had failed because "*we sought him not after the due order*" (1 Chron 15:13).

**THOUGHT:** Are there any "Philistine" customs in my way of worship?

**PRAYER:** "*Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in thy sight, O LORD...*" (Ps 19:14).

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## THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

Theologically, this may be the most important passage in 1 and 2 Samuel. It contains the announcement of the Davidic covenant, and ranks with other key covenant declarations such as the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 12 and the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31. Each covenant is a part of God's single purpose and plan of redemption. They are the unfolding of the promise of God which began in Genesis 3:15 and which will climax at the second coming of Christ.

The first thing to notice about this prophecy is its Divine origin. This is brought out first by the fact that it was contrary to Nathan's own thought. The prophet's first advice to David was for him to go ahead and build the Temple as he desired (7:1-3). However, that night the word of the Lord came to Nathan with a different message. This illustrates the truth of 2 Peter 1:21 that *"the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man."* The Davidic covenant is truly a *"Thus saith the LORD"* (7:5, 8, 11, 17).

Not only was the prophecy contrary to Nathan's thinking, it was totally unexpected. God, so to speak, turned the tables on David. The Lord asked David, *"Shalt thou build me an house for me to dwell in?"* (7:5) Then the Lord announced, *"the LORD telleth thee that he (the LORD) will make thee an house"* (7:11).

The basic content of the covenant was the establishment of David's dynasty. The Lord said, *"thy throne shall be established forever"* (7:16). This means that David's son would reign after him! Solomon's kingdom would be established (7:12-14). However, the prophecy points beyond Solomon to the greater Son of David, which is Christ. It was the fulfillment of this which the angel announced to Mary: *"and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David: and he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end"* (Luke 1:32-33).

**THOUGHT:** God is in control of everything: from past to future.

**PRAYER:** I thank Thee, Lord, for Thy great and precious promises.

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## A PATTERN FOR PRAYER

There is no better way to learn how to pray than to contemplate the great prayers in the Bible: the prayer of Moses interceding for Israel, Daniel's prayers from Captivity, the prayers of Paul, and of course, the prayers of our Lord. In 2 Samuel 7, we find David's prayer of thanksgiving in response to the Lord's special covenant.

We read: "*then went king David in*" (7:18). By this we understand that David went into the Tent of Meeting. He took time to enter into God's presence. He was not in a hurry, for we are told that he "*sat before the LORD*" (7:18). How does this compare with our hurried moments with the Lord?

David began his prayer by placing things in their proper perspective. He acknowledged his own unworthiness in view of God's great blessings. He cried, "*Who am I, O Lord GOD? and what is my house?*" (7:18). David echoed these same words in Psalm 8:4 where he asked, "*What is man, that thou art mindful of him?*" The first lesson of prayer is humility. This is represented symbolically when we close our eyes, bow our heads, and kneel before the Lord.

David's thoughts quickly moved from his own unworthiness to the goodness of God. He acknowledged that his blessings sprang from the heart and purpose of God (7:21). David praised the Lord not only for the "*great things*" which He had done, but also because the Lord Himself was "*great*" (7:22). The second lesson of prayer is praise.

In verse 23 and 24, David recounted the wonderful salvation which the Lord had accomplished for His people Israel. A key element in biblical prayer is this very thing: a rehearsing of God's work of redemption. Finally in verse 25 to 29, David claimed the promises of God. These verses merit careful attention. For true prayer is aligning ourselves with the purposes of God.

**THOUGHT:** What is prayer?

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I always pray according to Thy will.

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## NATIONAL DEFENCE

An important part of God's covenant with His people Israel is the promise of a land, which was first given to Abraham (Gen 15:18). It was renewed to Israel in the Mosaic covenant (Deut 11:24-25). Then it was promised afresh in the Davidic covenant. David's reign was to be part of a covenantal theocracy which would bring rest from Israel's enemies and establish the borders of her land (2 Sam 7:10).

2 Samuel 8 illustrates how God was working through David to bring about a provisional fulfillment of this promise. When we first read the summary contained in verses 1 to 14, the material may seem to be without any particular order. However the following outline helps us to see the geographical significance of David's victories:

1. Victory in the WEST, the Philistines (8:1)
2. Victory in the EAST, the Moabites (8:2)
3. Victory in the NORTH, the Aramaeans (8:3-6)  
(dedication of plunder from all sides to the Lord, 8:7-12)
4. Victory in the SOUTH, the Edomites (8:13-14)

With the Philistines defeated, the Mediterranean Sea provided a natural border to the west. With the Moabites subdued, the desert provided a border to the east. In the north and south, David established garrisons for defence (8:6,14). The key statement in this chapter is repeated twice: *"And the LORD preserved David whithersoever he went"* (8:6,14).

