

# Notes on 2 Samuel

2025 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)

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- VI. David's troubles chs. 9—20
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**MESSAGE**

First Samuel records how God prepared David to serve as Israel's king. Second Samuel records how God used David as Israel's king, including David's amazing successes as well as his tragic failures. In my notes on 1 Samuel I mentioned three aspects of David's preparation: as shepherd, as courtier, and as fugitive. 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 was well prepared to fulfill the office of Yahweh's vice-regent successfully as he followed God's leadership.

The message of 2 Samuel is that a person's attitude toward God creates an opportunity for God, and God's attitude toward that person creates an opportunity for him or her.

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

We find this principle stated in 2 Samuel 22:26 through 28. Compare Hannah's prayer of praise in 1 Samuel 2:1 through 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 nor did he presume to elevate himself to God's place as Head of the nation. This is clear in 22:2 through 16. Contrast David's view with Saul's. Some local church leaders unfortunately follow Saul's example rather than David's, but others follow David's.

Second, David believed that God was consistently and completely righteous (good, virtuous, upright, irreproachable) in His dealings with people. David confessed his sin when he was charged with it, rather than trying to deny it. In 22:17 through 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 to control his circumstances.

Fourth, David believed that God's will was always best. His greatest desire was for God's will to be done 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 He 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 when questions of rightness arose.

Third, because David appreciated God's mercy, God was able to be merciful to 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 well as "loving God."<sup>1</sup> God did not base His dealings with David primarily on David's momentary failures but on his deepest convictions and commitments.

This should be 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

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<sup>1</sup>Myrna Alexander, *With Him in the Struggle*, p. 9.

heading is more important than how far he or she has advanced in Christian growth.

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).<sup>1</sup>

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

We find this 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 Holy 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

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

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 people 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."

What is your attitude toward God? Do you really want to please God, or do you obey God simply because of your background or circumstances or 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, as He let Saul, 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 divinely Anointed One.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Adapted 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 of these chapters is helpful to observe because it clarifies the writer's intent in 2 Samuel, which was 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."<sup>1</sup>

"The governing idea of the biography of David (2 Sam. 9.20 [*sic* 9—20] 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*])."<sup>2</sup>

In chapters 1 through 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.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>J. Sidlow Baxter, *Explore the Book*, 2:67.

<sup>2</sup>Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 194.

<sup>3</sup>A motif is a theme. In biblical studies, *inclusio* is a literary device similar to a refrain. It is also known as bracketing or an envelope structure, and consists of the repetition of material at the beginning and end of a section of text.

"The thesis of the author—that Israel is blessed with fertility when the nation (and the epitome of the nation, the king) is following the [Mosaic] covenant—is demonstrated in these chapters."<sup>1</sup>

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

The present sub-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 through 3:5 we see the Israelites accepting David as their next 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 reign and demonstrates his many qualifications for being Israel's 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 through 8, as David did various things that earned him the support of 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."<sup>2</sup>

#### **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.

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

<sup>2</sup>Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, p. 223.





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

The biblical writer constructed this pericope (section of text) chiastically in order to focus the reader's attention on the Amalekite's story and David's reaction to it.<sup>1</sup>

- 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

1:1 The last chapter of 1 Samuel records the death of Saul on Mount Gilboa during his battle with the Philistines. David was at that time living in Ziklag, far from the scene of that battle. Our story resumes two days after David had returned from slaughtering the Amalekites farther to the south and was back in Ziklag (cf. 1 Sam. 30).

1:2 The next day a young Amalekite man (vv. 6-7) came to Ziklag with news of Saul's death. He was in mourning ("with his clothes torn and dust on his head") and he wanted David to know that the Israelites had been defeated by the Philistines.

Mount Gilboa stood some 80 miles north of Ziklag, so it probably took the young man three or four days to make the trip, assuming that he was on foot. The average traveler in Bible times would normally cover about 20 miles per day walking.

1:3-5 David asked the young man who he was and how things had gone in the battle. The man replied that many Israelites had

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<sup>1</sup>A chiasmus is a rhetorical or literary figure in which words, grammatical constructions, or concepts are repeated in reverse order, in the same or a modified form, in order to stress the unity of the material, and often to stress its central element or elements.

died in the battle including Saul and Jonathan. David then asked how he knew that Saul and Jonathan had died.

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

1:6-10      The young man then told David how he knew that they were indeed dead: He had personally killed Saul.

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)."<sup>2</sup>

Some interpreters believe that this young man's account of Saul's death was not accurate, in view of 1 Samuel 31:1 through 6 and 1 Chronicles 10:1 through 6.<sup>3</sup>

"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

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<sup>1</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary/History*, p. 303. NKJV refers to *The Holy Bible: New King James Version*.

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

<sup>3</sup>See Robert P. Gordon, *I & II Samuel: A Commentary*, pp. 208-9; 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; Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 197.

counter any possible rumors or accusations leveled against David."<sup>1</sup>

Other interpreters believe that the Amalekite's account was true, and that after Saul fell on his spear, he did not die immediately and asked the Amalekite to finish him off.<sup>2</sup> Josephus also blended the two accounts and described what happened as follows:

"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 ..."<sup>3</sup>

The young Amalekite probably returned to David with his story and the royal emblems in order to ingratiate himself (get in good) with David. 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."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Arnold A. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>See 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.

<sup>3</sup>Flavius Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, 6:14:7. Cf. *ibid.*, 7:1:1. Josephus was a Jewish historian who lived in the first century A.D. His histories should not be taken as equally reliable as Scripture. He sometimes contradicted Scripture.

<sup>4</sup>Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Practical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, p. 229.

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.

1:11-12 David and all his men proceeded to mourn the deaths of Saul, Jonathan, and the Israelites who had died in the battle.

1:13 Then David asked the young messenger where he came from, which seemingly was unnecessary, since the man had just told him that he was an Amalekite. Perhaps David asked this question in order to find out if the young man lived within Israel or outside Israel. The youth explained that he was "the son of a stranger": a "protected foreigner."<sup>1</sup> The Amalekite was probably a mercenary: a soldier hired to serve in Saul's army.

1:14 David also asked how it was that the young man was not afraid to kill the LORD's anointed. 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. Compare Doeg the Edomite's willingness to kill God's anointed priests at Nob in order to please Saul (1 Sam. 22:18).

However, the news of Saul's death saddened David instead of making him happy. This was because Saul was the Yahweh's anointed servant. Furthermore David's soul-brother Jonathan had died, as had many other Israelite soldiers.

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.

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<sup>1</sup>S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel*, p. 233.

1:15-16 David must have had the young Amalekite executed because he believed his story. "Your blood is on your head" means: The blood that you have shed is the cause of your own death (cf. Matt. 27:25; Luke 19:22).<sup>1</sup> 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."<sup>2</sup>

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 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.

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

<sup>2</sup>Moshe Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel: A Literary Study of Comparative Structures*, p. 106.

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."<sup>1</sup>

The strophes (structural divisions) gradually diminish in force with the falling away of the sorrow expressed therein.<sup>2</sup> 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).

1:17-18 David's lament over Saul and Jonathan's deaths is called "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. "The Book of Jashar" is no longer in existence (cf. Josh. 10:13).

1:19 "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 toward the middle. 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 beauty" 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.<sup>3</sup>

1:20 Gath, the Philistine capital, and Ashkelon, its chief religious center, were the easternmost and westernmost cities in Philistia respectively, and probably represent the totality of

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<sup>1</sup>Firth, p. 321.

<sup>2</sup>C. 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.

<sup>3</sup>David Noel Freedman, "The Refrain in David's Lament Over Saul and Jonathan," in *Ex Orbe Religionum: Studia Geo Widengren Oblata*, part 1, p. 120.

that nation.<sup>1</sup> David did not want the Philistines to hear of the deaths of Saul and Jonathan because the news would cause them to rejoice.

1:21 David wished that Mount Gilboa would be cursed with infertility because it had been the place where Saul and Jonathan had died. "Fields of offerings" refers to the fields on Mount Gilboa that yielded grain for offerings to God. Saul's shield had been defiled with his own blood rather than being anointed with oil so as to make arrows slip off of it.

1:22 David pictured Saul and Jonathan fighting for Israel to the bitter end of their lives. "The blood of those slaughtered" and "the fat of the mighty" is poetic parallelism for the Philistine enemy.

1:23 The Hebrew words translated "beloved" and "delightful" 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."<sup>2</sup>

Even in their deaths Saul and Jonathan had been united. David compared their swiftness to that of eagles and their might to that of lions.

1:24 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 (cf. 1 Sam. 14:47), which David lovingly did not mention.

1:25 "The separate treatment of Jonathan in a fake coda [conclusion, indicated by the refrain "How the mighty have fallen ..."] subtly shows David's preference for him [over Saul]."<sup>3</sup>

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

<sup>2</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *First and Second Samuel*, pp. 216-17.

<sup>3</sup>Zapf, p. 121.



- 1:26 David considered Jonathan's love more wonderful than that of women. The Hebrew word translated "love" here appears as "friendship" in Psalm 109:4 and 5 (NIV).<sup>1</sup> David was not alluding to some perverted type of love that he shared with Jonathan but to covenant and political loyalty.<sup>2</sup> One writer argued that Jonathan's love for David was equivalent to a homosexual relationship.<sup>3</sup> 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.
- 1:27 The "weapons of war" that had perished 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 them in v. 19).<sup>4</sup>

"It is remarkable that no [overt] *religious* thought of any kind appears in the poem: the feeling expressed by it is purely *human*."<sup>5</sup>

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 and Jonathan's deaths recalls Jesus' lament over the fate of Jerusalem (Matt. 23:37-39).

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<sup>1</sup>NIV stands for *The Holy Bible: New International Version*, 1984 ed.

<sup>2</sup>See Youngblood, p. 816; Robert North, "Social Dynamics From Saul to Jehu," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 12:4 (1982):112; Firth, p. 326.

<sup>3</sup>T. Horner, *Jonathan Loved David: Homosexuality in Biblical Times*.

<sup>4</sup>See Stanley Gevirtz, "David's Lament Over Saul and Jonathan," in *Patterns in the Early Poetry of Israel*, p. 95.

<sup>5</sup>Driver, p. 239. 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.

Three main emphases appear 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, and that Amalekite may have played some role in Saul's death, since Saul should have killed all the Amalekites but did not (1 Sam. 15:3). Second, David's regard for Saul as the LORD's anointed stands out, especially in verse 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.

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, suggesting 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. This was because God was with David as He had been (and still was) with the ark. David was the initial fulfillment of Hannah's desire for an anointed one (1 Sam. 2:10).<sup>1</sup>

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 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."<sup>2</sup>

2:1 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 (prophet; 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 from Ziklag, 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 at His time (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."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Martin, pp. 39-40.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>3</sup>John Bright, *A History of Israel*, p. 175.

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)."<sup>1</sup>

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 point in the Judean hill country.<sup>2</sup>

2:2 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 (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). I say that having two wives was the key to David's tragedy because it shows his disregard for God's will regarding monogamy (Gen. 2:24; Deut. 17:17).

2:3 David and his men then moved their households to the various nearby cities that surrounded Hebron.

2:4a 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 and their king.

"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

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, p. 306

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

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."<sup>1</sup>

### **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 [of Israel] 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."<sup>2</sup>

2:4b      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, in order 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. During his years of fleeing from Saul, David has spent almost all of his time in southern Israel and Philistia.

"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

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, 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.

<sup>2</sup>Brueggemann, p. 220.

affection and appreciation to overrule the will of God!"<sup>1</sup>

2:5-7 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). Fourth, he offered a "treaty of friendship" (vv. 6b-7; cf. Deut. 23:6; 1 Sam. 25:30).<sup>2</sup>

"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."<sup>3</sup>

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.<sup>4</sup>

"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."<sup>5</sup>

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

2:8-9 David's overtures to the Jabesh-gileadites were very important because 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 ordained (cf.

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, p. 307.

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

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>For a review of these hostilities, see Merrill, pp. 223-28.

<sup>5</sup>Anderson, p. 29.

1 Sam. 13:14). David was God's anointed. Abner was simply 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.<sup>1</sup> 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."<sup>2</sup>

Abner's initiative ignited the conflict between Saul's and David's houses that occupied the writer's attention in 2:8 through 32. This section is chiasmic in its arrangement and focuses on Abner's killing of Asahel (vv. 18-23).<sup>3</sup> 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," *bosheth*, "shame," being substituted for *baal*, "lord" or "Lord," on occasion, cf. Jer. 3:24; 11:13; Hos. 9:10) appears only in chapters 2 through 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.

"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 [disapproved] by the prophets, especially by Hosea (2, 18), and ultimately fell out

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

<sup>2</sup>Bright, p. 175.

<sup>3</sup>Youngblood, p. 822.

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

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.

2:10-11 Ish-bosheth was 40 years old when he began to reign, and he reigned over the northern tribes for two years from Mahanaim. David ruled over the house (tribe) of Judah for seven and one-half years from Hebron. David was 30 years old at this time (5:4).

"The distinctive concepts of 'Judah and Israel' evolved during David's kingdom in Hebron, and after a period of reunification these entities were allowed to live on in the United Monarchy, though without an official division."<sup>2</sup>

When David eventually became king of all Israel and Judah, seven and one-half years later, he ended Ish-bosheth's two-year reign. Gleason Archer believed that it took Abner over five years to establish Ish-bosheth on Israel's throne.<sup>3</sup> Abner put his personal preferences and cultural precedent—that a son of Saul would succeed his father—over God's will. Consequently

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<sup>1</sup>Driver, pp. 253-54.

<sup>2</sup>Zechariah Kallai, "Judah and Israel—A Study in Israelite Historiography," *Israel Exploration Journal* 28:4 (1978):257.

<sup>3</sup>Gleason L. Archer, *Encyclopedia of Bible Difficulties*, p 183.



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."<sup>1</sup>

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

2:12-13 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.<sup>2</sup>

"The pool is a cylindrical shaft thirty-seven feet in diameter and thirty-five feet deep. Its five-feet-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."<sup>3</sup>

There the forces of Ish-bosheth and David met for a peace conference. Abner was the leader of Ish-bosheth's soldiers, and Joab was the leader of David's.

2:14-17 Abner broke off the peace-talks, however, by suggesting that the two sides determine which of them would win with a battle by champions (cf. 1 Sam. 17).<sup>4</sup> Twelve soldiers from each side,

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, p. 308.

<sup>2</sup>*The Nelson Study Bible*, p. 509.

<sup>3</sup>Youngblood, p. 825. Cf. Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past*, p. 161.

<sup>4</sup>See 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.

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.

2:18-22 We now meet for the first time two more nephews of David, in addition to Joab, who will play major roles in the drama that is unfolding: Abishai and Asahel. Josephus wrote that Asahel ran so fast that he could outrun a horse.<sup>1</sup> Having lost the confrontation with David's men, Abner and his men were on their way home. But Asahel decided to pursue Abner. Abner warned Asahel twice to stop pursuing him and to fight with someone he might be able to defeat. He evidently wanted to avoid a blood feud with Joab's family that might go on for generations.

2:23 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 killed him with the butt end of his spear, or if he killed him with his back toward Asahel as he ran from him, or if he stopped suddenly and Asahel ran into the butt end of Abner's spear.<sup>2</sup>

"'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 ..."<sup>3</sup>

2:24-25 Many of Joab's soldiers stopped, but Joab and Abishai continued to pursue Abner. The other soldiers from Benjamin, which was Saul's and Abner's tribe, rallied around Abner, and

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<sup>1</sup>Josephus, 7:1:3.

<sup>2</sup>Anderson (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.

<sup>3</sup>Youngblood, p. 826. Cf. 20:12.

the hostility climaxed when they took a stand to defend themselves on a hilltop.

- 2:26-32      Abner tried to call a truce, but Joab correctly blamed him for starting the conflict in the first place (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.

This incident accounts for the personal hostility that later resulted in Abner's death and the disintegration of Ish-bosheth's reign. 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). Then, Abner insisted on defending himself (v. 23). Finally, many people died (v. 31).

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

- 3:1            This verse summarizes the result of what happened in 2:8 through 32: There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David. Hostilities ended when David became king over all Israel (5:3), but antagonism continued long after that. David's house became increasingly strong, but Saul's house became increasingly weak.

- 3:2-5        The point of the remaining verses in this pericope 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.<sup>1</sup>

David resorted to further polygamy, even though God had commanded Israel's kings not to multiply wives (Deut. 17:17).

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<sup>1</sup>For 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.

David's dynastic list in 1 Chronicles 3:1 through 9 records the six sons born to him in Hebron listed here, plus 13 more sons, one daughter, and an unspecified number of sons by his concubines, who were also 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."<sup>1</sup>

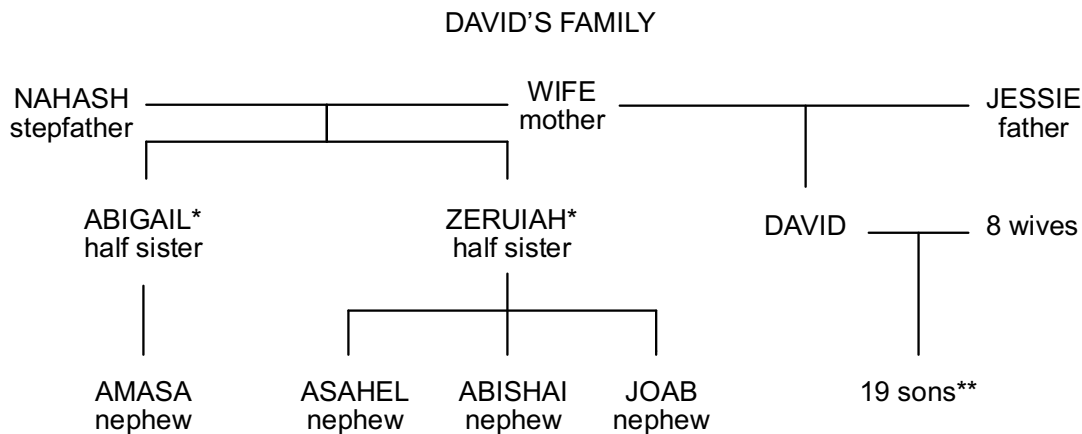
David undoubtedly married the women mentioned partially in order to cement political alliances, as was common in the ancient Near East.<sup>2</sup> Yet God had forbidden such alliances (Deut. 7:3).

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).

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<sup>1</sup>Leon J. Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History*, p. 274.

<sup>2</sup>Abraham Malamat, "Aspects of the Foreign Policies of David and Solomon," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 22:1 (1963):8.



\*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).

Yahweh blessed David in spite of his polygamy and his reliance of foreign alliances. This in no wise justifies these sins, but it glorifies the patience and grace of God toward His sinning servants (cf. God's dealings with Samson).

## **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)."<sup>1</sup>

"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."<sup>2</sup>

### **1. Abner's wise attempt to unify the nation 3:6-39**

#### **Abner's and Ish-bosheth's falling out 3:6-11**

3:6           Abner was the strong leader in Israel; Ish-bosheth was simply a figurehead (cf. v. 11). Abner's loyalty to the house of Saul

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<sup>1</sup>Youngblood, pp. 832-33.

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

is clear from his actions as recorded so far and those that follow in verses 7 and 8.

3:7-8 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 charged Abner with having sex with Saul's concubine.

"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]."<sup>1</sup>

Ish-bosheth regarded Abner's act as a sign of disloyalty. He believed that Abner wanted to have an heir by a royal concubine who could have, according to custom, become king one day (cf. 16:22; 1 Kings 2:22). We do not know whether this was Abner's plan or not. Abner implied denial of that motive, but he did not deny the act.

"A dog's head" (v. 8) seems to mean a worthless person (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 ...]."<sup>2</sup>

9-10 Whatever Abner meant, this incident resulted in him shifting his support from Ish-bosheth to David. Perhaps it was the last straw for Abner, who had previously suffered at least one

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<sup>1</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, pp. 301-2.

<sup>2</sup>Duane A. Garrett, "Song of Songs," in *Song of Songs, Lamentations*, p. 207.

devastating defeat by David's men (2:31), and who must have seen that he could not prevail.

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."<sup>1</sup>

"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 suggests something of the sort when it speaks of a *personal* deal between these two men."<sup>2</sup>

3:11 Abner's threat put an end to Ish-bosheth's accusations, because he feared him.

### Abner's covenant with David 3:12-16

3:12 Abner then proposed that he and David make a covenant of peace between the house of Saul and the house of David. This was virtually a surrender of Saul's forces to David.

3:13 David agreed to Abner's proposal with one condition: that Michal, his former wife, be returned to him. The fact that Michal was Saul's daughter was clearly part of the reason David required Abner to return her to him. Reunion with her would have tied David in to Saul's house and made him more acceptable to the northern tribes.

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<sup>1</sup>G. Campbell Morgan, *An Exposition of the Whole Bible*, p. 128.

<sup>2</sup>James Vanderkam, "Davidic Complicity in the Deaths of Abner and Eshbaal: A Historical and Redactional Study," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99:4 (1980):531-32.



"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."<sup>1</sup>

"... 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."<sup>2</sup>

3:14-16 Abner agreed to David's condition, and Ish-bosheth took Michal from her husband, Paltiel, and returned her to David. Later David would take another man's wife, Bathsheba, from her husband, Uriah (11:4). I see a progression here in David's actions going from bad to worse, evidently for political reasons.

### **Abner's successful unifying efforts 3:17-19**

3:17-18 Abner then lobbied for David with Israel's elders on the basis that they had previously favored David. Perhaps Abner and Ish-bosheth had blocked their efforts earlier. Abner also pointed out that the LORD had previously revealed that He would save the Israelites from the Philistines and all their enemies by David's hand (cf. 1 Sam. 15:28).

3:19 The Benjamites needed special courting, since Saul was a Benjamite. But the Benjamites as a whole went along with Abner's proposal. Abner may have expected an appointment in David's administration for his efforts.

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<sup>1</sup>David F. Payne, *I & II Samuel*, pp. 168-69.

<sup>2</sup>Firth, p. 348.

**Abner's peaceful intent and Joab's slander of Abner 3:20-25**

- 3:20-21 David held a feast for Abner and his delegation to celebrate the union of Saul's forces with David's, after which Abner returned home in peace to arrange for a covenant-making ceremony between the two factions.
- 3:22-23 After Abner had left Hebron Joab and a group of David's soldiers returned from a raid in which they had taken much plunder. It was told them that Abner had visited David and that he planned to hand over all Israel and Benjamin to David. There were many reasons why Joab disliked Abner, including that 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 (v. 30; 2:23).
- 3:24-25 Joab then confronted David and chided him for letting Abner go in peace since Abner, according to Joab, had only come to spy on David.

**Joab's murder of Abner 3:26-30**

- 3:26-27 Then Joab sent messengers after Abner and they brought him back to Hebron, without David's knowledge. When Joab met Abner at the gate of Hebron Joab stabbed him in the belly and assassinated him, because he had killed his brother. 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 his own importance in David's eyes to suspect that one of David's officers would dare to attack him.
- 3:28 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."<sup>1</sup>

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."<sup>2</sup>

- 3:29 Some interpreters of the Hebrew text believe that 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 that 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"—spinning being women's work.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>
- 3:30 Abishai also had some roll in killing Abner—because Abner had killed Asahel. Perhaps he conspired with Joab as to how they could take their revenge (cf. Deut. 32:35).

