

# DISCOVERING DAVID

*I will make an everlasting covenant with you,  
my unfailing kindnesses, promised to David.  
See, I have made him a witness to the peoples,  
a leader and commander of the peoples.*

Isaiah 55:3-4

*I, Jesus, ... am the Root and the Offspring of David,  
and the bright Morning Star.*

Revelation 22:16

**Ian Johnson**

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# INTRODUCTION

## **A thrilling story, but a bewildering one!**

You very likely know the story of how David the shepherd boy defeated Goliath, the huge and terrifying Philistine warrior, then how he and the king's son Jonathan became the closest of friends. These are happy stories often taught to children. Have you heard or read, though, about David's wild cultic dancing, when as king he brought the Ark of God to Jerusalem, and how his wife Michal despised him for it? Or about his grief when his favourite son Absalom led a rebellion against him, and greater grief when Absalom died in the battle that followed?

Have you been inspired by David's mercy and loyalty towards King Saul who in jealous rage had tried repeatedly to kill him? Or by the brave people (some of them Philistine mercenaries) who devotedly supported David when it looked as though Absalom would succeed? Have you been horrified at David arranging one warrior's death in battle, in the vain attempt to hide his adultery with the man's wife? Or at the bloody revenge demanded by the Gibeonites, before the terrible famine could end?

There is so much interest and variety in David's life-story - by far the fullest in the Bible, occupying some forty chapters. A wealth of characters too, from brave and beautiful Abigail to sinister, scheming Joab. Dreadful dilemmas and heart-warming generosity. Tedium too admittedly, in lists of conquests and champions, and some long repetitive speeches. And some weird things - the gruesome bride-price that Saul demanded for his daughter Michal, and the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, which on one occasion told David the Lord was fighting on his side.

Making sense of it all can be a real effort, and then there's the big question: Why should David be remembered for centuries afterwards as the ideal ruler, the measure of true kingship?

## **So what is its value?**

It can't be accurate history. There are too many inconsistencies and improbabilities. Yet scholars can find here all sorts of clues for forming a realistic picture of the times.

It doesn't provide clear theology. God is presented here as changing his mind (for instance, about Saul's suitability as king), favouring one nation against others, and inflicting terrible and unfair punishments (genocide of Amalekites for their ancestors' sins, and the violation of David's wives for his offence).

It's easy to dismiss this as just an old story, full of superstition and violence. But myths and legends can be very powerful to inspire positive feelings, and to teach us about life, using miracles, war, family and sexual relations as symbols. (For more on this subject, see part A.)

I firmly believe that David reflects something important and noble in our human nature. Why else should he have been remembered with such respect and love through many centuries? If we can find the 'David' in ourselves, let him tackle our inner enemies with his amazing drive and confidence in his God, while encouraging our true character with generosity and compassion, then he will build a strong kingdom in us – a character of power, wealth and beauty! Then through us and others he may build 'God's kingdom' in the world around.

The detailed life-story in the Bible, also later references in other books, can help us to understand and reflect on our spiritual development, reminding us that this is no

ordinary humdrum process but one full of drama and excitement, and hugely important 'in God's eyes'!

### **What you may find in this book**

You will not find a complete explanation or interpretation. I doubt if that is a possibility. There are three aspects to the book, which I cannot separate out, though I can give examples of where they appear. (See *Contents* listed below.)

I attempt to share **some of the meanings that I find** in the David narratives in the books of *Samuel* and *1 Kings*, also in some later references to him. These appear mainly in the parts entitled *Story*, *Scenes*, and *Characters* (Parts B,C and F).

There is some **straightforward information** to help you find your way through the stories and other passages - chiefly in the *Summaries* and *Indexes* (Parts G,H and I).

I also offer some **general reflections** on how best to understand the Bible (Part A), and some ideas running through these stories (Parts D and E).

**This is a resource book**, so there is no need to read the sections in the printed order. If you want to consider the general ideas in D and E before trying the Scenes in C, that's fine. While reading C, you may like to keep a bookmark in F (Characters), to find out just who this new person is. Some of us are easily confused by the unfamiliar Hebrew names – especially the many that start with 'Ab'.

I hope you will find in 'David' messages that are powerful and beautiful for you. Here I am offering some information and guidance to help you do so, plus some of what I have found which you may find stimulating. But do feel free to interpret things differently!

### **A few explanations:**

**God's name.** Early Israelites addressed and referred to their God by a proper name, the exact form of which is uncertain, because later generations always said 'the Lord' instead. This has been carried over into most English translations. Why I prefer to use the form YHVH, is explained in part D4.

**'Heart faith' and 'surface faith'.** You will find frequent use of these terms which I have coined to express briefly what I see represented by David and Saul.

**Quotations from the Bible** do not follow any published translation, but I acknowledge much use of the *New International Version*, *Revised Standard Version*, and *New English Bible*.

**References** to the books of *Samuel* and *Kings*, in view of their frequency, are kept brief: 2S7:8-16 means *Second Book of Samuel, chapter 7, verses 8 to 16*.

**My use of italic** print generally indicates my own attempt to interpret or explain, but I also use it in more usual ways for emphasis, titles, or introducing special words.

### **Acknowledgments**

Opinions and interpretations expressed here are largely my own, but I owe much to teachers and friends over many years, particularly my father Philip Johnson, and my pastor and college principal Paul Vickers. For specific help in producing this book I warmly thank Alan Bowie, Trevor Millar, Madeleine Taylor, Bruce Jarvis, and Helen Newton.

**Ian Johnson**

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## A BIBLE-TRUTH

### – an explanation of my approach to the Bible, and how it has developed

My own understanding of the Bible has been developing over seventy years and is probably not finalised yet. It started when I was very young in Sunday School, accepting stories simply as that, without critical questions or reservations, and there's something good about that approach which I'll come back to.

By secondary school years my view was changing in several ways: I was finding the miraculous hard to believe in, questioning God's justice (for instance in punishing a whole nation for the actions of a few), being puzzled by contradictions (e.g. in the Christmas stories), and realising how many people thought it all nonsense. Still, being raised on the ideas of Swedenborg (my father spent a good deal of time editing and translating his work), I was content to believe that there could be truth hidden in parables and myths.

As I learned more about problems of variant manuscripts, uncertain translations, historical and archaeological evidence, and so on, I was mostly reassured that the Bible could still contain messages about our spiritual growth. Before long though, I was facing other questions about Swedenborg's interpretations, as well his accounts of spiritual reality and communication. These have never made me doubt that the Bible is very special, but I have developed my own freer approach to interpretation and, having in recent years taken to Quaker ideas, I have found that approach to the Bible most helpful in clarifying mine.

I shall enlarge a little on Swedenborgian and Quaker ideas, before outlining my present belief.

### Emanuel Swedenborg

He is perhaps best known as a visionary who believed that in his visions he was really meeting people who had died and were living on in a spiritual world, where spirits choose what sort of community they will join, one centred on love and understanding (a heaven) or one basically hateful and deceptive (a hell). But he was known first as an eminent philosopher-scientist. So, when mysterious dreams and visions came to him, he explored this spiritual awareness fearlessly, struggling to express what he found in rational terms, which have impressed many great minds.

Much of his experience came when reading and reflecting on the Bible, so its nature and meaning is the focus of much of his writing. For me this image expresses his general view of it very well:

The Bible in its literal sense is like someone dressed but with face and hands bare. Everything that matters to human life and salvation is naked there, though other things are clothed. Even where clothed they often show through, like a face showing through a thin veil of silk.  
(*Doctrine of Sacred Scripture* 55)

However, he more often uses other terms (some original, some from mystical tradition), and explores its nature in many ways, such as the following:

1. The living truth of God flows down through several **planes** or **degrees** of reality, adapting itself to the understanding of souls less and less perfect.
2. Things on each plane **correspond** to things on higher and lower planes. For instance, light corresponds to knowledge, to understanding, and to wisdom. This is not arbitrary symbolism, but built into creation.

3. Characters, places, customs, etc. can also **represent** things on higher planes, for instance, a king the leadership of truth, and a priest the leadership of love.
4. Knowledge of these principles gives us some idea of how sacred scriptures convey inner truth, but to gain fuller understanding we need to live sincerely in accord with what we already understand. Only this will enable God's light to shine through.
5. The same story may be understood as describing the spiritual growth of an individual, also of a community, church, or nation, also in a special way of Jesus as his human nature came to embody divine nature perfectly.
6. Some stories were deliberately invented to convey truths - obviously parables told by Jesus or by prophets, but also the myths of early *Genesis*, Adam and Eve, the Flood, etc. Others actually happened, yet in such a way as to express spiritual teaching.
7. The outermost level of meaning is adapted to obscure human perceptions and, if understood literally, is often very misleading. Most obviously, God is often described as angry, jealous, or changeable – the way he seems to self-centred humanity.

All these insights I find helpful or at least thought-provoking. However, I come back to the view that Swedenborg was 'exploring the spiritual dimension' and, while explorers can report generally about the land they have discovered, also add on some definite details, they cannot present a complete picture. Though hugely indebted to what he has shown, and thrilled by it, and certain that he was truly enlightened, I am sure there is much more to be learned, and some first impressions to be revised. Swedenborg wrote,

Enlightenment comes only from the Lord, and to those who love truths because they are true, and make them their guide to a useful life..... The details of the Word contain a spiritual and a celestial sense, and these senses are filled with the light of heaven. Therefore the Lord by means of them and their light floods into the natural sense of the Word and the light this sheds on man. (*Doctrine of Sacred Scripture* 57-58)

We have the opportunity to see more and more meaning in the Bible, provided of course that we seek it for use in right living.

## Quakers

Quakers too seek Light, and believe that it may come to any honest, humble, open mind who waits for it in silence. Not that light gained in this way should be regarded as final. Better to test one's insight with that of other seekers, and for some Quakers that includes the Bible's authors.

Quakers vary immensely in their opinions, some being quite traditional in their approach to the Bible, while others show no interest in it, and yet others reflect deeply about it, as shown in these passages from the collection, *Quaker Faith and Practice*, nos. 27.34, 27.30, and 27.32:

The same Spirit which inspired the writers of the Bible is the Spirit which gives us understanding of it: it is this which is important to us rather than the literal words of scripture. Hence, while quotations from the Bible may illuminate a truth for us, we would not use them to prove a truth.

We then approach the Bible not mainly to criticise, but to listen; not merely to question but to be challenged, and to open our lives penitentially both to its judgments and to its liberating gospel.

It does not contain the absolute literal truth, but it can teach us the truth of life.

The first Quakers were soaked in Scripture, but reacted against the dogmatic use of it by intellectually trained clergy. They found passages such as *John 14:26*:

The Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things, and will remind you of everything I have said to you.

*Jeremiah 31:34*:

No longer will a man teach his neighbour, or a man his brother, saying 'Know the LORD,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest.

*Joel 2:29*:

Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days.

*Numbers 11:29* (Moses' reaction to a report of 'unauthorised prophesying'):

I wish that all the LORD's people were prophets and that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!

By these they felt confirmed in their beliefs, and were convinced that 'Christ has come again to teach his people himself'.

It was the same passages that, much later, led me to question the value of having ministers specially trained and set apart, and favour a more flexible system of teaching and leadership.

### **My present belief**

The word 'inspiration' has lost much of its original meaning. It has been made vague and ordinary, meaning little different from 'a brilliant idea'. Strictly it means that, when someone is creative in writing or speech, music, drama, or any other art, something extra is 'breathed into' the process, giving the result an exceptional power or beauty. It is something beyond the creator's understanding, something for which he can claim no credit. We may explain it as 'coming from the unconscious', or from a god, spirit or muse. We can apply the term to philosophical or scientific theorising, as well as to literature, music or art, performance, oratory or preaching, charismatic prophecy and 'speaking in tongues', or what Quakers call 'vocal ministry'. But *not* to what is simply clever.

I suspect that with 'sacred scriptures', it applies not only to the initial composition, but also to many acts of recitation and copying, translating and editing, interpreting and applying to life, so that the inspiration becomes more complex, richer, deeper, having drawn on more than one spirit or unconscious mind. (The same could apply to other art-forms, enriched by many performances and interpretations, but I shall leave that to experts in those disciplines.) In any case, what people regard as sacred is particularly likely to be earnestly guarded, reflected on, and expressed anew, and so to acquire new depths of meaning and power. (Admittedly it can also happen that something of the original is lost.)

If a text has been repeatedly inspired like that, then variation and inconsistency in text or translation may not matter very much, for the truth lies deeper. Detailed analysis of it can be fascinating, maybe instructive, but what matter most are the wisdom and emotive power of the story and its characters.

Responding to them in this straightforward way is part of what Jesus meant, I think, by 'turn and become like little children'! We can then set intellect aside awhile, and grasp more richly and intensely, without quibbles or reservations.

Swedenborg wrote of such simple reverent reading as putting us in touch with angels. More generally, I suggest, with all who have contributed to passing on the story, or have received it with real spirit! Once in touch with the spirit, we may reflect on the characters, events, etc. and find in them more and more meaning. But we will not adopt a dryly intellectual, authoritative interpretation.

Is there in this approach a danger of subjectivity, seeing just what suits our selfishness or wilful imagination? Yes there is, as in so much of life, but this can be corrected by sharing our responses with one another, by offering insights but without claiming certainty for them. In exchanging and exploring freely there is the chance even of new inspiration.

That is the spirit in which I offer this book.

## B STORY

– a sketch of the story of David (*picturing someone's spiritual growth*)

### Saul and David

Three huge surprises come to a shepherd-lad of Bethlehem. First the prophet and ruler Samuel appears to anoint him as king of Israel, although he's only the youngest of eight brothers - and isn't Saul the king anyway? Next he is summoned by King Saul to use his exceptional skill with the harp to soothe the black moods brought on the king by an evil spirit. And finally, when taking provisions to his elder brothers in the army, he feels himself drawn into fighting Goliath, a gigantic Philistine warrior whom no other Israelite dares to face and, with only a shepherd's sling plus implicit faith in YHVH his God, defeats him. (For this form of God's name, see D4.)

*I see young David as personifying the simple faith of a loving heart, and these events as showing its great potential for bringing safety, peace, and order into human lives, mine included.*

Saul has had a very unpleasant surprise not long before (seemingly unknown to David) when Samuel reproved him for disobedience and told him he would therefore be replaced as king. Hadn't he served Israel in defeating the Amalekites soundly - as well as Ammonites and Philistines earlier? But YHVH's command had been to annihilate the Amalekites completely, whereas he had spared their king's life and let his troops keep the best of the sheep and cattle as plunder and for sacrifice.

'You have rejected the word of YHVH, and YHVH has rejected you as king over Israel!' So YHVH's Spirit left Saul, and the evil spirit came instead.

*I see Saul as 'surface faith' - a religion consisting in literal beliefs and commands, which does defeat many false ideas and wrong habits (boasting, lying, sexual promiscuity, dishonest dealings, etc) but sadly doesn't change inner motives and attitudes. Behind good conduct it may conceal pride, certainty in its own opinions, and contempt and suspicion towards others (the king of the Amalekites still alive). If we are to find true goodness and happiness, we need 'David' to take over and grow stronger.*

### Rise of David

So David is destined to replace Saul, but how? Will it be by promotion and peaceful hand-over, by a violent revolution (perhaps assassination), or by a complex difficult transition?

*Will surface faith willingly accept subordination to heart faith? Or is a sudden painful conversion to a radically different lifestyle needed? Or does it mean gradual patient growth in spirit, till outward religion is transformed?*

Saul makes David a high-ranking officer, his son Jonathan becomes his close friend, and his younger daughter Michal falls in love with David, who is immensely popular with everyone, so it looks briefly as though the change-over may come easily. Understandably though Saul becomes jealous of David's success and, when the evil spirit seizes him, he hurls his spear at his musician. More deliberately he twice uses the offer of a daughter in marriage to lure David into risking his life against the Philistines. David survives all that but soon it is clear that, with Michal's and Jonathan's help, he must escape to safety.

There follow several years of Saul pursuing David around the southern borders of Israel, while David (although feeling lost from his God and his people) continues to respect Saul, passes over chances to kill him, and protests his loyalty. He even promises on oath never to harm Saul or any of his family - something hardly expected of an intending usurper! During this time he does more to protect Israel from enemies than Saul does, and his influence and following increase. He also acquires two new wives, while Saul gives Michal to another man, Paltiel.

*'All you need is the right knowledge.' This mistaken idea (meant by the Philistines) is the main threat against healthy growth of the human spirit. It's what surface faith cannot fight off, but heart faith defeats it easily and consistently, and so has wide appeal to our idealism. Still, for any of us who have been long content with the straightforwardness of literal belief and obedience, this heart faith can feel alien and a threat, demanding more humility, effort and trust than we are willing to give. Surface faith insists that it remains in charge (represented by Saul continuing as king) and fiercely rejects ideas of spiritual growth. At the same time inward love and understanding grow steadily (David in exile), but without seeking precedence.*

### **The kingdom established**

The Philistines defeat Saul's army decisively, killing Saul, Jonathan, and two other sons, so David's great opportunity has arrived. Though movingly lamenting Saul and Jonathan, he soon accepts the kingship of Judah, his own tribe, and gradually wrests power from Saul's remaining son Ishbosheth, and his powerful commander Abner. David is delighted when Abner offers terms of peace, then horrified that Abner is assassinated by David's new army-commander Joab. He is king now of the whole country, but for the rest of his 33-year reign he seems unable to do without Joab's shrewd but sinister support.

*Outward religion finally ceases to be convincing, and means little to me. I lament losing it, for it has got me to where I am, but now I need a new start. My will (Judah) is ready for inward love and understanding to be in control, but my mind (northern tribes) still clings to outward forms. Then an integration seems in sight (Abner's offer of peace) but is sabotaged by a newly-powerful force. This is the urge, even while growing in spirit and lifestyle, to keep personal control, to insist on doing it in my own way (Joab).*

The united kingdom grows quickly stronger, with victories against most neighbouring nations, particularly the capturing of the Jebusite citadel, Jerusalem, where there is new building, including a royal palace. The Ark of the Covenant of YHWH is rescued from obscurity, brought up to Jerusalem with great celebration in which David dances ecstatically, and installed in a tent there. However, YHWH declines David's offer to build a house for him, replying that instead he will build one for David - a never-ending dynasty. All this increases David's prestige, as does his collecting of wives and concubines, and them bearing him sons. Saul's harem becomes his, and Michal is reclaimed from a distraught Paltiel, but sadly she now despises David, and bears no children. Remembering his promises to Saul and Jonathan, David seeks out Jonathan's crippled only son Mephibosheth, and gives him possession of Saul's estates.

*Heavenly Love establishes a strong presence in my heart (Jerusalem), and gives assurance that, through whatever changes, the character of heart faith will always endure to rule my life. That faith develops new and varied affections (wives), though the enthusiasm so striking in youth has faded (Michal), and new ideas and insights are born. It tries hard to preserve something of surface faith (Saul's family).*

## Sin and Suffering

Not much later though, David falls from grace when he seduces Bathsheba, making her pregnant, then engineers the death of her husband Uriah in battle. He seems for the moment to forget YHWH completely, but of course is soon denounced by the prophet Nathan. He is frankly repentant, and quickly forgiven, but accepts that he must suffer the consequences, chiefly that 'the sword shall never depart from your house'.

This proves true in several ways, notably in his son Absalom leading a rebellion against him, which nearly succeeds. (I find the account - in 2S15-16 - of David's prudent withdrawal from Jerusalem very moving.) He is saved by the loyalty of many of his warriors and others, and of course by YHWH's continuing favour, but Absalom's death (unnecessarily fixed by Joab) distresses him hugely.

*My faith hungers to justify itself, to lay claim to simple innocence (Bathsheba), but in doing so destroys straightforward uprightness (Uriah), and brings down on me much distortion and pain - conflict of developing ideas, and affections abused. Heart faith is nearly dethroned by the wish for approval and admiration (Absalom), but gains fresh perception, patience, and perseverance.*

## Setting things in order

David's character grows with his suffering, from a straightforward confidence in what he can do under YHWH's guidance, to a more humble trust that YHWH will accomplish what is right, with or without David's help. Troubles continue for him - famine, due to a past sin of Saul's, which must be painfully expiated (this prompting him to rebury Saul and Jonathan in their ancestral tomb), and later a plague to punish David's illegal counting up of warriors. But people's loyalty and love for David endure too (expressed sometimes as heroic devotion), as does his basic concern for them and for following YHWH's will. While revered as 'the Lamp of Israel', he has to leave active conflict to younger men. His valiant champions are impressively listed, and he expresses his gratitude in poetry. Eventually, having ruled for forty years, he ensures that Bathsheba's son Solomon will succeed him - aware of the importance of following YHWH, and free from the dubious loyalty of people like Joab.

*Tidying up my spiritual character is a muddled business, a mix of pain and joy. The key to it is ceasing to claim any power or merit as my own (no counting up warriors), while appreciating what I've received from others, and praising Love as the greatest power of all. Then I'm ready for a new stage in life (Solomon), its character not yet clear, but honesty, trust, and obedience to Love all-important.*

## C SCENES

### - retold with reflections

In this section I have retold seventeen dramatic incidents from the story, done so fairly freely, filling in some context, imagining some details and dialogue, raising a few questions. I have tried not to distort or to speculate unduly, but I shall not be surprised if some readers think I have done so. Because these incidents are not continuous, you may need to check in Summaries (Part G) or in the Bible itself to be clear what is going on. I have added some of the spiritual messages I find in each scene, seeing Saul, David, and the rest all as elements within my own character, but I claim no authority for these. I shall be very content if others are stimulated to find different messages.

- 1 Anointing the Shepherd Boy** - *Realising the potential of heart faith*
- 2 Defeating Goliath** - *Throwing off the domination of doctrine*
- 3 Saul Possessed** - *My unease about 'this spirituality'*
- 4 Fleeing from Saul's Court** - *Settling for a slower path to 'the kingdom'*
- 5 Atrocity at Nob** - *The terrifying power of persistent literalism*
- 6 Marrying Abigail** - *Sorting out my motives*
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- 16 Over to Solomon** - *Trusting the way ahead*
- 17 Water from Bethlehem** - *for whom?*

## **1. ANOINTING THE SHEPHERD BOY (1S16:1-13)**

'What's bringing the great prophet Samuel to a little place like Bethlehem?' the town elders wonder. A common human instinct makes them fear trouble, but Samuel assures them he has come in peace, his purpose to sacrifice an offering. 'But still why here? And what's his interest in the family of Jesse?'

Samuel too is uneasy. He's been sent by YHVH's compelling voice within him to anoint one of Jesse's sons to be king and, if Saul the reigning king should hear of it, it could be Samuel who's in trouble. After all it's not so long since he was told to anoint Saul. It's not easy being a man of God!

Saul had been an impressive young man then, taller than anyone else in Israel. So now, when Eliab the eldest son appears, a young man of similar physical presence, Samuel assumes he has found Saul's successor, but the voice inside corrects him:

'Don't think about his looks or his height, for he's not the one I want. YHVH does not look in the way that humans do. Humans look at outward appearance, but YHVH looks at the heart.'

Six more sons follow but none brings the inner affirmation Samuel is waiting for. That comes, clear as daybreak, only when David is fetched from working with the sheep. He is a fine-looking lad, tanned from the wind and sun, but can YHVH really mean this youngster to be the next king?

'Get up and anoint him,' answers the voice. 'This is the one.' So Samuel anoints David then and there. We have no record of people's reactions, but presumably everyone present is staggered, most of all David. Still, 'from that day,' the story goes, 'YHVH's Spirit comes over David in power.'

