

Notes on 2 Samuel

2024 Edition
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Introduction

Second Samuel continues the history begun in 1 Samuel. Please see my comments regarding 2 Samuel's title, date, authorship, scope, purpose, genre, and themes and characteristics, in the introductory section of the 1 Samuel notes.

OUTLINE

(Continued from notes on 1 Samuel)

- V. David's triumphs chs. 1—8
 - A. The beginning of David's kingdom 1:1—3:5
 - 1. David's discovery of Saul and Jonathan's deaths ch. 1
 - 2. David's move to Hebron 2:1-4a
 - 3. David's overtures to Jabesh-gilead 2:4b-7
 - 4. Ish-bosheth's coronation over Israel 2:8-11
 - 5. The conflict between Abner and Joab 2:12-32
 - 6. The strengthening of David's position 3:1-5
 - B. The unification of the kingdom 3:6—5:16
 - 1. David's acceptance of Abner 3:6-39
 - 2. David's punishment of Ish-bosheth's murderers ch. 4
 - 3. David's acceptance by all Israel 5:1-12
 - 4. David's additional children 5:13-16
 - C. The establishment of the kingdom 5:17—8:18
 - 1. David's victories over the Philistines 5:17-25
 - 2. David's relocation of the ark to Jerusalem ch. 6
 - 3. The giving of the Davidic Covenant ch. 7

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4. The security of David's kingdom ch. 8
- VI. David's troubles chs. 9—20
- A. David's faithfulness ch. 9
 - B. God's faithfulness despite David's unfaithfulness chs. 10—12
 1. The Ammonite rebellion ch. 10
 2. David's unfaithfulness to God chs. 11—12
 - C. David's rejection and return chs. 13—20
 1. Events leading up to Absalom's rebellion chs. 13—14
 2. Absalom's attempt to usurp David's throne chs. 15—19
 3. Sheba's rebellion 20:1-22
 4. David's remaining cabinet 20:23-26
- VII. Summary illustrations chs. 21—24
- A. Famine from Saul's sin 21:1-14
 1. Saul's broken treaty with the Gibeonites 21:1-6
 2. David's justice and mercy 21:7-9
 3. David's honoring of Saul and Jonathan 21:10-14
 - B. Four giant killers 21:15-22
 - C. David's praise of Yahweh ch. 22
 - D. David's last testament 23:1-7
 - E. Thirty-seven mighty men 23:8-39
 1. Selected adventures of outstanding warriors 23:8-23
 2. A list of notable warriors among The Thirty 23:24-39
 - F. Pestilence from David's sin ch. 24
 1. David's sin of numbering the people 24:1-9
 2. David's confession of his guilt 24:10-14
 3. David's punishment 24:15-17
 4. David's repentance 24:18-25

MESSAGE

First Samuel records David's preparation. Second Samuel records his service, namely: his reign. In my notes on 1 Samuel, I mentioned three aspects of his preparation: as shepherd, as courtier, and as "outlaw." In 2 Samuel we see those aspects of his preparation put to work. He became the shepherd of his people, the center of his court, and the strong ruler of his nation. He fulfilled the office of king successfully under God's leadership.

The message of 2 Samuel is that man's attitude toward God creates an opportunity for God, and God's attitude toward man creates an opportunity for man.

First, man's attitude toward God creates an opportunity for God.

We find this principle stated in 2 Samuel 22:26-28. Compare Hannah's prayer of praise in 1 Samuel 2:1-10, the other "bookend" that frames 1 and 2 Samuel. God is to each person what that person is to God (cf. James 2:13).

We find the principle illustrated in David's attitudes toward God. David had four convictions about God. We see these in his thanksgiving psalm in chapter 22, which is also Psalm 18. David evidently wrote it early in his life.

First, David believed that God was Israel's supreme Ruler. He never doubted this or presumed to elevate himself to God's place as Head of the nation. This is clear in 22:2-16. Contrast David's view with Saul's. Some local church leaders unfortunately follow Saul's example rather than David's, but most follow David's.

Second, David believed that God was consistently and completely righteous (good, virtuous, upright, irreproachable) in His dealings. David confessed his sin when he was charged with it, rather than trying to deny it. In 22:17-27, this comes through clearly. Contrast Saul, who made excuses when he sinned.

Third, David believed that God was always merciful. He was willing to let God determine his punishment when he sinned, because he believed that God would be merciful (cf. 22:28-46). Contrast Saul, who sought control.

Fourth, David believed that God's will was always best. His greatest desire was for God's will in his own life and in Israel (cf. 22:47-51). Contrast Saul, who believed that his will was best.

David's convictions created opportunities for God.

First, because David really believed in God's sovereignty over himself and Israel, God could and did set David over the throne of Israel, and could direct him to govern God's people (cf. 22:2-3). Even today, loyal employees are the ones whom employers promote to positions of greater responsibility.

Second, because David acknowledged *God's* righteousness, God was able to bless David for *his* righteousness (cf. 22:21-28). There was no conflict over who was right in David's mind.

Third, because David appreciated God's mercy, God was able to be merciful with him (cf. 22:35-36). God defended David, even when he did not deserve it.

Fourth, because David viewed God's will as superior to his own, God was able to bring His will for David and Israel to pass (cf. 22:51). God returned loyalty to David for his loyalty to God.

Because he had these attitudes, David became God's instrument through whom God accomplished His larger plans and purposes. Even though David sinned, sometimes greatly, his deepest convictions lay in these truths. God based His dealings with David on David's deepest convictions. He was the man after God's own heart. What does it mean to be "after God's heart?" Eleven-year-old Christina Alexander described it as "loving God."¹ God did not base His dealings with David primarily on David's momentary failures but on his deepest convictions and commitments.

This is a great encouragement to readers of 2 Samuel. The Christian's deep underlying attitudes toward God provide a foundation on which God can build and use him or her in some way. The direction one is heading is more important than how far he or she has advanced in Christian growth.

¹Myrna Alexander, *With Him in the Struggle*, p. 9.

The other side of this coin is that God's attitude toward a person creates an opportunity for that person. John wrote, "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

We find this principle stated in 2 Samuel 23:1-5. David evidently wrote this chapter later in his life.

We find the principle illustrated in God's attitudes toward David. What were these?

First, God purposed for David to be king (cf. 23:1). This knowledge affected David's attitude toward God. He just needed to consent to God's purpose for him. God has purposed to bless every believer. This is the revelation of the whole Bible. God has chosen every Christian (Eph. 1:4).

Second, God's power would be adequate for David's needs (cf. 23:2). The power for all of David's life, including the inspiration for his words, came from God. David could simply cooperate with it. Christians, too, have the Spirit. We, too, only need to cooperate with God (Gal. 5:25).

Third, God's pattern for David's kingship was God's own rule (cf. 23:3-4). David could conform to God's example as Sovereign to fulfill his destiny. Christians have Jesus Christ's example as well as God's pattern (Heb. 12:1-2).

Fourth, God's persistence would result in the fulfillment of all His promises to David (cf. 23:5). This gave David confidence in God in the present. God has promised never to leave Christians (Matt. 28:20), and He has proved Himself faithful (Phil. 1:6).

In 1 Samuel, we see that God's ultimate victory does not depend on people's attitudes toward Him. His people can be loyal or rebellious, but this will not affect His ultimate victory.

In 2 Samuel, we learn that our ultimate victory in life depends on our attitude toward God. Conformity to the will of God creates fitness for service. Conformity to the will of God depends fundamentally on our attitude toward God. It does not depend primarily on our ability, or on our ability to persuade God to do something. It depends on our abandonment to Him, and on our willingness to let God persuade us to do something. It depends on our commitment to Him and our faithfulness to Him.

God does not measure us as other people do. We measure each other by external actions. God measures us by internal attitudes. 1 Samuel 16:7 says, "The LORD looks at the heart."¹

What is your attitude toward God? Do you really want to please God, or do you obey God simply because of your background and environment? Would you live a filthy life if you could get away with it? What is your real attitude toward God? Do you really want to do right? David was a man after God's own heart, because he really wanted what God wanted.

What do you really want? Be careful, because God will give you what you really want. Do you want to run your own life? God will let you do it, but He may let you run your life into a brick wall.

First Samuel stresses primarily negative examples of behavior from Saul's life as God's anointed. 2 Samuel stresses primarily positive examples from David's life as God's anointed. Christians are the LORD's anointed. 1 John 2:27 says, "The anointing which you received from Him [the Holy Spirit] remains in you." Compare also Jesus Christ, another Anointed One, and David.²

¹Quotations from the English Bible in these notes are from the NASB (*The New American Standard Bible*), 2020 ed., unless otherwise indicated.

²Adapted from G. Campbell Morgan, *Living Messages of the Books of the Bible*, 1:1:161-74.

Exposition

V. DAVID'S TRIUMPHS CHS. 1—8

The first 20 chapters of 2 Samuel are divisible into four units, each of which ends with a list of names that is four verses long (1:1—3:5; 3:6—5:16; 5:17—8:18; 9:1—20:26). The first two units conclude with lists of David's sons that were born to him, first in Hebron, and then in Jerusalem. The second two units end with lists of David's officials. This structural division is helpful to observe because it clarifies the writer's intent in 2 Samuel: to provide a record of the consolidation of Israel's monarchy under David. The first three units are generally positive and describe David's triumphs, whereas the last unit is generally negative and relates David's troubles. J. Sidlow Baxter expressed the message of the first part of 2 Samuel (chs. 1—12) as "triumph through faith" and the second part (chs. 13—24) as "trouble through sin." He believed the central message of the whole book is "triumphs turned to troubles through sin."¹

"The governing idea of the biography of David (2 Sam. 9.20 [sic] and 1 Kings 1—2), which by common consent is regarded by historians as a model of the narrative type, is expressed not by commentaries linked to the presentation of the facts but by the presentation of the facts themselves arranged with the object of showing up David's personality, whose kingship endures in spite of his own infidelities, which are in no way passed over in silence, and in spite of the obstacles of his enemies, for the disappearance of the three legitimate claimants to the throne, Amnon, Absalom and Adonijah, does not prevent the monarchy from being firmly settled in the hands of Solomon (1 Kings 2.46 [sic])."²

In chapters 1—8 the writer's fertility motif reaches a climax in his description of David's reign. 1:1 and 8:13 form an *inclusio* that surrounds this section.

"The thesis of the author—that Israel is blessed with fertility when the nation (and the epitome of the nation, the king) is

¹J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, 2:67.

²Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 194.

following the [Mosaic] covenant—is demonstrated in these chapters."¹

A. THE BEGINNING OF DAVID'S KINGDOM 1:1—3:5

The present section begins with Yahweh's destruction of Saul's line and ends with a summary of David's fecundity (his ability to produce abundant offspring). In the middle, we find the record of David's anointing as king over Judah (2:1-7). In 1:1—3:5 we see the Israelites turning to David as their king. They saw David as their source of deliverance and blessing. Furthermore, David's supporters were overcoming those of Saul.

This section describes the beginning of David's kingdom and demonstrates his many qualifications for being king. It also shows how God established him on his throne. It was a combination of God blessing David, and David behaving wisely as he depended on God, that secured his kingship. This section gives us insight into what a skillful diplomat David was. We see evidences of this throughout chapters 1—8, as David did various things that ingratiated him to all the Israelites. He behaved, in some respects, like a politician on the campaign trail as he sought to unite the nation.

"The eighty-year period of the reigns of David and Solomon is in many respects the golden age of Israel's long history."²

1. David's discovery of Saul and Jonathan's deaths ch. 1

First Samuel 31 and 2 Samuel 1 record the transition that took place in the royal leadership of Israel. Many students of these passages believe that 1 Samuel 31 contains the factual account of Saul's death.³ Others believe that the Amalekite killed Saul, as this chapter records. Some writers see no reason why both accounts could not be true.⁴ Josephus also conflated the two accounts and described what happened as follows:

¹John A. Martin, "Studies in 1 and 2 Samuel," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141:561 (January-March 1984):37.

²Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, p. 223.

³E.g., Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 197.

⁴See Leon J. Wood, *Israel's United Monarchy*, p. 168; Arno C. Gaebelin, *The Annotated Bible*, 1:2:191; David G. Firth, *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 322.

"But his [Saul's] armor bearer not daring to kill his master, he drew his own sword, and placing himself over against its point, he threw himself upon it; and when he could neither run it through him, nor, by leaning against it, make the sword pass through him, he turned him round, and asked a certain young man that stood by, who he was; and when he understood that he was an Amalekite, he desired him to force the sword through him, because he was not able to do it with his own hands, and thereby to procure him such a death as he desired. This young man did accordingly ..."¹

¹Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 6:14:7. Cf. *ibid.*, 7:1:1. Josephus' history should not be taken as equally reliable as Scripture. He sometimes contradicted Scripture.



An Amalekite's account of Saul and Jonathan's deaths 1:1-16

The young Amalekite was probably a mercenary: a soldier hired to serve in Saul's army. Some interpreters believe that this man's account of Saul's death was not accurate, rather than that he had indeed killed Saul, in view of 1 Samuel 31:1-6 and 1 Chronicles 10:1-6.¹ However, it is possible that his account was true, and that after Saul fell on his spear, he did not die immediately, and asked the Amalekite to finish him off. The young Amalekite was able to take Saul's crown and bracelet. He probably returned to David with his story and these royal emblems to ingratiate himself with David.

Mount Gilboa stood some 80 miles north of Ziklag, so it probably took the young man three or four days to make the trip. The average traveler in Bible times would normally cover about 20 miles per day walking. Ironically, God had commanded Saul to annihilate the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:3), and David had just returned from slaughtering a portion of them (v. 1; 1 Sam. 30). Now one of them claimed to have killed the king who disobeyed God by not killing all of the Amalekites.

"Since most, if not all, readers would be aware of the partially fictitious nature of the Amalekite's story, it seems that its primary function was to counter any possible rumors or accusations leveled against David."²

"One of the key words in this chapter is *fallen*, found in verses 4, 10, 12, 19, and 27. When Saul began his royal career, he was described as standing head and shoulders 'taller than any of the people' (1 Sam. 9:2; see 1 Sam. 10:23 and 16:7), but he ended his career a fallen king. He fell on his face in fear in the house of the spirit medium (1 Sam. 28:20), and he fell on the battlefield before the enemy (1 Sam. 31:4). David humbled himself before the Lord, and the Lord lifted him up; but Saul's pride and rebellion brought him to a shameful end. 'Therefore

¹See Robert P. Gordon, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary*, pp. 208-9; and Bill T. Arnold, "The Amalekite's Report of Saul's Death: Political Intrigue or Incompatible Sources?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 32:3 (1989):289-98.

²Arnold A. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, p. 10.

let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall' (1 Cor. 10:12 NKJV)."¹

One writer saw in Saul's "leaning on his spear" (v. 6) "... a parable of his tendency to rely on human effort rather than on divine resources (cf. Isa 10:20; 31:1, where 'rely' translates the same Hebrew verb as 'leaning' does here)."²

The biblical writer constructed this chapter chiastically in order to focus the reader's attention on the Amalekite's story and David's reaction to it (1:6-12).

- A David strikes the Amalekites. 1:1
- B David questions an Amalekite. 1:2-5
- C The Amalekite tells his story. 1:6-10
- C' David reacts to the Amalekite's story. 1:11-12
- B' David questions the Amalekite again. 1:13-14
- A' David strikes the Amalekite. 1:15-16

David asked the Amalekite who he was (v. 8), and the young man explained that he was an Amalekite. Then David asked him where he came from (v. 13), which seemingly was unnecessary, since the youth had just told him that he was an Amalekite. Perhaps David asked the second question to find out if the young man lived within Israel or outside Israel. The youth explained that he was "the son of a stranger" (v. 13): a "protected foreigner."³ Perhaps David could not understand how someone who lived in Israel could fail to understand that he respected Saul's life and did not want to kill him.

The Amalekite soldier undoubtedly thought David would have been glad that Saul had finally died, since Saul was David's rival for the throne. For about 10 years David had been running from Saul with a price on his head.

¹Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary/History*, p. 303.

²Ronald F. Youngblood, "1, 2 Samuel," in *Deuteronomy-2 Samuel*, vol. 3 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 806.

³S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel*, p. 233.

Compare Doeg the Edomite's willingness to slay God's anointed priests at Nob to please Saul (1 Sam. 22:18). The Amalekite brought to David the emblems of kingship that Saul wore: his crown, which was probably "a small metallic cap or wreath, which encircled the temples, serving the purpose of a helmet, with a very small horn projecting in front, as the emblem of power," and his bracelet, which was "the armlet worn above the elbow; an ancient mark of royal dignity."¹

However, the news of Saul's death saddened David instead of making him happy. This was because Saul was the Yahweh's anointed servant. All 11 references to "the LORD's anointed" in the Old Testament, except the one in Lamentations 4:20, appear in 1 and 2 Samuel. This phrase emphasizes the close relationship between Yahweh and the king. Furthermore David's soul-brother Jonathan had died, as had many other Israelite soldiers. David must have had the young Amalekite executed because he believed his story. "Your blood is on your head" (v. 16) means: the blood you have shed is the cause of your own death (cf. Matt. 27:25; Luke 19:22).² David had previously had at least two opportunities to kill Saul, but he had not done so because Saul was the LORD's anointed (1 Sam. 24:1-7; 26:1-11).

"The author of Samuel established a deliberate connection between the two stories [i.e., this one and the story of the Benjamite fugitive's report of the Philistine victory at Aphek in 1 Sam. 4:12-17] in order to set up an analogy between the fates of Saul's house and of Eli's. ... The comparison indicates that there is a clear rule of law which connects a leader's conduct with his fate and the fate of his house. A degenerate leader, whether it is himself who has sinned or his sons, will ultimately be deposed ... or come to a tragic end, just as Eli and his sons die on the same day, and so do Saul and his."³

It was dangerous for David to execute the Amalekite, because David was then residing in Philistine territory, in Ziklag. His Philistine neighbors would have interpreted any show of sorrow over Saul's death as treasonous. Once

¹Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, p. 229.

²See Charles Mabee, "David's Judicial Exoneration," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 92:1 (1980):92-107.

³Moshe Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel: A Literary Study of Comparative Structures*, p. 106.

again, David was willing to risk danger in order to do what was right. It was time for him to break with the Philistines and to return to Israel.

David's lament for Saul and Jonathan 1:17-27

"Structurally, Samuel is built around three major poetic blocks: Hannah's Song (1 Sam. 2:1-10), David's lament (2 Sam. 1:17-27) and David's two reflective pieces (2 Sam. 22:1—23:7). Kingship is central in each poem. Hannah's Song anticipates kingship. In David's lament, Saul's failure to provide the kingship required is considered, while the reflective pieces consider how kingship can make a positive contribution. Hannah's Song and the reflective pieces are at the book's boundaries, and the lament is its turning point as we move from Saul to David."¹

Students of David's lament over Saul and Jonathan's deaths have called it "the Song of the Bow" (v. 18; cf. v. 22). Laments over the deaths of individuals are not uncommon in the Old Testament (cf. 1 Kings 13:30; Jer. 22:18; 34:5; Ezek. 28:12-19; 32:2-15). The only other of David's laments over an individual's death recorded in Scripture were for Abner, Saul's commander-in-chief (3:33-34), and David's son Absalom (18:33). Many people in Judah learned and sang David's lament over Saul and Jonathan's deaths (v. 18). The Book of Jashar (v. 18) is no longer extant (cf. Josh. 10:13).

"How the mighty have fallen" is the key refrain in the song (vv. 19, 25, 27). It forms an *inclusio* that brackets the entire poem, as well as appearing in the middle. The strophes gradually diminish in force with the falling away of the sorrow expressed therein.² The lament lauds the fallen heroes, mourns their deaths, and praises their bravery, inseparable love, and Saul's virtues (vv. 19-24). It then expounds David and Jonathan's friendship (vv. 25-26) and concludes with a final sigh of grief (v. 27).

Jonathan had remained loyal to Saul—as his father, and as the LORD's anointed—even though Saul had many faults. The reference to "your

¹Firth, p. 321.

²C. F. Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Books of Samuel*, p. 289, argued for three strophes, while William H. Shea "Chiasmus and the Structure of David's Lament," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105:1 (1986):13-25, saw five, and Youngblood, p. 810, seven.

beauty" (v. 19) may be a reference to Jonathan (cf. 1 Sam. 14:4-5, 10, 12-13). One writer believed that the Hebrew word *hassebi*, translated "your beauty," should be "the gazelle," and that this was a nickname for Jonathan.¹ Gath, the Philistine capital, and Ashkelon, its chief religious center (v. 20), were the easternmost and westernmost cities in Philistia respectively, and probably represent the totality of that nation.² The Hebrew words translated "beloved" and "delightful" (v. 23), refer to physical attractiveness and fundamental devotion respectively. They occur again together in verse 26 but in reverse order where we read "love" and "wonderful."

"Taken together the two words articulate a peculiar and precious bonding with David."³

Saul's reign had been good for Israel economically. He had been a source of some blessing, because he was God's anointed, even though he also caused sorrow (v. 24; cf. 1 Sam. 14:47).

"The separate treatment of Jonathan in a fake coda [v. 25] subtly shows David's preference for him [over Saul]."⁴

David considered Jonathan's love more wonderful than that of women (v. 26). The Hebrew word translated "love" here appears as "friendship" in Psalm 109:4-5 (NIV).⁵ David was not alluding to some perverted type of love that he shared with Jonathan but to covenant and political loyalty.⁶ One writer argued that Jonathan's love for David was tantamount to a homosexual relationship.⁷ There is no evidence for this. David probably meant that he and Jonathan enjoyed a oneness that most married couples do not enjoy, because of their deep and strong commitment to Yahweh as well as to one another.

¹David Noel Freedman, "The Refrain in David's Lament Over Saul and Jonathan," in *Ex Orbe Religionum: Studia Geo Widengren Oblata*, part 1, p. 120.

²David L. Zapf, "How Are the Mighty Fallen! A Study of 2 Samuel 1:17-27," *Grace Theological Journal* 5:1 (1984):113.

³Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, pp. 216-17.

⁴Zapf, p. 121.

⁵NIV stands for *The Holy Bible: New International Version*, 1984 ed.

⁶See Youngblood, p. 816; Robert North, "Social Dynamics From Saul to Jehu," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 12:4 (1982):112; Firth, p. 326.

⁷T. Horner, *Jonathan Loved David: Homosexuality in Biblical Times*.

The "weapons of war" that had perished (v. 27) may refer to the Israelite soldiers who had perished in the battle. But they probably refer to Saul and Jonathan metaphorically (cf. the metaphorical reference to Jonathan in v. 19).¹

"It is remarkable that no [overt] *religious* thought of any kind appears in the poem: the feeling expressed by it is purely *human*."²

Even when Saul died, David acted properly toward the LORD's anointed. This shows his regard for Yahweh's leadership over Israel. Jonathan would have succeeded Saul on the throne customarily, but now he was dead. Even though David saw in the deaths of these men the removal of obstacles to his coronation as Israel's king, he did not rejoice. David's funerary lament over Saul's death recalls Jesus' lament over the death of Jerusalem (Matt. 23:37-39).

There appear three main emphases in the account of David's learning of Saul and Jonathan's death in chapter 1: First, it is clear that Saul's death was his own doing. It is ironic that David learned of Saul's death from an Amalekite, since Saul was supposed to have killed all the Amalekites but had not (1 Sam. 15:3). Second, David's regard for Saul as the LORD's anointed stands out (1:14). The third emphasis in this chapter is David's genuine sorrow over the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, as he expressed it in the "Song of the Bow" (vv. 19-27).

In the Saul and David narrative just completed (1 Sam. 16—2 Sam. 1), the importance of the anointed one surfaced many times. In order to be right before God, and to enjoy His blessing, one had to respond properly to His anointed king. This always holds true, especially concerning God's anointed King Jesus Christ.

¹See Stanley Gevirtz, "David's Lament Over Saul and Jonathan," in *Patterns in the Early Poetry of Israel*, p. 95. For additional studies of this song, see James Kennedy, "David's Lament over Saul and Jonathan: II Sam. 1:19-27," *American Journal of Semitic Languages* 32 (1916):118-25; William L. Holladay, "Form and Word-Play in David's Lament over Saul and Jonathan," *Vetus Testamentum* 20:2 (April 1970):153-89; and William H. Shea, "David's Lament," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 221 (February 1976):141-44. Gale A. Yee argued that this passage is a parody and was the basis for Isaiah 14:4b-21 in "The Anatomy of Biblical Parody: The Dirge Form in 2 Samuel 1 and Isaiah 14," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50:4 (October 1988):565-86.

²Driver, p. 239.

As Yahweh's anointed, David was to lead Israel in its battles. David began doing this with a shepherd's tools rather than with those of a warrior, showing that he would be an ideal leader. He led as a shepherd. Many in Israel, even the royal family of Saul, as well as many outside the nation (among the Philistines, Amalekites, et al.), recognized that God was bringing blessing to Israel through David. Like the ark, David went into exile in Philistia, but the Philistines sent him back because he was a greater threat than a help. This shows that God had been with David as He had been with the ark.

The major conflict between Saul and David in 1 Samuel 16 through 2 Samuel 1 contains eight sub-conflicts: God's Spirit left Saul and came upon David at his anointing (ch. 16). Goliath and Saul conflicted with David (17:1—18:5). Saul conflicted with David and Saul's household (18:6—20:42). Saul and Doeg conflicted with David and Israel's priests (chs. 21—22). Saul conflicted with David in the wilderness (chs. 23—26). Saul and his heirs conflicted with the Philistines (chs. 27—29). The Amalekites conflicted with David (ch. 30). Finally, Saul and Jonathan conflicted with the Philistines (1 Sam. 31—2 Sam. 1).

The basic conflict between Saul and David recalls the one between Samuel and Eli's sons. Saul was the epitome of what Israel wanted in a king. David, on the other hand, was the youngest son in his family, a shepherd, and even a surprise to Samuel as God's choice. David became what the ark had been earlier in 1 Samuel: the source of blessing for the godly and of trouble for the ungodly. He was the initial fulfillment of Hannah's desire for an anointed one (1 Sam. 2:10).¹

Both Samuel (1 Sam. 7) and David (1 Sam. 17:1—18:5) defeated the Philistines, who had no regard for Yahweh, though they did acknowledge His power. In contrast, Saul was never able to do so except with Jonathan's help. Only those deeply committed to Yahweh could overcome His enemies (cf. Mark 9:14-29).

2. David's move to Hebron 2:1-4a

"Without doubt this portion [of 2 Samuel, i.e., chapters 2—8] forms the crux of the book. Here the fertility motif reaches a peak. The thesis of the author—that Israel is blessed with

¹Martin, pp. 39-40.

fertility when the nation (and the epitome of the nation, the king) is following the covenant—is demonstrated in these chapters. The king, the ark (representing the presence of God and the Word of God, the covenant), and fertility are all intertwined in a beautifully artistic way."¹

David again expressed his dependence on God by asking, probably by using the sacred lots (cf. 1 Sam. 14:37-42; 23:9-11; 30:7-8; 2 Sam. 19, 23), or by consulting a seer (cf. 1 Sam. 22:5; 28:6; 2 Sam. 7:2-3): (1) if it was the right time for him to move back into Judah, and (2) where God wanted him to relocate. He prayed for guidance concerning time and space. He realized that he could not make the wisest choices alone, since he did not have God's perspective. He wanted God to use him most effectively, so he allowed God to place him in that spot (cf. Prov. 3:5-6).

"That he did this with the Philistines' consent is certain, for he was their vassal and could hardly have taken such a step without their approval."²

The observation of Bright above seems questionable to me. Since Saul had died, would not the Philistines have regarded David as his successor? If so, it seems to me that they would have opposed David at every turn. I think David moved from Ziklag into Judah on his own initiative, following Yahweh's direction.

"For the first time in ten years, David and his men were no longer fugitives. His men had suffered with him, and now they would reign with him (see 2 Tim. 2:12)."³

The territory of Judah was the divine choice of where David should go. That was David's tribal homeland and where he had the greatest acceptance (cf. 1 Sam. 30:26-30). Hebron stood about 25 miles northeast of Ziklag, and 19 miles south-southwest of Jerusalem, on the highest promontory in the Judean hill country.⁴

Verse 1 gives the key to David's triumphs, namely, his dependence on God. Verse 2 gives the key to his tragedy, namely, his relationships with women

¹Ibid., p. 37.

²John Bright, *A History of Israel*, p. 175.

³Wiersbe, p. 306

⁴See the map "Israel in the Time of David" in Joyce Baldwin, *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 48.

(cf. Gen. 2:24). Michal, David's first wife, is not mentioned, because Saul had taken her from David and had given her to another man (cf. 1 Sam. 25:42-44).

This was David's second anointing (in 1011 B.C.; cf. 1 Sam. 16:13). It represented a formal acknowledgment that the people of Judah viewed David as the LORD's anointed.

"In his accession to the throne of Israel, David illustrates the career of Jesus Christ, the son of David. Like David the shepherd, Jesus came first as a humble servant and was anointed king privately. Like David in exile, Jesus is King today but doesn't yet reign on the throne of David. Like Saul in David's day, Satan is still free to obstruct God's work and oppose God's people. One day, Jesus will return in glory, Satan will be imprisoned, and Jesus will reign in His glorious kingdom (Rev. 19:11—20:6). God's people today faithfully pray 'Thy kingdom come' (Matt. 6:10 KJV) and eagerly await the return of their King."¹

3. David's overtures to Jabesh-gilead 2:4b-7

"The much later crisis of I Kings 12 suggests that the Davidic hold on the north is never deeply established. In our chapter we are given two episodes of David's attentiveness to the north. One (vv. 4b-7) is a peaceable act of friendship. The other (vv. 8-32) is an act of confrontation and hostility."²

The people of Jabesh-gilead were very loyal to Saul, because Saul had rescued them from the Ammonites (cf. 1 Sam. 11:1-13; 31:8-13). David took special pains to express his sorrow over Saul's death to those residents, to show that the antagonism that had existed between Saul and himself was one-sided. If he could win their favor, David could gain a foothold of support in northern Israel.

¹Wiersbe, p. 306. Cf. Matthew Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 328. KJV refers to *The Holy Bible: Authorized King James Version*, which I refer to in these notes as the AV.

²Brueggemann, p. 220.

"The people of Jabesh Gilead allowed their affection for Saul to blind them to God's plan for the nation. They had a good motive, but they made a bad choice. How often in the history of the church have God's people allowed human affection and appreciation to overrule the will of God!"¹

We see in these verses how David sought peace and unity with those who had been loyal to Saul in Israel. First, he took the initiative in contacting them (v. 5a). Second, he paid them a sincere compliment (v. 5b). Third, he obliquely reminded them that he was now the LORD's anointed (v. 6). Finally, he offered a "treaty of friendship" (vv. 6b-7; cf. Deut. 23:6; 1 Sam. 25:30).²

"David wishes to take Saul's place as suzerain of Jabesh-Gilead. Since treaties did not automatically continue in force when a new king took the throne, it was necessary for David actively to seek a renewal of the pact."³

David's support at this time came mainly from the Judahites. Hostilities had existed between the Israelites in the northern tribes and those in the South for many generations.⁴

"One could almost say that the first recorded act of the new king of Judah was to offer friendship and comfort to a group of Israelites, with the implication that David may be a Judean but his heart belongs to all Israel."⁵

4. Ish-bosheth's coronation over Israel 2:8-11

David's overtures to the Jabesh-gileadites were very important. Saul's commander-in-chief and cousin, Abner, was working to install Saul's youngest son, Ish-bosheth (called Eshbaal in 1 Chron. 8:33; 9:39), Abner's nephew, as Saul's successor. This was not a move that Yahweh had prescribed (cf. 1 Sam. 13:14). David was God's anointed. Abner was simply

¹Wiersbe, p. 307.

²Delbert R. Hillers, "A Note on Some Treaty Terminology in the Old Testament," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 176 (1964):47.

³Ibid.

⁴For a review of these hostilities, see Merrill, pp. 223-28.

⁵Anderson, p. 29.

doing what was customary in the ancient Near East and, in the process, securing his own future. Earlier, Abner had brought David to Saul, after David killed Goliath (1 Sam. 17:55-58).

Mahanaim, a Levitical city of refuge (Josh. 21:38), was only 16 miles south of Jabesh-gilead in Transjordan.¹ It became the center for Saul's supporters at this time (cf. v. 29).

"This was a refugee government, if government it can be called, as its location out of reach of the Philistines indicates. Though it claimed to rule all Israel, it was without real authority. The principle of heredity was not recognized."²

Abner's initiative ignited the conflict between Saul's and David's houses that occupied the writer's attention in 2:8-32. This section is chiasmic in its arrangement and focuses on Abner's killing of Asahel (vv. 18-23).³ Whereas David was seeking peace and unity (vv. 4b-7), Abner was seeking power and victory (vv. 8-32; cf. Ps. 120:7).

Ish-bosheth (lit. "Man of Shame," *boshet*, "shame," being substituted for *baal*, "lord" or "Lord," on occasion, cf. Jer. 3:24; 11:13; Hos. 9:10) appears only in chapters 2—4. He may be the Ishvi (a corruption of Eshbaal) of 1 Samuel 14:49, and the Eshbaal ("Man of the Lord") of 1 Chronicles 8:33 and 9:39.

Since Ish-bosheth did not die in battle with Saul and his brothers, he may have been somewhat cowardly. This possibility may find support in the fact that Abner, rather than he, was the real leader of Saul's forces. The people of Judah made David their king (v. 4), but Abner single-handedly made Ish-bosheth king over "all Israel" (v. 9). This was not God's will, since God had chosen David to succeed Saul (1 Sam. 13:14). Abner's act fueled the conflict between the northern and southern inhabitants of the land.

"The distinctive concepts of 'Judah and Israel' evolved during David's kingdom in Hebron, and after a period of reunification

¹However, see *ibid.*, pp. 42-43, for an alternative site (cf. Jer. 41:12).

²Bright, p. 175.

³Youngblood, p. 822.

these entities were allowed to live on in the United Monarchy, though without an official division."¹

When David eventually became king of all Israel and Judah, seven and one-half years later, he ended Ish-bosheth's two-year reign. Evidently it took Abner over five years to establish Ish-bosheth on Israel's throne.² Abner put his personal preferences and cultural precedent—that a son of Saul would succeed his father—over God's will. Consequently, life became very complicated and problems followed in Israel, as always happens when people behave as Abner did.

"There's a modern touch to this scenario, for our political and religious worlds are populated by these same three kinds of people. We have weak people like Ish-Bosheth, who get where they are because they have 'connections.' We have strong, selfish people like Abner, who know how to manipulate others for their own personal profit. We also have people of God like David who are called, anointed, and equipped but must wait for God's time before they can serve."³

5. The conflict between Abner and Joab 2:12-32

Travelers can visit the pool of Gibeon today. It lies about three miles northwest of Gibeah at the El-jib excavation site. It was evidently meant to store rainwater or to provide access to the water table.⁴

"The pool is a cylindrical shaft thirty-seven feet in diameter and thirty-five feet deep. Its five-foot-wide spiral stairway [of 79 steps], which winds downward around the inside wall of the pool in a clockwise direction, continues below the floor level to an additional depth of forty-five feet."⁵

There the forces of Ish-bosheth and David met for a peace conference (v. 13). Abner broke off the peace-talks, however, by suggesting that the two

¹Zechariah Kallai, "Judah and Israel—A Study in Israelite Historiography," *Israel Exploration Journal* 28:4 (1978):257.

²Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, p 183.

³Wiersbe, p. 308.

⁴*The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 509.

⁵Youngblood, p. 825. Cf. Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, p. 161.

sides determine which of them would win with a battle by champions (cf. 1 Sam. 17).¹ Twelve soldiers from each side (v. 15), perhaps representing each of the twelve tribes, engaged in hand-to-hand combat to decide the leadership of the nation, probably two soldiers fighting at a time. The bloody contest was a draw, so the battle between the two armies escalated. Joab's men finally got the upper hand.

Josephus wrote that Asahel ran so fast that he could outrun a horse.² Abner warned Asahel twice to stop pursuing him and to fight with someone he might be able to defeat (vv. 21-22). He evidently wanted to avoid a blood feud with Joab's family that might go on for generations. Nevertheless, Asahel kept pushing Abner, who finally killed him rather than simply knocking him out. It is unclear whether Abner turned to face Asahel and slew him with the butt end of his spear, or slew him with his back toward Asahel as he ran from him, or stopped suddenly and Asahel ran into the butt end of Abner's spear.³

"'Every man' who 'stopped when he came' to the place where Asahel had died (v. 23) does not refer to travelers or others who stop to pay their respects, as many commentators believe (e.g., Baldwin, Hertzberg), but to David's men, Asahel's pursuers, who stand transfixed in horror at the death of a fallen comrade ..."⁴

Many of David's soldiers stopped, but Joab and Abishai continued to pursue Abner. The other soldiers from Benjamin, which was Saul and Abner's tribe, rallied around Abner, and the hostility climaxed when they took a stand to defend themselves on a hilltop (v. 25). Abner tried to call a truce (v. 26), but Joab correctly blamed him for starting the conflict in the first place (v. 27; cf. v. 14). Joab agreed to the truce, however, and both armies went home. Abner's side lost 360 soldiers in this fight, and 19 of Joab's men died (vv. 30, 31).

¹See F. Charles Fensham, "The Battle Between the Men of Joab and Abner as a Possible Ordeal by Battle?" *Vetus Testamentum* 20:3 (July 1970):356-57.

²Josephus, 7:1:3.

³Anderson (p. 45) preferred the first option, Josephus (7:1:3) and A. R. S. Kennedy (*Samuel*, p. 201) the second, and H. W. Hertzberg (*I & II Samuel: A Commentary*, p. 252) the third.

⁴Youngblood, p. 826. Cf. 20:12.

This incident accounts for the personal hostility that later resulted in Abner's death and the disintegration of Ish-bosheth's throne. Note that David played no part in it. God worked through Joab and Abner to place His anointed on the throne of all Israel. This passage shows how hostilities between the two factions in Israel escalated, as they often do in modern nations, neighborhoods, and families: First, the opposing parties stopped talking (v. 12). Next, they started fighting (v. 13). Then, Asahel kept pushing (v. 23). Finally, Abner insisted on defending himself (v. 23).

6. The strengthening of David's position 3:1-5 (cf. 1 Chron. 3:1-4)

The first verse in chapter 3 summarizes 2:8-32. The point of the remaining verses in this pericope (section of text) is that during the seven and one-half years that David ruled Judah, he grew stronger, because God was blessing him. Many of the sections of 2 Samuel, beginning with this one, plus 1 Samuel 31, were recast in 1 Chronicles.¹

David resorted to further polygamy, even though God had commanded Israel's kings not to multiply wives (Deut. 17:17). David's dynastic list in 1 Chronicles 3:1-9 records the six sons born to him in Hebron listed here, plus 13 more sons, one daughter, and an unspecified number of sons of his concubines, who were born in Jerusalem.

"In various lists taken together (II Sam. 3:2-5; 5:13-16; I Chron. 3:1-8; 14:4-7; II Chron. 11:18), the names of eight wives and twenty-one children are revealed. Besides the wives named, other 'wives and concubines' unnamed were added when David assumed his rule in Jerusalem."²

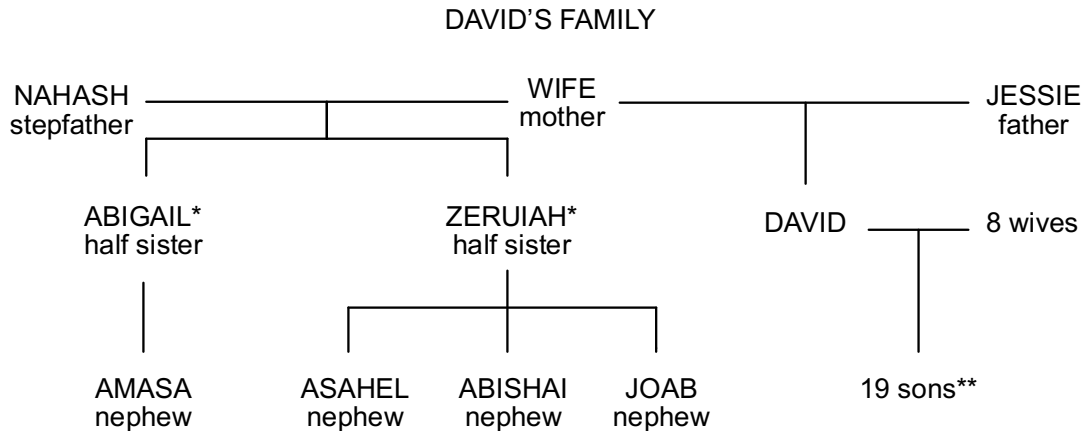
David undoubtedly married the women mentioned partially in order to cement political alliances, as was common in the ancient Near East.³ Yet God had forbidden such alliances (Deut. 7:3).

¹For the parallel references, see Youngblood, p. 803; William D. Crockett, *A Harmony of the Books of Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles*, pp. 106-41; James D. Newsome Jr., ed., *A Synoptic Harmony of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles*, pp. 23-79; or, for the Hebrew text, Abba Bendavid, *Parallels in the Bible*, pp. 31-70.

²Leon J. Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 274.

³Abraham Malamat, "Aspects of the Foreign Policies of David and Solomon," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 22:1 (1963):8.

David's wife Ahinoam was not the same person as Saul's wife of the same name (1 Sam. 14:50). Nor is the Abigail mentioned here the same person as the mother of Amasa (17:25; cf. 1 Sam. 25).



*2 Sam. 17:25; 1 Chron. 2:16-17

**2 Sam. 3:2-5; 1 Chron. 3:1-9; 14:3-7

The site of Geshur (v. 3) was northeast of the Sea of Chinnereth (Galilee) and north of Jabesh-gilead. The Israelites were to make no covenants with the native inhabitants of the Promised Land (Exod. 23:32; 34:12). That is where the king of Geshur lived: in the Promised Land. Perhaps if David had relied less on foreign alliances, which his marriage to the daughter of this king signals, he would not have had to fight as many battles with his neighbors as he did. Unfortunately he spent a large portion of his total reign as king fighting battles (cf. 1 Chron. 22:8).

B. THE UNIFICATION OF THE KINGDOM 3:6—5:16

The writer also documented God's blessing on David in this record of how David wisely unified the nation of Israel and became the leader of all 12 tribes.

"The story of how David became king of all Israel follows, in most essentials, the same outline already established in the account of his accession to kingship over Judah (1:1—3:5). Both begin with a warrior trying to curry David's favor (an unnamed Amalekite, 1:1-13; Saul's army commander Abner,

3:6-21) and continue with the execution or murder of the warrior (1:14-16; 3:22-32), which is followed by a lament uttered by David (over Saul and Jonathan, 1:17-27; over Abner, 3:33-34). Near the center of each literary unit is a brief report of the anointing of David as king (over Judah, 2:1-7; over Israel, 5:1-5). David and his men are then successful in defeating their enemies (2:8—3:1; 5:6-12), and each unit concludes with a list of sons/children born to David (in Hebron, 3:2-5; in Jerusalem, 5:13-16). The similarities between the two sections point to the careful craftsmanship of a single author, who now sets about to tell his readers that just as the house of David has replaced Saul and his house in southern Canaan (1:1—3:5), so also David's house is about to replace that of Saul in the rest of the land as well (3:6—5:16)."¹

"Avraham Biran and his team of Israeli excavators were wrapping up a day's work when one of them noticed a faint outline of characters incised on a rock embedded in a wall. Study showed it to be an Aramaic text from about 830 B.C., the substance of which was the account by an Aramaean king of his military operations against the 'house of David.' Along with a possible example in the Mesha inscription, this is the only reference to David so far in any extrabiblical text. This puts the historical existence of David beyond doubt and furthermore shows him to be so powerful a figure that the nation was named for him."²

1. David's acceptance of Abner 3:6-39

Abner was the strong leader in Israel; Ish-bosheth was simply a figurehead (v. 11). Abner's loyalty to the house of Saul is clear from his actions so far. However, there was conflict between Ish-bosheth and Abner. In the ancient Near East, the king's concubines were his means for raising up heirs if the queen could not bear children, or even if she could. Ish-bosheth regarded Abner's act as a sign of disloyalty. He seemed to be trying to have an heir by a royal concubine who could have, according to custom, become king

¹Youngblood, pp. 832-33.

²Eugene H. Merrill, "The Veracity of the Word: A Summary of Major Archaeological Finds," *Kindred Spirit* 34:3 (Winter 2010):13.

one day (cf. 16:22; 1 Kings 2:22). We do not know whether this was Abner's plan or not. He implied denial of that motive but not the act. In any case, this incident resulted in Abner shifting his support from Ish-bosheth to David. Perhaps it was the last straw for Abner, who had recently suffered a devastating defeat by David's men, and who must have seen that he could not win. "A dog's head" (v. 8) seems to mean a worthless dog (cf. 2 Kings 6:25). Another possible interpretation follows:

"But if 'head' is itself slang for 'penis,' then 'dog's head' is a special kind of slur, one reserved for a male prostitute. In this case, Abner is asking Ishbaal if he thinks that the Davidic party ['Judah'] has hired him as a male prostitute to bed Rizpah and so embarrass Ishbaal. This interpretation becomes all the more plausible when one recognizes that 'dog' by itself was a term for a male prostitute [Deut 23:18-19 ...]."¹

"It was the exclusive right of the successor to the throne to cohabit with the concubine of the deceased king, who came down to him as part of the property which he inherited [according to ancient Near Eastern custom, but not according to the Mosaic Law]."²

It is clear that Abner knew that it was God's will for David to be the king of all Israel (vv. 9, 18; cf. 5:2). If he knew this, then many other people throughout Israel also must have known it.

"No man can hope successfully to bring any purpose to final issue when his own will power is weakened by an inward conviction that he is fighting against God."³

"It may be that Abner, as *de facto* ruler of all Israel, offered David his allegiance in exchange for the position of *sar saba'* [commander of the army], the equivalent of his office in Eshbaal's army and the post currently held by Joab. V. 12

¹Duane A. Garrett, "Song of Songs," in *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, p. 207.

²Keil and Delitzsch, pp. 301-2.

³G. Campbell Morgan, *An Exposition of the Whole Bible*, p. 128.

suggests something of the sort when it speaks of a *personal* deal between these two men."¹

The fact that Michal was Saul's daughter was clearly part of the reason David required Abner to return her to him (v. 13). Reunion with her would have tied David in to Saul's house and made him more acceptable to the northern tribes.

"By making her his queen he would divide the loyalties of citizens in the north: did loyalty to Saul's memory mean that they should be the subjects of his son, Ish-bosheth, or of his daughter? By such means David could weaken his opponent without killing a single Israelite soldier and without causing any resentment at all."²

"... from David's perspective he [David] still had a valid marriage [to Michal] because he had met Saul's terms for the wedding (1 Sam. 18:20-27). Saul's decision to give Michal to Paltiel (1 Sam. 25:44) was invalid, and questions about remarriage after divorce (Deut. 24:1-4) do not arise."³

Abner lobbied for David with Israel's leading men (v. 17) on the basis that they had previously favored David. Perhaps Abner and Ish-bosheth had blocked their efforts earlier. He also did so because David was the LORD's anointed king (v. 18). The Benjamites needed special courting, since Saul was a Benjamite. Abner may have expected an appointment in David's administration for his efforts.

There were many reasons why Joab disliked Abner: because he was the rival commander-in-chief, and because he evidently had a superior character in some respects (cf. v. 38). He also opposed Abner because he was a threat to Joab's career advancement, if the alliance went through. Mostly Joab hated Abner because Abner had killed his brother, Asahel, in battle (v. 30).

Joab murdered Abner in a city of refuge, Hebron, where God had prohibited the taking of revenge (Num. 35:22-25). Abner may have been too sure of

¹James Vanderkam, "Davidic Complicity in the Deaths of Abner and Eshbaal: A Historical and Redactional Study," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99:4 (1980):531-32.

²David F. Payne, *I & II Samuel*, pp. 168-69.

³Firth, p. 348.

his own importance in David's eyes to suspect that one of David's officers would dare to attack him. David was very careful to let everyone know that Abner's murder was Joab's doing and not his. If it had been David's doing, he would have lost the support of the northern tribes.

"Rarely in the Old Testament has a narrator gone to such lengths, as has the writer of this passage, to preserve the good name of one of his characters. In one way and another, he assures us that neither David's heart nor his hand was set against Abner: Joab acted on his own account."¹

Why did David not execute or at least punish Joab for committing murder? The writer did not record the answer. However, we notice that David was characteristically too slow to discipline members of his own family when they deserved it (e.g., Joab, Ammon, and Absalom).

"Neither Ish-bosheth nor David can control their generals, with both seeing themselves as in some sense independent of their king's authority. They served the king only when their own purposes were secured."²

Some interpreters of the Hebrew text believe what David wished on Joab's descendants was that they would continually experience diseases, violent death, and poverty. This is what God promised to bring on those of His people who despised His will (cf. Deut. 21:1-9). One scholar believed David meant that Joab would always count among his descendants men fit only for the occupations of women, since David referred to one "who holds the spindle (v. 29)—spinning being women's work."³ Another writer suggested that David prayed that Joab's household would never be without a corvée-worker, namely, a person forced to work without pay.⁴

"We need not doubt David's genuine respect for Abner, but the funeral is also a media event. It is like a U.S. president with the returned body of a soldier from an unauthorized war. The president must lead national mourning, which is genuine, but

¹Gordon, pp. 216-17.

²Firth, p. 352.

³Driver, p. 251.

⁴Steven Holloway, "Distaff, Crutch or Chain Gang: The Curse of the House of Joab in 2 Samuel III 29," *Vetus Testamentum* 37:3 (July 1987):370-75.

at the same time must stage a media event designed to legitimate policy."¹

For the first time the writer referred to David as "King David" (v. 31). The writer had referred to David as the king previously (2:4, 7, 11; 3:17, 21-24), but he never used the title "King David." Now that the threat of the north had died with Abner, David's throne was secure enough to warrant this title.

The description of Abner as "a leader and a great man" who had fallen that day in Israel (v. 38) has inspired eulogizers in funerals for generations. David's good public relations were essential for support, but they would not avert divine discipline for his disobedience.

"He [David] was weak, his kingdom was newly planted, and a little shake would overthrow it. Joab's family had a great interest, were bold and daring, and to make them his enemies now might be of bad consequence."²

"Thenius (156) once noted that it is very surprising that David should openly confess his own weakness and fear of Joab and Abishai, yet this may be a possible explanation as to why David as king and judge failed to punish Joab. Alternatively, one could argue that in some way or other Joab's deed had some justification: his brother's blood had been shed and the killer was known. Even at a later time a manslayer could be killed by the avenger of blood if he did not reach the city of refuge in time (see Deut 19:6). Only after David's death was Joab's deed interpreted (for political reasons?) as crime worthy of death."³

It seems clear, however, that Joab was a murderer, not an executioner. His killing of Abner was the result of a blood feud; it was not an act of war.

"A king who cannot deal with someone of strength is open to challenge, so this narrative actually prepares for the rebellions of Absalom (2 Sam. 15—19) and Sheba (2 Sam. 20). In both of these rebellions we also find Joab ignoring David's

¹Brueggemann, p. 230.

²Henry, p. 330.

³Anderson, p. 64. His reference is to O. Thenius, *Die Bücher Samuels*, p. 156.

instructions to achieve his own goals (2 Sam. 18:9-15; 20:9-10). Joab is intensely loyal to David's reign, but his loyalty always has its own agenda. ... Only through Solomon, and after his own death, can David deal with Joab."¹

2. David's punishment of Ish-bosheth's murderers ch. 4

"Saul the king is dead, Jonathan the heir apparent is dead, Abinadab and Malki-Shua (two of Jonathan's brothers) are dead (1 Sam 31:2), Abner the commander of the army is dead—and no other viable claimants or pretenders continue to block David's accession to the throne except Saul's son Ish-Bosheth and Jonathan's son Mephibosheth. Chapter 4 removes them from the scene, one explicitly and the other implicitly."²

Beeroth (v. 2) was a town near the border of Benjamin, about two miles south of Gibeon (cf. Josh. 9:17). Gittaim (v. 3) stood about 18 miles west-northwest of Beeroth, near the Israelite-Philistine border. Even though the Beerothites had fled from their town to Gittaim, and were still out of Benjamite territory when the writer wrote, the writer wanted to make clear that Baanah and Rechab were Benjamites (v. 3).

The writer introduced the information in verse 4, parenthetically, to prepare for what he would write about Mephibosheth in chapter 9.

"There was a time when the name *bal owner* or *master* (of the place or district) was applied innocently to Yahweh, as *Owner* of the soil of Canaan: but, in consequence no doubt of the confusion which arose on the part of the unspiritual Israelites between Yahweh and the Phoenician god 'Baal,' the habit was discountenanced by the prophets, especially by Hosea (2, 18), and ultimately fell out of use. Proper names, therefore, in which *bal* originally formed part [of the name] had to be disguised, or otherwise rendered harmless. This was generally done by substituting *bst* shame for *bal*, as in the case of Ishbaal ..., and

¹Firth, p. 346.

²Youngblood, p. 843.

of Meribbaal the name of Saul's grandson here, and of one of his sons by Rizpah in 21, 8."¹

Mephibosheth (lit. "He Scatters Shame") was unfit to rule for two reasons: he was too young, and his physical condition made it impossible for him to provide military leadership. Evidently these conditions emboldened his assassins to attempt their cowardly and ambitious plot.² The repetition of the telling of Rechab and Baanah's heinous act in verses 6 and 7 stresses its atrocious, opportunistic nature. The "way of the Arabah [the Plain]" (v. 7) was the Jordan Valley.

"The gift of Ish-Bosheth's head [to David, v. 8] is at the same time the gift of the kingdom."³

David's designation of Ish-bosheth as "a righteous man" (v. 11) implicitly denied him the title of king. Even though Ish-bosheth was Saul's son and so had a claim to the throne, he had not been anointed as king. David's treatment of the corpses of the two murderers and the head of Ish-bosheth (v. 12) also showed the people that Ish-bosheth's murder was not an act that he ordered or approved (cf. 1:16; 3:28; Matt. 26:52).⁴ One writer argued that David both desired and planned the murder of Abner.⁵ There is no support for this in the text. Ironically, the long struggle between Ish-bosheth's men and David's men began and ended by a pool (cf. 2:13).

"With the death of Ish-Bosheth, no other viable candidate for king remains for the elders of the northern tribes. Meanwhile David sits in regal isolation, above the fray as always, innocent of the deaths of Saul, Jonathan, Abner, and now Ish-Bosheth. The way is open for his march to the throne of Israel."⁶

One cannot help but note the similar career of Jesus Christ, who now sits in regal isolation above the fray below, awaiting His universal acknowledgement as King.

¹Driver, pp. 253-54.

²Symon Patrick, *A Commentary Upon the Two Books of Samuel*, p. 364.

³David M. Gunn, "David and the Gift of the Kingdom," *Semeia* 3 (1975):17.

⁴See Mabee, pp. 98-107.

⁵Vanderkam, pp. 521-39.

⁶Youngblood, p. 847.

"In 2 Samuel 2—4, 9—20, and 1 Kings 1—2 we have a coherent story of accession, rebellion, and succession. The theme of giving and grasping is central, providing a key to David's fortunes."¹

Note David's inconsistency in his dealings with Ish-bosheth's murderers and Abner's murderer: David's nephew Joab (cf. Gen. 9:5). David succeeded at work, but he failed at home. He did not deal with the members of his own family as he should have, but he was more careful to manage the affairs of his government properly. One's home, not one's work, is the proving ground for church leadership. This is because the church is, or should be, more like a family than anything else (cf. 1 Tim. 3:1-13; 5:1-2).

3. David's acceptance by all Israel 5:1-12

In 1004 B.C. David became king of all Israel and Judah (cf. 1 Chron. 11:1-3).² This was his third anointing (cf. 1 Sam. 16:13; 2 Sam. 2:4). The people acknowledged David's physical connection to them, his previous military leadership of all Israel, and God's choice of him to shepherd His people as their king (cf. Prov. 16:7). Thus David's kingship stood on three legs: his human kinship, his proven merit, and his divine election. These are the same three qualifications that Jesus Christ has to serve as our King.³

"In the ancient East, shepherd at an early date became a title of honor applied to divinities and rulers alike."⁴

For example, King Hammurabi of Babylon (ca. 1792-1750 B.C.) referred to himself as the shepherd of his people.⁵ This is the first time the Bible refers to a specific human ruler as a shepherd,⁶ though as an analogy the term appears earlier (Num. 27:17) and with reference to God (Gen. 48:15; 49:24). The New Testament refers to David's greatest son, Jesus Christ,

¹Gunn, p. 14.

²See Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 243.

³Baxter, 2:69.

⁴*The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, s. v. "Shepherd," by E. Beyreuther, 3:564.

⁵See James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, pp. 164-65, 177-18.

⁶Patrick, p. 368. Cf. Isa. 44:28; Jer. 3:15; et al.

as the Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14), the Great Shepherd (Heb. 13:20), and the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4).

The fact that Samuel had anointed David when he was a youth was evidently now common knowledge in Israel. Therefore we might regard previous resistances to his assuming the throne, after Saul's death, as resistances to the known will of God. The covenant in view (v. 3) was an agreement between the king and the people before God.¹ Probably it included a fresh commitment to the Mosaic Covenant.

"Thirty years old (v. 4) was regarded as an ideal age at which to take on responsibility (cf. Num. 4:3; Lk. 3:23)."²

Three prominent descendants of Jacob began their ministries at or near the age of 30: Joseph (Gen. 41:46), David (v. 4), and Jesus (Luke 3:23). The years David reigned were 1011-971 B.C.: a total of 40 years.

"[Verses] 6-16 highlight key events of David's entire reign and are followed by summaries of his experiences in the military (vv. 17-25), cultic (i.e., ritual worship, ch. 6), and theological (ch. 7) arenas."³

Jerusalem (lit. "Foundation of Peace") was an excellent choice for a capital. It stood on the border between Benjamin and Judah, so both tribes felt they had a claim to it. It was better than Hebron in southern Judah, far from the northern tribes, or Shechem, Shiloh, or some other northern town that would have been too far from the Judahites. Joshua had captured Jerusalem (Josh. 10), but shortly after that the native inhabitants, the Jebusites, retook it (Judg. 1:21). The Jebusites were descendants of Jebus, the third son of Canaan (Gen. 10:16; 1 Chron. 1:14). It seems to have remained in Jebusite control since then. Josephus wrote that the Jebusites had controlled Jerusalem for 515 years.⁴ Jerusalem's elevated location, surrounded on three sides by valleys, made it fairly easy to defend. David's choice of Jerusalem was mainly political, but the city had military advantages as well, being accessible and defensible. However, its water source was vulnerable. David may have chosen Jerusalem also because he appears to have seen himself as the spiritual successor of

¹P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *II Samuel*, p. 131; Brueggemann, p. 239.

²Baldwin, p. 195.

³Youngblood, p. 853.

⁴Josephus, 7:3:2.

Melchizedek, a former king of Jerusalem in Abraham's day (Gen. 14; cf. Ps. 110:4-6).¹ One scholar estimated that the population of the city at this time was about 2,500 people.²

"Jerusalem is usually described as a city-state, and the position envisaged after its storming by David and his troops is that it remained a city-state; the coming of David meant only a change of city ruler. ... The inhabitants remained, but their fortress had now become the personal possession of David and was under his control."³

"... when ancient Jebus became the capital of the land, the boundary line between Judah and Benjamin ran right through the middle of the city and of the Temple; so that, according to Jewish tradition, the porch and the sanctuary itself were in Benjamin, and the Temple courts and altar in Judah."⁴

The interchange concerning "those who are blind and those who are lame" (vv. 6, 8) seems to be "pre-battle verbal taunting" (cf. 2 Kings 18:19-27).⁵ The Jebusites claimed that their town was so secure that even disabled inhabitants could withstand an invasion. Another view is that the Jebusites meant that they would fight to the last man. A third option is that the expression refers to the custom of parading a blind and lame woman before the opposing army as a warning of what would befall treaty-breakers. This view assumes David had previously made a treaty with the Jebusites.⁶ Still another view is that the blind and lame refer to the Jebusites' gods whom the Jebusites believed would keep David from taking the city.⁷

David countered by taking these enemies at their word and applying "those who are blind and those who limp" to all the Jebusite inhabitants of Jerusalem and/or their gods. His hatred was for the Jebusites and/or their gods, using the figure that they themselves had chosen to describe

¹See Eugene H. Merrill, "Royal Priesthood: An Old Testament Messianic Motif," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150:597 (January-March 1993):58.

²F. E. Peters, *Jerusalem*, p. 11. See also Finegan, pp. 177-80, 315-22.

³Gwilym H. Jones, *The Nathan Narratives*, p. 135.

⁴Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 39.

⁵Jones, p. 125.

⁶See Gordon, p. 226.

⁷Baxter, 2:70.

themselves, not for literally blind and lame people. "Those who are blind and those who limp" evidently became a nickname for the Jebusites as a result of this event.

Joab captured the city for David, and from then on people referred to it as the City of David and Zion (cf. 1 Chron. 11:4-9).¹ The name Zion (meaning unknown) appears for the first time here and only six times in the historical books of the Old Testament, though it occurs over 150 times in the Old Testament. It was a popular poetic name for Jerusalem.

"The word Zion originally applied to the Jebusite stronghold, which became the City of David after its capture. As the city expanded to the north, encompassing Mount Moriah, the temple mount came to be called Zion (Ps. 78:68, 69). Eventually the term was used as a synonym for Jerusalem (Is. 40:9)."²

The Millo (a transliteration of the Hebrew word, v. 9) probably consisted of terrace-like fortifications on the site's east side.³ The Hebrew word may refer to a landfill. Some of the older commentators, and others who did not have access to recent archaeological discoveries, viewed the Millo as a large tower or castle.⁴ Some have thought it to be "a generic element in fortified cities" (cf. Judg., 9:6,20; 1 Kings 9:15, 24; 11:27; 2 Chron. 32:5).⁵

"Possible archaeological light on what this Millo or 'filling' actually was has been found by Macalister in his excavation of the hill Ophel, the site on which the earliest city of Jerusalem was built. He found a breach or opening in the north wall, and the remains of a fortress which had apparently been constructed to fill the gap in the wall. Macalister identified this fortress as the Millo, or filling ... Duncan, who was associated

¹See the map "Wars during the Reign of David" in Baldwin, p. 222.

²*The Nelson ...*, p. 514.

³See Anderson, p. 85, and Nadav Na'aman, "The Interchange Between Bible and Archaeology," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 40:1 (January/February 2014):57-61, 68-69.

⁴E.g., Jamieson, et al., p. 232; J. Simons, *Jerusalem in the Old Testament*, pp. 116-17; 131-44.

⁵Firth, p. 365.

with Macalister in this excavation, also believes that Millo was at the north end of the early city of Jerusalem."¹

"As was characteristic of all the great walled cities of Canaan, Jerusalem had a vertical water shaft connecting with a tunnel leading to an underground water supply outside the walls."²

That shaft, which is still in place today, is about 230 feet from top to bottom. It was through this secret passage that Joab took the city.

"Many scholars have identified the *snwr* [water supply] with the shaft discovered by Sir Charles Warren in 1867 (see Vincent, *R[evue] B[iblique]* 33 [1924] 257-70; Simons, *Jerusalem*, 45-67). This shaft connected the Spring of the Steps or the Spring of Mary (i.e., the ancient spring of Gihon) with the settlement or stronghold on the southeastern hill. It is often thought that this tunnel may have been the proverbial Achilles' heel of Jerusalem in that David's soldiers were able either to penetrate the city through this shaft or, more likely, to cut off the water supply from the Jebusites. The former alternative would be a formidable task even if the Jebusites had neglected this weak spot in their defenses (see Mazar, *The Mountain of the Lord*, 168). However, there is no proof that this shaft was the Jebusite *snwr* [water supply] (see J. Shiloh, "The City of David: Archaeological Project: Third Season—1980," *B[iblical] A[rchaeologist]* 44 [1981] 170)."³

"Two of the most significant events in world history now took place. The first was when David became king of a united Israel. The second was when he made Jerusalem the capital of his united realm."⁴

The writer identified the key to David's success in verse 10: "The LORD God of armies was with him." David had nothing to do with God's choice of him as Israel's king. However, Yahweh of armies continued to bless David because David related to God properly, generally speaking.

¹Joseph P. Free, *Archaeology and Bible History*, p. 158.

²Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 236.

³Anderson, p. 84.

⁴Payne, p. 177.

An extra-biblical inscription that has been discovered mentions Hiram, the king of Tyre, and indicates that he reigned there about 980-947 B.C.¹ That would mean Hiram's reign coincided with only the last nine years of David's reign and the first 24 years of Solomon's reign. William Albright had previously dated Hiram's reign from 969-936 B.C., also a reign of 33 years.² This information helps us see that David built his palace (v. 11) late in his reign: either in the last decade or in the last two decades of David's 40-year reign, depending on which dates are correct. Verse 11, therefore, evidently does not describe something that took place immediately after David captured and fortified Jerusalem (vv. 6-10). It was a later project. The writer probably mentioned it here because it illustrates another important evidence of David's control over all Israel (cf. 1 Chron. 14:1-17).

"David has joined the nations. David is a practitioner of alliances and accommodations. ... Jeremiah later sees that cedar [v. 11] and its accompanying opulence will talk Judean kings out of justice (Jer. 22:13-18). Verse 11 sounds like a historical report, but it is in fact an ominous act of warning."³

Verse 12 is key to understanding why David prospered as Israel's king: David realized that Yahweh was Israel's real sovereign. Saul was never willing to acknowledge that and viewed himself as the ultimate authority in Israel. In contrast, David regarded his own kingship as a gift from God. He realized, too, that God had placed him on the throne for the Israelites' welfare, not for his own personal glory. Saul failed here as well. David had a proper view of his role in Israel's theocratic (rule by God) government.

"From the previous events it appears that David's kingdom was what could be described as a constitutional monarchy (cf. Halpern, *Monarchy in Israel*, 241). There is also a hint of a democratic concept of kingship since the exaltation of the king was for the sake of Israel. Therefore the kingship should be for the benefit of the people and not vice versa."⁴

Second Samuel 5:10-16 is most likely a summary of David's entire reign, followed by his military (5:17-25), cultic (ch. 6), theological (ch. 7), and

¹Frank M. Cross, "An Interpretation of the Nora Stone," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 208 (December 1972):17.

²W. F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine*, p. 122.

³Brueggemann, p. 246.

⁴Anderson, pp. 86-87.

further military (ch. 8) achievements. Then the "Court History," in chapters 9—20, records his steps in establishing his dynasty. This pattern follows the conventional annalistic style of documenting the reigns of kings that was common in ancient Near Eastern historiography (history writing).

4. David's additional children 5:13-16

Again David sinned by multiplying wives (Deut. 17:17). Nevertheless in spite of this sin, God continued to bless him with fertility because he was God's elect, and for the most part, God's obedient servant. Fortunately, God does not cut off all His blessings because His servants are less than perfect.

"This is the first time that concubines are mentioned in connection with David (cf. also 1 [*sic* 2] Chron 11:21)—and it is also the only time that the phrase 'concubines and wives' occurs in the Bible (the usual order is 'wives and concubines'; cf. 19:5; 1 Kings 11:3; 2 Chron 11:21; Dan 5:2-3, 23). By placing the word 'concubines' in emphatic position, the narrator is perhaps deploring David's proclivity for the trappings of a typical Oriental monarch, including a harem."¹

"The status of kings in ancient times was often measured in part by the size of their harems."²

Previously the writer listed six sons born to David in Hebron (3:2-5). Now he listed 11 more born to him in Jerusalem (vv. 14-16). Note that Solomon was tenth in the line of succession. First Chronicles records two additional sons: Nogah (1 Chron. 3:7), and a second Elphelet (1 Chron. 3:8), who is also called Elpelet (1 Chron. 14:5).

"David had many wives, and yet that did not keep him from coveting his neighbour's wife and defiling her; for men that have once broken the fence will wander endlessly."³

In all parts of this section (3:6—5:16), the writer placed emphasis on God's blessing of David, and the nation, that came about as Judah and Israel

¹Youngblood, p. 859.

²*The Nelson ...*, p. 515.

³Henry, p. 332.

united under David's divinely anointed leadership. The emphasis is on how David united Israel with Judah. Part of his success was the result of divine providence (God working through circumstances) and part was the result of David's skillful planning. First, Abner threw his support behind David, after a disagreement with Ish-bosheth. Second, David punished Ish-bosheth's assassins. Third, all Israel finally accepted David. Note the parallel career of Jesus Christ: initial rejection (in the past) followed by complete acceptance by His chosen people (in the future).

C. THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE KINGDOM 5:17—8:18

"As the story of David's accession to kingship over Judah (1:1—3:5) parallels that of his accession to the throne of Israel (3:6—5:16), each concluding with a list of his sons (3:2-5; 5:13-16), so the account of his powerful reign (5:17—8:18) parallels that of his court history (chs. 9—20), each concluding with a roster of his officials (8:15-18; 20:23-26)."¹

"At this point in 2 Samuel the narrator departs from a strict chronological structure and addresses the Davidic history topically."²

Firth provided a diagram of the chiasmic structure of this section:³

- A Military victories with Yahweh's help, 5:17-25
- B Worship of Yahweh: bringing the ark, 6:1-23
- B' Worship of Yahweh: Nathan's oracle, 7:1-29
- A' Military victories with Yahweh's help, 8:1-14

1. David's victories over the Philistines 5:17-25

God's greatest blessing on David and Israel, the ultimate in fertility, came when God covenanted with David to make his line of descendants

¹Youngblood, p. 861.

²Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 236.

³Firth, p. 368.

everlasting (ch. 7). However, before that took place, God blessed His anointed servant with victories over his enemies and peaceful conditions.

