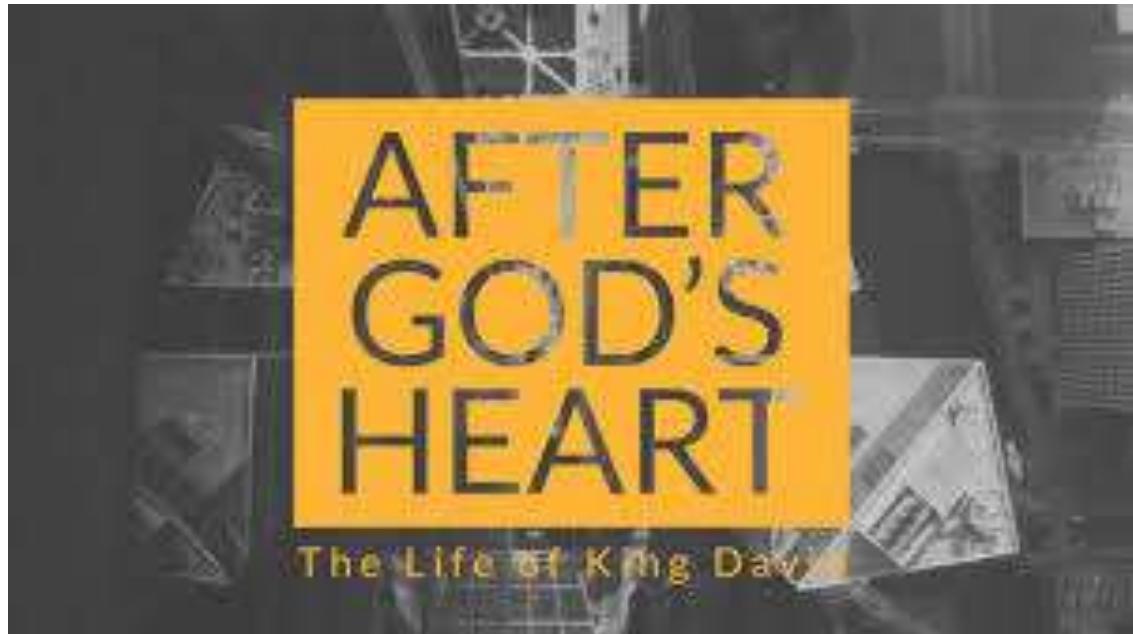


1 and 2 SAMUEL



A SERIES OF DAILY DEVOTIONS
ON THE BOOKS OF 1 AND 2 SAMUEL
FOR LENT 2017

This Lenten Devotion Booklet for 2017 was produced by members of St Stephens Lutheran Church Adelaide South Australia. These are the personal words and thoughts of the people in the congregation.

INTRODUCTION

1 & 2 Samuel. The names given to this section of Scripture are a little confusing since the stories contained in them are not limited to stories about Samuel and neither can Samuel be considered the author of these writings, as his death is reported before many of the events recorded occurred (cf. 1 Samuel 25:1; 28:3).

It is also tempting for post-moderns to see these writings as just giving historical information about ancient Israel. However, traditionally, these writings are known as prophetic books, prophetic not in the sense that they forecast the future, but in the sense that they speak of God's action within the world and specifically of the establishment of God's kingdom on earth. The main actor in these stories is God.

Of course, that can also cause some concern for post-modern ears as we read stories of violence and destruction, and we may wonder how on earth God can put his name to such activities. So, there's a lot to ponder in these devotional selections. Hopefully that pondering will lead to some fruitful dialogue with the God who is living and active through this Word. Arriving at truth and meaning sometime take time and effort, but the rewards are worth it. As you encounter the flawed characters that make up the stories in 1 & 2 Samuel may these devotions lead you into a deeper appreciation of God at work in our world today.

Thanks once again to Colin and Yvonne who have done all the cajoling and preparation to make these devotions a reality and especially to all the writers who gave a little piece of themselves to us.

May the Holy Spirit bless your meditations.

Pastor John Strelan

1 Samuel 1**COMPLEX FAMILY SAGA**

When I first read this chapter, I thought it was 'just' the story of Hannah and Samuel. After re-reading and thinking about it, I realised that there are many issues in it that are part of our every day lives.

We have Hannah, the favourite wife, who is unable to have children and is therefore sad and depressed and is also verbally abused by the 'other' wife. Also in the story there is Peninnah, the unhappy, jealous wife who is able to have children and does not understand why, in a society which considers women who can't have children a failure, she should be considered second best. Thirdly, we have the husband Elkanah, who is totally out of touch with what is going on in his household. He does not have a clue as to why all this tension is taking place. He says to Hannah, 'You have me. Isn't that better than having children?' Really??

So what can we take out of this scenario?

One of the things that struck me was that we should always be aware of what is happening around us. There are people who are hurting and we may be ignorant of the facts, but that is not an excuse to be insensitive to the different, diverse needs of others.

The most important thing I take from this is: what a wonderful comforter prayer is. I am not sure if Hannah had prayed for children before this time, but it is so very obvious how differently she felt after she earnestly prayed to God and left her troubles with Him. That, and the fact that we do not know how or when God will answer our prayers, but to be reassured that he listens and answers in His time, is all we really need to know. How good is that?

Prayer

Heavenly Father, grant me patience to wait for you to deal with my troubles, but most of all, remind me to turn to you when ever problems come my way, and not try to solve them myself. Amen.

1 Samuel 2**CONTRASTS**

Hannah's prayers of anguish and misery are now replaced by her song of joy, praise and thankfulness to God for the gift of her son. Looking beyond herself she also praises God for all that he does as he reorders the world.

Hannah not only thanks God in words however. She carries out her intention to give her son 'to the Lord.' From the beginning of his childhood Samuel 'ministered before the Lord under Eli the priest' at Shiloh in the House of the Lord far from the home of his mother and father.

On her rare visits Hannah brings the tunic she has made for Samuel to wear under his linen ephod, hence attending to the customary clothing.

Eli's prayer that these parents be blessed with more children is answered. Eli's own family situation is causing him distress. He confronts his sons about their wickedness and disrespect for the sacrificial rituals and towards God. The sons do not listen, much less repent and bring upon themselves dire consequences. Unlike Hannah, Eli does not follow up his words with action. He is told that his lack of action about his sons' wilfulness is an act of contempt and opposition to God which God will not ignore. God will now 'raise up a faithful priest' who will act in accordance with God's 'heart and mind.'

Hannah praises God for his faithfulness:

There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides you;

There is no Rock like our God.

But God contends with our unfaithfulness.

Prayer

Lord, forgive us when we are unfaithful to you and insist on our way. Thank you that you listen to us, that you act with mercy for us; that you are faithful, our Rock. Amen.

1 Samuel 3**THE LORD CALLS SAMUEL**

Then the Lord called Samuel. Samuel answered, 'Here I am.' And he ran to Eli and said, 'Here I am; you called me.'

The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, 'Samuel! Samuel!'

Then Samuel said, 'Speak, for your servant is listening.'

God calls us every day, just as he called young Samuel. Samuel heard and ran to Eli, thinking it was Eli that was calling him. He did this three times before realizing that it was God calling him. Three times. The fourth time he said 'Speak, for your servant is listening.'

Samuel needed three things:

To listen and hear: Samuel was confused about who was calling him, but he certainly heard the call. We often pay attention to images and sounds of the world, such as phone calls and television, but also to people who have meaning to us – friends, authorities, family members, etc. The voice of God can come through people or modern gadgets, but mostly, we should pay attention and listen to the quiet, insistent voice of our Lord calling us from within, inside our mind and heart.

To respond: Samuel responded, not once, but four times, though it was late at night. He did not say, 'I must be tired and confused'. Responding is often the hardest part of the process, because when the Lord calls, he does not say 'I am God and I am calling you'. God waits for you to respond, because that shows you are paying attention, and are ready for Him.

To be guided: Samuel needed Eli to guide him, and help him understand that the calling he had heard was God's. We need a supportive and caring person or community to truly understand God's calling and respond to it. This may be a parent, a friend, your Pastor, members of your Church.

Can you hear the voice of God calling you today? Will you recognize it among all other voices in your life? Will you respond to it? Will you talk to someone about it? Will you do what God is calling you for?

Prayer

Dear God, please give me the wisdom to hear, listen and respond to your voice. Thank you for those around me who will help and guide me. May you also empower me to help others hear your voice. Amen.

1 Samuel 4**WHOSE SIDE IS GOD ON?**

Reading these chapters brings to mind the vengeful God who is often used to portray Christianity as an unforgiving and unfathomable religion. God tells Samuel, who has been given to the Lord by his mother, Hannah, that He will bring vengeance against Israel because of the sins of Eli's sons and Eli's failure to restrain his sons from their sinful behaviour.

Sure enough, Israel is defeated by the Philistines not once but twice; more than 30,000 men are killed by the Philistines. They defeat the Israelites even though the Israelites bring with them the Ark of the Covenant, which they believe will protect them. The Philistines, too, fear the ark and exhort each other to 'Be strong! Be men, or you will be subject to the Hebrews as they have been to you!'

Overwhelmingly, this chapter and those that precede it remind us that life is often full of sadness, grief and loss. It is not hard to transpose the themes of these chapters to our modern world: infertility, jealousy, children going off the rails, death, war, violence, grief and loss. Ichabod, born on the day his mother and father die, is forever reminded of his own loss in his name, which means 'no glory'.

