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SILVER STAR BIBLE SCHOOL 2000

DAVID, A MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

THE KING OF ALL ISRAEL

Speaker: Bro. John Knowles

Study #4: Cast thy burden upon Yahweh, and He will Sustain Thee

Reading: Psalm 55, 2 Samuel 15 to 19

My dear brethren and sisters in our Lord Jesus Christ.

In this series of studies, the third session in the consideration of the life of David, we reached the point yesterday, where David as a result of the confession of his sin, and the acknowledgement in so doing of the righteousness of God, was assured by Nathan the prophet, that his sins would be forgiven. However, as we intimated yesterday and as we're going to see today, although God may forgive us our sins, He doesn't always take away the consequences of those sins.

And so, we'd like to start by going back to 2 Samuel chapter 12, to pick up some of the verses that were used yesterday, where in the early verses of 2 Samuel 12, Nathan came to David and he advised him that he was the man. Having spoken to him the parable about the rich man and the poor man and the little ewe lamb, and so forth, and David saying 'this man shall surely die, and he shall pay back fourfold', Nathan said, 'thou art the man'. And so we pick it up then, from verse 10, 'Now therefore, the sword shall never depart from thine house, because thou hast despised Me, and has taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife. Thus saith Yahweh, behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun. For thou didst it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun. And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against Yahweh. And Nathan said unto David, Yahweh also hath put away thy sin; thou shalt not die'. So his sin was forgiven, he was not condemned to death, but he was going to have to pay it back fourfold; remember what he'd said about that man with the ewe lamb, verse 6, 'he shall restore it fourfold'. And so, we're going to be introduced to one of those sons today; to one of those sons who was to die! There was the child, there was Amnon, there was Adonijah, and today we are going to be brought to this very tragic story of the relationship between David and Absalom and that other individual called Ahithophel. And so again, in this series, we're looking now today at character study; and, we want to eventually get to Psalm 55 and spend most of our time there because, once again today, we're more interested in

David's feelings. How David expresses himself as a result of his experiences, rather than just necessarily telling the story, which in general terms most of us know quite well.

So perhaps, for just a few moments, let's set the scene. In 2 Samuel chapter 12, as we said, David was told, YES, your sin will be forgiven, but the consequences won't be taken away. And even at that stage, b&s, I think it's good for us to think about that, for all of us have been through some experience in life where we've experienced a tragedy of our own making or of someone else's making. The tragedy might be a small 't' or a big 'T'; it doesn't matter much. The fact of the matter is, the incident has been put behind but, nevertheless, the consequences may still remain. And if they do, then God knows it's for our good, and one thing we must not do, is to complain about it! We alluded to James 1 yesterday and will do the same now. We won't turn to it, but 'count it all joy when you fall into divers trials, knowing that the trying of your faith worketh patience, and patience experience, etc. etc.' And so he says, 'if any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God who will give to you in singleness'. A totally single minded God, God is not double minded; when God says I'm prepared to forgive you, HE WILL AND HE MEANS IT! And He did to David and David didn't die!

So the story initially has a good ending, because as we know the setting of the story of Uriah and David and Bath-sheba was set at that time, back in chapter 12, when David decided that although it was the 'time when kings should go out to battle' this king sent Joab out to battle. This king decided to go to bed and have a sleep for the afternoon, and get up in eveningtime and go up onto the top of his house and there as he looked out upon the city, then of course, it became the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and all of that sort of thing. Nevertheless, the battle did take place, Uriah was killed over in the area of Jordan, over in the area of Ammon. But the end result is described in verse 29 was this, and perhaps we could go back to verse 26 to get the flow of the suggestion of Joab here. 'Joab fought against Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and took the royal city' (by the way, we understand that that city is the city of Amman, the capital of the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan, the city of Rabbah). Verse 27, 'And Joab sent messengers to David and said, I have fought against Rabbah, and have taken the city of waters. Now therefore gather the rest of the people together, and encamp against the city, and take it: lest I take the city, and it be called after my name. And David gathered all the people together, and went to Rabbah, and fought against it, and took it'. And so, for the moment all was well!

The sin had been put behind, and all seemed to be going well, but the scene is set for something which was not going to be one of the most pleasant experiences in David's life, perhaps, one of the most unpleasant; and, it's found in chapter 13 and in the opening verse.

And here we are introduced to the young man Absalom. 'And it came to pass after this, that Absalom the son of David, had a fair sister whose name was Tamar: and Amnon the son of David loved her', and so we're introduced here to Absalom and to Amnon; the chapter describes for us the disgraceful incident in which Amnon took Tamar, Absalom's

sister, and the subsequent intrigue which is described in this family is nothing short of absolutely disgraceful in deed. Absalom plotted then to take out his revenge on Amnon; and we know how a large part of chapter 13 describes the way in which Absalom set up this feast. He encouraged his father to allow the other brothers in the family to come to that feast; but he wasn't interested in all the rest of the family, he wanted to take out his revenge on Amnon. And so we find then, as we come down to verse 28 we read there, 'Now Absalom had commanded his servants, saying, Mark ye now when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say unto you, Smite Amnon; then kill him, fear not: have not I commanded you? be courageous, and be valiant'.