### ***Realising the potential of heart faith***

*David starts as a simple country boy. His job is minding sheep and he does it well, bravely tackling a lion, a bear, and no doubt wolves that threaten his flock. As a youngest son, he's not likely to be called on for great things. His three eldest brothers are in King Saul's army, liable to be called on for Israel's defence, and he may be needed to carry food or messages to them, but he's not likely to see more than that of great affairs.*

*There may be a similarly modest beginning to my spiritual growth. Just a concern for 'sheep', the timid but very useful feelings I keep around me for warmth and nourishment. They're not exciting or impressive but life would be very difficult without them, so I guard them against violent and destructive feelings, and in a world of aggression and arrogance that does sometimes take conviction and courage. It needs faith in the power of goodness, felt in the heart. Still I don't expect anything more dramatic to develop.*

*However, to my great surprise comes a prophetic insight: This simple heart faith is to be the basis for a great spiritual future! I realised, of course, that my surface faith was mostly just thinking, not working well, and simply wouldn't do as it was. But it (Saul) is still there, and surely the main thing in my life, the controlling principle. However, the prophetic insight is very clear. I feel sure it is from the Spirit of Truth, so I must affirm it - do so with love, honouring it as God's intention. And having done so, I feel such power in it!*

## **2. DEFEATING GOLIATH (1S17)**

'Can this really be happening?' David wonders, 'me against Goliath the Philistine champion? Not big brother Eliab, or the great Saul, or valiant Jonathan, but me answering the challenge against Israel?'

Spread out behind him are what he calls 'the armies of the living God' - a splendid sight!

'But how can they be scared of this weird character? Sure, he's big. So is his spear, and it's impressive armour he's wearing, but he's only a Philistine. Their men aren't even circumcised, everyone says, so he doesn't have YHVVH's protection, like us, and it's he who should be afraid of us. Why are our men chattering about rewards, money and king's daughters, when any of them could do this as well as me?'

Only a short time earlier he arrived at the Valley of Elah, bringing food for his brothers and a present for their commander, and was thrilled to see so many fine warriors. Then he heard the insolent challenge, and everyone was surprised at his contempt for it - except big brother Eliab who put him down as usual - and then incredibly he was called to see the king, who called him 'just a boy' and thought he should wear all that heavy armour.

'Now comes the test,' he realises. 'Goliath does look huge and ferocious now I'm closer, but no more so than that lion I killed last month. YHVVH's right beside me, he knows I can do it. He's made me a fine shot with a sling, and I've found some good smooth stones, so here goes the first!'

At once Goliath falls dead, all his might and his armour useless, and the Israelite army is suddenly brave again, and too strong for their demoralised enemies.

### ***Throwing off the domination of doctrine***

*The subjects of Love's kingdom face a powerful challenge. An idea has gained ground - that the true way to happiness is to conform to certain beliefs. It is professing this set of beliefs, rather than following the laws of Love, that will bring divine approval and the reward of heaven. Such is the current thinking. Of course I don't want my will-to-good (Israel, YHVVH's people) to be bound in this way, yet my mind is scared of getting it wrong, and dominated by religious authority, which is determined to control me. So all my thinking is petrified, unable to resist this huge alien falsity.*

*That is, until heart faith grows strong in me - until David the Anointed appears on the scene, filled with the Spirit of Love and confident that 'All you need is correct belief' is a godless nonsense, concocted by enemies of the Truth. With this confidence he needs only a few commonsense ideas to slay the frightening giant, and revive the spiritual lifestyle.*

*The conflict is not over yet, because my faith is still mainly at the surface-level (Saul still king). The Philistine nonsense will keep finding new forms with which to control me but, given the chance, heart faith will conquer it every time.*

### 3. SAUL POSSESSED (1S16:14-23; 18:8-11)

Saul is troubled - by an evil spirit from YHVH, they say. It used to be YHVH's own Spirit that empowered him to lead Israel to victory, but now that Spirit is withdrawn, and instead Saul is subject to dark moods. Fear, jealousy, and resentment have taken him over.

One thing has relieved his moods, David playing the harp. He has been doing so for a while, since before his famous defeat of Goliath, and the king has liked and been pleased with him. His music has driven the evil spirit away at times. (Saul seems to have difficulty in linking David's different roles.)

Anyway recently it's not been working well. The trouble is that David has become so popular, the crowds even praising him for killing more enemies than Saul has. Apparently Jonathan's very taken with him, and other army leaders too. Could David really be the 'neighbour' that Samuel warned him would soon be taking his place?

Today Saul is talking away strangely and fidgeting with his spear, while David is trying his best to make the music soothing, but with no clear effect. Suddenly Saul is on his feet, turns and hurls the spear at David.

'I'll pin him to the wall!' he shouts, but David steps aside just in time, and eludes a second throw too. He blames the evil spirit, not Saul himself, but still he has to escape to safety.

#### ***My unease about 'this spirituality'***

*An evil spirit of self-importance and self-justification is always watching for any chance of taking me over. If I feel unfairly treated, or expected to change in ways I don't want to, it makes me dwell on supposed injustices, then surges in to build up my resentment into anger. What a black mood!*

*This can be relieved by higher truths sounding sweetly in my mind, reminding me of the beauty and rightness of God's ways, so that I forget my grievances. It is growing heart faith (David-in-me) which shows me this.*

*But this heart faith is part of the trouble! It threatens to take control away from me, make me soft and forgiving, absorb me into a process I don't understand - except that I'm sure I shall be less important, if I survive at all. Dammit, I'll snatch this chance to get rid of it, transfix it with my strong certainty!*

#### **4. FLEEING FROM SAUL'S COURT (1S20:11-15,35-42;18:24-27;19:11-17)**

David is lying uncomfortably in a sheltered hollow, wondering when Jonathan and his boy will come. How different from the splendour of his lifestyle in the court at Gibeah until recently! If only Jonathan has managed to really convince Saul of his innocence! But even then Saul can alter again, he's so changeable.

David hears distant voices, then the whistle and thud of an arrow and the boy come running, and Jonathan's clear call, 'Isn't the arrow beyond you?' His heart sinks, for that's the signal that he will have to leave. He keeps hidden while Jonathan sends the boy off, then greets the prince humbly and gratefully. But Jonathan embraces him with tears, confirming that Saul is indeed still angry and vengeful, and David needs to get well clear of him. They promise lasting friendship, and part.

When will he see his friend again? Jonathan has been so generous towards him, virtually saying David should be the next king, then speaking up for him against Saul's jealous anger. David had no hesitation in promising never to harm Jonathan or any of his family. How could Jonathan think he needed to ask?

And his devoted new young wife? Will Michal be all right? Saul's fury can be terrible and, if he finds out that she helped David to escape the soldiers earlier, she will be in real danger. Yet Saul offered his daughter to David, after demanding a hard bride-price, as he thought. ('A hundred Philistines' foreskins? Weird, but not really hard. Was he really expecting - hoping? - they would kill me?') David has played his part, and what more can he do? To be separated like this so soon after their marriage is dreadful, for she loves him so beautifully.

Still, maybe his getting well away will give Saul time to come round. That's surely what YHWH has planned and will bring about. If only it's not too long a wait!

#### ***Settling for a slower path to 'the kingdom'***

*I'm torn apart! If only I could get myself in balance. I (David-and-Jonathan-in-me) can see that my surface faith isn't enough, and I'm thrilled to explore more inward faith and feeling. It's like a love affair, plus a feeling of safeness with a wonderful friend!*

*Yet I (Saul-in-me) feel bound to keep up outward literal belief and outward observance and good conduct in the way I always have. That's what I want. I worry where heart faith is leading me, what demands it will make of me, how I shall feel lost and out-of-control.*

*Yes, I (still the Saul part of me) know spiritual thinking solves theological puzzles well, amazingly well, and part of me loves it for this. If only it weren't so successful! If only it would get beaten in arguments (defeated by Philistines)! It just infuriates me, and makes me loathe my own softness and kindness. I'd rather be simply correct and strong.*

*I (David) feel the dilemma. So I'll keep thinking about spiritual growth and what it will involve, prepare the way for it, but I won't be in a hurry to change yet. Surely things will be easier later.*

## 5. ATROCITY AT NOB (1S21:1-9; 22:6-23)

David is hiding in the forest of Hereth, building a private army from a few hundred varied fugitives, but wondering if there's anywhere safe for him, where Saul can't track him down to kill him. At least he has ensured his parents are safe with the king of Moab.

A young priest arrives, tired and distressed. Whatever can be wrong? How has he found them? He brings horrifying news. Except for himself, all the priests at Nob have been killed by Saul's men, all their families too.

David at once knows why, and is struck with guilt. It's because Ahimelech, this priest's father, helped him when he first went on the run, giving him the consecrated bread, as well as Goliath's sword. And he hadn't explained that he was fleeing Saul's anger, pretended instead that Saul had sent him unexpectedly on a special mission. Will YHVH be angry and punish his deception?

While feverishly reflecting, he assures weary worried Abiathar that he can stay and will be safe with David. He can be useful too, David notes, for he has brought with him the precious ephod, through which priests seek guidance from YHVH.

His deception was surely necessary. He could not explain to Ahimelech the complex troubles at court, and without bread he might not have survived till now. Nor could he stop Doeg without giving himself away. (Saul's nasty chief shepherd was there at the time and must have told Saul about it.) Doeg, he now learns, carried out the massacre, since no one else was willing to obey Saul's outrageous command. What horribly excessive punishment – even if there had been any guilt!

The evil spirits that keep getting into Saul are fearsome. What else might they drive him to? Are they really controlled by YHVH? If so, why are they allowed, for what good reason? Without priests Israel would be a sad and difficult place! Yet YHVH must have a plan, and somehow all will come right.

### ***The terrifying power of persistent literalism***

*I can't help trying all the time to see the inner truth and beauty of life, and realise that my old outward good conduct and attitudes are inadequate. That's the David-in-me. I'm trying to stay hidden away, here in a dry land of study and speculation, but Saul-in-me knows I'm somewhere here, and the conventional belief in me is angry about my David-thinking, scared to lose the familiar ways, and furious at these new developments even in theory.*

*'The worst thing,' says my surface faith, 'is that the supposedly holy things I hear and feel in worship (the priests) seem to support this spirituality. They're taking its side, wanting me to change, step aside, make way for him. Well, I won't! I'll smash them first. I don't mean I'll stop going to church or let my standards of behaviour slip, but I won't allow these feelings to get under my skin. I can be a perfectly good and reverent person without them.'*

*And in my spiritual thinking I wonder, is it necessary to cause all this trouble? Should surface faith be accepted as sufficient after all, to avoid such ugliness and pain? The path of love and truth is so hard at times! Still, it must surely be better in the end.*

## 6. MARRYING ABIGAIL (1S25)

'So Nabal's dead, his heart turned to stone? Praise YHVH!' The news has just come to David at the stronghold, the safest place he's found yet.

He and his men had kept an eye on Nabal's flocks and shepherds lately, seen that no desert tribes could attack them or snatch sheep away. But, when shearing time arrived, and David requested a share of the abundance usually evident at such occasions, Nabal refused in a really offensive way.

'So yes, he richly deserved to die, but it was for YHVH to decide, not me. To think I nearly destroyed him in my rage, and all of his innocent household with him! And how bravely and tactfully his lovely wife forestalled me - and what generous gifts she offered.'

He recalls Abigail coming to meet his retribution-raid, her servants laden with food, then the impressive show of humble apology and flattery, and even better her crediting him with such fine qualities of mercy and justice, and being under YHVH's favour and guidance. He remembers his anger melting away, then thanking her warmly and accepting her gifts. Now he learns that, when next day she told Nabal what she had done, the shock brought on a fatal illness.

'What an admirable woman!' he reflects, 'and now a widow. A very intelligent one, brave, and excitingly beautiful. I could support another wife, and it's expected for leaders like me to have several wives. I'm very fortunate to have Ahinoam, but Abigail has extra qualities that I'd greatly value and enjoy - if she'll agree.'

'What about Michal who loved me so passionately and bravely - shall I ever see her again? And will she still love me after all that's happened? Or will Saul have turned her against me? It's said he's given her to another man.'

So messengers are sent, and soon Abigail arrives, seemingly glad to be David's.

### **Sorting out my motives**

*Delighting in the truth, simply for its nobility, its strength, its exactness, its capacity for explaining and relating - it's a very beautiful thing. (It's Abigail-in-me.) I've felt it for a long time but lately, reflecting here at leisure, I've realised something dreadful – and something exciting.*

*As my life's been enriched in all sorts of ways - knowledge, skills, opportunities, achievements - I haven't really wanted it to benefit or please other people, to be good for the world, even to contribute to developing my own character. I've just wanted to hoard it all for my own enjoyment, or my sense of superiority. When it's occurred to me that some of it might be shared with others, I've been indignant. No, they're mine! (That's Nabal-in-me)*

*Now I see that I've managed an amazing combination of delighting in truth and ignoring much of its application to me (Abigail married to Nabal). What an impossible partnership! So my growing heart faith (David) has been furious at myself, moved to self-destruction. Thank God that love for truth intervened in time, assuring me that I can be patient, allow that vile self-absorption to expire of itself, and avoid spoiling the healthy ideas and feelings that have belonged with it.*

*Clearly this delight in truth (Abigail) is something I need close to me continually, married to me. Other affections are good too, but with this I can build a really delightful partnership. That will be better than the shallow youthful zeal I started out with (Michal).*

## 7. GRIEVOUS LOSS: GREAT OPPORTUNITY (2S1)

'How the powerful have fallen! What courage and virtue have perished!' David can hardly believe that both Saul and Jonathan are dead, his king and his dearest friend killed in this latest battle against the Philistines.

Indeed the word of that young Amalekite is hardly to be believed - claiming that Saul asked to be finished off, having the effrontery to admit that he had presumed to take the life of the YHWH's Anointed One! Yet the crown and arm-band are genuine. He could only have taken them from Saul's dead body, and then why should he lie about Jonathan? He seemed to think David would be pleased with him for finishing Saul off, to expect a reward, but in David's view what he deserved was death.

They have wept and fasted, tearing their clothes, as mourning requires, but David is still mourning deeply in spirit. His best friend lost, such a brave and skilled warrior, who loved him more than anyone he knew. And King Saul, about whom only the good should be remembered - his skill and courage, and how much Israel owed to him. The mountains, as well as the people, should be weeping at this tragedy.

Now his real testing time has come. He must take Saul's place, as YHWH's prophet told him. Building Israel's safety and prosperity will call for all his courage, wisdom, and power of leadership. And who can he work with? Will Abner and the rest of Saul's family accept him? Or will there be disagreements and jealousies still, people wanting vengeance and power? (There's still Ishbosheth to claim Saul's throne.) What hope is there of uniting them against those Philistines?

A daunting situation! It will help though to honour past achievements and lost comrades. His own tribe, as well as Saul's, must be reminded in song ....

'Saul and Jonathan - in life they were loved and gracious,  
and in death they were not parted.  
They were swifter than eagles and stronger than lions.  
Daughters of Israel, weep for Saul,  
who clothed you in scarlet and finery,  
who adorned your garments with ornaments of gold.  
How the powerful have fallen in battle!'

### ***Spiritual collapse before rebuilding***

*This is dreadful! Church worship means almost nothing to me now, and I feel no obligation to observe the commandments precisely. All this theological argument about correct belief has ruled out kindness and obedience as essentials of religion, and though I value them at heart as expressions of love and faith, my life's a great unstructured muddle. How can things that have meant so much to me and to others (my Saul and Jonathan) - how can they be 'dead and gone'?*

*It is of course what I've foreseen and been preparing for. It's a marvellous opportunity to build my religious life from scratch on a sounder spiritual basis. But it's daunting. Where do I start? I'm not really prepared, and there are so many beliefs to be reconsidered, motives to be purified (the Israelites to be led and unified). Will my mind be a mass of conflicts way ahead?*

*I only realised the situation fully when that nasty little impulse to dishonesty (the Amalekite) appeared out of the blue. At least I've killed that off! I suppose I had to lose my literal beliefs, and stop being good simply as obedience, but couldn't it have happened another way?*

*Well, the Spirit will get things straight gradually. For the moment I must reaffirm the beauty and value of straightforward belief and practical virtue (Saul and Jonathan). They've got me where I am, and whatever new life I develop will surely owe a great deal to them. They've been like great warriors against injustice and wicked ideas. They've been warm friends of my soul, and brought me such a wealth of religious feelings and thoughts. What's happened is tragic!*

## 8. ABNER ASSASSINATED (2S3)

What! Joab's killed Abner? How appalling, thinks David, and disastrous! Was he taking revenge for his brother Asahel? That's not fair. Asahel was stupidly rash to challenge a hardened warrior like Abner, who had no choice but to kill him. Anyway it was treacherous and cowardly of Joab, pretending to start a private conversation with Abner, then stabbing him! Why not have the courage to challenge him as Asahel had done? Besides, was revenge all there was to it? Or was he afraid Abner might get to wield more influence than him? Was it about personal jealousy more than family honour? Joab's an excellent army commander but in this ....

There was David thinking the long struggle between his supporters and Saul's was over, and he was so glad and grateful to Abner for having the good sense and humility to recognise David's claim, and offer terms of peace. He'd always respected Abner as a solid honest loyal Israelite, even when he supported Ishbosheth's claim to succeed Saul. He was right to welcome Abner as an ally, with feasting and trust – no matter how great Joab's suspicion and resentment towards him.

Now the Benjamites and the rest will be furious, and rightly so. He and his supporters will be accused of bad faith. He will have to denounce Joab vehemently, which he thoroughly deserves, then lead the mourning for Abner and heap every possible honour on him – which *he* deserves. Curse Joab! No doubt YHVH will indeed do so, pour every hurt possible on him and his family.

So David orders official mourning rites for Abner, and leads the ceremony himself, paying generous tribute to his former opponent, so that no one can doubt he has been honest in making peace. And everyone seems to accept that and be pleased, and the peace between Israel and Judah holds secure. But Joab just stays quiet, and David ends by admitting lamely,

'Today, though I am the anointed king, I am weak, and these sons of Zeruiah are too strong for me.'

### ***Right action killed by self-conscious calculation***

*I find this powerful. I really want to live a good life in a straightforward, honest and genuine way (unite with Abner). I do, but something keeps stopping me. It's this urge to keep control, to calculate what will give the best impression (Joab), whereas simple honesty may leave me open to misunderstanding or contempt - David is my good intention, which should be king, ruling everything I say and do. But he has an able chief-of-staff, a resolute character named Joab, who often reckons he knows better than David, and has no intention of letting matters slip out of his control. (There's also my love of argument - Abishai, the other surviving son of Zeruiah – who's a bit torn between David and Joab.)*

*How fine it's going to be, I feel, if my habitual conscientious conduct (called Abner), which has always followed literal rules, now accepts the final authority of my heartfelt good intention (David). This will bring a new unity and power to my life. But no! says Joab, That would leave calculation out of the picture, limiting my freedom of choice. Such a possibility terrifies my self-awareness. So literal obedience must die! All I do must be planned and managed.*

*Good intention is horrified for it has always valued obedience. My habitual thought patterns (Saul's followers) see it the same way, so they need reassuring (David honouring Abner). Moreover I'm genuinely furious with the calculating dissembling part of myself, long to disown it, and see it as bound for a nasty end. That will no doubt come, but not yet, for I still cannot face life without maintaining a front.*

## 9. TRIUMPH IN JERUSALEM (2S6)

David is dancing with all his might! At the head of the imposing procession, wearing a kilt-like ephod, he leaps and dances with total abandon, while trumpets blast, and great crowds of people shout and sing and clap, thrilled with their high-spirited warm-hearted young king and all that he is achieving - uniting the tribes, routing the Philistines, and capturing Jerusalem.

His particular achievement now is to have brought the Ark of YHWH safely to Jerusalem. Just behind him priests are carrying the huge ornamental chest, the impressive symbol of Israel's God, up to the massive hill-top citadel which he and his army have captured, and made the centre of an increasingly powerful kingdom. This is full of significance for Israel, for they have all heard how the Ark guided their ancestors through the desert from Egypt to Canaan.

It was lost to the Philistines in battle when the venerable Samuel was still a child and, though soon miraculously returned, it frightened people with its power to harm anyone who failed to treat it with awe. Tradition teaches that it holds the tablets of the Law, which YHWH himself inscribed and gave to Moses on Mount Sinai, but when some men tried to look inside seventy of them died. So throughout Saul's reign it remained at Kiriath Jearim near the border, guarded by a single priest. David made one earlier attempt to bring it up, but again someone died for even daring to steady the Ark with his hand, and angrily David gave up - until now.

So this is a great religious and national occasion, and a great day in David's life. After so many victories this seems to be the final mark of YHWH's favour. Little wonder then that David leaps and dances with such zeal, honouring YHWH his God, or that he offers sacrifices, then personally distributes bread, dates and raisins to the people. How delightful to think of that tough warrior showing childlike joy, the powerful king not standing on ceremony but happily mixing with his people, sharing his excitement and thankfulness with everyone!

However, there is one person who cannot share it - Michal, his first wife. Seeing from a window her husband's dancing, she heartily despises him and, when at last he reaches home, she greets him sarcastically:

"How the king has distinguished himself today, exposing himself in front of his servants' slave girls, as any vulgar fellow might!"

She has not always been like this. Years earlier she loved the brave young warrior, and was thrilled to become his wife. She risked her own position to help him escape from her father's anger. But then he spent years as an outlaw, and acquired other wives, while her father gave her to Paltiel instead. When eventually after her father's death David became king and reclaimed her, it was no longer a love match. Nor did it help that his other wives bore him sons while she remained barren.

Still David feels unashamed, and protests that his dancing was in front of YHWH.

'I will celebrate before him. I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honour.'

## ***Ecstasy in working with God***

*This incident seems to me to express David's essential character (which I feel all too infrequently) - fearless, joyful, energetic commitment to the role he believes himself to have been destined for, uninhibited by mistakes, setbacks, or criticisms. This character will show in me when I take the truth of God's loving way to heart, set it at the centre of my being and living. That truth (the Ark) can hurt me when I misuse it, treat it merely with curiosity, call on it to justify my selfish motives or actions, or expect it to 'fight my battles'. But once established in my heart and mind (my central citadel) it will bring a wonderful security, peace and joy.*

*Not that everything will be perfect then. A shallow longing for dramatic or impressive externals (Michal), that seemed so brave and beautiful in youth, may linger in my mind, objecting that this is not how things should be. And the exhilaration of setting God's truth at the centre will sometimes be forgotten, especially when I hanker for other thrills. Yet, because it is essential and beautiful, it will not be destroyed.*

## 10. DAVID DENOUNCED (2S11-12)

David is seething with indignation at what he's been told by YHVH's prophet Nathan, about a rich man who stole a poor neighbour's beloved only lamb to feed a visitor, instead of using one from his own plentiful flocks.

'The man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.' But the indignation quickly changes when Nathan rejoins,

'You are that man!'

It's a parable he has been telling, not plain fact, and David surely guesses the meaning before Nathan spells it out. He's exposing David's shameful adultery with the wife of one of his warriors, while the husband was away fighting. Bathsheba is the lamb. Uriah her husband is - or rather, was - her owner. And he, David, stole her to satisfy his appetite, although he had numerous women of his own.

That's not the worst. (Nathan's parable was too restrained!) When Bathsheba told him of her pregnancy, and he could not hide his guilt by calling Uriah back from battle - because that upright man observed the traditional ritual law and would not sleep with his wife during a campaign - he plotted with Joab to make sure that Uriah would be killed by the Ammonites, then claimed Bathsheba as another wife for himself.

Weakly now he admits his guilt, and listens with resigned remorse as Nathan announces YHVH's sentence on him:

'Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from your house .... Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you .... I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel .... YHVH has taken away your sin. You are not going to die, but because by doing this you have shown utter contempt for YHVH, the son born to you will die.'