"So long as David was king only of Judah, the Philistines were content to tolerate his rule, but when he was proclaimed king of all Israel he became too powerful to be trusted, hence these two concerted efforts to divide his territory, and so weaken his effectiveness."¹

"Although by no means the only battles King David fought against the Philistines (cf. 8:1), these serve as a paradigm to summarize the continuing conflict."²

The first battle 5:17-21

The battle described in these verses appears to be the one retold in 23:13-17. It could have taken place between David's anointing as king over all Israel (v. 17; cf. v. 3) and his capture of Jerusalem (vv. 6-9),³ or perhaps shortly after he had conquered Jerusalem.⁴ The stronghold (v. 17), in the first case, may have been the cave of Adullam (23:13) northwest of Hebron (v. 3) about 11 miles.⁵ The Hebrew word translated stronghold means "mountain fortress." The exact location of the stronghold mentioned here is indefinite. If this battle took place after the capture of Jerusalem, the stronghold probably refers to Zion (v. 7). The valley of Rephaim (v. 18; 23:13), or "the valley of the giants," was just southwest of Jerusalem, where the Philistines massed for battle. Bethlehem, which was the site of the Philistine garrison (23:14), stood beside this valley. The Philistines probably wanted to defeat David at once, before he could take the offensive and begin to establish himself and expand his kingdom.

David often consulted with the LORD before engaging the Philistines in battle (v. 19; cf. 2:1; 1 Sam. 23:2; 30:8). God granted David's request for the LORD of armies' strategy, and victory followed for Israel. Baal-perazim (lit. "Lord of Breakthroughs") memorialized the LORD's victory (v. 20). Notice how David acknowledged Yahweh's ultimate authority over Israel, in contrast to how Saul did not. The Philistines' idols that they carried into

¹Baldwin, pp. 202-3. Cf. Bright, p. 177.

²Youngblood, p. 862.

³Keil and Delitzsch, p. 323; Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, pp. 237-38.

⁴J. Carl Laney, *First and Second Samuel*, p. 95.

⁵Gordon, p. 229; Payne, p. 180; Anderson, p. 95.

battle, to secure victory (blessing), proved useless, so the Philistines abandoned them (v. 21). The Israelites then carried them away (v. 21) and burned them (1 Chron. 14:12), in obedience to God (Deut. 7:5, 25; et al.).

The second battle 5:22-25

This time, in response to David's prayer, the LORD prescribed an attack from the rear (v. 23). The sound of marching in the baka-shrubs, among which the Israelites took cover, would be the sign that the LORD was going before his army to strike the enemy (v. 24; cf. Acts 2:2). The name Gibeon replaces Geba in the text in the parallel account of this battle (1 Chron. 14:16). Gibeon is probably correct. If David pursued the Philistines through the Aijalon valley, west of Jerusalem, he probably went through Gibeon northwest of Jerusalem, rather than Geba to the northeast. Another explanation is that there was another Geba in the valley of Rephaim.¹ Gezer stood in the Shephelah, 14 miles west of Gibeon, on the Philistine border.

These victories cleared the Philistines from the hill country of Judah and Benjamin, and made it possible for David to establish a secure capital in Jerusalem. Had he not defeated them, his reign would have gotten off to a much weaker start. Saul had also begun his reign by defeating the Philistines (1 Sam. 7).

"In the present context vv 17-25 depict two encounters between David and the Philistines, which apparently brought to an end the Philistine domination of Palestine (see also 2 Sam 8:1). In view of the book as a whole, it seems that the war with the Philistines was more prolonged, but the editor had chosen only these two select illustrations to sketch the *main* course of events. Perhaps, just as Israel had been defeated twice by the Philistines (1 Sam 4 and 31) so also the Philistines were twice routed by David."²

"David's victory over the Philistines at this stage was significant for several reasons. It indicated that the capital had been fully established and Israel was now a force with which to be reckoned. The victory certainly must have produced a great deal of confidence in the people regarding David's ability.

¹ *The Nelson ...*, p. 516.

² Anderson, p. 94.

Finally, this was an encouragement to David and a stabilizing factor among his officials."¹

2. David's relocation of the ark to Jerusalem ch. 6

This chapter also reveals David's viewpoint on God, and what resulted from it. J. Vernon McGee labeled this chapter "Doing a Right Thing in a Wrong Way."²

"In light of ... Akkadian and Phoenician parallels ... we are in a position to understand 2 Samuel 6 as the record of a historically unique cultic event, viz., the ritual dedication of the City of David as the new religious and political capital of the Israelites, the people of Yahweh. The purpose of the ceremony was the sanctification of the City of David for the installation of the ark in the hope that Yahweh's presence would assure the success of David's government and the welfare of the people."³

Chapter 6 has a symmetrical construction:

- "A David's unsuccessful attempt to transport the ark (6:1-5)
- B Judgment against Uzzah (6:6-11)
- A' David's successful attempt to transport the ark (6:12-19)
- B' Judgment against Michal (6:20-23)"⁴

The first move 6:1-11 (cf. 1 Chron. 13)

Baale-judah (lit. "Lords of Judah," also called "Baalah," v. 2) may have been the later name of Kiriath-jearim (cf. Josh. 15:9-10; 1 Chron. 13:6).⁵ The site must have been originally sacred to Baal.⁶ This was where the ark had

¹John J. Davis, in *A History of Israel*, p. 290.

²J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, 2:198.

³P. Kyle McCarter Jr., "The Ritual Dedication of the City of David in 2 Samuel 6," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday*, p. 276. Cf. Brueggemann, p. 249.

⁴Youngblood, p. 868.

⁵Ibid., p. 869.

⁶Driver, p. 266.

evidently rested for 20 years, since the Israelites had moved it from Beth-shemesh in Samuel's days (1 Sam. 6:12—7:2; cf. Ps. 132:6-8).¹

David wanted to bring the ark into his capital because it symbolized the LORD's presence. As we have seen, David did not believe superstitiously that the ark for its own sake would bring blessing wherever it went. He viewed Yahweh as the real source of blessing. However, he wanted the people to see that it was important that Israel's God, and what represented Him, should be at the center of national life. Unfortunately, he did not move the ark according to the specifications of the Mosaic Law, but according to customary practice, as the Philistines had done (cf. 1 Sam. 6:7-8). Priests were to carry it on poles (Exod. 25:14-15; Num. 3:30-31; 4:1-15), not on a common cart—even a new one. Furthermore, no one was to touch it, or they would die (cf. Num. 4:15). This incident is a striking illustration of the spiritual truth that God's work must be done in God's way to secure God's blessing.

"It is of importance to observe the proportionate severity of the punishments attending the profanation of the ark. The Philistines suffered by diseases, from which they were relieved by their oblations, because the law had not been given to them; the Beth-shemites also suffered, but not fatally; their error proceeded from ignorance or inadvertence. But Uzzah ... suffered death for his breach of the law."²

David was apparently angry because he expected God to bless his efforts. God taught him that obedience is more important than good intentions (cf. 1 Sam. 15:22). David learned a lesson about God's holiness too.

"He who had experienced wonderful protection over the years from the Lord his God, and had known unusual intimacy with him, had to come to terms with the fact that he had overstepped the mark, and presumed upon the relationship, by failing to observe the regulations laid down to safeguard respect for God's holiness. Though Jesus taught us to call God our Father, he also taught us to pray 'hallowed be thy name,'

¹Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Kiriath-jearim and the Ark," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969):146-47.

²Jamieson, et al., p. 232.

implying the need to pay careful attention lest privilege becomes presumption."¹

The death of Uzzah was a lesson similar to the deaths of Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10:1-2), Achan (Josh. 7), and Ananias and Saphira (Acts 5:1-11). All these people failed to take God seriously at the beginning of a new phase of His kingdom program. What God's people do is important, but how we do it is also important. Coming close to doing God's will is not enough, even though we have the best of motives—David wanted to honor God. We need to practice radical obedience: wholehearted commitment to God's will, as His disciples.

During the three months that the ark stayed with Obed-edom the Gittite, David evidently did some Bible study and discovered how God had said His people should move it (cf. 1 Chron. 15:1-13). Obed-edom probably came from the Levitical town of Gath-rimmon in Dan (Josh. 21:24; 19:45). He was a Levite from the family of Korah (1 Chron. 15:18, 24; cf. 1 Chron. 26:4-8). His house appears to have been on the southwestern hill of Jerusalem.²

The second move 6:12-23 (cf. 1 Chron. 15:1—16:43)

David observed that the ark's presence in Obed-edom's house resulted in blessing for its host. This made him more eager than ever to install the ark in Jerusalem.

Verse 13 probably means: after the priests had taken six steps, other priests sacrificed an ox and a fattened steer ("fatling" AV, or "calf" NIV). This happened every time the priests carrying the ark took six steps.³

God's symbolic entrance into Jerusalem was a cause for great celebration. David wore a short, sleeveless priestly garment (v. 14; cf. 1 Sam. 2:18) as he praised the LORD (v. 13). Some scholars believe the linen ephod that David wore was a brief loincloth, and that Michal despised him for exposing himself inappropriately.⁴ However, David wore two linen garments: a robe

¹Baldwin, p. 208. Cf. Gordon, p. 232.

²R. A. Carlson, *David the Chosen King*, p. 79.

³See McCarter, "The Ritual ...," pp. 273-74, 277, n. 1.

⁴E.g., Anthony Phillips, "David's Linen Ephod," *Vetus Testamentum* 19:4 (October 1967):485-87.

and an ephod (1 Chron. 15:27), so this explanation may not be valid.¹ The Hebrew word translated dancing (v. 14) literally means whirling.

"There is no New Testament evidence that dancing as a 'worship art form' was used either in the Jewish synagogue or the liturgy of the early church. The Greeks introduced dancing into worship in the post-Apostolic church, but the practice led to serious moral problems and was finally banned. It was difficult for congregations to distinguish between 'Christian dances' and dances honoring a pagan god or goddess, so the church abandoned the practice and later church fathers condemned it."²

Why did God not express His wrath over David functioning as a priest? Were not the priests the only individuals who could offer sacrifices to the LORD?

"The white ephod was, strictly speaking, a priestly costume, although in the law it is not prescribed as the dress to be worn by them when performing their official duties, but rather as the dress which denoted the priestly character of the wearer (see at 1 Sam. xxii. 18); and for this reason it was worn by David in connection with these festivities in honor of the Lord, as the head of the priestly nation of Israel (see at 1 Sam. ii. 18 [where we read that Samuel, as a boy serving in the tabernacle, wore a linen ephod])."³

"The suggestion has been offered that David assumed 'something of the role of priest-king' when, wearing a linen ephod, he danced before the ark as it was brought into Jerusalem, and also 'sacrificed oxen and fatlings' (II Sam. 6:13-19).⁴ This episode is unusual, but it need not be interpreted in this way, and to do so is contrary to other factors soon to be noticed. David's dancing should be thought of only as an expression of holy enthusiasm for the bringing of the ark to

¹See N. L. Tidwell, "The Linen Ephod: 1 Sam. II 18 and 2 Sam. VI 14," *Vetus Testamentum* 24:4 (October 1974):505-7.

²Wiersbe, p. 321.

³Keil and Delitzsch, p. 336.

⁴Footnote 11: "For a study of non-Levites functioning as priests in Israel, see Carl E. Armerding, "Were David's Sons Really Priests?" in *Current Issues in Biblical Patristic Interpretation*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne, pp. 75-86... "

Jerusalem, and as an attitude of humility as king before almighty God. ...

"That David wore a linen ephod—which was ordinarily worn only by priests, true enough (see 1 Sam. 22:18)—can be explained as a way of showing his association with the priests and Levites who were officiating in carrying the ark and in performing the sacrifices. It may also have been a further way of showing humility, since a linen ephod was a modest dress in comparison with David's ordinary royal robes. As for the sacrificing of oxen and fatlings, one need not think that David offered these himself. It was he who ordered this done, but the work certainly was performed by priests and Levites that he had invited to be on hand. After all, considerable work is involved in sacrificing, and a large number of animals were sacrificed. The work of many men would have been required [cf. 1 Kings 3:4]."¹

Priestly kingship was not uncommon in the ancient Near East.² In this dual role—of king and priest—David typified Jesus Christ, who is also a King-Priest.

Note that David's radical obedience resulted in his experiencing and expressing great joy, as seen in the way he celebrated. Whereas people often think that complete obedience to God will make them less happy, the opposite is true. We only experience full joy when we follow God's will completely (cf. Rom. 12:1-2). David felt anger and fear the first time he tried to bring the ark into Jerusalem (vv. 8-9), but when he observed the Mosaic Law carefully, the second time, he felt great freedom and joy.

Michal apparently did not understand—or appreciate, or approve of—David's reasons for bringing the ark into Jerusalem. She seems to have regarded kingship in Israel as her father had.³ He had believed the human king was the ultimate authority and that everyone should honor him. By referring to Michal as "the daughter of Saul" (v. 16), the writer linked her attitude with her father's attitude.

¹Wood, *Israel's United ...*, pp. 61-62.

²Sidney Smith, "The Practice of Kingship in Early Semitic Kingdoms," in *Myth, Ritual, and Kingship*, pp. 22-73.

³Gordon, p. 234; Firth, pp. 378-79.

"Her idea seems to have been that the king should avoid mixing with the people, and be aloof and inaccessible. As it was, *she despised him* for the very qualities that made him great, namely, devotion to the Lord and spontaneity in worship."¹

The tent David had pitched for the ark in Jerusalem (v. 17) was not the tabernacle of Moses (1 Chron. 21:28-30; 2 Chron. 1:3-6). The writer did not explain why David did not move this central sanctuary from Gibeon to Jerusalem. Probably he did not want to offend the northern tribes. His blessing the people (v. 18) and giving them cakes made with fruit (v. 19) was a sign to them that their God, who was now in their midst, would bless them, as He had promised. Fruit was a common symbol of fertility in the ancient Near East.² Solomon later decorated his temple with figures of fruits. Cake also connoted plenty, prosperity, and blessing.

"The bringing of the Ark to Jerusalem was an event of major theological significance. ... David wanted to make the Jebusite city not only the center of his rule but also the center of the worship of the Lord."³

"By bringing the Ark to his new Jebusite capital, David was attempting to bind the tribes and the central government more firmly."⁴

Whereas the people responded to David's leadership enthusiastically, David's own wife rejected it (vv. 20, 23). She despised her husband for his humility before the LORD. He had behaved as a servant of God. She evidently thought that he should have behaved in a more distinguished manner. David promised her that the LORD would give him distinction (v. 22); he did not need to claim that for himself. The honor of Yahweh was more important to David than his own dignity. In this he set all God's people a good example. As a result of her attitude toward God and His anointed, Michal suffered barrenness the rest of her life. This was, of course, the opposite of fruitfulness and fertility that result from responding properly to God and His anointed.

¹Baldwin, p. 209.

²Martin, p. 38.

³Homer Heater Jr., "A Theology of Samuel and Kings," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 127.

⁴Ibid.

"While the Lord's blessing on Obed-Edom resulted in a large number of descendants for him ..., David's intended blessing on his own household (v. 20) was effectively nullified by Michal's tragic criticism of her husband."¹

"But Michal's barrenness was a blessing from the Lord. It prevented Saul's family from continuing in Israel and therefore threatening the throne of David."²

"The final sentence of the chapter, which may imply some sort of judgement [*sic*] on Michal for her sarcasm, forecloses any possibility that David and Michal will produce an heir who will be able to unite Davidide and Saulide loyalties."³

It may be that God shut Michal's womb as a judgment on her for her attitude (v. 20). When she accused David of uncovering himself, she probably meant that he did so by wearing a modest ephod instead of his splendid royal robes. One writer believed that God judged her for her negative attitude toward the ark.⁴ Others have felt that she did not respect her husband or the LORD. Perhaps all these opinions are true. I think it is more probable, in view of the record of antagonism that precedes verse 23, that we should infer that David had no more intimate relations with her.⁵ He had other wives and concubines, and he could have fulfilled his sexual desires without Michal.

If this interpretation is correct, we have here another instance of David failing God in his family relations. He should have taken the initiative to heal the breach in his relations with Michal, which this chapter records, and not to have allowed them to continue. Even when we are right, as David was, we must be sensitive to the feelings of those who are wrong, as Michal was, and seek to resolve interpersonal conflicts. Josephus wrote that Michal had five children with another husband.⁶ But he may have confused Michal with Merab (cf. 21:8).

¹Youngblood, p. 878.

²Wiersbe, p. 321.

³Gordon, p. 230.

⁴Carlson, p. 93.

⁵Fred E. Young, "First and Second Samuel," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 296.

⁶Josephus, 7:4:3.

"Never, surely, were man and wife more unequally yoked together than was David, the man after God's own heart, with Mical [*sic*], Saul's daughter. What was David's meat was Michal's poison. What was sweeter than honey to David was gall and wormwood to Michal. The things that had become dearer and dearer to David's heart every day, those were the very things that drove Michal absolutely mad; furiously and ungovernably mad that day on which the ark of God was brought up to the city of David."¹

"The writer ... does not question the historically crucial fact of David's divine election, so prominently stressed by the king himself at the beginning of his speech [v. 21]; but theological rights do not necessarily justify domestic wrongs, and the anointed monarch of Israel may still be a harsh and unfeeling husband to the woman who has loved him and saved his life."²

The writer emphasized that those who follow God's covenant prosper, but God cuts off those who do not. The Philistine idols could not deliver the Philistines (5:21), but the ark of God brought blessing to His people (ch. 6).

Most scholars have placed David's bringing the ark into Jerusalem near the beginning of his reign.³ They have done so because of where the writer placed this incident in the text. However, a few have argued that this event occurred toward the end of David's reign.⁴ The basis for this view is 1 Chronicles 15:1, which says that David pitched a tent for the ark after he built houses for himself. Those who hold this second view believe—properly, I think—that the houses in view, in 5:11, were David's palace structures that Hiram helped him build.

"Possible archaeological light on King Hiram was found when a French excavation of Jebeil [or Gebal, Ezek. 27:9] in 1923-1924 uncovered a sarcophagus of Ramses II on which was inscribed in Phoenician writing the name Ahiram, equivalent to the Biblical Hiram ... This may be a reference to the Biblical

¹Alexander Whyte, *Bible Characters*, 1:272.

²Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, pp. 124-25. Cf. 1 Sam. 18:20, 28; 19:11-17.

³E.g., J. R. Porter, "The Interpretation of 2 Samuel VI and Psalm CXXXII," *Journal of Theological Studies* N.S. 5 (1954):161-73.

⁴E.g., Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, pp. 239, 262-63.

King Hiram, or one of his line, inasmuch as the inscription dates no earlier than the eleventh or twelfth century B.C. ..., and may be dated as late as 975 B.C."¹

Since Hiram reigned in Tyre only during the last part of David's reign, the building of his palace must have occurred late in David's reign (ca. 980-978 B.C.). After that, David built a tent for the ark and brought the ark into Jerusalem, as the writer recorded in this chapter (ca. 977 B.C.). However, these houses may have been David's original dwellings in Jerusalem that his palace complex later replaced. If so, 1 Chronicles 15:1 may describe conditions at the beginning of David's reign. This seems unlikely to me. Porter also believed that David introduced a Canaanite New Year type festival at his coronation, which this chapter describes, but this view has no textual support.²

"There is reason to believe that Tyre and Sidon, which formed the kingdom of Hiram (c. 969-936), the friend of David and Solomon, were then taking full advantage of the collapse of the Philistine empire under the blows of David to extend their trading empire into the western Mediterranean."³

3. The giving of the Davidic Covenant ch. 7 (cf. 1 Chron. 17)

The great passion of David's heart was to establish Yahweh's sovereignty in the consciousness of His people. This is why he brought the ark into Jerusalem, the center of the nation (6:12-15). But David did not just want to bring the ark into Jerusalem. He wanted to build an appropriately magnificent temple to honor Yahweh.

In response to David's desire to honor God (ch. 6), God promised to honor David with a line of descendants that would continue to rule Israel (ch. 7). Thus God would not only establish David's reign as long as he lived, but forever. This chapter, along with 1 Samuel 7 (Samuel's revival speech) and 12 (Samuel's farewell speech), is one of the most important in 1 and 2

¹Free, pp. 158-59.

²Porter, pp. 161-73.

³Albright, p. 122.

Samuel theologically. They all contain explanations of God's methods and His intentions.

"... 2 Samuel 7 is rightly regarded as an 'ideological summit,' not only in the 'Deuteronomistic History' but also in the Old Testament as a whole."¹

The Davidic Covenant recorded here receives more attention in the Old Testament than any other covenant except the Mosaic Covenant.²

"This chapter was to become the source of the messianic hope as it developed in the message of prophets and psalmists."³

Many scholars would say that this chapter adds significantly to the messianic hope that had its source in Genesis 3:15 and received strengthening through the promises in Genesis 49:10, Numbers 24:17; Deuteronomy 18:15, and others.

"Two types of official judicial documents had been diffused in the Mesopotamian cultural sphere from the middle of the second millennium onwards: the political treaty which is well known to us from the Hittite empire and the royal grant, the classical form of which is found in the Babylonian *kudurru* documents (boundary stones). ... The structure of both types of these documents is similar. Both preserve the same elements: historical introduction, border delineations, stipulations, witnesses, blessings and curses. Functionally, however, there is a vast difference between these two types of documents. While the 'treaty' constitutes an obligation of the vassal to his master, the suzerain, the 'grant' constitutes an obligation of the master to his servant. In the 'grant' the curse is directed towards the one who will violate the rights of the king's vassal, while in the treaty the curse is directed

¹Gordon, p. 235. Cf. Anderson, p. 112; Brueggemann, p. 253. The "Deuteronomistic History" is the history recorded in the books of Joshua through 2 Kings, which shows the outworking of the principles of God's dealings with Israel that are set forth in the Book of Deuteronomy.

²Jon D. Levenson, "The Davidic Covenant and Its Modern Interpreters," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 41:2 (1979):205-6. See Renald E. Showers, *There Really Is a Difference*, ch. 9: "The Davidic Covenant," pp. 85-97.

³Baldwin, p. 236. Cf. Brueggemann, p. 257; Carlson, p. 127; Gordon, p. 236.

towards the vassal who will violate the rights of his king. In other words, the 'grant' serves mainly to protect the rights of the *servant*, while the treaty comes to protect the rights of the *master*. What is more, while the grant is a reward for loyalty and good deeds already performed, the treaty is an inducement for future loyalty."¹

The Davidic Covenant is a covenant of grant rather than a treaty, as are the covenants God made with Noah (Gen. 9:8-17), Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:1-27), and Phinehas (Num. 25:10-13). The Mosaic Covenant was a treaty.

David's desire to honor God 7:1-3

It was when God had subdued all of David's enemies that He gave this covenant to him (vv. 1, 9). Those enemies included the Ammonites, with whom David was at war when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband Uriah murdered (ch. 11). Thus it seems clear that God gave the Davidic Covenant to David *after* he had committed these sins rather than before. The order of events in the text implies that the giving of the Davidic Covenant preceded David's great sins. We have already seen that the order of events in the text is not strictly chronological but primarily theological: to make the spiritual emphases that are traceable through the Books of Samuel. The traditional interpretation is that this chapter is in chronological order and that the rest that David experienced was a result of a lull in his wars with his enemies.²

"The concept of rest or peace from enemies is a Deuteronomistic idea (cf. Deut 12:10; 25:19; Josh 22:4; 23:1; 1 Kgs 5:18 [4]; 8:56; see also G. von Rad, 'Rest for the People of God,' *The Problem of Hexateuch*, 94-102). In this context 'rest' is security from enemies and peace from wars."³

The Israelites had anticipated entering into rest in the Promised Land since their wilderness wanderings (Deut. 12:9). Joshua had given them a

¹Moshe Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90:2 (1970):184-85.

²See Todd Bolen, "The Date of the Davidic Covenant," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 65:1 (March 2022); 61-78, for defense of the view that God gave this covenant in the first half of David's reign.

³Anderson, p, 116.

measure of rest (Josh. 21:44; 22:4; 23:1). Now, with David's victories, they enjoyed a larger measure of rest than they had anytime previously in their history (v. 1; cf. v. 11; 1 Kings 5:4; 1 Chron. 22:9, 18; 23:25; 2 Chron. 14:7; 15:15; 20:30).

"David completed what Joshua had begun: the taking possession of Canaan. It is this completion of Joshua's work which is reflected in II Sam. 7:1, 11. Now David plans to build a temple as the sequel of the LORD's having granted him rest from his enemies."¹

In the ancient Near East, the people did not consider a king's sovereignty fully established until he had built an appropriate palace for himself.² The people of ancient Near Eastern countries also regarded the kings as the vice-regents of their gods. Therefore they viewed the temples of the gods as the palaces of the true kings: their gods. This view existed in Israel as well. David thought it inappropriate for him, as second-in-command, to live in such a magnificent palace while his commander-in-chief's dwelling was only a temporary, much less impressive structure.³ The Canaanites often built a temple in honor of a god who gave them victory over their enemies, as David wanted to do here.⁴ Nathan originally encouraged David, "not as a prophet, but as a wise and good man," to pursue his plan (v. 3).⁵

God's purpose to honor David 7:4-17

The promises, which are also prophecies, that Yahweh made to David here are an important key to understanding God's program for the future.⁶

God rejected David's suggestion that he build a temple for the LORD, and He gave three reasons: First, there was no pressing need to do so, since the ark had resided in tents since the Exodus (v. 6). The tent it currently occupied was the one David had pitched for it in Jerusalem (6:17), not the tabernacle that stood then at Gibeon (1 Chron. 16:1, 39; 21:28-30). Second, God had not commanded His people to build Him a permanent

¹Wolfgang Roth, "The Deuteronomistic Rest Theology: A Redaction-Critical Study," *Biblical Research* 21 (1976):8.

²Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 274; A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, pp. 95-98.

³See Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, 2:282-83.

⁴Frank M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and the Hebrew Bible*, p. 243.

⁵Henry, p. 335.

⁶See J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, pp. 100-15.

temple (v. 7). Before God raised up Israel's kings, He Himself had dealt with the tribes of Israel, during the judges period (v. 7). At that time the leaders of the tribes were responsible to shepherd the Israelites in their areas.¹ Third, David was an inappropriate person to build a temple, since he had shed much blood (v. 5; 1 Chron. 22:8; 28:3). David had become ritually unclean because of all the killing he had been responsible for during his long reign. This was not true of Solomon (cf. 1 Kings 6:1).

"Fine temples both hinder and help the worship of God; it all depends on the worshipper."²

"The real issue is that both the initiative to build a temple and the choice of the person for the task must come from God and not from an individual king."³

"... just as Saul had to learn that in sacral matters he must submit to Yahweh's word through the prophet Samuel, so also David must submit to Yahweh's word through Nathan. Kings do not determine what Yahweh does, and although Yahweh will accept a temple, it must be on his terms."⁴

Notice that it was not because God was disciplining David, or had rejected him, that He prohibited David's good intention. God was simply redirecting His servant.⁵ He was to be a "leader" (v. 8), not a temple builder. Similarly, God does not always permit us to carry out our desires to honor Him, such as becoming a pastor or missionary. He sometimes makes this impossible because He wants us to serve Him in other ways. A realization of this fact would relieve many Christians from false guilt and shattered dreams.

"God's servants must learn to accept the disappointments of life, for as A. T. Pierson used to say, 'Disappointments are His appointments.'"⁶

¹See Patrick V. Reid, "Sbty in 2 Samuel 7:7," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 37:1 (January 1975):17-20; and Donald Murray, "Once Again 't 'hd Sbty Ysr'l in II Samuel 7:7," *Revue Biblique* 94:3 (July 1987):389-96.

²Payne, p. 188.

³Michiko Ota, "A Note on 2 Sam 7," in *A Light Unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Jacob M. Myers*, p. 406.

⁴Firth, p. 387.

⁵Charles R. Swindoll, *David: A Man of Passion and Destiny*, pp. 162-68.

⁶Wiersbe, p. 323.

"The irony in v. 6 must not be missed: Although God condescends to accompany his people on their journey with a tent as his dwelling (v. 6b), a tent carried by them, all along they have in fact been carried by him (v. 6a)."¹

God had blessed David in the past by choosing him as Israel's shepherd-king, by being with him in blessing, and by cutting off all of David's enemies (vv. 8-9a).

God made four promises to David: a great name (or famous reputation) for David (v. 9b), a homeland for Israel (v. 10), undisturbed rest from all Israel's enemies (vv. 10-11a), and an everlasting royal dynasty and kingdom for David and his heirs (vv. 11b-16).² Some of God's promises (prophecies) to David would find literal fulfillment during his lifetime (vv. 8-11a), and others would after his death (vv. 11b-16).³

"The promise of a 'great name' is reminiscent of God's covenant with Abraham (Gn. 12:2), and suggests (though the word 'covenant' nowhere appears in these verses) that the Davidic kingship is being incorporated into the Abrahamic covenant. This is reinforced by the reference to God's people Israel dwelling in their own place, undisturbed by enemies (v. 10), a reference to Genesis 15:18-21 and Deuteronomy 11:24. Moreover, the covenant word *hesed*, God's 'steadfast love' (v. 15), ensures the fulfillment of the promises, which are here unconditional, though the need for chastisement is foreseen."⁴

David would have a descendant for whom God would establish a kingdom (v. 12). God repeated to David at this time that his successor would be Solomon (cf. 1 Chron. 22:9-10). This son would build the temple that David

¹Youngblood, p. 887.

²For a discussion of illeisms in the Old Testament (the use of third-person self-references), see Andrew S. Malone, "God the Illeist: Third-Person Self-References and Trinitarian Hints in the Old Testament," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 52:3 (September 2009):499-518.

³Cf. Bruce K. Waltke, "The Phenomenon of Conditionality Within Unconditional Covenants," in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration: Essays in Honor of Roland K. Harrison*, p. 130.

⁴Baldwin, p. 36.

wanted to construct, and his right to rule, symbolized by the throne, would remain forever (v. 13).

"Up to this time, there had been no dynasty in Israel. Saul's son had generously and spiritually submitted himself to David. Now God promised David an eternal seed and an eternal throne. One of David's own sons would succeed him to the throne, and his throne, like David's, would be established forever. Much of the rest of 2 Samuel deals with the identification of that son. ... God's sovereign choice of David's line will never be abrogated even though discipline must come when disobedience takes place. This theme underlies much of the argument of 1 and 2 Kings."¹

Note the development of the similar theme of Abraham's heir in Genesis 12—22.

"As in the Abrahamic covenant the promised 'seed' was Isaac, in the immediate sense, and Christ in the ultimate sense (Gal. iii. 16), so, in the Davidic covenant the promised 'son' is Solomon, in the immediate sense, and Christ in the ultimate sense."²

The promise that God's people would "not be disturbed again" nor be oppressed "any more as previously" (v. 10) has yet to be fulfilled. The promise, of "rest from all your enemies" (v. 11), may seem incongruous in view of the earlier statements that God had already given David rest "from all his enemies" (v. 1) and had already "eliminated all" his "enemies" (v. 9). This promise implies that rest from all Israel's enemies—even greater than what the nation had so far experienced—lay in the future. The importance of the promise of a "house" (i.e., dynasty) is apparent in that references to it frame the future hope (vv. 11a, 16).

Verse 12 poses a chronological problem. It can be understood to mean that Solomon had not yet been born. Probably God meant that Solomon would "come from" David in the sense that Solomon would succeed David on the throne, not that he was yet to be born. Furthermore, if God gave the

¹Heater, p. 119.

²Baxter, 2:75.

Davidic Covenant late in David's reign, as seems to be true, Solomon must have been alive, since he began ruling shortly as an adult.

The Hebrew word *zera*, translated "descendant," means "seed." *Zera* and "seed" are both collective singulars in their respective languages and can refer to either one descendant or many descendants (Gen. 13:15; 17:8; cf. Gal. 3:16). Part of what God promised David here pertained to Solomon, part to all David's posterity, and part to Jesus Christ (cf. Matt. 3:17). In verse 11b it seems to be David's posterity that is in view as coming forth from him: his "house."¹

"In the Old Testament the relation between father and son denotes the deepest intimacy of love; and love is perfected in unity of nature, in the communication to the son of all that the father hath. The Father loveth the Son, and hath given all things into His hand (John iii. 35). Sonship therefore includes the government of the world. This not only applied to Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, but also to the seed of David generally, so far as they truly attained to the relation of children of God."²

"David, being a man of war, could not really typify Christ as Melchisedek [*sic*], who is King of Peace: this glory was reserved for Solomon. David established the kingdom over which Solomon reigned. But Christ will be both David and Solomon. As David, He will conquer all foes and set up the kingdom on earth; and, as Solomon, He will reign in everlasting peace."³

One writer concluded that God only spoke of Israel's king as His son in an adoptive sense.⁴ This was true of Israel's kings who preceded Messiah, but God spoke of Messiah as His Son in a real sense (Matt. 3:17). Another writer noted that the sonship of the Davidic king was apparently linked with three overlapping concepts: adoption, covenant, and royal grant.⁵

¹See Driver, pp. 275-76.

²Keil and Delitzsch, pp. 348-49.

³Baxter, 2:76.

⁴Gerald Cooke, "The Israelite King as Son of God," *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 73:2 (June 1961):202-25.

⁵Anderson, p. 122.

The title "Son of God," which appears so often in the Gospels and elsewhere in Scripture, has its origin in verse 14 (cf. Ps. 2:7). Consequently, when Jesus, Satan, the demons, and people acknowledged Jesus as the "Son of God," they were identifying Him as the Son of God the Father who would one day rule over Israel and the nations, which is what God promised David that his descendant would do.

If David's son sinned, God would discipline him, but God would never remove the right to rule from him (vv. 14-15; cf. Heb. 12:5-11). Thus David's house (dynasty), his kingdom (the people of Israel and their land), and his throne (the right to rule) would remain forever. These three promises (house, kingdom, and throne) constitute the Davidic Covenant: a house for David, a kingdom for David, and a throne for David—and all these would remain forever. Walter Kaiser Jr. described these promises a bit differently as a house for David, a seed for David, a kingdom for David, and a Son of God for David.¹ It seems to me that the Son of God promise was really part of the seed promise.

"In general terms the line would not fail. Yet in particular terms, benefits might be withdrawn from individuals."²

"YHWH irrecoverably committed himself to the house of David, but rewarded or disciplined individual kings by extending or withholding the benefits of the grant according to their loyalty or disloyalty to His treaty [i.e., the Mosaic Covenant]."³

"The failure of the kings generally leads not to disillusion with kingship but to the hope of a future king who will fulfill the kingship ideal—a hope which provides the most familiar way of understanding the significance of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ coming in his kingdom."⁴

Note that God did not promise that the rule of David's descendants would be without interruption. The Babylonian captivity and the present dispersion of the Jews throughout the world are interruptions (cf. Rom. 9—11). Indeed, Jesus taught that the Jews would experience domination by Gentile powers during "the times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24), namely,

¹Walter C. Kaiser Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology*, pp. 149-52.

²William J. Dumbrell, *Covenants and Creation*, p. 150.

³Waltke, p. 135. Cf. Gordon, p. 240.

