

## SECOND SAMUEL

### Introduction:

In *Explore the Book*, J. Sidlow Baxter states: “This second book of Samuel, as Matthew Henry is quick to observe, falls into two main parts. Alas, there is no mistaking it. David’s great sin, recorded in chapter 11, marks the sad divide, right in the middle of the book and right in the middle of David’s forty year’s reign, for it falls about the end of the first twenty years. Up to this point all goes triumphantly for David; but after this there are ugly knots and tangles, grievous blows and tragic trials. In the first part, we sing David’s triumph. In the second part, we mourn David’s troubles.”

Although the book of *Second Samuel* deals mainly with the reign of David, its significance is in the Messianic prophecy that is given form in it. This prophecy comes in the form of a covenant God made with David, the terms of which are found in chapter seven. David had built himself a palace and had just moved in, realizing that “the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him.” This made him conceive the plan that the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of the presence of God deserved a better place than a tent. Consulting with the prophet Nathan, he initially receives the prophet’s approval, but in the night God spoke to his prophet and said: “Go and tell my servant David, ‘This is what the Lord says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, ‘Why have you not built me a house of cedar?’” Now then, tell my servant David, “This is what the Lord Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth. And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies. The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.”<sup>1</sup>

J. Sidlow Baxter, in *Explore the Book*, comments on this: ‘On no account should we fail to weigh duly the fact and the terms of this covenant; for, besides largely affecting all that follows in the Scriptures, it determinatively affects the whole history of mankind, especially that part which is yet future. It is one of the supremely great passages of the Bible, and one of the principle keys to the Divine plan of history. From the time when

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<sup>1</sup> II Sam. 7:1-16

this covenant was announced, the Jews have always believed that the Messiah must come of David's line. They believed it in the time of our Lord, and they believe it now. That the Messiah should indeed be of David's line was later affirmed by the prophets, in such passages as Isaiah 11:1; Jeremiah 23: 5; Ezekiel 37:25; and in accord with such prophecies the angel Gabriel announced to Mary, concerning Jesus: 'He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father, David; and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever, and of His Kingdom there shall be no end.'

**Outline:**

In this study we follow again the outline given by Joyce G. Baldwin in her book 1 and 2 Samuel:

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## **1. THE REIGN OF DAVID 1:1 – 20:26**

### **a. David's rise to power in Judah 1:1 – 4:12**

#### *i. David receives news of Saul's death 1:1-16*

*1 After the death of Saul, David returned from defeating the Amalekites and stayed in Ziklag two days.*

*2 On the third day a man arrived from Saul's camp, with his clothes torn and with dust on his head. When he came to David, he fell to the ground to pay him honor.*

*3 'Where have you come from?' David asked him. He answered, 'I have escaped from the Israelite camp.'*

*4 'What happened?' David asked. 'Tell me.' He said, 'The men fled from the battle. Many of them fell and died. And Saul and his son Jonathan are dead.'*

*5 Then David said to the young man who brought him the report, 'How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?'*

*6 'I happened to be on Mount Gilboa,' the young man said, 'and there was Saul, leaning on his spear, with the chariots and riders almost upon him.'*

*7 When he turned around and saw me, he called out to me, and I said, 'What can I do?'*

*8 'He asked me, 'Who are you?' 'An Amalekite,' I answered.*

*9 'Then he said to me, 'Stand over me and kill me! I am in the throes of death, but I'm still alive.'*

*10 'So I stood over him and killed him, because I knew that after he had fallen he could not survive. And I took the crown that was on his head and the band on his arm and have brought them here to my lord.'*

*11 Then David and all the men with him took hold of their clothes and tore them.*

*12 They mourned and wept and fasted till evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the army of the Lord and the house of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.*

*13 David said to the young man who brought him the report, 'Where are you from?' 'I am the son of an alien, an Amalekite,' he answered.*

*14 David asked him, 'Why were you not afraid to lift your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?'*

*15 Then David called one of his men and said, 'Go, strike him down!' So he struck him down, and he died.*

*16 For David had said to him, 'Your blood be on your own head. Your own mouth testified against you when you said, 'I killed the Lord's anointed.'"*

The Hebrew text of v.1 reads literally: "Now it came to pass after the death of Saul when David was returned from the slaughter of the Amalekites and David had abode two days in Ziklag ..." It is not clear from this statement whether David knew what the outcome of the battle had been or whether the news only reached him when the young Amalekite arrived. *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* comments: "Whether the battle at Gilboa, in which Saul fell, occurred before or after the return of David, it is impossible to determine. All that follows from the juxtaposition of the two events in v. 1, is that they were nearly contemporaneous."

It is also not clear whether David had already heard about Saul's suicide, which would mean that he knew that the young man's story was made up for the obvious purpose of receiving a reward. The fact that David and his men reacted to the report by tearing their clothes, weeping and fasting, would indicate that they had not heard it previously.

The fact that this young man came straight to David indicates that he knew David to be the pretender to the throne of Israel and that, as such, he had been the object of Saul's hatred. The thought that word about Saul's death could be anything but welcome news must have been inconceivable to him. He fully expected to be rewarded handsomely and he felt that the story of the role he played in Saul's demise would make him a hero.

*The Pulpit Commentary* observes about him: "Though the Amalekite came out of the camp, yet we are not to suppose that he had been one of the combatants. Every army is followed by a vast number of vagabonds, intent upon gain, purchasing of the troops their booty, plundering wherever they have the chance, and carrying on a lucrative but illicit trade. He was more probably a sort of gipsy settler than, as many suppose, the slave of some Israelite. He professes, however, to be upon Israel's side, and appears with the usual marks of sorrow. By so doing he hoped to commend himself to David, whom he knew to be too patriotic to rejoice at the defeat of his countrymen, though he doubted not that he would hear with joy of the death of so inveterate a personal enemy as Saul. On this account, and because the way would now stand open to David's ambition, he evidently felt sure of receiving a large guerdon for his news. There is, moreover, a further interest in his conduct; for it demonstrates the existence of a widespread popular feeling that David was destined to be Israel's king."

The thought that the young man would have been the slave of some Israelite, as *The Pulpit Commentary* mentions, is based on the expression he uses about himself. The Hebrew text reads literally: "I am an escapee." The way the boy tells the story is incongruent with the report we read in *First Samuel* where we read: "Saul took his own sword and fell on it."<sup>2</sup> It is quite possible that the young man had overheard Saul's conversation with his armor-bearer and witnessed Saul's suicide, which gave him the thought that he could use the story of that incident to his own advantage.

The only part that cannot be doubted in the story is the fact that he took Saul's crown and armband, since he carried them with him and handed them to David.

The reaction to the news by David and all of his men is a remarkable demonstration of grief. Weeping, fasting and tearing of clothes were, of course, a common way in which to lament death. But they all must have realized that the death of Saul opened the way for them to return to their own home and heritage. They would no longer be the outlaws Saul had made them to be. We are not told whether David's grief was triggered by the news of Jonathan's death. It must have been the whole complex of the defeat of the army, the loss of a bosom friend and of the fact that "the LORD's anointed" had been destroyed. David may not have had much personal respect for Saul, but he did honor the Lord who had anointed him.

It seems that the second interview with the young Amalekite that begins in v.13 occurred later than the previous one. The mourning, and particularly the fasting of David and his men, had claimed the rest of the day on which the news of Saul's death and that

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<sup>2</sup> I Sam. 31:4

of his sons was received. But the next day may have been after 6 o'clock in the evening of that same day.

David knew already that the young man was an Amalekite, since the boy had mentioned that earlier. He received no answer to his question from where he came. But the boy's confession that Saul died by his hand was enough to convict him of regicide. The statement "Your blood be on your own head" reminds us of the shout of the crowd at Jesus' crucifixion: "Let his blood be on us and on our children!"<sup>3</sup> In this case it simply means that David was not guilty of a crime when he ordered the young man's execution.

Commenting on David's verdict, *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "This was no hasty sentence, for they had 'fasted until even.' And before pronouncing it David asks, 'Whence art thou?' that is, he makes more full inquiry into his condition and previous doings. He knew that he was an Amalekite, and most probably had seen clearly enough that his whole story was false; but before deciding upon his fate, he desired fuller information as to the man's previous life. His question elicits from him that he was a subject of Saul. For the word 'stranger' means a settler, who had withdrawn from his own country and joined himself to Israel. Moreover, it was the Amalekite's father who had done this, and probably he was one of many, who, finding their old nomad life too dangerous, had sought a home in the southern districts of Judah; but when the war broke out, the old instinct of these Bedouin made them follow the army for pilfer and trade in spoil. But as the son of a settler, the Amalekite owed by birth allegiance to Saul, and, should the occasion arise, was bound to render him loyal aid. Now, according to his own account, he had found Saul in no immediate danger of death, 'for his life was still whole within him.' Escape was at least possible with the Amalekite's aid, but he is eager to kill him. And David's question, 'How wast thou not afraid...to destroy the Lord's anointed?' virtually means, 'How wast thou not afraid to kill thy own king?' The Lord, that is, Jehovah, was no name of power to any outside the covenant people, nor in settling in Judea did the Amalekites accept the national religion. But the words would show even to a stranger that Saul was Israel's lawful and consecrated king."

## *ii. David's lament 1:17-27*

***17 David took up this lament concerning Saul and his son Jonathan,  
18 and ordered that the men of Judah be taught this lament of the bow (it is written in the Book of Jashar):***

***19 'Your glory, O Israel, lies slain on your heights. How the mighty have fallen!  
20 'Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines be glad, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised rejoice.***

***21 'O mountains of Gilboa, may you have neither dew nor rain, nor fields that yield offerings [of grain].***

***For there the shield of the mighty was defiled, the shield of Saul — no longer rubbed with oil.***

***22 From the blood of the slain, from the flesh of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, the sword of Saul did not return unsatisfied.***

***23 'Saul and Jonathan — in life they were loved and gracious, and in death they were not parted. They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions.***

<sup>3</sup> Matt. 27:25

**24 'O daughters of Israel, weep for Saul, who clothed you in scarlet and finery, who adorned your garments with ornaments of gold.**

**25 'How the mighty have fallen in battle! Jonathan lies slain on your heights.**

**26 I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women.**

**27 'How the mighty have fallen! The weapons of war have perished!'**

*The Pulpit Commentary* states about David's lament: "The Hebrew word for 'lamentation' is *kinah*, a technical term for an elegy or poem commemorative of the dead. Thus Jeremiah wrote a *kinah* in memory of King Josiah (... 2 Chronicles 35:25); and there is little doubt that the 'lamentations' there spoken of were a collection of dirges, in which probably this ode written by David held an honored place. In ... 2 Samuel 3:33, 34 we have a short *kinah* in Abner's honor, which possibly formed part of a longer poem, of which those two verses only are quoted as sufficing to prove, not only David's innocence, but also his indignation at Joab's foul deed. In both these places we have remains of David's secular poetry, and find it marked by the same strong emotion and the same sublimity of thought as distinguish his psalms. We observe also the nobleness of David's nature in his total silence concerning himself, and his generous eulogy, not of Jonathan only, but also of Saul. The mean envy and the implacable jealousy of the latter are no more remembered, and he sees in him, not the personal foe, but the brave king who has fallen in his country's cause."

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel* comments on David's lament: "It should be taught to the people of Judah (cf. the NIV, 'and ordered that the men of Judah be taught this lament of the bow'): the contrast draws attention to the Hebrew text, which reads literally, 'And he said to teach the sons of Judah the bow' (Heb. *qāšet*), which makes good sense if 'the bow' is used as a title (cf. Jesus' use of 'the bush' to refer to Exod. 3 in Luke 20:37). The RSV adopts the LXX<sup>4</sup> reading and omits the noun. David already has in view his authority over Judah, and provides a text which will ensure that all his people learn and remember the significance of the history that has been enacted on Mount Gilboa. Though the Hebrew has 'sons of Judah,' the lament is addressed also to the 'daughters of Israel' (v. 24), and the RSV is surely right to translate 'people of Judah.' *The Book of Jashar*, meaning 'the upright,' is mentioned also in Joshua 10:13; it evidently contained a collection of early poetry, commemorating outstanding events and providing a source-book for later writers of our Bible books. It was evidently known to the writer's contemporaries. All poetry is best appreciated in its original language, and the subtleties of Hebrew make this especially true of Old Testament poems, which rely for much of their effect on assonance, brevity and wordplay: this lament is no exception. Since none of these can be reproduced in another language, some technical explanation is unavoidable if the force of the Hebrew is to be appreciated."

It had been observed before that archery was the weapon that had decided the outcome of the battle with the Philistines, since the Israelites had not yet begun to use bows and arrows in war but limited themselves to fighting with sword and spear. Some Bible scholars consider that the reason for the title *the bow* given to this dirge. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments on this: "David took immediate measures for instructing the people in the knowledge and practice of archery, their great

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<sup>4</sup> The Septuagint

inferiority to the enemy in this military arm having been the main cause of the late national disaster.”

*The Pulpit Commentary* takes issue with this opinion, stating: “*Also he bade them teach the children of Judah [the use of] the bow.* The old view is that given by the inserted words, and is well put by Ephrem Syrus in his commentary upon the passage. He says that, as Israel’s defeat at Gilboa was the presage of a long struggle, and as the Philistines had gained the victory there by their skill in archery, David used his utmost authority with his own tribe to get them to practice this art for their protection in future wars. This explanation would be plausible were it not that we have reason for believing that the Israelites were already skilful in the use both of the sling and the bow, in both of which the Benjamites especially excelled (... 1 Chronicles 12:2). The modern view is that given in the Revised Version, where the inserted words are ‘the song of’ the bow. ‘The Bow’ is thus the name of the elegy, taken from the allusion to Jonathan’s skill in the use of that weapon (ver. 22; comp. ... 1 Samuel 18:4; 20:36); and the meaning is that David made his own tribesmen, who were probably ill disposed to Saul and his family, learn this dirge, not so much for its preservation, as to make them give the fallen king due honor.”

The Hebrew text of v.19 reads literally: “The beauty of Israel is slain upon your high places: how the mighty are fallen!” The Hebrew word for “beauty” is *tsebiy* which is also used for “gazelle.” The expression is used elsewhere in a military context also as in the verse: “Some Gadites defected to David at his stronghold in the desert. They were brave warriors, ready for battle and able to handle the shield and spear. Their faces were the faces of lions, and they were as swift as *gazelles* in the mountains.”<sup>5</sup> In the blessings Jacob bestowed upon his sons on his deathbed, he singled out Naphtali, saying: “Naphtali is a doe set free that bears beautiful fawns.”<sup>6</sup> It may be that the image had been adopted as an emblem applied to the whole nation of Israel, as a symbol of beauty and speed.

Commenting on the beauty and structure of the poem, Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, observes: “*Thy glory, O Israel* represents the first two words of a total of eight which form the introduction to the lament in Hebrew. No names are mentioned and ‘the glory’ (Heb *haššēbî*) has the second meaning ‘gazelle’ (used in 2 Sam. 2:18). The ambiguity here, and the tension created by such words as *slain* and *high places*, which would normally be the last to be conquered, makes the unconventional opening to a highly original lament: ‘The gazelle, O Israel – on your heights it lies slain.’ By contrast, *How are the mighty fallen!* is simple, understandable, and the kind of phraseology that is expected, but the eight words taken together avoid the obvious and evoke the horrors of defeat in battle. Verse 19b, repeated in different combinations in verses 25 and 27, is a catch line which expresses the recurring grief that cannot adequately be expressed. At the technical level, it provides an indication of the structure of the poem.”

Having recently spent considerable time in Philistine country, David has no problem imagining how Israel’s defeat would be celebrated in some of those cities. He could see the girls dancing and chanting in the streets in the same way as the Israelites had sung about him. We read: “When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul

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<sup>5</sup> 1 Chron. 12:8

<sup>6</sup> Gen. 49:21

with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with tambourines and lutes. As they danced, they sang: ‘Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands.’<sup>7</sup>

“Tell it not in Gath” eventually became a proverb in Israel which we find repeated in Micah’s prophecy: “Tell it not in Gath; weep not at all.”<sup>8</sup>

David puts a curse upon the mountains of Gilboa, a ridge of mountains in the territory of Issachar at the east end of the Plain of Jezreel, as it was the place of the defeat of the army of Israel and particularly the place where Saul and Jonathan met their end. There is a suggestion that the area produced a good harvest that was used in the presentation of the first fruit offering to the Lord. David’s curse was meant to put an end to this, turning the fruitful area into barren rock as a monument of disgrace.

Shields, whether made of leather or metal were rubbed with oil to deflect enemy arrows. In this case the shields of Saul and Jonathan were defiled by their own blood. Jonathan and Saul’s skill in the use of their weapons, bow and sword, made them both into war heroes.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, observes about this: “It would be somewhat prosaic for David to refer to the practice of oiling the shield (both to keep it bright and to cause missiles to glaze off it), were it not for the reference to ‘anointed’ (Heb. *māšiah?*), which applies most specifically to Saul, and by its sound even suggests his name. There the shield of the mighty heroes was defiled – yes even the shield of Saul, whose consecrated person shared the common fate as though he had never been set apart as the Anointed of Jehovah. Thus, by the use of metonymy, David has come to the heart of his lament. Memories of Jonathan and Saul at the height of their powers come flooding back. They had been courageous in battle: Jonathan, characteristically, with his *bow* (which suggested, perhaps, the title of the lament), and Saul with his *sword*, so that they *returned not empty* from battle, but brought with them rich spoils. They were accustomed to victory. Indeed David has almost changed his poem into a victory song, so enthused is he as he contemplates how deeply beloved and how lovable these two great men had been. But as he uses the word *life*, the stab of pain that demands the word *death* forces him to face reality. He finds cause for praise in the togetherness of father and son, which the enemy has not been able to destroy, and so introduces a small climax in the middle of the lament. The two comparisons, *swifter than eagles*, *stronger than lions*, evoke the wide open spaces, powerful movement and formidable strength, Saul and Jonathan had been in a class apart.”

David sees in the way Saul and Jonathan died together a picture of the way they had lived, using the Hebrew words *‘ahab*, meaning “affection” and *na`iyim*, “pleasant.” We find the first word used in the verse where God says to Abraham: “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, *whom you love*, and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains I will tell you about.”<sup>9</sup> And David uses the second word in “You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal *pleasures* at your right hand.”<sup>10</sup> In spite of their differences, father and son maintained a healthy, natural affectionate relationship with each other in

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<sup>7</sup> 1 Sam. 18:6,7

<sup>8</sup> Micah 1:10

<sup>9</sup> Gen. 22:2

<sup>10</sup> Ps. 16:11

spite of their different relationship with God. “Swifter than eagles” and “stronger than lions” seems to be a standard description of heroes in antiquity.

David calls upon the daughters of Israel, who had chanted at Saul’s victories, to now lament the death of their monarch. They had not only received a share of the booty taken from the conquered enemies, but Saul had also elevated their status in life. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “In old time, the women of Israel had celebrated Saul’s triumphs (ver. 20), but now it is their sad office to bewail his death. And a touching reason is given for their sorrow. During Saul’s reign the condition of the women had greatly improved. When a nation is in the miserable plight described in ... 1 Samuel 13:19-22, there is neither safety nor comfort for the weak; but when the strong arm of Saul had won freedom for Israel, the women were the first to reap the benefit, and ‘their scarlet clothing with delights,’ that is, their delightful or delicate clothing of bright colors and their golden ornaments, prove that the nation had made a great advance in prosperity and culture during the happier years of Saul’s reign.”