And so it happened! and when David heard about it, David was naturally, very angry. But David had these mixed motives, perhaps not mixed motives I should say, as mixed emotions. Here was something he couldn't agree with. He was obviously saddened by the death of Amnon, he couldn't accept the fact that Absalom was right in killing him, and yet he had a strange attraction to Absalom. Perhaps it was a little bit like Isaac and Esau or something like that; then again, Absalom was also his son. So, what was going to be done about it? Well, first of all, we find in verses 37 through to 39, that Absalom decided that he must flee. He had to get away from the scene, verse 37 says, 'But Absalom fled, and went to Talmai, the son of Ammihud, king of Geshur. And David mourned for his son every day. So Absalom fled, and went to Geshur, and was there three years. And the soul of king David longed to go forth unto Absalom, for he was comforted concerning Amnon, seeing he was dead'. So the story's very clear that he was sorry that Amnon died, but he seemed to be even sadder that Absalom had gone.

So Absalom went to Geshur. The map gives us a little bit of an indication of some of these movements. Geshur is up here in the north, and he fled to Geshur we are told. And so he remained there for a certain amount of time, and we'll just pick up the highlights of the story as we get to the real intrigue and the real drama. In 2 Samuel chapter 14 and in verses 23 and 24 we come to the sequel, to another story which is described in the earlier verses, in which Joab entreated so that Absalom might be allowed to return. And we know that this woman of Tekoa was sent to David with this little parable story and when David listened to that story he said, 'Can I ask you a question? and I want a straight answer, did Joab put you up to this?' And she said, 'well, I can't lie, yes, he did'. So Joab was there entreating to get Absalom back! So he got his way, and in verses 23 and 24, we read that 'Joab arose and went to Geshur, and brought Absalom to Jerusalem'. So, he comes back then to Jerusalem, down here, and there should be a green line which you can probably see better than I can, there it is, it goes down there and down there. So, our first line here, right at the top there, Absalom returns to Jerusalem, we see him coming from Geshur, possibly down this way, but it's only a diagrammatic line, and he returns then to Jerusalem. We've put this up so that we can just get some idea of where these various things took place and the final battle and so forth. However there was a qualification, and verse 24 gives us that qualification. 'And the king said, Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face. So Absalom returned to his own house, and saw not the king's face'. So, alright, I'll let him come back to Jerusalem, but he's not to see my face. Strange isn't it, because

David was mourning for Absalom, and yet there was a certain principle there, and he had to fight between principle and emotion, and that's not strange, is it? Everyone experiences that, so for the time being, he was not to see the king's face.

But this Absalom was a real nasty piece of goods; he was a very determined person, a very ambitious man to say the least. And so he tried to contact Joab and said, 'Look, Joab, this isn't good enough, I only feel like a second rate citizen here, arrange for me to see the king'. He wanted to say this to Joab, so he asked for Joab to come, and he asked for Joab to come, and he asked for Joab to come, and Joab didn't come. So, the dear little boy said to his servants, 'go out and set Joab's field of corn on fire, and that will make him come'. And it did! And Joab said, 'why did you set my field of corn on fire?' and Absalom said, 'Well, because you wouldn't come before, so I thought that would make you come!' Well, that's the way they acted, and so Joab did come and Absalom got his way; so, we read then in verse 33, 'And so Joab came to the king and told him, and when he called for Absalom, he came to the king and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king, and the king kissed Absalom'. So whilst we've left out a lot of very interesting story and interesting drama, as far as it goes; it was to say the least, very messy. Not a very good family situation at all, was it? But Absalom got his way and the end of chapter 14 is not the end of the problem, it's the beginning of the problem. So Absalom is back in Jerusalem, the king has accepted him, and Absalom says 'right, now I can have my way and now I can set out on a plan of action, and I'm going to take over!'

