

## 2 SAMUEL 22-24

### DAVID: A HERO WITH FLAWS

The book of 2 Samuel records Israel's history during David's reign. This section records a series of incidents in the latter section of that reign, concentrating largely but not exclusively on David's leadership. However, they are not just accurate accounts of past events. Like all Scripture, these stories are 'God-breathed and ... useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.'<sup>1</sup> We should read the chapters not just observing what happened, but also asking what we are meant to be learning and why, given the inevitable limitations on space, the author has chosen to include these particular stories.

Each day we will concentrate on a few verses. The account is not just a collection of individual stories but a carefully composed book. We should therefore be looking out for ongoing concerns and interests that arise, asking what this very gifted author is intending us to learn, how he expects us to feel, and what difference it might make to the way we live our lives for God.

The chapters convey a real sense of affection and appreciation of David, but there seems to be a special concern for pointing out his weaknesses and failures. It is possible that the writer is reflecting on 1 Samuel 13:14 and asking whether David really was the one God sought, who was 'after his own heart.'<sup>2</sup> David as psalmist fits this picture well, but the stories we shall read do raise doubts about David as king! Look out, too, for the way David interacts with others, his attitude to keeping promises, his treatment of his family, his close but strained relationship with Joab – and maybe for other ongoing themes not mentioned here.

<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim 3:16 <sup>2</sup> Acts 13:22

## 2 TIMOTHY

### ADVICE ON PASTORSHIP

The two epistles to Timothy and that to Titus are known as Paul's 'pastoral epistles.' They are letters of instruction to Timothy and Titus, about their pastoral duties in Ephesus and Crete. Paul wrote them in his old age, after his release from captivity in Rome. As well as teaching on Christian leadership, the pastorals provide a mature insight into Paul's last days. He instructs Timothy and Titus on handling the problems they encounter in the oversight of their churches, and he sets out the qualities they should look for in appointing church leaders. He gives advice on personal conduct. Timothy was not naturally brave, and he was often unwell. He needed encouragement. Paul's confidence, however, was not misplaced. He talks warmly of his 'son in the faith.'<sup>1</sup>

Second Timothy is Paul's last and most moving letter. After a lifetime of service and suffering for Christ, he is in prison once more and longs to see Timothy. He instructs Timothy as a young Christian leader and charges him to hold fast to the sound teaching of the gospel. It is difficult to dispute the authorship because of the abundance of personal notes. Paul asks Timothy to come to him and bring Mark and the books and cloak Paul left in Troas. He warns him about heresies affecting the churches and encourages him to preach the Scriptures and to promote godly living and spiritual perseverance. He concludes with his own epitaph: 'I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith' (4:6,7).

While you study this letter, try to see what lessons you can find for your church and your ministry.

### FOR FURTHER READING

John Stott, *The Message of 2 Timothy, Bible Speaks Today*, IVP, 1973  
Craig S Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*, IVP, 1993  
Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Writings of the New Testament*, SCM Press, 1986

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim 1:2; cf Acts 16:1,2; 2 Cor 1:1; Phil 1:1

## JEREMIAH 18 – 34

### JUDGMENT AND RESTORATION

One of the things readers of the Old Testament prophets soon discover is the different kinds of writing these prophets use, often switching from one to another without giving notice. Jeremiah is an example of this. A quick look at almost any page will show that sometimes the text is set out as poetry and sometimes as prose narrative. Most of the poetry is what we call ‘prophetic oracles’ (or prophetic words), although in some of the poetry Jeremiah laments his own poor treatment from the people. The narratives tell of events in Jeremiah’s life, as God instructs him to do certain things. There are also what we call ‘prose sermons’ – prophetic words of judgment or blessing, not in poetry but as prose.

The poetic prophetic words generally come in three types. Sometimes the prophets announce judgment against Israel, sometimes they announce judgment against the nations, and sometimes they announce blessing for Israel. Since Jeremiah’s ministry was after the fall of the northern kingdom of Israel, his words of judgment and blessing for Israel relate to the southern kingdom of Judah.

We find all these different kinds of writing in this part of Jeremiah, although judgment for Judah (e.g. 18:13–17) and blessing predominate. The announcements of blessing are especially prominent in chapters 30–33, sometimes called ‘the Book of Consolation.’ These chapters contain one of the high points of the Old Testament, Jeremiah’s prophecy of the new covenant (31:31–34). This also illustrates one other thing: the New Testament writers interpret announcements of blessing for Israel with reference to Christ and the church.<sup>1</sup>

As we work through these chapters, be on the lookout for these different kinds of writing and the way they come together to contribute to the overall message of the book. That message is that God will judge his people and after the judgment of exile he will restore them, although the restoration will exceed anything Jeremiah ever imagined.

<sup>1</sup> For an example of this, see Heb 8:7–12

## LUKE 9-13

### DISCIPLESHIP IS HARD AND COSTLY

With the words ‘As the time approached’ (9:51), Luke begins a new section in his gospel. It should have marked the start of a new chapter. Robert Estienne,<sup>1</sup> who created our verse numbers, did so while traveling, so he sometimes missed the spot. Stephen Langton<sup>2</sup> had much earlier invented reasonable chapter divisions, but he failed to discern this important dividing line.