These are universal, constant human themes and are the touchstone of these chapters. One cannot help but see the faces of the millions of Syrian (and other) refugees fleeing violence in the hope of a better life elsewhere. Even today we wonder at the seemingly unforgiving and unfathomable God who would allow innocents to be slaughtered and abandoned. And, just as we contemplate the myriad political complexities that underpin the conflict in the Middle East today, we remember that it is never a question of which side is 'right' and which is 'wrong' or whose side God is on. These chapters remind us that we can do nothing to redeem ourselves before God's anger at, and rejection of sin.

Ultimately, we know that our hope and our salvation rests in the risen Christ: even though we know sadness and loss in this life, we also know God's enduring love through the gift of his son.

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for the gift of your son, Jesus Christ. Thank you for your grace and forgiveness, which we know endures forever. Amen.

1 Samuel 5**WHAT A POWERFUL ALLY WE HAVE IN GOD**

And when the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the Lord.

The people of Israel were so often slow to recognize the might of their Lord and too quick to complain about God when things did not immediately seem to fit in with their plans. The stories in the Exodus from Egypt are filled with God's power and blessings and the Israelites' complaints.

The most precious possession of the Israelites, the most Holy Ark of the Covenant was captured by the Philistines. You would think that the Israelites would immediately plan to recapture it, but this did not seem to be on their agenda. Once again they seemed to shy away when things became really difficult.

This, however, became another opportunity to show God as the one true god, almighty and all powerful. The Philistines' god of Dagon was found fallen face first on the ground before the Ark of the Covenant. It was meant to be a sacrifice to their god but in the end their statue lay shattered on the ground in homage to the true God. The Philistine people of that city were afflicted with tumours and they cried, 'The God of Israel is punishing us and our god, Dagon.' This plague continued as the Ark was shifted from city to city in the Philistine nation. The people eventually demanded that the Ark be sent back from where it came.

How often are we reluctant to put ourselves out when an easier path seems available? God, though is working in the background, even when we seem to be totally ignorant of his involvement and impact in our lives. He has the power to bring about amazing change as well as be a real source of comfort. God continually shows his might to support us in our needs. All we must do is put ourselves in his hands and rely on him.

Prayer

Help us to fully recognize the gifts and bounty that you give us each and every day. You are there to always listen to our prayers and support us in our needs. Guide us to readily rely on you and your support and power in our lives and to never underestimate the direction and impact that you can provide. Amen.

1 Samuel 6 and 7**LOST IN SPACE - THE ARK OF THE COVENANT,
THE HEBREWS, AND THE PHILISTINES**

It was their heart. It was everything they believed in. Well designed, as Moses was instructed by God (Exodus 25). What it contained meant everything to the Hebrew people: their covenant with God, the two tablets with the Ten Commandments. The ark was always ahead of them, wherever they went.

Yet, because of conceit amongst the Israelites in their battles with the Philistines, their precious ark was lost to them. Their eternal enemy got hold of it.

What is remarkable here is the reversal of respect. The Philistines had placed the ark in their own temple, and suffered bitterly for having it in their midst. Yet they still acknowledged it as being the sacred core of the people of Israel and decided to return it to them, together with valuable gold as a guilt offering.

These are the people of today's Palestine, then despised because of their competition in occupying the Mediterranean coast of today's Israel and southern Syria. As far as the Hebrews were concerned, the five Philistine rulers and their people were aliens in the Promised Land. Even today, the Philistines are often quoted to denote an uncouth person who is ignorant of art, culture and science, preferring materialism and consumerism (in German: Spiessbürger).

The very same people make sure that the ark returns to its rightful owners-only to be disregarded there for the lifetime of another generation. And again, an unknown peasant, Abinadab, together with his son Eleazar, cares for the holiest of the holy of the people of Israel during their battles with the Philistines, in his own house in Kirjath-Jearim, on neutral grounds between the two warring parties. It needed Samuel, the Judge, to see his people return to their true faith. It was only then that David had the ark returned to Jerusalem. When in 587 BC the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and Solomon's Temple, the Ark of the Covenant was lost forever.

In the Book of Revelation (11:19), the vision of the Seventh Angel sees 'the Temple of God in heaven opened, and the Ark of his Covenant inside his Temple. There were flashes of lightning, noises, peals of thunder, an earthquake, and heavy hail.'

Prayer

'We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to rule. The nations were angry, but the time for your wrath has come. It is time for the dead to be judged — to reward your servants, the prophets, the saints, and all who fear your name, both unimportant and important, and to destroy those who destroy the earth.' Amen.
(Revelation 11:17-18)

1 Samuel 8**DETOURS**

When Moses lead the people of Israel out of Egypt they rebelled, rebelled and rebelled against the covenant relationship the Lord was using to relate to them - where the Lord would do his bit and they would do their bit. Because they constantly rebelled and failed to do their bit, eventually the Lord put the people on a 40 year detour in the desert before they entered the Promised Land.

As they settled in the Promised Land the Lord set up a new relationship with them - based on them occupying the land - the Lord doing his bit and the people expected to do their bit. The same rebellion and failure on the part of the people to do their bit continued for the 350 years from Joshua to this reading in 1 Samuel.

The people eventually blamed their failure on the relationship the Lord wanted with them. So they decided to set the terms of the relationship and came up with the idea of a king, a permanent palace for their king and a permanent temple for their worship - just like the nations around them. Politically it was simple – have a relationship that detours around the relationship the Lord wanted.

Instinctively Samuel said 'Not a good idea!' The Lord also pointed out the downsides to being under the authority of a king. The king would tax them severely; their children would summarily be used by the king as soldiers and servants; they would be paid from the money (the taxes) they had paid to the king; they would effectively be the slaves of the king working again for the money they had already earned. But the people were (and wanted to be) blind to all this. They argued that the way people do things is preferable to the way the Lord does things - an argument still used today.

The Lord too saw the relationship was not working and he relented to the idea of a king - clearly knowing things would not be good. It ended up being a self-imposed 1,000 year detour that took the people through three batches of fourteen kings and ended in the slavery to the king as the Lord had predicted. Worse, they ended up being slaves to a foreign (Babylonian) king – not even to an Israelite king – not even in the Promised Land.

The result of the first Lord-imposed detour was that the people ended up being blessed with 8,000 square miles of land - the Promised Land. The result of the second self-imposed detour was slavery and the loss of their land plus - a third detour – 70 years of slavery in Babylon.

While the Lord abandoned the people's king-based relationship he did not abandon the people. He replaced it with a new relationship - a personal individual relationship through Jesus - a relationship that cuts out the bits that depended on the people, on the palace and on the temple.

So, when we personally or as a church, want to be like the other nations (for example like having bishops) we know things are not likely to get better because of that. Instead we know things will only get better when the people have their personal relationship directly with Jesus.

Prayer: Lord, we know that we are no less rebellious than the Israelites, please stay with us till we finish all our detours too. Amen.

1 Samuel 9**SAMUEL ANOINTS SAUL KING OVER ISRAEL**

I once had a friend who was fascinated by the story of how Israel became led by a king. He was not a Christian, had little religious exposure in his life, but he knew this story. He was a committed libertarian and often used to point out to me that even God warned people over the interference of government. In some ways he missed the message that God was sending his people, rather than that we should look to God as our leader rather than an earthly one.

This chapter tells the story of how Saul was chosen as king. It was not one of the princes of the tribes who was chosen; someone with existing knowledge of the rules and ways of governing people, but a prophet.

We learn of Saul's' family, his appearance and demeanour and the serendipitous path to Samuel. The story sets up a hopeful future for God's people of someone chosen by God to lead as opposed to someone led by avarice of power and money. This would have been a very promising beginning if it had not been for the sin of the people in rejecting God's leadership.

At this present time where there is world discord over leaders chosen by the people we should remember the story of Saul and how being led by the desires of being 'like all the nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles' (1 Samuel 8:20) rather than being led by God as our King.

Prayer

Dear Father in heaven, let us have you as king in our heart rather than look to the rulers of this world. Guide us in all we do and lead us in your path, in Jesus name. Amen.

1 Samuel 10**SAUL BECOMES A KING**

If I accept you as you are, I will make you worse; however if I treat you as though you are what you are capable of becoming, I help you become that.—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

As a young adult, heading out to look for your father's donkeys, and tracking down the local prophet in order to ask directions for where to look, being told that you'll become king is a big curve ball!

When Saul is told this, his first instinct is to disbelieve Samuel. It's much easier for things to stay as they are, rather than to change, particularly our own self-perceptions. However, our self perceptions are influenced by how we think others see us.

From the time that Samuel meets Saul in 1 Samuel 9, we hear of Samuel treating Saul as the person he is to become, serving him the prize part of meat, anointing him with oil, showing him respect with a kiss.

This scene is in contrast to that of Saul meeting up with this uncle, who asks where Saul has been. In this setting, Saul doesn't feel comfortable telling his uncle about becoming king, and having the Holy Spirit come upon him. Was Saul concerned that his uncle's ideas about Saul's identity would not be consistent with who God was calling him to be?

Only God can truly see us for who we will become, and see all our potential, rather than the people we have been or are. Who is God inviting you to be?

Prayer

Dear God, We thank you for people in our lives who can be a positive influence on us, giving us the freedom to grow into who we want to be. Amen.

1 Samuel 11 and 12**SAMUEL SHARING GODS' LOVE OF THE WORLD**

In chapter 11 the Amonites had claimed Gilead as their land for a long time. After 90 years, they re-ignite their aspirations, appointing their King faster due to concerns of an invasion. Nahash intended to deprive the Jabeshites of sight in their right eye, to prevent their involvement in war.