⁴John Goldingay, *Theological Diversity and the Authority of the Old Testament*, p. 70.

from the time Gentiles assumed sovereignty over Israel's affairs (i.e., Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.) until Jesus Christ restored sovereignty to Israel (i.e., when He returns to rule at His second advent). Even though the present State of Israel enjoys a limited measure of sovereignty, Gentiles still dominate its affairs, and a Davidic king is not leading it. However, the privilege of ruling over Israel as king would always belong to David's descendants.

"This promise, generally described as the Davidic covenant, is technically in the form of a royal grant by which a sovereign graciously bestowed a blessing, usually in the form of land or a fiefdom, upon a vassal. This may have been in return for some act performed by the vassal in behalf of his lord, or it may have been simply a beneficence derived from the sheer love and kindness of the king.¹ The latter clearly is the case here, for the promise of eternal kingship through David had been articulated long before the birth of David himself. From the beginning it was the purpose of God to channel his sovereignty over his own people (and, indeed, over all the earth) through a line of kings that would eventuate in the divine Son of God himself. That line, David now came to understand, would begin with him."²

The Davidic Covenant is an outgrowth of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:1-3, 7).³ In the Abrahamic Covenant God promised a land, seed, and blessing to the patriarch. In time God gave further revelation regarding each of these promised blessings (cf. Deut. 30:1-10; 2 Sam. 7:5-16; Jer. 31:31-34). The Davidic Covenant deals with Abraham's descendants primarily and God's provision of leadership for them specifically. In Deuteronomy 30 God explained the land aspects of His promise more fully, and in Jeremiah 31

¹Weinfeld, pp. 184-203, esp. 185-86.

²Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 275. Cf. Ps. 2:2, 7-9; 18:43, 50; 45:7; 72:8-11, 17; 101:5-8; 110:1-2, 4-7. See also Matitiah Tsevat, "The House of David in Nathan's Prophecy," *Biblica* 46 (1965):353-56.

³For an excellent discussion of the Davidic Covenant, see J. Dwight Pentecost, *Thy Kingdom Come*, pp. 140-55. See also Cleon L. Rogers Jr., "The Promises to David in Early Judaism," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150:599 (July-September 1993):285-302; and idem, "The Davidic Covenant in the New Testament," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150:600 (October-December 1993):458-78; and 150:601 (January-March 1994):71-84; George Gunn, "What Is the Davidic Covenant?" in *The Gathering Storm*, pp. 240-57; Robert L. Saucy, *The Case for Progressive Dispensationalism*, pp. 59-80.

He expounded the blessing promise. These are the major revelations that clarify God's promises to Abraham, but they are not the only ones.

"The Davidic Covenant is the centerpiece of Samuel and Kings. David, as a type of the ideal king (both in position and often in practice), appears 'between the lines' in chapters 1—15 and dominates the lines in chapters 16—31. Seeing the centrality of the Davidic Covenant enables the reader to pick up the argument of 1 Samuel and to see how it moves inexorably toward 2 Samuel 7."¹

"After the conquest of Canaan when Israel's loyalty to YHWH lapsed, YHWH's protection of his people also lapsed. By the time of Samuel and Saul, the Philistines threatened the very existence of Israel. The institution of the Davidic covenant, vested in a vassal [the Davidic king] loyal to the suzerain [Yahweh], constituted an earnest of protection, vouchsafed but virtually impossible to realize in the Sinaitic covenant. The suzerain-vassal model as a legal framework for both the Sinaitic and Davidic covenants validated the basis on which YHWH's protection was to be obtained. There now existed no provision for national protection other than within the framework of a suzerain-vassal type of relationship with YHWH. But the Davidic covenant did away with the necessity that all Israel—to a man—maintain loyalty to YHWH in order to merit his protection. In the analogy of suzerain-vassal relationships, David's designation as YHWH's 'son' and 'firstborn' (2 Sam 7:14; Pss 2:6-7; 89:27) legitimized him as Israel's representative—as the embodiment of YHWH's covenant people, also called his 'son' and 'firstborn' (Exod 4:22). With regard to Israel's protection, the Davidic covenant superseded the Sinaitic covenant, but only because of Israel's regression in her loyalty toward YHWH (compare 1 Sam 8:7). Henceforth, the king stood as proxy between YHWH and his people."²

¹Heater, p. 120.

²Avraham Gileadi, "The Davidic Covenant: A Theological Basis for Corporate Protection," in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration*, p. 160. For similarities between the Davidic Covenant and Hittite and Neo-Assyrian suzerain-vassal agreements, see Weinfeld; Philip J. Calderone, *Dynastic Oracles and Suzerainty Treaty*; and F. Charles Fensham, "Clauses of Protection in Hittite Vassal-Treaties and the Old Testament," *Vetus Testamentum* 13:(1963):133-43.

The descendant of David through whom God will fulfill His promises completely is Jesus Christ.¹

"... this Davidic covenant marks *a fourth major development in Messianic prophecy*. The first great prophecy was made to Adam, in Genesis iii. 15, where we are told that *the seed of the woman* should bruise the head of the serpent. The second was made to Abraham, in Genesis xxii. 18, '*In thy seed* shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.' The third was made through Jacob, in Genesis xlix. 10—'The scepter shall not depart *from Judah* ... until Shiloh come.' The fourth is now made to David in 2 Samuel vii. See the development then. First, in the case of Adam, the promise is to the *race* in general. Then, in the case of Abraham, it is to one *nation* in the race—the nation Israel. Then, in the case of Jacob, it is to one *tribe* in that nation—the tribe of Judah. Then, in the case of David, it is to one *family* in that tribe—the family of David. Thus are we prepared for that completing word which Isaiah adds still later, namely, that the coming Seed of the woman, Son of Abraham, Lion of Judah, and Heir of David, should be *born of a virgin*."²

In view of what God said of Jesus Christ in Luke 1:32-33, there are five major implications of the Davidic Covenant for the future: (1) God must preserve the Jewish people as a nation. (2) He must bring them back into their land. (3) A descendant of David must rule over them in the land (i.e., Jesus Christ). (4) His kingdom must be an earthly kingdom, as opposed to a spiritual rule from heaven. And (5) this kingdom must be everlasting.³

"All conservative [Christian] interpreters of the Bible recognize that the promise has its ultimate fulfillment in Christ. Again the amillennial and premillennial differences in explaining eschatology come to the fore, however. The amillennial position is that Christ is now on the throne of David in heaven, equating the heavenly throne with the earthly throne of David,

¹For the Jewish view that the nation of Israel, not a personal Messiah, would fulfill these promises, see Matitiah Tsevat, "Studies in the Book of Samuel," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 34 (1963):71-82.

²Baxter, 2:75-76.

³Pentecost, *Things to ...*, pp. 114-15.

whereas the traditional premillennial view is that the Davidic throne will be occupied at the second coming of Christ when Christ assumes his rule in Jerusalem."¹

"The difficult questions that separate dispensational and non-dispensational interpreters relate to how many of the covenant promises have been fulfilled in Christ's first coming and present ministry and how many remain for the future. Two key elements of the covenant promise stand at the center of the controversy: (1) a royal dynasty or house, and (2) a kingdom with universal blessing."²

Dispensationalists believe that these two things will be fulfilled in the future through Israel, whereas non-dispensationalists believe they are being fulfilled in the present through the church. David and Solomon both understood the promise of a kingdom to refer to a literal earthly kingdom for Israel (vv. 18-29; 2 Chron. 6:14-16). Therefore dispensationalists look for the fulfillment to be a literal earthly kingdom for Israel.

"This covenant, let it be most definitely understood, has to do with a literal posterity, and a literal throne, and a literal kingdom. To start 'spiritualising [*sic*]' it into meaning a heavenly posterity and a spiritual kingdom synonymous with the Christian Church is to violate the very first principle [*sic* principle] of Scripture interpretation, namely, the principle that plainly spoken words should at least be accepted as meaning what they say."³

God did not condition His promises to David here on anything. There are no "if" conditions stated, but there are nine "I will" commitments given. Therefore we can count on their complete fulfillment.

¹John F. Walvoord, "The New Covenant," in *Integrity of Heart, Skillfulness of Hands*, pp. 192-93. See also idem, *Israel in Prophecy*, ch. 5: "The Kingdom Promised to David," pp. 80-100.

²Saucy, p. 66.

³Baxter, 2:74.

"The overriding theological principle is that Yahweh's word is infallible."¹

"Sometimes life's greatest blessings flow out of its profoundest disappointments. ... Our willingness to do what little we can for Him [like David] will be repaid many times over by the outpouring of His lavish and surprising acts of grace both now and in the ages to come."²

"One of the reasons so many of us are so poor today is because we do so little for the Lord. We never get in a position where He can do much for us. We can learn a lesson from David. David wanted to do something great for God, and God did something far greater for him."³

David's prayer of thanksgiving 7:18-29

"The heartfelt response of King David to the oracle of the prophet Nathan is one of the most moving prayers in Scripture ..."⁴

Structurally, the prayer moves from thanksgiving for the present favor (vv. 18-21), to praise for what God had done in the past (vv. 22-24), to petition for future fulfillment of God's promises (vv. 25-29). David included humility (v. 18), gratitude (v. 19), praise (v. 22), remembrance (vv. 23-24), and acknowledgment (vv. 25-29), as ingredients in this prayer. Normally Israelites stood or knelt to pray. Perhaps David "sat" (v. 18) back on his heels to pray in a kneeling position because he was a king.⁵

"... David knew that God had made him the promise that he would be the ancestor of the promised man to come. As an Israelite who was chosen to be king because his heart was aligned with God's own heart, David understood this immediately on receiving Nathan's words. This, then, is the source that gives rise to the rich messianic passages in both

¹Dennis J. McCarthy, "II Samuel 7 and the Structure of the Deuteronomistic History," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84 (1965):136.

²Eugene H. Merrill, "2 Samuel," in *The Old Testament Explorer*, p. 233.

³McGee, 2:204

⁴Youngblood, p. 896.

⁵Jamieson, et al., p. 233; Gordon, p. 241; Anderson, p. 126.

the Old and New Testaments that emphasize the Messiah as a descendant of David."¹

In this prayer, David revealed a proper attitude toward himself, toward Yahweh, and toward their relationship. Ten times he referred to himself as Yahweh's servant, and eight times he called God his Master (Heb. *Adonai*). David saw his own role in the larger context of God's purpose for Israel. In all these particulars David contrasts with Saul. We also see why God blessed him personally and used him as a channel of blessing to others.

"'Thy kingdom come' is the thrust of verse 27, and 'Thy will be done' the thrust of verse 28."²

"Thus it came about that David gave up his intention of building the Temple. Though he was king of Israel, he accepted that he had to defer to a higher authority, that of the God of Israel, to whom he owed his calling through the prophet Samuel, his preservation in mortal danger at the hand of Saul, and his accession to the throne by common consent of the people. Recognition on the part of the king that he owed the throne of his kingdom to the sovereign Lord God involved humble acceptance of the role of servant, *thy servant*, as David calls himself ten times over in this prayer. David was far from perfect, as the subsequent narrative is to demonstrate, but he had grasped this all-important truth about himself, and it was because he valued so highly his call to serve the Lord God that he was sensitive to rebuke and repented when he stepped out of line. For this reason, he knew forgiveness and restoration of fellowship, both of which had eluded Saul because he could never bring himself to take his hands off the reins of government, or readily admit to being in the wrong. Saul, by clinging tenaciously to what he regarded as his kingly prerogative, lost the kingdom; David, more concerned about honouring the Lord than guarding his own reputation, had his kingdom made sure for ever."³

¹Andrew E. Steinmann, "What Did David Understand about the Promises in the Davidic Covenant?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 171:681 (January-March 2014):29.

²Wiersbe, p. 325.

³Baldwin, pp. 218-219.

Chapter 7 is a high point in the fertility motif that runs through 1 and 2 Samuel. Here the ultimate in blessing came to David. If the giving of this covenant followed David's sins with Bathsheba and Uriah, as I believe it did, we have extraordinary evidence of God's grace. God chose to bless David in spite of his sins because, overall, David was a man who sought to glorify God and to serve Him acceptably with his life. This covenant came in response to David's desire to honor God in Israel by helping the people perceive His true position as Head of the nation (ch. 6).

We should probably date God's giving of this covenant after David completed his own palace and the new tent for the ark in Jerusalem. It also probably took place after David moved the ark to Jerusalem, recovered from Absalom and Sheba's rebellions, took the ill-fated census of the people, and purchased the site of the temple. This seems most likely in view of textual references that make it clear that these previous events took place in this order. Probably David received the Davidic Covenant about 973 B.C.¹

4. The security of David's kingdom ch. 8 (cf. 1 Chron. 18)

"From the religious heights of chapter 7 we descend again to the everyday world of battles and bloodshed in chapter 8. The military action picks up where the story left off at the end of chapter 5."²

Chapter 8 evidently describes the conquest of David's enemies that took place before David brought the ark into Jerusalem (ch. 6) and received the Davidic Covenant (ch. 7). An apparent problem with this view is the statement, "Now it happened afterward," in verse 1. However, since 7:1 says that God had given David rest from all his enemies, chapter 8 must precede chapter 7, and probably chapter 6. "Afterward" most likely refers to the battles with the Philistines that the writer recorded in 5:17-25. Following those battles David had one or more other conflicts with the Philistines, described in 8:1.

The chief city of the Philistines (v. 1) was Gath (cf. 1 Chron. 18:1). The writer described David's military campaigns from west (v. 1), to east (v.

¹See the "Chronology of David's Life" in my notes on 1 Samuel 16.

²Payne, p. 193.

2), to north (vv. 3-11), to south (vv. 13-14), suggesting victory in every direction: total success thanks to Yahweh (vv. 6, 14).

"Though brief in detail, 2 Samuel 8 is of great historic value for it records Israel's emergence at the beginning of the tenth century B.C. as the leading nation in the Fertile Crescent."¹

"The Philistines considered themselves the legitimate heirs of the Egyptian rule in Palestine and their defeat by David implied the passage of the Egyptian province of Canaan into the hands of the Israelites."²

In the east, David defeated the Moabites, executed two-thirds of their soldiers, and obligated them to pay tribute (v. 2). One interpretation is that David spared the young Moabites (whose height was one "line") and executed the adults (whose height was two "lines").³ Another view is that David made the Moabites lie on the ground in lines and spared one out of every three lines. But why did David kill only two-third of the solders?

"He cannot let the Moabites return home en masse to fight again another day. But neither can he wipe them out completely, for the absence of an adult male population in Moab would weaken his eastern border and make it impossible for the Moabites to provide tribute. So David acts in a pragmatic manner. He kills two-thirds of the Moabite soldiers, eliminating the possibility of a renewal of hostility anytime soon, and allows one-third to return home, ensuring that Moab will be able to produce and send tribute on a regular basis."⁴

Perhaps David was also merciful to the Moabites because his grandmother Ruth was a Moabitess.

To the northeast, David subdued the king of Zobah (v. 3). The antecedent of "he" is probably Hadadezer.⁵ Hadadezer means "Hadad Is Help," Hadad

¹Alexander, p. 54.

²Abraham Malamat, "The Kingdom of David & Solomon in its Contact with Egypt and Aram Naharaim," *Biblical Archaeologist* 21:4 (1958):100.

³*The Nelson ...*, p. 520.

⁴Chisholm, sidebar on p. 229. See also Wiersbe, p. 326; and Baxter, 2:77.

⁵See Keil and Delitzsch, p. 358.

being the chief god of the Arameans.¹ There is a discrepancy in the number of horsemen David took in battle (v. 4). Probably the figure in 1 Chronicles 18:4 is correct: 7,000 rather than 1,700. Second Samuel 8:4 has suffered a textual corruption.² There are many minor textual corruptions in the Hebrew text of 1 and 2 Samuel, probably more than in any other book of the Old Testament.³

"The liberal scholars ... have excluded Damascus from the empire of David, and have located Zobah, the land of Hadad-ezer whom David conquered, in the Hauran, the area to the east of the Sea of Galilee. Archaeological discoveries, however, have given us much light on the Assyrian provincial organization and have demonstrated conclusively that Zobah, which the Assyrians called Subatu, lay north of Damascus and not south of it. Thus the Biblical indication that David's empire extended up to the north of Damascus in the area of the city of Homs (Hums) is confirmed by the archaeological discoveries."⁴

David evidently captured 7,000 horsemen and preserved enough horses for 1,000 chariots. Hamstringing the horses involved severing the large tendon above and behind their hocks, which correspond to human ankles, in order to disable them. Evidently David had plenty of horses and did not need to use all that he captured in war. Or, perhaps, he purposely did not multiply horses in obedience to Deuteronomy 17:16a: "He [Israel's king] is not acquire many horses for himself."⁵

"Although David multiplied wives (Solomon multiplied both horses and wives), he is apparently trying to follow the Lord's instructions in this matter concerning the horses."⁶

At the time of David's conquest, people called the residents of the area around Damascus, Arameans, and the area, Aram. Damascus at this time

¹Driver, p. 280.

²Archer, p. 184; Keil and Delitzsch, p. 360.

³For an introduction to the study of this subject, see Martin, pp. 209-22.

⁴Free, p. 160.

⁵See Yigael Yadin, *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands in the Light of Archaeological Discovery*, p. 285.

⁶McGee, 2:206.

was not as powerful as it became later. Aram was northeast of Canaan. David had previously defeated these people.¹

"Whether they [the gold shields, v. 7] were made of solid gold or simply bossed with gold or supplied with golden fittings is impossible to say (contrast the shields mentioned in 1 Kings 10:16-17; 14:26)."²

Betah (the Tibhath of 1 Chronicles 18:8) and Berothai (the Berothah of Ezekiel 47:16) were towns in Aram. The town of Hamath (v. 9) was farther northeast than the kingdoms of Zobah and Aram. Solomon later used the bronze, silver, and gold articles that David captured to build his temple (vv. 8, 10-12).

The battles summarized in verses 3-12 probably occurred after the ones reported in chapters 10—12.³

There is a textual omission in verse 13 after then number 18,000. Some ancient manuscripts have inserted "Arameans," and others have added "Edom." Perhaps while Israel was at war with the Arameans, the Edomites seized the opportunity to invade Israel and proceeded toward Israel as far as the Valley of Salt. This valley lay at the south end of the Salt (Dead) Sea. David evidently defeated the Edomites there after defeating the Arameans (cf. Ps. 60:1; 1 Chron. 18:12).⁴ Edom, of course, was Israel's neighbor to the southeast.

The writer of Samuel could have written much more about David's military victories, but he chose to move on to emphasize other things in the chapters that follow.

"Recapitulating David's military victories during his years as king over Israel and Judah in Jerusalem, vv. 1-14 parallel the account of the defeat of the Philistines (5:17-25) in the overall structure of the narrative of David's powerful reign (5:17—8:18; ...). The summary may not be intended as all-inclusive, since other wars and skirmishes are mentioned later in the

¹See my note on 10:15-19.

²Youngblood, p. 906.

³Ibid., p. 904; John A. Bright, *A History of Israel*, p. 202, n. 38; and Wood, *A Survey ...*, p. 226.

⁴Keil and Delitzsch, p. 364.

book (cf. ch. 10; 21:15-22; 23:8-23). The section leaves no doubt about the fact that David's armies were invincible and that no nation, however numerous or powerful its fighting men, could hope to withstand the Israelite hosts."¹

"... Israel's first three kings were quite unaffected by large powers, making possible in part the wide expansion of boundaries under King David."²

The real reason for David's success emerges clearly, however: "The LORD helped David wherever he went" (vv. 6, 14). Why? There are two reasons: First, God had chosen David to be Israel's king and to use David to accomplish His purposes for Israel. Second, David cooperated with God by submitting to Him as His servant and carrying out His will.

Were the land promises of the Abrahamic Covenant fulfilled in David's lifetime? Though some would say Yes,³ the correct answer is No. David's influence was larger than his kingdom. His kingdom did not include neighboring vassal states (e.g., Moab, Edom, Aram) much less other territories that acknowledged David's authority (e.g., Hamath, Philistia, and Phoenicia).

Verses 15-18 constitute a summary of David's administration and conclude this section of Samuel (5:17—8:18) that records the major important features of David's reign (cf. 20:23-26; 1 Sam. 14:47-52). God established his empire firmly. He had relocated his capital, subdued his enemy neighbors, brought the ark into Jerusalem, and received the Davidic Covenant. The writer probably listed David's military victories last in chapter 8 because the formal record of a king's accomplishments normally ended this way in the official records of ancient Near Eastern monarchs.⁴ The writer of the Book of Kings followed the same procedure in recording the reigns of the succeeding kings of Judah and Israel. These selected events from David's reign show God's blessing on him and on Israel through him. Because he was the LORD's anointed who followed God faithfully, Yahweh poured out blessing and fertility.

¹Youngblood, p. 901. Paragraph division omitted.

²Wood, *A Survey ...*, p. 237.

³E.g., Firth, p. 398.

⁴See my note on 1 Samuel 14:47-52.

"The *recorder* (Heb. *mazkir* ["secretary," v. 16]), whose title derived from the Hebrew 'to remember' had a most important role at court, with responsibility for keeping the king informed, advising him, and communicating the king's commands. Interestingly, the Lord is also depicted, like the human king, as having 'recorders', though the word is translated 'remembrancers' (RV, AV mg.); their responsibility was to keep reminding him of his stated intentions until they were completed (Is. 62:6). This is an aspect of prayer which is easily overlooked, though it is implicit in the Lord's prayer: 'thy kingdom come, thy will be done ...'"¹

Obviously God does not need people to remind Him of anything, since He is omniscient. Reminding God of things does more for the person reminding than for the One reminded, and this is the primary intent of the figure. Seraiah the "scribe" (v. 17, evidently also called Sheva in 20:25, Shisha in 1 Kings 4:3, and Shavsha in 1 Chron. 18:16) was similar to a secretary of state.² The Cherethites and Pelethites formed David's private bodyguard (cf. 15:18; 20:7, 23; 1 Kings 1:38, 44; 1 Chron. 18:17). The Cherethites were evidently Cretans and the Pelethites, Philistines. Though both groups came to Canaan from Crete, the Cherethites were native Cretans and the Pelethites had only passed through Crete during their migration from their original homeland: Greece.³ Together they constituted a core of foreign mercenaries that served as David's bodyguard (cf. 1 Sam. 30:14).

"Royal bodyguards were often made up of foreigners whose personal loyalty to the king was less likely to be adulterated by involvement in national politics (cf. 1 Sa. 28:2)."⁴

David's sons were in some sense priests. "Chief ministers" (v. 18) is literally "priests."⁵ Apparently they functioned in a mediatory capacity, but not by carrying out sacrificial functions, which were the exclusive responsibilities of the Levitical priests.

¹Baldwin, pp. 224-25. RV refers to *The Holy Bible: English Revised Version*. See also J. A. Thompson, *1, 2 Chronicles*, p. 153.

²Youngblood, p. 911; Wiersbe, p. 327.

³See *The New Bible Dictionary*, s.v. "Cherethites," by T. C. Mitchell, pp. 207-8.

⁴Gordon, p. 247.

⁵See Armerding, pp. 75-86; and J. Barton Payne, "1, 2 Chronicles," in *1 Kings-Job*, vol. 4 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 399.

"... the Hebrew term for priest (*Cohen*) denotes in its root-meaning 'one who stands up for another, and mediates in his cause. [Footnote 1:] This root-meaning (through the Arabic) of the Hebrew word for priest, as one intervening, explains its occasional though very rare applications to others than priests, as, for example, to the sons of David ..."¹

Gordon Wenham believed "priests" is a mistranslation and that the proper reading should be "administrators (of the royal estates)" (cf. 1 Chronicles 18:17).² Perhaps these priestly duties resulted from David's sons' connection with the Melchizedekian priesthood (cf. 6:12-15).³ Or David may simply have appointed his sons to positions in his government, as the translation "chief ministers" suggests.

David's kingdom stretched from the Gulf of Aqabah and the Wadi of Egypt, on the southeast and southwest respectively, to the Euphrates River on the northeast.⁴ David did not have complete sovereignty over all this territory, however. Some of his neighbor kingdoms were tribute-paying vassal states. Israel lost control of most of this territory later. Since God had promised Abraham's descendants permanent possession of the Promised Land (Gen. 13:15), David's kingdom did not constitute a complete fulfillment of the land promise in the Abrahamic Covenant.

Five major conflicts and reversals of fortune occur in chapters 2—8. Saul's men conflicted with David's men (2:1—3:5), Saul's kingdom conflicted with David's kingdom (3:6—5:16), and the Philistines conflicted with David (5:17-25). Saul's line conflicted with David and the ark (chs. 6—7), and the nations conflicted with David (ch. 8).

God's blessing came on Israel when the people had a proper attitude toward Him, which their proper attitude toward the ark symbolized (6:12-19). Preceding this attitude a series of conflicts resulted in David's forces gaining strength and Saul's forces losing strength. God reduced Saul's line to one crippled boy (4:4), and He condemned Saul's daughter Michal to

¹Edersheim, pp. 84-85.

²G. J. Wenham, "Were David's Sons Priests?" *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 87:1 (1975):79-82.

³Merrill, "2 Samuel," p. 234.

⁴See the map "The Kingdom of David" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 462.

remain childless (6:20-27). Later, He cut off the rest of Saul's line (21:1-14).

On the other hand, God promised David descendants who would endure and reign forever (ch. 7). In the fullness of time the ultimate Anointed One, Jesus Christ, issued from him (cf. Gal. 4:4).

VI. DAVID'S TROUBLES CHS. 9—20

Chapters 9—20 contrast with chapters 2—8 in that this new section is negative whereas the prior one was positive. It records failure whereas the former section records success. Compare the similar narrative of Saul's triumphs (1 Sam. 7—12) and his troubles (1 Sam. 13—31).

"The crumbling of the empire in these chapters is far from anticlimactic. It is an outworking of the fertility principle which the author has been presenting throughout the entire book. Even David, the successful king, is not above this principle. When he disobeyed the covenant he was judged, and since he was the king the whole nation was judged with him. Sexual sin (related to the fertility motif) was the cause of David's downfall, and his fall was followed by sexual sins in his family."¹

David got into trouble when he stopped being humble before God and became arrogant. He was not as bad as Eli and his sons, or Saul, in this respect. Had he been, God would have cut him off, too, instead of giving him the Davidic Covenant. Chapters 9—20 show the effects of being arrogant before God.

Scholars frequently refer to chapters 9—20 along with 1 Kings 1 and 2 as "the succession narrative."² The reason for this is that this passage deals with matters that lead up to Solomon's succession of David as Israel's king. Some scholars believe that there was a succession narrative source document that the writer(s) of this section of Scripture used, but others doubt the existence of such a document.³ Other scholars prefer to call this

¹Martin, p. 39.

²They follow Leonhard Rost, *The Succession to the Throne of David*. For a discussion of the succession narrative, see Anderson, pp. xxvi-xxxvi.

³E.g., David M. Gunn, "Traditional Composition in the 'Succession Narrative'," *Vetus Testamentum* 26:2 (April 1976):214-29; and Peter R. Ackroyd, "The Succession Narrative

unit "court history," since it deals with a broader range of subjects than just Solomon's succession to the throne.¹

"Virtually all scholars agree that this is one of the finest examples of history writing from the ancient Near Eastern world. It is at the same time a masterpiece of biography and storytelling what with its ingenious interweaving of plots and subplots, its brilliant character sketches, and its attention to artistic touches such as climax and denouement."²

As with the rest of Samuel, this section is basically chronological with exceptions for thematic and theological reasons. Chapters 9—20 begin with information about the survivors in Saul's family (ch. 9), as does the next major section of the book: chapters 21—24 (21:1-14).

A. DAVID'S FAITHFULNESS CH. 9

The story of David's kindness to Mephibosheth (ch. 9) helps to explain David's subsequent acceptance by the Benjamites. It also enables us to see that the writer returned here to events in David's early reign.

"It is, in my personal opinion, the greatest illustration of grace in all the Old Testament."³

If Mephibosheth was five years old when Jonathan and Saul died on Mt. Gilboa (4:4), he was born in 1016 B.C. When David captured Jerusalem in 1004 B.C., Mephibosheth was 12. Now we see Mephibosheth had a young son (v. 12), so perhaps he was about 20 years old. People frequently married in their teens in the ancient Near East, so perhaps the events of chapter 9 took place about 996 B.C.

(so-called)," *Interpretation* 35:4 (1980):383-96. See also Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, pp. 153-58, for a discussion of the history of composition.

¹E.g., Vanderkam, p. 522, n. 2; Driver, p. 285; James W. Flanagan, "Court History or Succession Document? A Study of 2 Samuel 9—20; 1 Kings 1—2," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91:2 (1972):172-81.

²Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, pp. 251-52. See also Robert H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 357.

³Swindoll, p. 169.

David's kindness (Heb. *hesed*, loyal love, vv. 1, 3, 7) to Jonathan's son, expressed concretely by allowing him to eat at David's table (vv. 7, 10-11, 13), shows that David was, at the beginning of his reign, a covenant-keeping king (cf. 1 Sam. 18:3-4; 20:14-17, 42). This was one of David's strengths.¹ His goodness to Mephibosheth was pure grace, entirely unearned by Saul's son. Yet the story is primarily about loyalty.

"David had eaten at Saul's table and it had nearly cost him his life [1 Sam. 18:2, 11], but Mephibosheth would eat at David's table and his life would be protected."²

Eating with someone expressed commitment to protect that person in the ancient Near East. David undoubtedly extended grace to Mephibosheth for two reasons: to fulfill his promise to Jonathan, and to cement relations with the Benjamites. David was very careful to show favor to the Benjamites, and it paid off: A generation later, when the kingdom split into two parts, the Benjamites sided with the Judahites against the other 10 tribes.

It is doubtful that the Ammiel mentioned in verse 4 was Bathsheba's father (cf. 1 Chron. 3:5), though this is possible. Lo-debar (lit. "No Pasture") was about 10 miles northwest of Jabesh-gilead in Transjordan, and 10 miles south of the Sea of Chinnereth (Galilee).

"Ziba, a servant of Saul, betrayed the hiding place of Mephibosheth, and David could have easily killed him."³

Perhaps Ziba was trying to ingratiate himself with David, as the Amalekite soldier had previously tried to do (1:2-16). Later, Ziba appears to have tried to do the same thing again (16:1-3).

David provided for Mephibosheth's needs in Jerusalem, but Ziba and his family cultivated Mephibosheth's land and brought the produce to David. Thus the produce of his land paid the cost of Mephibosheth's maintenance.

The writer may have stressed the fact that Mephibosheth was lame (vv. 3, 13) to remind us of the sad fate of Saul's line, because of his arrogance

¹Leo G. Perdue, "'Is There Anyone Left of the House of Saul ... ?' Ambiguity and the Characterization of David in the Succession Narrative," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 30 (October 1984):67-84, presented an interesting study of the complexity of David's character.

²Wiersbe, p. 329.

³McGee, 2:207.

before God. Mephibosheth physically had trouble standing before God and His anointed.

"Given David's loathing for 'the lame and the blind' since the war against the Jebusites (2 Sam 5:6-8), one is brought up short by his decision to give Jonathan's son Mephibosheth, 'lame in both feet' (9:3, 13), a permanent seat at the royal table. ... Is David willing to undergo such a daily ordeal just in memory of his friendship with Jonathan, as he himself declares, or as the price for keeping an eye on the last of Saul's line? Considering David's genius for aligning the proper with the expedient, he may be acting from both motives."¹

"On the whole it seems very likely that in this instance David's actions benefited not only Mephibosheth but served also the king's own interests."²

The sensitive reader will observe many parallels between Mephibosheth and himself or herself, and between David and God. As Mephibosheth had fallen, was deformed as a result of his fall, was hiding in a place of barrenness, and was fearful of the king, so is the sinner. David took the initiative to seek out Mephibosheth in spite of his unloveliness, bring him into his house and presence, and adopt him as his own son. He also shared his bounty and fellowship with this undeserving one for the rest of his life, because of Jonathan, as God has done with us Christians for the sake of Christ (cf. Ps. 23:6).

"When David looked upon this boy, he did not see a cripple; he saw Jonathan."³

In what sense can the affairs recorded in this chapter be considered part of David's troubles? We have here one of David's major attempts to appease the Benjamites. As the events of the following chapters will show, David had continuing problems with various Benjamites, culminating in the

¹Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading*, p. 255. James S. Ackerman, "Knowing Good and Evil: A Literary Analysis of the Court History in 2 Samuel 9—20 and 1 Kings 1—2," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 109:1 (Spring 1990):43; Perdue, p. 75; John Briggs Curtis, "'East is East ...,'" *Journal of Biblical Literature* 80:4 (1961):357; and David Payne, p. 197, shared the same opinion.

²Anderson, p. 143.

³McGee, 2:208.

rebellion of Sheba (ch. 20). Not all of David's troubles stemmed from his dealings with Bathsheba and Uriah. So David's relations with the Benjamites is a recurring theme in the narrative, which theme proceeds downward.

B. GOD'S FAITHFULNESS DESPITE DAVID'S UNFAITHFULNESS CHS. 10—12

These chapters form a sub-section within the Court History portion of 2 Samuel.¹ The phrase "Now it happened" (10:1) or "Now it was" (13:1) always opens a new section in the narrative.² Descriptions of Israel's victories over the Ammonites (10:1—11:1; 12:26-31) frame the Bathsheba and Uriah story. Similarly, descriptions of David sparing Saul's life (1 Sam. 24 and 26) frame the David and Abigail story (1 Sam. 25). The parallel passage in 1 Chronicles (19:1—20:3) spans 2 Samuel 10—12 while omitting the David and Bathsheba incident. The motif word *salah* ("send") appears 23 times in this section but only 21 times in the rest of the Court History. Its occurrence may signal the development of a power motif here.³

1. The Ammonite rebellion ch. 10 (cf. 1 Chron. 19)

This section prepares for David's adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah (ch. 11) by giving us the historical context in which those sins took place. It also shows David's growing power that led to his sinning.⁴ David's growing power had previously led to his sinning by marrying Abigail (1 Sam. 25:39).

This war with the Ammonites must have taken place early in David's reign, probably after his goodness to Mephibosheth (ch. 9). Again David showed kindness to a son (Hanun) for his father's sake, but this time the recipients of David's kindness were not Israelites.

¹Youngblood, p. 920.

²Wolfgang Roth, "You Are the Man! Structural Interaction in 2 Samuel 10-12." *Semeia* 8 (1977):4; John I. Lawlor, "Theology and Art in the Narrative of the Ammonite War (2 Samuel 10—12)," *Grace Theological Journal* 3:2 (1982):193.

³Lawlor, p. 196; Randall C. Bailey, *David in Love and War: The Pursuit of Power in 2 Samuel 10—12*.

⁴For a structural analysis of chapters 10—12, see Roth, "You Are ...". For a helpful study of the structure and narrative technique of this pericope, see Lawlor.

"It is a comfort to children, when their parents are dead, to find that their parents' friends are theirs, and that they intend to keep up an acquaintance with them."¹

In this instance, David's kindness (Heb. *hesed*, v. 2; cf. 9:1) was neither appreciated nor reciprocated, as is still the case occasionally.