The Lord is faithful. He will fulfil His promises. Though the security of Israel's borders was only temporary, there will come a day when Christ, the Son of David, will establish her borders once and for all. Even today when we see Israel's security threatened, we are encouraged by the promise of the Davidic covenant.

**THOUGHT:** True national security can only come from the Lord.

**PRAYER:** Lord, I pray for the peace of Israel.

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## A SCEPTRE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

2 Samuel 8 and 9 describe the internal affairs of David’s kingship. The theme is introduced in 8:15: *“And David reigned over all Israel; and David executed judgment and justice unto all his people.”*

To exhibit the orderliness of David’s reign, we are given a list of his government officials or cabinet: David’s military commander, Joab; a *“recorder”* who may have served as a kind of chief-of-staff, as well as overseer of the government records, Jehoshaphat; the priests, Zadok and Ahimelech; a scribe to perform secretarial duties, Seraiah; a leader of a special royal guard, Benaiah; and finally David’s own sons as royal advisers.

To illustrate the equity of David’s reign, we have the touching story of David’s kindness to Jonathan’s crippled son, Mephibosheth. David was a king who was faithful to his friends and faithful to his word (cf 1 Sam 20:15, 42).

These chapters of 2 Samuel are filled with hope: the promise of God’s presence, symbolized by the ark in Jerusalem (2 Sam 6), the promise of an eternal Davidic dynasty (2 Sam 7), the token of a future rest, illustrated by David’s securing of Israel’s borders (2 Sam 8), and the promise that Israel would be ruled in equity and justice (2 Sam 9).

In the following chapters, however, a shadow began to spread over Israel as the failures of David’s kingship were revealed. Eventually the kingdom would be divided and taken into captivity. The Psalmist at the end of the exile would cry: *“Lord, where are thy former lovingkindnesses, which thou swarest unto David in thy truth?”* (Ps 89:49). Yet in hope Israel waited for the Lord to remember his promise to the sons of David. It is against this background that the Gospel story, with its renewed promise, begins: *“The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, the son of David...”* (Matt 1:1).

**THOUGHT:** When will David’s dynasty end?

**PRAYER:** *“Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done...”*

---

## STAY ON THE FIRING LINE

In the preceding narrative, the focus has been on David’s accomplishments and glory. David’s life had exhibited the realization of God’s promises. The focus now shifts to David’s weaknesses and failures, especially in 2 Samuel 10 to 20. In these events, it becomes apparent that David himself fell far short of the true theocratic king. His failure points us to the need for Christ, the greater Son of David.

The record of the Israelite victories against the Ammonites and their allies in 2 Samuel 10 is a prelude to the account of David’s sin with Bathsheba. The battles described here illustrate God’s faithfulness in protecting Israel from her enemies. The odds against the Israelites were very great but the Lord, their true Sovereign, was able to deliver them. The Ammonites were all but subdued. When the winter set in, the campaign came to a temporary halt. But there was hope that in the spring the Ammonite capital of Rabbah would be taken.

It was at the very beginning of this final campaign that David stayed home in Jerusalem and committed his sin with Bathsheba (11:1). The historical circumstances of David’s sin thus magnify the wickedness of his deed. God was granting military victory, and at that very moment David was unfaithful to the Lord.

On this occasion, David could have learned something from his military commander. In 2 Samuel 10:12, Joab said to the army, *“Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God: and the LORD do that which seemeth to him good.”*

If we do our part, the Lord will surely do His. The time had come to go forth into battle once more for the Lord and for His people. But this time, *“David tarried still at Jerusalem”* (11:1).

**THOUGHT:** Am I on the battle front, or resting in Jerusalem?

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I learn to *“watch and pray.”*

---

## THE SERIOUSNESS OF SIN

David has been presented to us as a man after God's own heart. The little shepherd boy who slew Goliath in zeal for the Lord's honour, the sweet psalmist of Israel who could soothe a king's broken spirit, the faithful friend of Jonathan, the young warrior on the run who refused to touch the Lord's anointed, the mature king who united the kingdom and established Jerusalem as its capital, the recipient of the Davidic covenant who secured the borders of Israel, such is the David that we know. It is this David who now falls into sin. And how grievous is the sin!