(How are these punishments carried out? Chapters 13-18 are full of violent calamities in David's family, also (at 16:20-22) the violation by his rebellious son of ten of David's concubines. First Bathsheba's new-born son dies, but before very long she bears another - the future King Solomon.)

### ***Through rottenness to something like innocence***

*This is a key event in David's life, a huge and shocking turning point. It cries out for explanation and careful reflection - even more than all the other events. First I have so many questions about the literal story: Is David being wickedly self-indulgent, staying at home and leaving the conduct of the war to Joab? Is Bathsheba, in bathing where David might see her, being provocative? Is she as totally passive as the narrative makes her seem?*

*How could noble David possibly behave like this? Surely he's not simply overpowered by sexual desire. Does Bathsheba represent something more to him - an escape from the stress of kingship to simple goodness and beauty? (He doesn't achieve that, of course, but it all ends up with the birth of Solomon which, at least initially, seems good.)*

*How can David think that the God he so trusts and venerates will not know of his offence, or will overlook it? And how can YHVH still accept and trust David afterwards? I can only imagine David as knowing it's all wrong and bound to call down YHVH's wrath, but obstinately pushing it to the back of his mind. Still he's*

*unsurprised and uncomplaining when everything's exposed. He's as complex and changeable as any of us, and in that sense instructive. But he's also a symbol. So of course is YHVH - incredible as a Divine person (barbaric in his punishments!) but still a powerful picture of 'how life works'.*

*I'm quite puzzled by Nathan's parable. I appreciate the basic idea of someone rich and powerful dreadfully misusing his position, but from study of other parables I expect it to do more. Does Uriah need and care for Bathsheba as much as the poor man for his lamb? Is David's interest in her as casual as a visiting traveller? Or do the poor man and his lamb represent, not two people, but ideals of virtue which David has violated?*

*While searching for answers, I come up with my own provisional message:*

*Bathsheba and the lamb stand for the simple innocence I once had (as 'a shepherd-lad') and feel it would be so wonderful to regain. Uriah and the poor man are the clear humble trust and uprightness, which belong with such innocence but are no longer possible for me. (Not completely lost, apparently. Uriah is still listed as one of David's heroes in chapter 23.) When I have grown through trials, successes and reverses, learning some wisdom by them, it's wrong and foolish of me to pretend that I possess simple childlike innocence (to steal Bathsheba). Doing so destroys something fine and true in me (kills Uriah), and sets off all sorts of problems - represented by YHVH's sentence. These are not imposed by an angry vengeful god (though they may feel so to me) but result inevitably from the distortion I have myself chosen.*

*I shall be torn apart by different ways of seeing myself and my responsibilities - the sword dividing David's family, bringing the deaths of three of his eldest sons. These conflicts in my own mind will violate in an obvious way some of my dearest intentions and delights - David's wives ravished in broad daylight. And my foolish attempt at attaining innocence will fail - Bathsheba's son to die.*

*Nevertheless my God forgives me and stays true to his promises. The rule of Love will continue to grow in me, I'll carry on my quest for heavenly happiness, and in the sadness and soberness of failure a new stage begins to take shape (Solomon). Although my efforts can never regain the innocence of infancy, in repentance and humility I can mercifully be given something very like it (a changed Bathsheba).*

## 11. DAVID INTO EXILE

(2S15:13 –16:14)

How steep it seems, this slope of the Mount of Olives! A way David has walked vigorously many times before, setting out on campaigns from which he's later returned by the same way triumphant. But this time will he return at all? He and most of his household are fleeing for their lives, frightened and tearful at the recent turn of events. There are skilled and valiant troops with him, impressively loyal in this crisis, but will they be enough? Might it have been better to stay in Jerusalem, clinging to the safety and familiarity of the great citadel? Probably not. The rebels could have arrived before there was time to make defences properly ready, and anyway he would not have wanted to subject the people to the horrors of a siege.

Reports say that most of the country now wants David's son Absalom as king. Little wonder, for he's so charming and handsome, and makes a glamorous show with his chariot and runners - unlike his father who cares little for luxury or show. He can pretend friendly sympathy for people's troubles, and apparently has been criticising David's administration of justice, claiming he would do much better. It's heart-breaking that his best-loved son should be trying to overthrow and replace David, but it doesn't surprise him. He knows he was remiss in the matter of Absalom's sister Tamar and their half-brother Amnon - letting Amnon lure her deceitfully, doing nothing to punish him for raping her, nor to support or comfort his daughter, then not guessing at Absalom's scheme of vengeance, and neither punishing nor excusing him. His sons' doings are a puzzle and a distress to David, but then what should he expect?

'The sword shall never depart from your house.' Wasn't that YHWH's decree?

It's distressing too that Ahithophel has joined the rebellion - someone whose advice he has so respected. Hopefully YHWH will turn any advice he gives to Absalom into nonsense. Soon comes the news that Jonathan's son Mephibosheth too has stayed in Jerusalem, hoping that the people will restore to him his grandfather Saul's kingdom. What gratitude for David's friendship!

Yet these griefs and worries are balanced by the loyal support and assistance of others. Mephibosheth's steward Ziba who brings, with the bad news of his master, welcome supplies of food on donkeys. Old Hushai is waiting at the hill-top, and he agrees to pretend joining Absalom while really spying for David. The priests, Zadok and Abiathar, bring the Ark of YHWH as protection, and offer sacrifices, but David tells them to take the Ark back to where it belongs, assuring them that he is content to trust in YHWH's powerful protection - or punishment, if that's what he deserves. Ittai too, with his six hundred men from Gath, the old enemy, along with their families. Why on earth should these mercenary soldiers be loyal to him? He says as much to Ittai, tells him he is quite entitled to stay with Absalom.

'You came only yesterday, and today shall I make you wander with us, when I do not know where I am going?' But the answer is prompt and clear,

'As surely as YHWH lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king may be, whether it means life or death, there will your servant be.' So the weariness of the march is lightened.

What a contrast now with Shimei, Saul's distant kinsman but still David's own countryman. As they approach Bahurim, Shimei appears from the town, brimming with the old resentment, and boldly expressing it now that he reckons David is finished. Stones and curses, accusations and insults fly from him.

'Get out, get out, you man of blood, you scoundrel! ....You've come to ruin because you're a man of blood.'

To Abishai, loyal and impetuous as ever, this treason calls for death, and he's eager to 'cut off the dead dog's head', but David sees it quite differently.

'If he is cursing because YHVH said to him, "Curse David," who can ask "Why do you do this?" .... Leave him alone .... It may be that YHVH will see my distress and repay me with good for the cursing I am receiving today.'

### ***Compelled to think afresh***

*I'm moved by David's distressing situation. What a comedown for the great king! Even more moving is his humble acceptance that he deserves it all, and that maybe YHVH intends Absalom to succeed. Also moving is the loyalty of some of his subjects, even Philistine mercenaries.*

*I do wonder sometimes if I may have taken a wrong direction. Certainly I've made mistakes. So could it be that a radical change is needed (Absalom taking David's place)? Now that rule by higher truth is (I hope) fairly well established, the main threats of falsity defeated, should I think about making its working attractive, pleasant, impressive? Some of my attitudes and feelings (Israelites) clearly favour such a change, and I can see that others might fit in with it quite easily.*

*Of course I don't want my central motivation and belief (David) to die out, or feel totally obsolete or unappreciated, and clearly some parts of my mind are holding fast to that approach, which is gratifying, and I want to safeguard them. Some ideas I am very sure of. Yet there may be something I have to learn from even the most reactionary and hostile doubts (Shimei). I must keep an open lively mind, and let the Truth show itself.*

## 12. DAVID'S DEATH WISH (2S18:19 – 19:8)

'O my son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you!'

Ahimaaz is thrilled to be bringing great news of victory, David's army having routed Absalom's. 'All is well!' proclaims Ahimaaz but the Cushite messenger who arrives just after him knows that Absalom is dead. The latter news seems to be all King David cares about and, when the army returns to the city soon afterwards, he takes no notice, still overcome at the loss of his rebellious son. No one dares to celebrate.

How puzzling it all is! As soon as news of the rebellion came, David wisely withdrew from Jerusalem. He prayed that Absalom would get bad advice, and laid careful plans for foiling his campaign. Yet he seemed half to expect Absalom to succeed, even to hope for that, suggesting that it might be YHWH's wish. Before the battle he urged his commanders not to harm the rebel leader, and now he is heart-broken at his army's success!

One person, however, is not going to tolerate this nonsense. Joab confronts David and scathingly rebukes him,

'I see that you'd be pleased if Absalom were alive today and all of us dead,' then sternly warns him, 'If you don't go out and encourage your men, not one will be left with you by nightfall. It will be the worst calamity of your life.' And David meekly obeys.

Has anyone told him that it was Joab who killed Absalom - deliberately and unnecessarily, since the prince was helpless, caught in the branches of an oak tree by his fine hair? In a very short time David will appoint Amasa, another nephew who had fought for Absalom, as commander in place of Joab. Yet Joab is not so easily got rid of.

### ***Being given strength to fight on***

*I am deeply attracted to 'the Absalom approach'. What a relief it would be to rest from the spiritual struggle, and allow myself more pleasure and display in what has been achieved, the spiritual state I have reached! David-in-me is weary, doubts his true value, and so is ready for this.*

*But it is not what the loyal, the stronger army was fighting for! Ittai, Abishai, Joab and their troops drew on their courage and skill in defending David, so that he would continue to lead and inspire them. The best part of me wants to keep learning and growing in spirit, work with God to spread and strengthen the kingdom further.*

*Joab of course (my calculating self-awareness) is not straightforward. What motivates him to murder Absalom, then drag David out of his mourning? He tells me I must maintain my self-respect and my reputation with others. That means sticking to the hard strenuous path, keeping control of things.*

### 13. RIZPAH AND THE BONES (2S21:1-14)

'She's still there, you know, scaring off the vultures. At night too, they say, she's not afraid of wolves or anything, won't let them touch those precious bodies. You wouldn't think she had the strength.'

David wants to know whom his servants are discussing, and they tell him,

'It's Aiah's daughter, Rizpah, my Lord, guarding her sons' bodies on the hill at Gibeah. No one else sees fit to interfere but she's really determined.'

Of course, Rizpah, whose two sons David has been forced to hand over for execution, so that the curse on the land may be lifted. He's hardly known her, for the king cannot know everyone in his household, and she being of low status (formerly Saul's concubine) and quite an age. He really feels for her though, also for Saul's daughter Merab, who's lost her five sons for the same reason. Clearly Rizpah's a fine woman, loyal and brave. It's rumoured that Abner and Ishbosheth fell out over her – no wonder!

Such terrible events have followed what Saul did to the Gibeonites! Whatever prompted him to attack them so fiercely? Was it that evil spirit that drove him, or had it happened when he was younger? Did he imagine that his new status as anointed king released him from the oath of mercy sworn by the elders in Joshua's time? A tragic mistake!

The famine's been appalling these three years past, such weakness and misery and dead animals everywhere, and David couldn't imagine why the land should be so stricken - until he consulted YHVH properly, and got this answer. Should he as king have realised what was going on? He'd heard of the age-old agreement that this Amorite tribe could stay in Israel unharmed, so long as they supplied wood and water for the sanctuary, but he'd no idea of their plight, till he sent for them and could see the pathetic condition of the few survivors. No wonder they wanted vengeance - seven of Saul's male descendants to execute and expose at Gibeah, Saul's old home.

Yet he'd promised Saul not to harm his descendants - rashly perhaps - and now he's had to break that oath in hope of expiating what Saul himself did. Oh, the horrors of inherited guilt - these seven lives destroyed for their father's wrong-doing!

It's fitting though to honour their bones, as Rizpah has tried to do. And the same applies to Saul's bones, whatever his faults. Dreadful how the Philistines treated him and Jonathan at Beth Shan, and excellent how the people of Jabesh Gilead rescued the remains, for which he'd blessed them. But was that enough? Really those royal bones belong in the family tomb of Kish in Zela of Benjamin, and he must see that they are moved even now. These things must be kept in correct order, so that YHVH is not offended. He will show mercy when his people truly honour his will.

#### ***Being taught how to treat religious externals***

*There are so many simple but important things that I take for granted - like the ability to pick up knowledge and kindly habits. These I suspect are 'my Gibeonites', not strictly among 'God's people', but very helpful to them. The dogmatic approach of surface faith (Saul) acts to abolish such free enquiry and spontaneous behaviour, but without their healthy activity the mind soon lacks nourishment - a psychological famine.*

*Luckily, enough of them remain to 'demand vengeance', and their wish is to put an end to the customs of little or no meaning that surface faith has spawned (the sons of*

*Merab and Rizpah). Heart faith (David) can appreciate this, while regretting that yet more familiar ways are to be lost, and strongly sympathising with the gracious affection which guards and mourns them.*

*While letting go of outward forms as essential, I realise, something of them can still be included in a more spiritual lifestyle, and remembered with honour (Saul's and Jonathan's bones buried more appropriately). Just, honest, or compassionate actions have obvious value in their effects, but they may be spoiled if done simply as habit or for the sake of reputation. They are likely to achieve more if questioned, then done deliberately - from genuinely loving or well-reasoned motives.*

## 14. LAMP OF ISRAEL

(2S21:15-17)

David is feeling very weary. This latest battle with the Philistines is dragging on, and his stamina is not what it used to be. Now one of those massive 'Sons of Rapha' is heading his way, huge bronze spearhead gleaming, and shouting 'I'm going to kill that David!' Will this be the end for him? Well, he has to face up to it bravely.

He parries the first two blows but clearly he won't be able to last long. Goliath will be avenged at last! But with a fierce yell another figure hurls itself on to David's attacker. His nephew Abishai, ever loyal and still lusty, fells the monster with a blow and quickly finishes him. That turns the tables, and soon David's men have their enemies in flight, while David thanks YHWH for once again saving his life. The company are exhilarated with victory, but soon sober down as everyone realises what has happened. They could have lost their beloved king and captain.

'This must be the last time you join in the battle,' they tell him respectfully but firmly. 'We must not let the lamp of Israel be extinguished.'

### ***The changing role of heart faith***

*Lamp of Israel? Why this strikingly laudatory title? And why is David to be remembered for centuries with such veneration?*

*Heart faith has its weaknesses, its critics, its own doubts, yet it can lead and inspire a whole nation of beliefs, concerns, interests, attitudes, and so on, especially those which are needed to defend the nation as a whole - its warrior-truths. Having fought to establish himself and his pattern of life, David-in-me does not need to get embroiled in any more argument or controversy. His role now is to keep a steadily clear and cheerful light shining on each aspect of my life, by which my actions will be decided.*

*It's hard though, for anyone to give up active leadership, especially handing over to others whose judgment you don't altogether trust. For all his gratitude to Abishai, David must have been worried about his nephew's inclination to hasty aggression! Am I able, can I remember, always to consult heart faith before leaping into argument or condemnation? Probably not, but so long as I have that intention and endeavour, things won't go too badly wrong.*

## 15. THE SHEPHERD'S GUILT (2S24)

'What, more deaths?' asks David. 'How many thousand now?' As he anxiously watches YHVH's angel-messenger moving swiftly across the land, laying its people low with the plague, he has to protest,

'I am the one who has sinned and done wrong. These others are only sheep. What have they done?'

He can hardly believe what has happened - this insane urge he felt to count Israel's warriors. Protected by a fine bodyguard, surrounded by valiant champions, and with the impressive loyalty of thousands more, why take trouble to count up all the warriors of the land? (In fact the urge was planted in him by YHVH to punish the nation.)

Joab, shrewd as only that villain can be, tried to dissuade him but was overruled. As soon as it was done, David was shaken with remorse, for he really knew tradition forbade it, but too late! The prophet Gad then brought YHVH's message,

'Three years of famine in the land, three months being pursued by enemies, or three days of plague on the land - choose which.' Spontaneously he answered,

'Let us fall into YHVH's hands, since his mercy is great; don't let me fall into the hands of men.' And the plague started, but was far more devastating than he expected - seventy thousand, it was reported.

At last the messenger ceases, restrained by YHVH. The plague has not reached Jerusalem, stopping at Araunah the Jebusite's threshing-floor.

'Go up and build an altar there to YHVH,' urges Gad and, knowing that he speaks for YHVH, David hurries to obey. When Araunah understands that the king wishes to buy his land, he offers it as a gift, along with oxen and wooden implements for the burnt offering, but David cannot accept.

'I will not sacrifice to YHVH my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.' So Araunah accepts fifty shekels of silver, the altar is built and the offerings made. The nightmare is over.

### ***Facing a key truth about Life***

*Counting up the virtues and great ideas I reckon as mine – it is a vain and dangerous activity! Surely concern for appearances (Joab) tells me that, but at heart I can't help it. It is part of the nature I'm given as a human being, and only by suffering the consequences am I likely to be cured of it. It may infect my whole character with complacency or pride, lethal diseases which even kill off 'my sheep'.*

*Mercifully my nature also has the potential to desist. Araunah the Jebusite is a little bit of inborn goodness whose territory marks the point where I can attribute my little real goodness and knowledge to the Lord of Life.*

## 16. OVER TO SOLOMON (1K1-2:12)

David is more than just tired now; he is weak, ailing, and cannot get warm. No question of action, and how can he be a lamp any longer? But he's at peace, with lovely young Abishag waiting on him, even warming his poor old body. So kind of her, and thoughtful of his servants to find such a pretty nurse for him. It's a shame that he can't enjoy her loveliness as most men would, as he would have done once, but she will need someone stronger.

'Who's this coming now?' he wonders. 'Ah, Bathsheba. She's still lovely too, and I've really loved her, albeit wrongly at first. That was dreadful of me, and I've rightly suffered for it. But it spread so much suffering on others, her included, for which I feel very bad. People seem to have forgiven me luckily. I'm still amazed that YHWH did.'

'Now what's Bathsheba asking me? Didn't I say her boy Solomon was to follow me? Yes, of course. But now, she says, Adonijah's become king, offered sacrifices and made a feast, and invited my other sons, the priest Abiathar and Joab, but not Solomon. Well, I can't allow this, can't believe it. Now here's Nathan asking,

"Have you, my lord the king, declared that Adonijah shall be king after you? He has arranged sacrifices and a feast ...."

'So then there are still things I have to do! Reassure Bathsheba first, ease her distress. Then get Nathan to declare Solomon king, with Zadok of course to anoint him. (Not that foolish Abiathar!) But who's to take command if Joab's supporting the upstart? (Now he's really gone too far.) Benaiah of course - just the man, much more reliable than Joab! They must enthrone Solomon, see that the whole city knows that's my wish. Surely that will still be respected.'

\* \* \* \* \*

"May YHWH be with Solomon to make his throne even greater than yours!" Something like that, Benaiah said to me, good man. So it's all settled then, thank YHWH! It shouldn't be difficult for Solomon, young as he is, with people like Benaiah serving him. I suppose I should give him some ideas, though, some fatherly advice.

'Trust YHWH and obey him! That should be obvious but it can't be stressed enough. Remember his covenant with Israel, and all will be well.

'Of course, he'll have to deal with Joab. I've slipped up badly there. Thinking I couldn't stand without him, or against him, I've let Joab please himself and survive - kill Abner, then Amasa, both his betters. Even my boy Absalom. Solomon must show greater wisdom. On the other hand he must show kindness to Barzillai's family, Kimham and the others, as I promised. Wonderful how much they helped me in Gilead, when Absalom led his revolt. And then there's Shimei! I thought it noble to promise him mercy, but I was too hasty, for he'll never rest from plotting against our family. Solomon needs to be rid of him.

'I expect there's more but I can't think now. He will manage very well, I'm sure. May he find strength and peace - while I find peace in another way.'

### ***Trusting the way ahead***

*David's thoughts and decisions on his death-bed seem to reflect the conclusion of a phase in a person's spiritual growth, a stage when I (or you) realise that another fundamental change is needed. At some point I shall have to move on, go beyond this state of heart faith. What's to follow it, I'm not clear.*

*From the union of David with Bathsheba were born two sons, first one who had to die, then another whom YHVH loved - Solomon. (See 2S12:24-25 and scene 10.) While my heart faith has dealt with varied challenges, this new element has been quietly maturing, and now spiritual insight (Nathan), working with the innocence of experience (Bathsheba), ensures that it should take control. The character meant by Solomon is still unclear to me but I am confident that, so long as I stay loyal to the demands of Truth (YHVH's Law), and get thoroughly rid of self-conscious calculation (Joab) and obstinate literalism (Shimei), my incomprehension does not matter. With Zadok-type reverence and Benaiah-like obedience - plus lovely Abishag - kindness - surely all will be well. And, as Truth has clearly promised, the spirit of David -faith will never really be lost.*

## **17. WATER FROM BETHLEHEM – FOR WHOM? (2S23:15-17)**

Once, during battle with the Philistines, David was longing for water, and exclaimed, 'If only someone would fetch me a drink from the well near the gate of Bethlehem!'

No doubt he had happy memories from his childhood of slaking his thirst there, but still he was speaking in jest, for Bethlehem was held by the enemy. However, three of his finest warriors broke through the Philistine lines and brought water from the well back to David. Yet David would not drink it.

'How could I possibly drink this - the blood of men who risked their lives for it?' Instead he poured it out as an offering to YHVH his God.

*What an appalling waste to pour that water on the ground! Yet in that very different world from ours it was the customary way of making drink offerings of wine to YHVH. David was acknowledging that all water, from wells, streams, or the sky, was YHVH's gift, so pouring it on the ground was returning a little to him. The action was extra powerful when the water had been so desired and won at such cost!*

*The incident shows how enormously David was valued by his followers, yet how little he thought of himself, and how much he appreciated and honoured them. Which people and things in my life do I most value?*

*In the heat of spiritual conflict, heart faith does thirst for pure true knowledge, such as it remembers from its beginnings. If mature powers of the mind manage to refresh that knowledge, it will be dedicated to honouring True Life.*

*Is this tale an afterthought? That's how it seems, for the incident would fit better fairly early in David's reign, although it's narrated after later events. Still, for this series it makes a good keynote to end on!*

## D IDEAS

### - reflections on some key ideas involved

#### 1. YHVH God of Israel

David, like other early Israelites, thought of his God as personal and male, yet with supernatural knowledge and power, so that he controlled the elements, plants and animals, people's health and sickness, life and death, as well as their feelings and intentions. He could grant virtues, skills and wisdom, regarded as 'filling them with his Spirit (or breath)', or take these things away. He decided the outcome of battles. His power was focussed on Israel, yet often extended into other nations, overriding the influence of foreign gods.

In later generations Israelites became certain that he was the universal God, controlling all nations, and since then many people have found difficulty in seeing such a great and infinite God as being personal. I shall not go into the vast history of theology, but simply say how I view this: There is a loving purpose and intention to the universe, and boundless wisdom about how we can grow to find individual fulfilment in harmony with that purpose. There is something human, person-like about this love and wisdom, even though both are greater than any person could encompass, so there is power and aptness in picturing them as within a very special person. I can see this Biblical YHVH, for all his limitations, as expressing that ineffable reality, and interpret those limitations as imaging aspects of how we humans relate to it.

Yet it was impossible or at least rare and highly dangerous (in the Bible's account) to see YHVH, and strictly forbidden to make any image of him. His presence was greater in specially chosen places, and was somehow attached to the Ark of the Covenant. (See entry in part H.) This is a useful reminder to me that my understanding of Reality is limited, my awareness of God varying according to 'where I am'. Sometimes at least I need an Ark of my own, something to help me feel the universal Spirit close to me.