King Nahash of Ammon had just died. This king had threatened Jabesh-gilead at the start of Saul's reign (1 Sam. 11:1-11), so Nahash must have reigned longer than 40 years. However, he must not have reigned much longer than that. If he had done so, he would have had an unusually long reign. Furthermore, when the Ammonites humiliated David's soldiers (v. 4), they showed no fear of Israel. This would have been their reaction only at the beginning of David's reign, not after he had subdued all his enemies. Probably Hanun shaved the beards of David's messengers vertically to make them look very foolish (cf. Isa. 7:20).² Military victors sometimes humiliated their captives by exposing their buttocks (cf. Isa. 20:4). Probably Nahash also removed the tassels from the soldiers' garments that identified them as Jews (cf. Num. 15:37-41; Deut. 22:12). Notice that Hanun's advisors assumed David's worst motives rather than the best, which is a temptation for many people.

"As the hair on Samson's shorn head ultimately grew back (Judg 16:22) and proved to be a bad omen for the Philistines, so also the regrowth of the beards of David's men would portend disaster for the Ammonites."³

The fact that Zobah, Aramea, and other northeastern enemies of Israel would ally with Ammon also suggests that this event took place before David had brought them under his authority (v. 19; cf. 8:3-8). Perhaps 993-990 B.C. are reasonable dates for the Ammonite wars with Israel.⁴

"One may also note that there is at least no explicit consultation of Yahweh, such as described in 2:1 and 5:19, 23."⁵

¹Henry, p. 339.

²Youngblood, p. 922.

³Ibid., p. 923.

⁴Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 244.

⁵Anderson, p. 149.

The first battle took place at Medeba in Transjordan (v. 8; cf. 1 Chron. 19:7). Note Joab's commendable spirituality in verse 12 (cf. Josh. 1:6-7).

"Having done his best to prepare for the battle, Joab took confidence in the sovereignty of God."¹

David first had Joab lead his army against the enemy (v. 7), but later David himself went into battle and led his soldiers (v. 17). Later David would stay behind in Jerusalem and let Joab lead again (11:1). Saul also got into trouble when he stayed behind, rather than leading his people against their enemy (1 Sam. 14). Similarly, Jesus Christ is allowing His followers to engage in spiritual warfare now. However, the time is coming when He will personally return to the scene of opposition and subdue other Gentile enemies who have rejected His grace (cf. Rev. 19:11-16).

Another textual problem exists in verse 18. Probably 1 Chronicles 19:18 is correct in recording 7,000 charioteers.² Probably the writers of Samuel and Chronicles used different terms to describe the same fighting force in verse 6 and 1 Chronicles 19:6-7a, and in verse 18 and 1 Chronicles 19:18.³

2. David's unfaithfulness to God chs. 11—12

These two chapters form a unit, as is clear from their chiastic structure:

- "A David sends Joab to besiege Rabbah (11:1).
- B David sleeps with Bathsheba, who becomes pregnant (11:2-5).
- C David has Uriah killed (11:6-17).
- D Joab sends David a message (11:18-27a).
- E The Lord is displeased with David (11:27b).
- D' The Lord sends David a messenger (12:1-14).
- C' The Lord strikes David's infant son, who dies (12:15-23).

¹ *The Nelson ...*, p. 523.

² See Keil and Delitzsch, p. 380.

³ Zane C. Hodges, "Conflicts in the Biblical Account of the Ammonite-Syrian War," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 119:475 (July-September 1962):238-43.

B' David sleeps with Bathsheba, who becomes pregnant (12:24-25).

A' Joab sends for David to besiege and capture Rabbah (12:26-31)."¹

Even though David had been faithful to Jonathan by keeping his covenant with him (ch. 9), he was not faithful to Jehovah by keeping His covenant with Israel (i.e., the Mosaic Covenant). The writer's main point in this section, I believe, was the following: Disobedience to God's revealed will, in the Law of Moses, resulted in lack of blessing, symbolized by infertility and death. Another view is this:

"The Bathsheba interlude occurs in 2 Samuel 11—12 primarily to indicate the birth and choice of Solomon, but much is learned about God's covenant dealing with His king."²

This chapter records perhaps the third most notorious sin in the Bible, after the Fall and Judas' betrayal of Jesus. It has received much attention from unbelievers in movies and other forms of entertainment. Unbelievers love to gloat over the sins of godly people.

"Yet as Saint Augustine has said, 'David's fall should put upon their guard all who have not fallen, and save from despair all those who have fallen.'"³

David's adultery with Bathsheba 11:1-5

While Joab was continuing to fight the Ammonites the following spring, by besieging Rabbah (lit. "The Great One," which is modern Amman, the capital of Jordan; cf. 10:7; 1 Chron. 20:1), David was residing in Jerusalem (11:1). By mentioning the fact that normally kings led their armies into battle in the spring, the writer implied that David was not acting responsibly by staying in Jerusalem (cf. 1 Sam. 14:1-2).

"... leading his troops into battle was expected to be the major external activity of an ancient Near Eastern ruler ..."⁴

¹Youngblood, p. 927.

²Heater, p. 144.

³Alexander, p. 63.

⁴Youngblood, p. 928. Cf. 1 Sam. 8:5-6, 20.

"In ancient times, Israelite houses had an enclosed courtyard. Bathsheba was actually in her own house."¹

"Our most difficult times are not when things are going hard. Hard times create dependent people. You don't get proud when you're dependent on God. Survival keeps you humble. Pride happens when everything is swinging in your direction. When you've just received that promotion, when you look back and you can see an almost spotless record in the last number of months or years, when you're growing in prestige and fame and significance, that's the time to watch out ... especially if you're unaccountable. ..."²

"Our greatest battles don't usually come when we're working hard; they come when we have some leisure, when we've got time on our hands, when we're bored."³

David's temptation followed an age-old pattern: he saw, he desired, and he took (cf. Gen. 3:6; Josh. 7:21; James 1:14-15). He could not help seeing, but he could have stopped watching, lusting, sending for Bathsheba, and lying with her. He had obviously not done what Job did when Job said: "I have made a covenant with my eyes; How then could I look at a virgin [or, in this case, a naked woman]" (Job 31:1). "Very beautiful" (v. 2) translates a Hebrew phrase that describes people of striking physical appearance (cf. Gen. 24:16; 26:7 [Rebekah]; Esth. 1:11 [Vashti]; Esth. 2:7 [Esther]; 1 Sam. 16:12 [where a related expression describes David]).

Perhaps Bathsheba was not totally innocent, but that does not lessen David's guilt. It seems reasonable to assume that she could have shielded herself from view, if she had wanted to do so.⁴ She was not necessarily completely naked; she could have been washing herself using a bowl.⁵ Nevertheless, the writer never explicitly blamed Bathsheba for what happened; he only blamed David.

"The bathing itself may have been for the purpose of ritual purification and would therefore not only advertise

¹ *The Nelson ...*, p. 524.

² Swindoll, p. 183.

³ *Ibid.* See also Baxter, 2:8.

⁴ See E. M. Blaiklock, *Today's Handbook of Bible Characters*, p. 161; Wiersbe, p. 333.

⁵ Firth, p. 417.

Bathsheba's charms but would serve as a notice to the king that she was available to him."¹

Bathsheba's father, Eliam (v. 3), was apparently the son of Ahithophel, David's counselor (cf. 15:12; 23:34).² However, this is supposition.³ If true, and it seems probable to me, this may throw light on Ahithophel's later decision to abandon David and support Absalom, when Absalom tried to overthrow David. Uriah (lit. "The Lord Is Light") may have been a mercenary from one of the Syro-Hittite states to Israel's north. Alternatively he may have been the son of Hittites who had immigrated to Israel when the Hittite Empire was crumbling.⁴ Probably he was a member of the native Canaanite tribe of Hittites that inhabited the Promised Land before the Conquest (cf. Gen. 23:3-15; Num. 13:29; et al.).

After David had lusted after Bathsheba, he then had her brought to him (v. 4). We could translate the Hebrew word used here "he collected" her. In doing so he abused his royal power. Thus David acted like the king whom Samuel had warned the people about who "takes" (1 Sam. 8:10-18).

Evidently this was a "one night stand"; David and Bathsheba appear to have had sex only on this one occasion before their marriage. In the Hebrew text it is clear that Bathsheba purified herself before having sex with David. The Hebrew clause is disjunctive and could be parenthesized: "Now at that time she had purified herself from her (menstrual) uncleanness." Having just completed her menstrual cycle, and having purified herself from the ritual uncleanness that menstruation caused (cf. Lev. 12:2; 15:19; 18:19), Bathsheba would have been physically ready to conceive. Thus Uriah, who was away at war, could not have been the father of the child that she conceived.

¹Eugene H. Merrill, "2 Samuel," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 467.

²See Hayim Tadmor, "Traditional Institutions and the Monarchy: Social and Political Tensions in the Time of David and Solomon," in *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays*, p. 247.

³Firth, p. 417.

⁴Richard H. Beal, "The Hittites After the Empire's Fall," *Biblical Illustrator* 10:1 (Fall 1983):81.

David was surrounded by many pleasant things, but that was not enough for him. He had not learned to be content with what God had given him (cf. Phil. 4:11). He set his heart on one thing that was forbidden (cf. Adam).

"The only recorded speech of Bathsheba, brief though it is ["I am pregnant," v. 5], sets in motion a course of action which ultimately results in her husband's death."¹

Why did Bathsheba inform David that she was pregnant? Could she not have told her husband alone. Was she hoping that David would acknowledge her child and that the child would then enjoy royal privileges? The writer left us to guess. I think she told David because she hoped he would do something to help her. If she had told Uriah, he could have figured out that the child was not his. Since she had committed adultery, she could have been stoned.

About five years later, David's oldest son, Amnon ("Faithful"), followed in his father's footsteps (13:14). Since David was born in 1041 B.C. and this incident took place about 992 B.C., David was close to 49 years old when he committed adultery.

"The king who is content to be given the kingdom (2 Sam 2—4) nevertheless seizes with violence the woman of his desire. The theme of seizure then erupts in the rape of Tamar, the taking of Amnon's life and (in political form) the major incident of the rebellion of Absalom."²

"This king who took another man's wife already had a harem full of women. The simple fact is that the passion of sex is not satisfied by a full harem of women; it is *increased*. Having many women does not reduce a man's libido, it excites it ... it stimulates it. ... One of the lies of our secular society is that if you just satisfy this drive, then it'll be abated."³

¹Lawlor, p. 197.

²Gunn, "David and ...," p. 35.

³Swindoll, p. 182.

"By this instance [incident] we are taught what need we have to pray every day, *Father, in heaven, lead us not into temptation*, and to watch, that we enter not into it."¹

David's murder of Uriah 11:6-25

David compounded his sin by trying to cover it up rather than confessing it (cf. Gen. 3:8). He tried three cover-ups: a "clean" one (vv. 6-11), a "dirty" one (vv. 12-13), and a "criminal" one (vv. 14-17).² Again, David "sent" for someone who "came to him": Uriah.

David's suggestion that Uriah go home and "wash his feet" (v. 8) may have been an encouragement to enjoy his wife sexually, since "feet" in the Old Testament is sometimes a euphemistic reference to the genitals (cf. Exod. 4:25; Deut. 28:57; Isa. 7:20).³ Whatever David intended, his hypocrisy is clear. Note the present that David sent home with Uriah (v. 8). David was setting up this soldier in order to cover his own sin. However, the king underestimated faithful Uriah's commitment to David, for whom Uriah had been fighting in Ammon. Though Bathsheba's husband was a Hittite, he appears to have been a godly believer in Yahweh as well as a dedicated warrior. He was one of David's best soldiers, one of his "mighty men" (cf. 23:39).

"Uriah's name ["Yahweh Is My light"] turns out to be Yahwist, after all. In the heart of the imperial phalanges we find an orthodox Israelite, quietly observing the wartime soldier's ban against conjugal relations (cf. 1 Sam. 21:4-7)."⁴

Uriah's reference to the ark being in a temporary shelter (v. 11) may refer to its location at Kiriath-jearim. However, some interpreters believe that the reference is to Succoth.⁵ It could be that Joab had brought the ark to the battle scene in Ammon, and that it was in a temporary shelter there.

¹Henry, p. 340.

²Walter Vogels, "David's Greatness in His Sin and Repentance," *The Way* 15:4 (1975):246.

³Gale A. Yee, "'Fraught With Background': Literary Ambiguity in II Samuel 11," *Interpretation* 42:3 (July 1988):245; Uriel Simon, "The Poor Man's Ewe-Lamb," *Biblica* 48 (1967):214.

⁴Joel Rosenberg, *King and Kin: Political Allegory in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 132.

⁵Youngblood, p. 934.

"Astonishingly, this Hittite mentions the covenant symbol before everything else that has influenced his behaviour. He is aware also of his solidarity with the fighting men at the front, over whom he will not steal an advantage. Both of these considerations applied even more forcibly to the king, who had final responsibility for the war, and had laid much stress on covenant loyalty himself, but now a foreigner is showing him to be despicably lax."¹

David's next plan was to get Uriah drunk, hoping that in that condition he would return home and sleep with his wife (v. 13). But again, David underestimated Uriah.

"The despicableness of the king's behaviour contrasts with the noble figure of the wronged Uriah, several times referred to as 'the Hittite' (vv. 3, 6, 17, 24), as if to emphasize that, whereas the king of Israel was so obviously lacking in principle, the same could not be said of this foreigner."²

"... Uriah drunk proved to be a better man than David sober ..."³

David's brazen rebellion against God's will comes out clearly in his third plan to do away with Uriah. He ordered Uriah to carry his own death warrant to Joab (vv. 14-15). Compare wicked Queen Jezebel's similar action in 1 Kings 21:9-11. Joab's reply (vv. 19-21) mimicked David's instructions (v. 15).

"David, God's anointed and a great king, is otherwise poles apart from a petty thug like Abimelech [cf. v. 21; Judg. 9:50-54]. ... [But] that David is likened to Abimelech has—because of the very distance between them—the effect of diminishing his image. The more so since Abimelech fell at a woman's hands while at the head of his army [cf. Judg. 9:50-55]: David falls at a woman's hands precisely because he plays truant from war."⁴

¹Baldwin, p. 233.

²Gordon, pp. 253-54.

³Wiersbe, p. 335.

⁴Sternberg, pp. 221-22.

About seven years later, David's son, Absalom, ordered his followers to strike down his brother, Amnon, for raping Absalom's sister, Tamar (13:28).

"It was ironic that David, the protector of justice, would so pervert justice in the Uriah-Bathsheba incident."¹

"David's adultery with Bathsheba was a sin of passion, a sin of the moment that overtook him, but his sin of having Uriah killed was a premeditated crime that was deliberate and disgraceful."²

Some other innocent soldiers beside Uriah died because of David's orders concerning the battle strategy (v. 24). David was really responsible for their deaths, too. Someone wisely warned: "Never give the devil a ride. He'll always want to drive."

"... Joab did not follow David's orders exactly. David had told Joab to have Uriah killed by withdrawing soldiers from around him, leaving him to face the enemy alone [v. 15]. Perhaps Joab thought that this would be an obvious betrayal and would be difficult to explain to the other officers in the army. Instead, he devised a plan to have the soldiers fight near the wall. This maneuver endangered more soldiers and resulted in greater loss of life."³

This is probably why Joab prepared his messenger for David's strong reaction, to the news of Uriah's death, as he did (vv. 19-21).

David's response to his sins 11:26—12:15a

At first, David piously tried to salve Joab's conscience, as well as his own conscience, for Joab's complicity in Uriah's death (11:25). David was calling what was sin something other than sin: merely a natural consequence of war (cf. 1 John 1:9). What David had done was not only evil in Joab's eyes, but, of infinitely greater importance, it was evil in God's eyes. David further hardened his heart and covered up his sin by marrying Bathsheba (11:27).

¹Heater, p. 120.

²Wiersbe, p. 336.

³*The Nelson ...*, p. 525.

He should not have married her, but he should have provided for her maintenance, as he had provided for Mephibosheth's maintenance.

"The Hebrew phrase translated 'had her brought [NIV]' (v. 27) is literally 'sent and collected her' and emphasizes the abuse of royal power that David is increasingly willing to exercise..."¹

The same phrase appears in 1 Sam. 14:52 where it describes Saul's method of recruiting soldiers.

"How could a man—a man after God's own heart—fall to such a level? If you are honest about your own heart, it's not hard to understand."²

Here are some suggestions for guarding oneself against similar sexual sin: First, realize that there is nothing that will guarantee you immunity from sinning in this way. We face the choice to yield to sexual temptation over and over again, and overcoming it once, or many times, is no guarantee that we will always overcome it (cf. 1 Cor. 10:12).

Second, cultivate your daily commitment to the Lord. We cannot afford to live one day out of fellowship with Him. We can strengthen our hearts against temptation that may assail us during the day by recommitting ourselves to pleasing Him and obeying Him daily in prayer, before we encounter the temptations of that day (cf. Luke 22:46; Rom. 6:12-13).

Third, cultivate intimacy with your spouse, if you are married. Covetousness is less of a problem, though it will always be a problem, if you are content with the person whom God has given you. Contentment is something that we learn (cf. Phil. 4:11).

Fourth, cultivate accountability with your mate, if you are married. Voluntarily tell your spouse where you have been, what you have been doing, and who you have been with. Do not wait for your mate to ask you these questions, but volunteer this information. If you do this regularly and know that you are going to have to do it, because you have made a commitment to yourself to do it, it will affect what you do.

¹Youngblood, p. 938.

²Swindoll, p. 194.

Fifth, anticipate temptation and avoid it. If you know that a particular individual attracts you strongly, do not spend too much time with him or her. Furthermore, refrain from saying anything to such a person that you would not say if your spouse, or that person's spouse, were standing there with you.

Some time passed between the events of chapter 11 and those of chapter 12. God graciously gave David time to confess his sin, but when he did not, the Lord sent Nathan to confront him (cf. 1 Cor. 11:31). These must have been days of inner turmoil for David, because he had a guilty conscience (cf. Ps. 32:3-4).

"Though God may suffer his people to fall into sin, he will not suffer them to lie still in it."¹

"David wasn't relaxing and taking life easy, sipping lemonade on his patio, during the aftermath of his adultery. Count on it ... he had sleepless nights. He could see his sin written across the ceiling of his room as he tossed and turned in bed. He saw it written across the walls. He saw it on the plate where he tried to choke down his meals. He saw it on the faces of his counselors. He was a miserable husband, an irritable father, a poor leader, and a songless composer. He lived a lie but he couldn't escape the truth.

"He had no joy. ('Restore to me the joy of Thy salvation' Ps. 51:12.) He was unstable. He felt inferior and insecure. ('Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me' Ps. 51:10.) Sin does that to you. It's part of the wages that sin inevitably demands. A carnal Christian will dance all around and try to tell you, 'Everything's fine. Don't press me. I'm really free ... really having fun ... I'm doing well. You just haven't any idea.' But down inside it's there. Everything is empty, hollow, joyless, pointless. A true Christian cannot deny that. True guilt is there. Oppressively there. Constantly there."²

¹Henry, p. 341.

²Swindoll, p. 199.

Finally, the Lord sent His prophet to confront the king. This required considerable courage on Nathan's part, since David could have hardened his heart and had the prophet executed, as he had executed Uriah. Interestingly, David named one of his sons "Nathan" (1 Chron. 3:5). Was this in honor of the prophet who so boldly and effectively confronted the king? Perhaps.

"In confronting someone in his sin, the timing is as important as the wording. Simply to tighten your belt, grab your Bible and, at your convenience, confront a person who is in sin is unwise. Most importantly, you need to be sure that you're sent by God. Nathan was."¹

Nathan's parable (cf. 14:1-20; 1 Kings 20:35—42; Isa. 5:1-7; Jer. 3:1-5) appealed to David's compassion as a shepherd, and it drew an emotional response from the king (12:5).² Just like the man in the parable, David deserved to die, but David deserved to die because he had committed adultery (Lev. 20:10) and murder (Lev. 24:17). Hypocritically, David ordered the man in Nathan's story to make restitution, appealing to the Mosaic Law (Exod. 22:1), which he himself had disregarded. The man in the parable was not under a death sentence according to the Mosaic Law.³ David was reacting emotionally. He seems to have been trying to get rid of his own guilty conscience by condemning someone else while subconsciously passing judgment on himself.⁴

It is interesting that four of David's sons died, perhaps as a divine fulfillment of the fourfold restitution that David ordered. They were: David's first child by Bathsheba (v. 18), Amnon (13:28-29), Absalom (18:14-15), and Adonijah (1 Kings 2:23-25).⁵

"You yourself are the man!" (12:7) is certainly one of the most dramatic sentences in the Bible. Since several months had passed since David had committed his gross sins, they were probably not in the forefront of his

¹Ibid., p. 200.

²See Simon, pp. 207-42; and Peter W. Coxon, "A Note on 'Bathsheba' in 2 Samuel 12, 1-6," *Biblica* 62:2 (1981):247-50.

³See Anthony Phillips, "The Interpretation of 2 Samuel xii 5-6," *Vetus Testamentum* 16 (1966):242-44.

⁴Baldwin, p. 236. See J. P. Fokkerman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, vol. 1: *King David*, p. 77.

⁵Jones, p. 103.

thinking when Nathan entered his presence and told his story (cf. Prov. 25:15; 28:23). We see a prophet exercising authority over a king here. This was always the case in Israel's monarchy, as we shall see repeatedly in the Books of Kings.¹ David had abused the great blessings that God had given him. David thought that he was the judge, in the case of the men in Nathan's parable, but Nathan reminded David that Yahweh was the real Judge (of his actions)

Notice that the LORD said that He had done five great things for David (12:7-8), but David had done four sinful things in spite of God's goodness (12:9). (Nathan repeated one of the things that David had done, for emphasis: he had killed Uriah.) David had despised God by disobeying His Word, as though he were superior to it. David had seen what had happened to Saul for rejecting God's word.

The Hebrew word translated "wives" in verse 8 can also mean "women." Evidently all the female servants and courtesans of Saul's household had become David's when he became king.

"Marriage is a remedy against fornication, but marrying many is not; for, when once the law of unity is transgressed, the indulged lust will hardly stint itself."²

David's punishment would be twofold (cf. Gal. 6:7): his own fertility (children) would be the source of his discipline, and God would remove the sources of his fertility (children) from him (12:11). The executions of these sentences follow in the text (13:11-14, 38-39; 16:22; 18:15).

Verses 9 and 10 of the twelfth chapter have been called "the literary, historical, and theological crux and center of 2 Samuel as a whole."³ Compare David's earlier curse of Joab's house in 3:29. David had broken the sixth, seventh, and tenth commandments (Exod. 20:1-17; Deut. 5:6-21).

"As David 'took' Uriah's wife (vv. 9-10), so the Lord will 'take' David's wives (v. 11). As the Lord 'gave' Saul's property and Israel's kingdom to David (v. 8), so he says that he will now

¹See William Sanford LaSor, "The Prophets during the Monarchy: Turning Points in Israel's Decline," in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration*, pp. 59-70.

²Henry, p. 341.

³Youngblood, p. 944.

'give' David's wives to someone else, to 'one who is close to you' (v. 11)—ironically, an expression earlier used of David himself in similar circumstances (see 1 Sam 15:28; 28:17 ...)."¹

"Just as David willfully takes Bathsheba for himself (II Sam. 11:2-4), so Amnon forces Tamar (II Sam. 13:8-14), Absalom enters the royal harem (II Sam. 16:22), and Adonijah tries to claim his deceased father's concubine (I Kings 2:13-17)."²

"We need to remember that, like many sins, David's were carried out *secretly*—at least for a while [12:12]. One of the things that accompanies the promotion of individuals to higher positions of authority is an increase in privacy. This closed-door policy maintained by those in high office brings great temptation for things to be done in secret. Unaccountability is common among those in command. So it was with David."³

Psalm 32:3-4 probably records David's misery during the time between his sinning and his confessing. This psalm, and especially Psalm 51, gives further insight into David's feelings when he confessed his sins. God spared David's life by pure grace; normally David would have died for his sins (Lev. 20:10; 24:17). His pardon came as a special revelation from God through Nathan (12:13). David's confession was genuine. He called his sin what it was rather than trying to cover it up or explain it away, which was Saul's typical response. Moreover he acknowledged that his sin was primarily against Yahweh, not just against Bathsheba and Uriah (cf. Prov. 10:17).

"Repentance has its reward (*cf.* 1 Sa. 7:3)."⁴

"This was the turning-point in the life of David, and the clearest indication that he was different from Saul in the most essential relationship of all, that of submission to the Lord God. For that

¹Ibid., p. 945.

²P. Kyle McCarter Jr., "'Plots, True or False': The Succession Narrative as Court Apologetic," *Interpretation* 35:4 (October 1981):359.

³Swindoll, p. 196.

⁴Gordon, p. 258.

reason he found forgiveness, whereas Saul never accepted his guilt or the rejection that followed from it."¹

Notice that God's forgiveness followed immediately after David's confession—in the same verse (v. 13)! "Where sin increased, grace abounded more and more" (Rom. 5:20)!

"We might think it unfair, especially from the perspective of Uriah's family or the soldiers killed at Rabbah, that forgiveness is given so easily. Yet forgiveness is always unfair: that is what makes it grace."²

Whereas the LORD removed the guilt of David's sin (forgiveness), He did not remove the consequences of it (discipline). Someone observed that, after you hammer a nail in a board, you may remove the nail, but the hole remains.

"Just as judges today sometimes commute a sentence, so too God has the right and the power to modify or even cancel his own decisions in the light of the human response. In this case David's immediate signs of remorse allowed immediate forgiveness; but the deed itself could not be undone, and some consequences were inevitable."³

"David's voyeurism in 2 Sam 11:2 and Nathan's curse in 12:11 foreshadow Absalom's rooftop orgy (16:20-22)."⁴

This is how God deals with sin normally. He removes the guilt that would result in damnation, but He usually allows at least some of the consequences to follow, and He uses these for discipline and instruction. God's punishment fit David's crimes (cf. Gal. 6:7). In David's case the infant he fathered died.⁵

¹Baldwin, p. 239.

²Firth, p. 431.

³Payne, p. 209.

⁴Jon D. Levenson and Baruch Halpern, "The Political Import of David's Marriages," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99:4 (1980):514.

⁵See Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Rizpah's Torment: When God Punishes the Children for the Sin of the Father," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 175:697 (January-March 2018):50-66.

"God could not ignore David's sin and thus let unbelievers impugn the holiness of His character."¹

"How painful are the consequences of forgiven sin!"²

"Let us, like Job, 'make a covenant with our eyes' not to look on that which is seductive, lest, weaker than we suppose ourselves to be, we should give way to sin, and thereby heap sharp thorns into our bosom."³

David impugned Yahweh's holiness by practicing sins that his neighbor nations' pagan gods permitted. The pagans around Israel, who heard about David's sins, would have said: David did just what our kings do, and his God did not punish him any more than our gods punish our sinful kings. Thus David reduced Yahweh's reputation for holiness (uniqueness, including moral purity) in the eyes of the LORD's "enemies." This constituted blasphemy of Yahweh (cf. Matt. 6:9c; Luke 11:2b).

The death of one child and the birth of another 12:15b-25

Why did God take the life of this child, since its parents were the sinners?

"That the child should be punished for what David did seems wrong. We need to remind ourselves, however, that even today innocent children suffer from the things their parents do. The more pointed question deals with whether God should be credited with the cause of the suffering. I once sat at the funeral of a child who had been accidentally killed by a drunk man riding through the community on a motorcycle. In the funeral message the minister tried to convince those of us present that God had a purpose in the child's death as though it were something God had planned. I was revolted by what he said because he took an evil event and made God the cause. In understanding Nathan's interpretation of the child's illness we need to separate the physical cause and the religious interpretation or application. Whatever the child's illness, both

¹Laney, p. 109.

²Wiersbe, p. 366.

³Baxter, 2:67.

Nathan and David saw it as connected with David's sin and raised no questions about it as we do."¹

"When David slept with the woman and created new life, the woman did not belong to him but to Uriah. The child cannot belong to David. He cannot enrich himself through his sin, and in a sense, justice is done to Uriah."²

David prayed for the child's recovery, lying on the ground, like Uriah had previously slept on the ground (11:9, 11). However when God took the infant's life, David knew that the time for praying was over. The child died seven days after the LORD struck him or her (v. 18). So David would probably have seen the child's death as an act of God, rather than as a normal death, since the Jews associated seven days with divine acts, such as the Creation.

Praying for the dead finds no support in this passage or anywhere else in Scripture. Evidently the child died nameless, since the Israelites normally named their babies on the eighth day after their birth, when they also circumcised their boy babies.³ David's servants apparently believed that he would become hysterical with grief when he learned the child had died (v. 19).

David's worship (v. 20) consisted of his accepting God's judgment, submitting to God's will, and not becoming bitter or retaliatory over God's treatment. The fact that he ate food (v. 21) shows that he went on with his life; he did not show displeasure with the LORD by morbidly dwelling on the child's death (cf. Phil. 3:13).

Some expositors believed that David meant that he would see his child in the future life.⁴ But the king was probably referring to the grave, rather than to heaven, when he said, "I am going to him ..." (v. 23; cf. 1 Kings 2:2).⁵ In the context, the issue was the inevitability of death, not what happens after death. The child could not come back to life, but David would someday join him in death. Scripture is silent on the eternal state of dead

¹Kenneth L. Chafin, *1, 2 Samuel*, p. 309. See also Archer, pp. 152-53.

²Vogels, p. 251.

³*The Nelson ...*, p. 527.

⁴E.g., McGee, 2:216; Wiersbe, p. 339.

⁵Firth, p. 429; Chisholm, *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 238..

infants, but we can find great comfort in knowing that the Judge of all the earth will do right (Gen. 18:25).¹

The birth of David and Bathsheba's second son, Solomon (whose name comes from the Hebrew word *shalom*, peace, and means "Peaceable" or "Peaceful"), was a blessing from the LORD. It demonstrates that God's grace is greater than all our sins.² Solomon had another name, Jedidiah (lit. "Beloved of Yahweh"; cf. David, whose name means "Beloved"). The former was perhaps a throne name that David gave him to anticipate his reigning as king.³ It may also indicate that David felt that God was now at peace with him.⁴

Solomon was born about 991 B.C. The fact that God allowed him to live—and even made him David's successor on the throne—is testimony to God's great grace to David (cf. Rom. 5:20). The statement, "Now the LORD loved him," (v. 24) is the Hebrew way of saying that the LORD chose him (cf. Mal. 1:2-3).⁵ God had previously revealed to David that He would give him a son, and that he should name him "Solomon," and that this son would succeed David on his throne (1 Chron. 22:6-10; cf. 1 Chron. 28:5, 9; 29:1).

God's faithfulness to David 12:26-31 (cf. 1 Chron. 20:1-3)

In spite of David's rebellion, God granted his army victory over the Ammonites. Josephus wrote that Joab cut off the waters of the Ammonites and deprived them of other means of subsistence.⁶ Josephus called the precious stone in the crown of the Ammonite king's crown a sardonyx (onyx).⁷ The crown itself must have been purely ornamental and ceremonial, since it weighed about 75 pounds. The imperial crown of the kings and queens of England weighs only about three pounds, and those

¹For the view that infants who die go to heaven, see Roy B. Zuck, *Precious in His Sight*; Earl C. Radmacher, *Salvation*, pp. 229-36; Charles Hodge, *Systematic Theology*, 1:26-27; A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology*, pp. 660-64; W. H. Griffith Thomas, *The Principles of Theology*, p. 506. For the view that they do not, see Charles C. Ryrie, *The Holy Spirit*, p. 66.

²Merrill, "2 Samuel," in *The Old ...*, p. 236.

³Shemaryahu Talmon, *King, Cult, and Calendar in Ancient Israel: Collected Studies*, p. 152.

⁴*The NET2 Bible* note on verse 24. This is a reference to *The NET2 (New English Translation) Bible*, 2019 ed.

⁵Heater, p. 145. Cf. Mal. 1:2-3.

⁶Josephus, 7:7:5.

⁷*Ibid.* See Siegfried H. Horn, "The Crown of the King of the Ammonites," *Andrews University Seminary Bulletin* 11:2 (1973):170-80.

monarchs have found it difficult to wear it for any length of time.¹ David's military leaders evidently executed the defeated warriors (1 Chron. 20:3) and forced many of the people to do labor of various kinds to support Israel (v. 31).²

You may have been surprised that occasionally, when you have sinned deliberately, God has blessed you shortly thereafter in some special way. This in no way indicates His approval of that sin, but it shows His grace in spite of our sin. It is these outpourings of His goodness that should make us love Him all the more and strengthen our resolve to stop displeasing Him by rebelling against Him (cf. the Prodigal Son, Luke 15).

Chapters 10—12 contain very important revelation that helps us understand the complexity of God's righteous ways. We often think too superficially about the way God deals with sin in His people's lives. We either tend to take sin too lightly, or we overestimate its devastating consequences and do not appreciate God's grace enough. We see in these chapters that David's great sins did not completely wash out his past record of godly behavior. God continued to bless him, in part because God had chosen him as His anointed, but also because David genuinely had a heart for God and usually sought to please God. His sins had terrible consequences, as we shall see, but God did not cast David off (cf. 2 Tim. 2:13).

"As Augustine said, David's fall should put upon their guard all who have *not* fallen, and save from despair all those who *have* fallen."³

The most important factor seems to be David's basic heart attitude toward God. In this he was very different from Saul, and it is for this reason, I believe, that David did not end as Saul did. When David sinned, he confessed his sin. When Saul sinned, he made excuses (cf. Prov. 28:13).

¹Wiersbe, p. 339.

²See G. C. O'Ceallaigh, "'And So David Did to *All the Cities* of Ammon,'" *Vetus Testamentum* 12 (1962):179-89.

³Baxter, 2:79-80.

C. DAVID'S REJECTION AND RETURN CHS. 13—20

This is the longest literary section in the Court History of David (chs. 9—20). It records Absalom's antagonism to David that resulted in the king having to flee Jerusalem, but it ends with David's defeat of his enemy and his return to reign. There are obvious parallels with the experience of Jesus Christ.

"If the integrity of chapters 13—20 as a literary unit of the highest order is beyond question (cf. Conroy, p. 1), it is equally clear that the section contains two readily distinguishable subsections: chapters 13—14, which may be characterized as exhibiting for the most part a 'desire/fulfillment of desire' pattern, and chapters 15—20, which prefer a 'departure/return' pattern ..."¹

1. Events leading up to Absalom's rebellion chs. 13—14

David's disobedience to the Mosaic Covenant resulted in a cutting back of his personal blessing and of his effectiveness as an instrument of blessing to Israel. These chapters record this restriction of blessing, even though blessing characterized the total course of David's life more than judgment.

These chapters record "family tragedies."² Bathsheba's first-born child by David died, and three others of David's sons did as well, because of his sin.