1. David broke the tenth commandment: *"Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife"* (Exod 20:17). David lusted after Bathsheba when he should have been on the battlefield.
2. David broke the seventh commandment: *"Thou shalt not commit adultery"* (Exod 20:14). Even Uriah would not comfort himself with his wife at a time when the Lord's people were engaged in battle (11:11). But David committed adultery with Uriah's wife.
3. David broke the ninth commandment: *"Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour"* (Exod 20:16). The letter which David wrote to Joab implied that Uriah had committed some evil deed for which he was to be betrayed in battle (11:14-15). But Uriah was innocent.
4. David broke the sixth commandment: *"Thou shalt not kill"* (Exod 20:13). David murdered Uriah.
5. David broke the eighth commandment: *"Thou shalt not steal"* (Exod 20:15). When all was done, David took Bathsheba to be his own wife (11:27).

One writer has well written, "David's deep fall forms a turning-point not only in the inner life of the great king, but also in the history of his reign."

**THOUGHT:** The latter half of a man's life is often when his faithfulness to the Lord is really tested.

**PRAYER:** Lord, keep me close to Thee.

---

## A PROPER RESPONSE TO SIN

The word of judgment which Nathan brought is like that which Samuel had brought many years prior against king Saul (cf 1 Sam 15:17-19). However, there was an important difference. David was a man fallen into sin who nevertheless was restored to a vibrant relationship with the Lord. Saul was a man fallen into sin whose very spiritual life must be questioned.

Nearly a year had passed since David's sin with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah. He had taken Bathsheba as his wife and the child had already been born (11:27; 12:14-15). This was a time of painful soul-searching for David as he wrestled with his guilty conscience. His turmoil is reflected in Psalm 32:3-4.

David's immediate response to God's judgment upon him was confession. He cried, *"I have sinned against the LORD"* (12:13). It was on this occasion, perhaps while David lay weeping in his house praying for his child, that David composed Psalm 51. How appropriate are its words! *"Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy loving kindness..."* (Ps 51:1).

When a child of God sins, there are always consequences. Three of David's eldest sons would come to violent deaths (12:10). There would be much trouble in his house, especially during Absalom's rebellion (12:11). The son conceived in sin with Bathsheba would die (12:14, 18). The principle of Galatians 6:7 is binding: *"...whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."*

But for the believer there is always God's grace. David found forgiveness and a restored relationship with the Lord (12:13). What is more, the Lord gave him another child, *"and he called his name Solomon: and the LORD loved him"* (12:24). Solomon's name means "Man of Peace." David had found peace with God again.

**THOUGHT:** Sin always leaves a scar. How long can sin be hidden?

**PRAYER:** I have sinned against Thee, Lord. Forgive me my sins.

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## TRAINING OUR CHILDREN

When a child of one of God's servants falls into sin, it is a cause for special sorrow. In 1 Samuel, both Eli's sons and Samuel's sons did not follow in their father's footsteps. Hophni and Phinehas were called "*sons of Belial*" (1 Sam 2:12). We are told that Samuel's sons "*walked not in his ways, but turned aside after lucre, and took bribes, and perverted judgment*" (1 Sam 8:3). In 2 Samuel 13, we find David's children also practising great immorality. It is a sad picture.

Amnon, David's oldest son and the crown prince, raped his own half-sister, Tamar. Then Absalom, next in line for the throne and Tamar's brother, murdered Amnon. Such conduct brought anger and great sorrow to David's heart (13:21, 36-37). We wonder how such things can happen. Yet in our own day we often see the children of great Christian leaders wandering far from the Lord.

Some of the blame must be placed at the feet of the parents. David took wives, contrary to God's Word. This must have led to much jealousy and tension between his wives and their children. David's inconsistent personal life set a poor example for his sons, especially his sin with Bathsheba. Furthermore, David failed to properly discipline his sons. Neither Amnon nor Absalom were punished for their wickedness. Doubtless they had not been disciplined earlier in their lives either. If Christian parents would have godly children, they must:

1. faithfully obey God's instructions, especially concerning marriage;
2. live consistent lives as good role models for their children; and
3. exercise proper parenting in the home from an early age. This is best done by carefully balancing affection with discipline.

Having done these things we can then rest in the promise of the Scriptures: "*Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.*"

**THOUGHT:** How can I better nurture my children in the Lord?

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to balance affection and discipline.