So, in 2 Samuel chapter 15, the problem starts. Let's read the first 6 verses. 'And it came to pass after this, that Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him'. (You know, God willing, tomorrow we're going to be doing another study, by this time Absalom is going to be dead, but you know it doesn't stop, and another son is going to pop up and he's going to get chariots and horsemen and get men to run before him, Adonijah; so, it's the same thing over, and over again, but we'll leave that one until tomorrow.) So, at this stage it's Absalom, his chariots, his horses and 50 men, 'And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate: and it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, that Absalom called unto him, and said, oh, where are you from, what city are you from? and he said, Thy servant is of one of the tribes of Israel. And Absalom said unto him, See thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee. Moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice! And it was so, that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him. And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel'. Hasn't it ever been so, that the serpent has always paraded itself in a very acceptable way? You know, if problems in life, and perhaps even in ecclesial life, came up and said, 'here I am, I'm a problem; I believe wrong doctrine, I'm an immoral person, I don't want to do the right things but I want to be a Christadelphian', we might say, 'well, that's easily fixed'. But it's always a mixture, isn't it? of a little bit of truth and a little bit of error! It was true that David wasn't

able to handle all the problems that faced him; there was sort of a half truth there, and so the serpent always parades itself in a very plausible manner. You know, if you eat of the fruit of that tree, you're eyes will be open, and that was true, and you'll be like the elohim, that wasn't quite true, except to the extent that they were to be like the elohim and know good and evil. So, it was a half truth, and the serpent always makes it sound very plausible, and here was the serpent epitomized here in this Absalom.

So when we come to the next section, in verses 7 to 9, Absalom decides to go down to Hebron, and on the map here it's this little line down here, and the title says, 'Absalom conspires at Hebron'. Hebron wasn't very far south of Jerusalem and that's where Absalom goes. Let's read verses 7 to 9, 'And it came to pass after 40 years that Absalom said unto the king, I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow which I vowed unto Yahweh in Hebron' (Imagine Absalom paying any vow, the only vow he made was that he'd kill Amnon and that he was going to be king, but there was nothing virtuous in this, of course), 'for thy servant vowed a vow while I abode in Geshur in Syria, saying, if Yahweh shall bring me again indeed to Jerusalem, then I'll serve Yahweh' (what a hypocrite) 'And the king said unto him, go in peace; so he arose and went to Hebron'. And so, down in Hebron there, he was going to plot this rebellion against his father.

Well, reading verses 10 to 12 as well, in verse 10 we read, 'But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel saying, as soon as ye hear the sound of the trumpet, then you shall say, Absalom reigneth in Hebron. And with Absalom went 200 men out of Jerusalem that were called, and they went in their simplicity, and they knew not anything'. But the next fellow didn't go in simplicity and he knew a lot of things and he knew what he was doing! 'And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counsellor from his city even from Giloh while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong, for the people increased continually with Absalom'. Now, from verse 13 on then, we get the description of David recognizing what was happening and saying, 'the best thing to do now, is to - let's get out of here'. So David flees from Jerusalem, (and this particular code here answers to this particular arrow here). Now, David flees from Jerusalem, and goes out here and up there, and, of course, I'd dearly love to spend the rest of the time talking about the rest of the story but we've got two choices, either we tell the story in detail (which we can all read anyway) or we try to experience with David his feelings, and I've opted for the latter, and we're going to turn in just a moment to a psalm which, I don't think there's any doubt, is related to this incident.

But we know what happened on the way out: he went down through the Kidron, he went up through the Mount of Olives. As he goes out through Jerusalem, there's Shimei cursing him, and one of his servants said, 'let me cast a stone at him, all I need is one shot'. David said, 'don't do it; I know he's wrong, he can't curse the king, but everything he says about me is right'. You know, David was really a great man, when he had both feet on the ground he knew what was right and he knew what was wrong; he'd done the wrong thing but he couldn't touch Shimei! (And, by the way, anticipating tomorrow's story, what David couldn't do, he said to Solomon, 'I'll tell you a few things you can do; get Shimei, get Joab, and Adonijah. I can't touch them, I can't touch any of those three,

but you can, Solomon', and that's what we'll see tomorrow.) So, on the way up, there was that Shimei who cursed him; so David fled the city. One of the bits of intrigue that David now engages in is this: what worried David more than anything was that down here in Hebron was not just so much Absalom, but down there was Ahithophel. And this is going to become, I guess, the thrust of the remainder of our talk, David's extreme distress at what Ahithophel had done! He just couldn't believe that this man, my fellow, my counselor, he that had walked into the temple and had worshipped with me, my friend, he's gone down there and he's with Absalom. And what's more, he's smart, he's clever, he's a good counselor, and if he's really on Absalom's side, then I've got problems. And of course, it's fairly obvious why he was on Absalom's side, because he was Bath-sheba's grandfather, and it seems very clear that he never ever forgave David for that sin with Bath-sheba.