"Sin is infinitely prolific. Once planted, like some weed, it produces more sin, more unhappiness. Men and women are vastly more important than they imagine. For good or ill, they influence all those with whom they come into contact, and project their sin into other generations—as they also project good."³

¹Youngblood, 954. His reference to "Conroy" is to Charles Conroy, *Absalom Absalom! Narrative and Language in 2 Sam 13—20*.

²Mats Eskhult, *Studies in Verbal Aspect and Narrative Technique in Biblical Hebrew Prose*, pp. 58-59.

³Blaiklock, p. 164.

"The greater the man, the dearer price he pays for a short season of sinful pleasure."¹

Chapter 13 records the death of David's first-born son through Ahinoam. This chapter is chiasitic in design, focusing on Amnon's rape of Tamar and his change of heart from love (lust) to hate.² Many of the literary units in 1 and 2 Samuel were constructed chiasitically. The chiasms from this point on in 2 Samuel are easier to identify than some of the earlier ones.³

Amnon's rape of Tamar 13:1-22

Maacah, the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur, was the mother of Absalom ("Father Is Peace"). She gave birth to him while David was reigning in Hebron (3:3). He was David's third-born. Amnon ("Faithful"), his first-born, was also born in Hebron, but by Ahinoam ("My Brother Is Delight"), David's wife from Jezreel (3:2). Both sons may have been in their late teens or early twenties at this time. Tamar ("Palm Tree," cf. Song of Sol. 7:7-8) was the full sister of Absalom, and was evidently born in Jerusalem (1 Chron. 3:4-9), so she would have been younger than both of these brothers. The event described in this chapter probably occurred about 987 B.C.⁴

The story that unfolds is a tale of frustrated lust. Evidently Amnon had no desire to marry Tamar, which he might have been able to do with David's consent (v. 13; cf. Gen. 20:12). Yet the Mosaic Law forbade men from marrying their father's daughters (Lev. 18:11). David was the father of both Amnon and Tamar. The grisly episode is very contemporary and requires little clarification.

"We have seen the pattern before. David has several wives and concubines to satisfy his physical desires (5:13; 12:8), but he greedily grabs a woman who is off-limits to him. Amnon will repeat his father's sin."⁵

¹F. B. Meyer, quoted in Charles R. Swindoll, *The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart*, p. 523.

²George P. Ridout, *Prose Compositional Techniques in the Succession Narrative [2 Samuel 7, 9–20; 1 Kings 1–2]*, pp. 50-56.

³See Youngblood, who usually offered a chiasitic diagram at the beginning of his discussion of each section.

⁴Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 245.

⁵Chisholm, *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 244.

"The dialogue in the story of Amnon and Tamar ... looks like a conscious allusion to the technique used in the episode of Joseph and Potiphar's wife. Amnon addresses to his half-sister exactly the same words with which Potiphar's wife accosts Joseph—"Come to bed with me!" (Gen. 39:7)]—adding to them only one word, the thematically loaded 'sister' (2 Sam. 13:11). She responds with an elaborate protestation, like Joseph before her."¹

Jonadab, Amnon's "friend" (v. 3), who was a cousin of both Amnon and Tamar, may have been trying to secure his own political future with Absalom (vv. 3-5, 32-35).²

"The word 'friend' is desecrated by its use in such a connection. Any who out of friendship will aid in the pathway of sin, prove themselves enemies rather than friends."³

Tamar described what Amnon was about to do as a "disgraceful" sin (v. 12; cf. Judg. 19:23; 20:6, where the same Hebrew word occurs).⁴

David had violated God's will by sleeping (Heb. *skb 'm*) with Bathsheba, evidently with her consent. Amnon, however, violated God's will by laying with (Heb. *skb 't*) Tamar, forcing her against her will (v. 14; cf. 11:4).⁵ Evidently Tamar was stalling for time when she suggested that Amnon ask David for permission to marry her, since the Mosaic Law did not permit this kind of marriage (Lev. 18:9-11; 20:17; Deut. 27:22). Alternatively, this law may not have been enforced, or not enforced in the royal family.

Quite clearly Amnon's attraction to Tamar was only selfish infatuation. When he had raped Tamar, he hated her and wanted no more contact with her (v. 15). Contrast Amnon's attitude toward Tamar, after the rape, with that of pagan Shechem toward Dinah in a similar incident (Gen. 34:2-3): Amnon hated Tamar, but Shechem loved Dinah. Likewise, David continued

¹Alter, p. 73.

²Andrew E. Hill, "A Jonadab Connection in the Absalom Conspiracy?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30:4 (December 1987):387-90.

³Morgan, *An Exposition ...*, p. 132.

⁴Anthony Phillips, "NEBALAH—a term for serious disorderly and unruly conduct," *Vetus Testamentum* 25:2 (April 1975):237. See Chisholm, *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 245, for parallels with the rape of the Levite's concubine in Judges 19—20.

⁵David M. Gunn, *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation*, p. 100.

to love Bathsheba after their affair. Perhaps some of the hatred that Amnon felt was self-hatred.¹

Josephus described Tamar's "long-sleeved garment" (vv. 18-19) as "tied at the hands, and let down to the ankles, that the inner coats might not be seen."²

Absalom consoled Tamar with a view to taking vengeance for her, and gaining his own advantage. He probably saw in this incident an opportunity to bring Amnon down and advance himself as a candidate for the throne. The writer did not mention Chileab, David's second-born son (3:3), in the Court History. Perhaps he had already died.

Tamar remained "desolate" (v. 20), a term in Hebrew that means unmarried and childless, which was a living death for a Jewish woman (cf. 20:3).³ Tamar may have taken refuge in her brother Absalom's house "because in a polygamous society, it was the responsibility of a full brother to protect the honor of a full sister [cf. Gen. 29:32-35; 30:17-21]."⁴

David may have taken no action against Amnon because he realized that people would regard him as a hypocrite for punishing Amnon, since he himself had been guilty of a similar crime. Nevertheless, Amnon deserved to die (Lev. 20:17).

"The results of David's sin with Bathsheba became evident in his relations with his sons, for how can a father discipline his children when he knows that he has done worse than they? When David's son Amnon rapes Tamar ... David is very angry (II Sam. 13:21), and yet David takes no action, for he, too, has committed his own sexual offense. The upshot is that Tamar's brother, Absalom, murders Amnon (II Sam. 13:29), but David again does nothing, for he, too, has a murder on his head."⁵

¹ *The Nelson ...*, p. 528.

² Josephus, 7:8:1.

³ Conroy, p. 35, n. 70.

⁴ Wiersbe, p. 342.

⁵ Paul J. and Elizabeth Achtemeier, *The Old Testament Roots of Our Faith*, p. 94.

"David is as clearly unable to control his sons' passions as he is his own."¹

"If David had exerted himself as the situation required, he might have prevented that initial estrangement between himself and Absalom which was finally to plunge the nation into civil strife."²

"The chickens are beginning to come home to roost."³

Absalom's murder of Amnon 13:23-39

References to "two full years" (v. 23) and "three years" (v. 38) bracket this literary unit.

Amnon's murder 13:23-29

Absalom patiently and carefully plotted revenge against Amnon.

"... As the sheep of Absalom would lose their wool (vv. 23-24), so David's firstborn, the potential shepherd of Israel, would lose his life (vv. 28-29)."⁴

Absalom finally murdered his brother—though his servants actually did the deed—at Baal-hazor, 15 miles north-northeast of Jerusalem, two years after Amnon had raped Tamar (ca. 985 B.C.).

"As Tamar was trapped in the plan Amnon had set with Jonadab, so he is being caught in Absalom's trap."⁵

"Ephraim" here (v. 23) probably refers to the town (sometimes called Ephron or Ephrain) about two miles south of Baal-hazor; it is not the tribal territory of Ephraim (cf. 2 Chron. 13:19; John 11:54).

¹Youngblood, p. 966. Cf. Jared J. Jackson, "David's Throne: Patterns in the Succession Story," *Canadian Journal of Theology* 11:3 (July 1965):189.

²Gordon, p. 264.

³McGee, 2:218. Cf. Fokkelman, p. 125.

⁴Youngblood, p. 968.

⁵Firth, p. 439.

"'In taking revenge,' wrote Francis Bacon [in "Of Revenge" in *The Essays of Francis Bacon*], 'a man is but even with his enemy, but in passing it over, he is superior.'"¹

The aftermath of Amnon's murder 13:30-39

The writer may have devoted so much text to straightening out the rumor—that Absalom had killed all the king's sons—in order to stress God's mercy in not cutting off all of them. At first report, David probably thought God had judged him severely, but it became clear that God had been merciful: only Amnon had died.

Jonadab may have been a member of David's cabinet (v. 3). As David's nephew, he was a member of the royal family (v. 32). He and Absalom may have hatched the conspiracy against Amnon to remove the heir apparent to the throne.² Jonadab knew precisely what had happened.

Absalom fled to his maternal grandfather (3:3), who lived in the kingdom of Geshur, which lay northeast of the Sea of Chinnereth (Galilee). In this he followed the example of his ancestor Jacob, who fled to Aramean kinsmen in the Northeast (Gen. 28:10). There Absalom stayed for three years (until ca. 982 B.C.). This flight sets the scene for the next crisis in David's family.

So far at least six consequences of David's sins against Bathsheba and Uriah have surfaced (cf. 12:10-11): First, the child that Bathsheba bore died. Second, Amnon raped Tamar. Third, Absalom broke off communication with his brother, Amnon. Fourth, Absalom murdered Amnon. Fifth, Absalom left his native country and his family. Sixth, David had become an even more passive father. This family had become dysfunctional. It is remarkable how often children repeat the sins of their parents (cf. Gen. 12:13; 26:7). Nevertheless, God can break that example-imitation chain.

"Grace means that God, in forgiving you, does not kill you. Grace means that God, in forgiving you, gives you the strength to endure the consequences. Grace frees us so that we can obey our Lord. It does not mean sin's consequences are automatically removed. If I sin and in the process of sinning

¹Wiersbe, p. 344.

²Hill, p. 390.

break my arm, when I find forgiveness from sin, I still have to deal with a broken arm."¹

"When David sowed to the flesh, he reaped what the flesh produced. Moreover, he reaped the consequences of his actions even though he had confessed his sin and been forgiven for it. Underline it, star it, mark it deeply upon your conscious mind: *Confession and forgiveness in no way stop the harvest*. He had sown; he was to reap. Forgiven he was, but the consequences continued. This is exactly the emphasis Paul is giving the Galatians even in this age of grace [Gal. 6:7]. We are not to be deceived, for God will not be mocked. What we sow we will reap, and there are *no exceptions*."²

More Christians have probably memorized 1 John 1:9 than Romans 6:12-13. First John 1:9 deals with how to handle sin *after* we have committed it; it is corrective theology. Romans 6:12-13 deals with how to handle sin *before* we commit it; it is preventive theology. We need to pay more attention to Romans 6:12-13. One of the purposes of 2 Samuel 13 is to help the reader prevent this type of sin, rather than to help us recover from it, having fallen. It is a strong warning against letting our passions lead us, because of the consequences that will inevitably follow.

Joab's scheme to secure Absalom's pardon 14:1-20

Evidently Joab (David's commander-in-chief and nephew by his half-sister, Zeruah; 1 Chron. 2:16) concluded that it would be politically better for David and Israel if David brought Absalom back to Jerusalem from Geshur (cf. vv. 7, 13-15). Absalom was, of course, now David's heir to the throne by custom, though Yahweh had designated Solomon to succeed his father (1 Chron. 22:6-10). David had a great love for Absalom, even though he was a murderer—probably in part because David was also a murderer (v. 1; cf. 13:37, 39). David had a large capacity to love; he loved God and many other people greatly. Often people who love greatly find it difficult to confront wrongdoing and exercise discipline when it is needed.

The story that Joab gave the "actress" from Tekoa (10 miles south of Jerusalem) to tell David duplicated David's own problem with Absalom (cf.

¹Swindoll, *David ...*, p. 211.

²John W. Lawrence, *Life's Choices*, p. 39.

the story that God had given Nathan to tell David, 12:1-4). By putting the murderer to death, in the woman's story, the woman's hostile relatives would have deprived her of her means of support (v. 7; cf. the story of Cain and Abel, Gen. 4:1-8). By putting Absalom to death, David would have deprived himself of his heir, which Joab evidently perceived Absalom to be. Since David promised not to execute the woman's son (v. 11), it would have been inconsistent for him to refrain from pardoning Absalom (v. 13). The wise woman urged David to remember the LORD his God, specifically, His mercy (v. 11).

"David's reference to the 'hair' of the woman's 'son' [v. 11] is both ironic and poignant: The hair of his own son Absalom was not only an index of his handsome appearance (cf. vv. 25-26) but would also contribute to his undoing (cf. 18:9-15)."¹

The woman's references to "the people of God" (i.e., Israel, v. 13; cf. vv. 14-15, 17) point to popular support for Absalom and a common desire that David would pardon him and allow him to return to Jerusalem.

David had personally experienced God's mercy and had escaped death for his adultery and murder (12:13). The woman appealed to David to deal with Absalom as God had dealt with him—or the nation would suffer (v. 14). Verse 14 is a key verse in this chapter. The wise Tekoan "actress" reminded David that God does not take away life, that is, He does not delight in punishing people. Rather He plans ways by which guilty people can enjoy reconciliation with Himself. The Cross of Christ is the greatest historical proof of this truth. Judgment is God's "unusual" work (Isa. 28:21); mercy is what He delights to demonstrate. Thus, David should be godly and make a way to show mercy to Absalom, rather than punishing him with death. Such was Joab's reasoning, as this woman expressed it.

David knew that Joab wanted him to pardon Absalom. He sensed that the woman's arguments had come from him (vv. 18-19). Joab had written the script for the skit that she had performed (vv. 19-20).

"Ironically, Joab's demise begins at precisely the point where another woman (Bathsheba) is sent to the king by a thoroughly self-interested [?] statesman (Nathan) in order to

¹Youngblood, pp. 978-79.

foil the succession of the next in line after Absalom (Adonijah) and so to secure the crown for Solomon (1 Ki 1.11-31)."¹

There are also parallels between this incident and Abigail's appeal to David in 1 Samuel 25:24.²

Absalom's return to Jerusalem 14:21-33

Joab's masquerade proved effective: David agreed to allow Absalom to return to Jerusalem (v. 21). However, even though he did not execute him, neither did David restore Absalom to fellowship with himself (v. 24). His forgiveness was official but not personal. This led to more trouble. Thankfully, God both forgives sinners and restores them to fellowship with Himself.

Verses 25-27 give information about Absalom that helps us understand why he was able to win the hearts of the people: He was not only handsome but also a family man.³

"A strong growth of hair was a sign of great manly power ..."⁴

"What Absalom proudly considers his finest attribute will prove to be the vehicle of his ultimate downfall (cf. 18:9-15)."⁵

How often this proves to be true. Two hundred shekels (v. 26) equal five pounds in weight. Absalom was attractive physically, but not correspondingly attractive to God spiritually, because he put his own ambitions before God's plans. In these respects he was similar to Saul.

Verse 27 says that Absalom had three sons, but 18:18 says that he had no son to continue his name. Perhaps his three sons had died in infancy.⁶

After returning from Geshur, Absalom lived in Jerusalem for two years, about 982-980 B.C. (v. 28; cf. 13:38). During these years, he resented

¹George G. Nicol, "The Wisdom of Joab and the Wise Woman of Tekoa," *Studia Theologica* 36 (1982):101.

²See J. Hoftijzer, "David and the Tekoite Woman," *Vetus Testamentum* 20:4 (October 1970):419-44.

³On the apparent conflict between verse 27 and 18:18, see my note on 18:18.

⁴Keil and Delitzsch, p. 411.

⁵Youngblood, p. 985.

⁶Archer, p. 184; Keil and Delitzsch, p. 412.

David's treatment of him. He regarded himself as a prisoner in Jerusalem. He was willing to suffer death for his murder of Amnon, or to receive a true pardon, but he felt that the present compromise was unbearable (v. 32). When Absalom pressed for a personal reconciliation with his father, David finally conceded (v. 33), which David should have done at least two years earlier.

I believe David handled Absalom as he did partly because David's conscience bothered him; he himself had committed murder. This seems clear from 14:1-20. David's dealings with Absalom offended Absalom and contributed to his desire to seize the throne from his father.

"David made a blunder in not forgiving his son as God had forgiven David. He will live to regret it."¹

This entire chapter is the story of a father, and a king, caught between his responsibilities to be both just and merciful. Almost every parent and leader eventually finds himself or herself in David's position. God Himself had to find a solution to this dual responsibility.

The chapter deals with how to discipline. David's solution was to compromise. He tried to punish Absalom by keeping him in exile, but not executing him. Then he allowed him to return to Jerusalem, but not to have fellowship with himself. Both of these compromises failed and only made the relationship worse. God's solution is to be merciful, to forgive and welcome back warmly and quickly (cf. 12:13; Matt. 6:12, 14-15; Luke 15:11-24).

Perhaps David was reluctant to pardon Absalom because his son did not repent. At least the text says nothing about his doing so. Nevertheless, David's lack of true forgiveness bred a bitter attitude in Absalom that resulted in his organizing a revolution to overthrow his father (ch. 15). The law demands justice, but "mercy triumphs over justice" (James 2:13). A police officer who pulls you over for speeding can give you justice (a citation) or mercy (a warning). A murderer on death row can receive justice (execution) or mercy (a governor's pardon). The offender's attitude plays a part in the decision in every case, but ultimately the choice belongs to the person in power. A godly person will plan ways so the estranged may come back into fellowship (v. 14).

¹McGee, 2:221.

2. Absalom's attempt to usurp David's throne chs. 15— 19

Absalom was never Yahweh's choice to succeed David, and David knew this, though we do not know if Absalom knew it (cf. 12:24-25; 1 Chron. 22:9-10). Whether he knew it or not, Absalom's attempt to dethrone the LORD's anointed was contrary to God's will, and it was doomed to fail from the beginning. Even though he was personally fertile, as a result of God's blessing (14:27), his plan brought God's punishment on himself, even his premature death, rather than further blessing.

Absalom's conspiracy 15:1-12

Two sub-sections of this unit (15:1-6 and 7-12) form a literary diptych (i.e., two complementary panels).¹ The first six verses (the first panel) explain how Absalom undermined popular confidence in the LORD's anointed for four years. The last six (the second panel) relate his final preparations to lead a military revolution against David. Each sub-section begins with a reference to time (vv. 1, 7).

"Whatever the reason, he [Absalom] exhibited the same patient scheming and relentless determination which he had already shown when he set out to avenge the rape of his sister (chapter 13); the leopard had not changed his spots. His hatred for Amnon at least had had some excuse, but now it became clear that he had no affection for his father either. Apart from his love for his sister Tamar, he appears to have been a cold, ruthless and above all ambitious man."²

Absalom was a very self-centered person. Some indications of this are: he promoted himself and secured military weapons and strategy, giving himself a royal aura, to prepare for his revolution (15:1); he criticized his father's administration publicly (15:2-3); he promised to rule better than David (15:4); he used personal charm and flattery to gain support (15:5); and he exalted himself over David (15:6). All of these activities were intended to attract attention to Absalom and to remind the people that he was the natural heir to David's throne (cf. 1 Kings 1:5). Contrast David's submission to Saul.

¹Fokkelman, p. 165.

²Payne, p. 227.

"David had won the hearts of the people through sacrifice and service, but Absalom did it the easy way—and the modern way—by manufacturing an image of himself that the people couldn't resist. David was a hero; Absalom was only a celebrity."¹

"He that should have been judged to death for murder has the impudence to aim at being a judge of others."²

Absalom spent four years (v. 7, probably 980-976 B.C.) quietly planning a *coup d'état*. That "four" is the correct number, rather than 40, which the Septuagint and Josephus have, seems reasonable and clear from other chronological references.³ David was at this time (980-976 B.C.) building his palace in Jerusalem, then constructing a new dwelling place for the ark, and finally making preparations for the temple (5:9-12). These may have been some of the reasons why David was not meeting the needs of his people as well as he might have done—assuming that Absalom's criticisms were valid. This may also explain David's surprise when Absalom's *coup* began.

"God really took David to the woodshed."⁴

Perhaps Absalom chose Hebron as the place to announce his rebellion because that was his birthplace, and his support was probably strongest there. Some in Hebron may have resented David's moving his capital from there to Jerusalem.⁵

Ahithophel (lit. "Brother of Folly," v. 12) may have been Bathsheba's grandfather (11:3; 23:34).⁶ Since his name is very derogatory, it may have been a nickname that others gave him after his defection from David. Ahithophel's support of Absalom may suggest that the general public did not know about God's choice of David's successor. Ahithophel came from a town in Judah (Josh. 15:51).

¹Wiersbe, p. 348.

²Henry, p. 347.

³Josephus, 7:9:1.

⁴McGee, 2:221.

⁵Davis, p. 314; Laney, p. 113.

⁶See Firth, p. 456.

Absalom's rebellion against God's anointed king is similar to the reaction of the Jews to Jesus, the LORD's Messiah: They did not want Him to reign over them. Consequently, Jesus departed from them and returned to heaven, from which He will return to reign over them eventually.

David's flight from Jerusalem 15:13-37

The people of Israel had formerly given the kingdom to David as a gift (5:1-3), but now they took that gift from him (v. 13).¹ David knew that Absalom was popular with the people. Evidently he fled Jerusalem both to save his own life and to spare the capital from destruction. Perhaps Absalom planned to destroy David's capital as well as to kill the king and reassert Judean supremacy. "Behold, your servants will do whatever my lord the king chooses" (v. 15) "would be a fine statement for believers to adopt today as an expression of their devotion to Christ."²

"This must have been one of the darkest moments in David's life, for his humiliation did not come at the hands of great Philistine kings or outstanding monarchs from Egypt, but from his own son whom he had restored to royal favor."³

It seems clear that David planned to return to Jerusalem (v. 16). He was fleeing from an attack, not going into exile. By leaving 10 concubines in Jerusalem, David may have been claiming authority over Jerusalem through them.⁴

It was perhaps the morning after David crossed the Jordan River (v. 17) that he wrote Psalm 3, and Psalm 4 seems to have been written in very similar circumstances. The Cherethites and Pelethites were David's bodyguard. The "600 men ... from Gath" (v. 18) were probably mercenary soldiers. These foreigners were loyal to David even when his own son deserted him. Note the parallel in Jesus' experience (John 1:11-12).

¹Gunn, "David and ...," p. 22.

²Wiersbe, p. 353.

³Davis, p. 314.

⁴Firth, p. 456

"Ancient kings quite often preferred to employ foreign bodyguards, since they were unlikely to be affected by local political considerations or won over by local political factions."¹

David later repaid Ittai (v. 19), another former resident of Gath, for his loyalty by making him commander of one-third of his army (18:2). David urged Ittai to return to Jerusalem and to remain loyal to him there, but Ittai insisted on accompanying the king. Ittai's commitment to David (vv. 19-22) recalls Ruth's commitment to Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17).

"These are words of the strongest oath [i.e., "As the LORD lives," v. 21], and they distinguish the true believer in various periods of Israel's history (see 1 Kin. 17:1, 12; 18:10)."²

David crossed the Kidron Valley, located immediately east of Jerusalem, and moved up the Mount of Olives, which stood on the eastern side of the valley. In this he anticipated the movement of his descendant, Jesus Christ, who also crossed the Kidron Valley to pray on Mt. Olivet during His passion (John 18:1). David's treatment of the ark shows his submission to God's authority (vv. 25-26). He did not treat the ark as a good luck charm, as the Philistines and Saul had done. David may have written Psalm 63 at this time.

"... David always did his best during a crisis."³

At this time there were two leading priests in Israel: Zadok (who was also a prophet, v. 27) and Abiathar. Probably Zadok was responsible for worship in Jerusalem, where David built a new structure to house the ark. Abiathar seems to have functioned for many years as David's personal chaplain. Earlier Zadok had been in charge of the Gibeon sanctuary (1 Chron. 16:39-42). God's "habitation" (v. 25) most likely refers to the new tent David had recently completed in Jerusalem (cf. 1 Chron. 15:1). These facts suggest another reason for Absalom's rebellion and the support he enjoyed: Many of the Israelites probably considered David's projects of building a new tabernacle and bringing the ark into Jerusalem inappropriate, since Jerusalem was a formerly Canaanite stronghold. Many other people may

¹Payne, p. 231.

²*The Nelson ...*, p. 534.

³Wiersbe, p. 350.

have shared Michal's reaction to David's bringing the ark into Jerusalem (6:16-20).¹

David's complete submission to God's authority over his life is admirable (v. 26). The phrase "the river crossing places of the wilderness" (v. 28) probably refers to the place people forded the Jordan River near the wilderness of Judah (cf. 17:22).

David trudged up the Mount of Olives dressed for mourning (v. 30), praying as he wept (v. 31). On Mt. Olivet, David was still only a few hundred yards from the City of David. This hill rises about 200 feet above the city to its east. Walking barefoot (v. 30) symbolized "the shameful exile on which he is now embarking (cf. Isa. 20:2-3; cf. similarly Mic. 1:8)."² David's "friend" (i.e., counselor, adviser, v. 37; cf. 1 Kings 4:5) Hushai came from a family that evidently lived on Ephraim's southern border between Bethel and Ataroth (Josh. 16:2).³ He was probably quite old. The honorary title "the king's friend" was popular even in the later Persian Empire.⁴

"What do you do when one of your closest confidants betrays you? You do what David did—you pray and you worship."⁵

Chapter 15 teaches us a lot about friendship. Absalom is the negative example, and David's supporters as he left Jerusalem are the positive examples. David lost Absalom as a friend because he failed to reach out to him in genuine forgiveness. David won the friendship of many others in Israel because he had a heart for God that expressed itself in lovingkindness for people (cf. Matt. 22:37-39). This made people love David, and we see the marks of their friendship in their dealings with David in this chapter. The king's servants modeled true service by offering to do whatever David needed them to do (vv. 15-18). Ittai expressed his friendship by being a companion to David (vv. 19-23). Zadok and Abiathar became informants and made sure their friend had the information he needed to guarantee his welfare (vv. 24-29). Hushai was willing to risk his own safety to defend

¹Payne, p. 185.

²Youngblood, p. 997.

³Cf. Carl G. Rasmussen, *Zondervan NIV Atlas of the Bible*, p. 227.

⁴A. T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire*, p. 290.

⁵Wiersbe, p. 352.

David in the presence of his enemies (vv. 30-37). These people proved to be "sheltering trees"¹ for their friend in his hour of need.

"Meanwhile David showed a commendable attitude very much in contrast to Absalom's arrogance. He was completely willing to submit to God's will (verses 25f.), whatever that might prove to be. Such willingness to surrender leadership at the right time is another hallmark of good leadership."²

The kindness of Ziba 16:1-4

"David now encounters Ziba (vv. 1-4), the first of two men with links to the house of Saul (the other is Shimei [vv. 5-14]). Although Ziba attempts to ingratiate himself to him and Shimei curses him, David treats each with courtesy. The brief account of the king's kindness to Ziba (vv. 1-4) has obvious connections with the narrative of his kindness to Mephibosheth (ch. 9) ..."³

Ziba's gift to sustain David and his men is remarkably similar to Abigail's earlier gift to David and his men (cf. 1 Sam. 25:18). This suggests that the size of David's entourage was about the same on both occasions.

Ziba's report of Mephibosheth's reaction to the news that Absalom had rebelled seems to have been untrue (cf. 19:24-28). Perhaps he believed Absalom would kill his master and then David would reward him. David accepted Ziba's report too quickly, without getting all the facts, perhaps because Ziba showed himself to be a friend of David by sustaining him in his flight. We sometimes accept a friend's analysis of the motives of another person too quickly, because we do not bother to get all the facts. Here David slipped, because he too willingly accepted the complimentary words of a friend.

Shimei's curse 16:5-14

This second descendant of Saul demonstrated a reaction to David that was the opposite of Ziba's. Ziba had been ingratiating and submissive, but

¹Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Youth and Age," in *Poems That Live Forever*, p. 256.

²Payne, p. 232.

³Youngblood, pp. 998-99.

Shimei, a "reptile of the royal house of Saul,"¹ was insulting and defiant (cf. Gen. 12:3). The only other person who cursed David, according to 1 and 2 Samuel, was Goliath (1 Sam. 17:43).

The central focus of the chiasm in this section is Abishai's desire for Shimei's execution (v. 9; cf. 1 Sam. 17:46; 26:8; 2 Sam. 4:7). David may have written Psalm 7 at this time, if the "Cush," in the superscription of that psalm, is another name for Shimei.²

Bahurim evidently stood on the east side of Mt. Olivet, but not far away from the Kidron Valley (cf. 3:16; 17:18). Shimei's charge that David was a man of bloodshed (v. 8) was true; David had murdered Uriah. However, Shimei probably meant that David was responsible for the murders of Abner and Ish-bosheth, which was not true. It was a sin for Shimei to curse a ruler of God's people (Exod. 22:28).

David appears to have felt that his present distress might be God's punishment for killing Uriah (vv. 10-11; cf. 12:11). He hoped that, by showing Shimei mercy, God might be merciful to him (v. 12; cf. 22:26). David's attitude was entirely different from Abishai's (v. 9; cf. 1 Sam. 26:8), and that of Abishai's brother Joab's, who often seized the initiative from God. "Sons of Zeruiah" (v. 10) was probably a disparaging form of address (cf. 1 Sam. 10:11; 20:27).

"This is an interesting theological view, that coming from the hate-filled rantings of an apparent madman might be the voice of God to David. The willingness to listen to one's critics and even to one's enemies may be the only way to discover the truth of God. The natural tendency is to surround ourselves with friends who are often reluctant to tell us the things we need to know. This opens the possibility that we may do well at times to listen to people who wish us harm but tell us the truth. Here again we see David's willingness to expose himself to God's word for his life and to God's judgment upon his life."³

Here, in contrast to the previous pericope (vv. 1-4), David succeeded. He did not let the criticism of a critic elicit an improper response from him. Rather, he listened for the voice of God in Shimei's words. David showed

¹Whyte, 1:297.

²*The Nelson ...*, pp. 548, 881.

³Chafin, p. 338.

some growth here; previously he had reacted violently to the disdain of an enemy, namely, Nabal (cf. 1 Sam. 25:26, 32-34). For David to control his temper was a greater victory than slaying Goliath (Prov. 16:32). Times of stress bring out the best and the worst in people. This was true of David's flight from Absalom, as it had been true during his flight from Saul.

The counsel of Ahithophel and Hushai 16:15—17:29

This is the central unit of chapters 5—20, and its central focus is the judgment that Hushai's advice was better than Ahithophel's (17:14). This advice is the pivot on which the fortunes of David turned in his dealings with Absalom. Ahithophel's advice was that one man (David) should die for the people (17:2-3; cf. John 11:50).

Hushai was loyal to David primarily because David was the LORD's anointed (v. 18). His words to Absalom implied that he was supporting the revolution, but everything that Hushai said could have been taken as supporting David, which he did. They are masterful double-speak. Hushai was really serving David in the presence of his son Absalom (v. 19).

"Hushai has kept his integrity, Absalom has been blinded by his own egoism, and the reader is permitted to see one example of the outworking of God's providence."¹

In the ancient East people regarded the public appropriation of a king's concubines as an act that signaled the transfer of power to his successor.² Here Absalom broke the Mosaic Law (Lev. 18:7-8; 20:11) to gain power and so became liable to the death penalty. By following Ahithophel's advice, Absalom brought about one of the judgments that God had predicted would come on David for his sin (12:11-12). This act was also a great insult to David, and it jeopardized Absalom's inheritance rights (cf. Reuben's similar sin, Gen. 35:22; 49:3-4). The king was reaping what he had sown (Gal. 6:7). Absalom's immorality may have taken place on the very roof where David had committed adultery (cf. 11:2), though that is not certain. By taking David's concubines, Absalom showed his supporters that he would never be reconciled to David, and so strengthened their commitment to him.³

¹Baldwin, p. 264.

²de Vaux, 1:116.

³Josephus, 7:9:5.

"David had illicitly slept with a woman who was not his wife (cf. 11:4), and now his son is counseled to follow in his father's footsteps."¹

In 17:9, Hushai warned that if only a small group of Absalom's men pursued David and David defeated them, the news would spread that Absalom had lost the battle. The people would then side with David. He proposed the ultimate flattery, namely, that Absalom himself should lead his troops into battle, which is what kings usually did (v. 11). Yahweh sought to bring calamity on Absalom (v. 14), because Absalom sought to overthrow the LORD's anointed.

Enrogel (v. 17) lay just south of Zion near where the Hinnom and Kidron Valleys join. There are parallels between verses 17-22 and the story of the spies at Jericho (Josh. 2).² Ahithophel may have believed that Hushai's advice would result in Absalom's defeat and David's ultimate return to Jerusalem,³ or he may have committed suicide out of humiliation (v. 23).

"Ahithophel's self-destruction foreshadows what is about to happen to his new master, who will also die with his feet dangling in the air (18:9-15)."⁴

"It seems more plausible to assume that he took his life at some later stage, perhaps after the battle in the Forest of Ephraim."⁵

"All the utterly real issues between people and people and between God and people that swirl throughout II Samuel 9—20, I Kings 1—2 also swirl about Jesus as he moves toward the cross. One must think that the Gospel writers were acutely aware of this when they depicted Jesus' Maundy Thursday walk to the Mount of Olives in ways so graphically reminiscent of the 'passion' of the first *Meshiach* in II Samuel 15:13-37. Even the detail of Judas' betrayal of Jesus, and his subsequent suicide, have no remote parallel anywhere in Scripture, with the remarkable exception of Ahithophel, who betrayed the Lord's

¹Youngblood, p. 1007.

²See Gunn, "Traditional Composition ...," p. 224.

³Gordon, p. 282.

⁴Chisholm, *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 269.

⁵Anderson, p. 216.

anointed and thus opened the door to suicidal despair (II Samuel 17:23)."¹

Mahanaim on the Jabbok River in Transjordan had been Ish-bosheth's capital (2:8). Probably David went there because the inhabitants favored him for his goodness to Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson. Amasa was the son of Jithra (or Jether), an Ishmaelite (not Israelite, v. 25; cf. 1 Chron. 2:17), and the son of Joab's cousin Abigail. Absalom's army also camped in Transjordan in the Gilead hills, probably south of Mahanaim.

"There is a certain sadness in what David had to do. While the tribal allotments of ancient Israel included land on both sides of the Jordan, there was always an emotional understanding that the 'real' land of Israel was west of the Jordan. David was truly in exile. Later, his enemies would charge him with having 'fled from the land' (19:9)."²

Those who helped David included Shobi (v. 27), the son of Nahash, who had been king of Ammon, and who was probably the brother of Hanun, the present Ammonite king who had humiliated David's well-wishers (10:4). Ammon was presently subservient to Israel. David and Joab had subdued Ammon about 14 years earlier (12:26-31). Machir had been the host of Mephibosheth, before David assumed his support and moved him to Jerusalem from Lo-debar (9:1-5). Barzillai was a wealthy supporter of David from Rogelim, a town farther to the north in Gilead. Shobi, Machir, and Barzillai demonstrate other characteristics of true friends: they initiated help for David, and they supplied him abundantly with his needs and wants.