V.25 repeats the theme of the dirge, thus creating unity of thought. Having lamented the death of Saul, who had declared himself David’s archenemy, David now turns to Jonathan who had been his most intimate and trusted friend in life.

The friendship between David and Jonathan has throughout the ages been a model of all healthy affectionate relationships between men. We should not allow any recent philosophy of modern alternate lifestyle to influence the purity of this model. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel* comments: “While David had called on others to weep for Saul, David was consumed with grief for *my brother Jonathan*, whom he addresses as though he were still living, a common illusion in bereavement. *Very pleasant* does not express sufficiently strongly what the poet is saying here; ‘very dear’ (NIV) captures the emotion with which David remembers Jonathan. Indeed, David had never experienced such love as Jonathan had shown him. He did not need to spell it out, for everyone knew that Jonathan, the heir to the throne, had not clung to his rights, but had voluntarily renounced them in favor of David, whom he had protected and encouraged through the years. And this renunciation had been no impulsive act, but an ongoing generous attitude of heart and mind: Jonathan had allowed his own interests to be disregarded, in order that David’s could prosper. True, that kind of love David had found in the women of his life – his mother and his wives – but even their love was not to be compared with the love which had motivated Jonathan. While Saul had distributed gifts which tended to win him support (v. 24), Jonathan’s selfless, transparent goodness had not even looked for reward, hence David’s superlative praise: *your love to me was wonderful, passing the love [even] of women*. David has spoken to Jonathan, but now he must face reality: Jonathan is among *the mighty fallen*. The battle is over, *and the weapons of war perished*. For all David knows, these two great men are still lying untended on the war-torn slopes of Gilboa, their weapons useless beside them, impotent despite their destructive power. The scene is an eloquent and moving statement about human greatness, and brings to a fitting end David’s poignant lament.”

### ***iii. David king in Hebron 2:1-4a***

**1 In the course of time, David inquired of the Lord. "Shall I go up to one of the towns of Judah?" he asked. The Lord said, "Go up." David asked, "Where shall I go?" "To Hebron," the Lord answered.**

**2 So David went up there with his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel.**

**3 David also took the men who were with him, each with his family, and they settled in Hebron and its towns.**

**4 Then the men of Judah came to Hebron and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah.**

David was still in Ziklag when he received word of the death of Saul and Jonathan and when he learned that Israel had lost the battle with the Philistines. Although Saul's death removed the last obstacle for David's coronation as king, Saul's son Ishbosheth could be considered the more natural pretender to the throne. As we will see later, this fact led Israel to the brink of civil war.

David's attitude at this time demonstrates the greatness of his character and of his relationship with God. David exemplified the principle that his son Solomon would later formulate as a proverb: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight."<sup>11</sup>

It is assumed that David consulted the Lord through Abiathar the priest by using the Urim and Thummim. So David moves to Hebron with his two wives and the men who had accompanied him and their families and they make Hebron their new residence.

From a later report in *First Chronicles*, we learn that those who came with David formed a much larger segment of the population than would be gathered from the account in this chapter. The numbers of soldiers added to David's group of men add up to well over three hundred thousand.<sup>12</sup>

Several questions could be raised regarding David being anointed as king over the house of Judah. It is obvious that David was widely considered to be a candidate for the throne of Israel. The fact that the Ammonite slave in the first chapter brought him Saul's crown and armband proves this. Where were the other tribes of Israel is a question that could be asked legitimately. The whole country may have still been too much in disarray after losing the war with the Philistines for a united vote. But Judah's initiative could easily be interpreted as an effort to separate the tribe from the rest of the nation. There may not have been much cohesion among the tribes to begin with and the breaking up of Israel after the death of Solomon into two kingdoms may have been the natural outcome of a historic rift. Jacob's blessing of Judah, which stated: "The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his"<sup>13</sup> was part of Israel history. But this prophecy did not move the other tribes to cast their vote for David at this point.

*The Pulpit Commentary* comments here: "Samuel's anointing (... 1 Samuel 16:13) had been private, and, if we may judge by the manner in which Eliab treated David (... 1 Samuel 17:28), even his own family had not attached much importance to it.

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<sup>11</sup> Prov. 3:5,6

<sup>12</sup> See I Chron. 12:23-37.

<sup>13</sup> Gen. 49:10

It was nevertheless the indication of Jehovah's purpose, and now the anointing of David by the elders of Judah was the first step towards its accomplishment. And this was an independent act, though the knowledge of Samuel's anointing had prepared the way for it; and David thus acquired a legal right and authority by the nation's will, which Samuel could not have given him. So Saul's anointing by Samuel, and his election to be king at Gilgal, were independent acts; and while the former gave the king his sacredness, the latter conferred upon him jurisdiction and power."

According to *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary*, Psalm 27 may refer to this period and the *Septuagint* prefixed the title "before the anointing-namely, at Hebron" to it.

***iv. David's embassy to Jabesh-gilead 2:4b-7***

***4b When David was told that it was the men of Jabesh Gilead who had buried Saul, 5 he sent messengers to the men of Jabesh Gilead to say to them, "The Lord bless you for showing this kindness to Saul your master by burying him. 6 May the Lord now show you kindness and faithfulness, and I too will show you the same favor because you have done this. 7 Now then, be strong and brave, for Saul your master is dead, and the house of Judah has anointed me king over them."***

When David heard what the inhabitants of Jabesh had done in giving Saul and his sons a decent burial, he performed, what seems to be, his first official act as king of Judah by sending messengers to congratulate them. The men of Jabesh performed a heroic act in reclaiming the bodies from Philistine country and David sends them a royal medal. There is some political savvy in David's performance since he adds the words "Saul your master is dead, and the house of Judah has anointed me king over them."

***v. The rival kingdom 2:8-3:1***

***8 Meanwhile, Abner son of Ner, the commander of Saul's army, had taken Ish-Bosheth son of Saul and brought him over to Mahanaim. 9 He made him king over Gilead, Ashuri and Jezreel, and also over Ephraim, Benjamin and all Israel. 10 Ish-Bosheth son of Saul was forty years old when he became king over Israel, and he reigned two years. The house of Judah, however, followed David. 11 The length of time David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months. 12 Abner son of Ner, together with the men of Ish-Bosheth son of Saul, left Mahanaim and went to Gibeon. 13 Joab son of Zeruiah and David's men went out and met them at the pool of Gibeon. One group sat down on one side of the pool and one group on the other side. 14 Then Abner said to Joab, "Let's have some of the young men get up and fight hand to hand in front of us." "All right, let them do it," Joab said. 15 So they stood up and were counted off — twelve men for Benjamin and Ish-Bosheth son of Saul, and twelve for David.***

**16 Then each man grabbed his opponent by the head and thrust his dagger into his opponent's side, and they fell down together. So that place in Gibeon was called Helkath Hazzurim.**

**17 The battle that day was very fierce, and Abner and the men of Israel were defeated by David's men.**

**18 The three sons of Zeruah were there: Joab, Abishai and Asahel. Now Asahel was as fleet-footed as a wild gazelle.**

**19 He chased Abner, turning neither to the right nor to the left as he pursued him.**

**20 Abner looked behind him and asked, "Is that you, Asahel?" "It is," he answered.**

**21 Then Abner said to him, "Turn aside to the right or to the left; take on one of the young men and strip him of his weapons." But Asahel would not stop chasing him.**

**22 Again Abner warned Asahel, "Stop chasing me! Why should I strike you down? How could I look your brother Joab in the face?"**

**23 But Asahel refused to give up the pursuit; so Abner thrust the butt of his spear into Asahel's stomach, and the spear came out through his back. He fell there and died on the spot. And every man stopped when he came to the place where Asahel had fallen and died.**

**24 But Joab and Abishai pursued Abner, and as the sun was setting, they came to the hill of Ammah, near Giah on the way to the wasteland of Gibeon.**

**25 Then the men of Benjamin rallied behind Abner. They formed themselves into a group and took their stand on top of a hill.**

**26 Abner called out to Joab, "Must the sword devour forever? Don't you realize that this will end in bitterness? How long before you order your men to stop pursuing their brothers?"**

**27 Joab answered, "As surely as God lives, if you had not spoken, the men would have continued the pursuit of their brothers until morning."**

**28 So Joab blew the trumpet, and all the men came to a halt; they no longer pursued Israel, nor did they fight anymore.**

**29 All that night Abner and his men marched through the Arabah. They crossed the Jordan, continued through the whole Bithron and came to Mahanaim.**

**30 Then Joab returned from pursuing Abner and assembled all his men. Besides Asahel, nineteen of David's men were found missing.**

**31 But David's men had killed three hundred and sixty Benjamites who were with Abner.**

**32 They took Asahel and buried him in his father's tomb at Bethlehem. Then Joab and his men marched all night and arrived at Hebron by daybreak.**

**3:1 The war between the house of Saul and the house of David lasted a long time. David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker.**

The tragedy recorded in these verses could have been avoided if the whole nation of Israel had turned to the Lord and asked for His guidance as to what to do after the defeat of the army and the death of King Saul. Had Samuel still been living it would never have come to this moment where the nation would be on the brink of civil war. God had declared earlier that Saul was no longer His representative, a king under God, ruling within the framework of a theocracy. Long before this moment, Samuel had announced to Saul: "You have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected

you as king over Israel!”<sup>14</sup> It may not have been possible for the nation as a whole to impeach Saul and demand his resignation, but the people could have turned to the Lord at the moment of Saul’s death and seek His will. It would have avoided the loss of life and brought the twelve tribes back together as the one family God intended them to be. As it was, clan relations dominated the issue of succession.

Abner was the son of Ner, Saul’s uncle.<sup>15</sup> As commander-in-chief of Saul’s army, Abner used his considerable power to put Ish-Bosheth on the throne, thus assuring his own position of leadership. According to *First Chronicles*, where his name is given as Esh-Baal, Ish-Bosheth was the fourth son of Saul.<sup>16</sup> *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on Abner and his act: “This hero had been present at the battle of Gilboa, and probably had rallied many of the defeated Israelites, and made as much resistance as was possible to the onward march of the Philistines. And as soon as he had effected his retreat into the region beyond the Jordan, his power would be supreme. There was no one there to oppose the commander-in-chief of what remained of Saul’s army. Certainly all that remained of Saul’s body guard of three thousand men would gather round Abner, and as the Philistines did not push their pursuit further than the Jordan, he was free to do as he chose. Nor would there be any opposition. Abner was bound to do his best for Saul’s family, and the people would feel this, and approve of his conduct in standing up for the children of their king. Moreover, David by his conduct had made himself an object of suspicion to all the valiant men who had formed Saul’s army, and these would be the more embittered against him by their defeat.”

There is a discrepancy between the length of David’s reign in Hebron and Ish-Bosheth’s reign over the rest of the nation; the one being seven years and the other two. To assume that Abner crowned Ish-Bosheth five years after David had been declared king over Judah does not seem a logical conclusion. There may be a copying error in the account.

*The Pulpit Commentary* asks the question and tries to answer it: “Where are we to place the five years and a half of difference? The usual assumption is that David was made King of Israel immediately upon Ishbosheth’s murder; but this is wrong. We cannot believe that Abner would allow so long a period as five years to elapse before asserting the claims of Saul’s family, especially as David was already made King of Judah at Hebron. Still, as the war with the Philistines was the first object of his care, and as some form of popular ratification was necessary, some months may have passed before Ishbosheth was publicly installed as king, though Abner must have acted in his name from the first. The main interval of five years before David’s accession must have been after Ishbosheth’s death. That murder, and still more so the murder of Abner, must have made David an object of great suspicion to all Israel. Shimei, when he called him ‘a bloody man’ (... 2 Samuel 16:8), was but uttering a slander commonly current among the people. Gradually most of them would become convinced of his innocence; and all, as they contrasted the anarchy which prevailed in their country with the peace and security won by David for Judah, would regard his election as the best course under the circumstances. As the Philistines immediately resented their action, and endeavored to crush the king before he could concentrate his power, it is probable that during these five

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<sup>14</sup> I Sam. 15:26

<sup>15</sup> I Sam. 14:50

<sup>16</sup> I Chron. 8:33; 9:39

years they had again obtained practical command of the more fertile districts of Palestine.”

Abner’s meeting with Joab gives the impression as if Abner tried to find a solution to the conflict by means of peaceful negotiations, but it may have been more for the purpose of bringing Judah under Ish-Bosheth’s rule. *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* comments: “When Abner had brought all Israel under the dominion of Ishbosheth, he also sought to make Judah subject to him, and went with this intention from Mahanaim to Gibeon, the present Jib, in the western portion of the tribe of Benjamin, two good hours to the north of Jerusalem (see at Josh 9:3), taking with him the servants, i.e., the fighting men, of Ishbosheth. There Joab, a son of Zeruiah, David’s sister (1 Chron 2:16), advanced to meet him with the servants, i.e., the warriors of David; and the two armies met at the pool of Gibeon, i.e., probably one of the large reservoirs that are still to be found there ... the one encamping upon the one side of the pool and the other upon the other.”

Abner and Joab met at the pool of Gibeon as representatives of the two factions of Israel, trying to come to an agreement. The cynical way in which the proposals were exchanged strikes us as despicable. Here are two army generals trying to decide the fate of their country by suggesting a duel. The honorable way to do so, if “honorable” is the right word in this context, would have been if the two leaders had fought together and let the outcome decided which direction the country would go. As it went they simply sat and watched as one dozen of one and one dozen of the other fought and massacred each other. There were evidently no survivors on either side, which made the whole setup into a cruel feat that could not even amuse the two generals. The place where this duel took place acquired the name “Helkath Hazzurim,” which according to a footnote in *The New International Version* means “field of daggers or field of hostilities.” *The Pulpit Commentary* describes the scene: “The absence of the verb in the original sets powerfully before us the rapidity of the whole action. But what an action! Twenty-four experienced men each take the other by the head, and, without any attempt at self-defense, thrust their swords into their opponents’ side, and leave their own sides exposed to a similar thrust. Were they, then, unskillful in the use of weapons? Impossible. Were they blinded by hatred of one another? But no rancor would make a man forget his skill in defense. Here there is no variety, no checkered fortune of the combatants, but all twenty-four do and suffer just the same; and it is remarkable that they had swords only, and no shields. With shields on their arms, they could not have seized one another by the hair. It seems certain, therefore, that this mutual butchery was the ‘play;’ nor can we conceive of a more murderous and savage proceeding. Abner, at the head of his fierce Benjamites, thought, perhaps, that Joab had no men among his followers willing to throw life away in so senseless a manner. But Joab was as ready as Abner, and possibly some code of false honor, such as used to make men practice dueling, required the acceptance of the challenge. And so, with their appetite for blood whetted by the sight of twenty-four murders, they hastened to begin the fight.”

The duel did not decide anything but served as a sign for the civil war to begin. The two armies rise up and the battle begins. Abner’s men take to flight and even Abner runs for his life being pursued by Joab’s younger brother Asahel of whom the Scriptures testify “Now Asahel was as fleet-footed as a wild gazelle.” Asahel was fast but he was naïf. He thought that outrunning Abner was all it would take to win the war. Abner had

scruples in killing Asahel because of the political fallout that would be the consequence. Abner knew that Joab would not rest until he had avenged the death of his brother on Abner. But since he was unwilling to let himself be killed by someone faster than he, he stopped abruptly and pierced the unsuspecting Asahel with the butt of his spear, thus killing him instantly. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: “The hinder end of the spear was pointed so that it might be stuck into the ground. This explains the fact that the spear passed through the body.”

Abner’s guilty conscience as well as the realization that his army was losing the battle made him ask Joab for a truce. This would make it look as if Joab had begun the war and that Abner had been dragged into it. Joab had probably not become aware of his brother’s death when he blew the trumpet to cease all hostilities.

The final score of casualties was twenty on the side Judah and three hundred sixty in Benjamin. Only the burial of Asahel is mentioned, probably because his death was the reason of Joab’s vengeance later in the story. The opening verse of chapter three makes us understand that there were frequent clashes between the two armies, details of which are not mentioned, but in which Joab defeated Abner’s men, weakening Ish-Bosheth’s position and strengthening David.

#### *vi. David’s sons and heirs 3:2-5*

***2 Sons were born to David in Hebron: His firstborn was Amnon the son of Ahinoam of Jezreel;***

***3 his second, Kileab the son of Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel; the third, Absalom the son of Maacah daughter of Talmai king of Geshur;***

***4 the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital;***

***5 and the sixth, Ithream the son of David’s wife Eglah. These were born to David in Hebron.***

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments: “Already during David’s reign at Hebron the state archives contained records of those who might qualify as heirs to his throne. Some born later in Jerusalem are listed in 2 Samuel 5:13-16 (cf. 1 Chr. 3:1-9). Michal does not feature, because she bore no children. David’s firstborn son is *Amnon*, whose death is recorded (2 Sam. 13:28-29) at the hand of the third line in succession, *Absalom*, who was born to the daughter of a northern king. Between them came *Chileab*, who in 1 Chronicles 3:1 is called Daniel; nothing more is said about him, and he disappears from the scene. Adonijah was to make a bid for the throne when his father was dying (1 Kgs 1:5-53); simply on the grounds of seniority, he had a claim. David was ensuring that, even at this early stage, he would have a son to succeed him as king, and his household of six wives was a sign of prestige. It is not clear why the last-named, *Eglah*, is singled out as *David’s wife*, as though the other five were not wives; probably nothing more than the avoidance of repeating the word ‘wife’ lied behind this.”

*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments on the birth of Absalom the son of Maacah daughter of Talmai king of Geshur: “This marriage with a foreign princess may have been prompted by the desire to secure an ally in the neighborhood of Ishbosheth’s capital.”