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## BROKEN RELATIONSHIPS

Sin had made David ineffectual. It was not an external enemy of Israel that defeated him, not the Amalekites or the Philistines. What brought him down was the sin which spoiled his relationship with those in his own household.

David's first mistake was in not punishing his uncle Joab for the murder of Abner. On that occasion David cried, *"I am this day weak, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me"* (3:39). King David had abdicated his responsibility to execute justice. David's second failure with Joab was his letter requesting Joab's help in the murder of Uriah, Bathsheba's husband (2 Sam 11). With this letter, Joab could forever blackmail David. Now in 2 Samuel 14 we find David unduly influenced by Joab in his dealings with Absalom.

David's relationship with his son Absalom, too, was a failure. David had failed to execute justice when Amnon had abused Tamar, Absalom's sister (2 Sam 13). The Greek translation says, "Notwithstanding Amnon's sin, David did not trouble the spirit of Amnon his son." This ruined David's relationship with Absalom. Then when Absalom murdered Amnon, David still did not take charge of the situation. David's sin with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah had rendered him incapable of disciplining his own sons for their similar misdeeds.

To make matters worse, David had half forgiven Absalom. At first, he left him in exile, then when he allowed him to return, he refused to see him. Finally, when they were reunited, David simply overlooked the whole matter of repentance and justice. How important it is for us to deal with one another in love and righteousness. Sin cannot be overlooked in our personal relationships, and especially when it manifests itself in our own families.

**THOUGHT:** Do I have a broken relationship to restore?

**PRAYER:** Lord, may I deal in equity with everyone.

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## LIBERATION THEOLOGY

The significance of the name of David’s third oldest son, Absalom, is ironic. It means “my father is peace.” The relationship between David and Absalom was anything but one of peace. In the chapter before us, their broken relationship blossomed into a full scale conspiracy.

Absalom exhibited uncanny skill in scheming against the throne. His strategy was a kind of 10th century B.C. liberation theology. It could serve as a textbook for modern subversive movements:

1. Verse 1: Absalom prepared himself for a violent revolution. He armed himself with a chariot, the first in Israel, and horses. This was contrary to the instructions of Deuteronomy 17:16.
2. Verse 2-4: Absalom became an advocate of “justice and human rights,” in order to advance his own wicked purposes.
3. Verse 5-6: Absalom won the hearts of the people by showing them a pretense of affection and solidarity.
4. Verse 7-8: Absalom used religious language and ideas to camouflage his true intentions.
5. Verse 10: Absalom infiltrated the land with agitators to stir up rebellion among the people.
6. Verse 11: Absalom duped an influential group from the capital into following him.
7. Verse 12: Absalom gained the support of one of David’s own political advisers who secretly aligned himself with the revolution.

How could David respond to such a plot? The forces against him were overwhelming. His only recourse was in the Lord. In Psalm 55, we read his prayer for deliverance: “*But thou, O God, shall bring them down...but I will trust in thee*” (Ps 55:23).

**THOUGHT:** True liberation can only be found in the Lord and in His Word.

**PRAYER:** (Use: Psalm 55:23.)

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## THE KING IN CRISIS

For David, it was a very black hour. Yet even in this low point of his reign we can see noble traits in his character. David's first concern was for the safety of his people and the welfare of the city of Jerusalem. His purpose in abandoning the city was to preserve life and to avoid the devastation of the nation's capital (15:14).

In a time of great personal danger, David did not fail to consider the plight of others. A group of Philistines from Gath had joined David's men under the leadership of Ittai. David offered to release them now from any further duties. But Ittai, apparently converted to the Lord, vowed faithfulness to David (15:18-22).

David's conduct during this crisis also teaches us about his faith in the Lord. Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, had brought the Ark on the retreat from Jerusalem. Perhaps they assumed that it would assure God's presence with them and ultimate victory. But David would not make the mistake which the elders of Israel had made in fighting against the Philistines many years earlier (1 Sam 4). Instead of trusting in the Lord Himself, and living in a right relationship with Him, they had trusted in the physical presence of the Ark. The result was defeat. David said, "*Carry back the ark...if I shall find favour in the eyes of the LORD, he will bring me again, and shew me both it, and his habitation*" (15:25).

When David heard that Ahithophel, his adviser, had joined Absalom, David looked to the Lord for protection. David prayed, "*O LORD, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness*" (15:31). In this terrible time, David turned to the Lord. And the Lord saved him.