If all Christians are God's anointed (and we are, 1 John 2:27), even though former friends disappoint, forsake, and betray us, the LORD will preserve and protect us (cf. Heb. 13:5-6). He will even raise us from the dead to keep His promises to us (cf. Heb. 11:19). Our responsibility is simply to follow our Lord faithfully, in spite of opposition, as we see David doing in this story.

¹James A. Wharton, "A Plausible Tale: Story and Theology in II Samuel 9—20, I Kings 1—2," *Interpretation* 35:4 (October 1981):353.

²*The Nelson ...*, p. 539.

The end of Absalom 18:1—19:8

"In the overall structure of 15:1—20:22, the story of Absalom's death (18:1-18) provides a counterpoise to that of Shimei's curse (16:5-14 ...). Just as in the earlier narrative an adversary of David (Shimei) curses him (vv. 16:5, 7-8, 13), so also here an adversary of David (Absalom) opposes him in battle (vv. 6-8); just as in the earlier account David demands that Shimei be spared (16:11), so also here David demands that Absalom be spared (vv. 5, 12); and just as in the earlier episode a son of Zeruah (Abishai) is ready to kill Shimei (16:9), so also here a son of Zeruah (Joab, v. 2) is ready to kill Absalom—and indeed wounds him, perhaps mortally (vv. 14-15)."¹

The narrative of Absalom's death seems to me to have a chiasmic structure:

- A The strategies 18:1-5
- B The battle 18:6-8
- C The execution of Absalom 18:9-15
- C' The burial of Absalom 18:16-18
- B' The reports about the battle 18:19-33
- A' The responses 19:1-8

It is also significant, I believe, that the writer constructed each of these sections with two prominent components: two strategies (18:1-5), two armies (18:6-8), two options (18:9-15), two memorials (18:16-18), two messengers (18:19-33), and two responses (19:1-8). In each case, there is a tension or conflict between each element. This enhances the overall conflict in the whole passage, which is the conflict that David faced: between acting on his feelings as a father, and doing his duty as a king. The whole story reveals David's troubled (conflicted) soul.

¹Youngblood, p. 1017.

The two proposed strategies for battle 18:1-5

The writer referred to David no less than five times in this section as "the king," leaving no doubt as to who was the legitimate ruler and who was really in charge. "The king" occurs 30 times in the David-Absalom narrative and is a constant reminder that David, as the LORD's anointed, was responsible to act like a king (more than like a parent). Perhaps David instructed his three commanders to deal gently with Absalom, not only because he was his son, but because God had dealt gently with David for his sins.

"Absalom had stood at the gate in Jerusalem and attacked his father (15:1-6); now David stood at a city gate and instructed the soldiers to go easy on Absalom."¹

"The truth was that David acted as a father but not as a king—as if he and Absalom had had some minor domestic quarrel which could be put right by an apology and a handshake. He failed to see Absalom as a traitor and a rebel, whose actions had caused a great deal of harm to the stability and welfare of the kingdom, to say nothing of the great loss of life in the civil war (verse 7). Yet every parent will feel a good deal of sympathy with David's viewpoint."²

David's attitude toward Absalom's threat to his leadership contrasts with Saul's attitude toward David, whom Saul regarded as a threat to his leadership. Perhaps David's recollection of Saul's treatment of him was a contributing factor in David's soft approach to Absalom.

As David was worthy of greater honor and consideration than anyone else, as the LORD's anointed (v. 3), so Jesus Christ is far more worthy than any of His people.

The battle between David's and Absalom's armies 18:6-8

The location of the forest of Ephraim is unknown, but it was probably in Gilead (cf. Judg. 12:1-5).³ As early as the Judges Period, so many

¹Wiersbe, p. 359.

²Payne, p. 245.

³Cf. LaMoine DeVries, "The Forest of Ephraim," *Biblical Illustrator* 10:1 (1983):82-85; and the map in Carl G. Rasmussen, *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible*, revised edition, p. 143.

Ephraimites had settled in Gilead that the western Ephraimites called the Gileadites "renegades of Ephraim" (Judg. 12:4, NIV).¹ How the forest devoured more of Absalom's men than David's soldiers did (v. 8) is not clear, but that it did suggests that possibly Yahweh assisted David's men by using the forest somehow to give him the victory. W. M. Thomson attributed the forest's activity to its dense thickness:

"These waars [dense woods] are not pleasant, open forests, for the ground is too rocky for that—rocks piled in horrid confusion, and covered with prickly oak and other thorny coppice, which confound the unhappy traveler who gets entangled among them. ... Nothing is more impracticable than these stony, thorny waars, and I can readily believe that such a 'wood' would devour more of a routed army than the sword of the victors."²

Probably "the forest devoured more people" (v. 8) by making it unusually difficult for fleeing warriors to escape their pursuers, since the terrain prohibited rapid travel.³ It is interesting how, throughout history, God has exercised His sovereignty by controlling nature and the forces of nature to control the outcome of battles.

Absalom's death 18:9-15

"The mule was a royal mount; losing his mule [v. 9] Absalom has lost his kingdom."⁴

The text says Absalom's head caught in an overhanging oak branch (v. 9). Josephus interpreted this, perhaps in view of 14:26, as his hair got caught in the tree.⁵ In this case, God used a piece of nature, a tree, to snare His prey.

"The great tree, inanimate though it is, has proved more than a match for the pride of Absalom."⁶

¹George Adam Smith, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, p. 335, n. 2.

²W. M. Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, 1:473. See also 2:234.

³Jamieson, et al., p. 241.

⁴Conroy, p. 60.

⁵Josephus, 7:10:2.

⁶Baldwin, p. 270.

"The reader who recalls 14,26 will almost certainly visualize Absalom's hair in connection with the entanglement ... and will easily draw a contrast between promise and pride on the one hand and humiliation and doom on the other."¹

The soldier who found Absalom wisely obeyed the orders of David to spare Absalom's life. There are many evidences throughout the David saga that David had an excellent communications network. The soldier's parenthetical comment, "there is nothing hidden from the king" (v. 13), is just one evidence of this (cf. 14:20). Likewise, there is nothing hidden from David's greatest son, Jesus Christ, who knows all that happens under His authority.

Despite David's instructions, Joab wounded Absalom, probably mortally, where he found him (v. 14). Perhaps Joab feared David would have pardoned Absalom, thus giving him another opportunity to revolt.

"However harsh and unfeeling to the king Joab may appear, there can be no doubt that he acted the part of a wise statesman in regarding the peace and welfare of the kingdom more than his master's private inclinations, which were opposed to strict justice as well as his own interests. Absalom deserved to die by the divine law (Deut. 21:18, 21), as well as being an enemy to his king and country; and no time was more fitting than when he met that death in open battle."²

I do not believe that Joab should have done what he did. I believe that he should have obeyed David's instructions and trusted God with the outcome. Christians must be careful to conduct our spiritual warfare according to our King's instructions, rather than taking matters into our own hands, as Joab did.

Absalom's burial 18:16-18

Absalom's burial reminds one of what the Mosaic Law prescribed for a rebellious son: stoning to death (Deut. 21:18-21).

¹Conroy, p. 44, n. 4.

²Jamieson, et al., p. 241.

"Absalom is given the burial of the accursed, something hinted at as he hung on a tree (Deut. 21:22-23)."¹

God cut Absalom off because he rebelled against the LORD's anointed, rather than blessing him because he was David's eldest son. This was the third son that David had lost because of his sins against Bathsheba and Uriah.² Instead of having a line of kings succeed him, all Absalom left behind was a stone monument (what Josephus called a "marble pillar"³) that he had erected to himself (v. 18; cf. Gen. 11:4). His three sons (14:27) may have died prematurely, since he had no sons when he died (v. 18).⁴

"It is possible, however, that one or more of his sons were unwilling (for whatever reason) to perpetuate their father's memory."⁵

Other, less attractive, views are that the two verses in question (14:27 and 18:18) are from different literary sources,⁶ or that the writer was deliberately ambiguous in order to present Absalom from two different points of view.⁷

In the ancient world, a son normally erected a memorial to his father when his father died, if the father was famous. Moreover, people also expected a son to imitate his father and thus become a living memorial to his name.⁸ Absalom failed to receive either form of honor: a stone monument, or a son to carry on his name. Absalom lived like Eli's sons and Saul had lived, and he died as they died.⁹

¹Firth, p. 477.

²See my comment on 12:6.

³Josephus, 7:10:3.

⁴A Graeme Auld, *I and II Samuel*, p. 544; Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, p. 394; Chisholm, *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 321; Firth, p. 447.

⁵Youngblood, p. 1021.

⁶McCarter, *II Samuel*, p. 407; H. P. Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel*, p. 359.

⁷Randy L. McCracken, "How Many Sons Did Absalom Have: Intentional Ambiguity as Literary Art," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 172:687 (July-September 2015):286-98.

⁸Boyu Ockinga, "A Note on 2 Samuel 18.18," *Biblische Notizen* 31 (1986):32.

⁹For some interesting additional insights into Absalom gleaned from the text, see Roy Battenhouse, "The Tragedy of Absalom: A Literary Analysis," *Christianity and Literature* 31:3 (Spring 1982):53-57.

The King's Valley (v. 18) was the Kidron Valley. The 52-foot-high tomb, known as Absalom's Tomb, that marks the spot today, just east of the temple area, is an early first century A.D. Hellenistic or Roman sepulcher.¹ We should not confuse it with the memorial referred to in this text, though the present one may stand on the same spot as the older one did.

Absalom's *coup* was doomed to fail from the start, because he was rebelling against the will of God. Solomon was God's choice to succeed David, and this choice was known when Absalom rebelled (1 Chron. 22:9-10; 1 Kings 1:13, 17, 30). Absalom was David's third son (after Amnon and Chileab, who was also known as Daniel). Absalom sought to perpetuate traditional succession. As Israel's true Sovereign, God had the right to select whomever He wished to lead His nation.

Amnon and Absalom both were willful, cunning, obstinate, and immoral. They both followed counsel and experienced violent deaths. Amnon, however, repeated David's passionate sexual sin and was hedonistic, whereas Absalom repeated David's cold-blooded murder and was militarily and politically ambitious.

Absalom's attempt to usurp David's throne proves again that disobedience to God's covenant (i.e., the Mosaic Law) resulted in lack of fertility (blessing) in Israel. The enemies of the LORD's anointed would never succeed. Because of his sin, David had to flee Jerusalem, and he experienced much heartache. Because of his sins, Absalom died without honor. Nevertheless, in spite of David's sin, God restored him to power—because of God's elective choice of him as His anointed, and because of David's heart for God.

God had promised to punish David for his disregard of the Mosaic Covenant and the LORD. Still, He did not say He would cut him off as He had cut Saul off (12:10-12). The following verses (18:19—19:43) record Yahweh's restoration of His anointed after discipline.

The news of Absalom's death 18:19-33

Ahimaaz wanted to be the first to tell David the news of his victory, since messengers often received a reward for bringing good news (v. 22). Joab discouraged him, thinking he would also report that Absalom was dead.

¹W. Harold Mare, *The Archaeology of the Jerusalem Area*, p. 195; Chisholm, *1 & 2 Samuel*, sidebar on p. 275..

David would not have rewarded that news and might have slain its bearer (cf. 1:15). Joab sent "the Cushite" (v. 21), possibly one of Joab's attendants (cf. v. 15), to tell David the bad news. Cushites came from the upper Nile region of Egypt: Nubia (modern Ethiopia).¹ Joab may have selected this man because he was a foreigner, and he may have considered him more expendable than an Israelite.

David seems to have concluded that a single runner bore good news, because if the army had suffered a defeat, many people would have been retreating to Mahanaim. Ahimaaz may have lied about not knowing Absalom's fate (v. 29), or he may have been telling the truth. His greeting: "All is well" (v. 28), was literally *Shalom* ("Peace").

"His report contained only one word, *salom*, before his paying respects by prostrating himself before David. Ironically, *salom* was David's last word to Absalom (15:9), as well as what Ahithophel claimed he could bring about through his proposed strike on David (17:3)."²

The Cushite then arrived with the news of Absalom's death (vv. 31-32).

"Someone has defined 'tact' as 'the knack of making a point without making an enemy,' and the Cushite had tact."³

"There is a clear rule of law which connects a leader's conduct with his fate and the fate of his house. A degenerate leader, whether it is himself who has sinned or his sons, will ultimately be deposed (see the story of Samuel and his sons [?]) or come to a tragic end, just as Eli and his sons die on the same day, and so do Saul and his. This law holds true of David also; ... just as in the stories of the death of Eli, Saul and their sons, in the story of Absalom there appears a runner who announces the evil tidings of his death in battle (II Sam. 18:19-32); and before that, in the story of Amnon's murder, a rumor comes to the king of the killing of all his sons, although it is found that only Amnon had been killed (II Sam. 13:30-36). With this, the

¹J. Daniel Hays, "The Cushites: A Black Nation in the Bible," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:612 (October-December 1996):396-409.

²Firth, p. 479.

³Wiersbe, p. 361.

criticism of all four leaders described in the book of Samuel, together with their sons, reaches its conclusion."¹

Evidently there was a room over the town gate like the rooms that people built on the tops of their houses.² David retreated there to mourn when he had received the news of Absalom's death (v. 33).

"The description of Absalom's demise resonates with allusions to Abraham's binding of Isaac in Genesis 22. ... Both Absalom and the ram are caught in a thicket (*sobek/sebak*). Whereas Abraham is commanded not to send forth his hand (*'al tislah yadeka*) unto the lad (22:12), Joab's soldier refuses to send forth his hand (*lo' 'eslah yadi*) unto the son of the king (18:12). And finally, Abraham offers up the ram in place of his son (*tahat beno* [22:12]). It takes a while for David to help us perceive this analogy, but finally he makes it clear: 'would that I had died in place of you (*tahteka*), O Absalom, my son, my son."³

David behaved like a parent, rather than like a king, in this instance. All Christians need to remember our calling, and to make our decisions on the basis of who we are (in Christ), and what He has called us to do, rather than on the basis of our feelings or the opinions and expectations of other people.

David's two responses to the news of Absalom's death 19:1-8

David responded to Absalom's death similarly to the way he did when he heard of Saul's death (ch. 1). Certainly David was correct to weep over Absalom's death. However, Joab was also correct to warn David of the consequences of failing to thank his soldiers for saving his life and his kingdom. David's soldiers were ashamed to enter Mahanaim as the conquering heroes that they were, because of David's mourning.⁴ David should have tempered his personal sorrow, since Absalom had rebelled against the LORD's anointed. David responded as a parent rather than as a king. Joab urged him to remember that he was a king, as well as a father,

¹Moshe Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel: A Literary Study of Comparative Structures, Analogies, and Parallels*, p. 106.

²See Driver, p. 333.

³Ackerman, p. 50.

⁴Josephus, 7:10:5.

and to behave like a king. Since David had slain Uriah with the sword, God punished David by slaying his son, the fruit of his fertility, with death by the sword, too (12:9-10; cf. Gal. 6:7).

Joab's execution of Absalom cost him his position as commander of the army, at least temporarily (v. 13). Nevertheless, his rebuke of the king (vv. 5-7) was good, as well as needed. A true friend—and Joab was a true friend to David here—will be willing to take personal risks to confront a friend, out of love. A wise person, such as David, will accept strong advice from a friend who really cares about him or her.

David's emotions were sometimes inappropriate: loving those whom he should have hated, and hating those whom he should have loved (v. 6). Similarly, Amnon had hated Tamar, whom he should have loved (13:15). These emotions were common to father and son, both of whom committed serious injustices.¹

"This final 'gate scene' [v. 8] may call to mind the initial 'gate scene' in 15:2-6 which paved the way for the subsequent rebellion; thus they may form an inclusion."²

David's return to Jerusalem 19:9-43

The only thing the people could do, after Absalom had fallen, was to return to their former king (vv. 11-12). Absalom had found his strongest support among the people of Judah. David did not want the Judahites to conclude that by supporting Absalom they had become his enemies. David extended amnesty to them and informed them that he still regarded them as his closest kin. This wise political move helped to unite the nation again.

"... David's reference here [v. 12] is not to blood ties, though they may be present, but rather that mutual covenant commitments must be honored because the vows assume fidelity through thick and thin."³

¹Stuart Lasine, "Melodrama as Parable: The Story of the Poor Man's Ewe-Lamb and the Unmasking of David's Topsy-Turvy Emotions," *Hebrew Annual Review* 8 (1984):117.

²Anderson, p. 228. Cf. Youngblood, p. 1032.

³Walter Brueggemann, "Of the Same Flesh and Bone (Gn 2,23a)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 32:4 (September 1970):536.

David also forgave the Benjamites who had hoped for his downfall and had seen it as punishment for taking Saul's place on the throne (vv. 16-30). Shimei had actively opposed David, Ziba had misled him (apparently), and Mephibosheth had not supported him. Mephibosheth's failure to trim his toenails and his beard and to wash his clothes, were an expression of his grief, and resulted in his remaining ceremonially unclean while David was in exile (cf. Exod. 19:10, 14).¹ By forgiving all of these Benjamites, David again secured the support of this difficult tribe. Later, David urged Solomon to execute Shimei (1 Kings 2:8-9; cf. Gen. 12:3). A generation later, when the kingdom split in two, the tribe of Benjamin remained attached to Judah. Abishai had become an "adversary" (v. 22, Heb. *satan*) to David in the sense that he opposed David's purpose to pardon Shimei.²

"All these, as well as the tribe of Judah, laid a bridge [of boats] over the river, that the king, and those that were with him, might with ease pass over it."³

David may have divided Mephibosheth's land, that he has previously given to Ziba (16:4), between Mephibosheth and Ziba in order to determine which of them was telling the truth, or because he could not tell which of them was telling the truth (v. 29). Another possibility is that David felt guilty because he had spoken rashly to Ziba (16:4).⁴ Solomon followed a similar procedure and threatened to divide a living baby to determine which of two mothers was telling the truth (1 Kings 3:24-25). Mephibosheth offered the entire estate to Ziba (v. 30). His actions during David's absence from Jerusalem argue for his innocence.⁵

Barzillai's support (vv. 31-39) undoubtedly represented that of others in Transjordan. By honoring him and his representative, Chimham, David cemented good relations with the tribes across the Jordan. Chimham may

¹Cf. McCarter, *II Samuel*, pp. 417, 421.

²See Peggy Day, "Abishai and *satan* in 2 Samuel 19:17-24," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49:4 (October 1987):543-47.

³Josephus, 7:11:2.

⁴Gaebelein, 1:2:225.

⁵David Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant: Transformations of Genre in the Growth of Biblical Literature*, p. 247; Chisholm, *1 & 2 Samuel*, sidebar on p. 263. For a negative assessment of Mephibosheth's character and actions, see Whyte, 1:323-30.

have been Barzillai's son (cf. 1 Kings 2:7), a tradition that some manuscripts of the Septuagint and Josephus preserved.¹

The other Israelites (vv. 40-43) also rallied behind David again. The little "who loves the king most" contest that they held with the Judahites illustrates their support. Thus almost the whole nation again united behind the LORD's anointed. This was a blessing from God. The chiasmic literary structure of chapters 15—20 identifies an undercurrent of deterioration in the general relations that David enjoyed with his subjects at this time.²

This section (vv. 9-43) is a remarkable testimony to the power of forgiveness (cf. Matt. 6:12, 14-15; 18:21-22; Luke 7:47; 17:3). David had not really forgiven Absalom, and perhaps the consequences of his lack of forgiveness encouraged him to take a different approach with his subjects after Absalom's death. We see in David's dealings with Amasa (vv. 11-15) that forgiveness wins over former enemies. We see in his dealings with Shimei (vv. 16-23) that forgiveness gives time for people to change. We see in his treatment of Mephibosheth and Ziba (vv. 24-30) that forgiveness placates irreconcilable adversaries. We see in the section revealing the final reactions of the Israelites and the Judahites (vv. 40-43) that forgiveness lays a strong foundation for the future.

"The recent victory may have been seen as indicative of Yahweh's favor, but David still needed the people's 'acclamation' or invitation to be king once more."³

3. The rebellion of Sheba 20:1-22

"The account of Sheba's rebellion against David serves as a counterpoise [balance] to the story of Absalom's conspiracy (15:1-12) in chapters 15—20 [*sic*], which constitute the major part of the narrative that comprises chapters 13—20 (more precisely, 13:1—20:22), the longest definable literary section of the Court History of David (chs. 9—20 ...)."⁴

¹Josephus, 7:11:4.

²David M. Gunn, "From Jerusalem to the Jordan and Back: Symmetry in 2 Samuel XV-XX," *Vetus Testamentum* 30:1 (January 1980):109-13.

³Anderson, p. 242.

⁴Youngblood, p. 1042.

Not all the people of Israel followed David. Some lined up behind Sheba, a discontented Benjamite who sought to split the kingdom, as Jeroboam did 45 years later. Sheba sounded his rebel call in Gilgal and then proceeded north gathering supporters.

"It is no coincidence that independence is declared in practically identical terms in the cry of 2 Sam 20:1b and 1 Kgs 12:16. Sheba ben Bichri was before his time—so a 'worthless fellow.' After Ahijah's intervention, the time had come."¹

Sheba's rebellion was another premature act, like the Israelites demand for a king before God gave them David. The notation of David's dealings with his ten concubines (v. 3; cf. 15:16; 16:21-22) shows that the king behaved in harmony with the spirit of the Mosaic Law. The Law prohibited a woman who had had relations with two consecutive husbands from going back to her first husband (Deut. 24:1-4). The Law did not address David's case specifically, but Deuteronomy 24 was what seems to have guided his decision.

"The presence of concubines suggests how much the monarchy has embraced the royal ideology of the Near East, which is inimical [harmful] to the old covenant tradition. David takes a drastic step of confining the concubines and presumably having no more to do with them. His action is most likely a concession and conciliatory gesture to the north. ... In making this move, David not only distances himself from his own former practice but also offers a contrast to the conduct of Absalom (16:21-22)."²

David's action may also indicate that his temporary exile drove him back to the LORD and increased his desire to please Him. David had promoted Amasa by making him commander of the army in Joab's place (17:25), probably because Joab had killed Absalom (19:13). Unfortunately, Amasa moved too slowly (v. 5), so David put Abishai in charge in his place (v. 6). The writer probably referred to the soldiers as "Joab's men" (v. 7) because they had formerly been under Joab's command.

¹Anthony F. Campbell, *Of Prophets and Kings: A Late Ninth-Century Document (1 Samuel 1—2Kings 10)*, p. 83.

²Brueggemann, *First and ...*, p. 330.

Joab greeted Amasa in a customary way (v. 9).¹ He kissed the man he was about to slay, as Judas did centuries later (Luke 22:47-48). Solomon avenged Joab's murder of Amasa when he came to power (1 Kings 2:32-34). Perhaps David did not execute Joab because he felt gratefully indebted to him for his great service, and Joab was an effective commander who advanced David's interests. Some leaders still publicly decry the methods of people whom they privately (and sometimes publicly) encourage.

"There are parallels between Joab's assassinations of Abner and Amasa and Ehud's assassination of the Moabite king Eglon, recorded in Judges 3:12-30. ... Ehud killed to liberate a nation; Joab's killing is strictly to promote his own interests."²

Abel (or Beth-maacah, "Meadow of the House of Oppression") lay about 90 miles north of Gilgal and four miles west of Dan. Sheba had far fewer soldiers than Joab did (vv. 11, 14). It was contrary to Mosaic Law for Joab to besiege a town without first offering it terms of peace (Deut. 20:10, though this refers to Canaanite towns). The saying, "They will surely ask advice at Abel" (v. 18), means that people regarded the residents of that town as wise. The city was "a mother in Israel" (v. 19) in the sense that it exercised a beneficent, maternal influence over its neighboring villages. Similarly "daughters," when used in reference to a town, represents the town's satellite villages (e.g., Judg. 1:27; et al.). The epithet "mother in Israel" describes only Deborah elsewhere in the Old Testament (Judg. 5:7). For at least the third time in David's experience, God used a woman to change the course of events (cf. Abigail, 1 Sam. 25; and the wise woman of Tekoa, 2 Sam. 14).

"Abel is characterized in the proverb as a city with a long reputation for wisdom and faithfulness to the tradition of Israel. It is, therefore, a mother in the same way Deborah was: a creator and hence a symbol of the unity that bound Israel

¹Keil and Delitzsch, p. 454. See Edward A. Neiderhiser, "2 Samuel 20:8-10: A Note for a Commentary," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 24:3 (September 1981):209-10, for further explanation of how Joab deceived Amasa.

²Chisholm, *1 & 2 Samuel*, sidebar on p. 282.

together under one God Yahweh. And it is the wise woman's implicit appeal to this unity that stops Joab in his tracks."¹

"The inheritance of the LORD" (v. 19) refers to Israel (cf. 21:3). Evidently Sheba, though a Benjamite, lived in the hill country of Ephraim (v. 21).

David's rule was again secure with the death of Sheba, another man who rebelled against the LORD's anointed and died for his rebellion.

"Wise words override ruthless policy. At the end, not only the woman and the city are saved; something of David's dignity and self-respect are also rescued from Joab's mad, obedient intent."²

"In an earlier incident, another 'wise woman' had co-operated with Joab and had undertaken the delicate task of bringing the king to a new viewpoint (2 Sa. 14:1-20)."³

Compare also Abigail's wise counsel to David (1 Sam. 25). This story teaches much about wisdom and folly.

"First of all the woman [i.e., the wise woman of Abel] saw the problem realistically; the danger must have been clear enough to everyone in Abel, but there may have been some false hopes of rescue or intervention. Secondly, she did something about it—she did not wait for somebody else to act but took the initiative herself. Then she argued her case, challenging the rightness of Joab's actions; and he was forced to agree with what she said. So a compromise was reached; and finally she took steps to fulfil [*sic*] the terms agreed. In other words, wisdom was a combination of intelligent insight and bold action. The Old Testament rarely separates the intellectual from the pragmatic: wisdom is not simply knowing but also doing."⁴

¹Claudia V. Camp, "The Wise Women of 2 Samuel: A Role Model for Women in Early Israel," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43:1 (January 1981):28.

²Brueggemann, *First and ...*, p. 332.

³Baldwin, pp. 280-81.

⁴Payne, p. 257.

The wise woman contrasts with foolish Joab who, nonetheless, showed some wisdom himself when he listened to and cooperated with the woman. Sometimes very devoted people, such as Joab, can do much damage similarly in a church. Talk solved a problem that war would only have complicated. Wisdom saved the woman, her city, David's reputation, Joab's career, and many innocent lives. Her wisdom in action bears four marks: seeing the problem, acting to correct it, arguing her case persuasively, and fulfilling her responsibilities. God's glory evidently motivated and guided her actions (v. 19). Sheba's folly is clear in that he was easily offended, unable to muster support, and initiated a fight that he could not win. God continued to protect and bless His anointed king.

Tribal jealousies also continued, and finally divided Israel at the end of Solomon's reign.

4. David's remaining cabinet 20:23-26

"With Joab's return to the king in Jerusalem, the grand symphony known as the Court History of David reaches its conclusion for all practical purposes (at least as far as the books of Samuel are concerned ...). The last four verses of chapter 20 constitute a suitable formal coda, serving the same function for the Court History that the last four verses of chapter 8 do for the narrative of David's powerful reign ..."¹

A list of David's chiefs of state concludes this major section of Samuel (2 Sam. 9—20, "David's troubles") just as a former list closed another major section (2 Sam. 2—8, "David's triumphs"). Probably this list reflects David's administration toward the end of his reign. The former list evidently describes David's cabinet at an earlier time.

¹Youngblood, p. 1048.

8:15-18	20:23-26
Joab: army commander	Joab: army commander
Benaiah: Cherethite and Pelethite leader	Benaiah: Cherethite and Pelethite leader
	Adoram: forced labor supervisor
Jehoshaphat: secretary	Jehoshaphat: secretary
Seraiah: scribe	Sheva: scribe
Zadok and Ahimelech: priests	Zadok and Abiathar: priests
David's sons: chief ministers (priests)	Ira: priest

The "forced labor" force (v. 24), the *corvée*, was an age-old institution (cf. Deut. 20:10-11; 2 Sam. 8:2, 6, 14). It consisted of prisoners of war who worked on such public construction projects as highways, temples, and palaces. Adoram (Adoniram) later became a prominent figure in the apostasy of the Northern Kingdom (1 Kings 12:18-19). Ira may have been a royal adviser in the same sense as David's sons had been previously. The Hebrew word *kohen* ("priest," v. 26) seems to have this meaning elsewhere (e.g., 8:18).¹

This long section of David's troubles contains selected events that show that even the LORD's anointed was not above a principle by which God deals with all people. Obedience to the revealed will of God brings blessing to the individual and makes him or her a channel of blessing to others. However, disobedience brings divine judgment in the form of curtailed blessing (fertility). Here we also see the serious effects of arrogance before God (in the cases of Absalom and Sheba).

"... the narrator has invited the reader to pay particular attention to the social and psychological aftermath of adultery, as well as to the obvious fulfilment [*sic*] of God's

¹Cf. Goldman, pp. 236, 319.

judgment as pronounced by the prophet Nathan (2 Sa. 12:10-12)."¹

Another major lesson is that rebellion against the LORD's anointed cannot succeed. The parallels between David and Jesus Christ in these chapters stand out. Jesus, like David, suffered rejection at the hands of "His own," left His capital in apparent disgrace, but will return to rule and reign.

Seven sub-conflicts appear within this sixth major conflict section in Samuel: Mephibosheth and Jonathan's line conflicts with David's faithfulness (ch. 9). The Ammonite coalition conflicts with David (10:1—11:1). David's unfaithfulness to the covenant conflicts with Yahweh's faithfulness (11:2—12:25). Ammon conflicts with David (12:26-31). Amnon conflicts with Absalom (chs. 13—14). Absalom conflicts with David (ch. 15—18), and Sheba conflicts with David (chs. 19—20).

God's basic commitment to David resulted in his anointing, which guaranteed much blessing. David's basic commitment to God, his heart for God, resulted in his never losing a battle with a foreign nation, as far as the text records. David's occasional violation of the covenant resulted in some other losses (11:2—12:25; ch. 25).

"David's peculiar achievement ... was that he was able to unite the very diverse religious forces to be found in Israel under the leadership of the monarchy, and at the same time to secure the indispensable constitutional basis which would ensure the effectiveness of the kingly office."²

Similarly, God's election of the Christian results in much blessing for him or her. The believer's commitment to God as lord of his or her life results in a life characterized mainly by victory and success. The believer's occasional violation of God's revealed will results in some defeat for him or her. Even an elect believer, such as Saul (assuming that he was a believer), can experience a tragic life, if he or she does not commit himself or herself to following God faithfully (Rom. 12:1-2).

¹Baldwin, p. 282.

²Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 1:447.

VII. SUMMARY ILLUSTRATIONS CHS. 21—24

The last major section of the Book of Samuel (2 Sam. 21—24) consists of six separate pericopes that together constitute a conclusion to the whole book (cf. Judg. 17—21). Each pericope emphasizes the theological message of the book and the major theological points the writer wanted his readers to learn (cf. Judg. 17—21).¹ They also seem to focus on the divine and human sides of leadership.² These chapters reconstruct David's image, which chapters 11 through 19 deconstruct. The former section (chs. 9—20) focused on David's private life, whereas these last chapters focus on his public life.³

"... the final four chapters, far from being a clumsy appendix, offer a highly reflective, theological interpretation of David's whole career adumbrating the messianic hope."⁴

"The structure of the epilogue corresponds to the course of David's career as it unfolds in 1—2 Samuel."⁵

The structure of this section is also chiasmic. It corresponds to the chiasm in 5:17—8:14:

- "A The Lord's Wrath Against Israel (21:1-14)
- B David's Heroes (21:15-22)
- C David's Song of Praise (22:1-51)
- C' David's Last Words (23:1-7)
- B' David's Mighty Men (23:8-39)
- A' The Lord's Wrath Against Israel (24:1-25)"⁶

¹See Walter Brueggemann, "2 Samuel 21—24: An Appendix of Deconstruction?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50:3 (July 1988):383-97, for some helpful insights into these chapters.

²Wiersbe, p. 377.

³Firth, p. 502.

⁴Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, p 275. See also Gordon, p. 298.

⁵Chisholm, *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 284.

⁶Youngblood, p. 1051.

A. FAMINE FROM SAUL'S SIN 21:1-14

In this first subsection of the epilogue, the writer reminds the reader that breaking covenants results in God withdrawing the blessing of fertility. David had broken the Mosaic Covenant and so experienced God's discipline. Violating God's revealed will always has this effect. When David righted Saul's wrong, the land was blessed once again. David was usually faithful to the Mosaic Covenant, and therefore was blessed more than he was cursed. This section stresses the importance of obedience.

In the chiasmic structure of this summary section, this incident has a parallel in the pestilence that resulted from David's numbering the people (ch. 24). Both incidents emphasize the deadly consequences of unfaithfulness to God and His will, and they call for obedience. Here David apparently failed to trust God to bless Israel as He had promised, and he put too much confidence in the strength of his army to secure blessings (1 Chron. 21:3).

1. Saul's broken treaty with the Gibeonites 21:1-6

Internal references in 2 Samuel enable us to date this incident early in David's reign: between Mephibosheth's arrival in Jerusalem, and the beginning of the Ammonite wars. Probably God sent judgment on Israel for Saul's action soon after he died. Saul's concubine watched over the bodies of her slain sons until the famine ended. If this took place later in David's reign, she would have been very old, which is possible but unlikely. Also, David buried the bodies of Saul and Jonathan at this time. He would hardly have done this years later. The fact that David did not execute Mephibosheth suggests that this son of Jonathan had come under David's protection by this time. That took place after David moved his capital to Jerusalem. After the Ammonite wars began, David might not have had time for what the writer described here. Consequently a date within 996-993 B.C. for this famine seems reasonable.

Characteristically, David sought the LORD (for His mercy) concerning the famine (v. 1; cf. Deut. 28:47-48). Sometimes natural catastrophes such as famines resulted from Israel's sins, but sin was not always the cause (cf. Job; John 9:2-3). There is no mention elsewhere in Samuel that Saul had broken the Israelites' treaty with the Gibeonites (cf. Josh. 9:3-27). Saul evidently refused to acknowledge Israel's treaty with the Gibeonites (Josh. 9) and put some of them to death, evidently shedding innocent blood. One

writer suggested that Saul had made Gibeon his capital, and after a falling out with the native Hivite inhabitants, Saul slaughtered them.¹ However there is nothing in the text that indicates that he did this. Another possibility is that when Saul slew many of the priests at Nob, he also executed many Gibeonites (1 Sam. 22:19).

Verse 2 says that the Gibeonites were descendants of the Amorites, but elsewhere they are called Hivites (Josh. 9:7; 11:19). The answer to this apparent contradiction is that the term Amorite is often used in a general sense to describe any of the original occupants of the Promised Land (e.g., Gen. 15:16; Deut. 1:27).

David asked the Gibeonites what punishment would satisfy them and atone for Saul's sin of murder. However, there is no mention of his asking the LORD what he should do.