*vii. Abner defects to David 3:6-21*

**6** *During the war between the house of Saul and the house of David, Abner had been strengthening his own position in the house of Saul.*

**7** *Now Saul had had a concubine named Rizpah daughter of Aiah. And Ish-Bosheth said to Abner, "Why did you sleep with my father's concubine?"*

**8** *Abner was very angry because of what Ish-Bosheth said and he answered, "Am I a dog's head — on Judah's side? This very day I am loyal to the house of your father Saul and to his family and friends. I haven't handed you over to David. Yet now you accuse me of an offense involving this woman!"*

**9** *May God deal with Abner, be it ever so severely, if I do not do for David what the Lord promised him on oath*

**10** *and transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and establish David's throne over Israel and Judah from Dan to Beersheba."*

**11** *Ish-Bosheth did not dare to say another word to Abner, because he was afraid of him.*

**12** *Then Abner sent messengers on his behalf to say to David, "Whose land is it? Make an agreement with me, and I will help you bring all Israel over to you."*

**13** *"Good," said David. "I will make an agreement with you. But I demand one thing of you: Do not come into my presence unless you bring Michal daughter of Saul when you come to see me."*

**14** *Then David sent messengers to Ish-Bosheth son of Saul, demanding, "Give me my wife Michal, whom I betrothed to myself for the price of a hundred Philistine foreskins."*

**15** *So Ish-Bosheth gave orders and had her taken away from her husband Paltiel son of Laish.*

**16** *Her husband, however, went with her, weeping behind her all the way to Bahurim. Then Abner said to him, "Go back home!" So he went back.*

**17** *Abner conferred with the elders of Israel and said, "For some time you have wanted to make David your king.*

**18** *Now do it! For the Lord promised David, 'By my servant David I will rescue my people Israel from the hand of the Philistines and from the hand of all their enemies.'"*

**19** *Abner also spoke to the Benjamites in person. Then he went to Hebron to tell David everything that Israel and the whole house of Benjamin wanted to do.*

**20** *When Abner, who had twenty men with him, came to David at Hebron, David prepared a feast for him and his men.*

**21** *Then Abner said to David, "Let me go at once and assemble all Israel for my lord the king, so that they may make a compact with you, and that you may rule over all that your heart desires." So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace.*

Although Abner had lost several skirmishes, he had managed to strengthen his own position in Ish-Bosheth's court to the point that he considered himself to be above the law. There are several factors that contributed to the fulfillment of God's promise to David that he would be king over all of Israel. From the divine side there had been the anointing and the promise. That in itself ought to have been enough for the whole nation to wake up to after the death of Saul. Had the elders of Israel sought the Lord after the

defeat of the army and the death of their king, the Lord would have told them what steps to take. But that is not the way it went. The way chosen was through political intrigue and demonstrations of military superiority. Both Judah and Israel were virtually ruled by their generals who had the army to back up their commands. It is true that David was stronger and more mature than Ish-Bosheth, but David could not control Joab more than Ish-Bosheth could control Abner. The way God's plan was realized for Israel as one nation was probably not the way God had intended it to be realized. It is obvious that God needed no military or political intrigues for the accomplishment of His will. The only thing He needs is open hearts and obedience. When that road appeared to be blocked, God's will was done by means of sinful behavior, corruption of power and political intrigue, none of which bring glory to God except for the outcome. It is possible to do the will of the Lord without bringing glory to the Lord.

Abner was in reality the strong man in the northern tribes. Ish-Bosheth was merely the puppet king. He had no power and only ruled by the grace of Abner. It is also true that David's power depended heavily on Joab's leadership of the army. Joab was an unscrupulous character, but the focus of all his efforts was the wellbeing of David. Among the other tribes Ish-Bosheth merely served to boost the power of Abner. Neither David nor Ish-Bosheth were ever able to divest themselves of their corrupt generals.

Abner had entered into an illegitimate relationship with one of Saul's former concubines, Rizpah daughter of Aiah. Far from this being an innocent matter the gesture amounted to a claim to royal power. That was the way Solomon interpreted the efforts of his half-brother Adonijah to marry Abishag who had served David later in life, although not as a concubine.<sup>17</sup> The fallout of such affairs was always political.

Vv.8-11 describe well the arrogance of Abner as well as his attitude toward his king and toward God. He was aware of the prophecy about David as the new king of Israel. Although he knew the will of God, he chose to ignore it because it threatened his own position of power in Israel. Abner saw himself as the only power in Ish-Bosheth's kingdom. He evidently believed that if he handed Ish-Bosheth over to David, David would put Ish-Bosheth to death as his rival. His answer to Ish-Bosheth is a threat against the king's life. He could threaten his king because he knew that Ish-Bosheth had no power to do anything about that. He must also have believed that he could manipulate God also.

"Am I a dog's head — on Judah's side?" is an expression that means: "Do you consider me to be a traitor for Judah?" Having said that, he turns out to be the traitor he denies to be. The words "May God deal with Abner, be it ever so severely, if I do not do for David what the Lord promised him on oath" are some of the most blasphemous in all of Scripture. Abner believed that God depended on him to fulfill what He had promised on oath to David.

Abner is no less arrogant in the message he sent to David: "Whose land is it? Make an agreement with me, and I will help you bring all Israel over to you." Abner considered himself to be the real power in all of Israel, including Judah. Evidently, he believed that David would reward him handsomely by making him commander-in-chief of the army instead of Joab. He may have had revenge upon Joab in mind in making his offer to David. Abner may have understood that David was as much in the power of Joab as Ish-Bosheth was in his.

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<sup>17</sup> 1 Kings 2:22-25

We may be amazed that David lowered himself to consent entering into negotiations with Abner. He had God's promise to the throne and he could have waited upon the Lord for the fulfillment of that promise. But David was in a hurry and he saw in Abner's proposal a chance that was too good to let go. His feelings for his first wife, Michal, may have had something to do with it also.

Joyce G. Baldwin in 1 and 2 Samuel writes: "David was not caught off guard by the messengers Abner sent to him. He was being invited to enter into a covenant with a man who was betraying his master, and was claimed to have the power to bring over all Israel to David. Such a ruthless leader threatened to be a rival to David in future. For this reason David had his conditions ready: bring first Michal, Saul's daughter. He had fought for her (1 Sam. 18:27), she had been given to him in marriage, and, though she had been given to another man, he had the right to demand her return. It was a shrewd political move, because the presence of Saul's daughter as his wife would give to David a strong claim to the throne of Saul, while a son would unite the two houses, but it was also a bold move to approach the reigning king direct with such a request. David had read the situation aright: he was not rebuffed. Ishbosheth, flattered perhaps to have been given his royal status instead of having the usual intervention of Abner, complied and arranged for Michal to be escorted to David."

*The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "Besides David's affection for Michal, there were political reasons for demanding her restoration. Saul's despotic act in giving her in marriage to another man (... 1 Samuel 25:44) had been a public disavowal of David as the son-in-law of the royal house, and equivalent to a proclamation of outlawry. David's rights were all declared null by such an act. But now Ishbosheth must with equal publicity reverse his father's deed, and restore to David his lost position. It must have been a most painful humiliation to him to be driven thus to cancel his father's decree, and declare thereby to all Israel that he was unable to refuse his assent to whatever his rival demanded. And for this reason David sent his messengers directly to Ishbosheth, because the importance of Michal's surrender to him lay in its being a public act of the state."

*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments on this: "The return of Michal has been viewed by some as a political move to enlist the support of the Benjamites. By others it is taken as a sign of David's undying affection for his first wife. According to the law of Deut 24:1-4, David could not legitimately receive back his wife after her marriage to Paltiel. Jewish commentators explain that David had fled from Saul's home on the night of his marriage. Others say that Paltiel's marriage with Michal was never consummated. The latter seems very unlikely in the light of verse 16."

The law stated: "If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the Lord. Do not bring sin upon the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance."<sup>18</sup> This, however, does not completely cover the problem at hand. David never repudiated Michal. She was taken from him against his will and probably against hers also.

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<sup>18</sup> Deut. 24:1-4

In trying to make his deal with the northern tribes of Israel, Abner sounds very pious, referring both to the elders' desire to crown David king and to God's prophecy that David would be the one to settle the problem with the Philistines and their claims upon Israel's territory. Neither of these claims can be substantiated by other scripture references. If Abner were honest in making these statements one wonders why he had bothered to elevate Ish-Bosheth to the throne to begin with. Being a clever politician Abner seems to always have had the right word at the right place.

*The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* makes the following astute observation about Abner's dealing with the matter: "Abner had communication with the elders of Israel. He spoke the truth in impressing their minds with the well-known fact of David's divine designation to the kingdom. But he acted a base and hypocritical part in pretending that his present movement was prompted by religious motives, when it sprang entirely from malice and revenge against Ish-bosheth. The particular appeal to the Benjamites was a necessary policy: their tribe enjoyed the honor of giving birth to the royal dynasty of Saul, and they would naturally be disinclined to lose that prestige. They were, besides, a determined people, whose contiguity to Judah might render them troublesome and dangerous. The enlistment of their interest, therefore, in the scheme would smooth the way for the adhesion of the other tribes; and Abner enjoyed the most convenient opportunity of using his great influence in gaining over that tribe while escorting Michal to David with a suitable equipage. The mission enabled him to cover his treacherous designs against his master-to draw the attention of the elders and people to David as uniting in himself the double recommendation of being the nominee of Yahweh, no less than a connection of the royal house of Saul, and, without suspicion of any dishonorable motive, to advocate the policy of terminating the civil discord, by bestowing the sovereignty on the husband of Michal. In the same character of public ambassador he was received and feted by David; and while, ostensibly, the restoration of Michal was the sole object of his visit, he busily employed himself in making private overtures to David for bringing over to his cause those tribes which he had artfully seduced. Abner pursued a course unworthy of an honorable man; and though his offer was accepted by David, the guilt and infamy of the transaction were exclusively his." The commentators' conclusion that David was completely clean of all objectionable transactions may be considered to be somewhat hasty.

Humanly speaking David owed Abner a lot. In his dealings with the general he achieved what otherwise could only have been accomplished supernaturally. In stating this we become aware of the fact that the way David handled this was not God's chosen way. God would have given David what he had promised if David had waited for the Lord.

***ix. The death of Abner 3:22-39***

***22 Just then David's men and Joab returned from a raid and brought with them a great deal of plunder. But Abner was no longer with David in Hebron, because David had sent him away, and he had gone in peace.***

***23 When Joab and all the soldiers with him arrived, he was told that Abner son of Ner had come to the king and that the king had sent him away and that he had gone in peace.***

**24 So Joab went to the king and said, "What have you done? Look, Abner came to you. Why did you let him go? Now he is gone!"**

**25 You know Abner son of Ner; he came to deceive you and observe your movements and find out everything you are doing."**

**26 Joab then left David and sent messengers after Abner, and they brought him back from the well of Sirah. But David did not know it.**

**27 Now when Abner returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside into the gateway, as though to speak with him privately. And there, to avenge the blood of his brother Asahel, Joab stabbed him in the stomach, and he died.**

**28 Later, when David heard about this, he said, "I and my kingdom are forever innocent before the Lord concerning the blood of Abner son of Ner.**

**29 May his blood fall upon the head of Joab and upon all his father's house! May Joab's house never be without someone who has a running sore or leprosy or who leans on a crutch or who falls by the sword or who lacks food."**

**30 (Joab and his brother Abishai murdered Abner because he had killed their brother Asahel in the battle at Gibeon.)**

**31 Then David said to Joab and all the people with him, "Tear your clothes and put on sackcloth and walk in mourning in front of Abner." King David himself walked behind the bier.**

**32 They buried Abner in Hebron, and the king wept aloud at Abner's tomb. All the people wept also.**

**33 The king sang this lament for Abner: "Should Abner have died as the lawless die?**

**34 Your hands were not bound, your feet were not fettered. You fell as one falls before wicked men." And all the people wept over him again.**

**35 Then they all came and urged David to eat something while it was still day; but David took an oath, saying, "May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if I taste bread or anything else before the sun sets!"**

**36 All the people took note and were pleased; indeed, everything the king did pleased them.**

**37 So on that day all the people and all Israel knew that the king had no part in the murder of Abner son of Ner.**

**38 Then the king said to his men, "Do you not realize that a prince and a great man has fallen in Israel this day?**

**39 And today, though I am the anointed king, I am weak, and these sons of Zeruiah are too strong for me. May the Lord repay the evildoer according to his evil deeds!"**

Several things that happen in this chapter are a combination of sincere indignation and political motivation. We understand, at least partly, Joab's feelings toward Abner for killing Asahel. Joab may not have known that Abner had done this in self-defense. In a way Asahel's death was his own fault. Abner had given Asahel ample warning. Joab's distrust of Abner may have been correct. In bringing all Israel under David's rule Abner was working out his personal program. He probably wanted to replace Joab. But Abner's fidelity to David would never have equaled Joab's unflinching loyalty to his monarch. After all, if Abner could betray Ish-Bosheth, what guarantee was there that he would not betray David when that would be advantageous to Abner's cause? Whether the real

reason for Abner's coming to David was "to deceive you and observe your movements and find out everything you are doing," as Joab put it, is very doubtful.

Joab's murder of Abner was premeditated and David ought to have ordered Joab's execution. The fact that he did not act according to the Word of God at this time bound him to Joab for the rest of his life. David must have thought that he would lose his whole army if Joab were removed. But Joab's murder of Abner could have cost David all the tribes of Israel with the exception of Judah.

Joab had one more reason for wanting to get Abner out of the way. He wanted to remain the commander-in-chief of the king's army and Abner would be a serious rival if he would stay at David's court. We will see later that Joab tolerated no competition. When David appointed Amasa to replace Joab, Joab assassinated him in the same way he killed Abner.<sup>19</sup>

*The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comment here: "Joab's knowledge of Abner's wily character might have led him to doubt the sincerity of that person's proposals, and to disapprove the policy of relying on his fidelity. But undoubtedly there were other reasons of a private and personal nature which made Joab displeased and alarmed by the reception given to Abner. The military talents of that general, his popularity with the army, his influence throughout the nation, rendered him a formidable rival; and in the event of his overtures being carried out, the important service of bringing over all the other tribes to the king of Judah would establish so strong a claim on the gratitude of David, that his accession would inevitably raise a serious obstacle to the ambition of Joab. To these considerations was added the remembrance of the blood feud that existed between them since the death of his brother Asahel (2 Sam 2:23). Determined, therefore, to get Abner out of the way, Joab feigned some reason, probably in the king's name, for recalling him 'from the well of Sirah,' probably Ayun Derwa, about three miles from Hebron, and going out to meet him, stabbed him unawares; not within Hebron, because it was a city of refuge, but at a noted well in the neighbourhood."

Instead of ordering Joab's execution, David resorted to putting a curse on Joab and his family. He may have relieved Joab, at least temporarily of his position as commander-in-chief, because we read later that Joab was reinstated after the capture of Jerusalem.<sup>20</sup> David invoked upon Joab's family a curse of sickness, infirmity and hunger, which never seems to have touched the general personally. It is, however, more painful to be punished in one's children than to take the brunt of guilt upon oneself. When Noah cursed Ham, he cursed him in his children, saying "Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers."<sup>21</sup>

V.30 states in parenthesis: "(Joab and his brother Abishai murdered Abner because he had killed their brother Asahel in the battle at Gibeon.)" Abishai is not mentioned as the one committing the act, but he may have known about Joab's plan and thus became an accomplice. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "This curse of David is regarded in the Talmud ... as very sinful."

Although Joab was not hit personally by David's curse, he was given a demeaning role to play during the funeral procession. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel* reports: "David put Joab in his place by ordering him to take part in the official mourning for

<sup>19</sup> II Sam. 20:9

<sup>20</sup> See I Chron. 11:6.

<sup>21</sup> Gen. 9:25

Abner. Since he was the cause of the death, it was out of keeping that he should wear *sackcloth* as though he grieved for the loss of this man. The anomaly would not be missed by the crowds, who would see that David had not condoned the action of his general. David's desire to honor the memory of Abner was displayed by his place as first mourner in the funeral procession, by the fact that he led the expressions of grief, and by the poem he composed for the occasion. In this lament David displayed once more his originality as a poet. In the brief compass of four lines, he captures the pathos of the untimely death by likening it to the execution of a criminal. There is a correspondence of form and content between lines 1 and 4, 2 and 3, making an aesthetically satisfying pattern of thought (a, b, b, a) which conveys all that needs to be said. *Should Abner die as a fool dies?* The great man with so much potential had died like a fool in the sense that the Bible uses the word: like a rebel against God and his law, hence 'the lawless' (NIV). He had been put to death like a criminal, yet he was nothing of the sort. Addressing him directly, David declared Abner's freedom from handcuffs and chains: a free man, he fell *as one fall before the wicked*, a direct reference to Joab, yet refraining from calling him a murderer."

*The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "The excuse of the blood feud made it impossible for David to punish Joab further than by depriving him of his command; but he made him condemn his own deed by taking part in the public mourning for the man he had murdered. This mourning consisted in going in solemn procession, clad in sackcloth, before Abner's body, carried on a bier to the grave, while David followed as chief mourner; and the emphatic way in which he is called *King David* suggests the thought that he went in royal state, so as to give all possible dignity to the funeral. His tears and lamentations with uplifted voice were so genuine and hearty as to move the people to a similar outburst of grief. But while all those at Hebron had proof that David was innocent, the people generally would know only that, when Abner was escorting the king's wife back to him, and arranging for his election to rule over all Israel, he was treacherously murdered at the gate of Hebron by one who was chief over David's army and also his nephew." The suggestion by *The Pulpit Commentary* that Joab had the right of the avenger of Asahel's death does not seem to be justified, since Abner's killing of Asahel was during a war.

Undoubtedly, David felt genuine regret for Abner's death, which he expressed in the way the funeral was organized, but there was also a strong political element in this demonstration of grief. David wanted the tribes, which Abner had endeavored to bring under David's control, to understand that Abner's death had not been part of David's dealing with their general. David had not had any hidden program in his negotiations with Abner. Had David ordered Joab's execution for the crime he had committed, he would have been totally above suspicion; but David was not ready to go that far. He felt he lacked the power to do that at this point. But that did not make it right.

Personally, David went as far as he felt he could go in expressing public grief by fasting for the remainder of the day. In doing so he demonstrated clearly that he had not been involved in the murder of Abner. This met with the approval of the population and cleared David's name among them. David's public announcement admitting his lack of power in the face of "these sons of Zeruah" contains a suggestion that Abner may have been a candidate for the leadership of the army. However sincere these words may sound, they are all politically motivated. David felt he needed the army to keep him on the

throne. At this point David looked more down and around for affirmation than up to the One who had anointed him.

**ix. The downfall of Saul's house 4:1-12**

**1 When Ish-Bosheth son of Saul heard that Abner had died in Hebron, he lost courage, and all Israel became alarmed.**

**2 Now Saul's son had two men who were leaders of raiding bands. One was named Baanah and the other Recab; they were sons of Rimmon the Beerothite from the tribe of Benjamin-Beeroth is considered part of Benjamin,**

**3 because the people of Beeroth fled to Gittaim and have lived there as aliens to this day.**

**4 (Jonathan son of Saul had a son who was lame in both feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel. His nurse picked him up and fled, but as she hurried to leave, he fell and became crippled. His name was Mephibosheth.)**

**5 Now Recab and Baanah, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, set out for the house of Ish-Bosheth, and they arrived there in the heat of the day while he was taking his noonday rest.**

**6 They went into the inner part of the house as if to get some wheat, and they stabbed him in the stomach. Then Recab and his brother Baanah slipped away.**

**7 They had gone into the house while he was lying on the bed in his bedroom. After they stabbed and killed him, they cut off his head. Taking it with them, they traveled all night by way of the Arabah.**

**8 They brought the head of Ish-Bosheth to David at Hebron and said to the king, "Here is the head of Ish-Bosheth son of Saul, your enemy, who tried to take your life. This day the Lord has avenged my lord the king against Saul and his offspring."**

**9 David answered Recab and his brother Baanah, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, "As surely as the Lord lives, who has delivered me out of all trouble,**

**10 when a man told me, 'Saul is dead,' and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and put him to death in Ziklag. That was the reward I gave him for his news!**

**11 How much more — when wicked men have killed an innocent man in his own house and on his own bed — should I not now demand his blood from your hand and rid the earth of you!"**

**12 So David gave an order to his men, and they killed them. They cut off their hands and feet and hung the bodies by the pool in Hebron. But they took the head of Ish-Bosheth and buried it in Abner's tomb at Hebron.**

V.1 reads literally in the Hebrew text: "And when Saul's son heard that Abner was dead in Hebron, his hands were feeble, and all the Israelites were troubled." The idea seems to be that he felt paralyzed. Abner had been his only strength and now he was gone. Whether Ish-Bosheth knew that Abner had planned to bring the rest of the nation under David's rule is not clear. If he knew, he expected David to come and kill him.