### David's mourning for Abner 3:31-39

- 3:31-32 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

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<sup>1</sup>Gordon, pp. 216-17.

<sup>2</sup>Firth, p. 352.

<sup>3</sup>Driver, p. 251.

<sup>4</sup>Steven 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.

David." Now that the threat of the north had died with Abner, David's throne was secure enough to warrant this title.

David did several things to mourn Abner's death and to make clear to everyone that his death was not something that he had approved: He instructed Joab and the people to tare their clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourn (v. 31). He personally walked behind Abner's bier (v. 31), wept loudly (v. 32), composed and sang a song in Abner's honor (vv. 33-34), fasted (v. 35), eulogized Abner (v. 38), and expressed the weakness that he felt at the loss of this leader and great man (v. 39).

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

3:33-34     What did David mean when he said that Abner died as a fool dies? (v. 33). I believe he meant that Abner had died naively unaware of the danger that he faced. Abner foolishly underestimated Joab's hatred for him. He should have taken the possibility that Joab might want to take revenge more seriously and protected himself. Consequently he was unnecessarily vulnerable.

3:35-38     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.

Throughout this section of verses there are repeated references to the people's reaction to Abner's death. They wept (vv. 32, 34), they comforted David in his distress (v. 35), they took note of David's vow not to eat (v. 36), they were pleased with everything that David did (v. 36), and they

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<sup>1</sup>Brueggemann, p. 230.

understood that David had no part in Abner's murder (v. 37). Thus the writer made it clear that the Israelites were solidly behind David at this time in his career.

3:39 "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."<sup>1</sup>

"Thenius (156) once noted that it is very surprising that David should openly confess his own weakness and fear of Joab and Abishai [v. 39], 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."<sup>2</sup>

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, though his brother had been killed in battle (v. 30). One writer argued that David both desired and planned the murder of Abner.<sup>3</sup> There is no support for this in the text.

"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

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<sup>1</sup>Henry, p. 330.

<sup>2</sup>Anderson, p. 64. His reference is to O. Thenius, *Die Bücher Samuels*, p. 156.

<sup>3</sup>Vanderkam, pp. 521-39.

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."<sup>1</sup>

## **2. Rechab's and Baanah's unwise attempt to unify the nation 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."<sup>2</sup>

- 4:1        The news of Abner's death removed Ish-bosheth's hope of continuing Saul's reign. It also shocked the Israelites who lived north of Judah.
- 4:2-3     The son of Saul in view in this verse was Ish-bosheth, and his wife was Rimmon. Beeroth was a town near the border of Benjamin, about two miles south of Gibeon (cf. Josh. 9:17). Gittaim 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 out of Benjamite territory when the writer wrote, the writer wanted to make clear that Baanah and Rechab were Benjamites—from Saul's tribe.
- 4:4        The writer introduced the information in this verse, parenthetically, in order to prepare for what he would write about Mephibosheth in chapter 9. Mephibosheth (lit. "He Scatters Shame") was the son of Jonathan, but he was unfit to rule over Israel for two reasons: he was too young, and his physical condition made it impossible for him to provide

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<sup>1</sup>Firth, p. 346.

<sup>2</sup>Youngblood, p. 843.

military leadership. Besides, God had anointed David as His chosen king to replace Saul.

4:5 Two commanders of Ish-bosheth's troops, Rechab and Baanah, assassinated him while he was taking his midday siesta. Evidently Mephibosheth's inability to succeed Saul emboldened Rechab and Baanah to attempt their cowardly and ambitious plot.<sup>1</sup>

4:6-7 The repetition of the telling of Rechab and Baanah's heinous act in these verses stresses its atrocious, opportunistic nature. The "way of the Arabah [the Plain]" was the Jordan Valley.

4:8 Rechab and Baanah then brought Ish-bosheth's head, which they had cut off, to David and presented it to him as a gift. They justified their action by saying that the LORD had now given David vengeance on Saul and his descendants (cf. 1 Sam. 24:4; 26:8).

"The gift of Ish-Bosheth's head is at the same time the gift of the kingdom."<sup>2</sup>

4:9-11 David, however, did not view Rechab's and Baanah's action as divine vengeance but as murder. 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.

4:12 David's treatment of the corpses of the two murderers and the head of Ish-bosheth also showed the people that Ish-bosheth's murder was not an act that he ordered or approved of (cf. 1:16; 3:28; Matt. 26:52).<sup>3</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup>Symon Patrick, *A Commentary Upon the Two Books of Samuel*, p. 364.

<sup>2</sup>David M. Gunn, "David and the Gift of the Kingdom," *Semeia* 3 (1975):17.

<sup>3</sup>See Mabee, pp. 98-107.

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."<sup>1</sup>

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.

"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."<sup>2</sup>

Note David's inconsistency in his dealings with Ish-bosheth's murderers, Rechab and Baanah, and Abner's murderer, his nephew Joab (cf. Gen. 9:5). David succeeded at his 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. The unification of the nation accomplished 5:1-16**

#### **David's coronation as king of all Israel 5:1-5**

5:1-2 Following Abner's attempt to unify Israel under David's leadership (3:6-39) and Rechab's and Baanah's attempt to do the same thing (ch. 4), all the tribes of Israel finally acknowledged David as their king. In 1004 B.C. David became king of all Israel and Judah (cf. 1 Chron. 11:1-3).<sup>3</sup> 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). The fact that Samuel had anointed David when he was a youth was evidently now common knowledge in Israel. Thus David's

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<sup>1</sup>Youngblood, p. 847.

<sup>2</sup>Gunn, p. 14.

<sup>3</sup>See Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 243.



kingship stood on three legs: his physical connection with his people, his proven merit, and his divine election. These are the same three qualifications that Jesus Christ has to serve as our King.<sup>1</sup>

"In the ancient East, shepherd [v. 2] at an early date became a title of honor applied to divinities and rulers alike."<sup>2</sup>

For example, King Hammurabi of Babylon (ca. 1792-1750 B.C.) referred to himself as the shepherd of his people.<sup>3</sup> This is the first time that the Bible refers to a specific human ruler as a shepherd,<sup>4</sup> 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, as the Good Shepherd (John 10:11, 14), the Great Shepherd (Heb. 13:20), and the Chief Shepherd (1 Pet. 5:4).

5:3        The covenant that David made with the elders of Israel was an agreement between the king and the people before God.<sup>5</sup> Probably it included a fresh commitment to the Mosaic Covenant as well as the responsibilities of the king to the people and the people to their king. The elders also anointed David with oil. This was David's third anointing (cf. 1 Sam. 16:13; 2 Sam. 2:4).

5:4-5     These chronological references provide a framework for David's reign.

"Thirty years old (v. 4) was regarded as an ideal age at which to take on responsibility (cf. Num. 4:3; Lk. 3:23)."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Baxter, 2:69.

<sup>2</sup>*The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, s. v. "Shepherd," by E. Beyreuther, 3:564.

<sup>3</sup>See James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, pp. 164-65, 177-18.

<sup>4</sup>Patrick, p. 368. Cf. Isa. 44:28; Jer. 3:15; et al.

<sup>5</sup>P. Kyle McCarter Jr., *II Samuel*, p. 131; Brueggemann, p. 239.

<sup>6</sup>Baldwin, p. 195.

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, over Judah and over all Israel, were 1011-971 B.C.: a total of 40 years.

### Key events in David's reign 5:6-16

"[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."<sup>1</sup>

### The conquest of Jerusalem 5:6-10

5:6        One of the most important things that David did after he became king of all Israel was his capture of Jerusalem in order to make it his capital.

Jerusalem (lit. "Foundation of Peace") was an excellent choice for a capital. It stood on the border between Benjamin (Saul's tribe) and Judah (David's tribe), 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.<sup>2</sup>

David's choice of Jerusalem was mainly political, but the city had military advantages as well, being accessible and defensible. Jerusalem's elevated location, surrounded on three sides by valleys, made it fairly easy to defend. However, its water source was vulnerable. David may have chosen Jerusalem also because he appears to have seen himself as the spiritual successor of Melchizedek, a former king of Jerusalem

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<sup>1</sup>Youngblood, p. 853.

<sup>2</sup>Josephus, 7:3:2.

in Abraham's day (Gen. 14; cf. Ps. 110:4-6).<sup>1</sup> One scholar estimated that the population of the city in David's day was about 2,500 people.<sup>2</sup>

"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."<sup>3</sup>

"... 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."<sup>4</sup>

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).<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> But there is no biblical evidence of that. Still another view is that the blind

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

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

<sup>3</sup>Gwilym H. Jones, *The Nathan Narratives*, p. 135.

<sup>4</sup>Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple*, p. 39.

<sup>5</sup>Jones, p. 125.

<sup>6</sup>See Gordon, p. 226.

and lame refer to the Jebusites' gods whom the Jebusites believed would keep David from taking the city.<sup>1</sup>

5:7 In spite of the boasts of the Jebusites, David was able to capture Jerusalem, which later became known as "the stronghold of Zion" and "the city of David." 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)."<sup>2</sup>

5:8 David countered the Jebusites' taunts by taking these enemies at their word and applying the phrase "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 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.

Later we learn that it was really Joab who captured the city for David (cf. 1 Chron. 11:6). But the writer of 2 Samuel gave all the credit to David who led the invasion of Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup>

"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."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Baxter, 2:70.

<sup>2</sup>*The Nelson ...*, p. 514.

<sup>3</sup>See the map "Wars during the Reign of David" in Baldwin, p. 222.

<sup>4</sup>Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 236.

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)."<sup>1</sup>

5:9 The Millo (a transliteration of the Hebrew word) probably consisted of terrace-like fortifications on Jerusalem's east side.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Anderson, p. 84.

<sup>2</sup>See 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.

<sup>3</sup>E.g., Jamieson, et al., p. 232; J. Simons, *Jerusalem in the Old Testament*, pp. 116-17; 131-44.

<sup>4</sup>Firth, p. 365.

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

"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."<sup>2</sup>

- 5:10      The writer identified the key to David's success: "The LORD God of armies was with him." David had nothing to do with God's choice of him as Israel's king. But Yahweh of armies continued to bless David because David related to Him properly, generally speaking.

### The building of David's palace 5:11-12

- 5:11      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.<sup>3</sup> That would mean that 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.<sup>4</sup> This information helps us to see that David built his palace late in his reign, either in the last decade or in the

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<sup>1</sup>Joseph P. Free, *Archaeology and Bible History*, p. 158.

<sup>2</sup>Payne, p. 177.

<sup>3</sup>Frank M. Cross, "An Interpretation of the Nora Stone," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 208 (December 1972):17.

<sup>4</sup>W. F. Albright, *The Archaeology of Palestine*, p. 122.

last two decades of his 40-year reign, depending on which dates are correct.

This verse, 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 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."<sup>1</sup>

5:12 This verse is key to understanding why David prospered as Israel's king: David realized that Yahweh was Israel's real sovereign ("the LORD had appointed him as king over Israel"). Saul was never willing to submit to that fact 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 ("for the sake of His people Israel"). 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."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Brueggemann, p. 246.

<sup>2</sup>Anderson, pp. 86-87.

**David's domestic fertility 5:13-16**

5:13 Again David sinned by multiplying wives after he settled in Jerusalem (cf. 3:2-5; 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 [liking] for the trappings of a typical Oriental monarch, including a harem."<sup>1</sup>

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

5:14-16 Previously the writer listed six sons born to David in Hebron (3:2-5). Now he listed 11 more that were born to him in Jerusalem. Note that Solomon was tenth in the line of succession. First Chronicles records two additional sons: Nogah (1 Chron. 3:7), and Eliphelet (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."<sup>3</sup>

These verses (13-16) then are another ominous warning of potential problems for David, as are verses 11 and 12.

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<sup>1</sup>Youngblood, p. 859.

<sup>2</sup>*The Nelson ...*, p. 515.

<sup>3</sup>Henry, p. 332.



Verses 1 through 16 are a summary of David's entire reign. Then follow his military (5:17-25), cultic (ch. 6), theological (ch. 7), and further military (ch. 8) achievements. Then the "Court History," in chapters 9 through 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).

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 united under David's divinely anointed leadership. The emphasis is on how God united Israel with Judah behind David. Part of David's success was the result of divine providence (God working through circumstances) and part was the result of David's skillful conduct. First, Abner threw his support behind David, after a disagreement with Ish-bosheth. Second, Rechab and Baanah tried to unify the nation by assassinating Ish-bosheth, but David punished them. Third, all Israel finally accepted David. The result was that David flourished in many ways.

Note the parallel career of Jesus Christ: initial rejection (in the past; cf. John 1:11) followed by complete acceptance by His chosen people (in the future; cf. Zech. 12:10-14).

### **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)."<sup>1</sup>

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

Firth provided a diagram of the chiasmic structure of 5:17 through 8:14:<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Youngblood, p. 861.

<sup>2</sup>Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 236.

<sup>3</sup>Firth, p. 368.

- A Military victories with Yahweh's help, 5:17-25
- B Worship of Yahweh: bringing the ark into Jerusalem, 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 everlasting (ch. 7). However, before that took place, God blessed His anointed servant with victories over his enemies and peaceful conditions within Israel.

"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."<sup>1</sup>

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

#### **The first battle 5:17-21**

This battle may have taken place between David's anointing as king over all Israel (v. 3) and his capture of Jerusalem (vv. 6-9).<sup>3</sup> Or it may have taken place shortly after he had captured Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup>

5:17 The exact location of "the stronghold" mentioned here is indefinite. The Hebrew word translated "stronghold" means "mountain fortress." If this battle took place after David's capture of Jerusalem, the stronghold may refer to Zion (Jerusalem), which is the stronghold mentioned in the

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<sup>1</sup>Baldwin, pp. 202-3. Cf. Bright, p. 177.

<sup>2</sup>Youngblood, p. 862.

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

<sup>4</sup>J. Carl Laney, *First and Second Samuel*, p. 95.

preceding context (v. 7). In this case David evidently went down to a secure fortress within Jerusalem. 23:13 refers to David going to "the cave of Adullam, while the army of the Philistines was camping in the Valley of Rephaim." The cave of Adullam was about 11 miles northwest of Hebron. So that may be the stronghold in view here.<sup>1</sup> In view of what follows, I prefer the former option.

5:18 "The Valley of Rephaim," or "the Valley of the Giants," was just southwest of Jerusalem, where the Philistines massed for battle. The Philistines probably wanted to defeat David at once, before he could take the offensive and begin to establish himself and expand his kingdom.

Bethlehem, which was the site of the Philistine garrison at one time, according to 23:14, stood farther south of this valley, though it is not certain that the events described in 23:13 through 17 correspond to those in this verse.

5:19 David often consulted with the LORD before engaging the Philistines in battle (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.

5:20 The naming of the site of David's victory "Baal-perazim" (lit. "Lord of Breakthroughs") memorialized the victory as the LORD's. David acknowledged Yahweh's ultimate authority over Israel, in contrast to how Saul did not.

5:21 The Philistines' idols that they carried into battle, in order to secure victory, proved useless. So the Philistines abandoned them. The Israelites then carried them away and burned them (1 Chron. 14:12) in obedience to God's command (Deut. 7:5, 25; et al.).

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<sup>1</sup>Gordon, p. 229; Payne, p. 180; Anderson, p. 95.

**The second battle 5:22-25**

5:22-23 Once again the Philistines attacked Jerusalem from the Valley of Rephaim. This time, in response to David's prayer, the LORD prescribed an attack from the rear.

5:24-25 The sound of marching in the baka-shrubs, among which the Israelites were to take cover, would be the sign that the LORD was going before His army to strike the enemy (cf. Acts 2:2). This strategy proved effective, as David again obeyed the LORD's directions, and the Israelites were able to rout the Philistines again.

The name "Gibeon" replaces "Geba" in the text in the parallel account of this battle (1 Chron. 14:16). Gibeon is probably the correct location. If David pursued the Philistines through the Aijalon valley, west of Jerusalem, he probably went through Gibeon northwest of Jerusalem, rather than through Geba to the northeast. Another explanation is that there was another Geba in the Valley of Rephaim.<sup>1</sup> Gezer stood in the Shephelah (foothills), 14 miles west of Gibeon, on the Philistine border.

These two victories cleared the Philistines from the hill country of Judah and Benjamin, and they 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."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Nelson ...*, p. 516.

<sup>2</sup>Anderson, p. 94.

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

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

This chapter reveals David's commendable attitude toward God and what resulted from it.

"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."<sup>2</sup>

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)"<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>John J. Davis, in *A History of Israel*, p. 290.

<sup>2</sup>P. 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.

<sup>3</sup>Youngblood, p. 868.

### The first move and its results 6:1-11 (cf. 1 Chron. 13)

J. Vernon McGee titled this chapter "Doing a Right Thing in a Wrong Way."<sup>1</sup> This title is more appropriate for the first 11 verses of this chapter than it is for the whole chapter.

6:1 David assembled 30,000 chosen men from all over Israel. They were probably all kinds of leaders from among the 12 tribes. His assembling such a large multitude anticipates a very important event.

6:2 Baale-judah (lit. "Lords of Judah," also called "Baalah" in 1 Chron. 13:6) may have been the later name of Kiriath-jearim (cf. Josh. 15:9-10; 1 Chron. 13:6).<sup>2</sup> The site must have been originally sacred to Baal.<sup>3</sup> This was where the ark had 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).<sup>4</sup>

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 very center of their national life.

6:3-4 Unfortunately David 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 cart. Furthermore, no non-priest was to touch it, or he would die (cf. Num. 4:15, 19).

It is common for God's people who want to honor Him to adopt the methods to do so that seem normal, reasonable, and have

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<sup>1</sup>J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, 2:198.

<sup>2</sup>Youngblood, p. 869.

<sup>3</sup>Driver, p. 266.

<sup>4</sup>Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Kiriath-jearim and the Ark," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969):146-47.

proven effective in the past—as David did when he had the ark placed on a cart. But God must be honored as He has specified in His Word.

How those in charge moved the ark from the house of Abinadab to the cart is not explained. I suspect that they carried it by the poles that were attached to the ark. This would have been less serious than touching the ark itself, which had tragic consequences. Presumably Abinadab's sons, Uzzah and Ahio, would have carried it since they also led the cart.

6:5 While the ark was being placed on the cart, David and the Israelites who were present were celebrating by praising the LORD with all kinds of musical instruments.

6:6 As the cart moved toward Jerusalem, the oxen pulling the cart nearly overturned it. Uzzah grasped the ark in order to keep it from falling off the cart. This happened at the threshing floor of Nacon (also called Chidon in 1 Chronicles 13:9).

6:7 This caused Yahweh's anger to burn against Uzzah, and He struck him down for his irreverence, and he died on the spot.

"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 [offerings], 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."<sup>1</sup>

6:8 David was apparently angry because he expected God to bless his efforts. God taught him that obedience is as important as good intentions (cf. 1 Sam. 15:22). David learned a lesson about God's holiness too: God's holiness must be respected.

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<sup>1</sup>Jamieson, et al., p. 232.

"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,' implying the need to pay careful attention lest privilege becomes presumption."<sup>1</sup>

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.

6:9-11      This incident resulted in David postponing his attempt to bring the ark into Jerusalem. Instead he placed it in the nearby house of Obed-edom, presumably using the poles attached to the ark to carry it there. 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). Carlson believed that his house was on the southwestern hill of Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Baldwin, p. 208. Cf. Gordon, p. 232.

<sup>2</sup>R. A. Carlson, *David the Chosen King*, p. 79.



The ark's presence, and more importantly the LORD's presence, in Obed-edom's house, brought great blessing to this man and all of his household.

This incident is a striking illustration of the spiritual truth that God's work must be done in God's way in order to secure God's blessing.

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

6:12 David learned that the ark's presence in Obed-edom's house resulted in blessing for its host. This made him more eager than ever to bring the ark into Jerusalem, which he proceeded to do.

6:13 This time Levites carried the ark by its poles (1 Chron. 15:2, 15). When they had marched six paces David offered an ox and a fattened steer (or calf, NIV) to the LORD.<sup>1</sup>

6:14 God's symbolic entrance into Jerusalem was a cause for great celebration. David wore a priestly garment (cf. 1 Sam. 2:18) as he danced before the LORD with all his strength. The Hebrew word translated "dancing" literally means "whirling."

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 and wear a linen ephod?

"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])."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See McCarter, "The Ritual ...," pp. 273-74, 277, n. 1.

<sup>2</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, p. 336.

"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).<sup>1</sup> 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 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 I 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]."<sup>2</sup>

Priestly kingship was not uncommon in the ancient Near East.<sup>3</sup> In this dual role, of king and priest, David typified Jesus Christ, who is also a King-Priest.

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<sup>1</sup>Footnote 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 ..."

<sup>2</sup>Wood, *Israel's United ...*, pp. 61-62.

<sup>3</sup>Sidney Smith, "The Practice of Kingship in Early Semitic Kingdoms," in *Myth, Ritual, and Kingship*, pp. 22-73.

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.

6:15 The entrance of the ark into Jerusalem was like a tickertape celebration. Undoubtedly everyone in the city turned out to celebrate the entrance of Israel's beloved Hero and the symbol of His invisible presence.

6:16 Some scholars believe that the linen ephod that David wore was a brief loincloth, and that Michal despised him for exposing himself inappropriately.<sup>1</sup> But David wore two linen garments: a robe and an ephod (1 Chron. 15:27), so this explanation is probably not valid.<sup>2</sup> Rather the text is clear that it was David's "leaping and dancing" that drew Michal's contempt.

"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."<sup>3</sup>

Michal apparently did not understand—or appreciate, or approve of—David's reasons for bringing the ark into

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<sup>1</sup>E.g., Anthony Phillips, "David's Linen Ephod," *Vetus Testamentum* 19:4 (October 1967):485-87.

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

<sup>3</sup>Wiersbe, p. 321.

Jerusalem and his unkingly conduct. She seems to have regarded kingship in Israel as her father had.<sup>1</sup> He had believed that the human king was the ultimate authority and that everyone should honor him. By referring to Michal as "the daughter of Saul" the writer linked her attitude with her father's attitude.

"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."<sup>2</sup>

6:17 The tent that David had pitched for the ark in Jerusalem 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, which was probably then at Gibeon, to Jerusalem. Perhaps he did not want to offend the Benjamites, Saul's tribe, since Gibeon was in Benjamite territory. Burnt and peace offerings were offerings of worship that symbolized dedication to Yahweh. David offered these sacrifices in Jerusalem (cf. v. 18; 1 Chron. 16:1-3).

6:18-19 David's blessing of the people and giving them cakes made with fruit 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.<sup>3</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup>Gordon, p. 234; Firth, pp. 378-79.

<sup>2</sup>Baldwin, p. 209.

<sup>3</sup>Martin, p. 38.

center of his rule but also the center of the worship of the Lord.<sup>1</sup>

"By bringing the Ark to his new Jebusite capital, David was attempting to bind the tribes and the central government more firmly."<sup>2</sup>

6:20        Whereas the people responded to David's leadership enthusiastically, David's own wife rejected it. 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 dignified manner.