Saul added the name of Samuel to his own name, to seek greater influence and to inflict more terror on their opponents. Saul led his army all night, arriving at the Ammonites' camp at sunrise. The overwhelming majority of people who admired Saul did not retaliate to those who opposed him. This strong support enabled the foundation of the kingdom to be formed with Saul as its Leader.

In chapter 12 Samuel spoke to the people of Israel about how God had helped those who helped those who have served him. This reading describes how Samuel explained to the people of Israel the many ways the Lord will always love his followers, despite the poor decisions they may make. Samuel told the people to continue serving the Lord, and the Lord will always love and care for them.

Samuel spoke with such passion, reinforcing to the people to continue their faith in God, and not to give up hope, particularly when faced with ongoing challenges.

Prayer

Dear God, thank you for showing us your Love and humility through Samuel. Help us to show others how we can live in peace together, no matter what their colour or faith may be. Amen.

1 Samuel 13**A KINGDOM SACRIFICED**

Battles against the Philistines dominated Saul's reign.

Jonathon leads a successful battle at Geba. Saul takes credit for this success. Following this attack Saul finds himself in a desperate situation, his troops are deserting him and Samuel has not arrived to offer the sacrifice required before his army could commence battle. Saul, frustrated and impatient, decides to take matters into his own hands and offer the sacrifice himself. Samuel arrives and confronts him. Saul directs the blame away from himself to others justifying his actions. Saul's deliberate disobedience cost him his kingdom. He is now in a worse situation, his army is diminished, and the Philistines ravage the country and prevent the Israelites from making weapons of war.

The crisis that Saul found himself was definitely a time that called for patience and trust in God. Not so, for Saul showed himself to be impatient and self-sufficient. His sacrifice was sinful; he was neither priest nor prophet and he disobeyed Samuel's clear instructions. Saul showed no sign of repentance and he covered his disobedience to God's command with a pretence of concern for God's favour.

As it was for Saul, God desires our obedience and full surrender to his will. He takes our attitudes and actions very seriously. His commands serve as a test of our faith and patience and there lies the temptation to choose our way rather than God's.

Obeying God's Word is the best choice for our lives. When we fail we have the offer of God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Lord God, enable us to walk your way with integrity, faithfully believing in your Word and faithfully obeying your commands. Amen.

1 Samuel 14**SAUL'S LACK OF TRUST**

How often do we plan and make decisions and when they go pear shaped we think maybe we should have brought God into the picture.

How often do we say or do something without thinking about the consequences and then later it comes back to bite us.

Here we have Saul doing his best to make this happen.

It all began when his son Jonathon and his armour bearer, trusting in the Lord, decided to attack a Philistine army outpost. This and an earthquake sent by God caused confusion and panic in the Philistine army scattering them throughout the country side.

Saul's lack of trust

With all the confusion happening to the Philistines Saul was eager to join in on the fight. So eager he thought it a waste of time to consult the priest and hear what God had to say.

He decided to build an altar to God. This was well into his reign as king of Israel.

And then Saul wanted to chase the Philistines all night and destroy every last one of them. Ahijah the priest suggested that they consult God first.

Saul's foolish oaths.

Saul makes an oath that if any of his men eats before evening they would be cursed. The consequences were that his men became stressed and tired and unable to fight in the battle.

When they could eat they were so hungry that they ate meat that still contained blood, which was against God's law. Also this oath almost killed his son Jonathon. Saul would rather have his son killed than admit that he was wrong in making these oaths.

Prayer

Lord we thank you that you are always with us. We know that we can talk to you at any time. You are there to listen to our concerns and aspirations. May we learn to listen to you and your word. Amen.

1 Samuel 15**DISOBEDIENCE AND DOWNFALL**

After Saul was made king, Samuel approached him with a message from the Lord.

As punishment to the Amelakites, for what was done to Israel, when waylaid from Egypt, Saul was to attack and totally destroy them. The command, seemingly harsh, demanded that none of the Amelakites were to be spared.

Like Saul, we think we know better, ignoring God's word, blatantly making our own rules. Saul spared Agag, the Amelakite king, together with sheep, cattle and anything considered good.

The Lord related his displeasure about Saul's disobedience to Samuel. Samuel set out early in the morning to meet with Saul.

Meanwhile, Saul had gone to Carmel where he set up a monument in his own honour, disobeying the Lord's orders.

When Samuel reached Saul, who had gone on to Gilgal, he reproached him for disobeying the Lord's orders.

Saul however, insisted that he had obeyed instructions. The best cattle and sheep had been spared as a sacrifice to the Lord.

Samuel explained that obedience to the voice of the Lord was preferable to sacrifice and burnt offerings. The Lord therefore, seeing Saul as untrustworthy and disobedient, denounced him as king.

The story however, does not end there. Saul, noting the error of his ways, was repentant, but it was Samuel's task to put Agag to death.

Samuel left for Ramah and although he mourned for Saul, he did not meet with him again.

It seems that mankind today has learnt nothing from this Biblical episode. The struggle for power and supremacy continues. Nation fights nation, causing loss, displacement and untold misery to millions of people. Like Saul, we think that we know better, ignoring God's word, blatantly making our own rules.

Prayer

Dear Lord, we like Saul, so often become, 'too big for our boots'.

Help us to listen to your commands and to obey them accordingly, acknowledging that we need your guidance to do so. Amen

1 Samuel 16**SAMUEL ANOINTS DAVID AND GOD HAS OUR BACK!**

The Reading begins, 'The Lord said to Samuel, How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as King over Israel?' How often have we faced disappointments in life-the loss of a friend, a job, our health or home, or the unbearable loss of a dearly loved child or partner, only to have people say 'how long are you going to be sad for', 'snap out of it', 'it's not that bad'? It's as if our sadness makes them uncomfortable. How long do we mourn? How long is a piece of string? The answer is, we mourn for as long as it takes.

Samuel is sad because Saul will not be King. He has failed and he fears for his life. But God has other plans, greater plans! In His wisdom He always knows what's best for us. He ALWAYS has our back and will not let us down.

Through sadness and loss and grief, comes understanding, wisdom and growth. We are 'born again'.

We just need to trust God's Great Plan for us, even if we don't understand it at the time. When Samuel arrived in Bethlehem to anoint God's chosen one, once again he was surprised by God's choice.

'But the Lord said to Samuel, Do not consider his appearance or his height. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart'.

This is such a lesson for us all. Not only to look at the inner beauty of those around us, but for us to grow that beauty within.

Prayer

Dear Lord, may we always trust your greater plan for us. May we comfort those who mourn and see the beauty within all humanity. May we be open to new possibilities and remember, no matter what, you ALWAYS have our back. Praise be to God. Amen.

1 Samuel 17**DAVID AND GOLIATH**

Deciding a battle by means of combat between two champions, one from either army, seems eminently sensible. When practised in days of old it certainly would have prevented the unnecessary carnage of large-scale warfare. But have two combatants ever been so thoroughly mismatched as David and Goliath? Goliath is almost 10 feet tall; his armour weighs about 125 pounds. Each day he strides out and mocks the Israelite army and calls on them to choose someone to take him on. All that the Israelites can do is quake in fear. But David is different. The young shepherd boy hasn't even been chosen to join his older brothers who have been called up for military duties under King Saul against the Philistines. But as David visits his brothers at Israel's army camp to bring them some provisions from home and check on their welfare, he is eager to hear the words of Goliath that are striking such fear in the hearts of Israel's fighting forces.

To cut a long and familiar story short, David succeeds in persuading Saul to let him go out to fight the Philistine giant with nothing but a staff, a shanghai and five smooth stones, rather than the light armour that Saul has offered him. As one would expect, Goliath ridicules David. 'Am I a dog that you come to me with sticks? Come here, and I will give your flesh to the birds of the air and to the wild animals of the field.' But David is fearless. He knows that he is not fighting alone. He knows that he goes 'in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel' (vs. 45). So with one unerring shot, and with the Lord's help, he finds the chink in Saul's armour and sinks a stone in his forehead.

The Lord laughs at enemies who put their trust in weapons (see Psalm 2:4). By contrast David is pictured as a man of passionate and decisive faith, who trusts in God to deliver him when humanly speaking the odds are stacked against him. The Israelite army and Saul are like the terror-stricken disciples when a storm arises on the Sea of Galilee. They wake the napping Jesus and ask, 'Don't you care that we are perishing?' After stilling the storm, Jesus asks them [and us], 'Why are you afraid? Have you still no faith?' (Mark 4:35–41).

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for sending Jesus as our champion to fight for us. Thank you that in Jesus' life, death and resurrection, your stone has struck its mark and removed all reason to fear. Thank you that your unerring Word has completely overcome the giants that loom in our path—whether they be our setbacks and hardships, our guilty fear, or our sense that life has no purpose. Thank you that, just as fearful Israel found their champion in David, we can place our trust in David's greatest son, indeed your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. In his dear name we pray. Amen.

1 Samuel 18**SAUL'S JEALOUSY**

Even a cursory reading of this chapter shows an obvious growing envy Saul has against David and is illustrative of what happens when this destructive power takes hold.

Initially Saul is pleased with David who had defeated Goliath. In so doing, Saul must have breathed a huge sigh of relief as it was obvious that he would have had to champion Israel's cause. He would almost certainly have lost the fight, lost his life and left his people in slavery. God was with David and the opposite occurred.

It was only a short while later however, when he hears the people singing, praising him, but to a greater extent praising David. He could easily have picked up the kudos encouraging people to think his decision to let David fight was rather a brilliant strategy on his part.

