

NOTES AND QUESTIONS ON THE BOOK OF II SAMUEL FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY - PART FOUR - CHAPTERS 19-24

Sometimes David beautifully shows Jesus in his life, leadership and love for those who rejected him, but at other times he crashes in failure as hard as any man in the Bible. It is on just one issue that he fails over and over, his serial marriages to women God did not choose.(3) The last and most damaging episode is with Bathsheba resulting in adultery, an embarrassing pregnancy, the murder of her husband,(11) and a humiliating visit from the prophet Nathan.(12) They are totally forgiven in heaven, evidenced by God's subsequent gift to them of another son, Solomon, but the consequence on earth continues for the rest of David's reign through the jealousies and rebellion of his children.

First Amnon copies his father in taking the woman he wants. Tamar tells her brother instead of her father. Absalom harbours hatred and takes the law into his own hands by having his brother killed, as David had had Uriah murdered.(13) Joab like a modern psychologist tries to patch up the relationship between a weak father and a proud son without recognising that the problem lies in the hearts of both.(14) Absalom finally makes his move to replace David as king and David seems demoralised and defeated, until an old friend, Ittai, reminds him that God is alive and therefore all things are possible.(15)

Once more David begins to be a picture of Jesus as he leaves Jerusalem for the Mount of Olives, promising to return. David shows patience and mercy to those who mock him in his time of trial as Jesus would do as He faced the cross.(16) One of his former followers betrays him but then hangs himself when his plan is rejected, as Judas would sell out to Jesus' enemies and then take his own life when he saw where his action was leading.(17) David then takes charge again, preparing for his return as Jesus would promise His resurrection and His return at the end of history. He pleads for a gentle treatment of his wayward son as the Lord would offer mercy to the returning prodigal. Joab does not understand mercy and executes Absalom, as Jesus' followers all too often judge and condemn the weak.(18)

CHAPTER 19 A once successful kingdom lies in ruins through civil war. The king is grief-stricken. Many of his people are dead. The survivors are embarrassed. The leadership is paralysed. Finally David begins once more to picture Jesus, offering forgiveness and reconciliation, and urging his people to make him king again. The process of reconciliation is not easy. Amasa and Shimei are forgiven. Mephibosheth is re-instated and urged to settle differences with his dishonest servant, Ziba. Barzillai is rewarded and allowed to stay home. The two parts of the nation begin slowly to re-unite around David. Healing divisions among Christians is a slow process but it can happen, based around our relationship with Jesus.

CHAPTER 20 Yet another rebellion breaks out led by Sheba who works on the still unhealed wounds between Judah and the rest of Israel. Amasa has been given Joab's job as army commander. When he does not perform fast enough, Joab seizes his opportunity to kill his rival. Sheba takes refuge in the city of Abel which Joab besieges. A woman

mediates between the city, who would all have suffered, and Joab. The price of settlement is the head of Sheba. Mercy is not a word in Joab's vocabulary.

CHAPTER 21 Many centuries before in the time of Joshua,(Josh.9:3,15,20) the Amorite people who lived in Gibeon had tricked the Israelites into accepting them and they had been allowed to become honorary Israelites, although as a despised servant class. King Saul had discriminated against them, persecuted them and killed some. His offence had gone unpunished but the whole country is suffering the consequence of this injustice. When David is made aware of the resentment of the Gibeonites and the effect it is having on the whole country, he hands over some of Saul's surviving relatives to them, to be punished in Saul's place. They could have followed David's own example in forgiveness but they choose justice instead. Further battles with the Philistines follow. The Philistines are led by Goliath's four sons intent on revenge. David is growing old and tired but a new generation is learning how to deal with the giants in their lives.

CHAPTER 22 Years before when on the run from Saul, David had written Psalm 18. As his life is drawing towards its end it seems a good moment to remind his people of the principles he learned far back in those early days. The Creator is the foundation of his life. If God could handle making a universe He could cope with David's problems. He promises victory over every enemy, the world, the flesh and the Devil but only if we trust Him to keep our hearts clean and to live His life through us in His strength, as the Maker of everything, including us. Among the Psalms there is always one or more to fit every situation.

CHAPTER 23 David's final words are a simple testimony to the faithfulness of the Lord whom he had served all his life. More than anything he recalls not the big affairs of state or the great battles he had won, but the privilege of being God's mouthpiece in writing the Psalms. His last prayer is for his family, whom he had failed and who had caused much trouble, but whom he knows he can safely leave in the hands of his Rock, the God on whom his life had been built. The chapter concludes with a roll of honour, a list of the 37 heroes who had stuck with David through hard times and good times, through many adventures in Christ. First there are three superheroes, then three commanders including Joab, next the 30 who followed them and lastly one sad name, Uriah the Hittite.

CHAPTER 24 It would have been better for David's reputation if the story had ended at chapter 23 but it goes on to record one last silly mistake he makes when he orders, out of pride, a census of Israel. We see achievement in numbers, God in the qualities of the heart. David insists on counting his people despite a warning from Joab. He faces a choice from God of three possible consequences of his sin and selects three days of an epidemic disease which takes a terrible toll. At the very end he comes back to sacrifice on an altar, a picture of the cross. The location is the future site of the temple which in turn had been where Abraham had been prepared to offer his son, Isaac.(II Chron.3:1; Gen.22))

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR FURTHER STUDY

1. What insight does David's grief over Absalom give into how the Lord feels about our sin? Isn't this weakness? What can we learn from the way David deals with each person in this chapter?(chap.19)
2. What does the story of Sheba show us about why division happens so easily in the Christian church? Although Joab was a loyal friend and follower of David what did he never seem to understand about his master's plan? How can we make the same mistake?(chap.20)
3. What do we find hard to accept as Christians about this story of the Gibeonites? How does it reveal our struggle to come to terms with both the justice and the mercy of God? What light does the revelation that Goliath had 4 sons cast on David's decision to carry 5 stones in his pouch when he went out to face Goliath in I Sam.17?(chap.21)
4. Of all the Psalms David might have recalled near the end of his life, why do you suppose Psalm 18 could have been his favourite? How does it speak to what may have been very dark days in our own lives?(chap.22)
5. What do David's final words tell us about what really mattered in his life as a believer and what should matter most in ours? What was the basis of David's friendship with the 37 heroes? What should we look for in seeking friendships?(chap.23)
6. How, particularly as Christian leaders, do we make the same mistakes that David makes here? How once again does God turn David's sin into a means of blessing for future generations?(chap.24)