And so, here was a man who had a grudge against David. So that's what's worrying David; down here in Hebron is Absalom with all of the determination and all the ambition, but the counselor down there was a very clever man. So David says, 'I know what we'll do, we'll send Hushai down, and he can also give good counsel; and undoubtedly the hand of providence was in all of this, and to cut a long story short, because we're going to fill a bit of it in when we go to the psalms, I guess we all know the story that what happened was, that when Absalom asked for advice from Ahithophel as to what they should do about the going out after David, Ahithophel said, 'quick, get out there, straightaway'; and, Absalom said, 'well, yes, it sounds like a good idea, but let's ask Hushai what he thinks'; and, Hushai said, 'ah, that would be a very foolish thing to do'; he said, 'you know what your father's like, he's like a lion robbed of it's whelps, you go out now and get him, and he's an angry man, he'll get you'. Actually, that's not quite right! Hushai wanted to give David time to escape; so he says, 'it's better if you consolidate your forces, and go out and handle it as a proper formal battle.' And, of course, that's what they eventually did, and the yellow line there shows that they went up there and met David, and we know what happened here in the forest of Ephraim. Well, they didn't meet David, but they met David's men up there. So, the first thing was that Absalom took Hushai's advice and waited which gave David the chance to escape, but Ahithophel was just about as bad as the spoiled little brat, Absalom, who set someone's field on fire because he couldn't get an answer, and Ahithophel when he found that his counsel had been rejected, he went out and hanged himself!

Well, a lot of interesting characters, but we want to turn, b&s, to Psalm 55; the psalm which we read today, and we're going to spend our time in this psalm because, as I said, the purpose for this study today, as it was essentially yesterday, is to try and get the feelings of David while you've got all of these different characters. You've got an Absalom, you've got an Ahithophel, you've got a Hushai, you've got a David, you've got all of these sort of people intermixing. Now, although yesterday we could say with absolute certainty that Psalm 51 was written on the basis of David's sin with Bath-sheba, because the title said so; Psalm 55 doesn't actually have a specific title. But I do think though, that from the information that we've got here, the evidence is very clearly telling us that this psalm is set at the time when David was fleeing from Absalom.

Now, the fact of the matter is, even if it wasn't at that time, it was a very, very similar circumstance, and I'm going to say that I'm quite satisfied in my own mind, that it does find its setting at this time; and we will basically expound the chapter on that basis, although allowing for the broader principle.

Now, one of the things we'd like to try and achieve in this talk is to ask ourselves the question, how can we derive the most benefit from reading psalms? Now, I'm taking a step back here because I'm projecting my thoughts into your mind. I have difficulty reading the psalms; first of all, they're not written in the original language are they? They've been translated from Hebrew to English, we don't pick up the poetry there because the Hebrew poetry just can't be brought across into the English. So, as we were taught at school, prose teaches us facts, poetry teaches us feelings, it's very difficult to get the feelings of the psalms, written particularly in our King James bible, like the way that the Hebrews would have got it, back in the day when they saw it in its original form. So, we've got a challenge to start with! how then can we manage to get the maximum amount of feeling from the psalm? Some of the more modern translations have put the psalms in verse form (I don't mean verses like we've got here, 1, 2 and 3, but verse like we'd have in poetry and it helps a little bit. You may be familiar with the Scottish Psalter. I don't know how long ago it was done, but a long time ago, and many of the hymns in our book, are taken from the Scottish Psalter; so, for example, if you would just like to read Psalm 55 and say, the first 5 verses, listen to it in this form, which does give to us a little bit of the feeling of the poetry. It's not the real Hebrew feeling but it's a better feeling. Listen to this one! Psalm 55 verse 1,

LORD, hear my prayer,
Hide not Thyself from my entreating voice,
Attend and hear me in my plaint,
I mourn and make a noise.

Because of the enemies' voice,
And for lewd men's oppression great
On me they cast iniquity
And they in wrath, me hate.

Sore pain within me is my heart
Death's terror on me fall,
On me comes trembling, fear and dread
O'erwhelmed me with all.

Well, I think at least it's an attempt and, therefore, I sometimes will go to the Scottish Psalter, not because I had a tartan tie on yesterday, but because I think that the fact is, that it does make some sort of an attempt to give us a little bit of the poetry, but it's still not the true Hebrew poetry, but it is a step to give us some of the feeling.

Well, the next thing is, and we are helped in this regard in Psalm 55, a title, and we call

that 'superscription' because that goes on top, as distinct from the ending which is called the 'subscription'; so super above, sub below, and this psalm has a very significant superscription, it tells us that it's a 'maschil' psalm. Now remember, yesterday we came across that word 'maschil' at the top of Psalm 32, the fact is that there are 13 maschil psalms. And, by the way, just taking a step back, for those who may not have done this study, I think it's one of the first ones you better set yourself to do when you go home. Sort out the titles of the psalms. There's a book called 'Titles of the Psalms' by J.W. Fourthly, the Companion bible has got them right, that is, it shows that sometimes what is the title of one psalm should really be the ending of another one. Any other sources that we can get them from? I know those two, Fourthly and Companion bible, anyone come across another one? Well, if you have, we could get Skip to announce it later on, but at least those two sources will help us sort out the fact that at the beginning of Psalm 55 it says, 'To the chief musician on Neginoth' (now that should really be the end of the previous psalm). So the title of Psalm 55 is 'maschil'. Now a 'maschil' psalm is a psalm of instruction; there are 13 of them and the very first one was the one we considered yesterday, Psalm 32. Of these 'maschil' psalms, David wrote 6 of them, and in fact, there's a group of 4 all here together, Psalms 52, 53, 54, and 55; these are all 'maschil' psalms.