6:21-22     David promised Michal that the LORD would give him distinction; 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.

6:23        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.

"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."<sup>3</sup>

"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."<sup>4</sup>

"The final sentence of the chapter, which may imply some sort of judgement [*sic* judgment] on

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<sup>1</sup>Homer Heater Jr., "A Theology of Samuel and Kings," in *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 127.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Youngblood, p. 878.

<sup>4</sup>Wiersbe, p. 321.

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."<sup>1</sup>

It may be that God shut Michal's womb as a judgment on her for her attitude. 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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 should not 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.<sup>4</sup> But he may have confused Michal with Merab (cf. 21:8).

"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

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<sup>1</sup>Gordon, p. 230.

<sup>2</sup>Carlson, p. 93.

<sup>3</sup>Fred E. Young, "First and Second Samuel," in *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, p. 296.

<sup>4</sup>Josephus, 7:4:3.

that day on which the ark of God was brought up to the city of David."<sup>1</sup>

"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."<sup>2</sup>

The writer emphasized that those who obey God's will—in this case as expressed in the Mosaic Law—prosper, but God cuts off those who do not (i.e., Uzzah). 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.<sup>3</sup> They have done so because of where the writer placed this incident in the text. But a few have argued that this event occurred toward the end of David's reign.<sup>4</sup> 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 that the houses in view, in 2 Samuel 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 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."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Alexander Whyte, *Bible Characters*, 1:272.

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

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

<sup>4</sup>E.g., Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, pp. 239, 262-63.

<sup>5</sup>Free, pp. 158-59.

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.

Porter also believed that David introduced a Canaanite New Year type festival at his coronation, which this chapter describes.<sup>1</sup> But this view has no textual support.

"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."<sup>2</sup>

### **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 also 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 1 Samuel 12 (Samuel's farewell speech), is one of the most important in 1 and 2 Samuel theologically. They all contain explanations of God's methods and His intentions.

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<sup>1</sup>Porter, pp. 161-73.

<sup>2</sup>Albright, p. 122.



"... 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."<sup>1</sup>

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

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

Many scholars would say, and I agree, 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 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

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<sup>1</sup>Gordon, 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.

<sup>2</sup>Jon 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.

<sup>3</sup>Baldwin, p. 236. Cf. Brueggemann, p. 257; Carlson, p. 127; Gordon, p. 236.

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."<sup>1</sup>

The Davidic Covenant is a covenant of grant rather than a treaty, as are the covenants that 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 build a house to honor Yahweh 7:1-3

7:1-2 It was when God had subdued all of David's enemies that He gave this covenant to him (cf. v. 9; cf. 1 Chron. 17:8). 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. How amazing is the grace of God, that He would give David these blessings after David had behaved so wickedly.

But 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 historiographical and theological: to write history in the customary form of the day, and 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.<sup>2</sup>

"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

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<sup>1</sup>Moshe 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.

<sup>2</sup>See 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.

'rest' is security from enemies and peace from wars."<sup>1</sup>

The Israelites had anticipated entering into rest in the Promised Land since their wilderness wanderings (Deut. 12:9). Joshua had given them a 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."<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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 a magnificent palace while his commander-in-chief's dwelling was only a temporary, much less impressive structure.<sup>4</sup> The Canaanites often built a temple in honor of a god who gave them victory over their enemies, as David wanted to do here.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Anderson, p. 116.

<sup>2</sup>Wolfgang Roth, "The Deuteronomic Rest Theology: A Redaction-Critical Study," *Biblical Research* 21 (1976):8.

<sup>3</sup>Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 274; A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, pp. 95-98.

<sup>4</sup>See Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institutions*, 2:282-83.

<sup>5</sup>Frank M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and the Hebrew Bible*, p. 243.

- 7:3 Nathan originally encouraged David, "not as a prophet, but as a wise and good man," to pursue his plan to build a house for the LORD.<sup>1</sup>

#### God's response to David's desire 7:4-7

- 7:4-5 God quickly ("the same night") reversed Nathan's advice by giving him a message for David. God rejected David's suggestion that he build a temple for Himself, and He gave three reasons why He did not want him to do that:

- 7:6 First, there was no pressing need to do so, since the ark had resided in tents since the Exodus. The tent it currently occupied was the one that David had pitched to house it in Jerusalem (6:17), not the tabernacle that stood then at Gibeon (1 Chron. 16:1, 39; 21:28-30).

"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)."<sup>2</sup>

- 7:7 Second, God had not commanded His people to build Him a permanent temple. Before God raised up Israel's kings, He Himself had dealt with the tribes of Israel, during the Judges Period. At that time the leaders of the tribes were responsible to shepherd the Israelites in their areas.<sup>3</sup>

Third, David was an inappropriate person to build a temple since he had shed much blood. This reason is not given here, but it appears twice in 1 Chronicles (1 Chron. 22:8; 28:3). David had become ritually unclean because of all the killing that he had been responsible for. This was not true of Solomon, whom God allowed to build Him a temple (1 Kings 6:1).

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<sup>1</sup>Henry, p. 335.

<sup>2</sup>Youngblood, p. 887.

<sup>3</sup>See 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.

"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."<sup>1</sup>

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

"... 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."<sup>3</sup>

### God's promise to build a house to honor David 7:8-17

7:8-9a      God described David as "My servant" when He gave Nathan the following message for David. It was because David was indeed the servant of Yahweh that God blessed him as He did. Also Yahweh described Himself as "the LORD of armies." It would take a powerful God to bring to pass all of what Yahweh promised to do for David.

God proceeded to review what He had already done for David in order to bolster David's confidence in what He would do for him. Yahweh Himself had exalted David from being a mere shepherd of sheep to being the leader over God's people. He had been with David wherever he had gone. And He had eliminated all of David's enemies.

It was not because God was disciplining David, or had rejected him, that He prohibited David from carrying out his noble plan of building a temple for the LORD. God was simply redirecting His servant.<sup>4</sup> He was to be a "leader" of the Israelites, not a temple builder. Similarly, God does not always permit us to carry out our desires to honor Him, such as becoming a pastor

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<sup>1</sup>Michiko Ota, "A Note on 2 Sam 7," in *A Light Unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Jacob M. Myers*, p. 406.

<sup>2</sup>Payne, p. 188.

<sup>3</sup>Firth, p. 387.

<sup>4</sup>Charles R. Swindoll, *David: A Man of Passion and Destiny*, pp. 162-68.

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.'"<sup>1</sup>

7:9b God proceeded to give four promises to David. First, God promised to give David a great name (or famous reputation) like that of other great men of the earth. David saw the fulfillment of this promise before he died to some extent, but history has shown that David was one of the greatest men who ever lived.

7:10-11a Second, God promised to give the Israelites a secure homeland and undisturbed "rest" from all their enemies. The promise of "rest from all your enemies" 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. This promise has yet to be fulfilled.

"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."<sup>2</sup>

7:11b Third, God promised to give David a "house" for himself. This would not be the kind of house that David wanted to build for

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, p. 323.

<sup>2</sup>Baxter, 2:76.

Yahweh but a dynasty, a royal house. Verses 12 through 16 elaborate on this third promise.

"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.<sup>1</sup> 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."<sup>2</sup>

7:12 In order to build this "house" for David, the LORD would raise up a descendant (lit. seed) of David, from among his own children, whose kingdom He would establish.

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 David's successors, and part to Jesus Christ (cf. Matt. 3:17). In this verse it seems to be all David's posterity that is in view as coming forth from him.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Weinfeld, pp. 184-203, esp. 185-86.

<sup>2</sup>Merrill, *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.

<sup>3</sup>See Driver, pp. 275-76.

God also revealed to David at this time that his immediate successor would be Solomon, who was yet to be born (cf. 1 Chron. 22:9).

7:13 This descendant would build a "house" (temple) for Yahweh, and God would establish his right to rule (his "throne," the symbol of his right to rule) forever. Solomon did indeed build a temple for Yahweh, and no one ever overthrew him.

David's greatest descendant, Jesus Christ, would also build a "house" for Yahweh, but it would be a "house" composed of all believers. And God would establish Christ's right to rule over all the earth spiritually (in the hearts of believers) and physically (when Jesus returns to the earth to rule and reign for 1,000 years).

7:14 David's descendant would have a relationship with God like that of a son to a father. When this son did wrong, God would discipline him, like a father disciplines his son.<sup>1</sup> In Solomon's case and in the case of his succeeding kings this discipline would come through other people. Solomon and his successors experienced increasing opposition from his neighbor nations as he departed farther and farther from God.

In the case of David's greatest descendant, Jesus Christ, He too would be a "Son of God." But He always did the will of His Father, so He never needed to be disciplined.

One writer concluded that God only spoke of Israel's king as His "son" in an adoptive sense.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. 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.

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

<sup>3</sup>Anderson, p. 122.



The title "Son of God," which appears so often in the Gospels and elsewhere in Scripture, has its origin in this verse (cf. Ps. 2:7). Consequently, when Jesus, Satan, the demons, and people acknowledged Jesus as the "Son of God," they were identifying Him, consciously or unconsciously, 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.

7:15 If David's descendant sinned, God would discipline him, but God would never remove His favor from him. He would not treat him like He had treated Saul. Specifically, He would not remove His Spirit from him (cf. 1 Sam. 16:14).

"In general terms the line would not fail. Yet in particular terms, benefits might be withdrawn from individuals."<sup>1</sup>

"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]."<sup>2</sup>

"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."<sup>3</sup>

7:16 Fourth, God promised to establish David's house (dynasty), his kingdom (his people and land), and his throne (his right to rule) "forever"—without end. These things would endure even beyond the reign of David's immediate descendant. These three promises (house, kingdom, and throne) constitute the

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<sup>1</sup>William J. Dumbrell, *Covenants and Creation*, p. 150.

<sup>2</sup>Waltke, p. 135. Cf. Gordon, p. 240.

<sup>3</sup>John Goldingay, *Theological Diversity and the Authority of the Old Testament*, p. 70.

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.<sup>1</sup> It seems to me that the Son of God promise was really part of the seed promise.

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 in the Davidic kingdom (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, 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.

7:17        Thus ended the LORD's message to David that Nathan received in a vision.

These promises, which are also prophecies, are an important key to understanding God's program for the future.<sup>2</sup>

"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

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

<sup>2</sup>See J. Dwight Pentecost, *Things to Come*, pp. 100-15.

love' (v, 15), ensures the fulfillment of the promises, which are here unconditional, though the need for chastisement is foreseen."<sup>1</sup>

"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."<sup>2</sup>

Note the development of the similar theme of Abraham's heir in Genesis 12 through 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."<sup>3</sup>

"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."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Baldwin, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup>Heater, p. 119.

<sup>3</sup>Baxter, 2:75.

<sup>4</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, pp. 348-49.

The Davidic Covenant is an outgrowth of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen. 12:1-3, 7).<sup>1</sup> 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 to Abraham more fully, and in Jeremiah 31 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."<sup>2</sup>

"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 [guarantee] of protection, vouchsafed [given graciously] 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 [confirmed] 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

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<sup>1</sup>For 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.

<sup>2</sup>Heater, p. 120.

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."<sup>1</sup>

The descendant of David through whom God will fulfill His promises completely is Jesus Christ.<sup>2</sup>

"... 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

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<sup>1</sup>Avraham 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.

<sup>2</sup>For 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.

Abraham, Lion of Judah, and Heir of David, should be *born of a virgin*."<sup>1</sup>

In view of what God said of Jesus Christ in Luke 1:32 and 33 ("He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end."), 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. (4) His kingdom must be an earthly kingdom, as opposed to a spiritual rule from heaven. And (5) this kingdom must be everlasting.<sup>2</sup>

"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, 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."<sup>3</sup>

"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."<sup>4</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup>Baxter, 2:75-76.

<sup>2</sup>Pentecost, *Things to ...*, pp. 114-15.

<sup>3</sup>John 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.

<sup>4</sup>Saucy, p. 66.

for Israel (vv. 18-29; 2 Chron. 6:14-16). Therefore dispensationalists look for the fulfillment to be a literal earthly kingdom for Israel.<sup>1</sup>

"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."<sup>2</sup>

God did not condition His promises to David here on anything. There are no "if" conditions stated, but there are nine "will" commitments given (vv. 9, 10, 11 [twice], 12 [twice], 13, 14 [twice]). Therefore we can count on their complete fulfillment.

"The overriding theological principle is that Yahweh's word is infallible."<sup>3</sup>

"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."<sup>4</sup>

"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."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See Showers, in the work cited earlier, for a comparison of covenant (non-dispensational) and dispensational theology. Dispensationalists believe that references to Israel in the New Testament describe the ethnic descendants of Jacob.

<sup>2</sup>Baxter, 2:74.

<sup>3</sup>Dennis J. McCarthy, "II Samuel 7 and the Structure of the Deuteronomic History," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84 (1965):136.

<sup>4</sup>Eugene H. Merrill, "2 Samuel," in *The Old Testament Explorer*, p. 233.

<sup>5</sup>McGee, 2:204

**David's prayer in response to God's promises 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 ..."<sup>1</sup>

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.

**Thanksgiving for God's promises 7:18-21**

7:18 Normally Israelites stood or kneeled to pray. Perhaps David "sat" back on his heels to pray in a kneeling position because he was a king.<sup>2</sup> David marveled that the "Lord" (his Master) Yahweh (here translated "God") had blessed him as He had in view of his humble background. David's humility shines through in this introductory address.

7:19 David acknowledged that his background had not been a factor in Yahweh's choice to bless him, and he realized that what God had promised him involved the "distant future."

"... 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 the Old and New Testaments that emphasize the Messiah as a descendant of David."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Youngblood, p. 896.

<sup>2</sup>Jamieson, et al., p. 233; Gordon, p. 241; Anderson, p. 126.

<sup>3</sup>Andrew E. Steinmann, "What Did David Understand about the Promises in the Davidic Covenant?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 171:681 (January-March 2014):29.



"The last clause of v. 19 ["this is the custom of mankind"] is difficult to interpret, but probably means that the evidence of grace in such actions by Yahweh acts as instruction (*tôrâ*) for all people, linking David's prayer to his earlier declaration in 1 Sam. 17:46 ["so all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel"] on the universal importance of Yahweh's actions in Israel."<sup>1</sup>

Another translation of this difficult clause is, "This is the charter by which humanity will be directed."<sup>2</sup>

7:20 David felt speechless at God's goodness to him. Even though the LORD knew him intimately, He still chose to give him these great promises.

7:21 David believed that God had made these promises to him for the sake of His word, that is, for the sake of His reputation as a covenant-keeping God, and out of the goodness of God's heart. Some interpreters believed that David meant that God made these promises for the sake of His servant, David.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Praise for what God had done in the past 7:22-24**

7:22 David ascribed unique greatness to Yahweh, the only God, for giving him these promises.

7:23 He also praised God for what He had done in redeeming Israel for Himself from Egypt. There was no nation, therefore, like Israel. God's past acts on behalf of Israel had made His name (reputation) great.

7:24 David viewed God's promises as the assurance that He had established, and would establish, Israel as His own people forever and Himself as the Israelites' God.

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<sup>1</sup>Firth, p 390.

<sup>2</sup>Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "The Blessing of David: The Charter for Humanity," in *The Law and the Prophets*, p. 311.

<sup>3</sup>Anderson, p. 127; Driver, p. 277.

**Petition for the future fulfillment of what God had promised 7:25-29**

- 7:25-26 David asked God to confirm (back up) what He had promised and do just as He had spoken so that Yahweh's reputation would be great forever. He also prayed that his house would indeed be established in God's presence.
- 7:27 David reaffirmed that he had understood that the LORD of armies would establish his house, and this is why he had found the courage to ask God to establish it forever.
- 7:28 Again David affirmed that Yahweh was Israel's God, and that His words were truth, and that He had made this good promise to Him.
- "'Thy kingdom come' is the thrust of verse 27, and 'Thy will be done' the thrust of verse 28."<sup>1</sup>
- 7:29 Finally David asked for God's blessing on his house so that it would indeed continue forever under Yahweh's watchful gaze. God had spoken, and with His blessing David believed that his house would indeed be blessed forever.

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 Yahweh his Master ("Lord," Heb. *Adonai*). David saw his own role in the larger context of God's purpose for Israel (vv. 23-24). In all these particulars David contrasts with Saul. We also see why God blessed David personally and used him as a channel of blessing to others.

"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

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, p. 325.

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 [right], lost the kingdom; David, more concerned about honouring the Lord than guarding his own reputation, had his kingdom made sure for ever."<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

#### **4. A summary of David's triumphs 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

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<sup>1</sup>Baldwin, pp. 218-219.

<sup>2</sup>See the "Chronology of David's Life" in my notes on 1 Samuel 16.

military action picks up where the story left off at the end of chapter 5."<sup>1</sup>

Chapter 8 evidently describes the conquest of David's enemies that took place before David brought the ark into Jerusalem (ch. 6) and before he received the Davidic Covenant (ch. 7).

"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."<sup>2</sup>

The writer proceeded to describe David's military campaigns from west (v. 1), to east (v. 2), to north (vv. 3-11), to south (vv. 13-14), suggesting victory in every direction: total success thanks to Yahweh (vv. 6, 14).

### **David's victory over the Philistines, 8:1**

An apparent problem with the chronology just mentioned is the statement, "Now it happened afterward." 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 through 25. Following those battles David had one or more other conflicts with the Philistines, which are described in this verse. The chief city of the Philistines was Gath (cf. 1 Chron. 18:1).

"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."<sup>3</sup>

### **David's victory over the Moabites 8:2**

To the east of Israel, David defeated the Moabites, executed two-thirds of their soldiers, and obligated them to pay tribute (honor and taxes). One interpretation of "he measured two lines to put to death, and a full line to keep alive" is that David spared the young Moabites (whose height was one

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<sup>1</sup>Payne, p. 193.

<sup>2</sup>Alexander, p. 54.

<sup>3</sup>Abraham Malamat, "The Kingdom of David & Solomon in its Contact with Egypt and Aram Naharaim," *Biblical Archaeologist* 21:4 (1958):100.

"line") and executed the adults (whose height was two "lines").<sup>1</sup> 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."<sup>2</sup>

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

### **David's victory over the Zobahites and the Arameans 8:3-8**

8:3 To the northeast, David subdued the son of the king of Zobah. The antecedent of "he" ("he went to restore") is probably Hadadezer.<sup>3</sup> Hadadezer means "Hadad Is My Help," Hadad being the chief god of the Arameans.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps Hadadezer served as co-regent with his father, King Rehob (cf. v. 5). But "Hadadezer" may have been a royal title rather than a personal name.<sup>5</sup>

8:4 There is a discrepancy in the number of Zobahite horsemen that David took in battle. Probably the figure in 1 Chronicles 18:4 is correct: 7,000, rather than 1,700.<sup>6</sup> This figure also seems to be more in harmony with the 20,000 foot soldiers that were captured.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Nelson ...*, p. 520.

<sup>2</sup> Chisholm, sidebar on p. 229. See also Wiersbe, p. 326; and Baxter, 2:77.

<sup>3</sup> See Keil and Delitzsch, p. 358.

<sup>4</sup> Driver, p. 280.

<sup>5</sup> See Youngblood, p. 904.

<sup>6</sup> The Septuagint also has 7,000.

This verse has suffered a textual corruption that is the reason for the difference in the number of the horsemen.<sup>1</sup> There are many minor textual corruptions in the Hebrew text of 1 and 2 Samuel, probably more than in any other books of the Old Testament.<sup>2</sup>

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 to acquire many horses for himself."<sup>3</sup>

"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."<sup>4</sup>

8:5 Aramean soldiers came to Hadadezer's aid, but David defeated them too and killed 22,000 of them. 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 was not as powerful as it became later. Aram was northeast of Canaan. David had previously defeated these people.<sup>5</sup>

"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

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<sup>1</sup>Archer, p. 184; Keil and Delitzsch, p. 360.

<sup>2</sup>For an introduction to the study of this subject, see Martin, pp. 209-22.

<sup>3</sup>See Yigael Yadin, *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands in the Light of Archaeological Discovery*, p. 285.

<sup>4</sup>McGee, 2:206.

<sup>5</sup>See my note on 10:15-19.

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."<sup>1</sup>

8:6 Having defeated the Arameans of Damascus, David placed outposts of Israelite troops ("garrisons") among them, and they paid him tribute.

8:7 David also took the Zobahites' gold shields, which were probably used for decorative purposes—since gold shields would not have been strong enough and would have been too valuable to use in battle—and he took them to Jerusalem as trophies of war.

"Whether they [the gold shields] 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)."<sup>2</sup>

Another view is that the shields were really quivers, and what David took was military equipment, not ceremonial armor.<sup>3</sup>

8:8 Betah (the Tibhath of 1 Chronicles 18:8) and Berothai (the Berothah of Ezekiel 47:16) were towns in Aram. David took many bronze articles from these towns.

### **The reaction of Toi to David's defeat of Hadadezer 8:9-10**

David received more treasure from Toi, the king of Hamath. The town of Hamath was farther northeast than the kingdoms of Zobah and Aram. Joram, Toi's son, congratulated David on defeating Hadadezer, because Toi had previously been at war with Hadadezer. He also gave David many gold, silver, and bronze articles.

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<sup>1</sup>Free, p. 160.

<sup>2</sup>Youngblood, p. 906.

<sup>3</sup>See Anderson, p. 133.

**David's consecration of the treasure that he had received 8:11-12**

David consecrated all of the wealth that he had taken in these battles, and the gifts that had been given to him, to the LORD. He probably set this aside to be used by Solomon when he would build the temple.

**David's victories over the Arameans in the Valley of Salt and the Edomites 8:13-14**

David also defeated another group of Arameans in the Valley of Salt. There is a textual omission in verse 13 after the 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).<sup>1</sup> Edom, of course, was Israel's antagonistic 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 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."<sup>2</sup>

"... Israel's first three kings were quite unaffected by large powers, making possible in part the wide expansion of boundaries under King David."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, p. 364.

<sup>2</sup>Youngblood, p. 901. Paragraph division omitted.

<sup>3</sup>Wood, *A Survey ...*, p. 237.



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 (cf. Gen. 15:18; et al.)? Some would say Yes.<sup>1</sup> But 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).

### **A summary of David's administration 8:15-18**

Verses 15 through 18 constitute a summary of David's administration and conclude this section of 1 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 David's kingdom 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.<sup>2</sup> 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 and followed God faithfully, Yahweh poured out blessing and fertility on him and his kingdom.

8:15        David reigned over all Israel, namely, the tribe of Judah and all the other tribes. His reign was marked by justice (fairness in dealing with all people) and righteousness (doing what was right in the sight of God and people).

8:16        Verses 16 through 18 give the names of David's "cabinet members" and their various responsibilities. Joab was David's military commander: his general. Jehoshaphat was his secretary.

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<sup>1</sup>E.g., Firth, p. 398.

<sup>2</sup>See my note on 1 Samuel 14:47-52.