"Since the verb *kipper* ["atonement"] is used absolutely here, it is impossible to say from the construction alone whether it means to propitiate [satisfy] or to expiate [remove]. From the context, however, it is clear that it means both. David is seeking both to satisfy the Gibeonites and to 'make up for' the wrong done to them. It is equally clear that he cannot achieve the latter with the former. There is no expiation [removal] without propitiation [satisfaction]."²

"The inheritance of the LORD" (v. 3) probably refers to the nation of Israel (cf. 20:19). The Gibeonites were content to have seven of Saul's descendants (probably his sons or grandsons in this case) executed. This was in keeping with ancient Near Eastern laws, but not the Mosaic Law. Saul's descendants may have been involved in the attack on the Gibeonites, since it was illegal to put children to death for their fathers' sins, under Mosaic Law (Deut. 24:16). Gleason Archer offered another explanation:

"... the full measure of his [Saul's] guilt had yet to be paid for. This vengeance had to be visited on seven descendants of that king, for seven was a number symbolizing the complete work of God. Israel had to learn by this solemn object lesson that

¹Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Did Saul Make Gibeon His Capital?" *Vetus Testamentum* 24:1 (January 1974):1-7.

²Paul Garnet, "Atonement Constructions in the Old Testament and the Qumran Scrolls," *Evangelical Quarterly* 46:3 (July-September 1974):134.

their covenants with foreign nations, sworn to in the name of Yahweh, had to be observed at all costs. Under special circumstances, then, the general rule of safeguarding children against punishment for the sins of their parents was subject to exception, so far as God's administration of justice was concerned."¹

Another possibility is that David simply did not obey the Law on this occasion.² There are records of broken treaties leading to natural calamities in other ancient Near Eastern literature.³

The Hebrew word translated "hang" (v. 6) means to execute in a way that the body suffers public humiliation (cf. Num. 25:4). Probably the seven descendants of Saul suffered execution and then their bodies were hung up so that everyone could witness their fate.

2. David's justice and mercy 21:7-9

David showed himself to be a true son of Yahweh by keeping his covenant with Jonathan and by sparing Mephibosheth (cf. v. 2; 1 Sam. 18:3; 20:8, 16). However, he followed God's Law and executed seven of Saul's descendants, including another Mephibosheth, Saul's son (v. 8). Merab (v. 8) is the correct name of another of Saul's daughters. Michal, the name that appears in the AV, is probably a scribal error (cf. 1 Sam. 18:19; 2 Sam. 6:23).⁴ David could justly slay Saul's descendants if they had had a part in the execution of the Gibeonites (cf. Deut. 24:16; 2 Kings 14:6). This seems to have been the case (v. 1; cf. Ezek. 18:4, 20). The execution took place in Gibeah, Saul's former home and capital, which was on a hill ("mountain," v. 9) of Benjamin.

The barley harvest began in late March or early April, when the feast of Passover took place. Since Passover memorialized the Israelites' liberation from oppression in Egypt, this was an appropriate time for this event. Verse 1 says that the famine lasted three years, so verse 9 probably means that the harvest that year was meager, or that the execution took place when

¹Archer, p. 153. Paragraph division omitted.

²Gaebelein, 1:2:228.

³See F. Charles Fensham, "The Treaty between Israel and the Gibeonites," *Biblical Archaeologist* 27:3 (1964):96-100.

⁴Driver, p. 352.

there was normally a harvest—even though there was not one that year. By getting things right with the Gibeonites, David brought Israel out from under God's oppression, which Saul's sin had caused.¹

3. David's honoring of Saul and Jonathan 21:10-14

The writer did not mention how much time elapsed between the execution of Saul's descendants and the coming of rain.

"Leaving corpses without burial, to be consumed by birds of prey and wild beasts, was regarded as the greatest ignominy that could befall the dead ..."²

It was also contrary to the Mosaic Law (Deut. 21:22-23).

David's action ended the famine, and God again blessed Israel with rain and fertility. David also proceeded to give Saul and Jonathan honorable burials.³

"David had to resolve the demands of bloodguilt, but could not demand humiliation."⁴

Because Saul had been unfaithful to Israel's covenant with the Gibeonites, God punished the nation with famine (lack of fertility). When David, even though he apparently did not keep the Mosaic Law, righted this wrong, God restored fertility to the land. God reduced Saul's line from one of the most powerful-looking men in Israel, Saul, to one of the weakest-looking, Mephibosheth. David's faithfulness to his covenant with Jonathan shows that he was a covenant-keeping king like Yahweh. Saul, on the other hand, broke Israel's covenant with the Gibeonites.

B. FOUR GIANT KILLERS 21:15-22 (CF. 1 CHRON. 20:4-8)

The two lists of David's mighty men (21:15-22 and 23:8-39) show God's remarkable blessing of David for his submission to Israel's Commander-In-Chief: Yahweh. David's small army accomplished amazing feats because God was with David. David's divine election, coupled with his customary

¹See Chisholm, "Rizpah's Torment ...," pp. 50-66.

²Keil and Delitzsch, p. 462.

³See my note on the significance of burial in the ancient Near East at 1 Sam. 31.

⁴Firth, p. 507.

trust and obedience Godward, resulted in many forms of fertility (military, political, and influential). This record of four giant killers emphasizes the supernatural character of the victories David was able to enjoy because God fought for him by using various men in his army. These warrior stories are similar to the stories of the minor judges in Judges 12:8-15 in that they introduce a character, provide minimal detail, and give no theological coloring.¹

"The lists of heroes and heroic exploits that frame the poetic centre-piece represent human instrumentality, but not the underlying reality, which is Yahweh."²

This pericope may describe what happened when David was fighting the Philistines early in his reign (cf. 5:18-25), probably right after he became king of all Israel, in 1004 B.C.³ However, it is really impossible to tell how the incidents recorded here relate to others mentioned in the book, or even if they do.

The "giant" (vv. 16, 18, 20, 22) appears to have been the father or ancestor of all four of the huge Philistine warriors mentioned in this passage. However, the Hebrew word translated giant (*raphah*) is a collective term for the Rephaim. The Rephaim were the mighty warriors who originally inhabited the Canaanite coastal plain (cf. Gen. 15:19-21; Deut. 2:11; 3:11, 13). They terrified ten of the 12 spies that Joshua sent out from Kadesh (Num. 13:33).

The "lamp of Israel" (v. 17) refers to David, the source of Israel's human guidance, prosperity, and wellbeing—its leading light.

"The lamp burning in a tent or house being a figure of the continued prosperity of its owner (*ps.* [Ps.] 18, 29 [*sic* 28]. Pr. 13, 9. Job 18, 6) or of his family (cf. the *nir* [lamp] promised to the house of David, 1 Ki. 11, 36. 15, 4. 2 Ki. 8, 19=2 Ch. 21, 7)."⁴

¹Ibid., p. 508.

²Gordon, p. 298.

³Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, pp. 237-38.

⁴Driver, p. 354.

As God was a light to His people, so the king was a source of life as His vice-regent. Similarly, Jesus is the light of the world, but Christians are to let our light shine before men.

"... when a man dies his lamp is extinguished (Jb. 18:6; Pr. 13:9); David's death would be tantamount to the extinction of the life of the community (cf. La. 4:20). The figure of the lamp, which came to symbolize the Davidic dynasty as maintained by Yahweh (1 Ki. 15:4; Ps. 132:17), possibly derives from the world of the sanctuary, in which a lamp was kept burning 'continually' (see on 1 Sa. 3:3)."¹

Gob (v. 18) was evidently another name for Gezer (1 Chron. 20:4). The reference in verse 19 to Elhanan killing Goliath the Gittite (i.e., a resident of Gath) seems to contradict 1 Samuel 17. However, 1 Chronicles 20:5 says that Elhanan killed Lahmi, the brother of Goliath. Evidently that is the correct reading.² It is highly unlikely that there were two Goliaths with the same name, both of whom were Gittites. Sometimes David was able to slay his enemies personally, but at other times he had to rely on the help of others (v. 17).

The "four" that "were born to the giant [Heb. *raphah*] in Gath" (v. 22) were: Ishbi-benob (v. 16), Saph (v. 19), Goliath [probably Lahmi] (v. 19), and the man of great stature (v. 20). Evidently Goliath had four brothers.

"David began his glory with the conquest of one giant, and here concludes it with the conquest of four."³

The point of this brief section is that God blessed David with military victories far beyond anyone's normal expectations, because he was God's faithful anointed servant. Yahweh brought blessing through him to Israel militarily as well as agriculturally (vv. 1-14). The first incident in the appendix (vv. 1-14) illustrates that breaking covenants reduces fertility, but this one (vv. 15-22) shows that God's favor results in supernatural victories.

¹Gordon, p. 303.

²See Archer, p. 179; Davis, pp. 319-20; Firth, p. 509; Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *Interpreting the Historical Books*, pp. 175-77.

³Henry, p. 357.

"If there is one thing 2 Samuel 21 reveals, it is the fact that God judges nations."¹

C. DAVID'S PRAISE OF YAHWEH CH. 22

In the center of this summary epilogue, we have two psalms in which David praised God. In these psalms, David articulated the deepest convictions of his heart about God. These convictions were the basis of David's greatness, and they account for God's blessing of him, on the human side.

"It has long been recognized that 2 Samuel 22 is not only one of the oldest major poems in the OT but also that, because Psalm 18 parallels it almost verbatim, it is a key passage for the theory and practice of OT textual criticism."²

This psalm records David's own expression of the theological message that the writer of Samuel expounded historically. Yahweh is King, and He blesses in many ways those who submit to His authority. Verse 21 is perhaps the key verse. David learned the truths expressed in this psalm and evidently composed it rather early in his career (vv. 1, 20-24; cf. the superscription of Psalm 18).

This song shares several key themes with Hannah's song (1 Sam. 2:1-10) and David's lament over Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam. 1:17-27). Both David and Hannah used "horn" as a figure of strength at the beginning (v. 3; 1 Sam. 2:1) and "rock" as a figure for God (v. v. 2; 1 Sam. 2:2). They both referred to divine deliverance (v. 3; 1 Sam. 2:1-2) and ended by equating God's king with His anointed (v. 51; 1 Sam. 2:10). Thus these two songs, by Hannah and by David, form a kind of *inclusio* around the Books of Samuel and give them literary unity. Given the similarities, each makes its own unique statement as well.³

This is a psalm of declarative praise (or "royal thanksgiving"⁴) for what God had done for David. It reflects David's rich spiritual life. While David focused

¹McGee, 2:236.

²Youngblood, p. 1064.

³See Frank Moore Cross Jr., and David Noel Freedman, "A Royal Song of Thanksgiving—II Samuel 22 = Psalm 18," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 72:1 (1953):15-34.

⁴Firth, p. 516.

attention on the LORD more than on himself, his emphasis was on the blessings Yahweh had bestowed upon him.

We can divide the passage into four sections: the LORD's exaltation (vv. 1-4), the LORD's exploits (vv. 5-20), the LORD's equity (vv. 21-30), and the LORD's excellence (vv. 31-51).¹

The first verse suggests that David composed this psalm early in his reign. The reference to God's temple (v. 7) probably means His heavenly dwelling place. "Arrows" (v. 15) is a figure for lightning bolts. God had drawn David out of the waters of affliction, as Pharaoh's daughter had drawn Moses out of literal dangerous waters (v. 17). God had rewarded David (not saved him) because of his righteous conduct (v. 21). Cleanness (Heb. *bor*) of hands (v. 21) is a figure describing moral purity that derives from the practice of washing the hands with soda (*bor*), which was probably some sodium compound used as a cleansing agent.

"The psalmist is not talking about justification by works, much less about sinless perfection, but about 'a conscience void of offence toward God and men' (Acts 24:16)."²

"He means especially his integrity with reference to Saul and Ish-bosheth, Absalom and Sheba, and those who either opposed his coming to the crown or endeavoured to dethrone him."³

God responds to people according to their conduct (vv. 26-27). He is astute (shrewd) to the perverted (crooked, v. 27) in the sense that He turns them into fools.⁴

"The point is that God sometimes uses deception to thwart the purposes of those who are morally and ethically corrupt."⁵

The similes in verse 43 picture David's enemies as objects of humiliation and contempt.⁶

¹Merrill, "2 Samuel," in *The Old ...*, pp. 477, 480.

²Gordon, p. 306.

³Henry, p. 358.

⁴Youngblood, p. 1073; Carlson, pp. 251-52.

⁵Chisholm, *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 298.

⁶Youngblood, p. 1075.

"It is ... both serendipitous and satisfying that the Song of David, a psalm of impressive scope and exquisite beauty, should begin with 'The LORD' (v. 2), the Eternal One, and end with 'forever' (v. 51)."¹

D. DAVID'S LAST TESTAMENT 23:1-7

The combination of David's final song (in the text, ch. 22) followed by his last testament (23:1-7) recalls the similar combination of Moses' final song and his last testament (Deut. 32 and 33). This was David's final literary legacy to Israel, "not a deathbed recording but a final public statement".² His claim to divine inspiration, in verse 2, is as strong as the better known claims in the New Testament: 2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 1:1-2; and 2 Peter 1:19-21.

"Whereas the psalm in the previous chapter celebrates the delivering acts of Yahweh by which the Davidic supremacy was established, this little poem is composed around the theme of the dynastic covenant through which the continued prosperity of the Davidic house was vouchsafed."³

"Because the poem is cast as an oracle, it takes a prophetic form, making this not only David's personal claims, but also an announcement of Yahweh's word and David's response to it."⁴

This poem also has a chiasmic structure, focusing on the LORD speaking (vv. 3-4). His words describe the ideal king. They are messianic. However the passage also anticipates all of David's successors.

The same great spiritual themes come through here as in the previous chapter and in the whole historical account recorded in 1 and 2 Samuel. The ancients regarded the last words of any person as especially significant. The last words of Israel's great leaders were even more important, and the last words of prophets were extremely important (cf. Gen. 49; Deut. 33;

¹Ibid., p. 1077. See also my comments on Psalm 18 in my notes on the Book of Psalms.

²Firth, p. 525.

³Gordon, p. 309.

⁴Firth, p. 525.

Acts 20:17-38; et al.). They often expressed lessons those who had walked with God for many years had learned.

David described himself as simply the son of Jesse, a common Israelite, and as someone whom God had raised up—in contrast to a self-made man (v. 1; cf. Dan. 4:29-33). David always viewed himself as one whom God had chosen and anointed for his role in life (v. 1). He was the LORD's anointed and the sweet psalmist. These four descriptions of David picture his leadership in relation to his family, his political administration, his military forces, and his spiritual influence.

David claimed that the words that he had spoken had been received from God (v. 2). He thus gave God the credit for his inspiration. He also recognized God as the real ruler of Israel (v. 3). Many ancient as well as modern interpreters of this book have understood David's description of Israel's ruler in verses 3 and 4 as a reference to Messiah. It probably also describes David and his royal descendants. The figure of the dawning sun pictures the righteous ruler as a source of promise, joy, and blessing to his people (v. 4). The figure of the sprouting grass describes him as a source of prosperity, new life, and fertility (v. 4). David viewed his dynasty this way because God had made an everlasting covenant (the Davidic Covenant) with him (v. 5). This resulted in order, security, deliverance, and fulfillment of desire (v. 5). David believed that the covenant would result in increased blessing for his house (v. 5). The worthless would suffer the reverse fate, however, and even be burned up as useless (cf. Matt. 13:30).¹

To summarize, David believed that the LORD sovereignly initiates blessing, and those who value it cause His blessings to increase on themselves and others.

E. THIRTY-SEVEN MIGHTY MEN 23:8-39 (CF. 1 CHRON. 11:10-47)

One might conclude from 1 Samuel 22:2 that David's army, made up as it was of malcontents and distressed debtors, would not have been able to accomplish anything. This list testifies to God's blessing on David and Israel militarily by enabling his warriors to accomplish supernatural feats and to become mighty men in war. Again, God's supernatural blessing is what this

¹For a linguistic analysis of this pericope, see H. Neil Richardson, "The Last Words of David: Some Notes on II Samuel 23:1-7," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 90:3 (1971):257-66.

section illustrates. The corresponding list of other mighty men in 21:15-22 contained no reference to Yahweh's help, but this list does.

1. Selected adventures of outstanding warriors 23:8-23

There were three warriors who received higher honor than all the rest (vv. 8-12): Josheb-basshebeth, Eleazar, and Shammah. What their relationship to "The Thirty" (v. 24) was is hard to determine.¹ One writer assumed they were over The Thirty.² Josheb-basshebeth may have been responsible for the killing of "800 ... at one time" (v. 8) through the troops that he commanded, rather than by killing them himself personally.³

Three unnamed men from The Thirty received special mention (vv. 13-17). David evidently poured out the water, which these men ventured their lives to obtain from the well at Bethlehem, because he believed that only Yahweh was worthy of such a sacrificial action.

"Great leaders don't take their followers for granted or treat lightly the sacrifices that they make beyond the call of duty."⁴

Two others also received great esteem (vv. 18-23): Abishai, and Benaiah, who is the only priest mentioned in the Old Testament who became a soldier.⁵ This was evidently the same Benaiah who became the head of David's bodyguard (20:23), a position similar to the one that David had occupied in Saul's army (1 Sam. 22:14).

"I love this one. This fellow slew a lion. That is not an easy thing to do, and he did it when there was snow on the ground. I know a lot of people who won't even come to church when there is a little rain on the sidewalk."⁶

"All people are created equal before God and the law, but all people are not equal in gifts and abilities; some people have greater gifts and opportunities than others. However, the fact that we can't achieve like 'the first three' shouldn't keep us

¹B. Mazar, "The Military Elite of King David," *Vetus Testamentum* 13 (1963):310-20.

²Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 282.

³Firth, p. 534.

⁴Wiersbe, p. 266.

⁵Ibid., p. 381.

⁶McGee, 2:240.

from doing less than our best and perhaps establishing a 'second three.' God doesn't measure us by what He helped others do but by what He wanted us to do with the abilities and opportunities He graciously gave us."¹

Josheb-basshebeth (v. 8) is an example of a spiritual warrior with exceptional strength (cf. Eph. 6:10). Eleazar demonstrated unusual stamina and persistence (cf. Isa. 40:31). Shammah's greatness lay in his supernatural steadfastness (cf. Eph. 6:14). The three warriors who took David's wish for water as their command and took a calculated risk (not wild recklessness) showed remarkable sacrifice, dedication, and loyalty (cf. Matt. 6:33). These are all qualities necessary in, and available to, spiritual warriors of all ages, by God's grace. Perhaps the writer also mentioned the feats of Abishai and Benaiah because they feature in the preceding narrative. As Jesus had his circles of intimates (Peter, James, and John, the Twelve, and the Seventy), so did David.

2. A list of notable warriors among The Thirty 23:24-39

Thirty-two more soldiers obtained special distinction (vv. 24-39), including Uriah the Hittite (v. 39). The writer referred to them as "The Thirty." This designation seems to have been a title for their exclusive group (cf. v. 18). Since more than 30 names appear in this list of "The Thirty," it may be that when one died, someone else took his place. Asahel, the first name listed, and Uriah, the last, had, of course, already died by the end of David's reign.

The Thirty may have been "a kind of supreme army council which was largely responsible for framing the internal army regulations, deciding on promotions and appointments, and handling other military matters."²

Compared with the list in 1 Chronicles 11 there are several variations in spelling, which occurs occasionally in the Hebrew Bible. Also some of the differences may be because some soldiers had replaced others. Perhaps in some cases the same man had two different names.³

¹Wiersbe, p. 380.

²Yadin, p. 277.

³See the comparative chart in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, pp. 478-79.

Note that each of these spiritual warriors received individual honor by God (cf. 1 Sam. 2:30). Each had a different background, reflected in his identification in this list. His background did not determine his success. Each was a special blessing to David, because David chose to follow the LORD faithfully. Conspicuous by its absence is the name of Joab, David's commander-in-chief.

The whole pericope (vv. 8-39) illustrates the fact that God enables those who follow His anointed faithfully and wholeheartedly to do great works of spiritual significance for Him.

F. PESTILENCE FROM DAVID'S SIN CH. 24 (CF. 1 CHRON. 21:1—22:1)

This last section of the book records another occasion on which God withdrew His blessing from Israel, this time because of David's sin (cf. 21:1-14). When David stopped trusting in Yahweh for protection, and placed his confidence in his military personnel, God sent a serious disease that killed 70,000 men (v. 15).

"... chapter 24 provides a fitting conclusion to the story of David by calling attention, once more and finally, not only to his ambition and pride, but also to his humility and remorse."¹

"Every spiritual leader would do well to read this story once a year!"²

1. David's sin of numbering the people 24:1-9

David probably ordered this census about 975 B.C.

"After the revolutions of both Absalom and Sheba it would have been reasonable for David to reassess his military situation against the possibility of similar uprisings or other emergencies."³

In support of this hypothesis is the fact that Joab and the army commanders were able to take over nine months to gather the population

¹Youngblood, p. 1095.

²Swindoll, *David ...*, p. 282.

³Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 272.

statistics (v. 8). This suggests a very peaceful condition in Israel that characterized David's later reign, but not his earlier reign.

The writer of Chronicles wrote that Satan (perhaps an adversarial neighbor nation since the Hebrew word *satan* means "adversary") moved David to take the census (1 Chron. 21:1). Yet, in verse 1, the writer of Samuel said that God was responsible. Both were true; God used an adversary to bring judgment on the objects of His anger (cf. Job. 1—2; Acts 2:23).¹

"... paradoxically, a divinely-sent affliction can be called a 'messenger of Satan' (2 Cor 12:7 ...)."²

"God, though He cannot tempt any man (Jas. 1:13), is frequently described in Scripture as doing what He merely permits to be done; and so, in this case, He permitted Satan to tempt David."³

We can identify perhaps four levels of causality in verse 1: God was the final cause, the primary instrumental cause was Satan, the secondary instrumental cause was some hostile human enemy, and David was the efficient cause.

The LORD was angry with Israel for some reason. He evidently allowed Satan to stir up hostile enemy forces to threaten David and Israel (cf. Job 1—2). In response to this military threat, David chose to number the people. David's choice was not his only option, but he chose to number the people. He sinned because he failed to trust God. The LORD did not force David to sin.

Quite clearly, David took the census to determine his military strength. Taking a census did not constitute sin (cf. Exod. 30:11-12; Num. 1:1-2). David's sin was apparently placing confidence in the number of his soldiers rather than in the LORD.

"For the Chronicler in particular [cf. 1 Chron. 27:23-24], ... the arena of David's transgression appears to be that taking a

¹See Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Does God Deceive?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:617 (January-March 1998):11-12, 21-23.

²Youngblood, p. 1096.

³Jamieson, et al., p. 246.

census impugns the faithfulness of God in the keeping of His promises—a kind of walking by sight instead of by faith."¹

Josephus suggested another reason why this census displeased the LORD:

"Now king David was desirous to know how many ten thousands there were of the people, but forgot the commands of Moses, who told them beforehand, that if the multitude were numbered, they should pay half a shekel to God for every head [Exod. 30:12]."²

"Conduct a census" (vv. 2, 4) literally means to "muster" in preparation for battle. Joab proceeded in a counterclockwise direction around Israel.³ The territory described included, but did not extend as far as, all the territory that God had promised to Abraham. There appear to have been 800,000 veterans in Israel plus 300,000 recruits (cf. 1 Chron. 21:5). In Judah there was a total of 500,000. The figure of 470,000 in 1 Chronicles 21 probably omitted the Benjamites (cf. 1 Chron. 21:6). The Hebrew word *elep* can mean either "thousand" or "military unit." Here it could very well mean military unit.⁴ The parallel account in 1 Chronicles 21 says that Joab did not number the men of Levi and Benjamin because David's command was abhorrent to Joab (1 Chron. 21:6).

Joab wisely warned David of his folly (v. 3). Even such a man as Joab could see that what David planned to do was wrong. Nevertheless, David chose to ignore Joab's counsel (v. 4). He behaved as one who refuses to be accountable to anyone, which was easy for David to do, since he was the king. The thing that David had done displeased the LORD, and He struck Israel (1 Chron. 21:7).

2. David's confession of his guilt 24:10-14

Apparently the census was complete—as complete as Joab took it—before David acknowledged that he had sinned. Finally guilt for his pride

¹Raymond B. Dillard, "David's Census: Perspectives on II Samuel 24 and I Chronicles 21," in *Through Christ's Word: A Festschrift for Dr. Philip E. Hughes*, p. 105.

²Josephus, 13:1:1.

³See Patrick W. Skehan, "Joab's Census: How Far North (2 Sm 24,6)?" *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 31:1 (January 1969):42-49, for a detailed study of his route. Rasmussen, *Zondervan NIV ...*, p. 119, provided a map of Joab's route.

⁴Cf. Baldwin, p. 296; Gordon, p. 319; Anderson, p. 285; McCarter, *II Samuel*, p. 510.

penetrated his conscience, and he confessed his sin and asked God for forgiveness (v. 10). This response shows David at his best, as "the man after God's own heart." God graciously gave the king some choices about how He would punish the nation (v. 13). This may be the only instance in Scripture where God gave someone the choice of choosing between several punishment options. Because David was the head of the nation, his actions affected all Israel, as well as himself. David's choice was whether he wanted a long, mild punishment or a short, intense one. He chose to leave the choice in God's hands, because he had learned that God is merciful (v. 14).

"War would place the nation at the mercy of its enemies: famine would make it dependent on corn-merchants, who might greatly aggravate the misery of scarcity: only in the pestilence—some form of plague sudden and mysterious in its attack, and baffling the medical knowledge of the time—would the punishment come directly from God, and depend immediately upon His Will."¹

"Sinners in the hands of an angry God have more reason for hope than does offending man in the clutches of an offended society."²

The rabbis assumed that David's reasoning was as follows:

"If I choose famine the people will say that I chose something which will affect them and not me, for I shall be well supplied with food; if I choose war, they will say that the king is well protected; let me choose pestilence, before which all are equal."³

3. David's punishment 24:15-17

An angelic messenger from God again brought death to many people throughout all Israel (cf. Exod. 12:23). Seventy thousand men (v. 15) is more than three times the number of men who followed Absalom and died in his uprising (i.e., 20,000; cf. 18:7).

¹Kirkpatrick, p. 228.

²Young, pp. 304-5.

³Goldman, p. 345.

"God is often described in Scripture as repenting ["relented," v. 16] when He ceased to pursue a course He had begun."¹

"Even while chastening, God is more loving, more faithful, more worthy of confidence than any other."²

The "angel of the LORD" may have been the pre-incarnate Christ, but he could have simply been an angelic messenger whom God sent.³ Evidently God gave David the ability to see the angel, who was killing the people, as the angel entered Jerusalem prepared to kill more innocent victims of David's sin there (v. 17; cf. 2 Kings 6:17). David asked God to have mercy on the people since he was the sinner responsible for the punishment. He had failed to appreciate the extent of the effects of his act when he ordered the census. Note David's shepherd heart in his reference to his people as "sheep" (v. 17).

"He is even willing to suffer (die?) for the sake of the sheep (v. 17)!"⁴

"Wanting more land and more people to rule, David finds himself with 70,000 fewer subjects."⁵

The 70,000 who died may have been 70 military units of soldiers.⁶

"Sin is really a selfish act. It's all about bringing ourselves pleasure caring little about the toll it will take on someone else."⁷

4. David's repentance 24:18-25

David proceeded to offer sacrifices in response to the prophet Gad's instructions (v. 18). David needed to commit himself again to God (the meaning of the burnt offering) and to renew his fellowship with God (the intent of the peace offering, v. 25). God instructed him to present these

¹Jamieson, et al., p. 247.

²J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, 1:515.

³See Youngblood, p. 1100-1.

⁴Gordon, p. 322.

⁵Dillard, p. 106.

⁶See Youngblood, p. 1100.

⁷Swindoll, *David ...*, p. 282.

sacrifices at the place where He had shown mercy (v. 16). David willingly obeyed (v. 19). According to Jewish tradition, "Abraham came and offered his son Isaac for a burnt-offering at that very place ..."¹

Araunah (also called Ornan, 1 Chron. 21) was a native Jebusite, so perhaps his land had never been sanctified (set apart) to Yahweh as other Israelite land had (cf. v. 23; note "the LORD *your* God," though Araunah may simply have been speaking politely). David purchased the threshing floor for one and one-quarter pounds of silver. He insisted on purchasing the threshing floor because a sacrifice that costs nothing is no sacrifice at all (cf. Mark 12:43-44). The incident recalls Abraham's purchase of the cave of Machpelah from Ephron the Hittite (Gen. 23:3-15), and it anticipates King Omri's purchase of a hill on which he built another capital: Samaria (1 Kings 16:23-24). The situations involving Abraham and David were both desperate. Araunah's threshing floor was to become the site of Solomon's temple.

"At the same site where Abraham once held a knife over his son (Gen. 22:1-19), David sees the angel of the Lord with sword ready to plunge into Jerusalem. In both cases death is averted by sacrifice. The temple is established there as the place where Israel was perpetually reminded that without the shedding of blood there is no remission of sin (Heb. 9:22). Death for Isaac and for David's Jerusalem was averted because the sword of divine justice would ultimately find its mark in the Son of God (John 19:33)."²

"Small wonder, then, that the NT should begin with 'a record of the genealogy of Jesus Christ the son of David, the son of Abraham...'"³

Verse 24 says that David bought "the threshing floor and the oxen for 50 shekels of silver." But 1 Chronicles 21:25 says that "David gave Ornan 600 shekels of gold by weight for the site." Probably 600 shekels of gold is what David paid for the entire site, not just the threshing floor and the

¹Josephus, 13:4.

²Dillard, p. 107.

³Youngblood, p. 1104.

oxen. The entire site may have include all of Mt. Moriah. The second transaction may have taken place some time after the first one.¹

The writer probably recorded David's census, not only because it accounts for the origin of the site of Solomon's temple, but because it illustrates a basic theological truth taught throughout the book: Whenever someone whom God has chosen for special blessing sins, he or she becomes the target of God's discipline, and he or she also becomes a channel of judgment to others. Only genuine repentance will turn the situation around. When David agreed to obey God's will, revealed through Gad, he began at once to become a source of blessing again.

"No one need aspire to leadership in the work of God who is not prepared to pay a price greater than his contemporaries and colleagues are willing to pay. True leadership always exacts a heavy toll on the whole man, and the more effective the leadership is, the higher the price to be paid."²

Much blessing came to Israel through the land David bought from Araunah the Jebusite. The fact that it was a threshing floor is interesting, too, since people threshed grain there, which was the blessing of agricultural fertility.

Many early Jewish readers of 1 and 2 Samuel would have viewed the purchase of the site of Solomon's temple as the climax of the book. The building of this temple is the focus of the first part of the Book of 1 Kings. Solomon's temple became the centerpiece of Israel for hundreds of years. It was the place where God met with His people and where they worshipped Him corporately—the center of their spiritual and national life. Therefore the mention of the purchase of Araunah's threshing floor was the first step in the building of the temple, the source of incalculable blessing to come (cf. Gen. 23:3-16).

As mentioned previously, the writer composed this last major section of Samuel (chs. 21—24) in a chiastic structure. Here is a similar diagram of this section:

¹Archer, p. 190.

²J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, p. 169.

- A Famine from Saul's sin 21:1-14 (narrative)
- B Military heroes and victories 21:15-22 (list)
- C David's psalm of praise to God ch. 22 (poem)
- C' David's tribute in praise of God 23:1-7 (poem)
- B' Military heroes and victories 23:8-39 (list)
- A' Pestilence from David's sin ch. 24 (narrative)

Hebrew writers often used this chiasmic literary structure to unify several different parts around one central concept. Here the center is quite clearly Yahweh. Praise of God reflects a right relationship to Him. This relationship results in blessing (strength, victories, etc.). When one is unfaithful to God, the result is judgment (famine, disease, etc.).

Within each of these six final sections there is also a conflict. Saul and his sons conflict with David and Mephibosheth (21:1-14). The Philistine giants conflict with David's warriors (21:15-22). Evil and arrogant enemies of God conflict with righteous covenant-keepers (ch. 22). The blessed conflict with the worthless (23:1-7). Israel's enemies conflict with David's men (23:8-39) and, finally, David conflicts with Joab and Araunah (ch. 24).

All of Saul's sons perished, but Mephibosheth, who was faithful Jonathan's son, was in covenant relationship to David, who was a covenant-keeping son of Yahweh. The Philistine giants perished because God was with David. David's psalm recalls Hannah's psalm (1 Sam. 2:1-10). In both of these prayers the contrast between the arrogant and the humble before God stands out. David received the Davidic Covenant because of God's sovereign choice and David's typical obedience. God raised up and empowered many mighty men because David walked before God submissively. The nation suffered when David got away from God but prospered when he got right with God. In fact, the prosperity that grew out of David's purchase of Araunah's threshing floor highlights the super-abounding grace of God.

Conclusion

When 1 Samuel opened, Israel was a loosely connected affiliation of tribes with little unity and loyalty. The judges led her, many of whom were weak and not completely effective. Her worship was in disrepute, due to corruption in the priesthood and even among the judges. She was at the mercy of her surrounding enemies. She was weak in influence and was struggling economically.

By the end of David's reign, 150 years later, Israel stood united as a nation behind a king who represented Yahweh's will faithfully. She had a revived priesthood that enjoyed support from the throne, and the prospect for a permanent temple located in the capital city was bright. She was militarily strong, and she controlled her environment politically and geographically. She enjoyed an influence in the world that was already powerful and still growing. Furthermore, her economy was strong. Most importantly she was led by a king who was normally submissive to Yahweh's authority.

David's most important contribution was probably uniting the political and religious life of Israel. He symbolized this by setting up both the political capital and the worship center of Israel in one place: Jerusalem. This effectively united the covenant traditions of the patriarchs and Moses with the newer provision of a human monarchy. David realized that he was not only Israel's political head but also her representative before God. He persuaded Israel of this dual role and so prepared her to function as the servant of the LORD in providing salvation for the other peoples of the world.¹

These changes had taken place because Yahweh had brought fertility to Israel. When the Israelites followed the Mosaic Covenant, God's revealed will for them, obedience resulted in blessing and life. When they did not obey, they experienced discipline and death.

The writer employed various literary devices to emphasize his main spiritual lessons. Primary among these was conflict and resolution. In every major section of the book there is at least one conflict, and often there are several, in which God either exalted the faithful, or put down the arrogant, or both. Another literary device is the reversal-of-fortune motif, by which the writer showed that Yahweh can and does change people's lives as they

¹Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 286.

respond to His Word—for good or for ill. A major chiasm, beginning with Hannah's prayer and ending with David's prayers, ties 1 and 2 Samuel together. Other frequent chiasms help the reader appreciate the writer's emphasis, such as the one in 2 Samuel 21—24.

"The broad theology of 1 and 2 Samuel is that God rules justly in the affairs of men. Furthermore, He requires that men live justly under His rule. The leader (whether judge or king) must represent Yahweh's justice in the rule of God's people. Failure to follow the patterns of righteousness established by God led to chastisement of the ruler and the people he ruled. This message was usually presented by a prophet who stood between God and the king as well as the people."¹

¹Heater, p. 146.

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