But, no! Filled with rage at a perceived lack of personal glory, Saul started scheming to bring about David's demise.

Whilst David soothes him by playing his lyre, Saul's jealousy grows murderous. He hurls his javelin at David – twice.

David however didn't let the esteem he had received go to his head, 'but behaved wisely in all his ways' (v14). Whatever Saul asked of him David did, in spades! Fight the Philistines – no problem; marry my besotted daughter – ok; dowry is 100 Philistine foreskins (yuck) – returns with 200! Saul couldn't even rely on his enemies to kill David.

These stories of Saul's jealousy show an ever increasing hatred of David, even to the point of attempted murder. His actions show the diametric opposite of Paul's teaching on love. (1 Cor. 13 – 4-8). Love – does not envy, is not proud, not easily angered and keeps no record of wrongs.

Prayer

Holy Spirit, may we always have an attitude of love towards others. Keep the sin of envy far from us. Amen.

1 Samuel 19**BEING PROTECTED**

When you love someone, you want to hide them away safely. In your heart. Away from harm.

Jonathon sought protection for his friend.

The promised protection meant nothing when Saul's emotions took over.

Michal then protected David and helped him get out of harm's way.

Both Jonathon and Michal supported beloved David against their own father. Perhaps it's more correct to say 'against their own father's actions'.

The story reaches its climax with Samuel, his prophets, then Saul's messengers, then Saul himself, falling into a prophetic frenzy.

God willed David to be protected.

Psalm 59 begins 'Deliver me from my enemies, O God; protect me from those who rise up against me. Deliver me from evildoers and save me from bloodthirsty men.' (NIV) God's protection evident in David's story has inspired trust in generations, through story-tellers and singers. Verse 16 of the psalm prayerfully rejoices, 'I will sing of your strength; I will sing of your love; for you are my fortress; my refuge in times of trouble.'

Prayer

Dear Lord, thank you for protecting me in times of trial. I'm sorry for the many times that I am the one who, puffed up in pride and jealous feelings of entitlement, has threatened others.

Please deliver protection to people in mortal danger from others who perceive them as political threats. Bring the knowledge of your loving and protecting ways to those with a dangerous mindset. Amen.

1 Samuel:20**KING OF ISRAEL-KING OF RECONCILIATION**

At this point in the story, Saul has already been rejected by God as the King of Israel and David has been anointed as the next king. Saul has already attempted to kill David but God protected David and is also blessing all of David's endeavours. So why then, when Saul comes to Naioth, does David flee? He could have simply stayed there for however long it took Saul to give up or die, and rested confidently in God's promise of care and protection. I think he left for a good reason; he wanted to see if Saul's heart had changed and he wanted to see if there was still a chance to reconcile with King Saul. Despite all the good that David had done on behalf of Saul, and despite all the hostility and abuse David had suffered at the hands of Saul, David still longed to be reconciled with him.

Is it not true that we should try and do the same? What is our attitude when we encounter those who would try to harm us? Do we seek to find opportunities for reconciliation or do we secretly hope and plan for revenge, justice or retribution?

Luckily, we have a friend like David did; and just like Jonathan was, he is the Son of the King. When we find ourselves at odds with God because of our sin and lack of love, all we need to do is turn to Jesus and ask for his help to restore our relationship with the father.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, fill us with your Spirit of Peace so that we may be peacemakers in the world. Amen.

1 Samuel 21 and 22**CALM THE PANICK**

David and the Holy Bread ch 21:1-9

David receives the holy bread of the Presence to sustain him during his flight from Saul. Despite David's weakness before men and his sin before God, he is sustained with this unusual blessing. When troubles and sins surround you, turn to the Lord and His servants for aid. Confess your sins and weakness honestly, and receive the care He administers through His servants. In mercy the Lord will nourish, sustain and forgive you.

David flees to Gath ch 21:10-15

David pretends to be insane and so escapes the predicament at Gath. What clever desperate measures! The author records these devices but does not commend their use in God's name. While God would have us use our minds to accomplish worthy goals, He would also call us to trust Him and confess Him in the face of difficulty. Our trustworthy Father can deliver us, as He demonstrated through the suffering of His beloved Son.

David at the cave of Adullam ch 22:1-5

During David's continued flight, his followers support him and God protects him, directing David through a prophet. David had panicked due to fear previously, but the Lord calmed and protected him. When troubled, treasure God's word as your stronghold. Through the word, the Lord will bless, comfort and strengthen you.

Saul kills the priests at Nob ch 22:6-23

The story temporarily leaves David. We see the priesthood nobly suffering at the hands of the godless. Be prepared to suffer as God's royal priesthood, remembering that God's purpose will not be thwarted, as shown in Jesus' death and resurrection for you.

Prayer

Continue to nourish Your people and arm them against evil, dear Lord. Grant them wisdom with honesty. As You have promised, gracious Lord, deliver those who call upon You in the day of trouble. Give us a trusting heart to obey You heavenly Father, and to live in the confidence of Your word, our stronghold. Jesus our great High Priest, since You freely gave Your life for me, take my life into your service. Amen

1 Samuel 23**THE SON IN DAVID**

David, young giant-killer (chap 17), on the run! Divinely anointed as Israel's future king, he is hunted by Saul, the anointed ruler rejected by God.

Bonhoeffer states: 'The period before David's accession to the throne is one of ongoing hostility toward him from every quarter. The demon in Saul hates him. He recognizes that David is the anointed one just as the demons recognized Christ; and because he knows that David will replace him and that David will be the one who rules, he engages in a life-and-death struggle against David.'

Like Jesus, David is in the desert, and tempted there. He resists opportunities for getting rid of Saul (e.g.26:8). His companions are people 'in distress or in debt or discontented' (22:2). Jonathon, son of Saul, comes to him: a true friend, without deceit.

We worship and – like Jonathon – love David's Son, the messianic King. In this anointed ruler the New Testament calls us to see Christ. So Peter proclaims at Pentecost (Acts 2:30) '[David] was a prophet', he 'knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne'.

Bonhoeffer's students heard: 'David is important only insofar as he is a witness to Christ, not in and for himself, but for Christ and thus for the church of Christ'. In fact, in terms of Hebrews, 'David is the shadow of the incarnate Messiah'. For us David is Christ alive, back there.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, David's Son, help and save your people, suffering and persecuted. Give us your Spirit, your abiding Presence. Amen.

1 Samuel 24**THE LORD MAKES A DIFFERENCE**

In the Zacchaeus story (Luke 19) the villagers hated their tax collector (Zacchaeus) so much that they actively prevented him from meeting Jesus and receiving the good things Jesus was giving out to them. If they had had their way, things would not have changed - Zacchaeus would have kept ripping them off and their hatred of him would have increased. But he got to meet Jesus, and Jesus saw that things could be different – very different. Jesus' intervention profoundly changed Zacchaeus' conscience, his heart, his attitude and his thinking and profoundly changed the life of the village. Jesus made a difference.

In this chapter, David and his rebel followers were desperate. They were hiding from the murderous King Saul in a cave that people used as a toilet. The rebel's view was that things would get no better for them (and David) until they saw the hated Saul dead. So, when Saul too used the cave they were hiding in as a toilet, he was alone and unprotected. (Well unprotected anyway.) The rebels and David could hardly believe their luck. It was the perfect opportunity to kill him.

In this story the Lord had already changed David's conscience, his heart, his attitude and his thinking. In this situation, David took seriously what he had learned from the Lord:

- first commandment: That he be in awe of and trust the Lord above the influences of his peers.
- third commandment: That he not diminish the sacred anointing the Lord had given Saul.
- fourth commandment: That Saul be respected, obeyed, loved and served because of his God given authority.
- fifth commandment: That he not kill Saul.
- seventh commandment: That he not steal Saul's kingship.
- eighth commandment: That he not betray but defend Saul.
- ninth commandment: That he not want the things Saul owned as king.
- tenth commandment: That he not want the people and servants who are under Saul's authority.

The Lord's word in both Zacchaeus' and David's hearts changed profoundly what happened next.

Prayer: Lord teach us to use the difference you make to better our lives and the lives of those around us when we use your commandments to guide our decisions and not produce the destructive alternates in our lives and in the lives of those around us when we don't.

1 Samuel 25 ABIGAIL DEFUSES A CRISIS BETWEEN DAVID AND NABAL

In this story we have 2 men who behaved badly and a woman who was caring and very diplomatic.

David could not tolerate being mocked and publicly insulted by Nabal, who was mean and bad tempered.

Abigail is one of the few women in the Bible who is described as wise and beautiful.

She quickly defused the crisis by doing what her husband failed to do. She gave David presents and appealed to David's better nature. Abigail stopped David taking revenge and she also acknowledged God's authority.

Abigail did not submit to her husband's stupidity, but protected her husband and his interests. She was loyal, humble and considerate. Abigail was very brave and she had great insights. She stepped in at great cost and risk to herself.

There may be times that we need to step in and seek to influence a bad situation to prevent it getting worse. There will be a cost, conflict, confrontation and change and hurt, but when we consider the pain that could occur if we do nothing it should move us to action.

Prayer

Dear Lord, give us your wisdom and let your love dwell in our hearts so that we are moved to be peacemakers, in Jesus name. Amen.

1 Samuel 26**THE UNEXPECTEDNESS OF GRACE**

Here we have the ultimate ‘happy ending’ story because of the hero David acting so radically outside the rules of war. David exhibits courage, cunning, wisdom and virtue as he spares the life of King Saul. However, he makes sure he gets his mileage and ultimate victory by confronting the king afterwards, and challenging him to acknowledge this.