Jesus recognizes that his ‘time’ is near, the time of his suffering and execution. Expecting pain and death, Jesus ‘set his face’ (9:51, AV) toward Jerusalem. Luke took ten chapters to get Jesus through Samaria to Jerusalem and his roadmap is sometimes vague – ‘a village of the Samaritans,’ ‘a certain village,’ ‘one town and village after another.’

Nevertheless, the decisive moment had come. Jesus was on his journey to his cross – but he was in no hurry to get there. He could linger. He worried about his disciples. He had much to teach them. He wanted to warn them of what lay ahead, to explain the cost of discipleship, to compose and narrate the sterner parables of death and judgment. He needed to give the disciples a practice lesson, sending them out into the world to learn how to tread the hard road of discipleship without his presence. How long did that take? It could have taken months, even a year, for Jesus and his retinue to reach Jerusalem. Some suggest that Luke compiled the teaching in this section from other gospels or elsewhere in Jesus’ ministry. The purpose of a gospel is not to provide an exhaustive chronological record of Jesus’ life but to teach us who Jesus was and what he said. Let us, then, begin Luke’s long narrative of the journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. Like the disciples of old, we need to heed the warnings and understand the risks. We too need to know the cost.

### FOR FURTHER READING

R Alan Culpepper, *The Gospel of Luke: The New Interpreter’s Bible*, Abingdon, 1995

<sup>1</sup> Robert Estienne, French printer, 1501–59 <sup>2</sup> Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury, 1150–1228

## JEREMIAH 35-52

### YAHWEH REJECTS HIS PEOPLE

The final 18 chapters of the book of Jeremiah tell the sorry tale of Judah's descent into political, religious, and social degeneracy, leading, in fulfillment of ancient warnings, to exile. Moses warned the Israelites that if they spurned the covenant, the land would thrust (vomit) them out into exile. Jeremiah tells the story of the obduracy of the last king, Zedekiah, whose pig-headedness is captured (36:19–26) in his act of burning the prophet's scroll containing the Word of God.

Although popular religion was thriving, along with days of fasting and large gatherings in Jerusalem, the hearts of the king, the people, the priests, the official prophets, and the nobility were not attentive to the authentic word of the Lord through Jeremiah. Jesus, in the parable of the sower, warned against hard-heartedness: the inability to allow the Word of God to seep deeply into the inner being so as to bring about a rich harvest. Jeremiah's generation refused to heed the word of God and they went into exile.

The sovereignty of the Lord, his freedom to speak and act freely in any situation, is a major theme. Above all the significant human players – Babylon, Egypt, the Medes and Persians and all the little nation states nestling in the fertile crescent – sits the Lord, whose word alone is final. The Lord uses any human instrument he chooses, but that does not validate any and every act of callousness, cruelty, or indifference. All human beings are held accountable to him.

Jeremiah challenges us to follow the example of David, not those of most of the other kings of Israel and Judah. It is said of David that his heart was after God's own heart<sup>1</sup> and that he served the Lord in his generation.<sup>2</sup>

### FOR FURTHER READING

Walter Brueggemann, *A Commentary on Jeremiah: Exile and Homecoming*, Eerdmans, 1998

JA Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, NICOT, Eerdmans, 1980

1 1 Sam 13:14 2 Acts 13:36

## PHILIPPIANS

### REVOLUTIONARY JOY

Philippians is many people's favorite book of the Bible and it's easy to see why. It's a privilege and a joy to expound this wonderful letter for Encounter with God. Advent and Christmas are many people's favorite times of the year, including mine, so the joy is doubled! Expect to be encouraged as we journey through a letter and a season that are so full of life, light, and wonderful, irrepressible joy.

Yet Philippians should deeply challenge us too. I believe some commentaries and expositions of the epistle are too peaceful, lacking a cutting edge. True, Paul affirms much that is positive about the Philippian church, but he also has some strong things to say. As I wrestled with the text, I concluded that it's more challenging than we often realize. Paul urges his readers to grow in righteousness (1:9-11), stand firm on the gospel (1:27), repair broken relationships (4:2,3), practice radical contentment (4:12,13) and much else besides. Above all, he directs us to look to Jesus and live like him (e.g. 2:5). He models following Christ wholeheartedly, showing us what this looks like in practice. He sets a high standard; big challenges come in verse after verse. Philippians is full of joy, but if we truly understand what Paul is saying we will recognize that his message – and example – are revolutionary.

If we want the joy that Paul has, we need to take on board the message of this letter and live like he does. The 'solid joys' of which Philippians speaks are only attained, as the hymn reminds us, by pursuing the 'lasting treasure' of the gospel.<sup>1</sup> The extent to which we experience the joy that bursts from this extraordinary epistle will depend on how far we give ourselves to our Lord and his purposes for us. Over the next two weeks, may God deepen our commitment and at the same time fill us with 'joy unspeakable.'<sup>2</sup>

### FOR FURTHER READING

Gordon D Fee, *Paul's Letter to the Philippians*, Eerdmans, 1995

<sup>1</sup> John Newton, 1725–1807, 'Glorious things of thee are spoken' **2** 1 Pet 1:8, AV