

NOTES AND QUESTIONS ON THE BOOK OF II SAMUEL FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY - PART ONE - CHAPTERS 1-6

As with the book of I Samuel, the writer of this book is unknown. Clearly it could not have been Samuel himself. It might have been one or more of the group of prophets like Nathan(chap.12) or Gad(chap.24) who were close to David. The author however is known; it was God Himself.(II Tim.3:16)

The first book had centred around three people, Samuel, Saul and David, and one issue. Who was to rule God's people? Samuel, like John the Baptist, was the mouthpiece of God who taught the people to listen to what God had to say. Saul, like the carnal Christian, or man of the flesh,(I Cor.3:1) was the king who began well and looked impressive, but in the end allowed self to rule. He revealed his nature by undervaluing the cross,(I Sam.13) the grace of God,(14) and the word of God.(16) The only answer to Saul's reign was to quit, which he did on the end of his own sword, to open the way for David, as we must quit running our own Christian lives at the cross.(Gal.2:20) David can be seen as a picture of the spiritual Christian,(I Cor.3:1) ruled by Christ not by self. David was God's choice because of the attitude of his heart.(I Sam.16:7) Saul was constantly jealous of David, sometimes to the point of attempting to murder him. David on the other hand showed forgiveness, grace and patience, refusing every opportunity to force Saul out and himself on to the throne. Thirty times the title 'Son of David' is applied to Jesus in the New Testament. But David was not perfect, making mistakes at times, just as the spiritual Christian while committed to living in Christ's strength not his own, will also forget and take over at times, sometimes with serious consequences.(I Jn.1:8,10)

The second book explores this idea further, on the one hand looking at how David's kingdom grew steadily stronger, but on the other acknowledging David's mistakes and their disastrous consequences beginning in his own family.

CHAPTER ONE The story begins with a curious episode in which a young Amalekite comes to David with a false story of how he had killed Saul, hoping presumably to win favour with the new king. His lie backfires badly and leads to his own execution for murdering a king chosen by God. Jesus wants us to quit entirely of our own accord. He will not force this Himself or condone any attempt by Christian preachers to manipulate the surrender of the flesh. David grieves deeply over the deaths of Jonathan, his good friend, and Saul, his Christian brother, forgetting all the harm Saul had tried to do to him. Our efforts to live the Christian life in our own strength brings great sorrow to the Holy Spirit.(Eph.4:30) David's song of lament remembers only the good times with Saul and Jonathan just as God, because of the cross, remembers only our faithfulness and not our sin. The book of Jashar is referred to also in Josh.10:13 and was presumably an extra hymn book in those days.

CHAPTER TWO David is content for his kingdom to begin small, with the tribe of Judah only, and to grow over time as more and more Israelites want him as king. Jesus begins His kingdom in us when we welcome Him, knowing that as we grow spiritually we will open more and more of our lives to His rule. Saul's general, Abner, still tries to cling to power by ruling a part of the kingdom through Ishbosheth, Saul's son. The flesh though claiming to quit still looks for every way to hold on to control. David's followers, led by Joab, try to push Saul's supporters out, despite

David's clear instruction not to do so. God is not glorified by the behaviour of either side.

CHAPTER THREE The contest between the two sides continues. Abner and Ishbosheth fall out between them just as the flesh will always be divided and competitive. Abner is ready now, like Saul, to quit and submit to David. David is willing to forgive and accept him. Sadly David's followers are less forgiving and see their opportunity for revenge. Isn't it sad how Jesus is so much more forgiving than His church which is reluctant to welcome back into fellowship those who have offended before? We saw in I Samuel how there was one aspect of life, marriage, in which David repeatedly failed to listen to God. He married Michal to become the king's son-in-law not because of God's guidance to do so. After she deserted him and married another man, David was again in too much of a hurry to find a new wife, Ahinoam, instead of waiting for God's provision of the lovely Abigail. It becomes apparent in this chapter how he continued to compound the problem by marrying over and over again till he had 6 wives in clear disregard of God's instruction to kings not to multiply wives,(Deut.17:17) as an example to those they led. Out of pride he compels Michal to leave her new husband and return to him, again ignoring God's instruction in Deut.24:3,4. His multiple marriages create an unhappy home situation, the consequences of which dominate much of the later years of his reign. They also make him vulnerable to temptation with Bathsheba in chapter 11.

CHAPTER FOUR The family and followers of Saul continue to lose heart and contemplate surrender to David. Two more of Saul's commanders suppose David will be pleased if they defeat 'the flesh' by force, and kill Ishbosheth, learning nothing from the fate of the Amalekite in chapter one. Once again David demonstrates that murdering the opposition is not his answer as Jesus does not want us to try to force His people to submit to Him. Mephibosheth's story begins and will demonstrate beautifully the grace of God to the defeated.

CHAPTER FIVE Finally, having seen how good David's rule in Judah was, the rest of Israel wants him as their king also. Like Jesus, David's ministry began at the age of 30. The original inhabitants of Jerusalem, the Jebusites, think they can hold out against David but he defeats them. The old enemies, Philistines, challenge him also but twice God gives David victory over them. Notice the contrast between his gentle patience with Saul and his family but his uncompromising opposition to those who follow other gods. Jesus patiently persuades His people by love to accept His rule but He is determined to overcome the world.(Jn.16:33) This chapter gives a further glimpse of his continuing unfaithfulness in taking yet more wives and girlfriends in the one aspect of life where God was never allowed to rule, his relationship with women. Why don't we learn?

CHAPTER SIX As soon as he has a firm hold on the kingdom, David's desire is to bring the ark of the covenant, containing the 10 commandments, back into the centre of his people's lives. Jesus will always be working to keep His word central in our hearts. There are some important lessons to be learned in the process. Uzzah ignores God's instruction not to touch the ark when he reaches out to stop it falling off the ox-cart. The Lord does not need our help to protect His word. David struggles to accept God's severe treatment of Uzzah but then notices how blessed the Philistine family who house the ark become. He therefore continues his plan to bring the ark to his

capital, Jerusalem. His enthusiasm as it enters the city causes Michal to despise him, revealing that as a 'daughter of the flesh' she still values status above worship. Their relationship is condemned to be fruitless as the relationship between Spirit and flesh will always be sterile.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR FURTHER STUDY

1. Trace the role of the Amalekites through Israel's history. What problem in our Christian lives do they always seem to represent? In what ways do we try to kill 'the flesh' in others? Why does it not work?(chap.1)
2. Reflect how in your own Christian life, Christ's kingdom began very small but slowly grew. How do we also become competitive as young Christians and do damage to ourselves and others in the process?(chap.2)
3. How do we all have the same problem as David in somehow having one aspect of life which escapes Christ's kingship? What have you learned so far in this story about why David had this problem and the damage it caused?(chap.3)
4. What do these two sons of Saul, Ishbosheth and Mephibosheth, show us about the characteristics of 'the flesh'? What is Jesus' way of dealing with self in our lives?(chap.4)
5. Describe the contrast between the manner in which David dealt with the rebellious tribes of Israel compared with how he coped with the Jebusites and the Philistines. What can we learn from the difference?(chap.5)
6. What are the hazards in trying to make the Bible central in our lives? How on the other hand will we be blessed as we do?(chap.6)