

NOTES AND QUESTIONS ON THE BOOK OF I SAMUEL FOR INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP STUDY
- PART FIVE - CHAPTERS 25-31

The contrast between Israel's two kings, Saul and David, moves on to its exciting conclusion. Saul is consistently a picture of the flesh, facing problems in his own strength, being primarily concerned with his own position and power, and therefore being jealous of anyone he considered a rival. David is usually, but not always as a mere man, a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ with an endless capacity for patience and forgiveness towards the one who opposes him.

There is only one possible solution to the problem of two kings in the same country and that is for one to quit. The question is whether this would be by force or by choice. David was determined that it should be the latter. Jesus is also determined that self in our lives should be dealt with in the same way. The closing chapters of this book demonstrate this principle in a most graphic way.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE records the death of Samuel. Now Saul and David were on their own. David mourns Samuel as Jesus would mourn the death of John the Baptist. The chapter describes yet another opponent of David, Nabal, who would have been the subject of revenge had not his gracious wife intervened. Nabal refuses hospitality to David and his men contrary to the tradition of their culture. David is angered and is about to retaliate when Abigail intercedes with hospitality and a plea for mercy. She teaches David the lesson that he usually taught others; God will deal with our enemies. God does deal with Nabal by ending his life. David proposes marriage to Nabal's beautiful wife. He had already married Ahinoam after Michal his first wife had left him for someone else. In Old Testament terms she had divorced him so he was free to remarry - but not two wives! God had very specifically warned kings to be an example to His people by not multiplying wives.(Deut.17:17) How much better if he had waited for, Abigail, the beautiful and faithful wife of God's choice!

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX is almost a repeat of chap.24 in which David has a remarkable opportunity to kill Saul but refuses to take it. He prefers forgiveness and mercy to justice and revenge. For the moment it softens Saul's jealous heart but not for long. Saul is once again on the warpath in search of David. Some of David's enemies have tipped Saul off as to where to look. He comes in pursuit with a powerful force but makes the God-organised mistake of camping just below where David and his men are hiding. This time it is Joab's brother, Abishai, who urges David to seize the opportunity to punish his enemy. Again he refuses and plays another trick on Saul to show him what could have happened. Once more Saul is moved to repentance and to seek reconciliation. It is another beautiful example of heaping coals of fire on his enemy's head by loving him. (Rom.12:20)

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN is in extraordinary contrast to the gracious courage of the previous chapter. David loses confidence in God's ability to keep him and turns to a Philistine king for protection. Notice that his panic begins when he talks to himself about his problem instead of to God. When we become fearful we too join the world which opposes God. Achish gives him a little town of his own from where he attacks some of Israel's enemies while pretending to Achish that he is attacking Israel. When we side with the world out of fear for our own safety it will always push us into pathetic deceit.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT prepares us for Saul's final battle with the Philistines. David is being pushed to decide on which side he will be. Saul is trying to find the will of God in the battle. God does not answer because Saul only wants the answer to a problem not the answer to his life. He turns instead to a spiritist medium despite his own God-ordained ban on such people early in his reign. He pretends to be someone else because of his sense of shame. God uses the situation to confront him with Samuel one last time. This is not a spiritist seance because the Devil cannot raise Christians from the dead. God intervenes for the sake of Saul to warn him he will die and that his dynasty will come to an end. However far we have sunk as believers by trusting the flesh instead of the Spirit, the Lord will not give up on us.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE shows the final battle drawing ever closer. David is persisting with his pretence of supporting the Philistines but they turn against him because they do not trust him. It is very embarrassing for us as Christians when it is the world which has to point out to us that we really do not

belong on their side. Achish has the job of telling David to separate himself from them but interestingly he acknowledges that David has had a spiritual impact upon him. Even in a time of compromise something of David's relationship with the Lord had shone through.

CHAPTER THIRTY reminds us that compromise with the world has its consequences particularly on those closest to us, even though God forgives us. When David and his men return to the wives and families they should never have left, they find that they have been kidnapped by Amalekites. Trusting God again He leads them to victory and the restoration of families. David persuades his friends that those too weak to take part fully should nevertheless share in the fruits of victory. This is fellowship at its best.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE demonstrates the simple solution to the years of conflict between David and Saul in which David had refused to use force to gain the kingdom. When Saul eventually sees that his cause is hopeless he quits - on the end of his sword! In the same way when self faces the futility of fighting the Lord Jesus and lets the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, get inside us, we too can quit. "I am crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me."(Gal.2:20) "Consider yourselves to be dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus."(Rom.6:11) The way is now open for David to become the king that God had appointed him to be.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION AND FURTHER STUDY

1. What can we learn for today from the story of David and Nabal about how God deals with difficult people if we leave it to Him. Where was God in the marriage between David and Abigail? What does this story teach us about the potential or the problems in seeking God's plan in marriage?(chap.25)
2. What have you learned from this further episode in the story of David and Saul about how to handle difficult people and the way God handles us? Compare the end of this story with the end of chapter 24? What do they both teach us about the impact of gentleness and graciousness on our enemies?(chap.26)
3. Look more closely at the mistakes David makes in this chapter and consider how we do the same today. What principles from the story of David and Goliath did he forget at times?(chap.27)
4. What does this story of Saul and the medium of Endor teach us about why God so strongly forbids spiritism?(chap.28)
5. What does this last episode in the story of David and Achish show us about the possibilities and difficulties of our witness to the world?(chap.29)
6. What is the greatest danger in our unwise involvement in the world? How can the damage sometimes be repaired?(chap.30)
7. Compare the eventual death of Saul and what led to it with Romans 6:1-23. How in present day terms can we 'reckon ourselves dead'? How does Jesus work to bring us to this attitude?(chap.31)