

NOTES AND QUESTIONS ON THE BOOK OF II SAMUEL FOR INDIVIDUAL
OR GROUP STUDY - PART THREE - CHAPTERS 13-18

David became king of Israel when Saul finally quit by his own hand, as Christ becomes King in our lives when self dies by our own choice. Progressively he took over more and more of the kingdom, as the other tribes let him, as Jesus takes over more and more in us. Victory over his enemies was the inevitable result, as victory over sin is normal when Christ rules in us. David's immediate concern was now to bring the ark of the covenant containing the word of God into the centre of his kingdom, as Jesus works to make the Bible the heart of our thinking. David's kingship was characterised by mercy and grace to those who would accept it, but there would be judgement on those who mocked him. So it is with Jesus.

So far all was well in David's kingdom but trouble was brewing. Right from his first political marriage to Michal, this had been the one area of blindness in David's relationship with God. Without ever stopping to ask God what He planned, David married one woman after another ignoring the Lord's special instruction to future kings.(Deut.17:17) It therefore should come as no surprise in chapter 11 when he has an affair with Bathsheba, and to hide his embarrassment has her husband, his loyal friend Uriah, killed. Nothing is hidden from God who reveals the sad story to Nathan, the prophet. He becomes God's means of restoring David's relationship with God on the basis of full repentance as expressed in Psalm 51. David is totally forgiven as he testified in Psalm 32. The completeness of God's forgiveness is demonstrated in God's choice of David and Bathsheba's second son, Solomon, as the future king. At the same time the consequence of sin continues on earth as illustrated in the death of the first child, and now in the tragic chapters which follow which describe the struggles of David's children by his various wives.

CHAPTER 13 The first sign of trouble arises when Amnon, David's first born son,(3:2) falls in love with his half sister, Tamar. Despite the clear prohibition of brother-sister marriage,(Lev.18:9) and urged on by bad advice from a friend, he tricks her to being alone with him and then rapes her. Like his father he put his lust above the word of God. His passion turns to hate and he now rejects her instead of marrying her as the Bible had instructed.(Deut.22:28) Absalom, her brother takes up her cause, when their father, David, hears what has happened but does nothing about it. Absalom's grudge grows steadily over 2 years until he sees opportunity to take the law into his own hands and have his half-brother killed at a drunken party. Again David is deeply upset but does nothing as an ineffective father. Absalom runs away to his grandparents expecting that as one set of David's in-laws they will take Absalom's side rather than David's. David misses his son but fails to show it.

CHAPTER 14 Joab changes occupation from general to psychologist, hoping to reconcile father and son. He does it through an elaborate role play perhaps remembering how David responded to Nathan when he told the king a moving story.(chap.12) David is moved to allow Absalom to return to Jerusalem, but not to deal with the problem. He could have done two things about Absalom, either judge and punish him or show mercy and forgive. He does neither. They are back in the same city but still strangers. The problem has been papered over but no reconciliation has taken place. Absalom's resentment continues to grow. He is good looking on the outside but his heart has not changed. When he marries and has children he names his

daughter Tamar to keep the cause of his anger with his father alive. He is disappointed with the half hearted truce with his father and complains to the 'psychologist', Joab. When Joab does not act fast enough, Absalom punishes him – and Joab accepts the blame and arranges another meeting between the king and his son.

CHAPTER 15 On the surface there is reconciliation between father and son, but Absalom's heart has not changed. He sets about winning popular support as a better prospect as king than David has been. Finally when Absalom is 40 he decides it is time to move. Under the guise of a religious occasion he draws his supporters together at Hebron, where David had begun his kingdom.(2:1) His followers proclaim him king. David as an ineffective father is, as usual, the last to know what his son is doing. Because being a godly husband and father has defeated him so far, it comes as no surprise that his first reaction is to admit failure and retreat from Jerusalem. Despite his poor performance, many old friends choose to stick with him. One of them in particular, Ittai, a converted Philistine, sums up how many felt. The Lord had used David to teach him how God was alive, so he would stay with David whether he lived or died. It seems as if Ittai's message hits home. David goes out of the city promising that he will return, as Jesus would be taken out to Calvary promising His return in resurrection. As he leaves he is weeping over Jerusalem as Jesus would do. He too marks his betrayal by walking on to the Mount of Olives. One of David's followers, Ahithophel goes over to the enemy as Jesus' disciple, Judas, did. Another friend, Hushai, however is planted in Absalom's court to keep David informed and cause confusion.

CHAPTER 16 As David leaves Jerusalem, seemingly defeated, people respond in various ways as they would do later to Jesus as He hung, seemingly defeated on the cross. Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth, tries to curry favour while pretending that his master is a traitor. Shimei abuses David who refuses to punish him as Abishai urges him to, showing the forgiveness of Christ as so often before. Absalom meanwhile claims Jerusalem and follows the advice of Ahithophel who betrays David. Hushai, David's secret agent, plants himself in a position to cause confusion to Absalom.

CHAPTER 17 Ahithophel gives Absalom sound advice on military strategy to pursue David while he and his followers are tired. Hushai, the spy, contradicts with bad advice to wait, and is listened to. He sends another spy to David to let him know Absalom's plans as Jesus would always be warned by God's secret agent, the Holy Spirit, about what was in men's hearts. When Ahithophel finds that his advice is not being listened to he hangs himself as Judas Iscariot would do. The stage is set for the final conflict. Absalom prepares for battle while David and his men are supported by those who love him.

CHAPTER 18 At last David is ready to reclaim his kingdom as Jesus will one day return to claim His kingdom. With all his old skill he prepares his army for battle. His people love him as in past times. Despite the magnitude of the rebellion his clear instruction is to show mercy to Absalom not revenge, as Jesus' first purpose is to forgive, not to punish. Absalom in a freak riding accident is found hanging from a tree, symbolic of the curse of God he has brought on himself.(Deut.21:23) One day Jesus would be cursed by hanging on the cross to take our sin.(Gal.3:13; I Pet.2:24)

While others do not dare to go against David's instruction, Joab, ruthless in revenge as always, takes the opportunity to kill him. The message finally reaches David and he is heartbroken. The battle is won but his son is lost. He would willingly have died in his place as Jesus would have died in ours.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OR FURTHER STUDY

1. Why are Amnon, Tamar and Absalom's actions so predictable in the light of their family background and upbringing? What light does this story cast on some teenage problems today?(chap.13)
2. What was wrong with the way Joab and David went about trying to fix the family problems? How does modern counselling also sometimes make the same mistakes?(chap.14)
3. How might David have prevented Absalom's rebellion? What finally turned his attitude from one of hopelessness to optimism? How can we help modern parents to rediscover how to be effective parents?(chap.15)
4. How was the abuse David received in seeming defeat similar to the way the world sees our humiliation and apparent irrelevance as Christians today? What can we learn from his response?(chap.16)
5. What examples can you remember of God planting His agents in the right place in the book of Acts? How has He done this in your own life?(chap.17)
6. Why was David so reluctant to see Absalom punished? Is God looking forward to judgement day? How is our attitude so often like Joab's towards the sins of others?(chap.18)