"The *recorder* (Heb. *mazkir* ["secretary"]), 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 ...'"<sup>1</sup>

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 of the reminder.

8:17 Zadok and Ahimelech shared the leadership of the priesthood. Seraiah the "scribe" (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.<sup>2</sup>

8:18 The Cherethites and Pelethites formed David's bodyguard (cf. 15:18; 20:7, 23; 1 Kings 1:38, 44; 1 Chron. 18:17). The Cherethites were evidently Cretans, and the Pelethites were 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.<sup>3</sup> 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

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

<sup>2</sup>Youngblood, p. 911; Wiersbe, p. 327.

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

less likely to be adulterated by involvement in national politics (*cf.* 1 Sa. 28:2)."<sup>1</sup>

David's sons were in some sense priests. "Chief ministers" is literally "priests" in Hebrew.<sup>2</sup> Apparently they functioned in a mediatory capacity, but not by carrying out sacrificial functions, which were the exclusive responsibilities of the Levitical priests.

"... 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 ..."<sup>3</sup>

Gordon Wenham believed that "priests" is a mistranslation and that the proper reading should be "administrators (of the royal estates)" (*cf.* 1 Chronicles 18:17).<sup>4</sup> Perhaps these priestly duties resulted from David's sons' connection with the Melchizedekian priesthood (*cf.* 6:12-15).<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> But David did not have complete sovereignty over all of this territory. Some of his neighbor kingdoms were tribute-paying vassal states. Israel lost control of most of this territory later in her history. Since God had promised Abraham's descendants permanent possession of the

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<sup>1</sup>Gordon, p. 247.

<sup>2</sup>See 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.

<sup>3</sup>Edersheim, pp. 84-85.

<sup>4</sup>G. J. Wenham, "Were David's Sons Priests?" *Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 87:1 (1975):79-82.

<sup>5</sup>Merrill, "2 Samuel," p. 234.

<sup>6</sup>See the map "The Kingdom of David" in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 462.

Promised Land (Gen. 13:15), David's kingdom did not constitute a complete fulfillment of the land promise in the Abrahamic Covenant. That fulfillment will take place when Jesus Christ returns to the earth and sets up His millennial kingdom.

Five major conflicts and reversals of fortune occur in chapters 2 through 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; 8:1). Saul's line conflicted with David and the ark (chs. 6—7), and other nations conflicted with David (8:2-8).

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

In contrast, 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 through 20 contrast with chapters 2 through 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."<sup>1</sup>

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 through 20 show the effects of being arrogant before God.

Scholars frequently refer to chapters 9 through 20, along with 1 Kings 1 and 2, as "the succession narrative."<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> Other scholars prefer to call this unit "court history," since it deals with a broader range of subjects than just Solomon's succession to the throne.<sup>4</sup>

"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."<sup>5</sup>

As with the rest of 1 and 2 Samuel, this section is basically chronological with exceptions for thematic and theological reasons. Chapters 9 through 20 begin with information about the survivors in Saul's family (ch. 9), as

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<sup>1</sup>Martin, p. 39.

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

<sup>3</sup>E.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 (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.

<sup>4</sup>E.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.

<sup>5</sup>Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, pp. 251-52. See also Robert H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 357.

does the next major section of the book: chapters 21 through 24 (21:1-14).

**A. DAVID'S KINDNESS TO MEPHIBOSHETH CH. 9**

The story of David's kindness to Mephibosheth shows how gracious and generous David was. But this chapter also helps to explain David's subsequent acceptance by the Benjamites. And it 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."<sup>1</sup>

9:1 David's desire to show kindness to any of Jonathan's descendants that still remained alive goes beyond what David had promised Jonathan: that he would not cut off his descendants when he became king (1 Sam. 20:15).

9:2-3 Ziba had been a servant in Saul's household. He told David about Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son, who was disabled in both his feet. 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 before God. Mephibosheth physically had trouble standing before God and His anointed.

9:4-5 Ziba told David that Mephibosheth was then residing in the town of Lo-debar. Lo-debar (lit. "No Pasture") was about 10 miles northwest of Jabesh-gilead (which had ties with Saul; cf. 1 Sam. 11:9; 31:11) in Transjordan, and 10 miles south of the Sea of Chinnereth (Galilee). It stood on the eastern edge of the Jordan Valley. So David sent messengers who brought Mephibosheth from Lo-debar to Jerusalem.

It is doubtful that Ammiel, mentioned in verse 4, was Bathsheba's father, who was also named "Ammiel" (cf. 1 Chron. 3:5), though this is possible.

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<sup>1</sup>Swindoll, p. 169.

"Ziba, a servant of Saul, betrayed the hiding place of Mephibosheth, and David could have easily killed him."<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps Ziba was trying to get in good 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).

9:6 When Mephibosheth met David he prostrated himself before the king and presented himself as David's servant.

9:7 David relieved Mephibosheth's fears by promising him three things: David would be kind to him, he would restore all of Saul's lands to him, and he would allow him to eat at his table regularly. David's kindness (Heb. *hesed*, loyal love, vv. 1, 3, 7) to Jonathan's son, expressed concretely by giving Mephibosheth these three things, 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.<sup>2</sup> It also shows David was godly, since God is gracious, generous, and faithful to His promises. David's goodness to Mephibosheth was pure grace, entirely unearned by Jonathan's son. Yet this story is primarily about loyalty: David's loyalty to Jonathan.

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

"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."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>McGee, 2:207.

<sup>2</sup>Leo 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.

<sup>3</sup>McGee, 2:208.

<sup>4</sup>Wiersbe, p. 329.

Eating with someone expressed commitment to protect that person in the ancient Near East. David undoubtedly extended grace to Mephibosheth for two reasons: to demonstrate his love for Mephibosheth and for Jonathan, and to cement relations with the Benjamites, Mephibosheth's tribesmen. 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.

"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."<sup>1</sup>

"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."<sup>2</sup>

- 9:8 Mephibosheth greatly appreciated David's grace to him and showed his gratitude by prostrating himself again before David. Interestingly he described himself as "a dead dog," the same figure that David had used to describe himself to Saul (1 Sam. 24:14; see also 2 Sam. 16:9).
- 9:9-10 David then explained to Ziba what he had done for Mephibosheth and assigned Ziba and his large household the

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<sup>1</sup>Meir 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.

<sup>2</sup>Anderson, p. 143.



responsibility of cultivating Mephibosheth's land and bringing the produce to David. The produce of Mephibosheth's land paid the cost of his maintenance. David provided for Mephibosheth's needs in Jerusalem, but he also provided work for Ziba.

9:11        Ziba then promised to do what the king had commanded, and Mephibosheth thereafter ate at the king's table along with David's own sons.

9:12-13    If Mephibosheth was five years old when Jonathan and Saul died on Mt. Gilboa (4:4), he was born about 1016 B.C. When David captured Jerusalem in 1004 B.C., Mephibosheth would have been 12. Now we see Mephibosheth had a young son, Mica, so perhaps he was about 20 years old. People frequently married in their teens in the ancient Near East, so perhaps the events of this chapter took place about 996 B.C.

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 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.

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 living in a place far removed from David, 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 virtually 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).

## **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.<sup>1</sup> The phrase "Now it happened" (10:1) or "Now it was" (13:1) always opens a new section in the narrative.<sup>2</sup> 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 through 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 (2 Sam. 9—1 Kings 2). Its occurrence may signal the development of a power motif here.<sup>3</sup>

### **1. The Ammonite and Aramean wars ch. 10 (cf. 1 Chron. 19)**

This chapter 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.<sup>4</sup> 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 (in this case Hanun) for his father's sake, but this time the recipient of David's kindness was not an Israelite, and his reaction was antagonistic rather than compliant.

#### **David's kindness to Hanun and its rejection 10:1-5**

10:1        This section of 2 Samuel (chs. 10—12) begins with the same phrase that began chapter 8: "Now it happened afterward."

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<sup>1</sup>Youngblood, p. 920.

<sup>2</sup>Wolfgang 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.

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

<sup>4</sup>For 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.

After what is not explained, but the events that follow probably occurred some time after Mephibosheth's arrival in Jerusalem (ch. 9), and probably early in David's time living there.<sup>1</sup>

The king of the Ammonites, who lived to the east of Israel in Transjordan, died, and his son, Hanun, took his place.

- 10:2a As with Mephibosheth (ch. 9), David extended kindness (Heb. *hesed*) to Hanun, because his father, Nahash, had shown kindness to David. There is no record in Scripture of what this kindness was. The only other mention of Nahash was when he led the Ammonites in an attack against the Israelite town of Jabesh-gilead in Saul's day (1 Sam. 11:1-11; see also 1 Sam. 12:12). But now David sent some of his servants to console Hanun on the death of his father.

"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."<sup>2</sup>

- 10:2b-3 But in this instance, David's kindness was neither appreciated nor reciprocated, as is still the case occasionally. Hanun's counselors interpreted the visit of David's comforters as an attempt to spy on the Ammonites.

- 10:4 By humiliating David's soldiers the Ammonites 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 (7:1).

Probably Hanun shaved the beards of David's messengers vertically to make them look very foolish (cf. Isa. 7:20).<sup>3</sup> Military victors sometimes humiliated their captives by exposing their buttocks (cf. Isa. 20:4). Therefore Nahash probably also removed the tassels from the hems of the

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<sup>1</sup>Firth, p. 408.

<sup>2</sup>Henry, p. 339.

<sup>3</sup>Youngblood, p. 922.

messengers' garments that identified them as Jews (cf. Num. 15:37-41; Deut. 22:12).

Hanun's advisors assumed David's worst motives rather than the best, which is a temptation for many people. Perhaps David's previous conquests made them suspect that he had set his sights on Ammon as his next target.

"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."<sup>1</sup>

- 10:5      The humiliated messengers of David evidently remained in Jericho, which was half way between Ammon and Jerusalem, until their beards grew back.

#### **The Ammonites' preparations for battle with Israel 10:6-8**

- 10:6      The Ammonites hired thousands of mercenary soldiers from Aram, Maacah, and Tob to supplement their own army, probably because they anticipated that David would retaliate. 1 Chronicles 19:6 and 7 add that Hanun sent 1,000 talents of silver to hire 32,000 chariots and horsemen from Mesopotamia, Aram-maacah (the Aramean kingdom of Maacah), and Zobah. Maacah lay to the northeast of the Sea of Cinnereth (Galilee), Zobah lay farther north, north of Damascus, and Tob lay to the north of Ammon and east of that Sea.

The fact that Arameans from Beth-rehob (also called Rehob, v. 8) and Zobah, and other northeastern enemies of Israel would ally with Ammon suggests that this event took place before David had brought them under his authority (cf. 8:3-8). Perhaps 993-990 B.C. are reasonable dates for the Ammonite wars with Israel.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 923.

<sup>2</sup>Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 244.

10:7 Having learned that the Ammonites were increasing their armed forces, David sent Joab with the entire Israelite army to attack the Ammonites. David did not attack because the Ammonites had humiliated his messengers but because they were planning to go to war with Israel.

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

10:8 The battle took place at Medeba, a town about 20 miles east of the north end of the Salt (Dead) Sea, in Transjordan (cf. 1 Chron. 19:7). The Ammonites divided the soldiers into two companies: The Ammonite army lined up in front of Medeba in order to defend it, and the Aramean forces were stationed in the field outside Medeba.

#### **The Israelites' victory at Medeba 10:9-14**

10:9-11 When Joab discovered that he faced a double threat, he divided his forces. He led the stronger company of Israelite soldiers against the Arameans in the field, and he told his brother Abishai to lead the other company against the Ammonites who were guarding the city. The plan was that, whichever group needed help, the other company would assist.

10:12 Joab gave a pep talk to all the Israelite soldiers before they engaged their enemy. He charged them to be strong and courageous for the sake of their people and for the sake of the cities of Yahweh (cf. Josh. 1:6-7). Perhaps the cities that he had in mind were Israelite cities in Transjordan that were threatened by Ammonite expansion.<sup>2</sup> Note Joab's commendable, and uncharacteristic, spirituality.

"Having done his best to prepare for the battle, Joab took confidence in the sovereignty of God."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Anderson, p. 149.

<sup>2</sup>Firth, p. 410.

<sup>3</sup>*The Nelson ...*, p. 523.

"This is part of a process of character reversals running through chs. 10—12, where David becomes a murderer, Joab expresses piety and a Hittite is the most faithful Yahwist of all, though Joab reverts to type when conspiring with David to murder Uriah."<sup>1</sup>

- 10:13-14 Joab and his elite company of soldiers were able to rout the Arameans, who fled from them. When the Ammonite soldiers saw this, they also ran from Abishai into the city. Then Joab led the Israelite soldiers back to Jerusalem.

### The Israelites' victory at Helam 10:15-19

- 10:15-16 The Arameans wanted to take revenge on the Israelites that had defeated them at Medeba. So Hadadezer, their king, sent for reinforcement from among the Arameans who lived in Mesopotamia, farther to the northeast beyond the Euphrates River. This combined army of Arameans assembled at Helam, a town about 35 miles east of the Sea of Cinnereth (Galilee). Shoback, Hadadezer's military commander, led them.

We have met Hadadezer previously in 8:3 through 8. Since that account ends with the Arameans being tribute-paying subjects of David (8:6), the events described in chapter 10 were probably prior to those in chapter 8.

- 10:17-18 This time when David learned of the threatening army he himself led the Israelite troops across the Jordan River to Helam. The two armies engaged in battle, but the Arameans fled from the Israelites, and David killed 700 Aramean charioteers (1 Chronicles 19:18 has 7,000 charioteers), 40,000 horsemen (1 Chronicles 19:18 say they were foot soldiers), and Shoback. Probably 1 Chronicles 19:18 is correct in recording 7,000 charioteers.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Firth, p. 410.

<sup>2</sup>See Keil and Delitzsch, p. 380. See also Zane C. Hodges, "Conflicts in the Biblical Account of the Ammonite-Syrian War," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 119:475 (July-September 1962):238-43.

10:19 As a result of this battle the Aramean kings who served Hadadezer made peace with David and served him. And they no longer assisted their former Ammonite allies.

## 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).
- B' David sleeps with Bathsheba, who becomes pregnant (12:24-25).
- A' Joab sends for David to besiege and capture Rabbah (12:26-31)."<sup>1</sup>

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, as contained 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."<sup>2</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup>Youngblood, p. 927.

<sup>2</sup>Heater, p. 144.

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.'"<sup>1</sup>

### David's adultery with Bathsheba 11:1-5

11:1 While Joab was continuing to fight the Ammonites the following spring, by besieging Rabbah (lit. "The Great One," which is modern Amman, now the capital of Jordan; cf. 10:7; 1 Chron. 20:1), David was residing in Jerusalem. By mentioning the fact that normally kings led their armies into battle in the spring, some interpreters believe that the writer was implying that David was not acting responsibly by staying in Jerusalem. Saul also got into trouble when he stayed behind, rather than leading his people against their enemy (1 Sam. 14:1-2).

"... leading his troops into battle was expected to be the major external activity of an ancient Near Eastern ruler ..."<sup>2</sup>

But earlier David had sent Joab to lead his army against an enemy (10:7), and then later David himself went into battle and led his soldiers (10:17). Now David again stayed behind in Jerusalem and sent Joab ahead to wage war against Rabbah. Later David joined his troops and captured Rabbah (12:28-29). I do not think that it was wrong for David to have remained in Jerusalem, but what David did when he remained in Jerusalem was wrong.

In an interesting parallel, Jesus Christ is allowing His followers to engage in spiritual warfare now. But 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).

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<sup>1</sup>Alexander, p. 63.

<sup>2</sup>Youngblood, p. 928. Cf. 1 Sam. 8:5-6, 20.



11:2 Neither was it morally wrong for David to walk around on the roof of his house in the evening or to happen to see a beautiful woman bathing. "Very beautiful" 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]).

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

Perhaps Bathsheba was not totally innocent, but that does not lessen David's guilt. Nevertheless, the writer, and God, never explicitly blamed Bathsheba for what happened. They only blamed David. It seems reasonable to assume that she could have shielded herself from view if she had wanted to do so.<sup>2</sup> And she was not necessarily completely naked. She could have been washing herself using a basin.<sup>3</sup>

"The bathing itself may have been for the purpose of ritual purification [cf. v. 4] and would therefore not only advertise Bathsheba's charms but would serve as a notice to the king that she was available to him."<sup>4</sup>

11:3 Nor was it morally wrong for David to send his servants to inquire who the woman was. But it did reveal an interest in her that David should not have pursued. If he was coveting his neighbor's wife at this point, as seems likely, he was sinning mentally (cf. Exod. 20:17; Deut. 5:21).

David had obviously not done what Job did when Job said, "I have made a covenant with my eyes; How then could I look at

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<sup>1</sup> *The Nelson ...*, p. 524.

<sup>2</sup> See E. M. Blaiklock, *Today's Handbook of Bible Characters*, p. 161; Wiersbe, p. 333.

<sup>3</sup> Firth, p. 417.

<sup>4</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, "2 Samuel," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 467.

a virgin [i.e., lustfully; or, in this case, a woman who was washing herself]" (Job 31:1).

"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."<sup>1</sup>

Bathsheba's father, Eliam, may have been the son of Ahithophel, David's counselor (cf. 15:12; 23:34).<sup>2</sup> However, this is supposition.<sup>3</sup> 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. Or he may have been the son of Hittites who had immigrated to Israel when the Hittite Empire was crumbling.<sup>4</sup> 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.).

11:4 After David had lusted after Bathsheba, he then had her brought to him. 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).

In the Hebrew text it is clear that Bathsheba purified herself before having sex with David. The Hebrew clause is disjunctive and could be paraphrased: "Now at that time she had purified herself from her [menstrual] uncleanness." Having just

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<sup>1</sup>Baxter, 2:67.

<sup>2</sup>See 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.

<sup>3</sup>Firth, p. 417.

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

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.

Evidently this was a "one night stand." That is, David and Bathsheba appear to have had sex only on this one occasion before their marriage. After having sex Bathsheba returned to her own house.

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).

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, pursuing, and lying with Bathsheba.

"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. ..."<sup>1</sup>

"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."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Swindoll, p. 183.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid. See also Baxter, 2:8.

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 [13:14], the taking of Amnon's life [13:28-29] and (in political form) the major incident of the rebellion of Absalom [chs. 15—19]."<sup>1</sup>

"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."<sup>2</sup>

"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."<sup>3</sup>

11:5 Obviously some time elapsed before Bathsheba realized that she was pregnant. 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. My guess is that she told David because she hoped that 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.

"The only recorded speech of Bathsheba, brief though it is ["I am pregnant"], sets in motion a

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<sup>1</sup>Gunn, "David and ...," p. 35.

<sup>2</sup>Swindoll, p. 182.

<sup>3</sup>Henry, p. 340.

course of action which ultimately results in her husband's death."<sup>1</sup>

### 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).<sup>2</sup>

11:6 When David learned that Bathsheba was pregnant by him, he began to cover up his sin rather than acknowledging it. His first plan was to get Uriah to sleep with Bathsheba and so make him think that he was the father of her child. So David ordered Joab to send Uriah from the battlefield to himself. Again David "sent" for someone who "came to him," namely, Uriah.

11:7-8 David made Uriah think that the only reason he had been sent for was to report on conditions on the Ammonite battlefield. David's order to Uriah to go home and wash his feet probably meant that Uriah was to go home and relax, the implication being that he would also resume normal sexual activity with his wife. "Feet" in the Old Testament is sometimes a euphemistic reference to the genitals (cf. Exod. 4:25; Deut. 28:57; Isa. 7:20).<sup>3</sup> David also sent a gift to Uriah. David's hypocrisy is clear. He was setting up this soldier in order to cover his own sin.

11:9 However David underestimated faithful Uriah's commitment to him. Rather than going home, Uriah slept with the other servants of David at the door of the king's house. Though Bathsheba's husband was a Hittite, he appears to have been a godly believer in Yahweh as well as a dedicated warrior. The writer noted later that Uriah was one of David's best soldiers, one of his "mighty men" (cf. 23:39).

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<sup>1</sup>Lawlor, p. 197.

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

<sup>3</sup>Gale 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.

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

- 11:10-11 When David recalled Uriah and asked him why he had not gone home, Uriah explained that he could not in good conscience do that. His reference to the ark being in a temporary shelter may refer to its location at Kiriath-jearim. However some interpreters believe that the reference is to Succoth.<sup>2</sup> It could be that Joab had brought the ark to the battle scene in Ammon, and that it was in a temporary shelter there. In any case, Uriah's reference to the ark expressed his admirable concern for its vulnerability.

"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 [ch. 9], but now a foreigner is showing him to be despicably lax."<sup>3</sup>

- 11:12-13 David's next plan was to get Uriah drunk, hoping that in that condition he would return home and sleep with his wife. 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

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<sup>1</sup> Joel Rosenberg, *King and Kin: Political Allegory in the Hebrew Bible*, p. 132.

<sup>2</sup> Youngblood, p. 934.

<sup>3</sup> Baldwin, p. 233.

principle, the same could not be said of this foreigner."<sup>1</sup>

"... Uriah drunk proved to be a better man than David sober ..."<sup>2</sup>

11:14-15 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. Compare wicked Queen Jezebel's similar act in 1 Kings 21:9 through 11.

11:16-17 Joab obediently carried out David's orders to put Uriah in a dangerous place in the fighting, and, as expected, Uriah was killed.

"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."<sup>3</sup>

"It was ironic that David, the protector of justice, would so pervert justice in the Uriah-Bathsheba incident."<sup>4</sup>

It is also ironic that 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).

11:18-21 Then Joab sent word to David that Uriah was dead. Evidently Joab's strategy for getting Uriah killed displeased David. But David quickly concluded that the end justified the means.

"David, God's anointed and a great king, is otherwise poles apart from a petty thug like Abimelech [cf. Judg. 9:50-54]. ... [But] that David is likened to Abimelech has—because of the

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<sup>1</sup>Gordon, pp. 253-54.

<sup>2</sup>Wiersbe, p. 335.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 336.

<sup>4</sup>Heater, p. 120.

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."<sup>1</sup>

11:22-25 Some other innocent soldiers beside Uriah died because of David's orders. David was responsible for their deaths too.

"... 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."<sup>2</sup>

This is probably why Joab prepared his messenger for David's strong reaction to the news of Uriah's death as he did.

At first, David piously tried to salve Joab's conscience, as well as his own conscience, for Joab's complicity in Uriah's death. David was calling what was sin something other than sin: merely a natural consequence of war (cf. 1 John 1:9).

### David's additional sin 11:26-27

When Bathsheba learned of Uriah's death she mourned. Some time later, when the time of mourning was over, David took her again, this time to his house to become his wife.

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<sup>1</sup>Sternberg, pp. 221-22.

<sup>2</sup>*The Nelson ...*, p. 525.



"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..."<sup>1</sup>

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

David should not have married Bathsheba, because he already had many wives. But he should have provided for her maintenance, as he had provided for Mephibosheth's maintenance. In due time their child was born, and he was a boy.

What David had done was not only evil in Joab's eyes, but, of infinitely greater importance, it was evil in Yahweh's eyes.