It is this nonsensical act that gives the king virtually no choice but to change his mind, even if for the sake of his own honour. David’s kindness and generosity win out – the ultimate good vs. evil story.

I wonder if this type of ‘diplomacy’ could work today.

Could a Christian leader’s response to aggression realistically be to somehow ‘heap coals of fire’ on the head of the opposing ideology. What if, for example, the world bombarded North Korea with its surplus food, technology, etc? Or if instead of politicians belittling each other across the floor of parliament, they actually listened to each other and responded to the opposition with respect?

Of course, it makes no sense, because in all diplomatic and political dealings there is always some kind of exchange of advantages. There are always ‘rights’.

The Christian way, though, is about grace. It’s about doing the opposite of what is ‘right’, expected, deserved. It’s Jesus giving his life on the cross when in reality we should have given ours.

So, if that works for God, surely it can also work for us.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, may your love for us move us to love others in all sorts of unexpected and ridiculous ways. Amen.

1 Samuel 27**VIOLENCE. KILLINGS. HORRIBLENESS. INJUSTICE**

David's decision not to kill Saul in the cave certainly had its consequences. It meant that after the feelings Saul had had about not being killed had worn off, his sociopathic will to destroy David re-surfaced and the hunt for David was back on. All this time David did not go back on this decision to honour and protect Saul because he was appointed by the Lord.

In this chapter David follows through on his decision to not kill Saul and to let him continue as the Lord's appointed by seeking political asylum in another country (Gath) – which was politically expedient for the king of Gath because, in exchange, David hunted down and plundered the king of Gath's enemies.

During the writing of this devotion book (and the previous one on Joshua, Judges and Ruth) a comment frequently made has been 'There must be better books to write devotions about. There is just so much killing, horribleness and injustice in these stories.' So, why does the Lord not put an end to all this horribleness? Surely the Lord could have put an end to Saul without dragging things out like he did - and all that suffering could have ended much sooner.

The 'zoomed out across history' perspective these books give us is that eventually, when the Lord puts an end to Saul's violence, killings, horribleness and injustices, they are simply replaced by (in this case) David's violence, killings, horribleness and injustices and then David's are replaced by Solomon's, and so on, and so on. In fact, it went on for around 950 years. There were three batches of fourteen kings - all of whom were keen to step up and take their turn - until the king of Babylon had his turn.

It is clear from the way toddlers play that they also want their turn.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for also staying with us as we work our way through our contributions to this world of violence, horribleness and injustice.

1 Samuel 28 and 29

HANDEL'S 'SAUL' NOW PLAYING AT THE
FESTIVAL THEATRE

It's very decent of the Adelaide Festival to put on a production of Handel's 'Saul', just as we are doing our Lenten Devotions on the books of Samuel.

Such a bloody, violent story. I wonder why the story caught the imagination of Handel to want to write a whole oratorio about it. And then I wonder why and who would go to see such a production.

But the reviews say that '*It's a knock-out that brings the work blazingly alive and transforms bewigged pieties into high human drama.*' (review by Rupert Christiansen).

Chapters 28 and 29 are in Act 3.

Scene 2 is the aria by the witch of Endor

*Infernal spirits, by whose pow'r
Departed ghosts in living forms appear,
Add horror to the midnight hour,
And chill the boldest hearts with fear:
To this stranger's wond'ring eyes
Let the prophet Samuel rise!*

And then much to her horror we read that Samuel actually did come – making it evident that her craft was a farce. Samuel told Saul what he already knew. That he and his sons would die in the next day's battle and that David would inherit the kingdom of Israel.

Saul had rejected God's word. God did not answer him. There was no more to be said.

People today reject God's word. Has God stopped talking to them? Maybe God uses productions like Handel's 'Saul' to work in people's hearts. This is God's grace. God finding opportunities to work in people to keep his message alive.

Prayer

Thank you God that you make yourself known through music, and film and art and drama and media. Open people's hearts to hear your voice speaking to them. Amen.

1 Samuel 30**THERE'S NO I IN TEAM**

Australian cricket lovers would like to forget the Ashes series of 2005. Having held the Ashes for 18 years Australia lost that five-match series 2-1 and they haven't won a series in England since. Following England's triumph the twelve players who played in the series were awarded the MBE (Most Excellent Order of the British Empire) for services to sport. Perhaps the luckiest recipient was Paul Collingwood who only played in the final match due to an injury to another player. Collingwood made scores of 10 and 7, but because he was part of the winning team he received the same honour as the others, much to the annoyance of many commentators.

As human beings we have a finely tuned sense of fairness and justice, usually based on the amount of work or effort one puts in: you do the work you can expect the reward. Team sports can often challenge this sense of fairness. How does one decide which players are more worthy than others? Sometimes individual players are carried by the team. We are then reminded that there is a bigger picture: the team is greater than the individual. It was this 'bigger picture' that David saw when dividing up the spoils of his campaign against the Amalekites. He knew some members of his team put in more than others; nevertheless, all were part of the team and so all shared equally the reward.

So it is with God's team. One name for God's team is 'the kingdom of heaven'. Another name for it is 'the church'. The church consists of all kinds of people, some pull their weight more than others, some seem to do all the work while others do nothing, and yet, all receive the same honour and the same reward. Is this fair? In human terms, probably not, but in the big picture of 'God's team' it actually turns out to be good news, for the rewards of the kingdom are not based on merit, but on simply being part of the team.

Prayer

Gracious God, thank you for incorporating me in the body of Christ, not by any merit on my part but by your love, grace and mercy given to me in my baptism. Help me to use your grace to be a team player. Amen.

1 Samuel 31 and 2 Samuel 1**THE KING IS DEAD, LONG LIVE THE KING!**

These two chapters tell the story of a defeat of Israel by the Philistines, the death of Saul and his 3 sons, and the responses of David, including death to the messenger and a long, poetic lament about the deaths (of Saul and Jonathan, without mention of the other two sons). This leaves David, anointed as future king by Samuel while Saul still ruled, as the King of the Hebrews.

It is easy to be side-tracked into history, battles, contradictions and confusions as we read these and the other chapters of the history of Israel and Judah. Why did Saul choose suicide? Did the Amalekite battlefield scavenger kill Saul or make up the story to please David? Why did David mourn Jonathan but not his brothers? Straightforward narrative is not the point of including these books. Rather, God speaks to us through the actions and characters.

I think what God is saying here is this: I choose leaders, though some (Saul) do not live up to their promise, and are left behind, and others (David) have serious flaws but are trying to hear me and follow my word. I am always there, paying attention to each of them, and providing guidance to any one who will listen to me.

Even today, God speaks to us, imperfect people that we are, and gives each of us opportunities to serve and honour our true King, the Creator. Kings Saul and David are now long-deceased—but our heavenly King is forever!

Prayer

Holy Lord, open my heart to hear your messages for me, and direct me so that I may fulfil the promise you have for me.

2 Samuel 2**DAVID AND THE WAR WITH ISHBOSHETH**

In this detailed and bloody story of civil war we see an escalation of violence caused by sectarian conflict. It is a story that reverberates in the world today.

The story begins with two tribes in conflict; Judah and Israel. Since only the House of Judah followed David while Ishbosheth ruled over the rest of Israel, the stakes were far higher for David and his men, and they would have been seen as the weaker force. Not surprisingly, Abner, commander of Saul's army agrees with Joab to begin the battle in a civilised way that is, allowing only 12 men from each side to engage in mortal combat. This 'representative combat' was apparently common in the ancient world, and Abner would have been confident of victory. But when it led to the bloodbath of all 24 men, the civility ended. Patriotism – support for their king – was overwhelming and men from both sides, impassioned and motivated by revenge, took to the battlefield. It was David's army that prevailed and at the end of the day; Joab lost only 20 men, while Abner lost 380. But it was to be a short-lived victory, and a 'long' civil war ensued. The pain and loss continued over many years.

So where was God? We may feel helpless and hopeless in the face of Syria and Iraq, and all the other conflict zones in the world. But this reading teaches us that God is even present where the bloodshed happens. We know it to be true, because he was with David and every individual in this story. This is how God works.

Prayer

Dear Lord, bless and protect those who work in humanitarian roles at the frontline of the many active war zones in our world. Bless the peacemakers, and help us to remember that you are present in our broken world, just as you were with David so long ago. Amen.

2 Samuel 3**THE UNEASY LIFE OF THE LEADER:
DAVID SUCCEEDS SAUL AS KING**

At the time of writing these devotional thoughts, the 2016 USA Presidential Election is drawing to its eventual climax. Media reports reaching us here in Australia highlight the disenchantment of voters with the American political scene, and the unpopularity of the two prime candidates. This sense of unease and disenchantment with politics and politicians is also evident here in our country, at both state and national levels of government. It seems that leadership and government bring with them ongoing challenges.

Following the deaths of King Saul and his son Jonathan, David was the anointed King of Judah. Our reading opens with the listing of the six sons born to David in Hebron - Amnon, Kileab, Absalom, Adonijah, Shephatiah and Ithream- all born to different mothers. Unlike the house of his predecessor King Saul, the house of David appears to have been richly blessed with these sons.

Furthermore, Abner, Saul's nephew and commander of King Saul's army, now reaches out to David, seeking an agreement with him in which Abner offers to assist in enlisting Israel's support for David. In agreeing, David requires that Saul's daughter Michal (previously promised to him by Saul, but since married) be brought to him from Israel, thus strengthening David's claim to the throne as the legitimate son-in-law of Saul. David sends Abner north to Israel to negotiate with the elders of Israel to make David their king too.