*The Pulpit Commentary* comments on Israel's anxiety: "Their trouble was caused rather by uncertainty than by fear. Abner's plans had fallen through, and the fact of his

murder threw grave suspicions on David. Had he now attacked Israel, the chiefs would most probably have stood loyally by Saul's house. But he did nothing, and his innocence slowly but gradually was made clear. They were thus in a state of suspense, and waiting till some brave man arose to lead them to a decision. Unfortunately, a fresh crime threw everything back into hopeless confusion." The fact that Ish-Bosheth, at this point, is referred to as "Saul's son," instead of "king" may be significant, indicating that no one considered him to be the ruler any more.

The two men who assassinated Ish-Bosheth, Baanah and Recab, are called Beerothites. They may have belonged to the Gibeonites who were spared by Joshua and the Israelites during the conquest of Canaan because of the ruse they used in telling Joshua that they were from far away and wanted to enter into a covenant with the Israelites.<sup>22</sup> Saul had broken that historic covenant by killing some of the Gibeonites, as we will see later. *Barnes' Notes* comments: "From Josh 9:17, it might have been expected that the population of Beeroth would be Canaanite. But from some unknown cause the Canaanite inhabitants of Beeroth had fled to Gittaim-perhaps the same as Gath-and continued there as sojourners. If this flight of the Beerothites took place at the time of Saul's cruel attack upon the Gibeonites (2 Sam 21:1-2), Baanah and Rehab may have been native Beerothites, and have been instigated to murder the son of Saul by a desire to avenge the blood of their countrymen. The fact of their being reckoned as Benjamites is quite compatible with their being Canaanites by blood."

So the Beerothites may have had their personal reasons for killing Ish-Bosheth. But they also saw an opportunity to get into the good graces of David and probably earn a reward by killing his rival. Little they must have known or understood of David's way of dealing with Saul as the anointed of the Lord.

There does not seem to be much reason for the interruption of the story in v.4 by mentioning what happened to Jonathan's son Mephibosheth, unless, as *The Pulpit Commentary* observes, "This is mentioned to show that Saul's lineage virtually became extinct on Ishbosheth's death. Mephibosheth, the heir, was a cripple, and physically incapable of reigning. Saul had, indeed, sons by a concubine, and grandchildren by his daughter Merab (... 2 Samuel 21:8). But throughout the history there is no hint that any of these were regarded as the representatives of Saul's house."

Baanah and Recab entered Ish-Bosheth's house and bedroom as his majesty was taking a nap and they killed him in cold blood, cutting off his head and taking it to David as a trophy. Their act may indicate that they assumed that David had been involved in the murder of Abner and that, consequently, he would welcome the murder of Ish-Bosheth also.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel* comments on the incident: "Ishbosheth appears to have had no suspicion that he might have traitors among his troops. The easy access these two men had to the person of the king is astonishing; even an ordinary household could be expected to be more security-conscious, especially during the afternoon rest hour. There are textual differences concerning the details. In verse 6 the RSV follows the LXX, whereas the AV, RV and NIV, following the Hebrew, make no mention of the sleeping doorkeeper. They went into the inner part of the house as if to get some wheat, and they stabbed him ...' (NIV). The NIV makes good sense of the following verse by making it explanatory: 'They had gone into the house ... After they

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<sup>22</sup> See Josh.9:3-26.

stabbed and killed him, they cut off his head.’ Even so, the text does appear repetitive, though Hebrew style favors such expansive additions. The motive for the murder is obscure, unless it was to curry favor with David, who was clearly going to be king of all Israel. The two men hastened to carry their trophy, dead Ishbosheth’s head, to David at Hebron, traveling by way of *Arabah*, the dry rift valley of the Jordan and Dead Sea, to avoid meeting other travelers. Their claim *The Lord has avenged my lord the king*, was presuming on God’s approval of their deed, as though they had acted on the Lord’s express orders.” As is clear from our previous comments, the motive for the murder seems to have been clear as day.”

The audience of the two men at David’s court went quite differently from what they expected. They counted on a warm welcome and expressions of gratitude. What they received was the death sentence as a reward for their cold-blooded murder. When David had the Amalekite killed who reported to him that he had killed Saul, David had no proof; but the head of Ish-Bosheth left no doubt about the murder these two Beerothites had committed.

The cutting off of these men’s limbs seems to be somewhat excessive. But, as *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: “The exposure of the mutilated remains was intended as not only a punishment of their crime, but also the attestation of David’s abhorrence.”

*The Pulpit Commentary* comments on this: “This was not intended for the purpose of mutilation, but to carry out an Eastern idea of retaliation. The hands were cut off because they had committed the murder; the feet, because they had brought the head to Hebron. Still, David was violating the spirit of the Mosaic Law. It ordered that the body of a man who had been put to death should be buried the same day (... Deuteronomy 21:23). In the face of this humane enactment, it is wonderful that the laws of Christian countries should have allowed the mutilation of the bodies of traitors, and the hanging on gibbets of criminals convicted of smaller crimes. Remembering, therefore, the customs of our fathers, we must not blame David much for suspending the hands and feet of these murderers at the pool of Hebron, that all, when coming for water, might know of their punishment. The head of Ishbosheth was honorably buried in Abner’s grave (... 2 Samuel 3:32).” No explanation is given as to why Ish-Bosheth’s head was not interred in the grave of his father. There may have been a symbolic demonstration of the fact that Ish-Bosheth had never been the legal heir of Saul’s throne; that his reign had mainly been Abner’s idea.

## **b. David king over all Israel 5:1 – 9:13**

### ***i. David’s covenant with Israel 5:1-5***

***1 All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, "We are your own flesh and blood.***

***2 In the past, while Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel on their military campaigns. And the Lord said to you, ‘You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler.’”***

***3 When all the elders of Israel had come to King David at Hebron, the king made a compact with them at Hebron before the Lord, and they anointed David king over Israel.***

**4 David was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years.**

**5 In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years.**

God's choice of David as king over Israel had been a well-known fact for decades among the Israelites. It seems strange to us that it took the remaining tribes so long before they came to David and accepted that which had been known to be the will of God for the country. In the parallel passage of *First Chronicles*, the phrase "as the Lord had promised through Samuel" is added to the text.<sup>23</sup> *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes correctly: "The deputies introduced the subject of their embassy in a somewhat singular, though, in the circumstances, not unnatural, manner. Their language points to the past course both of David's conduct and of their own experience. The alliance of David with the Philistines had raised so painful a suspicion respecting his patriotic attachment to Israel, and his protracted residence, within the Philistine territory had led to so widespread a belief that he had become a naturalized Philistine, as to have created powerful obstacles to the universal recognition of his claims to the throne. The people of Israel had to a large extent taken up this impression, and acted in opposition to him as a supposed alien. But time, as well as the tenor of David's administration in Judah, had dispelled their doubts, and proved him to their satisfaction to be in heart and soul an Israelite; so that they (the representatives of the people) had come to offer him the kingdom, conformably to that statute of the divine law (Deut 27:15) which required that 'one from among their brethren' should be set up king over them."

*The Pulpit Commentary* has a lengthy comment on the phrase *Then came all the tribes of Israel*, of which we copy the following: "As Ishbosheth reigned only two years, and David's reign at Hebron lasted for seven years and a half, there is an interval of more than five years to be accounted for; and we have given reason for believing ... that it must be placed after the death of Ishbosheth. The treacherous murder of Abner, and the tragic fate of Ishbosheth following upon it so rapidly, must have filled all Israel with horror, and made them look upon David as 'a bloody man' (... 2 Samuel 16:8). But gradually his innocence became clear to all except inveterate partisans, and as the prejudice against him passed away, the evident advantage of union under so able a ruler would force itself upon their attention, and their decision would be hastened by the advantage which the Philistines would be sure to take of their anarchy. How much they had profited by it we gather from the haste with which they endeavored to crush David's kingdom. The enormous gathering at Hebron to anoint David king proves not merely the unanimity of the tribes, but that his election was the result of long preparation and arrangement. We have fuller details of it in ... 1 Chronicles 12:23-40, where we learn that the people assembled in large numbers, the total being computed in the 'Speaker's Commentary' at 348,222; and it is remarkable that of this vast array only sixteen thousand nine hundred came from the tribes of Judah, Simeon, and Benjamin, which were situated in the neighbourhood of Hebron. On the other hand, the two and a half trans-Jordanic tribes sent no less than a hundred and twenty thousand men, and the three unimportant tribes of Zebulun, Asher, and Naphtali mustered a hundred and eighteen thousand; while Issachar was content to send only two hundred, who were all, however, 'men that had understanding... and their brethren were at their commandment.' These

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<sup>23</sup> 1 Chron. 11:1-3

words suggest the probable explanation of the disparity in the numbers, which to many seems so strange that they think they must be corrupt. Each tribe settled for itself in what way it would be represented, and the more distant sent a large proportion of their men of military age on what would be an enjoyable holiday. As they spent three days at Hebron, the expedition would occupy, even for those most remote, little more than a week; and it was well worth the while of the tribes thus to come together. It made them feel the value of unity, and gave them a knowledge of their strength. Their tribal independence during the time of the judges had made them too weak even to maintain their liberty; but now, welded by the kingly power into a nation, they soon, not only won freedom for themselves, but placed their yoke upon the shoulders of their neighbors. As for the difficulty of supplying them with food, all would bring victuals from home; and the neighboring tribes showed great hospitality. Especially we read that those who were nigh unto Hebron, ‘even as far as Issachar and Zebulun and Naphtali, brought bread on asses, and on camels, and on mules, and on oxen, victual of meal, cakes of figs, and clusters of raisins, and wine, and oil, and oxen, and sheep in abundance: for there was joy in Israel’ (... 1 Chronicles 12:40). It was a grand national festival, joyously kept because the people saw in the election of David an end to all their troubles; and so vast a gathering overbore all opposition, and gave both to them and their king the consciousness of their might. But while we find in the Book of Chronicles the account of this mighty multitude, it is here (ver. 3) expressly said that it was the elders who made a league with David, and anointed him king. The people by their presence testified their joyful assent to what was done; but David’s election was made legitimate by the decision of the constituted authorities in each tribe ... The manner of his election throws no light upon his character, and is passed over. Enough to know that in those five years after Ishbosheth’s murder David won the approval of all Israel, and that his appointment to the kingdom was by the free choice of the tribes, acting in a legitimate manner, and sending each their elders to Hebron to notify to David their consent; and that their decision was ratified by this joyful gathering of a mighty multitude from all parts of the land. Three reasons are given by the elders for David’s election, and we may be sure that they represent the arguments used in their popular assemblies. The first, that they were David’s bone and flesh. In other words, the tribes were all of one race, and united by the closest ties of relationship. For the descendants of a common ancestor to be at war with one another was both morally and politically wrong. The second, that David had been their actual leader in war even in Saul’s time. His personal qualities, therefore, justified their choice of him to be their deliverer from the evils which had overwhelmed the land after the disastrous defeat at Gilboa, when Saul had no longer the aid of David’s presence. The third, that Jehovah had by the mouth of his prophet given the throne to David. It is remarkable that the elders place this last. Their view probably was that the Divine command must be proved by outward circumstances, that so reason might confirm faith. So Saul’s public appointment by Samuel was ratified by the people only after he had shown himself worthy to be a king by the defeat of the Ammonites.”

David’s coronation has often been seen as a model and foreshadowing of the kingship of Christ. As the Apostle Paul proclaims: “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue

confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”<sup>24</sup> And “For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.”<sup>25</sup> David himself refers to this in one of his messianic psalms, saying: “You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery. Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him.”<sup>26</sup>

***ii. David makes Jerusalem his city 5:6-16***

***6 The king and his men marched to Jerusalem to attack the Jebusites, who lived there. The Jebusites said to David, "You will not get in here; even the blind and the lame can ward you off." They thought, "David cannot get in here."***

***7 Nevertheless, David captured the fortress of Zion, the City of David.***

***8 On that day, David said, "Anyone who conquers the Jebusites will have to use the water shaft to reach those 'lame and blind' who are David's enemies." That is why they say, "The 'blind and lame' will not enter the palace."***

***9 David then took up residence in the fortress and called it the City of David. He built up the area around it, from the supporting terraces inward.***

***10 And he became more and more powerful, because the Lord God Almighty was with him.***

***11 Now Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, along with cedar logs and carpenters and stonemasons, and they built a palace for David.***

***12 And David knew that the Lord had established him as king over Israel and had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel.***

***13 After he left Hebron, David took more concubines and wives in Jerusalem, and more sons and daughters were born to him.***

***14 These are the names of the children born to him there: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon,***

***15 Ibhar, Elishua, Nepheg, Japhia,***

***16 Elishama, Eliada and Eliphelet.***

The hesitation of the tribes of Israel to come and crown David as their king may be seen as an indication of a lack of unity and cohesion among them. Instead of considering themselves to be one nation under God, they had lived as twelve separated fiefdoms that ruled themselves and lived more or less independent from one another. The last verse of *The Book of Judges*, which runs as a theme through the latter part of the book, “In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit,”<sup>27</sup> describes their mentality rather well.

The city of Jerusalem, which was like an unyielding pocket of remaining old Canaanite conditions, having never been conquered by Israel, divided the land in two, symbolizing the lack of unity between the south and the north. David showed good

<sup>24</sup> Phil. 2:9-11

<sup>25</sup> I Cor. 15:25

<sup>26</sup> Ps. 2:9-12

<sup>27</sup> Judg. 21:25

strategic insight in wanting to conquer the city. If Jerusalem could be made the capital of the land it would become the key of unity among the tribes.

But Jerusalem seemed to be impregnable. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, writes: “The Jebusite defenders of the city considered themselves impregnable, *You will not come in here*. The wedge-shaped site consisted of a ridge, rising towards the north, with a slope on the west towards the Tyropoeon valley, and an even steeper and longer slope down on the eastern side to the Kidron. A city wall of heavy stones protected the citadel, and from the top stones could easily be rained down on attackers, even by *the blind and the lame*. As we might say, it was child’s play.”

As the name Jerusalem consisted of a combination of Jebus and Salem, the Jebusites must have been the original inhabitants of the place.

*The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary*, copying from Josephus’ *Jewish Wars*, comments: “‘The first expedition of David, as king of the whole country, was directed against this place, which had hitherto remained in the hands of the natives. The circumjacent country was barren and uninviting, so that the Hebrews had hitherto made no exertions to dislodge the inhabitants of the land.’ But now that the divided tribes of Israel were to be united under one monarchy into a compacted nation, it was necessary to fix the seat of government at a place more northerly than Hebron, as central as could be attained, and withal not too far removed from Judah. Jerusalem, with the sight of which, as visible from the ridge fronting Bethlehem, he must have been familiar from his earliest years, appeared to the discerning eye of David to combine the military advantage of a strong position with that of convenient communications with all parts of the kingdom, not only for political, but for religious objects. God had distinctly intimated His will that there should be a central place for national worship; and therefore we may reasonably believe that he who had consulted the divine oracle with reference to his repairing to Hebron, would not neglect to make similar inquiry in this more important case of choosing Jerusalem as the future metropolis. Accordingly, having obtained, as we may presume, the Lord’s approval of the site chosen, David made it the first act of his policy, after he became king of Israel, to acquire possession of that fortress. Jerusalem was thought to be so much in the midst of the countries and nations around (Ezek 5:5), that it was called literally, ‘the navel of the earth’.”

Some Bible scholars believe that the statement of the Jebusites that “the lame and blind” would ward off David refers to the brass idol statues that were buried in the foundations of the city as a form of protection against the assaulting enemy. That would give more meaning to the fact that David had an aversion to “the lame and blind.”

David circumvented the strong walls that defended the city by means of superstitious idolatry, but sending his troops through the water conducts that led into the city, much in the same way as Adolph Hitler circumvented the French Maginot Line by sending his troops around it in World War II. But there is some uncertainty in the Hebrew text, about which Joyce G. Baldwin states in *1 and 2 Samuel*: “Unfortunately there are uncertainties as to the exact meaning of the text here. The RSV interprets the challenge as *get up the water shaft* (Heb. *šinnor*), an ancient and attractive translation, which makes good sense because there were natural channels in the limestone rock through which it could have been feasible to enter the city, but the word is rare and occurs elsewhere in Scripture only in Psalm 42:7, where it is translated ‘cataracts.’ The NEB’s ‘let him use his grappling-iron’ (cf. NIV mg., ‘use scaling hooks’) is based on the LXX ‘dagger.’ A

recent scholar has claimed that ‘the *ṣinnor* should be understood as the fortress.’ The traditional understanding, ‘water channel,’ remains possible, and is perhaps the most likely translation. The verb translated ‘get up’ (Heb. *nāga’b*) usually means ‘to touch’; this interpretation requires therefore what S. R. Driver called ‘a questionable paraphrase.’ Nevertheless the verb has the meaning ‘assault’ in 2 Samuel 14:10. The situation called for an unusual activity, so we should not be surprised at an unusual use of words, but the fact is that this verb does not at present enable scholars to arrive at certainty as to what the activity was.”

According to *First Chronicles*, the one who led David’s soldiers into the city and conquered it was Joab, who thus managed to get himself back into the good graces of the new king of Israel. We read: “David had said, ‘Whoever leads the attack on the Jebusites will become commander-in-chief.’ Joab son of Zeruiah went up first, and so he received the command.”<sup>28</sup>

Having captured Jerusalem and making it the capital of the country, David settled himself in the fortress that came to be known as Zion, or “the city of David.”

*The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* observes: “The conquest of the citadel Zion took place immediately after the anointing of David as king over all the tribes of Israel. This is apparent, not only from the fact that the account follows directly afterwards, but also from the circumstance that, according to v. 5, David reigned in Jerusalem just as many years as he was king over all Israel.” And *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* adds: “The capture of Jerusalem marks a most important point in the history of Israel. Hitherto, the national life had had no real center. The residence of a judge, a prophet, or a king served as a temporary rallying place, such as the ‘palm tree of Deborah,’ Shiloh, Mizpeh, Gibeah (of Saul), Nob, or Hebron. From this time, the center was fixed, and, at least for the southern kingdom, all the other cities grew less and less important in comparison with the new capital. Jerusalem’s position, however, in the midst of the rocky, barren ridge running down central Palestine made it always more suitable for a fortress than for a wealthy commercial capital, such as Solomon tried to make it.”