#### 2. A loving God - or one law-obsessed?

David certainly reckoned YHVH to be fundamentally both righteous and benevolent - except on a few occasions, such as the death of Uzzah (2S6:8-11). Like others, he believed that there was an ancient covenant granting Israel YHVH's care and protection, insofar as the nation honoured him and obeyed his laws. This gave David impressive faith and courage which he memorably expressed to Saul with the words, 'YHVH who saved me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will save me from the hand of this Philistine' - meaning of course the giant Goliath. (1S17:37) YHVH made a further covenant with David personally (2S7) and his descendants. The covenant granted YHVH's protection and favour, but in return required worship and obedience - both to his declared laws and to specific instructions. Tradition said that Moses had been given the Law (the ten key laws inscribed on tablets of stone by YHVH's own hand, and many chapters that Moses had written down from dictation) for priests to read to the whole assembly of the people every seven years (*Deuteronomy* 31:9-13). These laws are an extraordinary collection of strange ritual and reasonable morality, but I understand them now as expressing (mostly in symbols) truths about how life works, truths which I need to understand, and to which I would be wise to adjust my behaviour. The dire penalties decreed for disobedience in some places are not arbitrary inflictions by an angry deity, but rather express the inevitable consequences of perversity.

How far the Law's provisions were known and obeyed in David's time is not at all clear. Some were certainly not observed, for instance when Saul and David offered sacrifices themselves, rather than leaving this to the priests, and nowhere is there any mention of keeping the Sabbath which received such stress at other times. Other laws were regarded as common knowledge, like that against adultery, and yet others were only 'partially known' - for instance that which forbade the counting up of warriors, except with 'atonement money'. (See *Exodus* 30:11-16 and 2S24)

Moral responsibility was seen as collective - much more so than nowadays. One person's sin could bring a penalty on the whole nation, and one generation's guilt could be inherited by later ones. A chilling example in these stories is YHVH's command to wipe out the Amalekites for what their ancestors had done to Israel centuries earlier, during their desert journeying. (1S15:2-3) The literal idea is corrected in the Bible itself (see *Ezekiel* 18, especially v.20), but it represents to me the truth that anything I do wrong will cause trouble to other people as well as me, most likely to my own family.

### **3. Communicating with his people**

YHVH sometimes gave specific guidance, and in any major decision it was normal to consult him. The priests could do this through the ephod (see 1S23:9-12) which clearly was some means of divination, but YHVH perhaps preferred to work through a prophet. This term means simply a spokesman, only sometimes involving knowledge of the future. YHVH might simply give his spokesman the ideas, or dictate actual words, or might take complete control of him ('pour out his Spirit upon him'), so that he entered a trance state. Divination gave only very brief answers, whereas a prophet's message might be long and detailed. I think of one as picturing the hints of intuition, the other the clearer insights of sincere reflection or prayer.

### **4. The Name of God**

Early Israelites addressed or referred to their God by name, and the utterance of that name was powerful, therefore holy. (See below.) The name contained four consonants, equivalent to our YHVH (though some people reckon W to be closer than V), and in early Hebrew custom that's all that needed to be written down, people understanding what vowels to add. Awe of the name's power led people in time to avoid pronouncing it, saying instead their equivalent of 'the Lord', and so over generations the pronunciation was forgotten. When the custom was changed to indicating vowels by 'pointing' (tiny marks around the consonants), scribes wrote in the vowels suitable for 'the Lord', and this made the name look like 'Yehovah' - or in Latin 'Jehovah', the J being pronounced as our Y. For various reasons it is now argued that the original sounding was Yahveh or Yahweh, as appears in much modern literature and a few English Bible versions. Swedenborgian scholars prefer 'Yehowah' (notably in *Pentateuch*, published by General Conference in 1970), representing what appears in the Hebrew manuscripts. Others stick with the traditional 'the LORD', capital letters distinguishing it from where the Hebrew actually means 'the Lord'. But I shall put 'YHVH', for it seems to me that the use of a single personal name suggests closeness (comparable to many Christians' use of 'Jesus') and I want to avoid the formality of 'the LORD'. Then you, like David's generation, can add what vowels seem right to you.

### **5. Israel**

'Israel' was a new name given to Jacob, grandson of Abraham, to express his growing character, and was understood to mean 'he who strives with God'. (See *Genesis* 32:27-28) It became the name of a nation who claimed descent from him - the 'children of Israel' or Israelites. That nation believed themselves chosen by the God YHVH, inheriting the promise YHVH had made in turn to Abraham, Isaac, and

Jacob, then re-affirmed in the great covenant made through Moses at Mount Sinai. (See *Exodus* 19:5-6; 34:10,27)

I see the Biblical story of Israel as expressing the way in which each human individual or group can achieve a truly fine and useful character, as promised in many passages of the Bible. In *Genesis* I can see pictured the formation of basic human character (the family of Abraham), then in *Exodus* through to *Joshua* an allegory of human life as a journey from mere worldly values (slavery in Egypt) to finding a rich spiritual inheritance (the promised land of Canaan). In *Judges* through to *Samuel* I can find the transformation of this rich but chaotic inheritance into an organised character (building God's kingdom). The kingdom then has to go through all manner of trials, along with some wonderful thrills (the rest of the Hebrew Scriptures), before the kingdom is fulfilled in the Gospels. (Alternatively I can see the whole of a life contained in any one part of the saga.)

## 6. The tribes of Israel

From earlier books we may get the picture of an orderly descent from Jacob's twelve sons to twelve tribes, and this idea carries on into some of the Prophets. This pattern in fact is not completely clear, and in *Samuel-Kings* it is not noticeable at all - except when YHWH decrees the splitting of the kingdom after Solomon (1K11:13,21-32). Instead we have frequent mention of two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, those to which David and Saul belonged, scarcely a mention of any other of the twelve, but occasional mention of other groups, apparently as important as some of the tribes - Calebites, Gibeonites, etc.

Rivalries between tribes could develop into war, very evident in *Judges*, but here only between Judah and the northern tribes as a whole (sometimes referred to as 'Israel'), or especially Benjamin.

All ethnic groups seem to stand for different elements in human character. Tribes descended from Jacob/Israel are those which basically are needed to form 'the church' - that of God in each person or community. There being twelve is clearly a symbol, presumably of those elements, which together can complete a godly character. (The same is true of the Twelve Apostles in the Gospels.) But smaller elements are sometimes important, and these need representing in the same way - notably in 2S21 the Gibeonites.

## 7. The neighbouring nations (or gentiles)

These I see as representing influences in our culture, which may help or hinder our growth. I hesitantly follow Swedenborg in identifying what some stand for, though his reasons are not all clear. (See entries in Part I.) They come in several groupings:

- **Earlier inhabitants of Canaan** whom YHWH decreed should be driven out - including Hittites, Amorites and Jebusites. These could be *traits we've inherited, mostly bad* - but a few seem to be good, such as Uriah the Hittite and Araunah the Jebusite.
- **Nations of similar cultural background to the Israelites**, traditionally thought to be likewise related to Abraham. These include Edomites, Midianites, Ammonites, Moabites - *external aspects of our character which may be helpful or harmful* - and Amalekites who seem to be always harmful and uniquely cursed.

- **Great distant nations**, mercifully non-aggressive during David's time - Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia - which I see as *traits dominant in the wider world* - materialism, rationalism, and so on.
- **Philistines** (including Gittites and maybe Kerethites) - Uniquely alien, it seems, and troublesome in this period. They do seem a suitable symbol of *attitudes to religious teaching and belief*. Their possession of iron weapons (true ideas) makes them strong, but their being uncircumcised (not cleansed from lusts) makes them hostile to God's people. They then stand for *the absurd idea that true knowledge can save without the loving practice of it*. (Swedenborg often calls this tersely 'faith separated' or 'faith alone'.)

The Israelites see other nations mostly as rivals, sometimes as oppressors (eg the Philistines for a long time), occasionally as friends or allies (Moab sheltering David's parents, Hiram king of Tyre providing building aid). But they are best brought under Israelite control, as most are by the end of David's reign.

Also individual aliens are accepted in Israel - e.g. Ruth the Moabitess who was David's great-grandmother, also (see part F) Doeg the Edomite, Obed-Edom the Gittite, Araunah and Uriah - and groups as warriors – Kerethites and Pelethites, and Ittai's band of Gittites.

## 8. Kingship in Israel

A king is an obvious symbol for the main principle governing my life, whether this be by true ideas or false ones.

Some Bible passages regard only YHVH as being the true king of Israel (see 1S8:6-7, Isaiah 44:6, etc). So leadership by his spokesmen, notably Samuel, pictures my life ordered by the perceptions of love. From this viewpoint any human king was a poor substitute, representing rule by a more intellectual grasp of truth. In 1S8:10-18 Israel was warned of all the disadvantages, how a king would require their children as his soldiers and servants, take much of their land, livestock and crops. In Deuteronomy 17:14-20 we find stern guidance on what sort of king was permissible - only an Israelite, one who would not acquire much wealth, nor many wives, nor horses (especially not from Egypt), but instead would pay careful attention to all YHVH's laws, not thinking himself better than his brothers. Certainly most kings showed some regard for the guidance of YHVH's prophets, and feared their censure, but still some disobeyed or were led astray. This seems to be saying that, however intelligent and educated, we are too liable to misunderstand the truth, or deliberately twist it by argument to suit ourselves. Rule merely by intelligence is not generally in our best interests.

There are other passages though, that paint kingship as a wonderful gift from YHVH (Psalms 89 and 132; Ezekiel 37:24ff), and there seems in later times to have been a cult of kingship involving elaborate ceremonial, with the reigning monarch seen as YHVH's favoured son (e.g. Psalms 20,21 & 72). Note also the Messianic passages in both Prophets and Psalms - see end of part H. All these seem to be saying that, properly handled, rule by truth can be noble and beneficial - and usually David is held up as the ideal.

Kings were sometimes seen as shepherds or pastors of their people, since truth should guide and protect the good qualities in life. Ezekiel 34 is a fierce reproof of the bad shepherds of Israel, with a promise that 'David' will be their good shepherd. Yet there are few allusions to this idea in David's life-story: 1S16 and 17:34-37 concern David's shepherd-boy origin, in 2S24:17 David pleads that the people should not be punished for his misdoing, as 'they are only sheep', but that seems to be all.

## 9. Deciding the succession

Should the throne pass from father to son? That's what YHVH's promise to David seems to imply, and in Judah it continued so for many generations. Not necessarily the eldest son, however. At David's death the people simply awaited David's decision, which was not for Adonijah (who may have been the eldest surviving), but for Solomon who appears to be listed as tenth.

David was of course chosen by YHVH to replace Saul. Did Jonathan realise this, or did he reckon that David's personal qualities made him the ideal successor? Later in the northern kingdom YHVH acted similarly to put Jehu in place of Joram, but then Jehu was told by YHVH's prophet to slaughter every male descendant of Ahab (Joram's father) - the obvious potential rivals to him. It's clear that both Saul and Jonathan feared similar treatment from David (1S20:14-15; 24:3-7,20-22), and his friendly conduct towards their family is truly magnanimous.

## 10. Saul, David, Solomon – and the rest

These three were the only kings to rule both Israel and Judah, and they can easily be seen as forming an ascending trio to the great climax of the completed temple in a strong nation at peace. So followers of Swedenborg have often interpreted them to represent ruling truth on three levels - natural, spiritual, and celestial, to use his terms. This surprises me now for, although Solomon at first appears to be the realisation of David's aims and hopes, he later fails completely. (See below, D13)

So how shall I see their relationship? It seems clear to me that David is the best of Israel's kings, although not perfect. I am inclined to see him as portraying the essential quality of true kingship, the aspiration and effort to govern life by loving truth. This needs to develop from a cruder form (Saul), but then establishes the main lines of a heavenly kingdom. All the descendants who follow him picture the amazingly mixed situations of life, through which David persists as the ideal to be aimed at. Solomon is the prime example of what could be achieved but is so often tragically missed.

The final stage, which I shall come to later, is Jesus. (See below, D16)

## 11. David and Saul (For more on Saul's early reign see entry in Part F.)

Saul clearly stands for an authority less satisfactory than David, and I do see him as picturing rule by outward or natural truth. To repeat from my earlier sketch, I like to label him 'surface faith' - a religion consisting in literal beliefs and commands, which does defeat many false ideas and wrong habits, but sadly doesn't change inner motives and attitudes. Behind good conduct it may conceal pride, certainty in its own opinions, and contempt and suspicion towards others. If we are to find true goodness and happiness, we need 'David' to take over - the deeper, kindlier, humbler faith which is essentially love for other people, appreciates true ideas from the heart, and governs all actions and words as expressions of goodwill.

I take the members of each family (or 'house') to express aspects or developments of the same type of faith. So all of Saul's family are something to do with 'surface faith' and all of David's family to do with 'heart faith'. Most of the characters in the David narratives (*1 Samuel 16 – 1 Kings 2*) belong to these two families, and most of the narratives are about conflict between them, or within David's house. (Wars against other nations seem relatively straightforward!)

Saul is resentful of being replaced, as are some of his family (with important exceptions), and this is a large concern for David throughout his reign, since he respects Saul and even more Jonathan, and promises both that he will deal kindly with their descendants. He has a high regard for Abner too, and for a time loves Michal, but fate seems determined to tear them all away from him. In the same way my habits of outward religious observance and moral conduct must each be rejected as mere habits.

Finally a divinely-sent famine forces David to allow the destruction of most of Saul's remaining descendants, and he finds a kind of peace in re-burying Saul's and Jonathan's bones. I think that represents the goodness in outward religion taking its rightful place in a heavenly character.

## **12. David on the throne**

Meanwhile spiritual development is by no means smooth or quick. David has big problems with himself, as well as with his sons and nephews, who seem to represent the variety of motives and attitudes, which are possible with even the spiritually-minded, and the conflict and distress these can cause.

My aim in growing spiritually may actually be selfish, wanting to justify myself, to prove myself guileless, and I see this represented in David stealing Bathsheba. This leads me on to taking pride in my spiritual insights and development, though I know this to be wrong, and expecting admiration for them - all of which I see in David's beloved son Absalom attempting to replace him, and David showing more grief at his rebel son's death than relief at defeating his challenge. Just as serious and trickier to deal with is my fear of losing control, so being more concerned with how I appear than with authentic action - meant by David's toleration of devious, ruthless Joab.

All these and other false developments David lives through painfully, forgiven and liberated from them only by YHVH's faith in him - True Life putting them to positive use.

## **13. David and Solomon**

In contrast to the long painful transition from Saul to David, that from David to Solomon seems rapid and easy. (It is not, of course, a change of dynasty.) All we know of Solomon beforehand is that he was born to Bathsheba, at which point YHVH loved him (2S12:24-25), and apparently David promised her at some time that Solomon would succeed him (1K1:17). There is no sign that David has groomed Solomon for kingship, but perhaps he was too young to have been involved earlier in ruling or war. Anyway it's a nasty surprise for Adonijah, who has thought he can claim the throne!

Solomon starts well, by following David's guidance then, when YHVH offers him a gift of his choice, requesting a discerning heart (1K3:4 onwards). What follows I find puzzling. YHVH is pleased at his request, then promises him (as well as wisdom and discernment) incomparable riches and honour. Yet this goes against the laws of kingship in *Deuteronomy 17:14-20* (mentioned above - in D8, 'Kingship in Israel'), as does his importing of horses from Egypt (1K10:26-29), and even more his excessive polygamy, which also leads him into idolatry (1K11:1-8). This incurs YHVH's wrath and rejection of him (vv.9-13), though he is allowed to stay king till his death - for the sake of David and Jerusalem. I still puzzle over Solomon.

And what has happened to YHVH's promises to David?

## 14. An Everlasting Covenant

'Is not my house right with God?' asks David.  
'Has he not made with me an everlasting covenant,  
arranged and secured in every part?'

These are among his 'last words' (2S23:5). His meaning there is not obvious, but the idea of YHVH's covenant with David was later to become very clear and powerful in some people's view. It would become a widespread belief, that one day a son of David would rule a liberated and revitalised Israel. The wording of the supposed covenant varies but probably the most striking form is in *Jeremiah 33:20-21*:

'If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night no longer come at their appointed time, then my covenant with David my servant .... can be broken and David will no longer have a descendant to reign on his throne.'

That was written when Davidic kings had ruled for several centuries, the latest had only just been deposed, and it seemed reasonable to hope for a restoration of the line. Yet the words have been literally understood and treasured by a few fundamentalist Jews and Christians ever since!

Is there a better explanation? The big idea seems to have begun in 2S7 with David's intention of building a house for YHVH, who then informed Nathan that it would be the other way round: YHVH would establish a house for David. Any wrong-doings by his son would be punished but YHVH's love would not be taken away, as had happened with Saul.

'Your house and your kingdom shall endure for ever before me, your throne shall be established for ever.'

## 15. The Relentless Sword

What was far less remembered in later times was YHVH's decree in 2S12:

'Now therefore the sword shall never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.'

Can later prophecies of a Son of David bringing peace be literally reconciled with this? David could hardly have been surprised that at times it looked as though his house would not fulfil the promise. Amnon and Absalom did not look likely inheritors of the covenant. Yet it appears as though he trusted YHVH implicitly and, when Solomon took firm control, his father died happy. For most of his reign - building the temple, strengthening and enriching Jerusalem, building fine new cities, organising administration of the country, making alliances and maintaining peace - Solomon appears to be the fulfilment of YHVH's promise. Towards the end though he spoils everything by 'letting his heart be turned after other gods' (1K11:4-10), as well as 'accumulating gold, silver, wives, chariots and horses' (1K10-11) - all the things forbidden for a king of Israel. He is angrily rejected by YHVH, and his kingdom divided (1K11:9-13). So the throne of David is reduced to kingship over Jerusalem and Judah, and continues so until with the Babylonian conquest it seems to be lost altogether (2K25). Spiritually, I think, this describes the decline of human character as it loses any genuine concern for truth.

## 16. The Real Meaning of the Covenant

Some people must have doubted the reality of the covenant, and it may have been widespread scepticism that prompted such dramatic invocations of it. Indeed Psalm 89, after a thrilling reassertion of the promise, then laments YHWH's angry renunciation of it, and ends by pleading for its renewal (verses 38-51). But surely there were people who realised that there might have been misunderstanding, that terms such as 'David's line' could be meant symbolically.

It can be argued that long before the collapse of the kingdom, David had become something of an abstract ideal. In the books of Kings he was remembered as the measure of true kingship - Asa, Hezekiah and Josiah being praised as true sons of David, but Solomon and others condemned for not walking in the way of their father David. In dismissing Abijah it states,

'David had not failed to keep any of YHWH's commands all the days of his life - except in the case of Uriah the Hittite.'

(A surprising assessment! See Part E2 on David's faults.) When YHWH acted favourably to his people, it was done 'for the sake of my servant David'. This was why Judah was kept for his descendants (1K11:12-13), and for the same reason Jerusalem was saved from the Assyrians (2 Kings 19:34).

However, when foreigners came to rule Israel, the people were consoled with the literal expectation that one day there would rise up a true son of David to liberate them. Or would it be (in some sense) David himself returned? (*Ezekiel* 34:23-24 & 37:24-25) YHWH's covenant with David is sometimes invoked, briefly or extravagantly, as in *Jeremiah* 33:14-26, quoted above. Literalists in every period would look for proof of correct lineage (e.g. *John* 7:40). The Gospels of *Matthew* and *Luke* seem concerned to show that Joseph, Jesus' earthly father, was descended from Abraham and David, each giving a long genealogy. (Oddly the two are different! *Matthew* 1:6 shows a line coming through Solomon, but *Luke* 3:31 a quite different one through his brother Nathan. Even more strangely, both Gospels insist that, since Mary was made pregnant by the Holy Spirit, Joseph was not really Jesus' father!)

Other people surely understood that a true 'son of David' was someone like the ideal David in character, rather than technically descended from him. (Cf. the comments on being 'a child of Abraham' in *John* 8:39-41 and *Luke* 3:7-8.) Jesus himself later seemed to question the whole idea (*Matthew* 22:41-46) but in the final verses of the Bible (*Revelation* 22:16) he is presented as claiming to be 'the Root and Offspring of David'. We can take this to mean that as God he was David's ancestor, while as Joseph's apparent son he was a descendant. More significantly surely, it's saying that the Eternal or Cosmic Jesus both gives birth to the ideal of spiritual kingship and conforms to it.

To me this everlasting covenant means simply, that our human nature will always and everywhere involve the aspiration and endeavour (however slight) to let truth rule our lives, and God (Life itself) will support us in this - as pictured in the relationship of YHWH and David. I think the author of *Isaiah* 55:1-4 had the idea pretty well:

Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters;  
and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! ....  
Give ear and come to me; hear me that your soul may live.  
I will make an everlasting covenant with you,  
my unfailing kindnesses, promised to David.  
See, I have made him a witness to the peoples,  
a leader and commander of the peoples.

## E QUESTIONS

### - a few puzzles discussed

#### 1. Why do women receive so little notice?

The story of David seems largely male-dominated, and indeed 'macho'. In literal terms I find this very sad, indeed appalling. Women's activities, thoughts and feelings deserve far more prominence.

*But this tale is myth and, following Swedenborg, I see the male dominance in the Bible as picturing the fact that thought-processes, decisive and argumentative, are the more obvious side of our nature. Affections and intuition are at least as important to us, implicit within all thinking and quite essential to life, and therefore aptly portrayed as women who are indispensable as lovers and mothers. But they are more private and subtle, less easily noticed or expressed. So the myth leaves them as uncertain and mysterious - respects their mystery.*

Still I find myself longing to know more about Abigail, who in 1S25 strikes me as the perfect partner for David, yet gets scarcely another mention afterwards. And while David's feelings about Absalom get plenty of notice, I am left wondering about those of Maacah, Absalom's mother. Is there any value in speculating about them, or Michal's feelings, or Bathsheba's? Could it bring any spiritual insights?

The story portrays a culture in which women were subject to husband, or father, or other kinsman, and valued chiefly for child-bearing or domestic work. (The common Hebrew word for 'woman' also means 'wife' and, though there is a separate word for 'concubine', the mention of 'wives' can include concubines.) Barrenness was seen as a disgrace, possibly a punishment (2S6:23). Widowhood usually brought hardship, so the Law appealed for charity towards them in various ways. According to at least one Bible Dictionary, remarriage was unusual, yet David married at least two widows, Abigail and Bathsheba.

A man usually needed to pay a bride-price for a wife ('dowry' in the King James Version), which might be in the form of service to the father, as with David and Saul in 1S18:17ff. (That in 1S18:25 must be extremely unusual! See *Circumcision* in Part H.) A concubine might be bought as a slave, or captured in war. A rich man could acquire several women, for polygamy was accepted - though monogamy was sometimes regarded as finer, and a king was forbidden in the Law to 'multiply wives' (*Deuteronomy* 17:17).

However, women had some protection in law and custom, and were often treated with love and respect. David saying that Jonathan's love for him was 'more wonderful than that of women' (2S1:26) shows that he thought highly of women's love. Michal must have declared her love for David, for Saul to know it and offer her in marriage, and she soon showed it in helping him escape from Saul (1S18:20-21;19:11-17). Years later he was clearly impressed by Rizpah's love in defending her sons' bodies (2S21 and Part C, Scene 13). Women could show bold independence, for instance Abigail in thwarting Nabal's wishes, for which David praised her highly (1S25 and Scene 6). We never meet David's sister Zeruiah but, most unusually, her three sons are continually referred to as 'sons of Zeruiah', not of their father, which maybe tells us something about her.

A woman might be credited with wisdom - for instance, the one whose help Joab sought in reconciling David and Absalom (2S14) and another who helped end Sheba's rebellion (2S20:16). Women were thought more likely than men to have

power as mediums (1S28) but the Law condemned them forcibly if they used such power.