The true nature of our faith comes out best when we are in a crisis. At that time, will we trust the arm of flesh, or will we rest in the Lord?

**THOUGHT:** What is my crisis today?

**PRAYER:** Forgive me, Lord. Turn me from trusting man, to Thee.

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### A TIME OF BETRAYAL

During Absalom's rebellion, David wrote Psalm 3 in which he cried, "*LORD, how are they increased that trouble me! Many are they that rise up against me*" (Ps 3:1). Not only did Absalom rebel, but some of David's closest associates, like Ahithophel, also betrayed him (15:12).

One of those who tried to take advantage of the crisis was the opportunist Ziba. He was the steward of Saul's estate. David had ordered that Mephibosheth (Saul's surviving heir) reap the benefits of this property. Now Ziba saw a way to regain control of his master's possessions. He convinced David that Mephibosheth was conspiring to regain Saul's throne (16:3). In the midst of the trouble, David believed the report and rewarded Ziba (16:4).

No sooner had David left the deceitful Ziba when Shimei (a relative of Saul) began to curse David and pellet him with stones (16:5ff). Abishai, Joab's brother, volunteered to kill the troublemaker. But David recognized the hand of the Lord in the circumstances (16:10-11). In these times of overwhelming difficulty, David did not trust in his own strength. If his own son would lead a rebellion against him, if his personal counselor would join the conspiracy, if others like Ziba were taking advantage, what good would it do to strike out against the cursing Shimei? David knew his only hope was in the Lord (16:12).

When David and his men reached their destination for the night they were naturally weary (16:14). But David found rest in the Lord. He wrote, "*I laid me down and slept; I awaked; for the LORD sustained me*" (Ps 3:5).

**THOUGHT:** "The Lord's our Rock, in Him we hide. A shelter in the time of storm."

**PRAYER:** My hope is in Thee, O Lord, in peace and in war.

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## THE LORD OF HISTORY

Absalom and his co-conspirators were now in Jerusalem. There was doubtless a sense of euphoria at how easily they had taken the capital. They occupied the palace and held their first cabinet meeting (16:20). The first item on the agenda was how to consolidate the revolution and secure complete victory. In their pride they overlooked the proverb, *“There is no wisdom nor understanding nor counsel against the LORD”* (Prov 21:30).

Though the wise and crafty Ahithophel had his own scheme, the Lord overruled it. Ahithophel advised Absalom to appropriate king David’s concubines. This would provide a public symbol that Absalom had assumed the royal power. Ahithophel bore the blame for such evil advice, Absalom the guilt for following it. But through it the Lord brought about the fulfillment of Nathan’s prophecy to David (2 Sam 12:11-12).

Ahithophel next counseled Absalom to attack David that very night with select troops. All agreed that the plan was a sound one. However, the Lord placed it in Absalom’s heart to call first for the advice of Hushai (17:5). Hushai’s advice was more convincing. First, he frightened Absalom by drawing a picture of David’s experience and fierceness in battle (17:7-10). Then, he used flattery, suggesting that Absalom could gather all Israel together and simply overwhelm David (17:11-13). In truth this was only a delaying tactic, for Hushai was actually loyal to David. Absalom bit the bait (17:14). The inspired historian explains, *“For the LORD had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel”* (17:14).

David, though driven into exile and weary, could comfort himself with the words of Psalm 33:10, *“The LORD bringeth the counsel of the heathen to nought; he maketh the devices of the people of none effect”* (cf 2 Sam 15:31).

**THOUGHT:** Man proposes, God disposes.

**PRAYER:** Lord, teach me to rest in Thy overruling Providence.

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## BUILDING MONUMENTS

The military victory which David's men won over the rebels under Absalom was quick and decisive. But the battle was costly: twenty thousand Israelites perished (18:7). As the preparations were being made for the final battle, David said to his leaders, "*Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom*" (18:5). How David had loved his son! Though Absalom had murdered Amnon in revenge for his sister, conspired against David's throne, abused David's concubines, and even set out to kill David his father, even so David loved Absalom. Oh, if only his love had been tempered with that fatherly discipline which true love requires. But now it was too late, oh, so late!

Absalom was caught up in his own devices. He wanted a name for himself. He was blinded by his own pride. His beauty, his influence, his popularity, to him these were not gifts to use for God's glory. Rather, they were things to be clutched. How insecure Absalom must have been!