Commenting of v.10, Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel* writes regarding David’s growing power: “At last David was in a position to take up permanent residence in a city which he had conquered, and which had no established connections with any one tribe. As *the city of David*, it transcended tribal rivalries and therefore made possible a new concept of unity by providing as a focal point a capital, which has continued to this day to capture the imagination of Abraham’s descendants. But first the foundations needed to be secured. The *Millo* is a transliteration of the Hebrew word, the meaning of which is probably ‘supporting terraces’ (NIV). The Jebusite city walls were built on the slopes of the hill, which was particularly steep on the west side, hence the need to have secure buttresses resting on terraces, which would not slide (even imperceptibly) downwards towards the valley. Even within the city there was more leveling in order to make building possible. David evidently turned his attention to this substructure early in his occupation of Jerusalem. Ultimately David’s continuing progress was to be attributed, not to his undoubted gifts, but to his spiritual resources: *the Lord, the God of hosts, was with him*. The divine name, *Yahweh*, ‘*ēlōhē ṣēbā’ōt*, is a variation of *Yahweh ṣēbā’ōt* ... David, borne along by the presence of the God of all authority and power, could not but grow in importance, as did his city: ‘God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved ...

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<sup>28</sup> I Chron. 11:6

The Lord of hosts is with us ... (Ps. 46:5,7,11). Though Israel did at times misapply this truth and presume upon it, so that the prophets had to threaten destruction (e.g. Jer. 7:1-4, 13-15), truth it remained. 'God with us,' Immanuel, was no empty triumphalism (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:23; 28:20). Two pointers are included to ways in which David would consolidate his hold on his new capital. One concerned foreign relations and the other sons and heirs."

There is some question as to whether Hiram, king of Tyre, in this passage is the same who later provided Solomon with cedar wood. It seems doubtful that his reign would span such a long period, but it is not impossible. From David's reaction to the message Hiram sent to David, we get the impression that Hiram took the initiative in the matter, which made David realize that his neighbors considered him to be more important than he thought he was. For this David gave all credit to the Lord who had made him king over all Israel. When the monarch of a neighboring nation offered to build a palace for David, David knew that the Lord had elevated him beyond what he thought could ever happen.

*The Pulpit Commentary* observes about Hiram's offer: "The necessity of importing 'workers of wood, and workers of stone for walls,' as the words literally mean, proves how miserable was the social state of Israel in David's time. Though they had been slaves in Egypt, yet at the Exodus the Israelites had men capable of working in the precious metals and jewelry, in weaving and embroidery, in wood carving, and even in the cutting of gems (... Exodus 35:30-35). During the long anarchy of the judges they had degenerated into a race of agricultural drudges, whom the Philistines had debarred from the use of even the simplest tools (... 1 Samuel 13:19). Possibly in Saul's time there was a faint restoration of the arts of civilized life (... 2 Samuel 1:24); but when we find Joab killing Absalom, not with darts, but with pointed stakes (... 2 Samuel 18:14), the weapons probably of most of the foot soldiers, we see that not much had been done even then in metallurgy; and here earlier in his reign David has to send to Tyre for men who could saw a plank or build a wall. When, then, we call to mind the high state of culture and the magnificence of Solomon's reign, we can form some idea of the vigor with which David raised his subjects from a state of semi-barbarism."

According to the law on the kingdom given by Moses, the king of Israel should not keep a harem.<sup>29</sup> Yet, the Lord never chided David because of it. At one point we read words that sound as if God approved, as in the punishment David received after his sin with Bathsheba, when the prophet Nathan told David in the Name of the Lord: "I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more."<sup>30</sup>

### ***iii. David twice defeats the Philistines 5:17-25***

***17 When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over Israel, they went up in full force to search for him, but David heard about it and went down to the stronghold.***

***18 Now the Philistines had come and spread out in the Valley of Rephaim;***

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<sup>29</sup> Deut. 17:17

<sup>30</sup> II Sam. 12:8

**19** *so David inquired of the Lord, "Shall I go and attack the Philistines? Will you hand them over to me?" The Lord answered him, "Go, for I will surely hand the Philistines over to you."*

**20** *So David went to Baal Perazim, and there he defeated them. He said, "As waters break out, the Lord has broken out against my enemies before me." So that place was called Baal Perazim.*

**21** *The Philistines abandoned their idols there, and David and his men carried them off.*

**22** *Once more the Philistines came up and spread out in the Valley of Rephaim;*

**23** *so David inquired of the Lord, and he answered, "Do not go straight up, but circle around behind them and attack them in front of the balsam trees.*

**24** *As soon as you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, move quickly, because that will mean the Lord has gone out in front of you to strike the Philistine army."*

**25** *So David did as the Lord commanded him, and he struck down the Philistines all the way from Gibeon to Gezer.*

The most amazing thing in this Philistine invasion is that it took so long before the attack occurred. It would seem that a Philistine attack was to be expected when David was made king in Judah. Then it had become clear that David's residence in Philistine country, when Saul was still hunting him down, had not made him the friend he had shown himself to be. It could be that, when the whole country rallied behind David and he had made Jerusalem into the capital of the land, the Philistines woke up and decided to act. But it is also possible that there is a lack of chronology in the way the events are reported and that this Philistine assault took place much earlier.

*The Pulpit Commentary* observes about the words *David... went down to the stronghold*: "Many commentators identify *the hold* with the cave of Adullam, and certainly the account of the brave deed of three of David's heroes, in breaking through the Philistine garrison of Bethlehem to bring him water thence, gives great probability to this view. For we read there that 'the Philistines were encamped in the valley of Rephaim, and that David was then in the hold' (... 2 Samuel 23:13,14, where note that the word 'hold' has the definite article). There are, however, many difficulties connected with this view; for the cave of Adullam was in the valley of Elah, on the road from Hebron to Philistia (... 1 Samuel 22:1), but the valley of Rephaim is close to Jerusalem (... Joshua 15:8), abutting, in fact, upon the valley of Ben-Hinnom. Baal-Perazim also is in the same neighbourhood, being the rocky height which forms the border of Ben-Hinnom, and bounds the valley of Rephaim on the north. Still, the passage in ... 2 Samuel 23:13, 14 seems too precise to be lightly set aside, and we must suppose, therefore, that the Philistines, alarmed by the gathering of half a million of men and women at Hebron, sent messengers throughout their country to assemble their warriors. It was the weakness of ancient warfare that its vast hosts of people melted away as rapidly as they had gathered. For provisions were soon spent, and the men had to return to their farms and their cattle. Thus David, having used some of that large concourse of strong men for the capture of Jerusalem, was left immediately afterwards with no other protection than that of his 'mighty men.' Saul had endeavored to have always round him three thousand trained men (... 1 Samuel 13:2), and David subsequently had probably

quite as many (... 2 Samuel 15:18); but at this early stage he had probably not many more than he had brought with him from Ziklag to Hebron. He could not, therefore, make head against the Philistines coming with all the militia of their land; but, leaving his wives and the wives of his mighty men in the Jebusite stronghold of Jerusalem, we may well believe that he sped away to gather the warriors of Israel. But what seems strange is that he should have gone to the rear of the Philistines, especially as they had come in such vast numbers as to occupy the whole country — a garrison, for instance, being posted at Bethlehem, and doubtless at other fit spots. Still, this country was well known to David, and he could gather there old friends, whose bravery he had often tried before. And while thus waiting for the mustering of such as God would move to help him, in deep distress at so terrible a reversal following so quickly upon his exaltation, a strange longing for water from the well of his native town seized him. He was suffering apparently from fever of body as well as from distress of mind, and soon there was relief from both. For three of his heroes heard the words burst from his parched lips, and, hastening to Bethlehem, broke through the Philistine garrison, and filled a water skin from the well at the gate of the city. Such an act naturally made a great impression upon David. What room was there for despair when he had such men around him? Pouring out, then, the water as a drink offering to Jehovah, his heart was now filled with hope, and inquiring of the Lord whether he might attack the Philistines, he received the assurance which he had already gathered from the exploit of his heroes, that God would deliver them into his hand.”

If David left Zion to go back to Adullam, as *The Pulpit Commentary* supposes, the sequence of events is difficult to follow. *The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* makes more sense in assuming that the battles took place at an earlier date. We read: “Both these victories belong in all probability to the interval between the anointing of David at Hebron over all Israel and the conquest of the citadel of Zion. This is very evident, so far as the first is concerned, from the words, ‘When the Philistines heard that they had anointed David king over Israel’ (v. 17), not when David had conquered the citadel of Zion. Moreover, when the Philistines approached, David ‘went down to the hold,’ or mountain fortress, by which we cannot possibly understand the citadel upon Zion, on account of the expression ‘went down.’ If David had been living upon Zion at the time, he would hardly have left this fortification when the Philistines encamped in the valley of Rephaim on the west of Jerusalem, but would rather have attacked and routed the enemy from the citadel itself. The second victory followed very soon after the first, and must therefore be assigned to the same period. The Philistines evidently resolved, as soon as the tidings reached them of the union of all the tribes under the sovereignty of David, that they would at once resist the growing power of Israel, and smite David before he had consolidated his government.”

The battles described here were probably the most important ever fought in Israel’s history. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, observes: “The importance of these two battles was obvious, not only to those who lived through them, but also to future generations in Israel. Had the Philistines been successful in defeating David at the beginning of his reign over the united tribes, it is doubtful whether he would have been able to command the allegiance which brought him to eminence among the peoples of the region. Isaiah was able to make passing reference to the event and expect it to be immediately meaningful, more than two centuries later (Isa. 28:21). For Israel it must have had all the emotional overtones that Trafalgar had for the British, together with the

awesome sense of God's overruling associated with the evacuation from Dunkirk, the Battle of Britain and with the D-day landings during the Second World War. This was one of Israel's remarkable deliverances." Baldwin's imbedded reference to Isaiah's prophecy reads: "The Lord will rise up as he did at Mount Perazim, he will rouse himself as in the Valley of Gibeon — to do his work, his strange work, and perform his task, his alien task."

David's consultation with God before engaging in battle is more than an indication of the seriousness of the event. There are reports of generals offering public prayer before their troops prior to important engagements with the enemy. George Patton's prayer during the Allied attack upon the German homeland became a famous part of history, when he intoned with: "Lord, this is Patton speaking." David realized that all victories belong to the Lord. As a young man, in his historic encounter with Goliath, David had said to the giant: "All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands."<sup>31</sup> Looking back over his life, David could say: "He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze. You give me your shield of victory; you stoop down to make me great."<sup>32</sup>

We do not read what took place during the battle and how the Philistine army was put to flight. Whether the Lord enabled David's army to break through where there seemed to be no possibility, or whether a natural or supernatural event brought about the victory is not explained. The name Baal-Perazim, indicates that God's intervention was very obvious. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments on the name: "An ancient Canaanite name meaning the Lord of breaking forth, indicating the local nature-deity or baal, who was supposed to dwell in the fountain. The image is that of waters breaking through a dam." Evidently, the name had been given to the place previous to the battle. David's victory thus became a demonstration of God's superiority over the idol after which the place had been named.

The fact that the Philistines left their idols behind when they fled is an indication of the speed with which they abandoned the battlefield, as well as a confirmation of God's supremacy.

*The Interlinear Hebrew Bible* reads v.21: "And they left there their images, and David and his men burned them." The Hebrew verb, rendered "burned" is *nasa*, which is almost always translated as "take up," or "carry," as in what Joseph's brothers did when "They *loaded* their grain on their donkeys and left."<sup>33</sup> The law did stipulate what must be done with pagan idol statues: "This is what you are to do to them: Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, cut down their Asherah poles and burn their idols in the fire."<sup>34</sup> But it is not stated here that this is what happened after the victory over the Philistines. From the account in First Chronicles of this battle we learn that this is what happened: "The Philistines had abandoned their gods there, and David gave orders to burn them in the fire."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> I Sam. 17:47

<sup>32</sup> II Sam. 22:35,36; Ps. 18:34,35

<sup>33</sup> Gen. 42:26

<sup>34</sup> Deut. 7:5

<sup>35</sup> I Chron. 14:12

When the Philistines attacked a second time, David again asked the Lord for guidance before reacting. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, writes: “In a second attempt to gain the upper hand over David, the Philistines attacked once more in the same valley. David did not take for granted that his God-given strategy on the previous occasion would succeed a second time, nor did he trust his own expertise but asked afresh for guidance. This time he was not to go to meet the enemy head on. Instead, he was to make a surprise attack from the rear, which would have the advantage of cutting off the Philistine retreat route. *Opposite the balsam trees*: the Hebrew word *bākā*’ comes only here (cf. I Chr. 14:14, the parallel account) besides Psalm 84:6, ‘the valley of Baca’ (or ‘weeping,’ RV). The ‘balsam,’ or ‘mulberry’ (AV), or ‘aspen’ (NEB), are uncertain translations, though ‘balsam’ is the traditional Jewish interpretation of the word *bākā*’. The name resembles the Hebrew word for ‘weep,’ a reference, perhaps, to the sap which exudes from balsam when it is torn or cut. More important than the identification of the species is the sign that the Lord will give, *the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees*. The wind which would cause a sound like a rushing of feet was in this case the wind of the Spirit of God, *for then the Lord has gone out before you to smite the army of the Philistines*. Once the sign is given, there is to be no delay: *bestir yourself* or ‘move quickly (NIV). David must move with the Spirit of God if he is to fulfill God’s purpose to defeat the enemy. There was a place for waiting, but a place also for action. David accomplished what Saul had failed to achieve, because *David did as the Lord commanded him*, and triumphed once again. The secret of success, obedience, had been an option open to Saul, but he had not chosen it. David was, indeed, one of a rare company of people, rare even in the Bible, of whom it could be said that they did as the Lord commanded them.”

This second victory over the Philistines is the result of a remarkable combination of divine intervention and human initiative. The invisible angelic army went ahead of David and did spiritually what David and his army had to do physically. God does not only send His angels in times of war for the purpose of attack. Sometimes it is for protection, as in the case of Syria’s attack on Samaria, when God protected Elisha. “And Elisha prayed, ‘O Lord, open his eyes so he may see.’ Then the Lord opened the servant’s eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.”<sup>36</sup> And in the case of Jacob, before he met his brother Esau. “Jacob also went on his way, and the angels of God met him. When Jacob saw them, he said, ‘This is the camp of God!’ So he named that place Mahanaim.”<sup>37</sup>

#### ***iv. David makes Jerusalem the city of God 6:1-23***

- 1 David again brought together out of Israel chosen men, thirty thousand in all.***
- 2 He and all his men set out from Baalah of Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the Name, the name of the Lord Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim that are on the ark.***
- 3 They set the ark of God on a new cart and brought it from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, were guiding the new cart***
- 4 with the ark of God on it, and Ahio was walking in front of it.***

<sup>36</sup> II Kings 6:17

<sup>37</sup> Gen. 32:1,2

*5 David and the whole house of Israel were celebrating with all their might before the Lord, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, sistrums and cymbals.*

*6 When they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled.*

*7 The Lord's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down and he died there beside the ark of God.*

*8 Then David was angry because the Lord's wrath had broken out against Uzzah, and to this day that place is called Perez Uzzah.*

*9 David was afraid of the Lord that day and said, "How can the ark of the Lord ever come to me?"*

*10 He was not willing to take the ark of the Lord to be with him in the City of David. Instead, he took it aside to the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite.*

*11 The ark of the Lord remained in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite for three months, and the Lord blessed him and his entire household.*

*12 Now King David was told, "The Lord has blessed the household of Obed-Edom and everything he has, because of the ark of God." So David went down and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with rejoicing.*

*13 When those who were carrying the ark of the Lord had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf.*

*14 David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the Lord with all his might,*

*15 while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the Lord with shouts and the sound of trumpets.*

*16 As the ark of the Lord was entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, she despised him in her heart.*

*17 They brought the ark of the Lord and set it in its place inside the tent that David had pitched for it, and David sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before the Lord.*

*18 After he had finished sacrificing the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord Almighty.*

*19 Then he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins to each person in the whole crowd of Israelites, both men and women. And all the people went to their homes.*

*20 When David returned home to bless his household, Michal daughter of Saul came out to meet him and said, "How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, disrobing in the sight of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!"*

*21 David said to Michal, "It was before the Lord, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the Lord's people Israel — I will celebrate before the Lord. 22 I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honor."*

*23 And Michal daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death.*

What David did when he brought the ark to Jerusalem had consequences that far exceeded any political ambitions. The ark not only symbolized the presence of God, it was the only place on earth where God had said to reveal Himself. "There, above the

cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the Testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites.”<sup>38</sup> David’s act made Jerusalem, as the heading of this chapter indicates, “the city of God.” It would make the city on earth a shadow of the heavenly city, the bride of the Lamb, God’s intent with mankind. The bringing over of the ark to Jerusalem would make the city the center of the earth.

In *First Chronicles* we find a more detailed account of the bringing over of the ark to Jerusalem. We read: “David conferred with each of his officers, the commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. He then said to the whole assembly of Israel, ‘If it seems good to you and if it is the will of the Lord our God, let us send word far and wide to the rest of our brothers throughout the territories of Israel, and also to the priests and Levites who are with them in their towns and pasturelands, to come and join us. Let us bring the ark of our God back to us, for we did not inquire of it during the reign of Saul.’ The whole assembly agreed to do this, because it seemed right to all the people. So David assembled all the Israelites, from the Sihor River in Egypt to Lebo Hamath, to bring the ark of God from Kiriath Jearim.”

*The Pulpit Commentary* emphasizes the unifying results of David’s act of worship, comparing it to the outcome of the American civil war of the nineteenth century. We read: “It was an act of piety, testifying David’s gratitude to God, who had so quickly raised him from the condition of a despairing fugitive hiding away in the cave of Adullam to that of a victorious king reigning over an independent and free people. But David had also a political purpose. The weakness of Israel in the past was the result of its divisions, he would heal this by giving it a capital, whither the tribes would come up for worship, and where they would feel that they formed one nation. David had seen the evils of a divided sovereignty, when he and Ishbosheth were wasting the strength of Israel in civil war. For more than half a century he remedied this, but before there had been time for the union of the tribes to be cemented by the gradual influence of religion. Solomon’s oppressive levies of unpaid workmen, forced to labor in his costly buildings, and the despotic stupidity of Rehoboam, broke up united Israel into two feeble states, which henceforward had to struggle hard for a mere existence. The condition of Israel was very similar to that of the United States of North America before their great civil war; except that their president, elected by all the people, and their Congress at Washington, were far stronger bonds of union than any that were possessed by the Israelites. But when there was danger of even these failing to keep them together as one people, the statesmen of the north put forth their utmost powers, and spared neither life nor treasure, because they saw clearly that the victory of the south meant the breaking up of their empire into a multitude of feeble governments, which, by their mutual jealousies, would paralyze and thwart one another. With equal discernment David endeavored to counteract the jealousy and separate action of the tribes, which was bringing about the disintegration of Israel, by giving them a point of union. Had he gone further north for his capital, he might, perhaps, have overawed the stubborn tribe of Ephraim, which was always the most unmanageable of the sections of Israel. But the situation of Jerusalem upon the borders of Benjamin and Judah, on a hill-top which neither had really possessed, and which was marked out for noble use by its wonderful natural conformation, fully justified David’s choice; and it has had the assent of mankind ever since. David then made this unrivalled spot his capital, and placed there, first of all, his royal residence, whereby it became the centre of all

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<sup>38</sup> Ex. 25:22

public business and of the administration of law; and, secondly, as a matter of still higher importance, he made it the headquarters of their national religion and the abode of their God. We see the weight of this religious influence in the anxiety of Jeroboam to counteract it, and in the strength given to Rehoboam by the migration into Judah of those who valued the temple services more than their worldly prosperity. Even Saul had valued the national religion, and had established its headquarters at Nob; but, giving way to the ungoverned anger of a despot, he had destroyed his own work. It was left to one who to the bravery of a soldier added the discernment of a statesman to consolidate the tribes into a nation by establishing their religion upon a sure and influential basis. For this reason also he made their services full of delight and enjoyment by the institution of choral chants and the use of instruments of music; while the psalms which his singers recited were so spiritual and ennobling that we to this day use them in our solemn worship.”