What do they try to teach us? Well, Psalm 52 was about Doeg the Edomite, it's specific instruction on how to handle a situation when you are betrayed by an enemy. Psalm 53 doesn't have a specific title, but it possibly was related to the incident with Nabal, the fool, the man who denies God by evil deeds will be put to shame. Psalm 54, was when the Ziphim came to Saul, and so this is a psalm of instruction as to how to act when you are betrayed by your own people.

Now what of Psalm 55? Well, the background is not stated but we're going to see particularly in a moment from the subscription, that it probably has relationship to the rebellion of Absalom and its background and especially the betrayal of Ahithophel, that we read about in 2 Samuel 15. It's a psalm for contemplation and instruction. It teaches how great servants of God have coped with personal betrayal; it teaches us to call upon God to expect His salvation and to learn to rely upon Him. So, there's our theme for the study, cast thy burden upon Yahweh, and He will sustain thee'. That's the title and, of course, it's the words that are found later on, in Psalm 55, and we do have that as an anthem, so at one stage we thought we were going to sing it today, but we're not, and of course, Mendelssohn, his wonderful oratorio, Elijah, which is often said to have some beautiful music in it, not much to do with Elijah, but a lot of beautiful psalms there, and he picks up, I think, some of the sentiments from here. So, it's how to handle a situation when somebody lets you down badly, somebody that you've relied on, somebody that you trusted, and the thing you come to realize is that there is One that you can trust in, and that is Yahweh Himself.

So we just jump for a moment to the end of it, to the subscription, 'sub' as meaning 'under', and this one is a very interesting one. We find it actually attached to the top of Psalm 56 in most bibles, because as we've said, they didn't get this sorted out very well.

At the top of Psalm 56 where we read the words 'To the chief musician upon Jonath-elem-rechokim' we've got there the subscription or the ending to Psalm 55. Now this is a particularly interesting one, isn't it? Jonath-elem-rechokim (3128) and it means relating to the dove in the distant teraphims (or the oaks if you like), relating to the dove in the distant oaks. And, you might just notice in Psalm 55 and verse 6, 'And I said, O that I had wings like the wings of a dove', and we are starting to get the picture now of David fleeing (the wings of a dove) and so this psalm is relating to the dove in the distant teraphims or oaks, and does seem to have reference back to those verses.

Let me read verses 6, 7 and 8 again from the Psalter:

O, that I like a dove had wings, said I,
 Then would I flee;
 Far hence that I might find a place
 Where I in rest might be,
 Lo then, far off I wander would,
 And in the desert stay,
 From windy storm and tempest, I would haste
 To 'scape away.

And there's a lot of other little details that when one goes under the surface and looks up words, you can see the connection then between this dove fleeing away and David at this time in his life.

Verse 17 for example of this psalm, reads 'Evening and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud and He shall hear my voice'. And the phrase 'cry aloud', the Hebrew word is 'amah'(1993); now, I'm not going to try to pronounce it for the reason that you'll know in the next sentence or two, because pronounced correctly in Hebrew it sounds like the cooing of the dove, and I wasn't going to try to attempt that! So, it's something like one of these words, (and if you haven't heard this one before, I'm sure you'll want to use this on somebody when you go away from the school), it's 'onomatopoeic', is a word that sounds like the thing that it's describing. I know in Jeremiah, when he emptied out the bottle before he smashed it, the word for 'poured out' is onomatopoeic. I suppose even our English word 'gurgle' would be that, wouldn't it? So, there are some words that sound like what they're trying to describe, and we are told that this word 'amah' in the Hebrew translated 'cry aloud' is a word that's onomatopoeic and is used of the cooing of the dove in Ezekiel chapter 7 verse 16. And furthermore, Hezekiah in Isaiah 38 and verse 14 said, 'I did moan as a dove'. And so, we're getting this picture then of a psalm, the setting probably being of David in the wilderness fleeing from Absalom. So, we've got David, we suggest, between here and over here, with this psalm in mind. When he actually wrote it, I don't know if he wrote it during that period or in retrospect, but he's got himself fleeing away from Absalom. But as we're going to see virtually straight away, it's not Absalom that's concerning him; yes, he was worried about Absalom, but the setting of this psalm is more particularly that man who went down there, deserted me and gave him that advice. That man, Ahithophel, I just can't

believe it! and this psalm therefore, is a psalm which says, my friend has let me down, but I can cast my burden upon Yahweh. And, b&s, all of us are going to be able to find situations into which we can inject this; and if we can go away with Psalm 55 as helpful to us, then, of course, the talk and the bible school has been of benefit.