After the account of Absalom's ignoble death on the oak tree, we are informed that during his lifetime he had built a monument to himself. In this, Absalom had tried to secure his memory (18:18). Apparently, all his sons had died in their youth. Saul, too, had built a monument in his own honour, when he should have been concerned with God's honour (1 Sam 15:12). This was what separated Saul from David, and Absalom from his father. They sought their own honour, while David, with all his imperfections, was a man who wanted God's glory.

How easy it is for you and me to be caught up in the affairs of our own lives. Let us not seek to erect monuments to ourselves. Let us live for God's glory.

**THOUGHT:** For what will my life count? The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

**PRAYER:** Remind me, Lord, to daily live for Thy glory, not mine.

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## A FATHER'S BROKEN HEART

David's lament for Absalom in the Bible is one of the most moving expressions of a father's love for a son in all literature. When the news reached him of Absalom's death, David cried:

18:33:     *"O my son Absalom,  
my son, my son Absalom!  
Would God I had died for thee,  
O Absalom, my son, my son!"*

19:4:     *"O my son Absalom,  
O Absalom, my son, my son!"*

There are several reasons for the depth of David's sorrow. First of all, David was by nature a man with a tender heart. This tenderness was seen in its brightest lustre when David twice spared Saul's life. But in relationship to his sons, David's compassion became distorted. Duty and love are twins. When they are separated, love becomes a soft sentimentality. When David set aside the duty of discipline, his sons were ruined. *"O my son Absalom!"*

David's sorrow was surely increased by the knowledge of what might have been for Absalom. The blessings of the Davidic covenant described in 2 Samuel 7 could have been his. If he had not sinned, if he had not rebelled, if he had not died, then Absalom one day might have inherited the throne of David. *"My son, my son, Absalom."*

Yet what truly broke David's heart on this sad day was the knowledge that Absalom's death was in part a result of David's own sin. Had not God said through Nathan the prophet, *"Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house?"* (12:10). The remorse which David felt could not be silenced: *"Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"*

**THOUGHT:** Love and duty are inseparable. Is my love strengthened by the exercise of discipline?

**PRAYER:** Lord, grant me strength of heart to discipline in love.

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## A FRAGILE KINGDOM

After Absalom's rebellion, the nation was in total confusion. David had three major parties to contend with: his own loyalists, those who had followed Absalom, and those who were disinterested in the Davidic dynasty. David, the rightful monarch, did not have absolute power. Political expediency was the need of the hour.

What David needed was a vote of confidence from the people. Though the Israelites had talked of re-calling him as king, David was most concerned for his own tribe of Judah, for that was where the rebellion had started (19:9-10). Through the priests, David appealed to them as his own relatives (19:11-12). He hoped to neutralize any remaining rebels by appointing Amasa, Absalom's military leader, as his own commander-in-chief (19:13). David did three other things to stabilize conditions. He accepted the repentance of Shimei, the Benjamite who had earlier cursed him on his flight from Jerusalem. This was prudent for Shimei was apparently a man of influence and a potential troublemaker (19:16-23). Though the right-winged loyalist, Abishai, wanted to execute Shimei, David overruled. Shimei's punishment would come at the proper time under the reign of Solomon (1 Kings 2:8-9).

David also found a compromised solution to the conflict between Mephibosheth and his ambitious steward, Ziba: dividing the Saulite inheritance equally between them. Perhaps at this time, David could not determine who was really at fault, though it was surely Ziba.

Finally, David showed generosity to his benefactor during the rebellion: Barzillai. This served as an example of how those who supported him would be favoured (19:31-39). How fragile was the monarchy in Israel! Not because of God's failure, but because of man's wickedness. Yet the Lord had not abandoned His promises. He would accomplish His purposes.

**THOUGHT:** The Lord is always faithful.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to find stability in Thee.

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## NATIONAL DISUNITY

From the earliest days of the monarchy, there was a national division between the ten tribes of Israel in the north and Judah, along with Simeon, in the south. Even during Saul's reign the soldiers from each part of the nation were listed separately (1 Sam 11:8; 15:4). After Saul's death, David was first recognized as king by Judah (5:4-5), and only later by Israel (5:12). Now on the heels of the Absalom rebellion, a troublemaker, Sheba by name, played on the jealousies of Israel to spark another conflict (20:1-2).