"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."<sup>2</sup>

Someone wisely warned: "Never give the devil a ride. He'll always want to drive."

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 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).

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<sup>1</sup>Youngblood, p. 938.

<sup>2</sup>Swindoll, p. 194.

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.

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.

### **Nathan's rebuke of David 12:1-15a**

Some time passed between the events of chapter 11 and those of chapter 12 (cf. Ps. 32:3-4). 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."<sup>1</sup>

"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.

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<sup>1</sup>Henry, p. 341.

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."<sup>1</sup>

- 12:1a 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."<sup>2</sup>

- 12:1b-4 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 (v. 5).<sup>3</sup> Just like the hard-hearted 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).
- 12:5-6 Unaware that he was "the man," David ordered that the selfish man in Nathan's story should 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.<sup>4</sup> David was reacting emotionally when he said that the man deserved to die. He seems to have been trying to get rid of his own guilty

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<sup>1</sup>Swindoll, p. 199.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 200.

<sup>3</sup>See Simon, pp. 207-42; and Peter W. Coxon, "A Note on 'Bathsheba' in 2 Samuel 12, 1-6," *Biblica* 62:2 (1981):247-50.

<sup>4</sup>See Anthony Phillips, "The Interpretation of 2 Samuel xii 5-6," *Vetus Testamentum* 16 (1966):242-44.

conscience by condemning someone else while subconsciously passing judgment on himself.<sup>1</sup>

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).<sup>2</sup>

12:7-8 "You yourself are the man!" is certainly one of the most dramatic sentences in the Bible. Since several months had evidently passed since David had committed his gross sins, they were probably not in the forefront of his 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.<sup>3</sup> 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 four great things for David: (1) He had anointed David as king over Israel. (2) He had rescued David from the hand of Saul. (3) He had given David Saul's house and put Saul's wives in David's care. 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. (4) And God had given David the whole nation of Israel to rule over.

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<sup>1</sup>Baldwin, p. 236. See J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*, vol. 1: *King David*, p. 77.

<sup>2</sup>Jones, p. 103.

<sup>3</sup>See William Sanford LaSor, "The Prophets during the Monarchy: Turning Points in Israel's Decline," in *Israel's Apostasy and Restoration*, pp. 59-70.

12:9 But David had done four sinful things in spite of God's goodness to him: (1) He had despised the word of the LORD by doing evil in His sight. David had despised God by disobeying His Word, as though he was superior to it. David had seen what had happened to Saul for despising God's word. (2) He had killed Uriah. (3) He had taken Uriah's wife.

"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 [hold back] itself."<sup>1</sup>

(4) And David had plotted the death of Uriah.

12:10-12 David's punishment would be fourfold (cf. Gal. 6:7): (1) The sword would never leave his house. That is, David's own family would thereafter kill one another. (2) Someone from his own household would rise up as his adversary. (3) Someone would take his wives illegitimately as he had taken Uriah's wife illegitimately. (4) David would experience public humiliation whereas he had caused private humiliation. Some of his own children would be the source of his discipline, and God would remove some of his children from him. The executions of these sentences follow in the text (13:11-14, 38-39; 16:22; 18:15).

Verses 9 and 10 of this chapter have been called "the literary, historical, and theological crux and center of 2 Samuel as a whole."<sup>2</sup> 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 'give' David's wives to someone else, to 'one who is close to you' (v. 11)—ironically, an expression

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<sup>1</sup>Henry, p. 341.

<sup>2</sup>Youngblood, p. 944.

earlier used of David himself in similar circumstances (see 1 Sam 15:28; 28:17 ...)."<sup>1</sup>

"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)."<sup>2</sup>

"David's voyeurism in 2 Sam 11:2 and Nathan's curse in 12:11 foreshadow Absalom's rooftop orgy (16:20-22)."<sup>3</sup>

"We need to remember that, like many sins, David's were carried out *secretly*—at least for a while. 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."<sup>4</sup>

12:13 Finally David confessed his sins. He considered them sins primarily against the LORD. In Psalm 51:4 David wrote, "Against You, You only, I have sinned and done what is evil in your sight ..." Evidently he meant that his sins against Bathsheba and Uriah were not worthy to be compared to his sins against the LORD, because his sin against the LORD was so much more significant. If that is what David meant, his confession shows how greatly David regarded his relationship with Yahweh.

Psalm 32:3 and 4 probably record 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

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 945.

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

<sup>3</sup>Jon D. Levenson and Baruch Halpern, "The Political Import of David's Marriages," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99:4 (1980):514.

<sup>4</sup>Swindoll, p. 196.

when he confessed his sins. David's confession was genuine (cf. Prov. 10:17). He called his sin what it was rather than trying to cover it up or explain it away, which was Saul's typical response when he sinned.

God spared David's life by pure grace. Normally David would have had to die for his sins (Lev. 20:10; 24:17). His pardon came as a special revelation from God through Nathan.

"Repentance has its reward (cf. 1 Sa. 7:3)."<sup>1</sup>

"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 reason he found forgiveness, whereas Saul never accepted his guilt or the rejection that followed from it."<sup>2</sup>

God's forgiveness followed immediately after David's confession—even in the same verse! "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."<sup>3</sup>

12:14      Whereas the LORD removed the immediate punishment of David's sin (his own death), He did not remove the consequences of it (his own 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

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<sup>1</sup>Gordon, p. 258.

<sup>2</sup>Baldwin, p. 239.

<sup>3</sup>Firth, p. 431.

immediate signs of remorse allowed immediate forgiveness; but the deed itself could not be undone, and some consequences were inevitable."<sup>1</sup>

God's punishment fit David's crimes (cf. Gal. 6:7). In David's case the infant that he fathered died, because David had shown disrespect for the LORD by what he had done.<sup>2</sup> As previously noted, when God's people genuinely confess their sins He removes the punishment that would result in the death of the sinner, but He usually allows at least some of the consequences of their acts to follow. And He uses these consequences to discipline and instruct the sinner—and often other people as well.

"How painful are the consequences of forgiven sin!"<sup>3</sup>

"God could not ignore David's sin and thus let unbelievers impugn the holiness of His character."<sup>4</sup>

David disrespected Yahweh's holiness by committing 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).

12:15a      Having confronted the king with his sins, and having heard his confession and announced his punishment, Nathan went home.

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<sup>1</sup>Payne, p. 209.

<sup>2</sup>See 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.

<sup>3</sup>Wiersbe, p. 366.

<sup>4</sup>Laney, p. 109.



**The death of one child 12:15b-23**

12:15b      Why did God punish this child with sickness, and eventually death (v. 18), 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 Nathan and David saw it as connected with David's sin and raised no questions about it as we do."<sup>1</sup>

"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."<sup>2</sup>

12:16-17    David prayed and fasted for the child's recovery, and he lay on the ground all night, apparently as an act of self-sacrifice, like Uriah had previously slept on the ground (11:9, 11). The elders of his household could not convince him to get up and eat food.

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

<sup>2</sup>Vogels, p. 251.

- 12:18-19 On the seventh day of David's fast the child died. His servants were reluctant to tell David that his son had died because they thought that he might harm himself. They apparently believed that he would become hysterical with grief when he learned that the child had died. But when David asked if the child was dead, his servants had to tell him that he had died.
- 12:20-21 When God took the infant's life, David knew that the time for praying and fasting was over. He may 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. Rather than being consumed with grief, David cleaned himself up and went into the house of the LORD and worshipped. "The house of the LORD" was probably the tent that David had erected to house the ark of the covenant in Jerusalem (6:17).

David's worship consisted of his accepting God's judgment, submitting to God's will, and not becoming bitter or sulking over God's treatment of him. The fact that he ate food 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).

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.<sup>1</sup>

- 12:22-23 David's servants could not understand the king's reaction to the child's death. It seemed to them that David should have mourned after the child's death, rather than before it. David then explained his actions.

Some expositors believed that David meant that he would see his child in the future life.<sup>2</sup> But the king was probably referring to the grave, rather than to heaven, when he said, "I am going

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<sup>1</sup> *The Nelson ...*, p. 527.

<sup>2</sup> E.g., McGee, 2:216; Wiersbe, p. 339.

to him ..." (cf. 1 Kings 2:2).<sup>1</sup> 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 infants, but we can find great comfort in knowing that the Judge of all the earth will do right (Gen. 18:25).<sup>2</sup>

### The birth of another child 12:24-25

The birth of David's 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.<sup>3</sup> Solomon had another name, "Jedidiah" (lit. "Beloved of Yahweh"; cf. "David," whose name means "Beloved"). "Solomon" was perhaps a throne name that David gave him to anticipate his reigning as king.<sup>4</sup> It may also indicate that David felt that God was now at peace with him.<sup>5</sup>

Solomon was born about 991 B.C. The fact that God allowed him to be born, 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 loved him to the extent that He chose him for special blessing (cf. Mal. 1:2-3).<sup>6</sup> 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).

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<sup>1</sup>Firth, p. 429; Chisholm, *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 238..

<sup>2</sup>For 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.

<sup>3</sup>Merrill, "2 Samuel," in *The Old ...*, p. 236.

<sup>4</sup>Shemaryahu Talmon, *King, Cult, and Calendar in Ancient Israel: Collected Studies*, p. 152.

<sup>5</sup>*The NET2 Bible* note on verse 24. This is a reference to *The NET2 (New English Translation) Bible*, 2019 ed.

<sup>6</sup>Heater, p. 145. Cf. Mal. 1:2-3.

**The end of the battle at Rabbah 12:26-31 (cf. 1 Chron. 20:1-3)**

In spite of David's sin, God granted his army victory over the Ammonites at Rabbah.

12:26-28 Joab finally captured Rabbah, "the royal city" of the Ammonites (i.e., its capital). This town was also called "the city of waters," undoubtedly because there was abundant water there. Josephus wrote that Joab cut off the waters of the Ammonites and deprived them of other means of subsistence.<sup>1</sup> Joab called for David to come and complete the conquest so that the city would be named for David rather than for Joab. Joab's remarkable loyalty to David contrasts with David's previous disloyalty to Uriah and Yahweh.

12:29-31 David then took "all the people" to Rabbah, fought against it, and captured it. "All the people" probably refers to the Israelite soldiers who had not previously been part of the battle. Josephus called the precious stone in the crown of the Ammonite king's crown a sardonyx (onyx).<sup>2</sup> 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 monarchs have found it difficult to wear it for any length of time.<sup>3</sup> David took much additional plunder from Rabbah and forced many of the Rabbahites to do labor of various kinds to support Israel (cf. 1 Chron. 20:3).<sup>4</sup> Then the warriors returned to Jerusalem.

Chapters 10 through 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

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<sup>1</sup>Josephus, 7:7:5.

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

<sup>3</sup>Wiersbe, p. 339.

<sup>4</sup>See G. C. O'Ceallaigh, "'And So David Did to All the Cities of Ammon,'" *Vetus Testamentum* 12 (1962):179-89.

record of godly behavior. God continued to bless him, in part because God had chosen him as His anointed servant, 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."<sup>1</sup>

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).

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 great grace in spite of our sin. "Mercy triumphs over judgment" (James 2:13). 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).

### 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 from Jerusalem for his life, 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'

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<sup>1</sup>Baxter, 2:79-80.

pattern, and chapters 15—20, which prefer a 'departure/return' pattern ..."<sup>1</sup>

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

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

These chapters record "family tragedies."<sup>2</sup> 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."<sup>3</sup>

"The greater the man, the dearer price he pays for a short season of sinful pleasure."<sup>4</sup>

Chapter 13 records the death of David's first-born son, Amnon, whose mother was Ahinoam. This chapter is chiasmic in design, focusing on Amnon's rape of Tamar and his change of heart from love (really lust) to hate.<sup>5</sup> Many of the literary units in 1 and 2 Samuel were constructed chiasmically. The chiasms from this point on in 2 Samuel are easier to identify than some of the earlier ones.<sup>6</sup>

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

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

<sup>3</sup>Blaiklock, p. 164.

<sup>4</sup>F. B. Meyer, quoted in Charles R. Swindoll, *The Tale of the Tardy Oxcart*, p. 523.

<sup>5</sup>George P. Ridout, *Prose Compositional Techniques in the Succession Narrative [2 Samuel 7, 9—20; 1 Kings 1—2]*, pp. 50-56.

<sup>6</sup>See Youngblood, who usually offered a chiasmic diagram at the beginning of his discussion of each section.

**Amnon's rape of Tamar 13:1-22****Events leading up to the rape 13:1-14**

13:1 The writer began this story, which probably occurred about 987 B.C.,<sup>1</sup> by introducing Absalom first, because he is the chief character in the larger narrative that begins here and continues through chapter 19. Absalom, whose name means "My Father Is Peace," was the son of David and Maacah, the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur. Maacah gave birth to Absalom while David was reigning in Hebron (3:3). He was David's third-born son. 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 was probably somewhat younger than both of these brothers. The writer did not mention Chileab, David's second-born son (3:3), in the Court History. Perhaps he had already died.

Amnon was in love with his half-sister. The writer used the term "love" loosely, because, as the story develops, it becomes clear that Amnon's feelings for Tamar were more lustful than loving.

13:2 What does the phrase "to do anything to her" mean? The references to Amnon being obsessed with thoughts of Tamar to the point that he made himself sick, and the fact that Tamar was a virgin, suggest that all Amnon wanted was to have sex with her. This finds support in Amnon's later disgust with Tamar (vv. 15, 17). He had no desire to marry her after he raped her.

13:3-6 Jonadab was Amnon's cousin, and he was a very "clever" fellow. He was clever in his ability to provoke mischief. When Amnon told his inquisitive cousin why he was so miserable, Jonadab proposed a plan whereby Amnon would have an opportunity to meet with Tamar privately. Jonadab may have

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<sup>1</sup>Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 245.

been trying to secure his own political future with Absalom by setting Amnon up for disgrace (cf. vv. 32-35).<sup>1</sup> Amnon followed through with Jonadab's suggestion.

"The word 'friend' [v. 3] 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."<sup>2</sup>

13:7 David innocently cooperated with Amnon's request, not anticipating what Amnon would do. Was David unaware of Amnon's feelings for Tamar? Perhaps. Or he may have expected better behavior from his son.

13:8-10 On the king's command Tamar went to Amnon's house. Obviously they lived in separate quarters. Tamar proceeded to prepare some pastries for Amnon while he watched, and the sight of her enflamed his passion for her. When she served the food to him Amnon refused to eat it and ordered everyone else out of the house. He then asked Tamar to bring the food into the inner room ("bedroom") in which he lay, and she complied, obviously unaware of his intentions.

13:11-14 Then Amnon asked Tamar to have sex with him, but she refused and tried to talk him out of it by saying that this was not done in Israel, it was a disgraceful sin, it would shame her, and it would result in Amnon being regarded as a fool. She also pleaded with him to ask David to give her to him in marriage, which she said David would do. But Amnon would not listen to reason, and he raped her.

"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."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Andrew E. Hill, "A Jonadab Connection in the Absalom Conspiracy?" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 30:4 (December 1987):387-90.

<sup>2</sup>Morgan, *An Exposition ...*, p. 132.

<sup>3</sup>Chisholm, *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 [sleep] 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."<sup>1</sup>

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).<sup>2</sup>

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).<sup>3</sup> 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.

### Events immediately following the rape 13:15-22

13:15 When he had raped Tamar, Amnon hated her "with a very great hatred" and wanted no more contact with her. 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 with a hatred that was even greater than the love with which he had loved her, but Shechem loved Dinah and planned to marry her. Likewise David continued to

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<sup>1</sup>Alter, p. 73.

<sup>2</sup>Anthony 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.

<sup>3</sup>David M. Gunn, *The Story of King David: Genre and Interpretation*, p. 100.

love Bathsheba after their adultery. Perhaps some of the hatred that Amnon felt was self-hatred.<sup>1</sup>

13:16-17 Tamar again tried to reason with Amnon. She pointed out that, by failing to take responsibility for his act, Amnon was doing something that was worse than his act. Raping and abandoning her was a greater wrong than only raping her. But Amnon refused to listen to her. In fact, he called for his attendants and instructed them to throw Tamar out of his house and lock the door behind her.

13:18-19 The attendant followed Amnon's orders and Tamar left mourning her condition publicly, by tearing her long-sleeved robe (or variegated tunic), putting ashes on her head, covering her head with her hand, and crying out (wailing). Josephus described Tamar's long-sleeved garment as "tied at the hands, and let down to the ankles, that the inner coats might not be seen."<sup>2</sup>

13:20 When Absalom, Tamar's full brother, discovered what had happened to Tamar, he suspected that Amnon was the culprit. He evidently knew of Amnon's previous longing for Tamar. Absalom's advice to his sister seems callused and unfeeling. He apparently 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.

Tamar remained "isolated," a term in Hebrew that means unmarried and childless, which was a living death for a Jewish woman (cf. 20:3).<sup>3</sup> 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]."<sup>4</sup>

13:21 David became "very angry" when he heard what Amnon had done. He may have taken no action against Amnon because he

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<sup>1</sup> *The Nelson ...*, p. 528.

<sup>2</sup> Josephus, 7:8:1.

<sup>3</sup> Conroy, p. 35, n. 70.

<sup>4</sup> Wiersbe, p. 342.

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."<sup>1</sup>

"David is as clearly unable to control his sons' passions as he is his own."<sup>2</sup>

"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."<sup>3</sup>

"The chickens are beginning to come home to roost."<sup>4</sup>

13:22      Absalom's response to Amnon was that he stopped speaking to him. But as the following verses show, he was planning to take vengeance on him.

### **Absalom's murder of Amnon 13:23-39**

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

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<sup>1</sup>Paul J. and Elizabeth Achtemeier, *The Old Testament Roots of Our Faith*, p. 94.

<sup>2</sup>Youngblood, p. 966. Cf. Jared J. Jackson, "David's Throne: Patterns in the Succession Story," *Canadian Journal of Theology* 11:3 (July 1965):189.

<sup>3</sup>Gordon, p. 264.

<sup>4</sup>McGee, 2:218. Cf. Fokkelman, p. 125.

**Amnon's murder 13:23-29**

13:23 Absalom owned some flocks of sheep. When the time to shear them arrived Absalom invited all of David's sons to the festivities that accompanied this annual event (cf. 1 Sam. 25:8). Baal-hazor stood about 16 miles north-northeast of Jerusalem on the Central Benjamin Plateau.<sup>1</sup> "Ephraim" probably refers to the town (sometimes called Ephron or Ephrain) about two miles south of Baal-hazor. It is not a reference to the tribal territory of Ephraim (cf. 2 Chron. 13:19; John 11:54). This verse summarizes what the following verses explain in more detail.

"... 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)."<sup>2</sup>

13:25-27 Absalom extended a special invitation to David to attend his celebration, but David declined. So Absalom asked the king to send Amnon, the next in line for the throne according to custom, in his place. David thought this request was strange, but since Absalom persisted, David gave permission for Amnon to go. This whole interchange between Absalom and David was undoubtedly preplanned so that Absalom could get Amnon out of Jerusalem and kill him.

13:28-29 Absalom finally murdered his brother—though his servants actually did the deed—at Baal-hazor 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."<sup>3</sup>

"'In taking revenge,' wrote Francis Bacon [in "Of Revenge" in *The Essays of Francis Bacon*], 'a man

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<sup>1</sup>See Carl G. Rasmussen, *Zondervan Atlas of the Bible*. Revised ed., pp. 23, 142.

<sup>2</sup>Youngblood, p. 968.

<sup>3</sup>Firth, p. 439.

is but even with his enemy, but in passing it over, he is superior."<sup>1</sup>

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

13:30-33 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 that God had judged him severely, but it became clear that God had been merciful. Only Amnon had died.

As David's nephew, Jonadab was a member of the royal family and so had access to the king. He and Absalom may have planned the conspiracy against Amnon in order to remove the heir apparent to the throne.<sup>2</sup> Jonadab knew precisely what had happened.

13:34-36 Absalom fled to his maternal grandfather, Talmai, who ruled over the kingdom of Geshur (3:3), 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). David's other sons returned to Jerusalem. David, his sons, and his servants all wept "profusely" because David's firstborn son had been assassinated.

13:37-39 Absalom stayed for three years in Geshur (until ca. 982 B.C.). During this time David mourned for Absalom every day. David longed for Absalom even after he stopped mourning over Amnon's death.

So far at least five 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 fled from his native country and his family. This family had become dysfunctional. It is remarkable how often children repeat

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, p. 344.

<sup>2</sup>Hill, p. 390.

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

"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*."<sup>2</sup>

More Christians have probably memorized 1 John 1:9 than Romans 6:12 and 13. First John 1:9 deals with how to handle sin *after* we have committed it; it is corrective theology. Romans 6:12 and 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 and 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

14:1 Joab, David's commander-in-chief and nephew by his half-sister, Zeruiah (8:16; 1 Chron. 2:16), believed that it would be better for David and Israel if David brought Absalom back to Jerusalem from Geshur and pardoned him for killing his half-brother (cf. vv. 7, 13-15). Evidently David's prolonged grieving

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<sup>1</sup>Swindoll, *David ...*, p. 211.

<sup>2</sup>John W. Lawrence, *Life's Choices*, p. 39.

for Absalom limited his effectiveness as king (cf. 13:37, 39). Absalom was now, since Amnon's death, David's heir to the throne by custom, though Yahweh had designated Solomon to succeed David, and He had told David this before Solomon was born (1 Chron. 22:9-10).

David had a great love for Absalom, even though he was a murderer. Perhaps David loved Absalom as he did partially because David too was a murderer (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 pass judgment and confront wrongdoing when it is needed. Often people who have committed some sin find it difficult to deal with other people who have committed the same sin.

14:2-3 In order to accomplish his objective, which was to get David to bring Absalom back from exile and pardon him, Joab sent for a wise woman who lived in Tekoa (10 miles south of Jerusalem). He told her to go to the king and play a part before him. He prepared her by telling her what to do, what to say, and even how to dress.

14:4-7 The story that Joab gave this actress to present paralleled David's own relationship with Absalom (cf. the story that God had given Nathan to tell David, 12:1-4). There are also parallels between this incident and Abigail's appeal to David in 1 Samuel 25:24.<sup>1</sup>

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 (cf. the story of Cain and Abel, Gen. 4:1-8). By allowing Absalom to remain in exile, David was depriving himself of his heir, which Joab perceived that Absalom was.

14:8-11 David wanted to postpone passing judgment in the woman's case, but she persevered, very humbly, with her request. So David promised to protect the woman from her relatives and to protect her son from death.

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<sup>1</sup>See J. Hoftijzer, "David and the Tekoite Woman," *Vetus Testamentum* 20:4 (October 1970):419-44.

The woman urged David to remember the LORD his God (v. 11). Probably she meant that David should remember that Yahweh had been merciful to him by sparing his life (cf. 12:13).

"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)."<sup>1</sup>

- 14:12-17 The woman then pointed out to David, again very humbly, that his judgment concerning the perpetuation of her family was inconsistent with his own dealings with Absalom. By allowing Absalom to remain in exile David had virtually eliminated his heir and the perpetuation of his family. David's act, according to the woman, was an act against "the people of God" (the Israelites, v. 13; cf. v. 14) The woman appealed to David to deal with Absalom as God had dealt with him, or the nation would suffer.