So then, in the time we've got left to us, let's go back then to the opening of the psalm and pick up the features and particularly watching for the apparent allusion to the betrayal of Ahithophel, (or the betrayal of David, I suppose you should say, by Ahithophel). So what we're suggesting then in the background is this: David is the dove, he sees himself far away in the distant woods, moaning over the trouble that's come upon him through the rebellion of Absalom which we read about back in 2 Samuel 15 through to 19. The challenge of the psalm is not so much to understand David's thought as to enter into his feelings and ultimately into the feelings of the Lord Himself. And so the psalm opens with the words, 'Give ear to my prayer, O God, and hide not thyself from my supplication'. You know, you can almost pick up a nervousness here as you read this. There's sort of an uncertainty as we read these opening verses, as to whether or not God will answer him! David was satisfied that God had forgiven him, but he was still very conscious as to what had caused all of this trouble. The same would be with us, wouldn't it? we go to God in prayer, and we do believe He will forgive us, but what about these consequences? Should I ask for the removal of the consequences and what if God doesn't remove the consequences? does that mean He hasn't answered my prayer? I'm sure we all can identify with that sort of feeling, and I really sense this in these opening verses of Psalm 55. 'I know my sins are forgiven, but these consequences, look, does Absalom really have to die? what's going to happen to Ahithophel? (I'm not sure at what stage this was (perhaps Ahithophel was already dead by now, but that's a bit unclear). There's all these uncertainties, and the answer is, 'don't worry about it, cast your burden on Yahweh, He's got the answer. Don't worry about the immediate, worry about the long term, and the long term is that Yahweh will ultimately save; but in the meantime, (and it's just as well we don't, we don't know what's going to happen from day to day in our lives. I say), it's just as well we don't know, because we'd overlook all the good times and we'd worry about all the bad things. So there just seems to be a little uncertainty there as to how far these consequences are going to be with him!

But God had warned him of this, hadn't He? as we read in Samuel. He'd been assured that Yahweh has put away his sins, but David could not shake off his feelings of guilt; and, when the trouble came, his mind instantly attributed the heaven sent punishment. That's a dangerous thing to do, isn't it? it's a wrong thing to do. You know, 'am I being punished for my sins?' Of course, that's the whole story of the book of Job, isn't it? that Job's three friends came along and they all believed that Job was suffering because he was a great sinner; they all had different reasons for Job's suffering, but it was all related to the fact that 'Job is a great sinner so Job must be a great sufferer'. We're all conscious of our sins and, therefore, we say 'is Yahweh bringing this upon me as a punishment of my sins?' I believe we should leave the word 'punishment' out, definitely the word 'punishment' out. It may be a chastening but Yahweh is wanting to save us,

and even if He does bring us into situations like this, David was going to be a better man for it. And so He had said, 'the sword shall never depart from thine house, because thou hast despised Me; behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house'. Remember, we read those words a few moments ago, and doubtless David, as he pens these words thinks, 'well, just how far is it going to go?'

We notice when reading verses 2 and 3, when he says, 'Attend unto me, and hear me: I mourn in my complaint, and make a noise; Because of the voice of the enemy, because of the oppression of the wicked: for they cast iniquity upon me, and in wrath they hate me'. So, there were two things that he speaks about here. In verse 3 he says, there's the voice of the enemy; you see, there was Shimei, wasn't there? What he said was right, but the fact that he was saying it was wrong; he shouldn't curse Yahweh's anointed (David wouldn't even kill Yahweh's anointed, and he was even very concerned that he even cut off the hem of his garment, and that was in the case of Saul. And he also speaks about the oppression of the wicked who bear a grudge against him, and I think this is probably our first intimation now that he's got Ahithophel very much in mind, that one that bears a grudge against me!

So we come then to verses 6 through to 8, where he says, 'Oh, that I had wings like a dove! For then would I fly away, and be at rest'. I'm sure everyone, from time to time, would like to be able to do that, the fact is, that there's many examples of that! We're told that Elijah went for his life on one occasion to the clefts of the rock in Horeb, to plead for the extinction of his people. We remember Jeremiah saying that 'he would like a lodging place in a small place in the country, a lodging place of wayfaring men, away from that idolatrous situation in which he found himself. And of course, even the Lord Himself, was not immune from this particular yearning.