Ever since the capture and return of the ark by the Philistines, it had resided in the house of Abinadab.<sup>39</sup> David had not done his homework in preparation for the bringing over of the ark. According to the law, only the Levites, and in particular the Kohathites, were allowed to handle the ark and they were to carry it on their shoulders.<sup>40</sup> To put the ark on a cart was an unlawful and fatal mistake. Although the transportation was accompanied by a joyful celebration with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, sistrums and cymbals, it was misguided. Our worship of God must be done in a way that is acceptable to Him. Mere good intentions are not sufficient. David’s intention, as well as of all the people, had been to glorify God. Uzzah’s intention to keep the ark from falling off the cart was also well-meaning. But it turned out to be lethal. When Uzzah touch the ark, he touched live-wire and died.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, writes about the transportation and celebration: “The slow pace of the cart permitted the procession to engage in dancing and singing *before the Lord with all their might*. The participle *making merry* (Heb. *mēšāhāqîm*, from the verb with which ‘Isaac’ is connected, and which means ‘to laugh’) had the force of unrestrained celebration in worship ... The names of the musical instruments are understandably difficult to translate; the first two are stringed instruments, of which the second is first mentioned in I Samuel 10:5 in the Bible. It may therefore have been of Phoenician origin. All the others are percussion instruments. It is interesting to observe that the last, cymbals, always occurs in a religious context. For Israel, all life’s great occasions were God-centered and connected with worship, and the same was true for Israel’s music.”

It is difficult to determine what actually happened with the ark and why Uzzah reacted the way he did. The Hebrew text of v.7 reads literally: “And when they came to Nachon’s threshing floor, Uzzah put forth [his hand] to the ark of the God and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it.” The Hebrew verb, rendered “shook” is *shamat*, which has a variety of meaning, from “discontinue,” to “overthrow,” to “throw down.” The same verb is used in: “For six years you are to sow your fields and harvest the crops, but during the seventh year *let the land lie unplowed and unused*. Then the poor among your people may get food from it, and the wild animals may eat what they leave. Do the same with your

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<sup>39</sup> I Sam. 7:1

<sup>40</sup> See Num. 3:30; 7:9.

vineyard and your olive grove,”<sup>41</sup> and in “Then Jehu went to Jezreel. When Jezebel heard about it, she painted her eyes, arranged her hair and looked out of a window. As Jehu entered the gate, she asked, ‘Have you come in peace, Zimri, you murderer of your master?’ He looked up at the window and called out, ‘Who is on my side? Who?’ Two or three eunuchs looked down at him. ‘*Throw her down!*’ Jehu said. So they *threw her down*, and some of her blood spattered the wall and the horses as they trampled her underfoot.”<sup>42</sup>

But Bible scholars disagree as to what happened. *Barnes’ Notes* states: “The use of the Heb. word here is unusual. Some take the word as in 2 Kings 9:33, and render the passage: ‘The oxen were throwing, or had thrown it down,’ very likely by turning aside to eat what grain there might be on the threshing-floor.”

*The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* comments: “Jerome paraphrases ... thus: ‘Because the oxen kicked and turned it (the ark) over.’ But *shamat* does not mean to kick; its true meaning is to let go, or let lie (Ex 23:11; Deut 15:2-3), hence to slip or stumble. The stumbling of the animals might easily have turned the cart over, and this was what Uzzah tried to prevent by laying hold of the ark. God smote him there ‘on account of the offence’ (... in the sense of erring, or committing a fault). The writer of the Chronicles gives it thus: ‘Because he had stretched out his hand to the ark,’ though of course the text before us is not to be altered to this.”

But *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “Nothing is said of the ark being in danger. Uzzah’s act was one of precaution. The ground was rough, the oxen stumbled, and he put forth his hand to hold the ark till the cart had reached level ground. If the threshing floor was formed in the natural rock, those who have been in Spain, and seen how the tracks in the Pyrenees are worn by the native carts into deep ruts in the solid stone, can well understand that the neighbourhood of this much-frequented spot would need very careful driving.”

None of the above comments provide a clear indication as to what caused Uzzah to do what he did. The obvious mistake, of course, is the fact that the ark was on an oxcart to begin with. Uzzah, being a Levite, ought to have known better.

The Hebrew text of v.8 reads: “And David was displeased, because the Lord had made a breach upon Uzzah.” The Hebrew word used for “displeased” is *charah*. “Displeased” seems to be too mild a translation. The first time the word is used is in “So Cain was *very angry*, and his face was downcast.”<sup>43</sup>

God’s revelation of Himself, both in Scripture and outside of it, can be the most disconcerting experience a human being can have. The author of Hebrews states: “It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.”<sup>44</sup> David’s discovery of God’s real character made him upset and angry. The knowledge that we are created in the image of God sometimes leads to presumptuous conclusions about who God is. What can be so disconcerting to us is to discover the difference. There is truth in Carl Barth’s definition of God as *der ganz Andere!* “The totally different One!”

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, observes about David’s reaction to Uzzah’s sudden death: “David for whom everything had been going so well, reacted with hot

<sup>41</sup> Ex. 23:10,11

<sup>42</sup> II Kings 9:30-33

<sup>43</sup> Gen. 4:5

<sup>44</sup> Heb. 10:31

indignation: he was angry at the Lord's intervention, recalled in the new name for the threshing floor, *Perez-uzzah* '[the Lord's] break out on Uzzah.' David in his humiliation blamed God for the incident and opted out of the task of taking the ark on to Jerusalem, partly because he was also *afraid of the Lord*. 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. As A. F. Kirkpatrick observes, 'If such reverence was due to the symbol, with how much greater reverence should the realities of the Christian Covenant be regarded?'"

In the visions certain prophets received of God, the throne upon which He sat was carried by angels. The law stated that the ark must be carried by the Levites. To entrust the ark to an oxcart, drawn by animals is the highest insult that could be imposed upon the Creator of the universe. David and the Levites should have known better. They had asked for trouble by not reading the instructions.

*The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* comments further on the incident and David's reaction: "He was therefore angry that such misfortune had attended his undertaking. In his first excitement and dismay, David may not have perceived the real and deeper ground of this divine judgment. Uzzah's offence consisted in the fact that he had touched the ark with profane feelings, although with good intentions, namely to prevent its rolling over and falling from the cart. Touching the ark, the throne of the divine glory and visible pledge of the invisible presence of the Lord, was a violation of the majesty of the holy God. Uzzah was therefore a type of all who with good intentions, humanly speaking, yet with unsanctified minds, interfere in the affairs of the kingdom of God, from the notion that they are in danger, and with the hope of saving them ... On further reflection, David could not fail to discover where the cause of Uzzah's offence, which he had atoned for with his life, really had lain, and that it had actually arisen from the fact that he (David) and those about him had decided to disregard the distinct instructions of the law with regard to the handling of the ark. According to Num 4 the ark was not only to be moved by none but Levites, but it was to be carried on the shoulders, not in a carriage; and in v. 15, even the Levites were expressly forbidden to touch it on pain of death. But instead of taking these instructions as their rule, they had followed the example of the Philistines when they sent back the ark (1 Sam 6:7 ff.), and had placed it upon a new cart, and directed Uzzah to drive it, whilst, as his conduct on the occasion clearly shows, he had no idea of the unapproachable holiness of the ark of God, and had to expiate his offence with his life, as a warning to all the Israelites."

David's fear of God makes him enter into a new relationship with his Creator. Although the "fear of the Lord" is usually spiritually interpreted, there is a healthy application in a literal interpretation. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding."<sup>45</sup> David's new understanding of God added depth and awe to the relationship.

After three months, during which the ark had resided at the home of Obed-Edom, this man experienced blessings he had never known before. The word was passed on to

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<sup>45</sup> Ps. 111:10; Prov. 1:7

David. Bible scholars disagree as to whether Obed-Edom was a Levite, a Kohathite, one assigned to carry the ark, or whether he was a foreigner from the Philistine city of Gath. The records of *Second Samuel* and *First Chronicles* present us with different versions.

The report of God's blessing upon Obed-Edom and his household encouraged David to proceed with the plan to bring the ark to Jerusalem. Now, however, the procession is carried out with all due caution.

*First Chronicles* gives a detailed account of the organization of this second procession with the ark. We read: "After David had constructed buildings for himself in the City of David, he prepared a place for the ark of God and pitched a tent for it. Then David said, 'No one but the Levites may carry the ark of God, because the Lord chose them to carry the ark of the Lord and to minister before him forever.' Then David summoned Zadok and Abiathar the priests, and Uriel, Asaiah, Joel, Shemaiah, Eliel and Amminadab the Levites. He said to them, 'You are the heads of the Levitical families; you and your fellow Levites are to consecrate yourselves and bring up the ark of the Lord, the God of Israel, to the place I have prepared for it. It was because you, the Levites, did not bring it up the first time that the Lord our God broke out in anger against us. We did not inquire of him about how to do it in the prescribed way.' So the priests and Levites consecrated themselves in order to bring up the ark of the Lord, the God of Israel. And the Levites carried the ark of God with the poles on their shoulders, as Moses had commanded in accordance with the word of the Lord."<sup>46</sup>

Another feature of the procession, that causes a variety of opinions among Bible scholars, is how long the road was along which the ark was carried, and, consequently, how many sacrifices were brought on the way. The *First Samuel* account speaks of a double sacrifice after every six steps by the Levites who carried the ark. If Obed-Edom's house was several miles from Jerusalem, it has been observed that "the way to the holy city was a way of blood. The stained streets of Zion, the rivers of blood, the slaughtered heaps and the blaze of altar fires formed a strange contrast to the dancing, the singing, and the harping of the multitudes who crowded the city," (Quoted in *The Pulpit Commentary*). But some believe that Obed-Edom lived within the city walls, which would reduce the distance to Zion considerably.

*The Pulpit Commentary* furthermore observes: "In Chronicles we read nothing of this, but of a sacrifice of seven bullocks and seven rams, offered by the Levites. The one was David's offering made at the beginning, to consecrate the removal; the other was made at the end, and was a thank offering of the Levites, because they had carried the ark safely (... 1 Chronicles 15:26). The Vulgate has a remarkable addition to ver. 12, taken doubtless by Jerome from manuscripts which existed in his day. It is as follows: 'There were with David seven choruses and a calf as victim.' The fact is not in itself improbable, and means that the musicians and dancers were divided into bands which mutually relieved one another. And as a sacrifice was also a feast, each band had a calf provided for it. The LXX. omits the thirteenth verse altogether, and substitutes for it, 'And seven choruses accompanied him, bearing the ark, and a calf and lambs as a sacrifice.'"

The text tells us that David wore a linen ephod and that he danced with all his might. The Hebrew verb, translated "dance" is *karar*, which is an unusual word that is only used in the Bible in this story. The word for "might" is *'oz*, which can be translated "force," "security," "majesty," or "praise." The first time this word is used in Scripture is

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<sup>46</sup> 1 Chron. 15:1,2,11-15

in the song of Moses in the phrase: “The Lord is my *strength* and my song”<sup>47</sup> *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “Dancing was usually the office of the women (... Exodus 15:20; ... Judges 11:35; 21:21; ... 1 Samuel 18:6); but men may also have often taken part in it, as Michal’s objection was that it was unbecoming a king. *David was girded with a linen ephod*. David wore this as a tightly fitting garment, which left him free to exert himself in the dance. So far from the use of it being an assumption of the priestly office, it was regarded by Michal as an act of humiliation, as it was a dress worn even by a child when admitted to service in a priest’s family (... 1 Samuel 2:18). Probably David did mean to rank himself for the time among the inferior servitors of the ark. He might have claimed more. In the theocracy he was the representative of Jehovah, and his anointing was a solemn consecration to a religious office.”

We read that Michal, David’s first wife, despised him when she saw him dancing before the ark. Michal, Saul’s daughter, had grown up in the palace, surrounded by the pomp of a royal court. She, evidently, compared David’s behavior with her father’s who had, at all times, observed the proper etiquette. Even when Samuel had confronted Saul about his sin of disobedience to the Lord’s command, Saul said to Samuel: “I have sinned. But please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel; come back with me, so that I may worship the Lord your God.”<sup>48</sup> Michal may have thought that David’s lack of decorum would reflect on her own status as the queen of Israel. So she scolded David, as he came home that evening. Michal’s main consideration was not what God thought of David’s behavior, but what people might think of him. Jesus said to the people of His time: “How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?”<sup>49</sup> In humbling himself before God, David received honor by God.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments on vv.21-23: “David in his reply did not mince his words. The derogatory reference to her father and family, though true, was sure to wound with its insistence on the contrast between Saul and himself in relation to *the Lord, who chose me above your father ... over Israel, the people of the Lord*. The election promise of 2 Samuel 5:2, precious to David and the people of Israel, and a source of conflict for Michal, is echoed here. She could not ‘win’ the argument, because she could not accept the divine purpose, which the maids (i.e. ‘maidservants’) joyously celebrated. Like her father before her, she found herself working against God. David in no way regrets what he has done. *I will be abased in your eyes*, while it makes good sense, is not what the Hebrew says. It has ‘in my eyes,’ indicating that David is more concerned to honor the Lord than to foster his own reputation, for he does not need to boost his own ego, nor does he lack popular support.

In the context, Michal’s childlessness implies that from that point on marital relations between her and David came to an end. This relationship between them had irrevocably broken down. There is however, a difference of opinion among commentators as to the meaning of this verse, e.g. [one scholar] says it should be interpreted ‘as quoting her childless condition as the penalty of her contempt of David the anointed king, and as the deprivation of the house of Saul of continuance, and especially

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<sup>47</sup> Ex. 15:2

<sup>48</sup> I Sam. 15:30

<sup>49</sup> John 5:44

of providing the mother of the successor to the throne.’ The two views are not, of course, mutually exclusive.

The installation of the ark in Jerusalem was the first momentous achievement of David’s reign after the capture of the city. It has been pointed out that no public ceremony took place there to proclaim David king or to enthrone him in Jerusalem; this great festival connected with the arrival of the ark was all the more impressive as the proclamation of the Lord as King in Jerusalem, with David as his appointed prince. (Heb. *nāgîd*, v. 21; cf. 2 Sam. 7:8). Jerusalem was now the city of the Lord of hosts, sanctified by his presence and protected by his power, though not unconditionally, as later generations were to discover.

Much has been made of the political astuteness shown by David in incorporating the ark and all it stood for in his capital. The fact is that devotion to God is not essentially opposed to prosperity in the wider world of national and international affairs, and the book of Proverbs insists many times over that the first and most important requirement, for kings as for everyone else, is the fear of the Lord. That his devotion brought him advantages should not occasion any surprise, nor is a cynical and self-regarding interpretation of David’s action appropriate.”

*v. A house for the Lord 7:1-29*

*1 After the king was settled in his palace and the Lord had given him rest from all his enemies around him,*

*2 he said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent."*

*3 Nathan replied to the king, "Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the Lord is with you."*

*4 That night the word of the Lord came to Nathan, saying:*

*5 "Go and tell my servant David, ‘This is what the Lord says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in?’*

*6 I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling.*

*7 Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?" ‘*

*8 "Now then, tell my servant David, ‘This is what the Lord Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel.*

*9 I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth.*

*10 And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning*

*11 and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies. "‘The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you:*

*12 When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom.*

*13 He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.*

*14 I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men.*

*15 But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you.*

*16 Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.'"*

*17 Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire revelation.*

*18 Then King David went in and sat before the Lord, and he said: "Who am I, O Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?"*

*19 And as if this were not enough in your sight, O Sovereign Lord, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant. Is this your usual way of dealing with man, O Sovereign Lord?"*

*20 "What more can David say to you? For you know your servant, O Sovereign Lord.*

*21 For the sake of your word and according to your will, you have done this great thing and made it known to your servant.*

*22 "How great you are, O Sovereign Lord! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears.*

*23 And who is like your people Israel — the one nation on earth that God went out to redeem as a people for himself, and to make a name for himself, and to perform great and awesome wonders by driving out nations and their gods from before your people, whom you redeemed from Egypt?"*

*24 You have established your people Israel as your very own forever, and you, O Lord, have become their God.*

*25 "And now, Lord God, keep forever the promise you have made concerning your servant and his house. Do as you promised,*

*26 so that your name will be great forever. Then men will say, 'The Lord Almighty is God over Israel!' And the house of your servant David will be established before you.*

*27 "O Lord Almighty, God of Israel, you have revealed this to your servant, saying, 'I will build a house for you.' So your servant has found courage to offer you this prayer.*

*28 O Sovereign Lord, you are God! Your words are trustworthy, and you have promised these good things to your servant.*

*29 Now be pleased to bless the house of your servant, that it may continue forever in your sight; for you, O Sovereign Lord, have spoken, and with your blessing the house of your servant will be blessed forever."*

This is the first time the prophet Nathan is mentioned in the Scriptures. He played an important part through the years of David's reign and in the early years of Solomon's. Nathan was an encourager, but he also stood up to David when the latter committed sin with Bathsheba. According to a reference in *Second Chronicles*, he kept records of both David's and Solomon's reign.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> I Chron. 29:29; II Chron. 9:29

Speaking about Nathan's influence upon Solomon, *The Fausset's Bible Dictionary* observes: "A similarity between the apologue style of Solomon in Eccl 9:14-16 and Nathan's in 2 Sam 12:1-4 may be due to Nathan's influence."

The chapter opens with the statement that David was settled in his palace and that there was no war. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "As regards the word 'rest,' we have to distinguish between the first series of wars, which established David firmly on his throne, and the second series, which gave him widespread dominion." It was during this period of rest that David reflected on his position, realizing that all his success was due to divine leading in his life. That thought filled him with amazement and gratitude. This gratitude would become more profound as Nathan informed him about the future that God had in mind for him. This is clearly expressed in David's humble response to Nathan's message: "Who am I, O Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?"

David felt embarrassed by what God had done for him in, not only establishing him as king over Israel, but also giving him the honor and respect of his neighbors. We read earlier that Hiram had sent building material for David's palace and David concluded from this "that the Lord had established him as king over Israel and had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel."<sup>51</sup> David felt that God had honored him. With this in mind, he wanted to return the honor to God. He felt that it was not right for him to live in a palace and God lived in a tent. The Hebrew words used are *bayith*, for "a house," and *yeriy'ah* for "something hanging," "a curtain," or "tent." So David conceived the plan of building a temple for the Lord where the ark could be placed. This plan met with the approval of the prophet Nathan.