However, it soon becomes evident that all is not well.

On his return from Israel Abner is confronted by Joab, a competent but ruthless military leader. Joab blames Abner for the death in battle of his brother and, perhaps sensing a threat from Abner to his own leadership prospects with David, conspires to stab Abner to death.

David's response is to distance himself from this act of assassination, and to place a curse upon Joab and his descendants.

Prayer

We give thanks to God for responsible and democratic government in our country. We pray for the many people who at this time endure oppressive rule in their countries. We pray that we will be blessed with good government, and served by responsible politicians.

The Old Testament can be pretty dry going; context is vital here.

David had many wives, which was frowned upon. His relative lack of children, despite all these wives, is evidence of divine disfavour.

Ishbaal's concubine belonged to whoever was king, so sleeping with her was a political act, and could be interpreted as a grab for power – if it even happened (in the Hebrew version, it is not a confirmed fact, only an accusation that may be intended to counteract Abner's rising power).

Joab kills Abner outside Hebron, so as not to violate the safety guaranteed to a guest. Did he do this solely for revenge, or because Abner, as a military commander, might displace Joab?

Perhaps the most useful tool for interpreting this piece of scripture, though, is understanding that David, as the 'ideal' king, is synonymous with God, or even Jesus. So when Abner turns to David, he's also turning to God, although for the wrong reason. Having come to faith, he behaves with the zeal of the newly converted: he argues with the elders for action, for bringing about David/God's kingdom on earth. And he is betrayed by his match within David's camp: an older brother who feels slighted, a Judas? David mourns extravagantly for this newly-found lamb.

Prayer

May we come to God in joy, not bitterness or despair.

May we feel the pull to action, not just comfortable faith.

May we follow God by welcoming the newcomer, the stranger. Amen.

2nd Samuel 4 and 5**THE LORD GOD ALMIGHTY ESTABLISHES
DAVID AS KING OVER THE ISRAELITES**

Ishbosheth loses courage when he hears Abner is dead. He trusted in man to gain his position, so when the man was gone, he knew his position was weak and he would soon be gone. Ishbosheth was then murdered by 2 of his own men while lying in bed.

The 2 men that murdered Ishbosheth took his head to David and told him that they were God's servants, defeating David's enemies as instruments of God.

David couldn't relate to the murderers killing an innocent man. Although Saul set himself as an enemy of David, David did not regard Saul as an enemy and David had learned to let God take vengeance.

The 2 men that murdered Ishbosheth thought David would be pleased to see that Ishbosheth was dead. However, they didn't understand David's loyalty to God and the house of Saul. David was loyal to his pledge to honour and preserve Saul's family and descendants (1 Samuel 24:20-22).

David made an example of these murderous men and ordered them killed. They were not soldiers fighting together with him; they were murderers who deserved just punishment.

With the death of Ishbosheth (Saul's son), the elders of Israel anointed David as king over all Israel. David then conquers Jerusalem and makes it his capital. David knew that the Lord established him as king over Israel. David dies at the age of 70 after reigning for 40 years.

Prayer

We pray everyone will be enlightened by your Word to live peacefully together, empathise and care for each other. We live in hope that we will all live peacefully together one day. Amen.

2 Samuel 6**THE ARK: A PIECE OF FURNITURE?**

Following Uzzah's death for not respecting the Ark, David in his anger left the Ark at that spot for three months. Upon hearing of the benefits that accrued to Obed Edom, David was determined to bring the Covenant Box to Mount Zion to establish a centre of worship for the children of Israel.

It was a joyous occasion celebrated with a sacrifice and the sound of trumpets accompanying the procession. David wanted to indicate his exuberant enthusiasm over what was transpiring hence his dancing. He did not allow any class distinctions when it came to worship. The Gospel equalizes all.

Michal was annoyed with the way David was dancing in front of all the people ignoring Michal's disapproval. She was focused on her status and possessions rather than worshipping the Lord Jehovah. She was the only person not joyfully worshipping God. For this she did not receive God's blessing and hence did not give birth to any children.

The people were afraid of what God was doing and hence needed a mediator to intervene between God and them. God solved this problem by sending his son Jesus Christ. Jesus gave himself as a ransom for all of mankind. We are now aware of the invitation of the Gospel in the New Testament; that sinners draw near to God through the shed blood of Jesus Christ.

Prayer

Father, as we reflect on such a solemn event as in this reading, we are reminded of our sinful nature. We commit ourselves to you and ask for your blessing upon us. For Jesus' sake. Amen.

2 Samuel 7 and 8**GOD'S PROMISE TO DAVID AND DAVID'S VICTORIES**

Chapter 7: the first lesson from our text is that even our highest, most noble ambitions and goals are flawed by sin. David's desire to build a house for God is so high even Nathan (the prophet) is taken in by it. Who could fault David for wanting to build God a house as the ark of God remains in a tent? God could and did. Secondly: no matter how high our goals are, God's goals are greater. Thirdly: does David suppose God will be more present in a temple than a tent? God has chosen to dwell in a very different 'temple'; it is the 'temple' of His body, the church.

Again we are reminded the greatest blessings of our lives are not the result of our labours, but always the result of God's work. David is rebuked for requesting to build God a temple, and yet out of this request, God promises to build a house far greater than David could ever imagine.

What a wonderful and awesome God we serve! We cannot thwart His purposes and promises. Let us rejoice that God no longer dwells within a tent or a temple, but in the Lord Jesus Christ and His body, the church. We are God's house if we have trusted in Jesus Christ.

Chapter 8: for years, David had very little power. He was put out in the fields to keep a small flock of sheep for his family. There were times when David exercised a certain amount of power and authority under Saul, but he soon became a fugitive, and then his official power was taken away. Even his wife was taken from home. Years later, Saul is dead and David has become king of Israel in his place. In our text, David will subdue his enemies and bring about peace. David is not on the defensive as much as he is on the offensive. This is due in part to the promise God gives David, saying, 'Thus says the Lord of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone and cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make you a great name.'

This chapter illustrates the providential hand of God, working all things to the good of the believer. David's actions anticipate the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ as the king of Israel. What will God's King be like? The promised Messiah, was a suffering servant, who would be rejected by men and who would lay down his life for sinners.

David has employed the power God gave him to do His will, to defeat the nations that surround Israel, to possess the land God promised, to show mercy and kindness. David has used the power God gave him properly. This then provides us with a picture of what the Messiah is like and will be like when He returns to establish His kingdom.

Prayer: Dear Lord thank you for Jesus, our Saviour. Give us the love, strength and courage to face all situations in our world. We give thanks to the Lord, His love is eternal. Amen.

2 Samuel 9 and 10**BORN FREE?**

In the midst of all the battles, David asks whether there is anyone left of the house of Saul that he could help for ‘Jonathon’s sake’. And so, Mephiboseth and the servant Ziba and their families were protected by King David. Not only did Mephiboseth eat at King David’s table, but he was given all of Saul’s land and possessions. In Chapter 4 we read that Mephibosheth was dropped by his nurse when she was fleeing following hearing about the demise of Saul and Jonathon. He was crippled in his feet.

What a fantastic outcome for this man who would otherwise have been on the outer because he was crippled. His ancestry assured him of protection and a prosperous future.

How many of us here in Australia are similarly blessed? We were born here, we have rights as citizens; we have freedom to move around this country as we please; we can choose to travel where we like and we have the resources to do that. How lucky we are.

And why are we so lucky? What have we done to deserve these freedoms? Have we earned this by anything that we have done? Conversely, what have those who don’t have such freedom done to deserve incarceration on Manus or Nauru? Detention with no prospect of freedom? Are we not all created equal in God’s sight? Don’t all people have the rights that are spelled out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights?

It is worth having a look or a re-look at this Declaration.

(Go to <http://www.un.org/en/universal-declaration-human-rights/index.html>).

The first Article states:

‘All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.’

Does this sound a bit similar to some of Jesus’ teachings? How is this being lived out in Australia today?

Prayer: We hear so much these days of things that are sad and bad and where people are treated in ways that are not pleasing to God. Violence is rife in homes, on the streets and in institutions. You are a loving God and a just God. Help us to understand the concepts of love and justice and speak out for them in our homes, our church and our community. Amen.

2 Samuel 11**UNHIDDEN SIN**

Jesus said in Matthew 5: 27 & 28. You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery. But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart’. Leviticus 20:10 also states that ‘If a man commits adultery with another man’s wife, both the adulterer and the adulteress are to be put to death.’

In our language it is called having an affair or cheating.

Estimates in Australia indicate that around 60% of men and 45% of women are willing to report that an affair has occurred sometime in their marriage and it suggests that 70% of all marriages experience an affair. ([www. Sexual Health Australia](http://www.sexualhealthaustralia.org.au))

David had already gone against God’s law. He had already married Michal, and Abigail. He shows a lack of romantic restraint. Bathsheba acted immodestly. She came at his request without any hesitation, and offered no resistance to his desires.

Adultery in the heart and mind is bad; adultery in practice is far worse.

For David and Bathsheba this pursuit of pleasure resulted in: an unwanted pregnancy, the murder of Uriah, a trusted friend, and the death of their baby.

David did what most unrepentant sinners do: he tried to hide his sin. And this thing that David did displeased the Lord.