## 2. What about all David's faults?

'David had done what was right in the eyes of YHVH and had not failed to keep any of YHVH's commands all the days of his life - except in the case of Uriah the Hittite.' *1 Kings 15:5*

So it appeared to a later writer, but that's not how the main narrative makes it sound! Indeed, Saul was rejected as king for what may seem to us lesser faults. However, unlike Saul, David was readily repentant when reproved. Then there are YHVH's words to Samuel, explaining his unexpected choice of David (1S16:7):

'YHVH does not look at the same things as humans do. They look at the outward appearance, but YHVH looks at the heart.'

Also humanity's moral views vary greatly through time and across cultures. (See next question, E3.)

Still there's wide agreement that something was badly wrong in **the matter of Uriah**. Just what offended YHVH is clear in 2S12:9:

'You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own.'

How alien to David's character these actions seem! So does his forgetting for some months the God he so trusted, until the prophet appeared. *To me this seems a stark reminder that, even when I have developed well in the spiritual life, I am still capable of being distracted by strong, selfish desires and separating them from my religious life, conveniently forgetting the connection.*

In Nathan's parable, the taking of Bathsheba is represented as stealing a lamb. *For me that suggests an attempt to claim innocence for myself - something that can only belong with the straightforward uprightness which is pictured by Uriah. In claiming it I am bound to corrupt it, and to destroy that kind of uprightness.*

Confronted with the accusation, David is genuinely repentant, and so is forgiven, but still has to face three penalties, which picture the unavoidable results of my turning aside from God's way:

'The sword shall never depart from your house,'  
'one who is close to you will lie with your wives in broad daylight,' and  
'the son born to you will die'. *2S12:10,11,14*

*Symbolically, I shall experience endless fierce conflict of ideas, feelings being horridly abused, and new ideas sadly coming to nothing. Yet YHVH is merciful: something like innocence can stay with me (keeping Bathsheba) and give birth to the best idea yet (Solomon).*

Note that here, as elsewhere in the Hebrew scriptures, adultery means stealing another man's wife. Infidelity to one's own wife seems not to be the issue, and maybe that's understandable when a man can have several wives. David is nowhere condemned for his **polygamy**, though kings were forbidden to 'multiply wives' (or horses or silver and gold - which David didn't).

David is clearly condemned (in 2S24) for **counting up fighting men**, and the whole nation is punished for it with deadly plague. According to the law in *Exodus 30:11-16*, the census would have been allowed if a half-shekel ransom were paid to YHVH for each man, but in this story the prohibition seems complete. The strangest thing though is, that the story starts with YHVH, angry against Israel, inciting David to do it. The meaning must be symbolic!

*Counting up warriors does seem to represent assessing my own strength or virtue, implying that I no longer trust the power of love and truth to protect me, and this can have various painful consequences, which are suggested in three options which the prophet Gad is told to offer David - famine, military defeat, or plague.*

There is **terrible violence** in the story, normal perhaps in the history of humankind, but should it be practised by YHVH's Anointed? What he does is to destroy the enemies of YHVH and Israel, *representing the wrong ideas that threaten my spiritual life. The threat is not only from fully-formed ideas (alien warriors) but from all the desires and half-grown thoughts that go with them (their women and children), so whole communities must be destroyed.* (In particular see **Amalekites**.)

(Swedenborg sees evidence of the historical David's cruelty in 2S12:31, but there is disagreement over the translation of this verse. Did he torture his Ammonite prisoners with various tools and sending them into brick-kilns (as the King James Version has it), or rather set them to labour with these things (as modern versions prefer)? *Whichever way, the meaning is surely about dealing with hostile character traits, either destroying them or making them serve a useful purpose.*)

Perhaps most worrying about David is his **failure to restrain his family from wrong-doing**. This appears painfully with Amnon's rape of his half-sister Tamar, and with Absalom (her full brother) killing Amnon in revenge (2S13). Much later, and more excusably, David ignores Adonijah's pretensions to the kingship, until prompted by Nathan to make clear his choice of Solomon to succeed him (1K1). *I see all four sons as picturing ways of using spiritual understanding, ways which develop out of the true approach. They grow in my own mind so, if they go wrong, I am reluctant to acknowledge it.* (See each separately in part F.) It seems very strange that none of the sons are said to have fought in David's army, in contrast to Saul's sons.

Even worse though is David's tolerance of his nephew Joab. (Again see more in part F, also in part C, Scenes 8 and 12.)

Related to this is another problem, David's **deceptions**. The attempt to hide his adultery with Bathsheba (2S11) is clearly wrong, and notably aided by Joab. Deceiving Achish, king of Gath (1S21 & 27), seems excusable as self-preservation, and the same may be said of deceiving Ahimelech (1S21), yet he clearly feels guilty about that. (See part C, Scene 5.)

*I started out in youth with a fairly clear-cut idea of truth and honesty but, as I become more aware of inner motivation and thinking, I realise that it's not so simple. The whole truth is too complex to express, or even to grasp, and I have to work with half-truths, provisional truths, or simplifications. The lack of fuller truth may bring hurt and distress yet be unavoidable at this stage in my growth.*

### 3. Was he just a product of his times and place?

A child of his times in some ways - regrettably in matters of warfare and gender relationships - David was yet able in others to question and defy convention.

An obvious example is with Bathsheba's first son who died as a punishment for David's sin. David puzzled his servants by fasting and weeping before the death, but not doing so afterwards, for which he had his own explanation (2S12:21-23).

Far more significant was his behaviour towards Saul and his family. When a king was replaced by someone other than his heir, it was usually by assassination, and the usurper was expected to wipe out any likely challengers. (See Baasha in 1K15, Zimri in 1K16, and Jehu who was YHWH's Anointed in 2K9.) So David's followers were amazed when he let pass the chance of killing Saul, instead promising not to wipe out his descendants (1S24:3-7,20-22). Even David's sworn friend Jonathan felt he needed to seek David's reassurance in the matter (1S20:14-17). Showing mercy or favour to Saul's family is in fact a major element in the rest of his reign.

When David evacuated Jerusalem to avoid Absalom sacking the city, the priests assumed that he would want them to bring the Ark of YHWH, since possession of it was regarded as the best possible protection. David however told them to return it to the city. He was content to trust in YHWH's justice and power without it (2S15:24-26). Nevertheless, as verses 27ff show, he made his own prudent plans to foil Absalom.

In general David's kingship seems to have avoided the excesses warned against in *Deuteronomy* 17 and 1S8. (See part D8.) He did recruit young men to his army, build a palace in Jerusalem, and gather a fair number of wives. But he certainly didn't acquire many horses or chariots, and there's little evidence that he indulged in luxury, deliberately flouted the Law, or considered himself better than his brothers. Whereas kings were expected to be self-confident and dogmatic, David was willing to listen to advice - not only from prophets and captains, but from Abigail (1S25), a woman from Tekoa (2S14), and from his warriors (2S21:15-17).

*Spiritual faith does make us question and re-assess our former opinions and customs. How useful are our cherished views and interests? Likewise our material possessions? Is it necessary to attack contrary opinions, or can we tolerate them, even learn from them?*

### 4. Was he really a musician?

There is a tradition of depicting David holding a harp (chiefly perhaps in stained glass windows) but how appropriate is this? The main reason for it is probably the belief that he was the author of the *Psalms*, though also the story tells of him being called to soothe Saul's black moods with his fine harp-playing (1S16), of him singing a lament for Saul and Jonathan (2S1) and a song of praise (2S22, reproduced as *Psalms* 18), and of him dancing in front of the Ark to the sound of trumpets (2S6).

Singing and dancing were a normal element in Israel's worship, not something done just by specialist musicians, but the implication of 1S16:15-18,23 is that David's skill with the harp was somewhat exceptional. Why though is it never again mentioned?

The connection of the *Psalms* to David is nowadays widely questioned. The phrase in many of the headings of psalms, and usually translated 'psalm of David' need not indicate authorship. It was some sort of direction to priests or to singers, perhaps that the psalm was to be used in ceremonies involving the king, 'David' being used as a title for any of his successors.

Singing and dancing can be spontaneous expressions of spiritual joy, or indeed some other emotions, so are thoroughly suitable for some worship-occasions.

*David's singing and dancing in the story express such emotions in our spiritual journey. Spiritual ideas can also be very calming when outward troubles disturb us in spirit - as David was able to calm Saul.*

## F INDEX OF CHARACTERS

Names are included of any individual person who clearly affects the story, or seems significant, or whose relevance needs explaining. There are many others mentioned only in lists, or who appear just once where their place in the story is clear, though often not their spiritual meaning.

For groups of people see part I – Place-names, etc.

Before the main alphabetical listing, the interrelations of the royal houses of Saul and David are shown, followed by a particular note on 'the sons of Zeruiah'. For those names printed in bold there are individual entries later. For more about their significance as groups, see 'David and Saul' in 'Ideas' (part D11).

### The Two Royal Houses

Most of the important characters in the story belong to two families, the 'Houses' of David and Saul, and most of the narratives are about conflict between the two houses, or within David's family. (Wars against other nations seem relatively straightforward!) I take the members of any one family to figure aspects of the same general character. As explained in *Kingship* (part D8), I understand kings to stand for ruling beliefs or lifestyles. Clearly both Saul and David are the Anointed of YHWH - both helpful to the true purpose and development of Life - but the David style is preferable in that it more successfully defeats Israel's enemies and establishes 'the Kingdom'.

Saul is resentful of being replaced, as are some of his family (with important exceptions), and this is a main concern for David throughout his reign, since he respects Saul and Abner, even more Jonathan, and for a time loves Michal.

*What all this means to me is that Saul and his family stand for straightforward literal belief and obedience. These can defend us against wrong attitudes (meant by Ammonites), like 'Look after yourself, 'cos no one else will'. Also to some extent against the 'Philistine fallacy', that what matters most is knowing true doctrine. Jonathan seems to stand for simple religion practised with kindness and honesty, which is powerful against 'Philistines'. For full character growth, however, we need an inner perception of the truth about life, which only comes with deeper love and humility, and this is what David pictures to me.*

*Saul's stubborn resistance to such change makes him ineffective, even Jonathan too, so that they die fighting the Philistines. David is genuinely and deeply saddened by this, for inner religion does value the outward observance from which it develops. Gradually though it must, however reluctantly, outgrow all outward aspects (meant by the deaths of Saul's relatives), or integrate them into the spiritual approach (Saul and Jonathan being suitably buried in their ancestral tomb).*

*Meanwhile spiritual development is by no means smooth or quick. David has big problems with his sons and nephews and himself, representing the variety of motives and attitudes which are possible with even the spiritually-minded, and the conflict and distress that these can cause.*

Here the members of the two families are listed by relationships, and some brief meanings suggested. For names in bold there are more details in individual entries in the alphabetical section.

## THE HOUSE OF SAUL

**Saul** – ‘surface faith’, literal belief and observance

### SAUL'S OLDER AND CONTEMPORARY RELATIVES

Kish, his father (1S14:49-51)

Ner, brother to Kish (also 1S14:49-51)

**Abner**, son of Ner (also 1S14:49-51) - *surface faith steadily sincerely applied*

**Ahinoam**, Saul's wife (also 1S14:49-51) - *affection for surface faith*

**Rizpah** , Saul's concubine (2S3:7-8; 21:8-13) - *a similar affection, simple but impressive*

2S12:8 mentions Saul's wives being passed on to David, but gives no more names – *affections which persist, even while the ruling principle changes*

SONS (see 1S14:49 & 1S31:2) - *developments of surface faith*

**Jonathan** - *applying it with kindness and honesty (immediately positive towards heart faith)*

**Ish-bosheth** (or Ishvi) (2S2:8 – 4:12) - *outward observance, after Saul's death a mere shell*

Abinadab and Malki-Shua - *particular beliefs, unable to resist 'knowledge alone'*

2 sons of Rizpah - see below under 'others'

### DAUGHTERS

**Merab** - *childish liking for religious practice (uncomprehending of heart faith)*

**Michal** - *adolescent passion for religion (initially excited by heart faith but unable to grow with it)*

### OTHERS

**Mephibosheth**, son of Jonathan - *merely sentimental ineffective religion (willing to put on a show of accepting heart faith, but without depth)*

5 sons of Merab and 2 sons of Rizpah (2S21:8-13 and Scene 13)  
- *meaningless customs which heart faith must eventually give up*

## THE HOUSE OF DAVID

1S16 introduces Jesse and his seven or eight sons, only four named, of whom David is the youngest.

*Ruth* 4:13,17 tells us that Boaz and Ruth (a Moabitess) were David's great-grandparents.

*Matthew* 1 shows his descent from Abraham through Judah, then his descendants through Solomon and all the later kings of Judah. (*Luke* 3 has a different line of descent.)

**David** - *'heart faith' - ruling life by genuine love and deeper appreciation of truth*

**Jesse**, David's father (1S16) - *simple uprightness which begets heart faith*

BROTHERS - (1S16:5-11; 17:12-29) - *earlier developments from Jesse*

**Eliab** - *complacency with simpler religion (physically impressive like Saul)*

**Abinadab, Shammah**, and 4 more mentioned but not named (see 1S16:10)

### SISTERS

**Zeruiah**, Abigail - listed as sisters in 1 *Chronicles* 2:17, though 2S17:25 calls them daughters of Nahash. Their sons, listed as nephews below, certainly seem close to David.

WIVES AND CONCUBINES – *affections attached to heart faith*

2S3:2-5 and 5:13-16 list some of his wives. The latter passage and 2S12:8 indicate more women, including at least ten concubines (2S15:16).

**Michal**, Saul's daughter

**Ahinoam, Abigail** - married while David an outlaw (1S25:42-44)

**Maacah**, Haggith, Abital, Eglah - married while David King of Judah in Hebron (2S3:2-5)

more wives and concubines taken while ruling in Jerusalem (2S5:13)  
- including **Bathsheba**

Saul's wives passed on to him! (2S12:8) - *affections that are involved in both outward and more inward religion*

10 concubines left to care for the palace (2S15:16), abused by Absalom (16:22), so separated (20:3) - *affections contaminated by a wrong faith-development, so no longer supportive*

**Abishag** - her relationship unclear (see 1K1:3-4)

CHILDREN - *beliefs, attitudes, affections arising from heart faith, though not all true to it*

6 sons born in Hebron (2S3:2-5) - **Amnon**, Kileab, **Absalom**, **Adonijah**, Shephatiah, Ithrean

11 sons born in Jerusalem (2S5:13-15, names given) - incl. **Nathan** and **Solomon**

He also had daughters (2S5:13), but the only one named is **Tamar** (full sister to Absalom - 2S13)

David's sons are never mentioned as joining his army (unlike Saul's sons, and three of his own nephews who serve him notably).

NEPHEWS – *attitudes allied to heart faith, though uneasily*

**Jonadab**, son of Shimeah/Shammah

**Joab, Abishai, Asahel** - 'the sons of Zeruah' (see note below)

**Amasa**, son of Abigail

**Note:** THE SONS OF ZERUAH

These three nephews of David, presumably near him in age, are among his keenest and most able supporters. In fact David is distressed by their excessive zeal and ruthlessness, exclaiming 'What have you and I in common?' (2S16:10) Yet he cannot do without them, and protests once, 'These sons of Zeruah are too strong for me' (2S3:39) They perhaps regard him as soft or lacking resolve.

Joab in particular proves at times indispensable to David, both as an effective general and as adviser, though he brazenly defies his king when he wants something different, and manages to get away with it. Abishai and Asahel are listed among David's heroes (2S23) for they fight bravely and fairly, but not Joab who only kills by deceit, or when the opponent is powerless, or by instructing others.

*I see them in myself as the urge to 'be thoroughly spiritual at all costs', dismissing any outward thought or custom as quite useless or problematic, and therefore to be terminated. Though each is an individual (see separate entries), they seem united in this.*

## ALPHABETICAL LISTING OF CHARACTERS

### Abiathar

A priest who escapes, when Saul takes vengeance on his fellows for helping David. He flees to David, then serves him in consulting the ephod. (See 1S23:9-12) Though loyal during Absalom's rebellion, he later supports Adonijah against Solomon, and is banished and replaced by Zadok.

*He seems to represent a rather shallow sense of worship, relic of an earlier state, but adequate just for a time.*

### Abigail (& Nabal) (1S25 and Scene 6)

David's third wife, formerly married to Nabal

Nabal, described as surly, mean, and stupid, refuses with insults to help the outlawed David and his followers, although their presence in the district has protected his flocks and servants. When David angrily threatens retribution, the servants appeal to Abigail, and she bravely hurries to take gifts to David, then flatteringly persuades him that he is far too great and noble to want vengeance, for which wise intervention he thanks her. When next day she tells Nabal what she has done, it seems that the shock brings on his death and, when David is told of this, he sends messengers to her proposing marriage. Described as intelligent and beautiful, and showing real courage and caring, she seems to me the ideal partner for David, yet after her impressive debut all we hear of her is being abducted (with other women) by Amalekites, then rescued by David and his men (1S30); and them all moving to Hebron, where she bears a son, Kileab (2S3). No more is heard of him either.

*To my mind she represents an affection for inner truth, one more reflective and perceptive than Michal, but maybe rather abstract. Her fading into obscurity could mean that she's still not really significant (less so than Bathsheba's passive innocence), or that this affection is too abstract or idealistic, or perhaps that she merges so perfectly into David's life that there's nothing more to be said.*

**Abinadab (1)** - Second eldest of David's brothers, mentioned only at David's anointing (1S16:8) and in the army that faced Goliath (17:13)

**Abinadab (2)** - son of Saul (1S31:2)

**Abinadab (3)** - who housed the Ark (1S7:1; 2S6:3)

### Abishag

A beautiful virgin employed to warm and wait on David in old age (1K1:1-4). She is later a matter of dispute between Adonijah and Solomon (1K2:19-23)

*She suggests to me a simple kindly affection which can ease the crises of life, and help to lead on to new states.*

### Abishai

David's nephew (see note above on 'The Sons of Zeruah'), one of his most zealous supporters and most capable lieutenants. He seems eager to punish any critic or opponent of David, notably the sleeping Saul (1S26:8) and the abusive Shimei (2S16:9-10, 19:21-23). David restrains him each time, exclaiming on two of the occasions, 'What do you and I have in common, you sons of Zeruah?'

*This suggests to me a zeal for truth, which believes that all opposing ideas should be destroyed with doctrinal argument. Such argument is not ideal, even if sometimes sadly necessary.*

Does he ever disobey David? It's unclear whether he helps his brother Joab in killing Abner (2S27:30), and Joab does seem to involve him in getting rid of Amasa (2S20:6-10), but deceit is hardly in his nature. He saves David's life when the king is tired in battle (2S21:15-17), and is listed among the champions (2S23:18-19). It's strange that he then fades out of the picture, and it's Benaiah who gets to deal with Shimei.

#### **Abner** (2S3:6-39 and Scene 8)

Saul's cousin and army-commander (1S17:55-58; 26:14-15), he faces a heavy responsibility when Saul and Jonathan are killed by the Philistines. Saul's only remaining son is Ishbosheth, apparently a weakling, so Abner sets him up as king over the northern tribes, and continues to oppose David though with increasing difficulty (2S2:8-3:1). Eventually, disillusioned with Ishbosheth, and seemingly aware of David's destiny, he offers his support to David instead, encouraging all the northern tribes to do so too. David welcomes this and celebrates the peace with feasting, but has not consulted Joab. Claiming that Abner is a dangerous deceiver, and seeking vengeance for Abner's killing his brother Asahel (though that was in fair fighting), Joab assassinates Abner in a cowardly way. David clearly denounces Joab and leads the mourning for Abner, so managing to keep at peace with the northerners. (All in 2S3 - see also Part C, Scene 8, perhaps the most poignant moment in David's reign.)

*I see Abner as sincere steady sensible obedience to literal commands, which is wary of 'clever thinking' (David and his supporters), preferring straightforward ideas. True spirituality has always respected this position, though pointing out its shortcomings, as when David chides Abner for failing to protect Saul (1S26:12-16). Even when literal faith collapses (death of Saul), this motive of loyalty clings to mere literal observance (makes Ishbosheth king) and, though losing ground to spiritual ideas (David's army), it is still strong enough to defeat the rash challenge of naïve spiritual argument (David's fleet-footed nephew Asahel who pursues retreating Abner, until the latter is forced reluctantly to kill him - 2S2:17-23).*

*Eventually this wish to do right realises the limits of mere outward observance (becomes disillusioned with Ishbosheth's jealousy and suspicions) and bravely chooses to acknowledge the need for heart faith to take charge (2S3:6-12). Briefly it looks as though conflict in the mind will cease (Israel will be happily united), for true spirituality (David) can happily work with outward righteousness. It's not so simple though. My urge to keep control of spiritual development myself feels threatened by such honest simplicity, and is determined to abolish it (Joab assassinating Abner).*

#### **Absalom** (2S13:18 and Scene 11)

David's third son, apparently his favourite, who nevertheless leads a dangerous rebellion against him.

His mother is Maacah, a princess of Geshur, who has born also a beautiful daughter Tamar. When Tamar is raped by their eldest half-brother Amnon, and David is furious but does nothing about it, Absalom arranges Amnon's murder, then flees to his mother's homeland (2S13). David misses him badly, so Joab manages to arrange a reconciliation (ch.14). Absalom, who is charming, very handsome and with an amazingly rich head of hair, now courts popularity and foments distrust of David's justice, until after four years he is able to mount a serious rebellion (chs.15-18).

Though hurt by this disloyalty, David wonders whether it may all be YHWH's intention, part of his punishment for killing Uriah. Still he enjoys much loyal support, and plans to thwart the rising. (See Scene 11) Having occupied Jerusalem, Absalom is advised to take possession publicly of David's concubines, proving his intention to replace David - also fulfilling YHWH's prediction (in 2S12:11-12). In the final battle David orders that everyone should be gentle with Absalom but, when Joab finds him caught in an oak tree by his splendid hair, he deliberately kills him and the rebellion melts away. David's extravagant grief for his son ('If only I had died instead of you!') spoils the victory for his followers. (See Scene 12)

*I see Absalom as picturing my effort to misuse inner truth to gain honour and influence for myself, especially by expressing it in a simplified and dramatic way - popularising it. When this effort threatens to become my ruling principle (rebellion), I am tempted to give in to self-satisfaction, rather than keep struggling for fuller growth (David wondering if Absalom would be a better king). Other beliefs and feelings make me resist, though at heart I don't wish to destroy him. The 'Absalom-idea' is soundly defeated, but only my need to appear upright (Joab) makes me actually destroy it.*

**Achish** - king of Gath whom David pretended to serve, in order to stay safe from Saul (1S21:10-15; 27-29) - *some false idea which yet aids my development*

### **Adonijah**

David's fourth son, whom David has never interfered with or questioned. This is only mentioned when, as David nears death, he makes a bid for the throne (1K1:5-10). He gains some support but not that of Nathan, who with Bathsheba alerts David to the situation, prompting him to make clear his wish for Solomon to follow him. After David's death he asks permission to marry Abishag, which Solomon interprets as a further bid for power, so has him executed. (1K2:13-25)

*Adonijah seems to be a pale echo of Absalom, likewise handsome and undisciplined, even copying him in getting himself chariots, horses and fifty runners, but far less thorough in his planning. Perhaps the 'Absalom-idea' which I have rejected haunts me a little to the end.*

**Adriel** - a man of Meholah who marries Merab, Saul's elder daughter (1S18:19; 2S21:8 - KJV's Michal in the latter passage must be a mistake.)