Again, we need to remember that the popular expectation was that Absalom would be the heir to David's throne by virtue of his being the oldest living son of David. This was not God's plan, however, because God had revealed to David, before Solomon's birth, that Solomon would be his successor (1 Chron. 22:9-10).

The second part of verse 14 is very important. The wise woman 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, the woman implied, David should be godly and plan a way by which guilty Absalom could enjoy reconciliation with himself. Absalom was a fugitive from justice, having murdered his half-brother Amnon. So it was up to David to devise a way by which his

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<sup>1</sup>Youngblood, pp. 978-79.



heir, in the popular view, could be reconciled to him. Such was Joab's reasoning as this woman expressed it in his behalf.

- 14:18-20 David knew that Joab wanted him to pardon Absalom and bring him back from exile. He sensed that the woman's arguments had come from him and that Joab had written the script for the skit that she had performed. The woman admitted that this was so.

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

### **Absalom's return to Jerusalem 14:21-33**

- 14:21-24 Joab's masquerade proved effective: David agreed to allow Absalom to return to Jerusalem. Joab expressed great gratitude to David for his decision. Joab then travelled to Geshur and escorted Absalom back to Jerusalem. However, even though David pardoned Absalom for his murder, he did not restore Absalom to fellowship with himself. Absalom had to live in his own house, but he could not enter David's presence. David's forgiveness was official but not personal. This led to more trouble. Thankfully, God both forgives sinners and restores them to fellowship with Himself.
- 14:25-27 Absalom was popular with the Israelites. They praised him for his handsome appearance (cf. Saul). These verses 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.

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

"A strong growth of hair was a sign of great manly power ..."<sup>1</sup>

"What Absalom proudly considers his finest attribute will prove to be the vehicle of his ultimate downfall (cf. 18:9-15)."<sup>2</sup>

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 (to replace the LORD's anointed) 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 or at a young age.<sup>3</sup>

14:28-33 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 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 full pardon, but he felt that the present compromise was unbearable. When Absalom pressed for a personal reconciliation with his father, David finally conceded, 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. David himself had committed murder. 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."<sup>4</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, p. 411.

<sup>2</sup>Youngblood, p. 985.

<sup>3</sup>Archer, p. 184; Keil and Delitzsch, p. 412.

<sup>4</sup>McGee, 2:221.

eventually finds himself or herself in David's position. God Himself had to find a solution to this dual responsibility.

This chapter deals with how to discipline. David's solution was to compromise. He tried to punish Absalom by not sending for him in exile, but he showed him grace by 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).

## **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 therefore 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).<sup>1</sup> The first six verses (the first panel) explain how Absalom undermined popular confidence in the LORD's anointed

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<sup>1</sup>Fokkelman, p. 165.

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."<sup>1</sup>

### **Absalom's initial preparations to rebel 15:1-6**

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, in order to prepare for his revolution (v. 1); he criticized his father's administration publicly (vv. 2-3); he promised to rule better than David (v. 4); he used personal charm and flattery to gain support (v. 5); and he exalted himself over David (v. 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.

"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."<sup>2</sup>

"He that should have been judged to death for murder has the impudence to aim at being a judge of others [v. 4]."<sup>3</sup>

### **Absalom's final preparations to rebel 15:7-12**

15:7-8      Absalom spent four years (probably 980-976 B.C.) quietly planning his sudden, violent, and illegal seizure of power. That

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<sup>1</sup>Payne, p. 227.

<sup>2</sup>Wiersbe, p. 348.

<sup>3</sup>Henry, p. 347.

"four" is the correct number, rather than 40, which the Septuagint and Josephus have, seems reasonable and clear from other chronological references.<sup>1</sup> 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 of him were valid. This may also explain David's surprise when Absalom's revolution began.

Absalom asked David's permission to leave Jerusalem to go to Hebron to pay a vow that he had previously made to Yahweh to serve the LORD. This pious request appears to have been part of Absalom's plan to take David by surprise.

15:9-11     Having received David's permission, Absalom first sent spies throughout Israel to prepare the people for the announcement that he had become king. Then he went to Hebron with 200 men. These men were innocent of Absalom's plan, but their appearance with Absalom gave the impression that he had a large following—another media event (cf. 3:31-32). Perhaps Absalom chose Hebron as the place to announce his rebellion because that was his birthplace, and his support was probably strongest there. Also, some in Hebron may have resented David's moving his capital from there to Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup>

15:12       Ahithophel (lit. "Brother of Folly") may have been Bathsheba's grandfather (11:3; 23:34).<sup>3</sup> Since his name is very derogatory, it may have been a nickname that others gave him after his defection from David. If Ahithophel was Bathsheba's grandfather, he may have sided with Absalom because he resented what David had done to Bathsheba. However the writer described Ahithophel simply as David's counselor who was offering sacrifices—perhaps an allusion to his piety—when Absalom sent for him. Ahithophel came from Giloh, which was a town in Judah (Josh. 15:51). The writer also noted that

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<sup>1</sup>Josephus, 7:9:1.

<sup>2</sup>Davis, p. 314; Laney, p. 113.

<sup>3</sup>See Firth, p. 456.

Absalom's popular support was continually increasing and that the conspiracy against David was strong.

"God really took David to the woodshed."<sup>1</sup>

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

15:13-15 The people of Israel had formerly given the kingdom to David as a gift (5:1-3), but now they were ready to take that gift from him.<sup>2</sup> David knew that Absalom was popular with the people. Evidently David fled Jerusalem both to save his own life and to spare the lives of his supporters from destruction. "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."<sup>3</sup>

"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."<sup>4</sup>

15:16 It seems clear that David planned to return to Jerusalem. 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.<sup>5</sup>

15:17-18 The Cherethites and Pelethites were David's bodyguard. The Gittites, "600 men ... from Gath," were probably mercenary soldiers. These foreigners were loyal to David even when his

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<sup>1</sup>McGee, 2:221.

<sup>2</sup>Gunn, "David and ...," p. 22.

<sup>3</sup>Wiersbe, p. 353.

<sup>4</sup>Davis, p. 314.

<sup>5</sup>Firth, p. 456

own son deserted him. Note the parallel in Jesus' experience (John 1:11-12).

"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."<sup>1</sup>

It was perhaps the morning after David had left Jerusalem that he wrote Psalm 3, and Psalm 4 seems to have been written in very similar circumstances.

- 15:19-22 David urged Ittai, another former resident of Gath, to return to Gath with his brothers, since he and they had only recently come to serve David. David sent them away with his blessing, but Ittai swore by Yahweh that he would accompany the king wherever he went. David later repaid Ittai for his loyalty by making him commander of one-third of his army (18:2). Ittai's commitment to David recalls Ruth's commitment to Naomi (Ruth 1:16-17). It seems that Ittai, like Ruth, had become a believer in Yahweh.

"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)."<sup>2</sup>

- 15:23 David crossed the Kidron Valley, which was located immediately east of Jerusalem, and he moved up the Mount of Olives (v. 30), 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). For David and his supporters this was a time of loud weeping. For Jesus it was a time of agonizing praying, and His supporters slept.

- 15:24-26 David's treatment of the ark shows his submission to God's authority. He did not treat the ark as a good luck charm, as the Philistines and Saul had done. Zadok the priest (cf. 8:17)

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<sup>1</sup>Payne, p. 231.

<sup>2</sup>*The Nelson ...*, p. 534.

had brought the ark out of the city to David, but David instructed him to take it back into Jerusalem. He believed that if Yahweh would grant him favor, He would bring him back to Jerusalem where he could again see the ark. God's "habitation" (v. 25) most likely refers to the new tent that David had recently completed in Jerusalem (cf. 1 Chron. 15:1). David's complete submission to God's authority over his life is admirable (v. 26). He may have written Psalm 63 at this time.

"... David always did his best during a crisis."<sup>1</sup>

15:27-29 At this time there were two leading priests in Israel: Zadok (who was also a prophet or "seer") and Abiathar. Probably Zadok was responsible for worship in Jerusalem, and 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).

The phrase "the river crossing places of the wilderness" (v. 28) probably refers to the place where people forded the Jordan River near the wilderness of Judah (cf. 17:22). Zadok and Abiathar obeyed David's order and returned the ark to Jerusalem, and they stayed there themselves with their two sons, who would later communicate important information to David (17:17-20).

The presence of the ark in Jerusalem may suggest another reason for Absalom's rebellion and the support that he enjoyed: Many of the Israelites may have considered David's projects of building a new tabernacle and bringing the ark into Jerusalem inappropriate, since Jerusalem was a formerly Canaanite stronghold. Many people also may have shared Michal's reaction to David's bringing the ark into Jerusalem (6:16-20).<sup>2</sup>

15:30-31 David trudged up the Mount of Olives dressed for mourning, praying as he went. On Mt. Olivet David was still only a few hundred yards from the City of David. This hill rises about 200

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, p. 350.

<sup>2</sup>Payne, p. 185.



feet above the city to its east. Walking barefoot symbolized "the shameful exile on which he is now embarking (cf. Isa. 20:2-3; cf. similarly Mic. 1:8)."<sup>1</sup> When someone told David that Ahithophel had joined Absalom's conspiracy, David prayed that the LORD would turn his advice into foolishness.

"What do you do when one of your closest confidants betrays you? You do what David did—you pray and you worship."<sup>2</sup>

15:32-37 David's "friend" (i.e., counselor, adviser; 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).<sup>3</sup> He was probably quite old. The honorary title "the king's friend" was popular even in the later Persian Empire.<sup>4</sup>

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 David in the presence of his enemies (vv. 30-37). These people proved to be "sheltering trees"<sup>5</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup>Youngblood, p. 997.

<sup>2</sup>Wiersbe, p. 352.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Carl G. Rasmussen, *Zondervan NIV Atlas of the Bible*, p. 227.

<sup>4</sup>A. T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire*, p. 290.

<sup>5</sup>Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Youth and Age," in *Poems That Live Forever*, p. 256.

prove to be. Such willingness to surrender leadership at the right time is another hallmark of good leadership."<sup>1</sup>

### 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) ..."<sup>2</sup>

- 16:1-2      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 (i.e., about 400 men).
- 16:3-4      Ziba's report of Mephibosheth's reaction to the news that Absalom had rebelled seems to have been untrue (cf. 19:24-28). Perhaps Ziba believed that Absalom would kill Mephibosheth, since Mephibosheth supported David, 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—he immediately transferred all of Mephibosheth's belongings to Ziba—because he too willingly accepted the words of a friend.

### Shimei's curse 16:5-14

- 16:5-8      Bahurim evidently stood on the east side of Mt. Olivet, but not far away from the Kidron Valley (cf. 3:16; 17:18). A second descendant of Saul demonstrated a reaction to David that was the opposite of Ziba's. Ziba had been helpful and submissive, but Shimei, a "reptile of the royal house of Saul,"<sup>3</sup> was insulting

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<sup>1</sup>Payne, p. 232.

<sup>2</sup>Youngblood, pp. 998-99.

<sup>3</sup>Whyte, 1:297.

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). It was a sin for Shimei to curse a ruler of God's people (Exod. 22:28).

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 also responsible for the murders of Abner and Ish-bosheth, which was not true.

16:9        The central focus of the chiastic structure of this section is Abishai's desire for Shimei's execution (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.<sup>1</sup>

16:10-12    David appears to have felt that his present distress might be God's punishment for killing Uriah (cf. 12:11). He hoped that, by showing Shimei mercy, God might be merciful to him (cf. 22:26). David's attitude was entirely different from Abishai's (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 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."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Nelson ...*, pp. 548, 881.

<sup>2</sup>Chafin, p. 338.

Here, in contrast to the previous pericope (vv. 1-4), David succeeded. He did not let the criticism of a critic draw out an improper response from him. Rather he listened for the voice of God in Shimei's words. David showed 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.

- 16:13-14 David and his faithful companions proceeded on their journey in spite of Shimei's continuing harassment, and they finally arrived at the fording place at the Jordan River (15:28).

### **The counsel of Ahithophel and Hushai 16:15—17:29**

This is the central unit of chapters 5 through 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.

#### **Hushai's loyalty 16:15-19**

- 16:15 Absalom and a large crowd of supporters from all over Israel now entered Jerusalem.
- 16:16-19 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-talk (saying one thing but meaning another). 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."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Baldwin, p. 264.

**Ahithophel's advice 16:23—17:4**

16:20-21 Ahithophel's advice to Absalom was to have sex with his father's concubines. 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.<sup>1</sup>

"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."<sup>2</sup>

16:22 Absalom followed Ahithophel's advice and had sex with these women publicly. So everyone in Jerusalem became aware that Absalom was claiming David's throne. Here Absalom broke the Mosaic Law (Lev. 18:7-8; 20:11) in order to gain power. In doing so he became worthy of death. 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.<sup>3</sup>

16:23 Ahithophel's advice was normally so good ("as though one inquired of the word of God") that both David and Absalom followed it. In this case Absalom followed Ahithophel's advice. But it was bad advice because it involved breaking the Mosaic Law.

17:1-3 Ahithophel also advised Absalom to let him take 12,000 soldiers and pursue David immediately. His plan was to attack David while David was still weary and exhausted from his flight. He believed that he could take David by surprise and the people who were with him would abandon him. Then Ahithophel

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<sup>1</sup>de Vaux, 1:116.

<sup>2</sup>Youngblood, p. 1007.

<sup>3</sup>Josephus, 7:9:5.

would attack and kill David while he was alone, and he would lead David's supporters back to Jerusalem. Ahithophel believed that the death of David was crucial, because it would unite the Israelites behind Absalom. Ahithophel's advice was that one man (David) should die for the people (17:2-3; cf. John 11:50).

- 17:4 This plan pleased Absalom and all the elders of Israel. That is, it pleased all the elders who had sided with Absalom.

#### **Hushai's advice 17:5-14**

- 17:5-7 Though Ahithophel's advice seemed good to everyone present, Absalom wanted a second opinion. So he called for Hushai, explained Ahithophel's plan, and asked Hushai for his advice. Hushai then said that Ahithophel's advice was not good.
- 17:8-10 Hushai then reminded Absalom that David and the warriors who were with him were fierce fighters and that David was an expert in warfare. Therefore, Hushai believed, David would not stay among his soldiers but would hide in some obscure place. He believed that when David first attacked Ahithophel's soldiers, some of them would die, and then the rest of them would conclude that all of Absalom's followers had been defeated. Hushai warned that if only a small group of Absalom's men pursued David—Ahithophel had proposed sending only 12,000—and David defeated them, the news would spread that Absalom had lost the battle. Even Ahithophel's valiant soldiers would draw this conclusion because David and his soldiers had such great reputations as fighters. The people would then side with David.
- 17:11-13 Then Hushai advised Absalom to amass as large a fighting force as possible and personally lead these soldiers into battle. He proposed the ultimate flattery, namely, that Absalom himself should lead his troops into battle, which is what kings usually did. This huge fighting force would overwhelm David and his men and kill all of them, Hushai predicted. Even if David took refuge in a city, Absalom's troops would be large enough to destroy that city completely.

- 17:14 Absalom and all the people with him concluded that Hushai's advice was better than Ahithophel's. The writer explained that they came to this decision because Yahweh sought to bring disaster on Absalom (because Absalom sought to overthrow the LORD's anointed). This is one of many verses in Scripture that present the free will of man alongside the sovereign control of God.

### **Hushai's report to David 17:15-22**

- 17:15 As soon as Absalom had decided to follow Hushai's advice, Hushai set about to inform David of Absalom's plans. He informed Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, of both plans that had been suggested.
- 17:16 Then Hushai sent advice to David not to camp on the east side of the Jordan River but to cross over to the west side immediately. He believed that unless he did this his whole company of followers would be destroyed. After all, a huge group of Absalom's followers from all over Israel would soon arrive (cf. v. 11).
- 17:17-21 These thrilling verses describe how Jonathan and Ahimaaz, the sons of Zadok and Abiathar, were able to deliver Hushai's message to David. Enrogel (v. 17) lay just south of Jerusalem near where the Hinnom and Kidron Valleys joined. There are parallels between these verses and the story of the men who spied out Jericho (Josh. 2).<sup>1</sup>
- 17:22 As a result of Hushai's advice to David he and all his supporters crossed the Jordan River that very night and so delayed the battle that was to come.

### **Ahithophel's suicide 17:23**

Ahithophel may have believed that Hushai's advice would result in Absalom's defeat and David's ultimate return to Jerusalem.<sup>2</sup> Or he may have committed suicide out of humiliation. He had lost face.

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<sup>1</sup>See Gunn, "Traditional Composition ...," p. 224.

<sup>2</sup>Gordon, p. 282.

"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)."<sup>1</sup>

"It seems more plausible to assume that he took his life at some later stage, perhaps after the battle in the Forest of Ephraim."<sup>2</sup>

"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 anointed and thus opened the door to suicidal despair (II Samuel 17:23)."<sup>3</sup>

### Preparations for the battle 17:24-29

17:24 Mahanaim on the Jabbok River in Transjordan had been Ish-bosheth's capital (2:8). Perhaps David went there because the inhabitants favored him for his goodness to Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson. In the meantime, Absalom's forces crossed the Jordan River into Transjordan.

"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

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<sup>1</sup>Chisholm, *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 269.

<sup>2</sup>Anderson, p. 216.

<sup>3</sup>James A. Wharton, "A Plausible Tale: Story and Theology in II Samuel 9—20, I Kings 1—2," *Interpretation* 35:4 (October 1981):353.



was truly in exile. Later, his enemies would charge him with having 'fled from the land' (19:9)."<sup>1</sup>

17:25-26 Amasa was the son of Jithra (or Jether), an Ishmaelite (not an Israelite; cf. 1 Chron. 2:17), and the son of Joab's cousin Abigail. Absalom's army camped in Transjordan in the Gilead hills, probably south of Mahanaim.

17:27-29 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 Mephibosheth's 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 his needs and wants abundantly.

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.

### 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

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<sup>1</sup> *The Nelson ...*, p. 539.

episode a son of Zeruiah (Abishai) is ready to kill Shimei (16:9), so also here a son of Zeruiah (Joab, v. 2) is ready to kill Absalom—and indeed wounds him, perhaps mortally (vv. 14-15)."<sup>1</sup>

The narrative of Absalom's death seems to me to have a chiastic 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 of the two elements. 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.

### **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 Israel's 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 not only Israel's legitimate ruler but was responsible to act like a king (more than like a parent).

- 18:1-2     After counting his soldiers, David divided them into three divisions and assigned Joab, Abishai, and Ittai to lead each group (cf. 17:8). David planned to go into battle himself, but his followers convinced him to stay in Mahanaim (17:24). They

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<sup>1</sup>Youngblood, p. 1017.

knew that he would be the main target of the enemy (cf. 17:9).

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.

18:4-5 David wisely listened to this advice and, instead of going into battle, he encouraged his troops as they left the city. Perhaps David instructed his three commanders to deal gently with Absalom, not only because he was David's 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."<sup>1</sup>

"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."<sup>2</sup>

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.

### **The battle between David's and Absalom's armies 18:6-8**

18:6 The location of the forest of Ephraim, where the battle took place, is unknown, but it was probably in Gilead (cf. Judg. 12:1-

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, p. 359.

<sup>2</sup>Payne, p. 245.

5).<sup>1</sup> As early as the Judges Period, so many Ephraimites had settled in Gilead that the western Ephraimites called the Gileadites "renegades of Ephraim" (Judg. 12:4, NIV).<sup>2</sup>

18:7 David's troops were able to defeat "the people of Israel" (Absalom's army), and 20,000 of them died that day. This was a great slaughter. Later David's followers gave credit to the LORD for this victory (vv. 28, 31).

18:8 How the forest devoured more of Absalom's men than David's soldiers did 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, who visited this area, 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 [cut back vegetation], 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."<sup>3</sup>

Probably "the forest devoured more people" by making it unusually difficult for fleeing warriors to escape their pursuers, since the terrain prohibited rapid travel.<sup>4</sup> 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.

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. 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.

<sup>2</sup>George Adam Smith, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, p. 335, n. 2.

<sup>3</sup>W. M. Thomson, *The Land and the Book*, 1:473. See also 2:234.

<sup>4</sup>Jamieson, et al., p. 241.

**Absalom's death 18:9-15**

- 18:9 Absalom's head caught in an overhanging oak branch. Josephus interpreted this, perhaps in view of 14:26, as his hair got caught in the tree.<sup>1</sup> 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."<sup>2</sup>

"The reader who recalls 14,26 [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."<sup>3</sup>

"The mule was a royal mount [cf. 13:29]; losing his mule Absalom has lost his kingdom."<sup>4</sup>

- 19:10-13 The soldier who found Absalom wisely obeyed David's order to spare Absalom's life, in spite of Joab's criticism of him. 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.

- 19:14-15 Despite David's instructions, Joab wounded Absalom, probably mortally, where he found him, and his armorbearers finished him off. 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

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<sup>1</sup>Josephus, 7:10:2.

<sup>2</sup>Baldwin, p. 270.

<sup>3</sup>Conroy, p. 44, n. 4.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 60.

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."<sup>1</sup>

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**

18:16-17 With Absalom dead there was no need to continue the battle, so Joab called it off. Absalom's burial was in keeping with what the Mosaic Law prescribed for a rebellious son: stoning (Deut. 21:18-21).

"Absalom is given the burial of the accursed, something hinted at as he hung on a tree (Deut. 21:22-23)."<sup>2</sup>

God cut Absalom off because he rebelled against the LORD's anointed—instead of blessing him because he was David's oldest son. Absalom was the third son that David had lost because of his sins against Bathsheba and Uriah (the baby who was born from David and Bathsheba's adultery, Amnon, and Absalom).<sup>3</sup>

18:18 Instead of having a line of kings succeed him, all Absalom left behind was a stone monument—what Josephus called a "marble pillar"<sup>4</sup>—that he had erected to himself (cf. Gen.

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<sup>1</sup>Jamieson, et al., p. 241.

<sup>2</sup>Firth, p. 477.

<sup>3</sup>See my comment on 12:6.

<sup>4</sup>Josephus, 7:10:3.

11:4). His three sons (14:27) may have died prematurely, since he had no sons when he died.<sup>1</sup>

"It is possible, however, that one or more of his sons were unwilling (for whatever reason) to perpetuate their father's memory."<sup>2</sup>

Other, less attractive, views are that the two verses in question (14:27 and 18:18) are from different literary sources,<sup>3</sup> or that the writer was deliberately ambiguous in order to present Absalom from two different points of view.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup>

Absalom lived like Eli's sons and Saul had lived, and he died as they died: in battle.<sup>6</sup>

"The King's Valley" 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 (small room).<sup>7</sup> We should not confuse it with the memorial referred to in this verse, though the present one may stand on the same spot as the older one did.

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<sup>1</sup>A 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.

<sup>2</sup>Youngblood, p. 1021.

<sup>3</sup>McCarter, *II Samuel*, p. 407; H. P. Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel*, p. 359.

<sup>4</sup>Randy L. McCracken, "How Many Sons Did Absalom Have: Intentional Ambiguity as Literary Art," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 172:687 (July-September 2015):286-98.