The whole concept of hiding our sin is deceptive. Our sin is never hidden before God and only hidden with difficulty from our conscience. Our hidden sin hinders our fellowship with God and with others and it is a barrier in our spiritual lives.

The real question for us all is this: Are we prepared to face sin? Not to discuss someone else’s sin, but to face our own sin.

God reconciles himself to David. And he has done this for us as well. Jesus has taken that punishment of death upon himself. As we repent, he forgives. That is true love.

It was through David’s line that Jesus was born; through David and Bathsheba.

Prayer: Merciful Father, it is only by your grace, your love and your forgiveness that you find us pleasing in your sight. We can only thank you and praise you for that. Amen.

2 Samuel 12**WHEN IS ENOUGH ENOUGH?**

God had given David everything he had wanted. A palace, wisdom, riches, harem and wives. David had always prayed to God before making a decision like going to war. This pleased God and David was blessed abundantly.

He had all any man could want for but he wanted more. The eye of David became the eye of lust for another man's wife.

To hide his sin he then committed another to cover the first. This brought Nathan, (sent by God) to approach David to give his decision on a problem. David was appalled by Nathan's message saying that the person should die and pay back 'fourfold'

Nathan's blunt answer that 'you are the man' made David realise he had sinned against God and David repented. Nathan then said that God had forgiven him, but he would suffer the consequences – loss of his son and family disarray.

Like David we often want more in our lives than we already have. Instead of being satisfied and thanking and praising God for what we have. Do we really desire/ need more?

We should come to God every day repenting and asking forgiveness of known and unknown sins. A contrite heart is a believing heart. Jesus died on the cross for our sins.

Let us not forget that sacrifice.

Prayer

Lord Jesus, remember me and take away my sins. Keep me from worldly passions and lead me in your path of righteousness. Amen.

What a story of Happy Families is written here. We have fantasy, collusion with David's brother, lies and deceit, forced sex, then murder.... wow and all this in the family setting. No sweeping this story under the carpet; it's told warts and all. What are we to learn from these people's actions?

In a male dominated culture of the time, Ammon (David's Son) had desires for his virgin sister (Tamar). So blokes being blokes get what they want. But just because you can, it doesn't make it right . It is actually totally wrong. There is a line here surely that Ammon should have known not to cross.

Some time later Absalom (Ammon's Brother) has his people murder Ammon for his sister's rape. An eye for an eye I guess. But again totally wrong. Absalom harbours a grudge until he has to act. Absalom has committed a grave sin in trying to find his own justice.

How sad that both of these men did not think before they acted because their actions have had far-reaching ramifications. These were not heat-of-the-moment crimes but well thought out.

But our sympathies lie with Tamar. She is the totally innocent one in this tale. In our society, one in six Australian women has been the victim of a sexual assault by a non-partner. These women need help and support.

Prayer

Dear God, Please help women who are victims of sexual assaults with counselling and financial support, to give them back their self-worth. They need to know it is not their fault. Amen.

2 Samuel 14**SOMEONE ELSE'S POISON**

The background sounds fascinating! Lust. Deceit. Anger. Revenge. Harm inflicted on others. Turmoil. Loved ones banished, fearing for their lives. Sounds like an ad for the next big fictional mini-series on Channel 10 (or, for that matter, the next big reality series on Channel 10). We'd all want to see what happens next, right? But actually we can get it all from this chapter, and the Old Testament parable that it includes.

The story is not so much about the harm that people are inflicting on each other, but on themselves - 'the king's heart longed for Absalom.' The damage done to the relationships between family members is arguably less than that done to the spirits of those harbouring the grudges and anger. The king misses his son, and the son wants to be reconciled with his father. All makes perfect sense, and in simple terms easy to fix. But forgiveness is hard.

But is it?

A terrific phrase: 'to not forgive someone is like swallowing poison and hoping that the other person will become sick'. Unforgiven 'wrongs', especially in families, result in damaging, corrosive internal tension which can often make the person feeling 'wronged' sick at heart. So what's the solution?

Forgiveness.

But it's hard... isn't it?

We don't have to be whipped, spat on, tried and put to death. Instead, we just have to remind ourselves of the one who was whipped, spat on, tried and put to death to give us forgiveness. He had it hard so that we have it easy.

No, forgetting a 'wrong' isn't always easy - but taking Jesus' (and King David's!) example, forgiving the wrong is another story altogether.

Prayer

Lord, help us to learn from parables, wherever we find them, and to forgive, whether or not we forget! Amen.

2 Samuel 15**ABSOLOM'S BETRAYAL**

The story continues with King David's son Absolom getting impatient with waiting to be king himself. He stands at the palace front gate each morning, dispensing judgement to curry favour with petitioners. We see him basically grooming people to follow him while building a power base to depose David.

When Absolom takes his conspiracy to all the tribes of Israel in Hebron, David's messenger tells him of Absolom's attack to come. David flees Jerusalem into the wilderness with his household and loyalists to prevent bloodshed in the city. He questions why the foreigner Ittai should be loyal to him. He charges Zadok the priest with taking back the ark of the covenant to keep it safe, preferring to trust his own relationship with God to the symbol of that relationship. David goes up the Mount of Olives, praying and crying in penitence over his own sins and his son turning against him. But ever the strategist, he also sends a friend, Hushai to be a spy on Absolom's camp.

This chapter reminds us that nothing is new under the sun when it comes to intrigue, jealousy and betrayal. Trust is such a precious thing and Absolom breaks his father's, following his own ambitions. The characters in this drama can be any of us at any times of our lives. Which of us are clearly all good or all evil?

Prayer

Wise God who knows our inner hearts, show us your way when we feel that we are under attack and in the wilderness. Give us humility to acknowledge our failings in actions and motivations and empathy and guidance in interacting with others close to us. Amen.

2 Samuel 16**THE BLAME GAME**

Ziba, a servant, uses Mephibosheth's absence to mislead David into thinking Mephibosheth was planning to take power from him, and Ziba is rewarded.

Shimei uses the fall of Saul and his family to abuse a humiliated David.

Ahitophel's immoral and treasonous advice to Absalom intended to permanently keep David and Absalom against one another, and Ahitophel had much to lose if they reconciled.

In an earlier chapter, to hide his own actions, David had Bathsheba's husband killed.

We push our own sin on to others, because that's what our ego wants. Our inability to accept ourselves as we are leads us to project our ugly stuff onto someone or something else.

God is used as an excuse to increase our own power and advance our own causes.

We impotently stand as religious power is used to label, divide and ostracise people.

We fear the actions of radicals so we punish those seeking refuge.

We blame the victim when a system is so broken that we don't know where to start.

Others shouldn't bear the brunt of our sin. Jesus already has.

'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.'

Prayer

Help me to blame less, be less egotistical and less controlling. Help me to always reflect your goodness and love. Amen.

2 Samuel 17**WAITING, GIVING AND FORGIVING**

This chapter reminds me of wikileaks. It gives an as-it-happened, deeply personal insight into the gory details of the events that were happening around Absalom and David. You can visualize what is going on. You can smell the fear. You can feel the panic. You can sense impending death.

It is a story of the elite – in this case a father and son – in an unequal, complicated and bitter power struggle – a likely fight to the death for their political lives and for their physical lives. It tells what they do and how they do it, how it impacts on the lives of the less elite. It tells how the less elite getting sucked into the fight – how they take sides – how they try to stack the fight in their favour – how they try to pick the winner - so that they are not the ones to face the retribution when the fight is over.

The elite's advisors are desperately trying to give their best strategic and politically correct advice. But, the elite plays the advisors off against each other. And it ends when the one person's advice ends up being the politically wrong advice. It would be nice to say that Ahithophel fell on his 'political sword' and only died politically – but no, for Ahithophel it was a real death.

Wikileaks provides very strong evidence that Ahithophel's story is not just a story of the past. The characters change but the same things happen. In just the six weeks to August 2016, the history and evidence shows the story repeated at least five times to people acting against the Clinton's political interests – and for them too it was a real death.

The dead include

- a judge deciding a corruption case against the Clintons – he was reported to have died of a heart attack – except he had a bullet hole in his chest.
- just days after a young lawyer served a class action against the Clinton's political party for election fraud he was found dead in his bathroom – no cause of death has been reported.
- within hours of wikileaks releasing copies of internal emails indicating Clinton's party had been arranging election fraud, an ex-chairman of the party was found dead under odd circumstances.

- a party adviser suspected of leaking information about the Clinton campaign was shot four times in the back as he walked home from his girlfriend's place. Initially it was reported he had been robbed - except the police found his watch, wallet and credit cards on his body.

- a united nations official due to testify against the Clintons in a federal case beginning the next day, died reportedly from a crushed throat while lifting weights in a gym.

We often say 'Why have reports about people like Ahithophel in the bible? The Lord IS NOT amongst this stuff?' Maybe it is because the Lord is waiting for us to apply the things he has tried to teach us. That the Lord is to be put first and foremost – not our egos. That we are to honour - not hate. That we are to protect - not murder. That we give to others - not covet what is theirs. And the greatest - that we love one another just as Christ loved us.

But even when we don't do what the Lord is trying to teach us, these bible passages show the Lord waiting for us to stop doing what we want – no matter what it is – and while he is waiting he pushes every blessing he can our way - especially his blessing of forgiveness.

Prayer

Thank you Lord for waiting, giving and forgiving. Amen.

2 Samuel 18**GOOD NEWS – BAD NEWS**

What a story of intrigue, deceit, rivalry, violence..... So much of the history of David's reign is laced with tragedy and disaster.