Having returned to Jerusalem, David, after setting his personal affairs in order, turned his attention to suppress this new rebellion (20:3-6). He ordered Amasa, his new commander-in-chief, to muster the troops for the pursuit. When Amasa delayed, David gave the orders to Abishai. Joab was thus twice bypassed. But he still had the favour of the troops. When Amasa finally arrived, Joab murdered him and retook command of the army. He did not turn against David, but rather continued the pursuit of the rebel, Sheba. With the help of a wise woman at the city of Abel, which Sheba had besieged, the rebellion was defused. The residents beheaded the rebel and threw his head over the wall. Joab then returned to Jerusalem and to king David. The nation was now stabilized. It would remain so until the end of Solomon's reign.

The division of God's people is a stark reminder of the brokenness which sin introduces into life. The only thing which brings true unity is God's redemption and the willing submission of the sinner to His sovereign reign.

**THOUGHT:** Reconciliation with God must precede reconciliation with man.

**PRAYER:** Lord, help me to be a peace-maker.

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## ACCOUNTABLE TO GOD

The final four chapters of 2 Samuel are in topical rather than chronological order. These closing chapters consist of some important final reflections on David's reign.

Today's passage describes a three-year famine in Israel during David's reign. What can we learn from this account? Why is it placed here at the end of 2 Samuel? As the history of David's reign comes to a close, the Bible reminds us that we are answerable to the Lord for all our conduct, both personal and national.

God expects His people to be true to their word. Joshua had vowed before the Lord to spare the Gibeonites (21:2, cf Josh 9). But Saul had tried to exterminate them (21:1, 5). Though Saul was now dead, the offence still had to be dealt with.

David had vowed to Jonathan many years prior that he would be kind to his descendants (1 Sam 20:15). When David became king, he remembered his promise and treated Mephibosheth with honour (2 Sam 9). Now when the Gibeonites demanded the death of seven of Saul's sons as restitution for Saul's unjust persecution, David remembered his oath and protected Mephibosheth (21:7).

Sin cannot go unpunished. The persecution of the Gibeonites was a sin against the Lord. His name had been involved in Joshua's pledge to spare the Gibeonites. Since Saul was dead, the Gibeonites sought the death of seven of his sons. This number would represent a complete expiation of the sin (21:6, 9; Num 35:33). Sin is a terrible thing, and its consequences are likewise terrible. The wages of sin is death (Rom 6:23)! Without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin (Heb 9:22). How grateful we should be for the cleansing which we have in Christ!

**THOUGHT:** Are there areas in my life I need to give an account for?

**PRAYER:** Lord, keep me from sinning against Thee.

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## THE RIGHT PERSPECTIVE OF NATIONAL DEFENCE

The wilderness wanderings came because Israel feared the giants in the land, the Anakims (Num 13:33; Deut 1:28; 2:10-11). During Saul's reign, it was one such giant, Goliath, who threatened to destroy the young nation. The boy David cried out, "*Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?*" (1 Sam 17:26). David, then, in the Lord's strength slew Goliath. 2 Samuel 21:15-22 records how four of David's warriors accomplished similar feats.

This section should be read along with 2 Samuel 23:8-39, which also discusses David's warriors. David had a regular standing army of 24,000 men. These men were changed every month, which means that David actually had 288,000 trained men which could be called into action (1 Chron 27:1-15). However, the hard core of David's army seems to have been the six hundred who had been with him from early in his career. When many rebelled under Absalom, it was these who remained faithful to David (15:18). They were simply called "*mighty men*" (20:7, 23:8). They were also responsible for putting down the revolt under Sheba (20:7).

From this group of six hundred, special "*mighty men*" were selected to serve as commanders. It was the exploits of these that was celebrated in 2 Samuel 23:8-39. The key clause of the passage is found twice: "*the LORD wrought a great victory*" (23:10-12). God had, indeed, surrounded David with mighty men, but it was the Lord Himself who gave the victory.

Though David's men referred to him as the "*light of Israel*" (21:17) for the guidance and security which he had brought, David knew that it was the Lord who was the true Lamp (cf 21:17 with 22:29). David testified that it was the Lord who had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies (22:1).

**THOUGHT:** God is my sure defence.

**PRAYER:** I thank Thee, Lord, for the physical security of my life.

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## A MIGHTY FORTRESS

David had often hid in the rocks of the wilderness during his days of refuge from Saul. He had used the cave Adullam as a military base (1 Sam 22:1). He had been hiding in a rock in the wilderness of Maon when Saul almost caught him (1 Sam 23:25). Likewise, he hid in the rocks in the wilderness of Engedi (1 Sam 24:2). Part of his reputation as a warrior was that he could skillfully use the formations of nature to elude his enemies (2 Sam 17:8-9).