But that night, God spoke to Nathan, either in a dream or directly and Nathan was given a message to pass on to David that is one of the great statements in the Old Testament. The core of the message is God saying to David, you will not build me a house, but I will build you a house. God uses the same word *bayith* that David had used before, but in this context the word acquires a much more extended meaning. The house of David will be the family of David, David's offspring. The ultimate meaning here is a prophecy about the coming of the Messiah, who is from the root of David. Jesus would say to John in Revelation: "I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."<sup>52</sup> And when John describes the incarnation of the Son of God in his gospel, we read: "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth."<sup>53</sup> The Greek word rendered "made his dwelling" is *skenoō*, which literally means "to tent or encamp." We could render it "He pitched his tent among us."

Tents are not permanent dwellings. Even those who all their lives live in a tent do not always stay at the same place. Tent-dwellers are nomads who pull up their tent and put it up somewhere else. Nothing symbolizes the transience of human existence as well as a tent. The author of Hebrew states about Abraham: "By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the

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<sup>51</sup> II Sam 5:11,12

<sup>52</sup> Rev. 22:16

<sup>53</sup> John 1:14

city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.”<sup>54</sup> When God became man He shared the transitory quality of our human life on earth.

There are in the message Nathan was given to pass on to David several lines of revelation that make it both beautiful and complex. The first truth revealed is that David was not to be the actual builder of an edifice, the temple, that would become the place where the ark would come to rest. David had been right in assuming that it was his duty to find a place for the ark of the Lord. God had said to Moses: “But you are to seek the place the Lord your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go; there bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, what you have vowed to give and your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. There, in the presence of the Lord your God, you and your families shall eat and shall rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the Lord your God has blessed you.”<sup>55</sup> It was also clear from Scripture that divine leading was needed to determine where that place should be. Again God had said to Moses: “Three times a year all your men must appear before the Lord your God at the place he will choose: at the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles. No man should appear before the Lord empty-handed: Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the Lord your God has blessed you.”<sup>56</sup>

It would take David almost the rest of his life to receive assurance as to where that place was to be. Actually, it was through the commission of the sin of ordering an illegal census, that David discovered the place of which he could confidently say: “The house of the Lord God is to be here, and also the altar of burnt offering for Israel.”<sup>57</sup>

There may be some irony in the way God introduces the subject to David by reminding him of his background as a shepherd boy who rose to the level of being a king. David did live in a cedar palace and he probably regarded that fact as a symbol of his own greatness, saying to himself, “See how far I have come in the world!” We can see God smile and gently poke fun at David, suggesting that He would be jealous of David living in a cedar house and God in a tent! It is as if God says, “David, it is not where you live, but who you are in relationship with me that makes you great.” And at that point God says: “I am going to make you really great, greater than anybody else on earth.” Now David had natural talents that would have made him outstanding in his own right. His poetry has survived the ages and some of it has never been paralleled or surpassed. He was a great strategic military figure who succeeded in fusing twelve bickering nomadic tribes into one of the greatest nations in the world. Israel still provides men for the think-tanks of this world. But that is not what made David rise above the rest of humanity. It was what God did through him, in making him the ultimate key in the line, that would bring the second person of the Trinity into the world as a human being. Jesus resembles David in that He could say at one point in His life: “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.”<sup>58</sup> God did to Jesus as He had done to David and we read in Paul’s words: “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus

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<sup>54</sup> Heb. 11:9,10

<sup>55</sup> Deut. 12:5-7

<sup>56</sup> Deut. 16:16,17

<sup>57</sup> I Chron. 22:1

<sup>58</sup> Matt. 8:20

every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”<sup>59</sup>

When God says “I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed,” Israel had already lived in Canaan for several centuries. These words, therefore, must be interpreted in a deeper and more spiritual sense than the literal.

It is also obvious that, although God intended Israel to be planted an undisturbed, they were disturbed and imprisoned, and even spread out all over the world in the Diaspora. This happened, not because God wanted it, but because of their disobedience. God’s promises are not self-fulfilling; they depend upon people’s obedience.

God’s promise to David personally, that God would give him rest from all his enemies, was accomplished, as is clear from the introductory note of Psalm Eighteen, which reads: “He sang to the Lord the words of this song when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.”

The core of the message is that God would build David a house in his offspring. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: “There is here a paronomasia or play upon the word house. David had proposed to build a house for the glory of God; but God announces His purpose to ‘make David a house.’ By the erection of a magnificent temple, it was intended to establish a center of religious unity for the nation; but now it was made known that the presence and the oracles of God would be henceforth embodied, not in a national temple, but in the living line of David’s dynasty. In other words, the promise now made, with the previous blessings it involved, would from this time be associated, not with a temple of stone, but with ‘the son of David.’ This announcement is celebrated in strains of the liveliest gratitude and joy (Ps 21:1-5; 61:5-6; 138:2-8).”

The prophecy about the son who would build the house is also more complex than David would have been able to understand. It pertained both to Solomon who would build the temple edifice, but the ultimate fulfillment of the promise would be in Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Messiah, who would be the builder of the spiritual house of God, the church. His kingdom is the kingdom of heaven of which He is the eternal king. When the angel Gabriel announced to Mary that she would be the mother of the Messiah, he said: “He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”<sup>60</sup>

*The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “Between father and son there is not only love, but oneness. Whatsoever the father hath, that belongs also to the son by natural right. But this sonship is magnified in the Psalms beyond the measure of Solomon or any natural limits. The Son there is ‘the Firstborn,’ which Solomon was not, ‘higher than the kings of the earth’ (... Psalm 89:27); and he must have ‘the nations for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession’ (... Psalm 2:8). Psalms like the second and seventy-second belong, not to Solomon personally, but to him as the type of the prince of Peace; and they help to show us what is the true meaning and fulfillment of the words here. *The rod of men*; that is, such punishment as men fitly receive for their faults. David’s natural posterity was to be exempt neither from human depravity, nor

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<sup>59</sup> Phil. 2:9-11

<sup>60</sup> Luke 1:32,33

from punishment, nor from the changes and chances of mortal life. With them, as with men generally, there would be a tangled skein, of virtue and sin, of folly and wisdom, of terrible fall and penitent recovery. But there was to be no blotting out of David's lineage. Great earthly houses, in the long course of events, one after another become extinct, and even the tabernacle of David was to fall (... Amos 9:11), but not forever. God would 'raise up its ruins' in Christ, and 'build it as in the days of old.' So in ... Isaiah 9:1 there is the same thought of the complete down-hewing of David's earthly lineage, yet only to rise again to nobler life and vigor, in the Branch, or Sucker, that was to spring from the fallen trunk."

Although the words "I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men" refer, in first instance to God's punishments of the kings of Israel who did not follow the Lord, they can also be taken as a prophecy of the punishment Christ took upon Himself for the sins of mankind. We can see in it Isaiah's prophecy about Jesus: "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."<sup>61</sup>

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, observes: "Two distinct but related themes in the subsequent literature of the Bible have their source in this chapter. First, the Davidic line is given the right to rule *for ever*, and the Lord gives his word that he will not withdraw his *steadfast love* (Heb. *hesed*, the covenant term) from David's son as he did from Saul (v. 15). Thus the Lord is to build David's house; that is, David would found a dynasty. The fact that its rule came to an end, and had been seen by the prophets to be failing, gave rise to the second theme which developed as a reinterpretation of the promises to David: his booth would be repaired (Amos 9:11); a Davidic child would establish his throne with justice and with righteousness (Isa. 9:6-7); a branch from the stump of Jesse would yet create an ideal kingdom (Isa. 11:1-9), cf. Jer. 23:5; Zech. 3:8). In other words, this chapter was to become the source of the messianic hope as it developed in the message of prophets and psalmists."

Adding a footnote from another source, Ms. Baldwin states: "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. The Nathan oracle constitutes the title-deed of the Davidic house to the rule of Israel and Judah, which rule it did indeed exercise over Judah for fully four centuries."

David's reaction to God's Word is almost as remarkable as the message itself. With genuine humility, David bows before God and says: "God, why me?" This ought to be the response of all of us who have experienced the "amazing grace that saved a wretch like me." The realization that God not only extended His grace to David personally, but also made him the most important link in the history of salvation was more than David was able to take in. David realized that God did not choose David because of his own abilities or potentials, but that His amazing grace somehow was given to mankind as a whole. "Is this your usual way of dealing with man, O Sovereign Lord?" indicates that David began to understand something of the fact that God is love; that "love" is His character. David did not know at this point, nor could he have understood that God would so love the world that He would give his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Isa. 53:5

<sup>62</sup> John 3:16

David's conclusion is not that God acted this way because David was great or had such great potentials, but that God is great. It is the greatness of God that made him great and that made Israel into the most important nation of the world. In one of his psalms David would sing: "You give me your shield of victory, and your right hand sustains me; you stoop down to make me great."<sup>63</sup> If Israel as a nation had been able to understand what David understood here, this world would have been a different place. But Israel reacted to God's election by behaving as if it was their greatness that made God decide to live among them. Instead of reacting with humility to God's grace as David did, they became proud.

David's concluding prayer must not be interpreted as if there was any doubt in his mind about God's reliability. David knew that God's promises were conditional. None of God's promises can be fulfilled without faith. The Apostle Paul expresses this in one of his epistles, saying: "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God. Now it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ. He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come."<sup>64</sup> It is our "amen" in response to God's "yes" that enables God to be consistent in doing what He promised to do. What David asks for in this prayer is that God will enable him and his house to keep the faith so that God's promises can be realized. The fact that many of David's sons did not keep the faith caused long delays and deference, but God never cancelled His promise about the coming of the Messiah who would make the line of David into an eternal dynasty.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel* comments on the end of David's prayer: "*And now* indicates a new departure, as David makes specific requests (cf. 28-29). Up to this point he has been entering into all that the Lord has done in the past; only after that does his mind turn to the interests of his own kingdom, seen in relation to God's kingdom, and therefore in true perspective, but still important in its own right. It is easy to read with knowledge of the fulfillment of the promises in mind, and forget that for David the establishment of his dynasty was still hidden in the unknown future, and to be accepted by faith, every bit as much as the 'eternal' element in the promise. So David reasons with himself (v. 28), i. *thou art God*, ii. *thy words are true*, iii. *thou hast promised*, to all of which the logical conclusion is that God's word must be fulfilled. But, like us, David needed to trace the steps in the argument in order to be certain that his feet were on sure ground, and by turning the promise into prayer he both endorsed his acceptance of God's word and also, by repetition, underscored it for future generations. He ends his prayer, not with petition, but with an assertion that his house will be *blessed for ever*."

Thus it came about that David gave up his intention of building the temple. Though he was king of Israel, he accepted that he had to defer to a higher authority, that of the God of Israel to whom he owed his calling through the prophet Samuel, his preservation in mortal danger at the hand of Saul, and his accession to the throne by common consent of the people. Recognition on the part of the king that he owed the throne of his kingdom to the sovereign Lord God involved humble acceptance of the role of servant, *thy servant*, as David calls himself ten times over in this prayer. David was far

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<sup>63</sup> Ps. 18:35

<sup>64</sup> II Cor. 1:20-22

from perfect, as the subsequent narrative is to demonstrate, but he had grasped this all-important truth about himself, and it was because he valued so highly his call to serve the Lord God that he was sensitive to rebuke and repented when he stepped out of line. For this reason, he knew forgiveness and restoration of fellowship, both of which had eluded Saul because he could never bring himself to take his hands off the reins of government, or readily admit to being in the wrong. Saul, by clinging tenaciously to what he regarded as his kingly prerogative, lost the kingdom; David, more concerned about honoring the Lord than guarding his own reputation, had his kingdom made sure for ever. It was this promise that gripped future generations, especially in troubled times, and caused the Davidic line to be recorded with more than usual care by different branches of the family, so that when the Gospels came to be written, the evangelists Matthew and Luke each used a genealogy of Jesus that included David but differed in intention and details (Matt. 1:5-6, 20; Luke 3:31).”

*vi. The establishment of David’s empire 8:1-14*

***1 In the course of time, David defeated the Philistines and subdued them, and he took Gath from the control of the Philistines.***

***2 David also defeated the Moabites. He made them lie down on the ground and measured them off with a length of cord. Every two lengths of them were put to death, and the third length was allowed to live. So the Moabites became subject to David and brought tribute.***

***3 Moreover, David fought Hadadezer son of Rehob, king of Zobah, when he went to restore his control along the Euphrates River.***

***4 David captured a thousand of his chariots, seven thousand charioteers and twenty thousand foot soldiers. He hamstrung all but a hundred of the chariot horses.***

***5 When the Arameans of Damascus came to help Hadadezer king of Zobah, David struck down twenty-two thousand of them.***

***6 He put garrisons in the Aramean kingdom of Damascus, and the Arameans became subject to him and brought tribute. The Lord gave David victory wherever he went.***

***7 David took the gold shields that belonged to the officers of Hadadezer and brought them to Jerusalem. 8 From Tebah and Berothai, towns that belonged to Hadadezer, King David took a great quantity of bronze.***

***9 When Tou king of Hamath heard that David had defeated the entire army of Hadadezer,***

***10 he sent his son Joram to King David to greet him and congratulate him on his victory in battle over Hadadezer, who had been at war with Tou. Joram brought with him articles of silver and gold and bronze.***

***11 King David dedicated these articles to the Lord, as he had done with the silver and gold from all the nations he had subdued:***

***12 Edom and Moab, the Ammonites and the Philistines, and Amalek. He also dedicated the plunder taken from Hadadezer son of Rehob, king of Zobah.***

***13 And David became famous after he returned from striking down eighteen thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt.***

***14 He put garrisons throughout Edom, and all the Edomites became subject to David. The Lord gave David victory wherever he went.***

This chapter gives a summary of David's military exploits and victories, some of which had already been recorded in chapter 5:17-25. The story begins where chapter five leaves off. The wars mentioned in brief are with the Philistines, the Moabites, the king of Zobah and his Aramean confederates and with Edom. In all instances David was victorious, which is attributed to the fact that "The Lord gave David the victory wherever he went."

The record of most of these wars is also found in 1 Chronicles 18, where, in some cases, different figures are used for horses, chariots and footmen captured.

It is difficult to determine what David did with some of his Moabite prisoners of war. If we interpret v.2 literally, we get the impression that the prisoners were ordered to lie on the ground and a measuring line determined who would be killed and who kept alive. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states: "*Measured them with a line* may mean that he spared the little ones but killed the adults whose height approximated the length of two cords."

*The Adam Clarke's Commentary*, adopting a more humane interpretation, comments: "It has been generally conjectured that David, after he had conquered Moab, consigned two-thirds of the inhabitants to the sword; but I think the text will bear a meaning much more reputable to that king. The first clause of the verse seems to determine the sense; he measured them with a line, casting them down to the ground—to put to death, and with one line to keep alive. Death seems here to be referred to the cities by way of metaphor; and, from this view of the subject we may conclude that two-thirds of the cities, that is, the strong places of Moab, were erased; and not having strong places to trust to, the text adds, so the Moabites became David's servants, and brought gifts, i.e., were obliged to pay tribute. The word line may mean the same here as our rod, i.e., the instrument by which land is measured. There are various opinions on this verse, with which I shall not trouble the reader."

*The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* believes that David had personal reasons for avenging himself upon the Moabites, stating: "This refers to a well-known practice of Eastern kings, to command their prisoners of war, particularly those who, notorious for the atrocity of their crimes, or distinguished by the indomitable spirit of their resistance, had greatly incensed the victors, to lie down on the ground, and then put to death a certain portion of them, which was determined by lot, but most commonly by a measuring line. Our version makes him put two-thirds to death, and spare one-third. The Septuagint and Vulgate make one-half. This war usage was not, perhaps, usually practiced by the people of God; but Jewish writers assert that the cause of this particular severity against this people was their having massacred David's parents and family, whom he had, during his exile, committed to the king of Moab."

Finally, *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "*Casting them down to the ground*; Hebrew, *making them to lie down on the ground*; and so the Revised Version. It is plain that those who were made to lie on the ground were combatants who had been made prisoners, and the Hebrew seems to mean that, while they were thus prostrate, they were measured off into three divisions, whereof two were put to the sword, and one permitted to live. All the versions, however, understand that only half were put to death, making the sense to be that he measured them with two cords, one to kill, and one full cord — one,

that is, of larger size, to save alive. We get no help from ... 1 Chronicles 18:2, where this treatment of the Moabites is omitted.”

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments as follows on David’s war with Hadadezer, king of Zobah: “Mention of Zobah takes David’s campaigns far to the north of the territory which had thus far belonged to Israel. Saul had had cause to fight against Zobah (1 Sam. 14:47); David went on the offensive to attack this mountainous kingdom to the north of Damascus. He chose a moment when the king, Hadadezer, was campaigning to recapture territory that had belonged to him to the north, including part of the Euphrates river, so opening up a second front. David’s strategy was effective, enabling him to take captive a sizeable number of men and horses. The decision of David to cripple the chariot horses by cutting the tendons in their legs, so rendering them useless for warfare, may have been a realistic decision on a campaign. There would be limits to the number of horses he could keep fed and cared for, and in the mountainous terrain chariots were of limited value. Chariots had not greatly helped their enemies thus far (cf. Exod. 15:19; Josh. 11:6-0; Judg. 4:15-16), hence David’s wariness of the advanced military vehicle, though he retained a hundred of them. When the Syrians of Damascus went to the aid of Hadadezer, David could have been trapped between the two armies, but such was his ability as a commander that his army overcame their enemy and put large numbers to death.”

In his war with Hadadezer David collected a number of gold shields, as well as a large quantity of bronze, all of which he dedicated to the Lord. These shields may have inspired Solomon later, who had three hundred small shields made, which he used for the decoration of his own palace.<sup>65</sup> After Solomon’s death, his son, Rehoboam, lost both his father’s treasures as well as the temple’s in a war with Shishak, king of Egypt.<sup>66</sup> Hoping that no one would notice the difference when the sun shone on the shields, “King Rehoboam made bronze shields to replace them and assigned these to the commanders of the guard on duty at the entrance to the royal palace. Whenever the king went to the Lord’s temple, the guards bore the shields, and afterward they returned them to the guardroom.”<sup>67</sup> What was, in David’s mind, a means to glorify the Lord became, in Solomon’s day, a means to self glorification. And Rehoboam learned to live with a substitute of glory, which he mainly devoted to himself. Such samples of spiritual decline are easily traced in following generations that lost the vision of the glory of the Lord.