**Ahimaaz** - son of Zadok the priest, who (with Jonathan (2)) carries valuable information about Absalom's plans to David (2S17:15-21). He later brings news of Absalom's defeat to David at Mahanaim (2S18:19-29).

**Ahimelech** - leading priest at Nob who helps David, not knowing of Saul's anger with him, and is killed on Saul's orders (See 1S21-22 and scene 5)

*He may stand for simple piety, which tends to favour spiritual growth, but is destroyed by insistent literalism.*

**Ahinoam** (1S25:43)

David's second wife, a native of Jezreel, and mother to the ill-fated eldest son, Amnon. (Not to be confused with Saul's wife, her namesake, in 1S14:50-51)

**Ahio** - see with **Uzzah**

**Ahithophel**

An adviser to David and resident of Giloh, whose opinion was most highly regarded (2S16:23), he is persuaded to join Absalom's rebellion. His shrewd advice to attack David quickly while he is still weak is rejected in favour of Hushai's deliberately bad advice, so Ahithophel kills himself (ch.17:23).

*In Ahithophel I see some false insight, which both impresses me and encourages my Absalom-trend, but which cannot stand up to honest examination.*

#### **Amasa (2S17:25 – 20:13)**

Manuscripts disagree as to his parentage, but possibly David's nephew. (David says 'my own flesh and blood' - 2S19:13) Absalom makes him commander of his army and, in spite of his defeat, David gives him the same office, replacing Joab, maybe also as a gesture of amnesty towards the rebels. He shows no great skill and is soon gruesomely assassinated by Joab.

*He is linked with Abner by both David and Solomon (1K2:5,32) as two good men treacherously killed by Joab. So I see him as a wish for honesty, more spiritual than Abner, but sadly ineffective in face of Joab-machination.*

#### **Amnon (2S13)**

David's eldest son, born to Ahinoam. He desires his beautiful half-sister Tamar and, on the advice of his cousin Jonadab, pretends to need her care in illness, but rapes her, then rejects her. David is furious yet does nothing. Tamar's full brother Absalom takes her in and two years later arranges Amnon's murder.

*To my mind Amnon is a tendency to take advantage of inner truth, to use its flexibility and subtlety merely as a game or to indulge selfish desires. This does serious harm to gentle affections and arouses my self-esteem (Absalom) to kill it off.*

**Araunah** (2S24:16-25) - a Jebusite who owns a threshing-floor near Jerusalem

#### **Asahel (2S2:18-23)**

David's nephew, the youngest of the sons of Zeruiah (see special note under listing of David's family). Being fleet-footed, he pursues the formidable Abner during the northerners' retreat, rashly challenges him, and is easily killed. This gives his brother Joab reason (or excuse) to assassinate Abner (2S3:27).

*This suggests to me the arrogance of thinking that a little spiritual understanding makes me better or stronger than the most mature literalist.*

**Baanah** – see Recab

**Barzillai** - Old and wealthy inhabitant of Gilead who supplies food, etc. to David and his followers during Absalom's rising, but eloquently declines a place at court as a reward. On his deathbed David remembers this kindness. (2S17:27-29; 19:31-39; 1K2:7)

*An outer form which is totally supportive of heart faith and needed by it?*

#### **Bathsheba (and Uriah the Hittite) (2S11-12; 1K1-2, Scene 10)**

Her beauty when bathing arouses David's desire disastrously, with tragic repercussions, yet she later becomes his wife and bears Solomon, the son who will succeed him.

She is married first to Uriah, listed as one of David's champions (2S23:39). Captivated by her beauty, David seduces her and, desperate that her pregnancy should not betray him, plots Uriah's death in battle, then marries her. Nathan is sent to confront him with his guilt, and to pronounce sentence, including the death of Bathsheba's first son. As David fully admits his guilt and accepts the consequences without complaint, YHWH forgives him and allows him to keep Bathsheba, even welcomes her second son with a name meaning 'loved by YHWH'.

*I find it easiest to imagine her as simple, trusting, and uncondemning - a character unspoiled by the wrong-doing around her. The parable with which Nathan confronts David seems to represent her as a stolen lamb, and I think she must stand for a kind of innocence - something which my growing spirit presumptuously claims as mine, and which in a very painful way may become so, producing a new kind of wisdom. (See more discussion in Scene 10)*

The second son is Solomon, and apparently David at some point promises Bathsheba that Solomon will succeed him. Long after, as David is dying, and Adonijah bids for the throne, Nathan prompts her to remind David of this, and ensure his intervention (1K1). Her readiness to speak for Adonijah (1K2) again suggests an innocent unsuspecting character.

### **Benaiah**, son of Jehoiada

Himself from the tribe of Judah, he commands the Kerethites and Pelethites, an elite band of mercenaries (2S8:18; 20:23), and is counted among David's finest champions (2S23:20-23). He joins Nathan and Zadok in ensuring Solomon's accession, then becomes Commander of the whole army, and is charged with executing Adonijah, Joab and Shimei (1K1-2).

*He seems a fit symbol of quietly determined obedience to inner truth.*

### **David**

He is involved everywhere, but see chiefly parts B, C, and E2&3.

**Doeg the Edomite** - Saul's head shepherd who witnesses David's visit to Nob and welcome there, reports these to Saul, and on Saul's command kills all the priests and the townspeople. (1S21:7; 22:9-19)

*Obviously some very nasty, or very misguided, idea!*

### **Eliab**

David's eldest brother, tall and impressive to Samuel's eyes but passed over by YHWH with the memorable words, 'Man looks at the outward appearance, but YHWH looks at the heart.' (1S16:6-7) He is contemptuous of David's brave words about Goliath. (1S17:28-29)

*Complacency with simpler religion?*

**Gad** - a prophet who makes two brief interventions (1S22:5; 2S24:18)

*Spiritual insight, like Nathan – but is there some difference from him?*

**Goliath** - a giant Philistine champion whom young David defeats and kills (1S17) though in 2S21:19 this feat is attributed to Elhanan!

*The idea, in its most extreme and frightening form, that true knowledge is all-important!*

**Hadadezer** - king of Zobah, an Aramaean kingdom (2S8 and 10)

**Hiram** - king of Tyre who supplies cedarwood to both David and Solomon (2S5:11; 1K5)

*An alien but favourable principle of truth?*

**Hushai** - a supporter of David, who asks him to pretend supporting Absalom, but give him bad strategic advice. This Hushai does ably, leading to Absalom's defeat. (2S15:32-37; 16:15-19; 17:5-13)

*Hushai to my mind is some true insight, which confuses my Absalom-trend, enabling the truth to defeat it.*

**Ishbi-Benob** - giant Philistine who threatens the life of David when tired but is killed by Abishai (2S21:15-19).

**Ish-Bosheth** (2S2-4)

Son of Saul whom Abner makes king over northern Israel for a few years after his father's and brothers' deaths. However, when his jealous suspicion offends and exasperates his champion, Abner transfers his support to David, making Ishbosheth irrelevant. After Abner's death, he is treacherously murdered by two of his captains.

*Mere outward observance of religion, a shallow pretence without meaning or conviction.*

**Ittai**

The leader of a band of Gittite (Philistine) mercenaries who serve David late in his reign, he shows impressive loyalty when Absalom rebels (2S15:19-22), and is later given high command (18:1-13).

*Doctrine playing its proper role of serving truly spiritual life (contrast Goliath!)*

**Jesse** - David's father (1S16; 17:12-19). David is sometimes referred to simply as 'Jesse's son'.

*Simple uprightness which begets heart faith?*

**Joab**

David's nephew, eldest of the three sons of his sister Zeruiah (see *note on them under listings of David's family*), the army commander for most of David's reign, and frequently a shrewd adviser. Yet he is the most puzzling, ambiguous character in the whole story.

We never hear that David has chosen him, just that he is in command. He seems to be missing at some important moments (e.g. the taking of Jerusalem, and bringing up of the Ark there). There are clearly times when David wants to be rid of him, yet on one of these he complains, 'These sons of Zeruiah are too strong for me'. (See *Abishai* for his relationship to Joab.)

Maybe Joab has strong backing within family and tribe, which David has to take into account (2S20 has several mentions of 'Joab's men' as if a separate group), but more interesting is his strength in the symbolic sense.

*I see Joab in myself as the pride, which thinks I can achieve spiritual growth in my own way, and is resolved to do so without interference from God or man. It also makes me keep up a front, determined not to show vulnerability or weakness, nor to risk ridicule or pity, but to keep control by pretence, even downright hypocrisy.*

Joab is an able general, highly successful in defeating Ammonites and Aramaeans (2S10), also rebellions within Israel, yet is never mentioned as fighting Philistines, nor in the important capture of Jerusalem. He is a shrewd adviser. When David is so distressed at losing his son that he ignores his loyal troops, Joab sensibly points out that he risks losing their loyalty, and the warning is heeded (2S19). He rightly advises David against a census of warriors, though on David's insistence he carries it out (2S24).

He is also a resourceful 'fixer', unquestioningly assisting David in the dreadful killing of Uriah (2S11). He tactfully engineers a reconciliation between David and his son Absalom (2S14), but later, when Absalom leads a rebellion, he coldly kills the helpless rebel, against David's express orders (2S18). *Joab-in-me is sometimes impressively clear-sighted, always coldly calculating. He is actually useful in some aspects of spiritual growth, BUT ....*

He is totally ruthless towards potential rivals, and shamelessly deceitful in dealing with them. This shows most clearly in assassinating Amasa, whom David has chosen to replace him (2S20:4-10). Killing Abner (2S3:24-27) is claimed to be avenging Asahel's death, also a safeguard against Abner's treachery (verse 25), but looks very much like fear of Abner taking his place of influence. His motive in eliminating Absalom is unclear, but may be jealousy again, and all three killings are deceitful, cowardly, and defiant towards David.

*David-in-me wants to be honest and genuine (to get rid of Joab and ally with Abner, or later Amasa), but I never feel quite confident enough, feel safer with this trait still around - even though it kills off other better possibilities. Joab is my shadow-self, objectionable but seemingly inescapable.*

As David is dying, Joab backs Adonijah's claim to succeed, but on David's advice and Solomon's orders he is ignominiously executed (1K1-2).

*Authenticity at last!*

**Jonadab** – son of David's brother Shimeah and close friend of his eldest son Amnon (2S13:1-5, 32-33), whom Jonadab encourages in wrong-doing.

*Some false idea, such as 'Self-indulgence is always OK'.*

### **Jonathan (1)**

Eldest son of Saul, and a champion in his army, who after the killing of Goliath quickly forms a close friendship with David, so that David later recalls, 'Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women.' (2S1:26) Giving David his robes and arms (1S18:4) is remarkable, being symbolic of recognising him as the next king.

*I see Jonathan as the genuinely good and kindly life, which surface faith (Saul) can give rise to - noble but limited. At first it easily defeats the challenge of 'knowledge only' (Philistines), and welcomes the further inspiration of heart faith (David).*

*However, when surface faith (Saul) becomes proud and intolerant, its goodness loses strength.*

I find him a rather contradictory character. He has proved valiant and effective against the Philistines (1S14:1-23) yet does not answer Goliath's challenge. He has clashed with Saul over the inadvertent breaking of an oath which nearly brought him death (1S14:24-45) but cannot believe Saul would try to kill David (1S20:1-2). He swears lasting friendship with David (18:3-4; 20:42) and intercedes with Saul for him, which brings even worse conflict (1S20:24-34), yet makes no further effort to prevent Saul's pursuit of David.

*Well, goodness without spiritual understanding can be inconsistent or confused.*

Along with Saul, Jonathan is eventually killed and abused by the Philistines (1S31), and David laments them together (2S1), then later re-buries them together (2S21).

*True spiritual development will eventually integrate outward faith and goodness into a deeply spiritual lifestyle.*

**Jonathan (2)** - son of Abiathar the priest. See with Ahimaaz for his main contribution. He also brings news of Solomon's accession to Adonijah (1K1:42-48)

**Kimham** - son of Barzillai to whom David shows favour (2S19:37-40)

**Kish** - father of Saul (1S9:1-3)

**Maacah** - princess of Geshur, married to David, and mother of Absalom (2S3:3)

**Makir, son of Amiel** – resident of Lo Debar in Gilead - houses Mephibosheth (2S9:4) - later supports David in exile (2S17:27-29)

### **Mephibosheth and Ziba**

Mephibosheth is Jonathan's son, sadly lame in both feet - a fact several times repeated. His lameness was due to an accident, when his nurse heard of Jonathan's death, the boy being aged five, and in her hurry she dropped him. (2S4:4)

True to his oath and his old friend, David looks after Mephibosheth at court, appointing Ziba to run Saul's estates for his benefit. (2S9) He treats David with much deference but at the time of Absalom's rebellion his sincerity comes into question. Ziba tells David that he has stayed in Jerusalem in hopes of regaining his grandfather's realm (2S16:1-4), though he later asserts that Ziba betrayed him and left him helpless (2S19:24-30). David, having first given the estates to Ziba, now makes no judgment but splits the estates between them - an offer which Mephibosheth declines. In the affair of the Gibeonites David still spares Mephibosheth. (2S21:7)

*I take him to mean a kindly belief or vague goodwill, like Jonathan's but sentimental and ineffective. I value and maintain this trait, giving it some new practical slant (Ziba) and, although in a crisis the combination breaks down, I manage to keep both going.*

## Merab

Saul's elder daughter, whom Saul considers giving in marriage to David, on condition that he keeps fighting Philistines - hoping he will die in battle. But David feels unworthy, so Saul gives her instead to Adriel of Meholah. (1S18:17-19)

*I see her as a very superficial liking for religious ideas and practice, such as I felt in childhood - a matter of imitation, curiosity, and finding some fun. It has little understanding of more inward belief (David), and gets attached to literal ideas.*

She bears Adriel five sons, but years later David is forced to give them up for execution by the Gibeonites. (2S21 and Scene 13 - At 21:8 the King James Version reads 'Michal', but this must be due to a mistake in Hebrew copying.) *For me these sons represent shallow ideas about worship and conduct, which survive well into my spiritual journey but must finally be given up.*

## Michal

Saul's younger daughter, and David's first wife. Her life, like that of many princesses, is blighted by politics.

*The sad story, however, usefully reflects a danger in our religious development. The 'David idea' of spiritual growth excites in many of us a passionate enthusiasm, a wish to be part of it, a readiness to take risks to support and liberate it. And this enthusiasm is movingly expressed in Michal falling in love with David, the young hero (1S18:20). She must be affected by Saul's and Jonathan's high opinion of him, and all the women singing his praises with dancing (verses 1-7). Although her moody father turns jealous of him (stubborn literalism resenting spirituality), she can imagine nothing better than to marry David, and probably does not realise that Saul is plotting to make extravagant demands of David for a bride-price which will ensure his being killed by Philistines (verses 21-27). Self-satisfied literalism hopes that this inward nonsense can be ruled out by doctrinal dogmatism.*

However David comes through this test successfully (see *Circumcision* in Part H) and Saul's jealousy has to find other outlets. When it reaches the point of sending soldiers to assassinate her bridegroom, Michal takes the enormous risk of letting him down through a palace window, then covering his escape with his pretended illness and a fake body in the bed. Her treachery is unmasked to Saul's fury, and she pretends that David had threatened her. (1S19:11-17) However, with David outlawed and exiled, Saul emphasises the breach by giving Michal to another man, Paltiel. (2S3:13-16) *This affection that finds spirit-truth so exciting is still 'Saul's daughter'. I see it as a passing adolescent enthusiasm, quite shallow for all its impulsive risk-taking, which is easily separated from its object, and soon finds another attachment - some more straightforward idea.*

Meanwhile David builds his power-base, Saul is defeated and killed, and eventually his remaining heirs have to accept David as king. Along the way he gains more wives and concubines, and these produce sons. *Spiritual truth becomes more and more powerful in the mind, defeating all ideas of merely literal truth. It is also combined with more and more feelings of delight and creativity, which give birth to further spiritual insights.*

As part of the peace settlement, David requires the return of his wife Michal, and this is arranged (2S3:13-16). There's no indication of her feelings in the matter, but Paltiel, with whom she has been far longer than she was with David, is clearly heartbroken. She comes to David's court to find herself one of many, and by custom all Saul's wives and concubines would become his at the same time. David's action

looks like simply a political move, *but may represent heart faith's continuing respect for its roots in 'basic religion'.*

When YHWH's Ark is brought to rest in Jerusalem, and David dances uninhibitedly with glee in front of his God, Michal feels only contempt, and greets him with coldness and sarcasm as he arrives home. The breach seems complete, as David justifies himself, and the last we hear of Michal is that she eventually dies childless (2S6:16,20-23). *As the truth of God's loving way is set at the centre of my life, outward immature enthusiasm does not understand it nor the joy of heart faith. There are plenty of other affections to unite with the spiritual and produce new life but, were I to remain simply motivated by 'Michal', my spirit would have no future.* (See Scene 9)

**Nabal** - See with **Abigail**

**Nathan (1)** - Prophet who advises David about building a house for YHWH (2S7), later denounces him regarding Bathsheba and Uriah (2S12), and lastly leads the move to ensure Solomon's succession (1K1:11-27)

*Each message stands for some insight, some light on my path.*

**Nathan (2)** - son of David (2S5:14). Also (according to Luke 3:31) ancestor of Joseph, Jesus' earthly father.

**Obed-Edom** - a Gittite living in Israel, at whose house the Ark of YHWH resides for a time (2S6:9-12)

**Paltiel** - second husband of Michal (1S25:44; 2S3:13-16)

**Rapha, sons of (or Rephaim)** - a family of Philistine giants (2S21:16-22)

*They may remind us how powerful the idea 'All you need is knowing' can be.*

**Recab and Baanah** - two Benjamite warriors in service of Ishbosheth, who assassinate him in expectation of gaining David's favour, but instead are executed (2S4)

**Rizpah** - Formerly a concubine of Saul whom Ishbosheth and Abner later quarrel about (2S3:6-10). Later still her brave defence of the bodies of her two sons deeply moves David. (See Scene 13 and 2S21:8-13)

*A simple but noble affection for outward religion and morality. Shallow pretence (Ishbosheth) cannot hold her. Heart faith (David) respects her, though feeling no need for the meaningless customs she loves (her sons).*

**Samuel**

Prophet and priest of YHWH, judge and leader of Israel, who is charged with anointing David as king (1S16). It is no easy task for him, after all that has gone before.

The popular story of his call by YHWH as a small child (1S3) suggests that *he represents a simple love and trust in God in infancy, which is yet able to deal with the hardships of life*, for his first charge is to carry a message of doom to the old priest Eli. For a long while (1S7) he is Israel's sole leader and the Philistines are kept at bay, *which to me pictures the settled state of a well-ordered childhood. When this breaks down, there is a need for understanding to direct life*, indicated by the people wanting a king to lead them, and the confusion of chapters 8-10 *may paint the turmoil*

*of adolescent adjustment, during which childhood trust is still an anchor – Samuel still the prophet, guiding and correcting Saul (chs.11-13). This trust eventually brings the insight that merely outward living (Saul) will never be enough, needs replacing with an inner faith and understanding (David) (chs.15-16).*

Samuel sees David only once more, when he flees Saul's court and finds Samuel at Ramah (1S19:18-24). *This heart faith needs only a little reassurance from childhood faith, then grows in new ways.* Saul in contrast has to call Samuel up from the grave for guidance (1S28). *Surface faith still works from simple truths of childhood.*

## **Saul**

King of Israel before David. (See parts B, D 8-11, start of F, and C 1,3-5,7)

It helps to know about his earlier life: The Israelites become convinced, in spite of YHWH's warnings, that a king will defend them better than a priestly leader (1S8). Saul is selected and anointed in a complex way (chs.9-10), and rules with some success for a while (chs.11-15), being a brave warrior, but with a streak of wilfulness and self-righteousness, which eventually makes YHWH reject him (15:22-29), and appoint David to take his place (16:1-13). YHWH's Spirit in him is replaced by an evil spirit (16:14), which brings fierce mood changes, and later murderous jealousy of David.

For a while he unknowingly encourages David to serve him, first as harpist, then as army officer (16:19-23:18:5). But for the rest of his reign he vacillates between trying to trap David into dying in battle, blatantly attacking him and anyone who appears to support him, and briefly begging forgiveness (24:16-22; 26:21-25). All this interferes with his resistance to Philistine domination, the ghost of Samuel warns him his cause is hopeless (ch.28), and he dies in battle (ch.31).

*As a king, Saul stands for truth guiding and defending religious character, but clearly a form of truth with severe limitations. I see him as quite external or literal belief and practice - professing a written creed, obeying clear commands as to conduct, and faithfully carrying out fixed rituals. ('Surface faith' is my shorthand.) This faith can assist the process of spiritual growth for a while, for instance through one's youth or in the early stages after a conversion. It can defeat clearly wrong attitudes (like Ammonites) but is less effective against subtle falsities, such as 'I understand all the doctrine, so I must be OK' (Philistines). At some point a deeper spirituality (David as 'heart faith') has to take over. A strong element in human make-up resists such change, is puzzled by new spiritual ideas, and feels indignant at being replaced. It will even try to use dogma to destroy its rival (trying to get David killed by Philistines). However, these outward forms are respected and valued by heart faith, as Saul is honoured by David, and the latter will not abandon them suddenly or wholesale. So ....*

David promises both Saul and Jonathan that he will not harm their descendants, and for most of his reign members of the house of Saul play an important role, whether helpful or hostile. This seems to end when David is moved to re-inter Saul's and Jonathan's bones in their ancestral tomb (2S21:11-14 - see C13). Yet there is still Shimei (see below).

**Shammah/ Shimeah** - third eldest brother of David, father of Amnon's friend Jonadab (1S16:9; 2S13:32) (No connection with either of the Shammahs listed as champions in 2S23.)

## Sheba

He leads a rebellion of northern tribes against David (2S20) which David reckons dangerous (v6), yet it melts away quickly with Sheba being betrayed by the people of Abel Beth Maacah (v22). The narrative seems more concerned with the conflict over who should command David's army, Amasa or Joab.

## Shimei

A shifty member of the same clan as Saul. He is delighted at David's flight from Jerusalem, hurling accusations, stones, and abuse at him (2S16:5-14 and Scene 11) but at David's return he is profusely repentant (2S19:16-23). On both occasions Abishai is eager to execute him but David vehemently refuses.

*He suggests to me a persistent attachment to some literal beliefs, and resentment of spiritual growth, though without the courage to be honest about it. Doctrinal argument sees clearly the treachery of this sentiment, but my heart is reluctant to be harsh with it.*

Still at his death David strongly advises Solomon to kill Shimei (1K2:8) and this eventually happens (1K2:36-44).

## Solomon

Son of David and Bathsheba, he is chosen by his dying father to follow him as king (1K1:32-35) - possibly because of the sign of YHWH's favour at his birth (2S12:24-25).

