

- *The questions that arise from this text are largely to do with the organisation of the mission of the church. Most people would like the church to function without meetings, but is this right? What can you do to help the organisation and running of your church?*
- *Pray with the leaders of your church about how the church is run, and if possible, suggest that 2 Samuel 8:9-18 might have some wisdom they can consider.*

Final Prayer

Great and mighty Lord, Your name is known throughout the earth! Forgive us when we give a false impression of our faith, which leads other people to turn away from You. Teach us the truth and correct us when we are wrong, so we may learn and be effective in mission. Keep us close to You, O Lord, and make us secure in You; AMEN

Prayer

Lead us in our worship this day, Lord Jesus. Be a worship leader to us, inviting us to open our hearts, encouraging us to join in, showing us the possibilities and drawing us into the presence of Almighty God. May the Spirit of God so capture our hearts that we become enthralled and liberated in our worship; all praise be to You, Almighty, Living God!

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Land

We all live on this earth, and land means a great deal to many people. It lies at the heart of many of the great issues of our day, so today, please pray for the land on which you live.

On-going prayers

- *Give thanks to God for the fellowship of the church*
- *Pray for all who are affected badly by the world recession*
- *Pray for all who seek to solve the world's troubles in peace*

Meditation

(This meditation invites you to follow each question or suggestion and answer it carefully and honestly)

What is on your heart today? What matters most to you just now?

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Do these things really deserve your full attention, what about others?

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Where does God figure in your immediate thoughts and plans?

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What would Jesus say to you about what is on your mind?

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Think again about your current priorities in the light of Christ;

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Commit this day to the Lord; and seek do what is right before God.

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Bible Study - 2 Samuel 8:9-18

⁹ *When King Toi of Hamath heard that David had defeated the whole army of Hadadezer, ¹⁰ He sent his son Joram to King David, to greet him and congratulate him for fighting Hadadezer and defeating him; Hadadezer had often been at war with Toi. Joram brought with him articles of silver, gold, and bronze; ¹¹ King David also dedicated these to the LORD, together with the silver and gold he dedicated from all the nations he subdued, ¹² from Edom, Moab, the Ammonites, the Philistines, Amalek, and from the spoil of King Hadadezer son of Rehob of Zobah.*

¹³ David became famous for defeating eighteen thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt, ¹⁴ and he put garrisons throughout Edom, making all the Edomites his servants. The LORD gave victory to David wherever he went.

¹⁵ So David reigned over all Israel. He administered justice and equity to all his people. ¹⁶ Joab son of Zeruiah was over the army; Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was recorder; ¹⁷ Zadok son of Ahitub and Ahimelech son of Abiathar were priests; Seraiah was secretary; ¹⁸ Benaiah son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites and the Pelethites; and David's sons were priests.

Review

After the great wonder of the promises of God made to David in 2 Samuel 7, almost anything that happened next was bound to sound flat. Yet after the awesome spiritual experience of the revelation of God's plans through the prophet Nathan, David appears to have left the whole matter of his dynasty in God's hands, and returned to the daily work of being the King of Israel. This entailed securing the borders of the country either by battle or by treaties with neighbouring states (2 Sam 8:1-8) and organising the country and its government. David began by appointing senior army positions, religious hierarchy, and administrative posts (2 Sam 8:15-18).

This may seem rather mundane and we tend to pay little attention to such passages of scripture, but they are included for a purpose. Such structures underpin the life of God's people living within a sinful world, and they protect those who seek to live according to the laws of God within a turbulent and changing world. The way that David handled these matters may seem too ancient for our interest, but because it is in scripture, we should consider how it reflects God's will for the governance of the church today.

David defends the new state of Israel Prior to our passage in chapter 8, David waged war on a variety of neighbouring states, starting with the Philistines (8:1). David would have many more battles with the Philistines, but it was appropriate that he start by evicting them from the Israelite territory they had annexed after the battle of Mount Gilboa (1 Sam 31) when King Saul was killed. The region of Metheg-ammah (8:1) where David fought the Philistines is unknown, but the word means that extended area of Philistine territory around its major city 'Gath', which David knew well (1 Sam 17:4f. 21:10f.).