<sup>5</sup>Boyu Ockinga, "A Note on 2 Samuel 18.18," *Biblische Notizen* 31 (1986):32.

<sup>6</sup>For 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.

<sup>7</sup>W. Harold Mare, *The Archaeology of the Jerusalem Area*, p. 195; Chisholm, *1 & 2 Samuel*, sidebar on p. 275..

Absalom's attempt to overthrow David's leadership of Israel 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, at least to David, 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; 1 Chron. 3:1). Absalom sought to perpetuate kingly succession as it was customarily done in his day, namely, with the oldest son succeeding his father. 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 bad advice 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 sins, David had to flee Jerusalem, and he experienced much heartache. Because of his sins, Absalom died without honor. Nevertheless, in spite of David's sins, God restored him to power, because of God's elective choice of him as His anointed servant, 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**

18:19-21 Ahimaaz, Zadok's son, wanted to be the first to tell David the news of his soldiers' victory, since messengers often received a reward for bringing good news (v. 22). But Joab discouraged him, apparently thinking that he would also report that Absalom was dead. David would not have rewarded that news and might even have killed 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).<sup>1</sup> Joab may have selected this man because he was a foreigner, and he may have considered him more expendable than Ahimaaz.

18:22-23 Ahimaaz insisted on bearing the good news to David, and Joab finally allowed him to go. Evidently Ahimaaz intended to give David only the good news that the battle had been won. Ahimaaz was able to outrun the Cushite and passed him on the way to Mahanaim.

18:24-27 David seems to have concluded that a single runner bore good news (v. 25) because, if the army had suffered a defeat, many people would have been retreating to Mahanaim. Two single runners gave David even more hope of hearing good news (v. 26). And when the watchman identified Ahimaaz as the first runner, David was sure the news would be good (v. 27).

18:28-30 Ahimaaz did indeed bring good news, namely, that the LORD had defeated the rebels. His greeting: "All is well" (v. 28), was literally *Shalom* ("Peace").

"His report contained only one word, *shalom*, before his paying respects by prostrating himself before David. Ironically, *shalom* 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)."<sup>2</sup>

But when David inquired about Absalom, Ahimaaz pleaded ignorance. Ahimaaz may have lied about not knowing Absalom's fate, or he may have been telling the truth. So David told Ahimaaz to stand aside until the Cushite would arrive with more news.

18:31-32 The Cushite then arrived and repeated the good news that the LORD had freed David from those who had risen up against him.

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<sup>1</sup>J. Daniel Hays, "The Cushites: A Black Nation in the Bible," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 153:612 (October-December 1996):396-409.

<sup>2</sup>Firth, p. 479.

David then asked for news about Absalom and the Cushite tactfully informed David that Absalom had died.

"Someone has defined 'tact' as 'the knack of making a point without making an enemy,' and the Cushite had tact."<sup>1</sup>

"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 criticism of all four leaders described in the book of Samuel, together with their sons, reaches its conclusion."<sup>2</sup>

18:33 Evidently there was a room over the town gate like the rooms that people built on the tops of their houses.<sup>3</sup> David retreated there to mourn when he had received the news of Absalom's death.

"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 tislakh yadeka*) unto the lad (22:12), Joab's

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<sup>1</sup>Wiersbe, p. 361.

<sup>2</sup>Moshe Garsiel, *The First Book of Samuel: A Literary Study of Comparative Structures, Analogies, and Parallels*, p. 106.

<sup>3</sup>See Driver, p. 333.

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.'"<sup>1</sup>

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 response to the news of Absalom's death 19:1-9a

- 19:1-4 David responded to Absalom's death similarly to the way he did when he heard of Saul's death (cf. 1:11-12). Certainly David was correct to weep over Absalom's death. But David's sorrow, which became well known, took the edge off the joy that his soldiers felt at having won the battle. David's soldiers were ashamed to enter Mahanaim as the conquering heroes that they were because of David's mourning.<sup>2</sup> David, on the other hand, continued to mourn for Absalom almost uncontrollably. 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.
- 19:5-7 Like Nathan had previously done, Joab boldly confronted David with the folly of his behavior. Joab was correct to warn David of the consequences of failing to thank his soldiers for saving his life and his kingdom. His rebuke of the king was wise as well as needed. A true friend—and Joab was a true friend to David by rebuking him—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.

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<sup>1</sup>Ackerman, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup>Josephus, 7:10:5.

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), and Absalom hated David, whom he should have loved. These emotions were common to father and sons, all of whom committed serious injustices.<sup>1</sup>

Joab urged David to remember that he was a king, as well as a father, and to behave like a king. Since David had killed Uriah with the sword, God punished David by killing his son, the fruit of his fertility, with death by the sword too (12:9-10; cf. Gal. 6:7).

19:8-9a David took Joab's advice, pulled himself together, and went out to the city gate where he received, and presumably congratulated, his soldiers.

"This final 'gate scene' 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."<sup>2</sup>

Meanwhile Absalom's soldiers fled from the scene of the battle and went home.

### David's return 19:9b-43

#### The general reaction of all the Israelites 19:9b-10

David's victory and Absalom's death caused turmoil throughout Israel. The people remembered that David had delivered them from the Philistines, but just recently he had fled before another enemy: Absalom. Many of the people had sided with Absalom (cf. 15:6, 12). What should they do now? The only thing the people could do, after Absalom had fallen, was to support their king.

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<sup>1</sup>Stuart 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.

<sup>2</sup>Anderson, p. 228. Cf. Youngblood, p. 1032.

**David's forgiveness of the Judahites 19:11-15**

19:11-12 David realized his need to secure the support of his people once again. So he sent Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, to encourage the elders of Judah, David's home tribe and the center of his strongest support, to escort David back to Jerusalem. These men knew best that God had anointed David as the king of Israel, yet they had done nothing to reinstate David on his throne in spite of the general sentiment throughout all Israel to do so (v. 10).

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 him to unite the nation again. Commenting on David's statement to the elders, "you are my bone and my flesh," Brueggemann wrote the following:

"... David's reference here 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."<sup>1</sup>

I tend to think that David was referring only to his blood ties to the Judahites, since he used the same clause to describe his relationship to Amasa in verse 13.

"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."<sup>2</sup>

19:13 David also instructed Zadok and Abiathar to tell Amasa that the king was appointing him commander of the army in place of Joab. Amasa was David's cousin ("my bone and my flesh").

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<sup>1</sup>Walter Brueggemann, "Of the Same Flesh and Bone (Gn 2,23a)," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 32:4 (September 1970):536.

<sup>2</sup>Anderson, p. 242.

His mother, Abigail, was David's half-sister and the full sister of Zeruiah, the mother of Asahel, Abishai, and Joab.<sup>1</sup> David had previously placed Amasa over the army in place of Joab (17:25), but that appointment appears to have been temporary. Joab's execution of Absalom cost him his position as commander of the army, at least temporarily.

- 19:14-15 David's appeal to the elders of Judah proved effective. The Judahites united wholeheartedly behind David. A delegation of them then proceeded to the Jordan River and escorted David across it.

### David's forgiveness of the Benjamites 19:16-30

- 19:16-18a 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. Shimei, a Benjamite, had actively opposed David (16:5-13). Now he led 1,000 men from Benjamin down to the Jordan River to welcome David. Ziba, who was formerly Saul's servant, and his whole household also helped David and his household to cross the Jordan.
- 19:18b-23 Abishai, Joab's brother, was in favor of executing Shimei because he had cursed the LORD's anointed. Abishai was a bloodthirsty man (cf. 1 Sam. 26:8; 2 Sam. 3:30). That is why David rebuked him so severely. Abishai had become an "adversary" (v. 22, Heb. *satan*) to David in the sense that he opposed David's purpose to pardon Shimei.<sup>2</sup> David accepted Shimei's apology, forgave him, and promised that he would not take his life (but cf. 1 Kings 2:8-9, 36-46; Gen. 12:3).
- 19:24-28 Mephibosheth, the grandson of Saul who was lame in both feet, also came to welcome David back into Cisjordan (the part of Israel west of the Jordan River). Mephibosheth's failure to care for his feet, trim his beard, and wash his clothes were expressions of his grief and mourning. This resulted in his

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<sup>1</sup>See the diagram of the family tree of David near my notes on 3:2-5 above.

<sup>2</sup>See Peggy Day, "Abishai and *satan* in 2 Samuel 19:17-24," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 49:4 (October 1987):543-47.

remaining ceremonially unclean while David was in exile (cf. Exod. 19:10, 14).<sup>1</sup>

When David asked Mephibosheth why he had not accompanied him when he fled Jerusalem, Mephibosheth explained that his servant, Ziba, had betrayed him by misrepresenting and slandering him. Ziba had told David that Mephibosheth believed that God was about to return the throne of Saul to him (16:3). Mephibosheth's comparison of David to an angel of God seems to mean that he viewed David as his protector. Mephibosheth explained that David's gracious and generous treatment of him left him with no reason to complain against the king.

19:29-30 It seems that Ziba had indeed slandered Mephibosheth. But if so, why did David divide Mephibosheth's land equally between the two of them? Perhaps he wanted to reward Ziba for his goodness to him (cf. 16:1) and to reward Mephibosheth for his loyalty to him.

David may have divided Mephibosheth's land in order to determine which of them was telling the truth. 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, like the true mother of the infant in Solomon's case, gave evidence of his innocence by his willingness to forfeit the prize (the land in Mephibosheth's case, and the infant in the mother's case). Mephibosheth's response to David's decision indicates that he cared little for his land. He offered the entire estate to Ziba (v. 30). His sole concern was David's safety. His actions during David's absence from Jerusalem also argue for his innocence.<sup>2</sup>

Another view of why David divided the land equally is that he could not tell which man was telling the truth. Still another

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. McCarter, *II Samuel*, pp. 417, 421.

<sup>2</sup>David 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.

possibility is that David felt guilty because he had spoken rashly to Ziba (16:4).<sup>1</sup>

By forgiving all of these Benjamites (vv. 16-30), David again secured the support of this difficult tribe. A generation later, when the kingdom split in two, the tribe of Benjamin remained attached to Judah.

"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."<sup>2</sup>

### Other events that strengthened David's position 19:31-43

19:31-39 Barzillai's support 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 have been Barzillai's son (cf. 1 Kings 2:7), a tradition that some manuscripts of the Septuagint and Josephus preserved.<sup>3</sup>

19:40-43 About half of the non-Judahite Israelites joined the Judahites in supporting David. The little "who loves the king most" contest that the other tribes of Israel held with the Judahites illustrates their support. Thus a large portion of the nation again united behind the LORD's anointed. This was a blessing from God.

But the chiasmic literary structure of chapters 15 through 20 identifies an undercurrent of deterioration in the general relations that David enjoyed with his subjects at this time.<sup>4</sup> A significant rebellion against David had taken place, which indicated that a number of his subjects were dissatisfied with his leadership.

This section (vv. 9b-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

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<sup>1</sup>Gaebelein, 1:2:225.

<sup>2</sup>Josephus, 7:11:2.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 7:11:4.

<sup>4</sup>David M. Gunn, "From Jerusalem to the Jordan and Back: Symmetry in 2 Samuel XV-XX," *Vetus Testamentum* 30:1 (January 1980):109-13.



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 the elders of Judah that forgiveness wins over former enemies (Absalom's followers in Judah). We see in his dealings with Shimei that forgiveness gives time for people to change. We see in his treatment of Mephibosheth and Ziba that forgiveness placates irreconcilable adversaries. We see in the section revealing the final reactions of the Israelites that forgiveness lays a strong foundation for the future.

### **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, 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 ...)."<sup>1</sup>

#### **Sheba's revolt 20:1-2**

It was evidently while David and his supporters were traveling from the Jordan River back to Jerusalem that Sheba, a discontented Benjamite, blew his trumpet and called the non-Judean Israelites to stop following David and return home. He apparently appealed to the half of the non-Judahite Israelites who were not supporting David (cf. 19:40). A large number of these Israelites lined up behind Sheba, who sought to split the kingdom into Saulide and Davidic factions. Jeroboam did split the kingdom into two factions 45 years later (1 Kings 11:14; 12:16). Sheba evidently sounded his rebel call near Gilgal (19:40) and then proceeded north gathering supporters as he went. So Sheba's revolt took place shortly after David had crossed the Jordan River.

"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

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<sup>1</sup>Youngblood, p. 1042.

fellow.' After Ahijah's intervention, the time had come [for the division of the kingdom]."<sup>1</sup>

Sheba's rebellion was another premature act, like the Israelites demand for a king before God gave them David (1 Sam. 8:4).

### **David's return to Jerusalem 20:3**

Meanwhile, David proceed up from the Jordan River to Jerusalem. When he arrived he placed his 10 concubines, whom Absalom had violated, in seclusion (cf. 15:16; 16:21-22). In this he 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—at least he did what God had said should be done in such cases. Being "locked up" does not mean that they were prisoners but simply restricted to David's harem where he provided for them.

"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)."<sup>2</sup>

David's action may also indicate that his temporary exile drove him closer to the LORD and increased his desire to please Him.

### **Joab's murder of Amasa 20:4-13**

20:4-7      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). David ordered Amasa to gather the men (i.e., soldiers) of Judah to Jerusalem within three days.

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<sup>1</sup>Anthony F. Campbell, *Of Prophets and Kings: A Late Ninth-Century Document (1 Samuel 1—2Kings 10)*, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup>Brueggemann, *First and ...*, p. 330.

Unfortunately, Amasa moved too slowly, so David put Abishai in charge in his place. All the Judahite warriors, along with the Cherethites and the Pelethites, David's bodyguard (cf. 15:18; 20:7, 23; 1 Kings 1:38, 44; 1 Chron. 18:17), then went to pursue Sheba. The writer probably referred to the soldiers as "Joab's men" (v. 7) because they had formerly been under Joab's command—and they soon came under his command again.

20:8:10 Amasa finally caught up with the Judahite troops at Gibeon, a few miles north of Jerusalem. Evidently the army had taken a rest stop at a prominent stone there. Joab greeted Amasa in a customary way: with a kiss.<sup>1</sup> He kissed the man he was about to kill, like Judas did centuries later (Luke 22:47-48).

Perhaps David did not punish Joab for killing Amasa because he felt indebted to him for his loyal 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. Solomon avenged Joab's murder of Amasa when he came to power by putting Joab to death (1 Kings 2:32-34).

"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."<sup>2</sup>

20:11-13 Apparently Joab's act, and the sight of Amasa wallowing in his own blood, made many of the Judahite soldiers think twice about continuing on with Joab. But one of Joab's young warriors moved Amasa's body from the road to a nearby field and threw a cloak over it. This removed the distraction, and the army proceeded north in pursuit of Sheba.

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<sup>1</sup>Keil 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.

<sup>2</sup>Chisholm, *1 & 2 Samuel*, sidebar on p. 282.

**Sheba's defeat 20:14-22**

- 20:14 The writer now provided information about Sheba's movements. "He" in this verse refers to Sheba. Sheba led his supporters through the territory of several of the northern Israelite tribes far north until they reached the town of Abel. Abel (or Beth-maacah, "Meadow of the House of Oppression") stood about 85 miles north of Gilgal, where Sheba's rebellion began, and four miles west of the town of Dan. The name "Berites" is probably a variation of the name "Bichrites."<sup>1</sup> These people were evidently relatives of Sheba, "the son of Bichri" (v. 1), who entered Abel with him.<sup>2</sup>
- 20:15 The "they" in this verse refers to Joab and his army. Having tracked Sheba to Abel, Joab proceeded to mount a siege against the town. 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). Joab's siege seems to be overkill, since he only wanted the life of one man. He would have been wiser to negotiate for Sheba's capture with the people of Abel before besieging the whole city. But Joab, as we have seen, was given to violence.
- 20:16-19 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 phrase "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 wise 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

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<sup>1</sup>The Septuagint has "Bichrites."

<sup>2</sup>Firth, p. 493; Gordon, p. 295.

the same way Deborah was: a creator and hence a symbol of the unity that bound Israel together under one God Yahweh. And it is the wise woman's implicit appeal to this unity that stops Joab in his tracks."<sup>1</sup>

"The inheritance of the LORD" (v. 19) refers to Abel here. The towns in Israel that Yahweh had given to His people were an inheritance from Him to them.

20:20-21 Joab explained that he only wanted the life of Sheba, and the wise woman promised him that she would kill Sheba, or have him killed, for Joab. Evidently Sheba, though a Benjamite, lived in the hill country of Ephraim.

20:22 The woman was true to her word and threw Sheba's head over the wall to Joab. Joab too kept his promise and withdrew from Abel and returned to Jerusalem. 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."<sup>2</sup>

This story teaches much about wisdom and folly.

"First of all the woman 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

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<sup>1</sup>Claudia V. Camp, "The Wise Women of 2 Samuel: A Role Model for Women in Early Israel," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 43:1 (January 1981):28.

<sup>2</sup>Brueggemann, *First and ...*, p. 332.

Testament rarely separates the intellectual from the pragmatic: wisdom is not simply knowing but also doing."<sup>1</sup>

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 warfare would only have complicated. Wisdom saved the woman, her city, David's reputation, and possibly his kingdom, Joab's career, and many innocent lives.

This woman's wisdom in action bears four marks: seeing the problem, acting to correct it, arguing persuasively, and fulfilling responsibilities. God's glory evidently motivated and guided her actions (v. 19).

Sheba's folly is clear in that he was easily provoked (by David's return to power), he initiated a fight that he could not win (against the LORD's anointed), and he was unable to muster adequate support (to defend himself in Abel). God continued to protect and bless His anointed king.

Tribal jealousies also continued, and they 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 [v. 22], 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 [concluding section], 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 ..."<sup>2</sup>

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.

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<sup>1</sup>Payne, p. 257.

<sup>2</sup>Youngblood, 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 (Ahimelech's son): priests
David's sons: chief ministers (priests)	Ira: priest (minister)

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 roadways, temples, and palaces. Adoram (Adoniram) later became a prominent figure in the history of the revolution 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).<sup>1</sup>

The long section of David's troubles (chs. 9—20) 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. But disobedience brings divine judgment in the form of curtailed blessing (fertility). Here we also see the serious effects of arrogance before God, namely, in the cases of Absalom and Sheba who sought to overthrow the LORD's anointed king.

"... the narrator has invited the reader to pay particular attention to the social and psychological aftermath of

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<sup>1</sup>Cf. Goldman, pp. 236, 319.

adultery, as well as to the obvious fulfilment [*sic*] of God's judgment as pronounced by the prophet Nathan (2 Sa. 12:10-12)."<sup>1</sup>

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).

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.

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. But 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."<sup>2</sup>

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 David, can experience a tragic life if he or she does not commit himself or herself to following God faithfully (Rom. 12:1-2).

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<sup>1</sup>Baldwin, p. 282.

<sup>2</sup>Walther 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 that the writer wanted his readers to learn (cf. Judg. 17—21).<sup>1</sup> They also seem to focus on the divine and human sides of leadership.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

"... the final four chapters, far from being a clumsy appendix, offer a highly reflective, theological interpretation of David's whole career adumbrating [foreshadowing] the messianic hope."<sup>4</sup>

"The structure of the epilogue corresponds to the course of David's career as it unfolds in 1—2 Samuel."<sup>5</sup>

The structure of this section is also chiasmic. It corresponds to the chiasm in 5:17 through 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)"<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>See 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.

<sup>2</sup>Wiersbe, p. 377.

<sup>3</sup>Firth, p. 502.

<sup>4</sup>Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture*, p 275. See also Gordon, p. 298.

<sup>5</sup>Chisholm, *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 284.

<sup>6</sup>Youngblood, p. 1051.

**A. FAMINE FROM SAUL'S SIN 21:1-14**

In this first subsection of the epilogue the writer reminded 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 was therefore blessed more than he was cursed. This section stresses the importance of making things right, correcting previous wrongdoing.

In the chiastic 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 remind the reader of the need for obedience to His will.

**1. Saul's broken treaty with the Gibeonites 21:1-6**

21:1 Other references in 2 Samuel enable us to date the three-year famine, referred to in this verse, early in David's reign, probably between Mephibosheth's arrival in Jerusalem and the beginning of the Ammonite wars. Evidently God sent this judgment on Israel for Saul's action soon after Saul died. The evidence is as follows: First, the fact that David did not execute Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth (v. 7), suggests that he had come under David's protection by this time. That took place after David moved his capital to Jerusalem. Second, Saul's concubine watched over the bodies of her slain sons (v. 10). If this took place later in David's reign, she would have been very old, which is possible but unlikely. Third, David buried the bodies of Saul and Jonathan at this time (v. 14). He would hardly have done this years later. Fourth, after the Ammonite wars began David probably would 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, probably for His mercy and for an explanation of the reason for the famine (cf. Deut. 28:47-48). Perhaps David went into the tent that he had

erected for the ark, since the text says that David "sought the presence of the LORD." But if this event happened early in David's reign, as seems to be the case, the phrase "sought the presence of the LORD" may simply mean that David sought the LORD.

The LORD explained that He had sent the famine because Saul had put the Gibeonites to death. Saul had shed innocent blood. Sin was responsible for the famine in this case. 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 are records of broken treaties leading to natural calamities in other ancient Near Eastern literature.<sup>1</sup>

There is no mention elsewhere in 1 Samuel that Saul had done this, though quite clearly he had done it. One writer suggested that Saul had made Gibeon his capital, and after a falling out with the native Hivite inhabitants, Saul slaughtered them.<sup>2</sup> However there is nothing in the text that indicates that he did this. Another possibility is that when Saul killed many of the priests at Nob, he also executed many Gibeonites (1 Sam. 22:19). But exactly when Saul killed the Gibeonites remains a mystery.

21:2 Upon hearing that Saul's treatment of the Gibeonites was the reason for the present famine, David called for the remaining Gibeonites. Obviously Saul had not killed all of them. 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 inhabitants of the Promised Land (e.g., Gen. 15:16; Deut. 1:27). Saul had killed many of the Gibeonites in his misguided zeal to eliminate these non-Israelites, but the Israelites had made a covenant with them in the LORD's name in Joshua's day

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<sup>1</sup>See F. Charles Fensham, "The Treaty between Israel and the Gibeonites," *Biblical Archaeologist* 27:3 (1964):96-100.

<sup>2</sup>Joseph Blenkinsopp, "Did Saul Make Gibeon His Capital?" *Vetus Testamentum* 24:1 (January 1974):1-7.

(Josh. 9:15). So for Saul to kill them, when they had been promised protection in Yahweh's name, was a sin.

- 21:3 David asked the Gibeonites what punishment would satisfy them and atone for Saul's sin of murder. Perhaps the LORD had revealed this course of action to David when he had sought Him (v. 1).

"Since the verb *kipper* ["make amends"] 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]."<sup>1</sup>

"The inheritance of the LORD" probably refers to the whole nation of Israel here (cf. 20:19, where it refers to a part of the nation, namely, the town of Abel).