He starts his reign well in asking for wisdom as his preferred gift from YHWH (1K3:5-9), having also less pleasantly but firmly suppressed the sinister presences of Joab, Shimei, and Adonijah (1K2). He then fulfils YHWH's promise (2S7:11-13) by building the great temple (1K5-8). He builds up the nation too with trade, administration, fortifications, and alliances. *In all this he seems to follow David admirably, even to be the fulfilment of David's efforts, and some interpreters see him as picturing an advanced spiritual stage (in Swedenborg's terms, the rule of celestial truth, truth perceived by love, which is freed from conflict).*

All is not well though. Is it wise of him to amass gold, chariots and horses, and wives (1K10:14ff), in this going right against YHWH's law (see part D8 on 'Kingship')? It's possible even to see the temple-building as a lapse, rather than great achievement. (Cf. Isaiah 66:1-2; Jeremiah 7:3-4; Mark 13:1-2) He is stubbornly foolish to let his wives lead him into worshipping foreign gods, and so is angrily rejected by YHWH (1K11). As a result most of Israel is taken away from his descendants, just one tribe being kept 'for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem'. Later generations attributed wise proverbs to him (*Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*), also romantic poetry (*Song of Songs*), but chroniclers classed him among kings who had failed to follow David's great example (1K11:6), in the Prophets he gets just one factual mention, and Jesus' two references to him sound rather dismissive (*Matthew* 6:28-29; 12:42). *Does he illustrate the heights and depths to which rule by truth can rise or fall? Or that the very best of human achievement is fleeting and unreliable? I'm still wondering.*

## Tamar

David's daughter by Maacah, and sister to Absalom. Her eldest half-brother Amnon craftily, callously rapes her, then rejects her. Her full brother Absalom comforts and houses her, and later has Amnon murdered, but Tamar is left 'a desolate woman .... disgraced'. (2S13)

*David had other daughters than this, some of whom surely led happier lives - just as our spiritual growth produces lovely new affections. How sad that only Tamar is mentioned, and that this lovely affection is spoiled by the selfish exploitation of inner truths (Amnon)! Is it surprising that David-in-me seems at a loss how to react? Absalom though (my self-esteem) is in no doubt that this shame must be ruthlessly expiated.*

**Uriah the Hittite** - one of David's champions, and former husband of Bathsheba (see with her) – the victim of David's great sin (2S11-12; 23:39; Scene 10).

**Uzzah & Ahio** - two sons of Abinadab who accompany the Ark of YHVH towards Jerusalem. Uzzah is killed for touching the Ark, much to David's anger and fear. (2S6:1-8) *God's truth does not need mere human support.*

**Wise woman of Tekoa** (2S14) - Joab employs her to persuade David to recall Absalom from exile. And a **wise woman of Abel Beth Maacah** (2S20) - She arranges beheading of Sheba, so that Joab will call off the siege of her city. *Two good affections put to use in a calculating way, but to good effect.*

**Zadok** - priest during much of David's reign, who replaces Abiathar from Solomon's succession (2S8:17; 15:24-29; 1K2:35)

*A higher sense of worship*

**Zeruiah** - sister of David, mother of Joab, Abishai, and Asahel (exceptionally always known as *her* sons)

*Does she represent the affection which drives all of them in different ways? A zeal for spiritual development as new and superior?*

**Ziba** - see with **Mephibosheth**

## **G SUMMARY OF THE STORY IN *SAMUEL AND KINGS***

### **- chapter by chapter**

#### **1 Samuel 1-15**

These chapters recount the emergence of Israel from a period of chaos, achieved chiefly through the priestly leadership of Samuel.

#### **Chapters**

- |        |                                                         |
|--------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| 1 - 7  | Samuel's rise and period as 'judge'                     |
| 8      | Israel's wish for a king and YHVH's reluctant agreement |
| 9 - 14 | the choice of Saul and his reign, mainly successful     |
| 15     | his disobedience, and rejection by YHVH                 |

#### **1 Samuel 16-31**

#### **Chapter - verses**

- |     |       |                                                                                                                                                                         |
|-----|-------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 16: | 1-13  | Samuel sent to anoint David - the Spirit of YHVH coming on him in power                                                                                                 |
|     | 14-23 | David called as harpist to soothe Saul's evil spirit                                                                                                                    |
| 17: | 1-11  | Goliath's terrifying challenge                                                                                                                                          |
|     | 12-40 | David's response                                                                                                                                                        |
|     | 41-54 | his victory and the rout of the Philistines                                                                                                                             |
|     | 55-58 | Saul finds out who David is                                                                                                                                             |
| 18: | 1- 4  | David befriended by Jonathan                                                                                                                                            |
|     | 5-7   | promoted and immensely popular                                                                                                                                          |
|     | 8-16  | but arousing Saul's violent jealousy                                                                                                                                    |
|     | 17-19 | David to marry one of Saul's daughters? - not Merab                                                                                                                     |
|     | 20-30 | but, having survived Saul's trap, marries Michal                                                                                                                        |
| 19: | 1-7   | Jonathan arranges brief reconciliation                                                                                                                                  |
|     | 8-17  | Saul's jealous rage revives - David saved only by Michal's ruse                                                                                                         |
|     | 18-24 | he flees to Samuel at Ramah - his pursuers are made to prophesy by the Spirit of God                                                                                    |
| 20: | 1-23  | Jonathan and David reaffirm their friendship - plan to test Saul's intent - arrange signal involving arrows                                                             |
|     | 24-42 | Jonathan pleads for David - is attacked by Saul - his tearful separation from David                                                                                     |
| 21: | 1-9   | David flees to the priests at Nob - pretends to be with men on royal errand - is given consecrated bread and Goliath's sword - this observed by Doeg, Saul's shepherd   |
|     | 10-15 | David flees to Gath - pretends madness                                                                                                                                  |
| 22: | 1-5   | to cave of Adullam - gathers 400 followers (men in debt, discontented or distressed) plus family - takes parents to safety with king of Moab - then to forest of Hereth |
|     | 6-19  | Saul, feeling betrayed, accuses priests of knowingly aiding David against him - at his command Doeg destroys 85 priests and their families and community                |
|     | 20-23 | Only Abiathar escapes to tell David, taking the ephod                                                                                                                   |
| 23: | 1-6   | David saves Keilah from the Philistines                                                                                                                                 |
|     | 7-14  | leaves Keilah and keeps moving, pursued by Saul                                                                                                                         |

|     |       |                                                                                                                                                                                |
|-----|-------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|     | 15-18 | brief meeting with Jonathan                                                                                                                                                    |
|     | 19-29 | tipped by locals, Saul nearly corners David but has to turn his attention to the Philistines                                                                                   |
| 24: | 1-7   | David's chance to kill Saul - cannot harm 'the Lord's Anointed'                                                                                                                |
|     | 8-15  | proves this to Saul and pleads for justice                                                                                                                                     |
|     | 16-22 | Saul repents and acknowledges David's destiny - obtains David's promise not to harm his descendants                                                                            |
| 25: | 1     | Samuel dies                                                                                                                                                                    |
|     | 2-13  | David asks help from Nabal, is rebuffed, resolves on vengeance                                                                                                                 |
|     | 14-35 | Nabal's wife Abigail brings gifts to David, tactfully placates him                                                                                                             |
|     | 36-42 | when Nabal dies, David marries Abigail                                                                                                                                         |
|     | 43-44 | already married to Ahinoam, but Michal given to Paltiel                                                                                                                        |
| 26: | 1-12  | Saul pursues David again, who resists second chance of killing him                                                                                                             |
|     | 13-25 | again pleads for reconciliation - Saul repents again                                                                                                                           |
| 27: | 1-12  | David offers alliance with Achish king of Gath, is given Ziklag, pretends to raid Judah while actually attacking enemy tribes                                                  |
| 28: | 1-2   | David made Achish's bodyguard for life                                                                                                                                         |
|     | 3-25  | Saul, terrified at new Philistine attack, commands a medium to call up Samuel's ghost, who predicts disaster                                                                   |
| 29: | 1-11  | Achish takes David along to fight Israel but Philistine commanders distrust him and send him back                                                                              |
| 30: | 1-6   | Ziklag has been sacked by Amalekites, families taken captive, and men blame David.                                                                                             |
|     | 7-31  | re-assured by consulting YHWH, David pursues and wipes out most Amalekites, regains families - insists on fair sharing of plunder - sends gifts to elders of Judah             |
| 31: | 1-10  | Philistines defeat Israel, killing three of Saul's sons - Saul kills himself - bodies fastened to wall of Beth Shan but recovered by men of Jabesh Gilead - bones buried there |

## 2 Samuel 1-24

- 1: 1-16 Amalekite tells David of Saul's defeat, claiming to have found him wounded and killed him at his request - is executed  
17-27 David laments Saul and Jonathan (song to be passed on)
- 2: 1-7 David anointed king over Judah in Hebron - sends thanks to Jabesh Gilead  
8-11 Saul's son Ishbosheth king of Israel (the north) - length of his and David's reigns  
12-17 battle at Gibeon, army of Israel commanded by Abner, Judah's by Joab  
18-23 Joab's brother Asahel pursues Abner who warns him back, then has to kill him  
24-32 Abner and Joab call temporary truce
- 3: 1 but war drags on, while David grows gradually stronger  
2-5 David's wives and sons in Hebron listed  
6-11 Ishbosheth and Abner quarrel  
12-21 Abner offers to support David, agrees Michal should be returned to him, and they meet to make peace at Hebron  
22-27 Joab objects, treacherously assassinates Abner  
28-37 David condemns Joab, calling a curse on him - leads mourning with extravagant praise, at which most people are pleased  
38-39 He confesses his weakness against 'these sons of Zeruiah'
- 4: 1-12 Ishbosheth murdered by two of his captains, who carry his head to David, expecting reward - but instead are executed  
(3-4) how Jonathan's son Mephibosheth came to be crippled)
- 5: 1-5 David made king over all Israel (aged 30) to reign 33 years  
6-10 He conquers Jerusalem - strengthens it  
11-16 - builds a palace - takes more wives – begets more children  
17-25 More victories over Philistines - with YHWH's mystical leading
- 6: 1-11 David starts to bring the Ark from the Philistine border to Jerusalem but Uzzah dies for presuming to steady the Ark, and David anxiously decides to leave it at Obed-Edom's house.  
12-19 Obed-Edom having been blessed, David brings it the rest of the way - great rejoicing with David dancing  
20-23 Michal despises David's 'indecent' - his defence - Michal barren till death
- 7: 1-3 David aspires to build a house for YHWH  
4-17 YHWH through Nathan discourages him, promises greatness for David, security for Israel, and a house to rule after David, his son to build a house for YHWH  
18-29 David's expression of thanks
- 8: 1-14 David defeats Philistines, Moabites, Aramaeans, Edomites - dedicates all tribute and plunder to YHWH  
15-18 David's officials
- 9: 1-13 David gives all the land that belonged to Saul to Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, with Ziba and family to farm them for him
- 10: 1-5 New king of Ammon insults David's ambassadors

- 6-19 Ammonites and their Aramaean allies well defeated
- 11: 1-5 David seduces Bathsheba, wife of Uriah the Hittite, making her pregnant  
6-13 tries to disguise this by calling Uriah back from war  
14-25 then instructs Joab to engineer Uriah's death  
26-27 and marries Bathsheba who bears a son
- 12: 1-6 Prophet Nathan tells story of rich man stealing neighbour's lamb, at which David is angry  
7-14 'You are the man' declares Nathan, and announces David's punishment: sword to divide his house, one close to him to lie openly with his wives, and son to die  
15-25 New-born son dies, in spite of David's fasting to plead for him - David does not fast in mourning, explains why - comforts Bathsheba who then bears Solomon, loved by YHWH  
25-31 Further victories over Ammonites
- 13: 1-22 Amnon, David's eldest son, rapes his half-sister Tamar  
- David furious but does nothing  
23-38 Tamar's full brother, Absalom, arranges murder of Amnon - then flees to the king of Geshur, his grandfather
- 14: 1-24 Knowing David longs to see Absalom, Joab employs a wise woman from Tekoa to convince him he should recall his son  
25-33 Absalom's exceptional beauty, especially his hair - his full reconciliation with David
- 15: 1-12 Absalom curries popularity - mounts a rebellion - involves David's counsellor Ahithophel  
13-37 David leaves Jerusalem with many servants and soldiers determined to support him - leaves ten concubines to care for the palace - tells priests to keep the Ark in the city - asks friend Hushai to join Absalom and give him bad advice - arranges for priests' sons to bring him messages
- 16: 1-4 Mephibosheth's servant Ziba has brought supplies to David, reporting that his master is disloyal, and is rewarded  
5-14 Shimei a member of Saul's clan insults David, who restrains Abishai from killing him, reflecting it may be YHWH's intention  
15-23 On Ahithophel's advice, Absalom lies with David's concubines Openly (so making clear his claim to the throne)
- 17: 1-14 Ahithophel advises rapid pursuit of David with 12000 men  
- Absalom prefers Hushai's advice of waiting for a larger army  
15-29 Hushai sends word to David, enabling him to cross Jordan and find safety and supplies
- 18: 1-5 Army want David to stay safe, so he appoints Joab, Abishai and Ittai (Philistine mercenary leader) to command three sections, instructs everyone to be gentle with Absalom  
6-18 Absalom's army defeated, and he caught in a tree by his hair, where Joab deliberately kills him  
19-33 Messengers sent to David, who seems unmoved by the victory, only grief-stricken for Absalom
- 19: 1-8 Joab reproves David for ingratitude, warning he may lose his warriors' support, and he takes the advice

- 9-30 David returns to Jerusalem though with some confusion - makes Amasa, Absalom's commander, commander in Joab's place, pardons Shimei and Mephibosheth
- 31-40 eloquent parting by elderly supporter Barzillai
- 41-43 friction between men of Judah and Israel
- 20: 1-3 Sheba arouses Israel against David - ten concubines separated  
4-13 involved response to rebellion, in which Joab craftily assassinates Amasa and takes back command
- 14-22 David's army besiege Sheba and Israelites in Abel Beth Maacah - wise woman in city agrees with Joab to throw out Sheba's head, so that siege can end
- 23-26 David's officers
- 21: 1-9 Three-year famine - YHWH explains, it's because of Saul killing Gibeonites - they demand execution of seven of Saul's descendants - David hands over five sons of Merab and two sons of Rizpah (Saul's concubine) to be killed and exposed
- 10-14 Rizpah guards her sons' bodies against birds and animals - David moved by this to fetch bones of Saul and Jonathan to be buried in family tomb - end of famine
- 15-22 More wars with Philistines - weary David threatened by giant, rescued by Abishai, told by men he must stay out of battle, to preserve 'the lamp of Israel' - other giant 'sons of Rapha' killed by David's men
- 22: 1-51 David's praise to the Lord (*same as Psalm 18*) - mostly for saving him from enemies (warlike!)
- 23: 1-7 David's 'last words' (*psalm-like*) - more about ruling David's 'mighty men' or champions, the Three and the Thirty, and some of their exploits
- 24: 1-9 David incited by angry YHWH to order census of fighting men (forbidden in the Law)
- 10-17 as punishment, given choice of famine, military defeat, or plague, he chooses last - 70,000 die - David complains 'Why them?'
- 18-25 builds altar on Araunah's threshing-floor, where plague halted

## 1 Kings 1-2

- 1: 1-4 David comforted in old age by lovely young Abishag  
5-10 Adonijah (third son) makes a bid to become king  
11-27 Bathsheba and Nathan question if this is David's will  
28-40 and he gives orders for Solomon to be enthroned  
41-53 Adonijah is told and takes fright, is pardoned
- 2: 1-4 David exhorts Solomon to follow YHWH's way faithfully  
5-10 to deal harshly with Joab and Shimei – dies and is buried

## **1 Kings 2–11**

These chapters tell of Solomon's reign - a wonderful climax, followed by the decline of Solomon, and the start to a rapid disintegration of David's kingdom.

- 2 consolidation of Solomon's position
- 3 Solomon's dream of YHWH - judgment of two prostitutes
- 4 his officials, prosperity, and wisdom
- 5-8 building and dedication of the Temple
- 9 YHWH re-states his promise - Solomon's other building,  
enslavement of former peoples of Canaan, and rich trading
- 10 the Queen of Sheba's visit - Solomon's great wealth
- 11 his many wives - and other gods  
YHWH's reproof and threat to break up the kingdom  
- which starts to happen

## **SOME PASSAGES FROM LATER BOOKS, REFERRING BACK TO DAVID**

1 Chronicles 11-29 offers more material on the life of David, retelling a few incidents from Samuel, but concentrating on what many critics reckon to be the interests of priestly editors, such as the tribes and the Temple. Like Swedenborg, I do not feel it to be spiritually inspired.

### **David used as the measure for judging other kings**

|          |         |         |
|----------|---------|---------|
| Solomon  | 1 Kings | 11:1-13 |
| Abijah   | " "     | 15:1-5  |
| Asa      | " "     | 15:11   |
| Amaziah  | 2 Kings | 14:3    |
| Ahaz     | " "     | 16:2    |
| Hezekiah | " "     | 18:3    |
| Josiah   | " "     | 22:2    |

### **YHVH's covenant with David invoked or re-affirmed**

Psalms 18:50

Psalms 89

Jeremiah 33:14-26

### **YHVH acting 'for the sake of David my servant'**

1 Kings 11:13 - allowing Solomon's descendants to keep ruling Judah

2 Kings 8:19 - sparing Judah in spite of its evil

2 Kings 19:34 - saving Jerusalem from the Assyrians

**The Book of Psalms** was traditionally attributed to David but this is now widely doubted. (See part E4) There are several passages in the book about David:

78:70-72 - David as the shepherd of his people (according to the start of the psalm, a parable or 'dark saying')

89:3-4,19-51 - invoking, then doubting the covenant with David

132 - linking the welfare of Jerusalem to the same covenant

A number of psalm-titles relate them to events in David's life. I find the links unconvincing (some are even literally inaccurate!) but you may wish to form your own opinion. They are nos.3,7,18,34,51,52,54,56,57,59,60,63,142.

### **Promises of an Anointed one (Messiah) to 'reign on David's throne'**

Isaiah 9:6-7; 11:1; 16:5

Ezekiel 34:23-24 & 37:24-25 (literally read, David himself to return)

### **Gospel references**

Matthew 1:1-17 - Genealogy of Joseph (and Jesus?) - David at v.8

Luke 3:23-38 - " " " " " " - David at v.31

Luke 1:32 - Jesus to be given 'the throne of his father David'

Matthew 12:1-4 - David's conduct used to justify the disciples

Matthew 22:41-46 - Jesus questioning the idea of 'son of David'

**Revelation 22:16** - Jesus calling himself 'the Root and Offspring of David'  
(see also 3:7 and 5:5)

## **H INDEX OF TOPICS – Contents**

*Unless otherwise indicated, the following are treated in the same order below.*

**Altar**

**Angels of God**

**Ark of the Covenant/ of YHVH/ of God**

**Bread of the Presence/ Shewbread**

**Brideprice or Dowry – See Part E1**

**Chariots – see Warfare**

**Circumcision**

**Concubines – See Part E1**

**Covenants**

**Crime and Punishment**

**Death - its customs and beliefs**

**Desert or Wilderness**

**Ephod**

**Fasting**

**Health and Sickness**

**High place**

**Messiah**

**Miracles**

**Oaths – see Vows**

**Offerings – See Sacrifices**

**Plague – see Health and Sickness**

**Polygamy – See Part E1**

**Priests, Prophets and prophesying**

**Religion**

**Sacrifices and Offerings**

**Sanctuaries and High Places**

**Sheep-shearing**

**Spirit(s)**

**Temple – See Sanctuaries**

**Vows and Oaths**

**Warfare**

**Wilderness – see Desert**

## INDEX OF TOPICS

**Altar** - a place for making offerings to a god, particularly of animals to be used in a ceremonial feast, or completely burnt. Could be simply a rock, but more usually a built structure of rocks (as probably meant in 2S24), and sometimes a wooden structure overlaid with bronze, which might have 'horns' at the corners (1K1:50). An unintentional killer could claim sanctuary at an altar, but if his intent was clear he could still be executed (*Exodus* 21:12-14) which partially explains the incidents in 1K1:50 & 1K2:28-34.

**Angels (*literally messengers*) of God** - The only one mentioned is in 2S24, where he is clearly an agent of YHVH, sent to bring terrible plague in retribution. *I see him as a symbol of truth emphasising how little I can myself achieve.*

David is several times compared to an angel of God! The wise woman of Tekoa is attributing wisdom to him (2S14:17,20), and Mephibosheth justice (2S19:27), but both of these could be simply flattery. The same could hardly be said of Achish king of Gath (1S29:9) who is apologising for dismissing David after much devoted service (as he thinks): 'I know that you have been as pleasing in my eyes as an angel of God'. *Heart faith is of course a messenger and agent of Life itself, and recognised as such in varied situations.*

### **Ark of the Covenant/ of YHVH/ of God**

A chest which was seen as carrying YHVH's presence, and believed to contain the two tablets of the Ten Commandments. It was described as richly elaborate in *Exodus* 25ff, but much more simply in *Deuteronomy* 10:1-5. In 2S6:2 it has the two cherubim carved on the lid but there is no mention of the elaborate gold covering. It is conveyed on a cart, not carried by priests as in *Exodus*.

### **Bread of the Presence (Shewbread in KJV)**

Term used in various passages about bread consecrated to YHVH. We have no other evidence as to what the custom was at Nob (1S21:3-6)

### **Circumcision**

In *Genesis* 17:9-14 it is decreed as the sign of YHVH's covenant with Abraham and his descendants: for a boy-child at eight days old, but also for slaves or immigrants later. However, it was practised also by most of the nations around, with the notable exception of the Philistines (probably from Crete originally), who are therefore contemptuously referred to as 'the uncircumcised'. (The Hebrew word is actually positive – 'with a foreskin'.)

The original reason for the custom is debatable. There may have been several reasons, but it came to be understood by some people as symbolic of a change in character. The foreskin stands for some obstructing fault, hence Moses describes himself as 'of uncircumcised lips' - poor at talking, as if he had a web of skin over his mouth! (*Exodus* 6:12) Several passages exhort to 'circumcising the heart' – removing some fault which has prevented the full expression of love? (*Deuteronomy* 10:16; 30:6; *Jeremiah* 4:4).

So what of the weird story of Michal's bride-price (1S18:24-27)? *I can imagine it starting out as a bawdy joke among Israelite soldiers, but it can be seen as a powerful focus of meaning: Philistines stand for the false belief, that religious knowledge is the key to salvation, and so a life of love is merely optional. As this idea suggests no urgency about mending our faults, it is represented as uncircumcised. (Not that everyone holding the belief behaves in this way.)*

*A religion of outward belief and practice (which Saul and his family represent) is continually threatened by this false idea, so Saul cannot lead Israel to defeat the*

*Philistines. He doubts that David (heartfelt religion) can resist it either, indeed he hopes that David will die in the vain effort, but is proved totally wrong.*

### **Covenant**

The Israelite idea of it was more than a practical or legal agreement. It implied friendship and loyalty, and was often linked with a solemn oath. This is very clear with David and Jonathan (1S18:1-4). YHWH is described as repeatedly making covenants, with Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and most significantly with Israel in Moses' time. *The agreement offered is always essentially the same - If you try sincerely to live in the way I show you, then you will find life to be deeply fulfilling and delightful - but the succession of covenants picture how various lives of religion can be.* See 'Ark of the Covenant' (above) and 'An Everlasting Covenant' (Part D14 and 16)

### **Crime and Punishment**

David's first advice to Solomon (in 1K2:2-4) is to follow YHWH's commandments as written in the Law of Moses. These occupy large parts of the books from *Genesis* to *Deuteronomy*, and a Bible Dictionary will tell you about changing law codes, traditional judgment by elders in the city gate (only exceptional cases referred to the king), the formal requirement for two witnesses, penalties involving compensation, retribution within limits (an eye for an eye, etc) or execution by stoning, and much more.

Yet mostly in these stories we seem to be in a quite different world - one where custom is the main authority, kings order summary executions (much of the time in war situations where rough justice is unsurprising), or else matters are left in YHWH's hands. We meet only a few echoes of Moses' systems. Here YHWH does plenty of condemning and punishing, so it's a relief to conclude that this is myth rather than history. It is not revealing a God of arbitrary retribution but rather describing the inevitable repercussions of wrong action or intention.)