Another great victory was over the northern King Hadadezar, a ruler who allied with the Arameans who held sway over territories from Damascus to the Euphrates. A number of historic and very powerful ancient cities lay to the north of Galilee, and David's defeat of them was important for the security of the nation. Another city state in that region, Hammath (8:9f.), had previously been oppressed by Hadadezar, so it made peace with David (8:9,10). Once David was able to defeat powerful enemies, he was in a position to create treaties with peaceful states and therefore enable trade and commerce to grow, making Israel a very rich nation under his son, Solomon.

Verses 13 and 14 are unclear in Hebrew, but they indicate that David gained control over the Edomites (descended from Jacob's brother Esau), and these historic enemies of Israel were brought into servitude. This does not mean that the Edomites all became 'servants' in a literal sense, but they were governed from Jerusalem and were occupied militarily.

Government The Jerusalem government now began to take shape. David kept control over issues of justice himself (8:15), and other state affairs were delegated. The army was commanded by Joab, the affairs of the nations were officially recorded by Ahilud, Zadok and Ahimelech were chief priests responsible for all religious affairs, Seraiah was the secretary responsible for administration of the state, Benaiah commanded David's elite bodyguard (the Cherethites and the Pelethites - see also 2 Sam 23:23), and finally, 'David's sons were priests.

This simple structure works by combining the military, religious and state affairs of the nation in government, though the fact that David kept the 'ministry of Justice' to himself would not go down well in a modern state today! Two other things are of interest, firstly, it was important for David's private bodyguard to do more than protect him physically, and by having a place in government, they were kept abreast of all affairs of state. In order to protect David they needed to do more than stand around with swords at the ready! Finally, it may sound strange to us for David's sons to be made 'priests'. However, according to the vision of Nathan, one of David's sons would carry the anointing and promise of God for the future of Israel and the whole world, so it may have seemed appropriate that they should spend their time in priestly service.

Organising the church today! Whilst we can see the logic of this structure for the infant state of Israel, it also indicates how God's people might best be governed today. For example, the church's 'army' extends the boundaries of the Kingdom through operating the work of the church through our call to mission (Matt 28:18,19). Then, does David's control over 'justice' indicate that these issues should be dealt with by its most senior leaders? This seems to be born out in Matthew's Gospel (Mat 18:15-20, e.g.) and the letters of Paul (2 Timothy). Also, importance is given to the office of a recorder (Ahilud), who recorded everything that happened for posterity so that the people's heritage could be handed on. Administration is also covered by the office of 'secretary' (a work listed as a gift of the Spirit by Paul - Romans 12:7). Finally, it may seem humorous to suggest that a church leader needs a bodyguard, but spiritually, leaders need a spiritual bodyguard of people who will prayerfully protect them from the works of the enemy. Too many have fallen because they do not have such protection!

Our text today may have seemed very mundane at first reading. However, I suggest that it raises a number of important questions about how we manage the life of the Church. David may well have acted to secure the government of his people according to ancient principles, but through this God show us some wisdom about how His church should be managed today!

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Do you think it is reasonable to find principles of church management within the list of posts in today's text? Is this the purpose of the text or has it any other meaning?
2. Which of the issues raised in the concluding comments are most significant within the life of your church, and why?
3. Does good government guarantee the peace of God's people? If not, why not?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Much of the despair people feel about running the church comes from bad leadership and the abandonment of good Biblical principles of management. The basics of leadership (running meetings, recording things properly etc.) are generally not taught to ministers and priests in training, so the problem will continue! In addition, too many people look to modern methods of running businesses when trying to find ways to run the church and they ignore what the Bible says. This is a step towards disaster; when will we read the Bible and find what God has given to us?

Ideas for discipleship programme