We come to verses 9 through 11. So David pleads in verse 9, 'Destroy, O Yahweh, and divide their tongues: for I have seen violence and strife in the city. Day and night they go about it, upon the walls therefore: mischief also and sorrow are in the midst of it. Wickedness is in the midst thereof: deceit and guile depart not from her streets'. We skipped over those verses rather quickly so that we can focus now, more particularly on verses 12 to 15, because I think this brings now the characters of our story together.

Verse 12, 'For it was not any enemy that reproached me; then I could have borne it: neither was it he that hated me that did magnify himself against me; then I would have hid myself from him: But it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide, and mine acquaintance. We took sweet counsel together, and walked unto the house of God in company'. And so that was the thing, that was the thing that distressed David more than anything else in this whole drama, the betrayal of Ahithophel! You see, David had elevated quite a number of men to positions of honour and of trust; but not all of them had David's turn of mind. This was Joab, for example, Joab was one but despite his motives he did remain loyal to David. But now we've got this one here, this man Ahithophel, mine own familiar friend. So let's go back to the book of Samuel and let's just trace the story of Ahithophel in the midst of all this; we've been through the overall

story but now we want to focus on Ahithophel so we can appreciate David's sentiments.

Let's go back to 2 Samuel 15 and the first of the references we've already noted, but we'll read it, verse 12. Here we're introduced to the fact when (on our chart here) Absalom went down to Hebron, then he called Ahithophel to go down with him. So verse 12 says, 'That Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, from his city even from Giloh, while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong: for the people increased continually with Absalom'. We jump across to verses 30 to 34, we've got David now leaving the city, he's escaping from the city: and verse 30 says, 'That David went up by the ascent of mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot; and all the people that was with him covered every man his head; and they went up, weeping as they went up'. It's a tragic situation, isn't it? this man who only a short time earlier, had been dancing there dressed as a king-priest leading the ark up to Zion, going out now as a fugitive; it's just incredible that things could change so quickly, and from his own son and being supported by his, probably, closest friend. Verse 31 says, 'And one told David saying, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom. And David said, O Yahweh, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness. And it came to pass, that when David was come to the top of the mount, where he worshipped God, behold, Hushai the Archite came to meet him with his coat rent, and earth upon his head. Unto whom David said, If thou passeth on with me, then thou shalt be a burden unto me. But if thou return to the city and say unto Absalom, I will be thy servant O king, as I have been thy father's servant hither to, so also will I be thy servant. Then, mayest thou for me, defeat the counsel of Ahithophel'.

We jump across to chapter 16, we pick up the story from verse 15, Absalom is on his way back now, from Hebron back to Jerusalem: and verse 15 says, 'And Absalom, and all the people the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel with him.' Verse 20, 'Then said Absalom to Ahithophel, Give counsel among you what we shall do. And Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Go in unto thy father's concubines, which he hath left to keep the house, and all Israel shall hear that thou art abhorred of thy father: then shall the hands of all that are with thee be strong'. You know, Nathan had told David that's what would happen, so Ahithophel wasn't very smart in saying that, but it showed what side he was on! Verse 23, 'And the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counseled in those days, was as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God; so was all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom'; so, he must have been considered to be a very, very wonderful man, at least at that early stage of his life!

Coming over to chapter 17 verse 1, 'Moreover Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Let me now choose out 12,000 men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night', and as we said earlier, Ahithophel said, let's get out and get him before he's ready; and, in fact, strategically speaking, that would have been the clever way to go, and Hushai knew that and so did David. We come to verse 6 though, and 'When Hushai was come to Absalom, Absalom spake unto him saying, Ahithophel has spoken after this manner, shall we go after his saying? if not, speak thou? And Hushai said unto Absalom, the counsel that Ahithophel has given, is not good at this time'. Now, to save time, let's jump

down to verse 14, 'And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel. For Yahweh had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel to the intent that Yahweh might bring evil upon Absalom. Then said Hushai unto Zadok and to Abiathar the priests, Thus and thus doth Ahithophel counsel Absalom and the elders of Israel, and thus and thus have I counseled'. And so Ahithophel was shortly to show what he really was!

And so, jumping down to verse 21, 'And it came to pass after they were departed, that they came up out of the well' (and this was the young men who were going off to tell king David) 'and said unto David, Arise, and pass quickly over the water: for thus hath Ahithophel counseled against you'. Verse 23, 'And when Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed he saddled his ass, he arose, he got him home to his house, to his city; he put his household in order, and he hanged himself. And he died and was buried in the sepulchre of his father'. So, we've traced all of the verses that mention about Ahithophel and, so, it's in this context that we go back to Psalm 55. David, of course, didn't realize in the early days, that this was the sort of man that Ahithophel really was; but you know, it goes without saying that the Lord had chosen 12 disciples, perhaps He understood Judas better than David understood Ahithophel, but there's no doubt that there are echoes of that very same thing in the life of the Lord. And even in ecclesial life, whilst we're not looking around for the Judases and the Ahithophels, there are people that we place confidence in, and those people will let us down from time to time, because they are imperfect. But when they let us down as badly as this, Ahithophel, what do you do about it?