Adonijah's case is striking (1K2:13-25), condemned to death by Solomon simply for requesting Abishag as his wife! To Solomon this constitutes a disguised bid for the throne, since it was custom for the wives and concubines of a king to be claimed by his successor or usurper (cf. 2S3:6-8; 12:7-8; 16:20-23), though there is nothing about this in the Law. Anyway 1K1:4 seems to throw doubt on Abishag's relationship with David, and Bathsheba sees nothing sinister in the request. Still the king is in charge, and Adonijah is executed, not by stoning but by the sword.

All the kings practise summary condemning and execution:

- Saul sentences the priests of Nob for helping the rebel David (1S22).
- He several times orders David's death.
- David condemns the Amalekite who claims to have killed Saul (2S1:14-16).
- Likewise with Ishbosheth's assassins (2S4).
- Solomon has Joab and Shimei executed (1K2).

David very clearly leaves judgment on Joab to YHWH (2S3:39), and the same seems to me to be implied with Nabal (1S25:29:33) and with Shimei (2S16:9-12). Yet, while YHWH seems promptly to accept responsibility for Nabal (v.38), he leaves the other two to Solomon!

There is mention of David settling civil disputes – not reliably, according to Absalom (2S15:1-4), and a clear example of Solomon doing so (1K3:16-28), but the storyteller is not very interested in such matters.

In fact the most obvious interest is in YHVH's activity in the role of divine judge, and his 'rough justice', especially towards his anointed kings.

Saul is rejected for not thoroughly obeying YHVH's drastic instructions (1S15), and Solomon for worshipping pagan gods (2K11) - the most serious offence of all in the Law. To us David's offences of adultery and murder may seem worse, but they are not so to YHVH (partly due to David's sincere repentance), so he is forgiven and assured he will continue as king. His punishments are continuing conflict within his dynasty, the violation of his concubines, and the death of his baby son (2S12:10-14) - all of which seem to me inappropriate.

They are examples of the principle of **collective responsibility**, which appears in various ways in Hebrew Scriptures and is best known from the Ten Commandments :

I YHVH thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me and keep my commandments.  
(Exodus 20:5-6 – King James Version)

The same principle explains the execution of Saul's sons and grandsons in 2S21, and the famine and plague inflicted on the whole nation in 2S21 & 24. But the later protection of Jerusalem and Judah 'for the sake of my servant David' suggests a companion principle of **collective pardon**.

*The inner truth I see in 'collective responsibility' is that any wrong action or intention of mine is likely to infect everything around it - my other feelings, attitudes, and conduct, also more practically the people close to me, particularly my family. However, only I am truly responsible, and certain to be hurt by it - as clarified and roundly insisted on in Ezekiel 18 - 'The soul who sins is the one who will die'.*

### **Death - customs and beliefs**

Death was normally greeted with demonstrative **mourning**, such as wailing, tearing clothes, fasting, wearing sack-cloth and ashes. Note David's unconventionality with his new-born son. (2S12:16-23)

Bodies were **buried in graves or tombs**, with strong preference for a family tomb or at least burial in the home town. To deny decent burial, especially exposing the body publicly or leaving it to scavenging animals, was an insult and disgrace. Hence the fetching of Saul's and his sons' remains, also the later burials (1S31:11-13; 2S2:5; 2S21:11-14).

The dead were believed to **sleep in the grave** or underworld (Hebrew *sheol*), yet also to be capable of influence, even of being called up and consulted. But this was strictly forbidden (1S28).

**Desert or Wilderness** - The term is applied to many areas, particularly to the southern borderlands of Israel, much of which is only 'semi-desert'. *The desert seems often symbolic of spiritual or emotional hunger, longing, or trial - sometimes a useful experience or stage in life.*

**Ephod** - a word causing some confusion! It means a garment, apparently a waist-cloth or short kilt of linen, worn by priests (1S2:18; 22:18). Also a highly ornamental vestment for ceremonial (Exodus 28 & 39). A story in Judges 17-18 involves an ephod as a cultic object found in an ordinary home, while in 1S21-23 & 30 the ephod is a uniquely powerful means of consulting YHVH - which could have been a priestly garment. When David wears a linen ephod to lead the Ark up to Jerusalem, he is presumably acting in a priestly role (2S6:14-15).

**Fasting** (going without food, at least through daylight hours) - It was commonly practised to express humility, grief, repentance, or to reinforce prayer.

### **Health and Sickness**

These are seen as gifts or penalties from YHVH, rather than having natural causes - except sometimes where a physical cause is obvious, as with Mephibosheth's lameness which resulted from being dropped by his nurse (2S4:4). The general view is clear in the death of Nabal (1S25), in the death of Bathsheba's first son (2S12), and in the promise of long life to Solomon (1K3:14). It seems implied in Michal's lasting barrenness (2S6:23).

Saul's mental torment is unique in being caused by 'an evil spirit from YHVH'.

*In the language of myth all illnesses surely picture defects of character - blindness clearly ignorance or foolishness; lameness inability to make progress; barrenness creating or achieving nothing; and so on.*

### **High place**

This term usually indicates a place for religious ceremonial (see Sanctuary), which was not necessarily a hill. Sometimes it seems to be used simply, eg in 'David's Lament' (2S1:19,25).

### **Messiah**

A rendering of the Hebrew word for anointed, which of course became a special title.

### **Miracles**

There are no spectacularly improbable events in these stories, but divine power is assumed in the outcome of war, plague and recovery, etc. Also supernatural appearances, communication with God or with spirits.

### **Priests, Prophets and Prophesying**

Priests were appointed for ceremonial purposes, and the office was mostly inherited within certain families. Could kings function in a priestly way? It seems so in 2S6:12-18; 24:25 and 1K3:4, but Saul is severely reproved for it in 1S13:8-14.

Prophesying was seen as an effect of YHVH's Spirit, which might affect anyone, as in 1S10:5-13; 19:18-24, and be complete in itself. More importantly though certain individuals might be known to bring messages from YHVH, and so known as prophets, notably in these stories Samuel, Nathan, and Gad. (For these see Part F)

*Priests seem to stand for our sense of holiness, which sometimes brings insights, but prophets for humble reflection bringing clearer understanding. Priests Ahimelech and Abiathar with their divination bring only simple messages, but the prophet Nathan spells out YHVH's view in detail. Samuel is unusual in combining these two roles, perhaps meaning that in childlike states our best understanding comes through our simple affection.*

### **Religion**

Religion was everything in Israel, so it's not a distinct topic, but important aspects can be found under Ark, Covenants, Priests and Prophets, Sacrifices, Sanctuaries, and so on, also in Part D, esp.1-4.

### **Sacrifices and Offerings**

The Law uses several technical terms for different offerings, only some of which were ceremonially burned. However, in these stories there seems to be no significant difference.

### Sanctuaries and 'high places'

In early Israel there were innumerable High Places where offerings were made and guidance sought, but later there was an intensive campaign to centralise all such activities at the temple in Jerusalem. (In *Deuteronomy* we find repeatedly such phrases as 'the place YHWH your God will choose to put his name there' (12:1-7), but later Jews were certain that Jerusalem was meant. Samaritans favoured Mount Gerizim; hence Jesus' striking conversation with the Samaritan woman (*John* 4:20-24).)

In these stories worship is practised in many places - Bethlehem, Ramah, Nob, Hebron, and on Araunah's threshing-floor. In Samuel's childhood there was even a temple at Shiloh. Yet when Solomon worships at Gibeon it has to be explained (1K3:2-4). It seems that worship was suitable wherever the Ark went (2S6:13 & 15:24), but after the latter occasion (during Absalom's rebellion) this was always in its tent in Jerusalem.

### Sheep-shearing

This seems to have been an occasion for feasting (See 1S25:6-8,36; 2S13:23-38), though surprisingly the Law contains no regulations about it.

### Spirit(s)

Breath was assumed to be the same as life or spirit, so the same word is used for both in Hebrew, Greek and Latin. So YHWH's life could be breathed into people, giving power, as with Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson (all in *Judges*), or to inspire prophecy, as with the seventy elders in *Numbers* 11:24-25, and frequently in the books of the Prophets. Saul receives the Spirit in both ways (1S10:6-10) but loses it again when disobedient (16:14). David receives it with power from the time of his anointing onward (1S6:13), but the only time he seems to prophesy is in his 'Last Words' (2S23:1-7)

### Vows and Oaths

These were treated much more seriously than nowadays, probably because people feared divine punishment for breaking them. This was part of the meaning of 'taking the Lord's name in vain', or in more modern terms 'misusing it' (*Exodus* 20:7).

### Warfare

War was liable to arise at any time between tribes, factions, or nations, due to competition for land, power or wealth, revenge for past damage or insults, or maybe to gain prestige for a nation or its god. Certainly war was often seen as a **religious duty**, and was governed by ritual rules (see below). The Philistine threat grew to require a national effort, and Israel responded by seeking a **king to lead them in battle** (1S8). Saul and David then needed to build up a **standing army**, rather than relying on general mobilisation, and David increasingly employed foreign **mercenaries**. In particular he had a select bodyguard of Kerethites and Pelethites (2S8:18, etc), also a band of Gittites (all apparently Philistines!). Ittai the Gittite became a loyal and able commander.

**YHWH's guidance** or approval would often be sought before going to war. It was also thought prudent to take the Ark of his Covenant along, though David was clear that YHWH could protect him without it (2S15:24-26) **Cleansing or fasting** might be required of warriors, also **sexual abstinence** – fatally insisted on by Uriah in 2S11.

Fighting was on foot, due to mountainous terrain and lack of horses before Solomon's time, though David captured some from Aramaeans. Iron **weapons** were still scarce, so spears and swords were mainly of copper and wood. There were archers too, though little mentioned. There were shields, but little body **armour** except for kings and champions. Single combat seems to have played an occasional part (1S17 & 2S2).

Both Saul and David led in battle, but they appointed army **commanders**, and David increasingly left the war in their hands. A horn or trumpet would rally men to fight, and sound the end of fighting.

**Prisoners and plunder:** In some circumstances an enemy group might be totally destroyed, all its members and possessions dedicated as an offering to YHWH. Otherwise some might be killed or mistreated in retribution, their bodies displayed in triumph (especially those of leaders – see 1S31:8-10). Others might be enslaved or sold, and women taken as concubines. Plunder could be offered to gods, otherwise divided among the victors, most for commanders. David's treatment of the defeated certainly strikes us as barbaric at times (see the Moabites, 2S8:2&4) but the roasting of Ammonite prisoners, which Swedenborg quotes as proving David's cruelty (see 2S12:31 in KJV), is now regarded as a wrong translation.

## I INDEX OF PLACE-NAMES, NATIONS, TRIBES AND GROUPS

Names are included of any place or group that clearly affects the story or seems significant, or the relevance of which needs explaining. There are many others mentioned only in lists, or that appear just once where their relevance is clear. This index is not concerned with history, only to importance in the myth. So a few meanings are suggested, mostly Swedenborg's interpretations of nations, etc.

The suffix **-ites** most commonly means inhabitants of a place (in which case see the place name). Where it means descendants of an ancestor, or where the meaning is uncertain, the word is listed separately.

**Abel Beth Maacah** - town in far north of Israel, where Sheba's rebellion was crushed (2S20)

**Adullam**, cave of - in southern Judah, one of David's hide-outs while outlawed

**Amalek, Amalekites** - nomadic nation of the southern desert, descended from a grandson of Esau (*Genesis* 36:12), who earned YHVH's lasting enmity by attacking weary Israelite stragglers during their journeyings (*Deuteronomy* 25:17-19; *Ex.* 17:14-16), defeated by both Saul (though he disobediently kept booty) and David (1S15 & 30)

*Wrong ideas suggested by our bad inclinations (contempt for others, excuses for selfish indulgence, etc) - so damaging us by stealth*

**Ammon, Ammonites** - nation to the east of Jordan, descended from a great-nephew of Abraham (*Genesis* 19:38), sometimes friendly to Israel (2S10:2) but more often hostile. Defeated in both Saul's and David's time (1S11, 2S10 & 12)

*Wrong ideas which openly challenge our thinking - It's OK to exploit strangers; adultery's harmless; etc*

**Amorites** - nation of Canaan conquered by Israel in Joshua's time, mainly exterminated though not the **Gibeonites**. A remnant were enslaved by Solomon (1K9:20-21).

*Bad inclinations from heredity*

**Aram, Aramaeans** - nation to the north-east of Israel (in older English Bibles called Syria and Syrians), defeated by David's forces (2S8 & 10)

*Knowledge useful to spiritual growth, though sometimes hindering it. .*

**Ashkelon** - a main city of the Philistines (2S1:20)

**Bahurim** - town in territory of Benjamin, NE of Jerusalem

**Benjamin, Benjamites** - tribe living just to NE of Jerusalem, to which Saul's family belonged, so often hostile to David

*The more shallow aspects of religion, relative to Judah*

**Bethlehem** - town where David grew up, and fondly remembered by him during a battle (2S23:14)

**Caleb, Calebites** - a clan, sometimes reckoned as belonging to the tribe of Judah, and occupying territory in the extreme south of the land

**Carmel** - district in south of Judah, home of Nabal and Abigail (1S25)  
(no connection with Mount Carmel in NW Israel)

**Cherethites** - older spelling of Kerethites

**Cush, Cushites** - name for land south of Egypt, its people (2S18:21)

**Damascus** - city and centre of an Aramaean kingdom (2S8:5)

**Edom , Edomites** - nation to the south-east of Israel, descended from Jacob's brother Esau, so the most closely related to Israel. David's subjection of them is only briefly mentioned (2S8:13-14) but 1K11:14-17 tells of Joab slaughtering many Edomites, which brought retaliation in Solomon's time.

*Spontaneous inclinations, sometimes good, but resentful of being told.*

**Ekron** - a main city of the Philistines (1S17:52)

**Endor** - town of central Israel, where Saul consulted a medium (1S28)

**En Rogel** - a spring just outside Jerusalem

**Ephraim, Ephraimites** - central area of Israel, territory of a tribe later to dominate the northern kingdom

*The understanding of truth*

**Gath, Gittites** - a main city of the Philistines, where David took refuge from Saul for a while (1S21 and 27-29), home of his adversary Goliath (1S17) but also of mercenaries who later served David with outstanding loyalty (2S15).

*Religious belief, which sometimes claims to be all-important, hence oppressing spiritual belief (Israel), but which can come to serve it well.*

**Geshur** - small kingdom NE of Israel, home of David's wife Maacah, so natural refuge for her son Absalom when he feared David's anger (2S13-14).

**Gibeah** - town in Benjamin where Saul held court

**Gibeon** - town in Benjamin, scene of a battle in which Asahel was killed

**Gibeonites** - an indigenous clan which had survived, due to an unusual treaty in Joshua's time (*Joshua* 9), but which Saul mistreated, bringing famine on the land later (see 2S21 and part D, scene 13)

**Gilboa** - mountain in central Israel where Saul and Jonathan were defeated and killed (1S31)

**Gilead** - the area immediately east of the Jordan, settled by some Israelites when they arrived from Egypt, but often lost to Ammon

**Gilgal** - town near the Jordan and Jericho, where the Israelites first entered Canaan, and where David re-entered after the defeat of Absalom (2S19:15)

**Gittites** - see **Gath**

**Hebron** - city of southern Israel, David's capital while king only of Judah

**Hittites** - nation in Canaan before Israel

**Jabesh Gilead** - town just east of the Jordan, which Saul rescued from the Ammonites at the start of his reign (1S11), and whose men later recovered Saul's and Jonathan's bodies from abuse by the Philistines (1S31:11-13)

**Jebusites** - nation in Canaan before Israel, whose stronghold was Jerusalem

**Jerusalem** - conquered by David from the Jebusites (2S5:6-8), from then on the capital of his kingdom, later just of Judah the southern kingdom. Made the religious centre also by the bringing of the Ark of YHWH (2S6) and later the building of the temple (1K5-8).

*In the Psalms and prophetic books the city is mentioned with great emotion, clearly the spiritual heart of the nation. For many it has become a symbol of heaven above or heaven in our hearts and lives, and such meaning can be read back into these stories.*

The mention of David bringing Goliath's head there (1S17:54) is historically very odd, but symbolically could be about doctrine needing to serve heavenly purposes.

**Jezreel (1)** - town and valley in N central Israel, important strategically

**Jezreel (2)** - small town in southern Judah, home of David's wife Ahinoam

**Jordan** - major river flowing down the east side of Israel

**Judah** - major tribe (named from the fourth son of Jacob) from which David came, and which occupied most of southern Israel; a separate kingdom for seven years under David (2S2-4), also after Solomon for three centuries.

*The inner life of religion, relative to Benjamin and other northern tribes*

**Keilah** - town in SW of Judah, saved by David from Philistines (1S23)

**Kerethites and Pelethites** - a distinct group of warriors, probably mercenaries but loyally serving David in his later years and later still Solomon. Kerethites are mentioned in *Ezekiel* and *Zephaniah* as an alien group linked with Philistines, and 'Pelethites' could be a corrupt form of 'Philistines' (less surprising in Hebrew), but the word is used nowhere else.

**Levites** - tribe (descended from the third son of Jacob) who served as priests and temple workers, but had no territory of their own

**Mahanaim** - key town in Gilead, from where Ishbosheth ruled the northern tribes (2S2-4), and from where David directed his campaign against Absalom (2S17-19)

**Maon** - desert area of southern Judah

**Moab, Moabites** - nation to SE of Israel, descended from great-nephew of Abraham, sometimes friendly to Israel, more often hostile. David's great-grandmother Ruth was a Moabitess (*Ruth* 4:13-22; *Matthew* 1:5-6), so he took his parents for safety to the king of Moab (1S22:3-4). His brutal treatment of Moabites in 2S8:2 therefore seems wickedly ungrateful - unless symbolic.

*Ordinarily kind and decent behaviour which breaks down at any difficult demand.*

**Negev** - word used for the dry lands to the south of Israel as a whole, or of particular parts of it; sometimes translated just as 'the south'

**Nob** - town near Jerusalem and Gibeah where lived a community of priests, to whom David went for help, and whom Saul slaughtered as a result (1S21-22 and Scene 5)

**Pelethites** - see with **Kerethites**

**Philistia, Philistines** - nation to the SW of Israel along the coastal plain. (See Part D7 and in C – scene 2)

**Rabbah** - capital city of Ammon, besieged by Joab, and where Uriah died (2S11-12)

**Ramah** - town to north of Jerusalem where Samuel lived

**Rephaim** or **sons of Rapha** - Philistine family of giants (2S21:15-22)  
- Valley of Rephaim near Jerusalem to the west

**Syria** - Greek name for **Aram**, used in older Bible translations

**Tekoa** - small town south of Jerusalem

**Tyre** - Phoenician city-state NW of Israel, close to the Lebanon mountains, from where came cedar for building and expert carpenters (2S5 & 1K5)

**Ziklag** - Philistine town which Achish entrusted to David (1S27-30)

**Ziph** - desert area south of Hebron where Saul pursued David

**Zobah** - Aramaean kingdom which David defeated (2S8 & 10)

## J SOME FURTHER READING

**From Swedenborg** (For title abbreviations, see below)

The main lines of his teaching on **the Bible** are helpfully gathered in chapter 4 of *True Christian Religion*, also in *The Doctrine of Sacred Scripture*.

In other works he uses many phrases to express what **the character of David** symbolises, most commonly 'the Lord as to Divine Truth', and interprets a few of David's experiences as imagery of Jesus's inner life while on earth. He taught that in Jesus Divine Truth was made human, revealing God's nature to us, so David is also explained with phrases like 'the Lord on earth'. (See e.g. AC 10249.5, AE 781.12) At another level though, according to his general teaching, David must stand for God's truth at work in our lives, the spiritual character being built within us.

[He several times makes the point, that someone historically bad in character could be used in parable to represent something spiritually good and beautiful – a very reasonable idea which encourages me just to ignore history and focus on the spiritual story. It saddens me though, that he gives David as a prime instance of this – along with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses. (See HH 526.4, AC 2604) His claim to have met David's spirit and found it to be evil involves a few difficulties – about identification of spirits, the interpretation of his *Spiritual Diary* (the claim appears in numerous passages there – 2621 etc), and the uncertain translation of 2S12:31. Also, if the Bible story is parable or myth, how can we use its details as evidence for historical character?]

Comment on **other characters**, or on **particular incidents**, is very limited, mostly concerned with just one word used in them, and mostly in the long posthumously published *Apocalypse Explained*. I list a few passages that I have found helpful to various degrees (some puzzling too):

On Saul and Jonathan - AE 323.12, 357.3, 395.5-7  
On the Philistines and circumcision - AE 817.6-11  
On the Ark and the Philistines, and its coming to Jerusalem - AE 700.20-32  
On Joab - AC 9012-14  
On Absalom - SD 2658, 2694  
On counting warriors - AE 453.1-3  
On Solomon - AE 654.29, 47, DP 245

There are numerous briefer references scattered through the books mentioned above, for finding which the following are helpful:

J.F.Potts: *The Swedenborg Concordance* (Swedenborg Society 1888, reprinted 1976)  
A.H.Searle: *General Index to Swedenborg's Scripture Quotations* (Swedenborg Society, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition 2006)  
*NewSearch 98* – CD published by The Academy of the New Church

However, piecing these references together seems to me a largely academic exercise - not how God's Word is meant to work!

### Abbreviations:

AC Arcana Caelestia  
AE Apocalypse Explained  
DP Divine Providence  
HH Heaven and Hell  
SD Spiritual Diary

## Other Swedenborgian sources

I am grateful for the work of various previous writers, whose books are listed below. I have consulted them to varying degrees, and found them variously helpful. (Inevitably they don't agree in some respects.) I believe the best we can do is to gather what we find useful from Swedenborg and the others, but then read and reflect, sincerely and humbly looking for spiritual guidance, and trust that we too can be enlightened according to our need and spiritual maturity.

Hoeck, Louis G. *The Tree of Life*, volume 2  
(The American New Church Tract and Publication Society, 1940 - a small paperback)  
Sub-titled '*A Running Commentary on the Inner Meaning of the Word of God*', this provides some idea on the whole story though quite sketchily - about half a page on each chapter.

Odhner, Hugo Lj. *Saul, David and Solomon*  
(The General Church of the New Jerusalem, 1967) 113-page book largely about David's reign, expounding the main features of the story but far from complete, though with plenty of Swedenborgian doctrine woven in.

Two series of sermons, long, detailed and didactic, which include some based on the David story. (Others can be found in older issues of New Church periodicals.)

Bayley, Jonathan, *The Divine Wisdom of the Word of God as seen in the Spiritual sense of the Histories of Samuel, Saul, David, Solomon, and Daniel*  
(James Speirs 1871)

Bruce, William *The First Three Kings of Israel*  
(James Speirs 1879)

Teaching notes, all of which include some account of spiritual meaning for the teacher's preparation:

*Graded Manual of Lessons* (New Church Sunday School Union 1953-54)  
Volume 3 of the Junior Series contains 11 lessons on stories of David's rise to power. Volume 4 of the Senior Series has 5 lessons on Saul and David, 4 on David and Absalom, 1 on David and Solomon.

*Teacher's Manual* (NCSSU 1908-1911) - Almost complete coverage of the David story, though *not* the crucial but 'indelicate' events of 2 *Samuel*, chapters 10-13.

*Bible Notes*, by Anita Dole (American New Church Sunday School Association 1979)  
- a series of David stories are treated in volume 3, pages 116-173

*The Sower* (ANCSSA 1940-51) Volume 2

## Quaker source

*Quaker Faith and Practice* is published by The Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Britain, and contains more views on the Bible which can be found through the Subject index. (Much else of great interest and insight too.) I have quoted on pages 8-9 from the Second Edition (1999).

Unfortunately I am not aware of any Quaker books specifically about David.