- 21:4 The Gibeonites responded that they did not want monetary compensation from Saul's descendants. This was in keeping with what the Mosaic Law specified: "You shall not accept a ransom for the life of a murderer [Saul] who is condemned to death" (Num. 35:31). Nor did the Gibeonites want to be responsible for putting Saul's descendants to death ("nor is it *for us* to put anyone to death"). David replied that he would do whatever they said.
- 21:5-6 The Gibeonites then asked David to hand over to them seven of Saul's sons (descendants) and they would hang them "before the LORD" in Gibeah, Saul's hometown and capital city. The Gibeonites did not want to be responsible for these executions (v. 4). They wanted David to hand them over to

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<sup>1</sup>Paul Garnet, "Atonement Constructions in the Old Testament and the Qumran Scrolls," *Evangelical Quarterly* 46:3 (July-September 1974):134.

them since he was the king, and then the responsibility for their deaths would be his. David agreed to do this.

The Hebrew word translated "hang" means to treat in a way that the person suffers public humiliation (cf. Num. 25:4). Probably the seven descendants of Saul were first executed, probably by stoning, and then their bodies were hung up so that everyone could witness their fate.

Saul's seven descendants may have been involved in the attack on the Gibeonites. Ancient Near Eastern law permitted children to be put to death for their parents' sins, but the Mosaic Law did not (Deut. 24:16).

"... 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 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."<sup>1</sup>

Another possibility is that David simply did not obey the Law on this occasion and handed these innocent descendants over to be killed.<sup>2</sup>

## **2. David's justice and mercy 21:7-9**

21:7-8 David showed himself to be a true son of Yahweh by keeping his covenant with Jonathan and by sparing his son, Mephibosheth (cf. v. 2; 1 Sam. 18:3; 20:8, 16). But he executed seven of Saul's descendants, including another Mephibosheth, who was Saul's son (v. 8). "Merab" (v. 8) is the

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<sup>1</sup>Archer, p. 153. Paragraph division omitted.

<sup>2</sup>Gaebelein, 1:2:228.

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).<sup>1</sup> David could justly kill Saul's two sons and five grandsons 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: Verse 1 refers to Saul's "bloody house" (cf. Ezek. 18:4, 20).

- 21:9 The executions took place in Gibeah, which was on a hill ("mountain," v. 9) in the territory 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 executions took place when 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.

### **3. David's honoring of Saul and Jonathan 21:10-14**

- 21:10 Presumably shortly after the seven bodies were hung up (v. 9) they were taken down, as the Mosaic Law specified (Deut. 21:22-23). But, in view of what follows, it appears that they were not buried.

"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 ..."<sup>2</sup>

Rizpah, the mother of two of Saul's sons who had been executed, "took sackcloth and spread it out for herself on the rock." Evidently she camped near the corpses and mourned their deaths from the beginning of harvest, the time of their executions (v. 9), until the fall rains began. The writer did not

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<sup>1</sup>Driver, p. 352.

<sup>2</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, p. 462.

mention how much time elapsed between these events, but it must have been months. "The rock" is nowhere else identified, so it was probably a local landmark near Gibeah. Rizpah kept the birds and wild animals away from the corpses during this time as a sign of her love.<sup>1</sup>

21:11-14 When David heard what Rizpah had done he was moved to give the corpses of Saul, Jonathan, and the seven descendants of Saul who had recently died, a proper burial. Saul's and Jonathan's corpses were laid to rest in the family tomb of Kish, Saul's father. Where the others were buried is unknown, perhaps in the same place.<sup>2</sup>

David's action ended the famine, and God again blessed Israel with rain and fertility in answer to prayer. It is interesting that references to prayer open and close this pericope.

Because Saul had been unfaithful to Israel's covenant with the Gibeonites, God punished the nation with famine (lack of fertility). When David 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 army accomplished amazing feats because God was with David. David's divine election, coupled with his customary 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 military victories that 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 through

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<sup>1</sup>See Chisholm, "Rizpah's Torment ...," pp. 50-66.

<sup>2</sup>See my note on the significance of burial in the ancient Near East at 1 Sam. 31.

15 in that they introduce a character, provide minimal detail, and give no theological coloring.<sup>1</sup>

"The lists of heroes and heroic exploits that frame the poetic centre-piece [22:1—23:7] represent human instrumentality, but not the underlying reality, which is Yahweh."<sup>2</sup>

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, about 1004 B.C.<sup>3</sup> However, it is really impossible to tell how the incidents recorded here relate to others mentioned in the book, or even if they do.

21:15-17 At some time during his wars with the Philistines David became physically exhausted. A particular giant, Ishbi-benob, whose spear weighted about 9 pounds, and who had a new sword strapped on, intended to kill David. But Abishai, Joab's brother killed the giant and so saved David's life.

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). Their ancestors had terrified ten of the 12 spies that Joshua sent out from Kadesh (Num. 13:33).

This close brush with death made David's men insist that he not participate personally in hand-to-hand combat any more lest "the lamp of Israel" (David, Israel's guiding light) should be extinguished.

"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

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<sup>1</sup>Firth, p. 508.

<sup>2</sup>Gordon, p. 298.

<sup>3</sup>Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, pp. 237-38.



David, 1 Ki. 11, 36. 15, 4. 2 Ki. 8, 19=2 Ch. 21, 7)."¹

As God was a light to His people, so the king was a source of light as His vice-regent. Similarly, Jesus is the light of the world, but Christians are to let our light shine before men (Matt. 5:16).

"... 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)."²

21:18 On another occasion when the Israelites were fighting the Philistines, Sibbecai killed another giant named "Saph." Gob, where this battle took place, was evidently another name for the Philistine town Gezer (1 Chron. 20:4). Sibbecai apparently came from the town of Hushah, about 4 miles southwest of Bethlehem.

21:19 In still another battle with the Philistines, again at Gob, Elnathan, a Bethlehemite, killed "Goliath the Gittite" (i.e., a resident of Gath). This seems to contradict 1 Samuel 17 (vv. 4, 50), where we read that David killed Goliath from Gath. However 1 Chronicles 20:5 says that Elhanan killed Lahmi, the brother of Goliath. Evidently that is the correct statement.<sup>3</sup> It is highly unlikely that there were two Goliaths with the same name, both of whom were Gittites. Another explanation for this apparent contradiction is that Goliath was an old name for

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<sup>1</sup>Driver, p. 354.

<sup>2</sup>Gordon, p. 303.

<sup>3</sup>See Archer, p. 179; Davis, pp. 319-20; Firth, p. 509; Robert B. Chisholm Jr., *Interpreting the Historical Books*, pp. 175-77.

a giant-hero that was applied to two different individuals from Gath.<sup>1</sup>

21:20-21 In a battle with the Philistines at Gath, the Israelites encountered a tall giant with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot. Jonathan, the son of Shimei, David's brother, killed him.

20:22 The four that were born to "the giant at Gath" were Ishbi-benob (v. 16), Saph (v. 19), Goliath (probably Lahmi, v. 19), and the man of great stature (v. 20). The name of the parent or ancestor giant is not given, though he may have been the "Anak" mentioned in Numbers 13 (vv. 22, 28, 33; cf. Deut. 9:2; Josh. 15:14; Judg. 1:20). Obviously there were several Philistine giants, even more than those named in Scripture.

This verse and 1 Chronicles 20:8 both say that these giants "fell by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants." But the death of each one is attributed to David's servants, not David. Probably David was credited with killing them because he was his servants' commander.<sup>2</sup>

"David began his glory with the conquest of one giant, and here concludes it with the conquest of four."<sup>3</sup>

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.

"If there is one thing 2 Samuel 21 reveals, it is the fact that God judges nations."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>David T. Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel*, p. 440.

<sup>2</sup>Firth, p. 511.

<sup>3</sup>Henry, p. 357.

<sup>4</sup>McGee, 2:236.

### 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. They also show David's heart for God.

"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."<sup>1</sup>

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).<sup>2</sup>

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 the animal "horn" as a figure of strength at the beginning (v. 3; 1 Sam. 2:1, 10) and a "rock" as a figure for God (vv. 2, 3, 32, 47; 1 Sam. 2:2). Both songs referred to divine deliverance (vv. 3, 4, 28, 36, 42, 47, 51; 1 Sam. 2:1) 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.<sup>3</sup>

This is a psalm of declarative praise (or "royal thanksgiving"<sup>4</sup>) for what God had done for David. It reflects David's rich spiritual life. While David focused attention on the LORD more than on himself, his emphasis was on the blessings that Yahweh had bestowed upon him.

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<sup>1</sup>Youngblood, p. 1064.

<sup>2</sup>See also my comments on Psalm 18 in my notes on Psalms.

<sup>3</sup>See 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.

<sup>4</sup>Firth, p. 516.

Merrill divided 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).<sup>1</sup>

### David's joy 22:1-4

22:1        The first verse suggests that David composed this psalm early in his reign.

"We know of no single day when this was so ("the day that the LORD had saved him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul") unless it was his accession day for Israel and Judah (5:1-5), and so early in his reign."<sup>2</sup>

22:2-3     David used many metaphors to describe Yahweh in verses 1 and 2: his rock, his fortress, his deliverer, his refuge, his shield, his strength ("horn"), his stronghold, and his savior—as well as his God. These metaphors, and others, help the worshipper envision and appreciate the many facets of God's goodness.

22:4        Because God was worthy of his praise, David called upon him (prayed to him), and the LORD delivered him from his enemies (cf. v. 1). This had become a pattern of behavior for David, and it should be for all believers.

### The LORD's deeds 22:5-20

22:5-6     David described the peril that he had been in, either on a particular occasion or in summary fashion, with four other metaphors.

22:7        In his distress David called out to God, and the LORD heard (responded to) his cry. The reference to God's temple probably means His heavenly dwelling place.

22:8-17    These verses describe Yahweh coming to the aid of David. They present God as angry with David's adversary (vv. 8-9), and His intervention in David's crisis (vv. 10-11). Evidently God

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<sup>1</sup>Merrill, "2 Samuel," in *The Old ...*, pp. 477, 480.

<sup>2</sup>Firth, p. 517.

saved David by using the forces of nature (vv. 12-16), or perhaps these verse simply describe the coming of Yahweh's salvation like the coming of lightning and thunder. "Arrows" (v. 15) is a figure for lightning bolts. God had drawn David out of the waters of affliction, like Pharaoh's daughter had drawn Moses out of literal dangerous waters (v. 17).

22:18-20 These verses are a more literal description of the LORD's deliverance of His servant. God had given David support from an enemy, or enemies, that were too strong for him. He had brought him out from a confined space into an open place (literally or metaphorically) because He delighted in David.

### The LORD's fairness 22:21-30

22:21 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)."<sup>1</sup>

"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."<sup>2</sup>

22:22-25 David could hardly have made the claims recorded in these verses after he had sinned against Bathsheba and Uriah. This is further evidence that he wrote this psalm earlier in his career.

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<sup>1</sup>Gordon, p. 306.

<sup>2</sup>Henry, p. 358.

22:26-28 God responds to people according to their conduct. He is astute (shrewd) to the perverted (crooked, v. 27) in the sense that He turns them into fools.<sup>1</sup>

"The point is that God sometimes uses deception to thwart the purposes of those who are morally and ethically corrupt."<sup>2</sup>

22:29-30 The LORD was David's "lamp" in that He provided illumination (insight) for David and guided him when it was difficult for him to know which way to go. And God had given David unusual courage and the ability to surmount formidable obstacles.

### David's praise 22:31-49

22:31-33 Turning from himself ("I can," v. 30), David turned to describe Yahweh ("As for God").

22:34-43 In these verses David reviewed how God had saved him in battle and had destroyed his enemies. The similes in verse 43 picture David's enemies as objects of humiliation and contempt.<sup>3</sup>

22:44-46 God had also made David the ruler over many foreign nations.

22:47-49 Again David praised God and exalted Him for taking vengeance for him against his enemies.

### David's promise 22:50-51

David closed this psalm by promising to give thanks to Yahweh among the nations (publicly) and to sing praises to His name. The reference to God showing favor to David's descendants forever does not necessarily mean that David wrote this psalm after he received the Davidic Covenant. David probably meant that God would show favor not only to himself but also to his descendants after him.

"It is ... both serendipitous and satisfying that the Song of David, a psalm of impressive scope and exquisite beauty,

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<sup>1</sup>Youngblood, p. 1073; Carlson, pp. 251-52.

<sup>2</sup>Chisholm, *1 & 2 Samuel*, p. 298.

<sup>3</sup>Youngblood, p. 1075.

should begin with 'The LORD' (v. 2), the Eternal One, and end with 'forever' (v. 51)."<sup>1</sup>

#### **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".<sup>2</sup>

"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 [graciously given]."<sup>3</sup>

"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."<sup>4</sup>

This poem has a chiastic structure, focusing on the LORD speaking (vv. 3-4). His words describe the ideal king, and 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; Acts 20:17-38; et al.). They often expressed lessons that those who had walked with God for many years had learned.

23:1 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 (cf. Dan. 4:29-33). David always viewed himself as one whom God had chosen and

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 1077.

<sup>2</sup>Firth, p. 525.

<sup>3</sup>Gordon, p. 309.

<sup>4</sup>Firth, p. 525.

anointed for his role in life. He was the LORD's "anointed" and "the sweet psalmist of Israel." These four descriptions of David picture his leadership in relation to his family, his political administration, his military forces, and his spiritual influence.

23:2 David claimed that the words that he had spoken had been received from God. He thus gave God the credit for his inspiration. His claim to divine inspiration is as strong as the better known claims in the New Testament: 2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 1:1 and 2; and 2 Peter 1:19 through 21. David was not claiming divine inspiration for everything that he said, of course, but only for his prophetic utterances, including his psalms.

23:3-4 David also recognized God as the real ruler of Israel. Many ancient as well as modern interpreters of this book have understood David's description of Israel's ruler in these verses 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. The figure of the sprouting grass describes him as a source of prosperity, new life, and fertility.

23:5 David viewed his dynasty this way because God had made an everlasting covenant (the Davidic Covenant) with him. This resulted in order, security, deliverance, and the fulfillment of desire. David believed that the covenant would result in increased blessing for his house.

23:6-7 The worthless would suffer the reverse fate, however, and even be burned up as useless (cf. Matt. 13:30).

To summarize, David believed that the LORD sovereignly initiates blessing, and those who value it cause His blessings to increase on themselves and others.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>For 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.



**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 section illustrates. The corresponding list of other mighty men in 21:15 through 22 contained no reference to Yahweh's help, but this list does.

**1. Selected adventures of outstanding warriors 23:8-23**

23:8-12 There were three warriors who received higher honor than all the rest: Josheb-basshebeth, Eleazar, and Shammah. What their relationship to "The Thirty" (v. 24) was is hard to determine.<sup>1</sup> One writer assumed they were commanders of The Thirty.<sup>2</sup>

Josheb-basshebeth may have been responsible for the killing of "800 ... at one time" through the troops that he commanded, rather than by killing them himself personally.<sup>3</sup> Josheb-basshebeth 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).

23:13-17 Three unnamed men from The Thirty received special mention. 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."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>B. Mazar, "The Military Elite of King David," *Vetus Testamentum* 13 (1963):310-20.

<sup>2</sup>Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 282.

<sup>3</sup>Firth, p. 534.

<sup>4</sup>Wiersbe, p. 266.

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.

- 23:18-23 Two others also received great esteem: Abishai, and Benaiah. Benaiah is the only priest mentioned in the Old Testament who became a soldier.<sup>1</sup> 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."<sup>2</sup>

Perhaps the writer also mentioned the feats of Abishai and Benaiah because they feature in the preceding narrative.

"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 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."<sup>3</sup>

As Jesus had his circles of intimates (Peter, James, and John, the Twelve, and the Seventy), so did David.

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<sup>1</sup>Ibid., p. 381.

<sup>2</sup>McGee, 2:240.

<sup>3</sup>Wiersbe, p. 380.

## **2. A list of notable warriors among The Thirty 23:24-39**

Thirty-two more soldiers obtained special distinction, 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."<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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.

This whole list of David's mighty men (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. 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).

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<sup>1</sup>Yadin, p. 277.

<sup>2</sup>See the comparative chart in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, pp. 478-79.

"... 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."<sup>1</sup>

"Every spiritual leader would do well to read this story once a year!"<sup>2</sup>

### 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."<sup>3</sup>

In support of this theory is the fact that Joab and the army commanders were able to take over nine months to gather the population statistics (v. 8). This suggests a very peaceful condition in Israel, which characterized David's later reign, but not his earlier reign.

24:1      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 this verse, the writer of Samuel said that God did. Evidently God used an adversary to bring judgment on the objects of His anger (cf. Job. 1—2; Acts 2:23).<sup>4</sup>

"... paradoxically, a divinely-sent affliction can be called a 'messenger of Satan' (2 Cor 12:7 ...)."<sup>5</sup>

"God, though He cannot tempt any man (Jas. 1:13), is frequently described in Scripture as

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<sup>1</sup>Youngblood, p. 1095.

<sup>2</sup>Swindoll, *David* ..., p. 282.

<sup>3</sup>Merrill, *Kingdom of ...*, p. 272.

<sup>4</sup>See Robert B. Chisholm Jr., "Does God Deceive?" *Bibliotheca Sacra* 155:617 (January-March 1998):11-12, 21-23.

<sup>5</sup>Youngblood, p. 1096.

doing what He merely permits to be done; and so, in this case, He permitted Satan to tempt David."<sup>1</sup>

We can identify four agents of causality in this verse: God was the final cause, the primary instrumental cause was Satan, the secondary instrumental cause may have been 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).

24:2 In response to this military threat, I assume, 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 census impugns the faithfulness of God in the keeping of His promises—a kind of walking by sight instead of by faith."<sup>2</sup>

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,

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<sup>1</sup>Jamieson, et al., p. 246.

<sup>2</sup>Raymond 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.

they should pay half a shekel to God for every head [Exod. 30:12]."<sup>1</sup>

"Conduct a census" (vv. 2, 4) literally means to "muster" in preparation for battle.

24:3-4 Joab and the other military commanders tried to talk David out of his decision. Even such a man as Joab could see that what David planned to do was wrong. Nevertheless, David chose to ignore Joab's counsel. He behaved as one who refuses to be accountable to anyone, which was easy for David to do, since he was the king.

24:5-8 Joab proceeded in a counterclockwise direction around Israel.<sup>2</sup> The territory described included much of, but not all of, the territory that God had promised to Abraham. The whole census-taking process took nine months and 20 days.

24:9 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 *eleph* can mean either "thousand" or "military unit." Here it could very well mean military unit.<sup>3</sup> 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).

The thing that David had done displeased the LORD, and "He struck Israel" (1 Chron. 21:7). This made David realize his sin (1 Chron. 27:8).

## **2. David's confession of his guilt 24:10-14**

24:10 David's heart troubled him because he saw the connection between his census and God's judgment. He confessed to the LORD that he had sinned greatly and asked for forgiveness for

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<sup>1</sup>Josephus, 13:1:1.

<sup>2</sup>See 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.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. Baldwin, p. 296; Gordon, p. 319; Anderson, p. 285; McCarter, *II Samuel*, p. 510.

his foolishness. Fools are people who do not listen to others, and David had not listened to Joab. This response shows David at his best, as "the man after God's own heart."

24:11-12 Again the LORD used a prophet, this time Gad, to convey His message to the king. The LORD responded immediately to David's repentance (cf. 12:13).

24:13-14 God graciously gave the king three choices about how He would punish the nation because of David's sin. 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, extended punishment or a short, intense one. He chose to leave the choice in God's hands, because he had learned that God is merciful.

"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."<sup>1</sup>

"Sinners in the hands of an angry God have more reason for hope than does offending man in the clutches of an offended society."<sup>2</sup>

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,

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<sup>1</sup>Kirkpatrick, p. 228.

<sup>2</sup>Young, pp. 304-5.

they will say that the king is well protected; let me choose pestilence, before which all are equal."<sup>1</sup>

### 3. David's punishment 24:15-17

24:15 An angelic messenger from God again brought death to many people throughout all Israel (cf. Exod. 12:23). Seventy thousand men is more than three times the number of men who followed Absalom and died in his uprising (i.e., 20,000; cf. 18:7).

"Wanting more land and more people to rule, David finds himself with 70,000 fewer subjects."<sup>2</sup>

The 70,000 who died may have been 70 military units of soldiers.<sup>3</sup>

24:16 The "angel of the LORD" may have been the pre-incarnate Christ, but he could have simply been an angelic messenger whom God sent.<sup>4</sup>

"God is often described in Scripture as repenting ["relented"] when He ceased to pursue a course He had begun."<sup>5</sup>

"Even while chastening, God is more loving, more faithful, more worthy of confidence than any other."<sup>6</sup>

24:17 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 (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

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<sup>1</sup>Goldman, p. 345.

<sup>2</sup>Dillard, p. 106.

<sup>3</sup>See Youngblood, p. 1100.

<sup>4</sup>See Ibid., p. 1100-1.

<sup>5</sup>Jamieson, et al., p. 247.

<sup>6</sup>J. N. Darby, *Synopsis of the Books of the Bible*, 1:515.



the census. Note David's shepherd heart in his reference to his people as "sheep."

"He is even willing to suffer (die?) for the sake of the sheep (v. 17)!"<sup>1</sup>

"Sin is really a selfish act. It's all about bringing ourselves pleasure caring little about the toll it will take on someone else."<sup>2</sup>

#### **4. David's repentance 24:18-25**

24:18-19 David proceeded to prepare to offer sacrifices in response to the prophet Gad's instructions. God instructed him to present these sacrifices at the place where He had shown mercy (v. 16). David willingly obeyed.

24:20-23 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). Araunah offered to give the site to David, plus his oxen and wooden implements, with his blessing.

24:24 David insisted on purchasing the threshing floor because a sacrifice that costs nothing is no sacrifice at all (cf. Mark 12:43-44).

This verse says that David bought "the threshing floor and the oxen for 50 shekels (one and one quarter pounds) 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 oxen. The entire site may have included all of Mt. Moriah. The second transaction may have taken place some time after the first one.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Gordon, p. 322.

<sup>2</sup>Swindoll, *David ...*, p. 282.

<sup>3</sup>Archer, p. 190.

24:25 David then proceeded to build an altar on the site and offer burnt and peace offerings to the LORD. 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). The LORD responded to prayer for the land and withdrew the plague from Israel.

Araunah's threshing floor was to become the site of Solomon's temple.

According to Jewish tradition, "Abraham came and offered his son Isaac for a burnt-offering at that very place ..." <sup>1</sup>

"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)." <sup>2</sup>

"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...' " <sup>3</sup>

This 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.

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

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<sup>1</sup>Josephus, 13:4.

<sup>2</sup>Dillard, p. 107.

<sup>3</sup>Youngblood, p. 1104.

whom God has chosen for special blessing sins, he or she becomes the object 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."<sup>1</sup>

Much blessing came to Israel through the land that 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, which was 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:

- 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)

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<sup>1</sup>J. Oswald Sanders, *Spiritual Leadership*, p. 169.

## 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 it 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 also 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.<sup>1</sup>

These changes had taken place because Yahweh had brought fertility to Israel. When the Israelites followed the Mosaic Covenant, which was 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

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<sup>1</sup>Merrill, *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 through 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."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Heater, p. 146.

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