Well, perhaps you write a psalm like David did, or you experience these sentiments. And so, going back then, we find that he says back in Psalm 55 again, 'But it was thou, a man mine equal, my guide and my acquaintance', I'm always reminded of a little bit of poetry I had to learn once (I don't know if any of you ever learnt it, it's actually a piece of poetry by John Dryden, who had a habit of writing satyr which was directed against the monarchy in England usually, and he picked certain characters from a certain story line and he put it against the royalty in England. This piece of poetry is called 'Absalom and Ahithophel', it's quite a long piece, you know,

Of these the bold Ahithophel was first,
A name to all succeeding ages cursed,
The close designs and crooked counsels fit,
A seditious bold and turbulent of wit
Restless, unfixed in principles and place,
In power displeas'd, in patience of disgrace,
A fiery soul, which working out its way,
Fretted the pygmy body to decay,
And ill informed the tenement of clay.

I think that was the only part I ever learnt from the bit of poetry, but it does show the drama of this man. He says he's a mixed up man, he's a seditious man but he's restless

and unfixed in principles and place; he was concerned, of course, with himself. He was obviously boasted up by his own powers of giving counsel; and as soon as someone said, I don't take your advice, he hanged himself. Have you ever said, 'well, I'm not going to that meeting anymore because they didn't pay any attention to me last time at the committee meeting or whatever it might be, I'm pulling out because they won't listen to me'. Well, let's never any of us ever think, that we're all that clever, that we can't sometimes be wrong.

Well, b&s, we need, of course, to try and bring this together with some sort of positive exhortation, and I think that undoubtedly comes as we skip down to some of the concluding words. Particularly, say in the section, verse 22 onwards, where we left off in verse 13, he speaks about the wickedness of the wicked and so forth, but here comes the positive side to the story. And David in the midst of all this emotion, would Absalom be killed? it's a tragedy about Ahithophel! the answer's got to be this in verse 22, 'Cast thy burden upon Yahweh, and He shall sustain thee: He shall never suffer the righteous to be moved'. And those are the words as I've said, from our anthems, from Mendelssohn's oratorio 'Elijah' and the like.

Well, there are many passages that we could go to in the New Testament, there are certainly many in Hebrews, (I've got quite a few listed down here, but I think in order to just bring our thoughts to some sort of focus), I'd like to go over to some of the closing words of Hebrews (I don't mean right to the last chapter as such) but when we go over to Hebrews, we find first of all, say in Hebrews chapter 10, some words which would appear to have quite a direct bearing upon these sorts of sentiments. Hebrews chapter 10, and let's pick it up from verse 22, the sentence, of course, really starts a lot earlier than that, so we'll go back to verse 21 for a little bit of a run in, 'And having an high priest over the house of God; Let us (do three things) draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water. (Let's do another thing) Let us hold fast the profession of our hope (and if anybody hasn't crossed out the word 'faith' and put 'hope' there, it's a good idea to do it because it's not faith it's hope) without wavering;(for He is faithful that promised)'. Cast your burden upon Yahweh, He is faithful that promised. And the third thing we should do, 'And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works'. And doubtless, many of you have noticed before, the three phrases, 'let us' in verse 22, 23 and verse 24, and you notice the three terms are, faith, hope and love, which of course, we are so familiar with from 1 Corinthians 13.

So he says Yahweh is faithful, so what should we do about it? 'Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching', and I think, b&s, maybe and because of physical reasons as well, that would be an important point to stop. There's the positive exhortation, we trust that none of us would ever be as bad as an Ahithophel or an Absalom. But you know, we're not all as steadfast, we're not all as constant as we would like to be; fickleness seems to be part of human nature. The only One who is totally constant is God, so we finish with some of the words we used earlier from

James, 'if any man lack wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men in singleness' (I know it says 'liberally' in the AV, but it means 'in singleness'). God can only act one way, and that is as Spirit, but the verses go on to say, 'But a double-minded man is unstable in all his ways', so the appeal to us is to try and be like David; yes, he had his ups and downs, but by and large, by and large David was a single-minded man, and that's why he can be described as a man after God's own heart; that's the sort of spirit we want. And that's the sort of spirit we want to be able to try (and as we've endeavoured in probably an imperfect way this afternoon), to try and extract from some of these psalms, the feelings of this man, that we can take away, not just the facts of the story, but the feelings. And certainly not like Absalom and Ahithophel who were separating themselves; Ahithophel hanging himself because he was upset that no one would take his advice; Absalom going and burning a field of corn because he didn't get his own way. 'Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is, but exhorting one another, and so much more as you see the day approaching'.