David had also spent much time in wilderness fortresses. In 1 Samuel 22:4-5 and 24:22, the word translated “*hold*” means fortress or stronghold. David returned to such a fortress when preparing for battle against the Philistines after he had become king (2 Sam 5:17, cf 23:14). The way God had protected him in the wilderness is well summarized in 1 Samuel 23:14: “*And David abode in the wilderness in strong holds... And Saul sought him every day, but God delivered him not into his hand.*”

As David reflected on these experiences, he recognized that his true protection had been in the Lord. Accordingly he celebrated his victories with the words, “*The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; the God of my rock; in him will I trust...*” (22:2-3).

The great reformer, Martin Luther, shared this common experience of God’s protection. While seeking refuge from the Pope, Luther found a fortress in the Wartburg Castle under Frederick the Wise. During his days of solace there, he wrote the words to the famous and loved hymn, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God.”

This is the theme that runs throughout 2 Samuel 22 (which equals Psalm 18). “*For who is God, save the LORD? and who is a rock, save our God?*” (22:32). “*The LORD liveth; and blessed be my rock; and exalted be the God of the rock of my salvation*” (22:47).

**THOUGHT:** What gives stability and security to my life?

**PRAYER:** Let me look always to Thee, Lord, the mighty Fortress.

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## LOOKING FORWARD TO CHRIST

People have a natural interest in the final words which someone speaks. Biographers often seek out a great man's last words. The last words of William Tyndale at his execution were, "Lord, open the King of England's eyes." J. Gresham Machen, a stalwart defender of the faith in modern times, said, "I'm so thankful for the active obedience of Christ. No hope without it." Such words reveal much of a man's life and heart! Here, David's last words are recorded for us.

David began with a prophetic utterance. This divine message is important. David emphasized its source four times (23:2-3): 1) "*The Spirit of the LORD spake by me*" 2) "*his word was in my tongue*" 3) "*The God of Israel said*" and 4) "*the Rock of Israel spake to me*"

The content of this special prophecy is found in verse 3b to 4. One writer has well summarized its meaning: "A ruler over the human race will arise, a just ruler, and he will exercise his dominion in the spirit of the fear of God." This message is rooted in the Davidic covenant first given by God through Nathan in 2 Samuel 7:12-16. This "*everlasting covenant*" (23:5) is what 1 and 2 Samuel have been laying the foundation for, the establishment of the theocracy in Israel through the Lord's anointed.

The later prophets would take up this same theme in speaking of the coming King. Jeremiah, for example, would say, "*Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.*"

**THOUGHT:** Live everyday as if it were my last.

**PRAYER:** May my life, O Lord, point always to Christ.

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## AN ARK, A KING, AND AN ARMY

1 Chronicles 21:1 tells us that Satan inspired David to take this census. When Joab received the order, he rightly questioned David's motive (24:3). David himself had no sooner finished, when he came to his senses and cried, "*I have sinned greatly*" (24:10). Yet we are told in verse 1 that the Lord is the One who moved David to take the census. This apparent dilemma is solved when we remember that although God is not the source of sin, men and angels, including Satan himself, are under His sovereign control.

The Lord's purpose in this affair was twofold. God was angry with Israel for their part in the rebellion under Absalom and Sheba (24:1). Thus the pestilence which ensued was partly God's judgment upon them for this. But more importantly, the basic lesson of the theocracy needed to be reinforced.

The final lesson of 1 and 2 Samuel contains a warning against taking pride in a nation's military strength, rather than resting in the Lord Himself. Now that God had established the monarchy in Israel and greatly blessed David, the danger was that the king might begin to glory in his own military might. The two warrior lists in this closing section of 2 Samuel bring the danger to mind (21:15-22; 23:8-39).

Israel's error had constantly been to trust in something besides the Lord. The elders of Israel had trusted in the Ark and suffered defeat (1 Sam 4). Later, they wanted a king for protection like the other nations (1 Sam 8). On both occasions, God expressed His displeasure. He wanted a people who would trust in Him alone. God in His sovereign love had established the Davidic dynasty in Israel as a military power. But God's people must never put their confidence in religious institutions (the Ark), or human leadership (the king) or in military might (the number of soldiers). Their certainty must be in God, and God alone.

**THOUGHT:** Satan loves to sidetrack our faith.

**PRAYER:** Lord, keep my confidence in the Thee alone.

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