As the showdown looms between the forces loyal to Absalom, seeking to dethrone his father, and David, desperately hanging on to power, David orders his Generals 'for my sake, *deal gently* with young Absalom'. This is the heart of a father, pleading for the life of his son who is plotting the death of his king!

It is interesting that the writer gives more time to the arrangements for reporting Absalom's death than for the battle itself. Joab, the Commander who arranged for the death of Uriah, thus freeing David to take Bathsheba, knows that the death of Absalom will not be *good news* for David. In one way the victory of David's army was *good news* for the King, but not for David the father.

'O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you! O Absalom, my son, my son.' Surely guilt and grief for David.

But not even David could die instead of Absalom. Only God would provide the 'Son of David' to die in the place of rebellious sinners.

And how amazing that in, with and under all this sadness and madness, God is present, seeking ways to bring *good news* to his people, even you and me!

Prayer

Gracious God, the reporters in today's world are still reporting on tragedies, deaths and disasters. It's often hard to see you through the smoke of the battle fields, but your love for us shines through Jesus. Thank you. Amen.

2 Samuel 19**THE AFTERMATH OF CIVIL WAR**

All wars are tragic; civil wars are beyond tragic: they split families and communities and leave almost intractable problems when they are over. Chapter 19 lays this out in spades.

A father, King David, grieves over the death of his son Absalom who rebelled against him. The turmoil in David's heart is something that echoes across time. I am reminded of the observation wrongly attributed to Joseph Stalin: 'The death of an individual is a tragedy; the death of millions is a statistic'. We can identify with David. But his weary troops are understandably unsympathetic. 'You love those who hate you and hate those who love you.....I see that you would be pleased if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead.'

But keeping the troops loyal is not the end of David's problems. He has to contend with jealousies and rivalries between individual commanders and decide what to do with those who had supported the rebels. He sensibly rejects vengeance and spares those who repent: even Amasa who deserved death for his treason is now appointed the new commander of David's army, a clever move to win over the allegiance of those who had followed Amasa, especially those of Judah. Against the urging of supporters he chooses not to execute his adversaries, even Shimai: 'Should anyone be put to death in Israel today? Do I not know that today I am king over Israel?'

This magnanimity by David brought the peoples of Israel and Judah together again; forgiveness and mercy have a practical value on the human level. On a wider canvas David's actions serve as a pointer to God who also chose the path of forgiveness and the re-establishment of a broken relationship between Himself as King and his rebellious people who, like Absalom defied Him.

Prayer

Heavenly father, remember not our iniquities but look upon us in mercy. Thanks be to God who has forgiven our rebelliousness and, through Jesus, re-established his relationship with us. Amen.

2 Samuel 20**THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER**

Jealousy. Envy. Covetousness. The green-eyed monster. Call it what you will. Jealousy addles our brains. Jealousy is destructive.

It was jealousy that addled the brains of the people of Israel (see 2 Samuel 19:41-43). They were jealous of their brothers in Judah. Jealous that King David had set up court there. Jealous that Judah might be getting more than Israel. How easy then was it for Sheba to tempt them into rebellion? It's the age-old story. It's the human condition. It's our condition. Should we be surprised that the violent events described in this passage are still being played out today in the Middle East? Should we be surprised that jealousy continues to wreak violent destruction in the well-to-do, middle class homes of Adelaide? Should we be surprised that within our own church the green-eyed monster continues on his merry way?

No, we shouldn't be surprised, but we should also be saddened and angry and committed to change. Because, despite it being the age-old story, it's not the only way. The green-eyed monster doesn't have to rule our lives. In fact, it doesn't rule our lives. We have a new master; a master who is peaceable and faithful; a master who desires life not death, freedom not bondage, respect not violence. That master is Jesus. He can lead us beyond jealousy.

But, with jealousy there is always a damaging consequence. In order to provide another way – a way of peace – God gave up his own son; Jesus was the sacrifice – one man for the sins of many. He who was without jealousy gave himself up for those who know no other way in order that there would be another way. May we seek that way. Jesus' way. It makes for far less gruesome reading!

Prayer

Lord God, when the green-eyed monster sinks its teeth into me help me to recall the loving and selfless sacrifice of Jesus and fill me with your spirit of grace that I would not perpetuate the violence that comes natural to me. In Jesus' name. Amen.

2 Samuel 21**RIZPAH**

2 Samuel 21:10 Then Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it on a rock for herself, from the beginning of harvest until rain fell on them from the heavens; she did not allow the birds of the air to come on the bodies by day, or the wild animals by night.

When I read Scripture I always ask myself the question: What new thing can I learn about God from this passage? When that is too hard to answer, I ask: What can I learn from God's people in this passage? In the heavy political drama of 2 Samuel, there is so much that is foreign and abhorrent, and claims made for God that don't fit our understanding of God as gracious and loving; Gospel is difficult to find.

In Joshua 9:3-27, JHWH indicates that retribution will be given to the one that violates an oath given to the Gibeonites, and in this passage from 2 Samuel all of Israel is suffering. A three year drought has been brought down on them by Saul's actions. David sends seven men to their death, for the good of the country.

The figure of hope in the story is Rizpah. She watches over the bodies of those that have been sacrificed, to retain what dignity is possible for them in death. She grieves by spreading her sackcloth *on a rock*. The use of the same Hebrew phrase in Isaiah 30:29 and 51:1 helps us interpret this as meaning 'to God'. *Sackcloth* is a sign of repentance as well as grief. In taking her grief to God, Rizpah's act of trust reminds us that God longs to be gracious and compassionate to God's people and to restore them when repentance follows divine judgement. Rizpah is showing Israel what to do.

Her low social status – a concubine, an outsider – reminds us that God chooses to speak to us or inspire us through people we can easily overlook.

Prayer

Loving and gracious God, help me to not be afraid to face up to my shortcomings and failures, but always to trust that you will answer repentance with love and grace. Amen.

2 Samuel 22**IS DAVID WORTHY TO BE LISTENED TO?**

By all modern measures, King David was a terrible man. In his teenage years he was loyal to King Saul, but then he became a rival, and he murdered many of his own nation to become king of Israel, then later on King of Judea. Jerusalem was taken from another culture, and they were slaughtered. Even by the standards of 3,000 years ago he was brutal. He was also unfaithful to his servants, soldiers, family, wives and his own brothers. He treated several of his daughters very poorly. The case of the wife of the Hittite, Uriah is most famous, where he arranges for him to die in battle, so that David's infidelity can remain hidden.

Yet in this song, he claims to have clean hands and to be righteous. Clearly this is propaganda from the victors of war, which the followers of King Saul lost. However there is one strong theme throughout; all the credit he gives to God. All the power and all the meaning comes from God, not from David. And all the salvation too. This reflects his life, that whenever he committed sins large and small he asked forgiveness; forgiveness that he always claimed earnestly and with genuine regret. So in his mind his hands were clean.

We are all a bit like David, (not that we murder people mostly!), but that we sin, ask for forgiveness, then still sin again. And in the song, David says that this salvation and shield is available to everyone, not just him, or Jews or any racial group. This salvation is for those who are humble and merciful, and who observe the rules and statutes.

Prayer

Thank you God for the words of King David, who through his many flaws, we see a total dedication to the will of God, and that salvation for anyone and everyone is available always. Amen.

2 Samuel 23**THE THIRTY EIGHT MUSKETEERS**

David, one of the greatest of Israel's kings, was a monarch of war. Even now, our politicians seem to ride waves of popularity when at war, with Howard, Blair and Bush all experiencing high approval ratings when the invasion of Iraq occurred in the early 2000s. It's at odds with our concept of God being a God of love and peace that we would place David in such high regard being a man of war. Furthermore, it's at odds that David, who literally broke every one of the Ten Commandments, is seen as being great.

But what is great about David, is that he was a man of faith and, for the most part, he followed God's will, and had the ability to lead his warriors to follow his directions, following God. As the second book of Samuel draws to a close, the passage records the thirty-seven warriors that David worked with, and their ability to defeat their enemies – usually the Philistines. The reason that they were successful was, as a team, following God, they could do anything.

Prayer

Heavenly father, your will be done on earth as it is done in heaven. Teach us to know your will, and to work with others to fulfil it. Amen.

2 Samuel 24**INTO THE HANDS**

Of the three punishments offered by David's seer, David chooses the third - not three months of being terrorised by Israel's enemies, or three years of famine, which would leave Israel directly vulnerable to her enemies, but three days of plague. Not, perhaps, because it was the shortest of the punishments, but (so David reasoned) it would let Israel fall directly into the hands of the Lord, rather than into the hands of Israel's enemies, as 'the Lord's mercy is great'.

These days we might not think that bacteria are any more merciful than barbarians. But even if David's science was flawed, his religious feeling was not. If we place ourselves in the hands of humans, human hands will betray us, if not through malice, then through ignorance, or the inevitable limitations of human power.

Jesus, who bore no guilt, chose both punishments. He placed himself directly into the hands of his enemies. Those hands put him to death, which put him beyond the power of all human hands to harm or help, but also directly into the hands of God. After three days of death in the hands of the Lord, those hands raised him to life, and us to life in Christ.

In this world we are never solely in God's hands, we are always in the hands of his creatures. But it is God's hand which upholds all creation, and when we pass out the world's hands into death, it is God's hand which will carry us through death to eternal life.

Prayer

Dear Lord, remind us always that we are always in your hands. No matter how sharp the pains, how black the despair, how bleak the horizon - or how sweet the joys - let us know that your hands are always beneath us, sustaining us and carrying us forward to new life in you. Amen.



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