Not much is known about the kingdom of Hamath, but evidently David’s victory over Hadadezer meant the end of suppression for Hamath, so David made himself a friend. King Tou sent his son as an ambassador to congratulate David. In *II Samuel* this man is called Joram, while in *I Chronicles* he goes by the name of Hadoram. We read there: “When Tou king of Hamath heard that David had defeated the entire army of Hadadezer king of Zobah, he sent his son Hadoram to King David to greet him and congratulate him on his victory in battle over Hadadezer, who had been at war with Tou. Hadoram brought all kinds of articles of gold and silver and bronze.”<sup>68</sup> *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on the name Hadoram: “This was apparently his real name,

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<sup>65</sup> I Kings 10:17

<sup>66</sup> I Kings 14:25,26

<sup>67</sup> I Kings 14:27,28

<sup>68</sup> I Chron. 18:9,10

Joram being merely the substitution of the nearest Hebrew word for something foreign and therefore unintelligible.”

David also dedicated the gifts Joram brought him to the Lord, in the recognition that his rise to power was due to the Lord’s grace, not to his own abilities.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments on vv.13 and 14: “As the marginal reading indicates, most Hebrew texts have ‘Syrians’ where the RSV text, following the LXX, Syriac and some Hebrew MSS, has *Edomites* (cf. 1 Chr. 18:12). *The Valley of Salt*, to the south of the Dead Sea, certainly implies Edom rather than Syria (Heb. Aram and Edom were easily mistaken). The large number of Edomites put to death implies an attempt to invade Israel from the south, and so preserve their monopoly on trade routes through the desert to the Red Sea port of Ezion Geber. On this occasion they were crippled by heavy losses, and forced to submit. David *put garrisons ... through all Edom, and all the Edomites became David’s servants*, so establishing his trade monopoly there and opening the way to communications with Arabia and Africa, which were to develop significantly during Solomon’s reign (cf. 1 Kgs. 9:26-28). *And the Lord gave victory to David wherever he went*: the repetition of verse 6c concludes a section which in a modern history of a reign would have had far greater space, for it is usual to reckon a leader’s victories in battle as his major achievements. These military operations must also have been time-consuming, occupying much of David’s best years, and displaying his brilliance as a general; but the scriptural writer, far from cultivating a hero-cult, attributes David’s success to the Lord who called him and enabled him to succeed, and gives emphasis to other aspects of David’s character in the chapters that follow.”

David wrote Psalm Sixty on the occasion of the war with Edom, which carries the following subscript: “A miktam of David. For teaching. When he fought Arama Naharaim and Aram Zobah, and when Joab returned and struck down twelve thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt.” *The Tyndale Commentary* comments on this introduction to the actual text of the poem: “But for this psalm and its title we should have no inkling of the resilience of David’s hostile neighbors at the peak of his power. His very success brought its dangers of alliances among his enemies (cf. II Sam. 8:5), and of battles far from home. At such a moment, when his main force was with him near the Euphrates (II Sam. 8:3), Edom evidently took its chance to fall upon Judah from the South.” David won the victory on the battlefield, but he lost the battle at home. That is the reason this psalm is not a song of victory, but the cry of a saddened heart.”

*The Pulpit Commentary* furthermore comments: “In the superscription of Psalm Sixty we find the wars with Aram-Naharaim (Mesopotamia) and Aram-Zobah coupled with this smiting of Edom in the valley of salt, which lay to the south of the Dead Sea, and was a fatal place to the Edomites in their war subsequently with Amaziah (... 2 Kings 14:7). Such a double victory over the Arameans first, and immediately afterwards over Edom, would account for the ‘name,’ that is, the reputation, which David gained. The course of events seems to have been as follows. The Edomites, believing that David was engaged in a struggle beyond his powers with the Syrians, took the opportunity to invade Israel. But the campaign in Aram was quickly decided, and David was able to send Abishai with a detachment of his forces to repel the Edomites. On hearing of his approach, they retired before him, and, making a stand in their own territories, were defeated in the valley of salt, with the loss of eighteen thousand men (... 1 Chronicles 18:12). In this place the victory is ascribed to David, because it was won by his general

acting under his orders. For some unexplained reason, the feelings of the Israelites against Edom were very vindictive, and Joab followed with larger forces, and not only slew twelve thousand in a second battle (Psalm 60, title), but remained six months in the country, ruthlessly putting every male to death (... 1 Kings 11:15, 16). From this time the Edomites and Israelites were implacable foes, and in later Jewish literature the Jews gave vent to their intense hatred of the Roman empire by giving it the name of Edom.”

***vii. David’s delegation of duties 8:15-18***

***15 David reigned over all Israel, doing what was just and right for all his people.  
16 Joab son of Zeruiah was over the army; Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was recorder;  
17 Zadok son of Ahitub and Ahimelech son of Abiathar were priests; Seraiah was secretary;  
18 Benaiah son of Jehoiada was over the Kerethites and Pelethites; and David’s sons were royal advisers.***

In these verses we find a list of, what could be called, David’s cabinet. Although David considered himself to be “king under God,” as in a theocracy, he did rule as an absolute monarch, having the power of life-and-death over his subjects. But this did not mean that he could not delegate the day-to-day administration to his ministers, or did not take advice from others, in this case his own sons.

There are two similar lists of David’s cabinet ministers in this book.<sup>69</sup> The differences between the two lists are easily explained when the lapse of time is taken into consideration. It is more amazing to find some names of people who served consistently during all of David’s reign in both lists than to note that some were no longer serving. The most amazing survivor is Joab, who was the thorn in David’s flesh, but who stuck to David, in spite of David’s efforts to rid himself of his army commander. Joab was unscrupulous but totally dedicated to David’s person, as well as to his own position. David believed that he would lose the army if he dismissed Joab, and he felt he could not afford that.

*The Pulpit Commentary* puts David’s organization of government in perspective by comparing it with the preceding and following administrations. We read: “[David] was as distinguished in the arts of peace as in those of war. And thus, while his first care was for the establishment of religion, and while even the singing in the sanctuary was not beneath his notice, he also, even in the midst of dangerous wars, gave careful attention to the orderly government of his kingdom and the maintenance of right and law. We have already seen with what consummate skill he selected a capital immediately that he was made king of all Israel. Saul had done much in war. Though finally defeated at Gilboa, he had taught the Israelites their strength, and laid the foundations of David’s empire; but he had done nothing to consolidate the tribes, or provide tribunals for the settlement of disputed legal rights or the punishment of crimes. Israel was as loose an aggregate of discordant atoms at his death as it was at his appointment; and the maintenance of order was left to the caprice of local sheiks. Samuel had done far more for the internal development and consolidation of the people than Saul; but it was David who made them into a nation. The continuance of his work was frustrated by the extravagance of

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<sup>69</sup> II Sam. 20:23-26

Solomon, the folly of Rehoboam, and the ambition of the restless tribe of Ephraim; but the two parts into which his realm was broken at least held together, and there never again was danger of such anarchy and threatened disintegration as existed in the times of the judges.”

*The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes about the priesthood: “Zadok ... and ... Ahimelech the son of Abiathar were the priests. There is a confusion in the text here (cf. 1 Chron 18:16; 24:3,6,31). Ahimelech is substituted for Abiathar – ‘and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar’ for ‘Abiathar the son of Ahimelech.’ But in 2 Sam 20:25, and in all other passages, it is Abiathar who is mentioned as contemporary with Zadok. On the massacre of the priests at Nob, Saul conferred the priesthood on Zadok, of the family of Eleazar (1 Chron 6:50), while David acknowledged Abiathar, of Ithamar’s family, who fled to him. The two high priests exercised their office under the respective princes to whom they were attached. But on David’s obtaining the kingdom over all Israel, they both retained their dignity-Abiathar officiating at Jerusalem, and Zadok at Gibeon (1 Chron 16:39).”

On “the Kerethites and Pelethites” Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, states: “*Joab the son of Zeruah*, David’s nephew (1 Chr. 2:16), having put to death Abner (2 Sam. 3:27), who might have been in competition for the post, became the army general, though the *Cherethites and the Pelethites*, mercenary soldiers with special responsibility for guarding the king, were under the separate command of *Benaiah the son of Jehoiada*, a valiant soldier (2 Sam. 23:20-23). By employing foreign guards to ensure the safety of the king, David would minimize the possibility of becoming the victim of inter-tribal rivalries; these men from Crete could give whole-hearted allegiance to him (cf. 2 Sam. 15:18; 20:7).”

***ix. David honors a possible rival 9:1-13***

***1 David asked, "Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?"***

***2 Now there was a servant of Saul's household named Ziba. They called him to appear before David, and the king said to him, "Are you Ziba?" "Your servant," he replied.***

***3 The king asked, "Is there no one still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show God's kindness?" Ziba answered the king, "There is still a son of Jonathan; he is crippled in both feet."***

***4 "Where is he?" the king asked. Ziba answered, "He is at the house of Makir son of Ammiel in Lo Debar."***

***5 So King David had him brought from Lo Debar, from the house of Makir son of Ammiel.***

***6 When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor. David said, "Mephibosheth!" "Your servant," he replied.***

***7 "Don't be afraid," David said to him, "for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table."***

***8 Mephibosheth bowed down and said, "What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?"***

**9 Then the king summoned Ziba, Saul's servant, and said to him, "I have given your master's grandson everything that belonged to Saul and his family.**

**10 You and your sons and your servants are to farm the land for him and bring in the crops, so that your master's grandson may be provided for. And Mephibosheth, grandson of your master, will always eat at my table." (Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.)**

**11 Then Ziba said to the king, "Your servant will do whatever my lord the king commands his servant to do." So Mephibosheth ate at David's table like one of the king's sons.**

**12 Mephibosheth had a young son named Mica, and all the members of Ziba's household were servants of Mephibosheth.**

**13 And Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king's table, and he was crippled in both feet.**

David and Jonathan had made a covenant in which David promised not to exterminate Jonathan's family when he became king in Saul's place. We read: "Show me unfailing kindness like that of the Lord as long as I live, so that I may not be killed, and do not ever cut off your kindness from my family — not even when the Lord has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth." So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, 'May the Lord call David's enemies to account.'"<sup>70</sup> The covenant had been remarkable in that Jonathan had initiated it, but also that, naturally speaking, Jonathan was the pretender to the throne, which right he ceded to David. It would have been considered normal in those days, if David had wiped out all of Saul's family. That is what kings did at a change in dynasty. What David does here, however, goes well beyond any promise made to Jonathan. David did not just inquire about Jonathan's offspring, but about anyone from the house of Saul.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, observes: "David throws the net wider than his promises required, extending his generosity to any of Saul's surviving sons or grandsons, though his motive is clear: he is neither soft nor weak, but intends to show *kindness* (Heb. *hesed*) *for Jonathan's sake*, for he remembered how much he had owed to Jonathan. Members of the previous king's household had made themselves scarce, hence David's need of information. One who can give the needed information is a man who has served in Saul's palace, by the name of *Ziba*, and who now calls himself David's *servant*. He was a man of some standing, with twenty servants of his own (v.10). The only person he mentions as a descendant of Saul, to whom David might have shown *the kindness of God* (cf. Eph. 4:32), happens to be Jonathan's son, crippled in a fall (2 Sam. 4:4), though it transpires that there were others who might have had some claim (2 Sam 21:8). *Mephibosheth*, who is called Merib-baal in 1 Chronicles 8:34 and 9:40 (the word 'baal' being avoided in Samuel because of its idolatrous associations), had been living in relative obscurity in Lo-debar, usually identified with Debir in God's territory (Josh. 13:27). Amos made a disparaging reference to it (Amos 6:13). *Machir the son of Ammiel*, who had provided a home for the prince of the deposed house of Saul, was to appear again in a hospitable role when David was in need (2 Sam. 17:27)."

We are not told at what point David made this inquiry into Saul's survivors. Mephibosheth had been five years old when Jonathan and Saul died. We are told that he

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<sup>70</sup> 1 Sam. 20:14-16

had a young son at the time David called him, which indicates that he must have been more than a teenager. We read about some of the kings of Israel and Judah who were in their early teens when they married and started a family, so there is a possibility that Mephibosheth was still fairly young when he met David. *Barnes' Notes* observes: "Mephibosheth was five years old at Saul's death. He may have been thirteen at David's accession to the throne of Israel. In the eighth year of David's reign over all Israel he would have been twenty-one. His having a son at this time indicates that we are about the 10<sup>th</sup> year of David's reign."

Although no details are given about Mephibosheth's physical problem, we know that he fell as a boy and we may assume that he broke both legs, which never healed properly. How Mephibosheth felt about his handicap is clear from the fact that he calls himself "a dead dog." The term indicates probably more than humility. Not only had the accident damaged his self-image, Mephibosheth may have feared for his life when David called him. He may have wanted to make clear to David that his physical condition made him an unlikely pretender to the throne of Israel and that David would have no reason to rid himself of a potential rival. The fact that David intended, not only to spare his life, but would adopt him as part of the royal family, was so unheard of at that time, that the thought probably never have entered Mephibosheth's head.

*The Matthew Henry's Commentary* draws a beautiful spiritual lesson from David's act of kindness toward Mephibosheth, saying: "Now because David was a type of Christ, his Lord and son, his root and offspring, let his kindness to Mephibosheth serve to illustrate the kindness and love of God our Savior towards fallen man, which yet he was under no obligation to, as David was to Jonathan. Man was convicted of rebellion against God, and, like Saul's house, under a sentence of rejection from him, was not only brought low and impoverished, but lame and impotent, made so by the fall. The Son of God enquires after this degenerate race, that enquired not after him, comes to seek and save them. To those of them that humble themselves before him, and commit themselves to him, he restores the forfeited inheritance, he entitles them to a better paradise than that which Adam lost, and takes them into communion with himself, sets them with his children at his table, and feasts them with the dainties of heaven. Lord, what is man, that thou shouldst thus magnify him!"

As we will later see, when David fled Jerusalem during Absalom's rebellion, both Ziba and Mephibosheth accuse one another of treacherous behavior to the point where it is difficult to determine who spoke the truth.

### **c. David's personal crisis 10:1 – 12:31**

#### ***i.. War with Ammon 10:1-19***

***1 In the course of time, the king of the Ammonites died, and his son Hanun succeeded him as king.***

***2 David thought, "I will show kindness to Hanun son of Nahash, just as his father showed kindness to me." So David sent a delegation to express his sympathy to Hanun concerning his father. When David's men came to the land of the Ammonites,***

***3 the Ammonite nobles said to Hanun their lord, "Do you think David is honoring your father by sending men to you to express sympathy? Hasn't David sent them to you to explore the city and spy it out and overthrow it?"***

*4 So Hanun seized David's men, shaved off half of each man's beard, cut off their garments in the middle at the buttocks, and sent them away.*

*5 When David was told about this, he sent messengers to meet the men, for they were greatly humiliated. The king said, "Stay at Jericho till your beards have grown, and then come back."*

*6 When the Ammonites realized that they had become a stench in David's nostrils, they hired twenty thousand Aramean foot soldiers from Beth Rehob and Zobah, as well as the king of Maacah with a thousand men, and also twelve thousand men from Tob.*

*7 On hearing this, David sent Joab out with the entire army of fighting men.*

*8 The Ammonites came out and drew up in battle formation at the entrance to their city gate, while the Arameans of Zobah and Rehob and the men of Tob and Maacah were by themselves in the open country.*

*9 Joab saw that there were battle lines in front of him and behind him; so he selected some of the best troops in Israel and deployed them against the Arameans.*

*10 He put the rest of the men under the command of Abishai his brother and deployed them against the Ammonites.*

*11 Joab said, "If the Arameans are too strong for me, then you are to come to my rescue; but if the Ammonites are too strong for you, then I will come to rescue you.*

*12 Be strong and let us fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God. The Lord will do what is good in his sight."*

*13 Then Joab and the troops with him advanced to fight the Arameans, and they fled before him.*

*14 When the Ammonites saw that the Arameans were fleeing, they fled before Abishai and went inside the city. So Joab returned from fighting the Ammonites and came to Jerusalem.*

*15 After the Arameans saw that they had been routed by Israel, they regrouped.*

*16 Hadadezer had Arameans brought from beyond the River; they went to Helam, with Shobach the commander of Hadadezer's army leading them.*

*17 When David was told of this, he gathered all Israel, crossed the Jordan and went to Helam. The Arameans formed their battle lines to meet David and fought against him.*

*18 But they fled before Israel, and David killed seven hundred of their charioteers and forty thousand of their foot soldiers. He also struck down Shobach the commander of their army, and he died there.*

*19 When all the kings who were vassals of Hadadezer saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they made peace with the Israelites and became subject to them. So the Arameans were afraid to help the Ammonites anymore.*

There is a question as to whether Nahash, who is said to have died in the chapter, is the same as the one who had attacked Jabesh in Gilead, demanding the right to gouge out the right eye of every fighting man of the city.<sup>71</sup> That event had propelled Saul's popularity to its all-time height. But that incident occurred approximately fifty years before the story described here. As *Barnes' Notes* observes: "The interval between the two events, not less than 50 years, and possibly more, is against his being the same as the Nahash of 1 Sam 11."

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<sup>71</sup> 1 Sam. 11:1,2

Whoever this Nahash was, there had been friendly relationships between him and David. And when David heard of his death and the ascension of his son Hanun to the throne of Ammon, he decided to send a delegation of condolences to the Ammonite court. David may have been overly naïve in doing so. The thought had obviously never entered his mind that his well-meaning gesture could be interpreted as a sly political move to obtain information prior to a military attack. Yet, David could not be overly blamed for trying to maintain diplomatic relationships with, what could be assumed to be, a friendly neighbor. The fact that he proved to be wrong did not make him a deficient diplomat. What he tried to do is rather an example of how international relationships between nations ought to be maintained.

There is in Second Samuel an earlier brief mention of David subduing the Ammonites, which probably refers to the incidents described here.<sup>72</sup> The Scriptures do not give any further details about the friendly relationships that had existed between David and Nahash.

The fact that Hanun accepts the advice of his counselors to treat David's envoys with suspicion is an indication of his own duplicity. We usually suspect others of wrong doings that we would do ourselves. What Hanun could have done was simply refuse to meet with David's delegations. The treatment he subjected them to was an invitation to trouble. No self-respecting country would allow its ambassadors to be treated like this without retaliation. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on Hanun's treatment of the diplomats: "To an Oriental the beard was the mark of his being a free man, and to cut it off on one side was not merely an insult to David's ambassadors, but the treating them like slaves. Moreover, as only the priests wore underclothing, and as the ordinary dress of men consisted of a tunic and a loose flowing robe thrown over it, the cutting of this robe short up to the hip was a vile and abominable affront. Of course, Hanun intended this as a challenge to war, whereas David had meant peace and friendship."

David's delegation had to travel almost fifty miles to make it back home. We may assume that they were able to change clothes as soon as they crossed their own borders, but the growing back of their beards would take considerable time. David, correctly, took Hanun's treatment of his envoys as a personal insult. It amounted indeed to a declaration of war between the two nations.

*The New International Version* gives the most literal rendering of the Hebrew text of v.6, stating: "When the Ammonites realized that they had become a stench in David's nostrils ...". The Hebrew text reads literally: "When the children of Ammon saw that they stank before David ...". *The Revised Standard Version* reads: "When the Ammonites saw that they had become odious to David ...". It almost sounds as if the Ammonites had acted unintentionally, as if they had not considered the possibility that David would react.

It does appear, indeed, that they had not been ready for war, since they had to hire foreign troops in order to fend off an attack by the Israelite army. V.6 seems to give us a rather condensed version of the Ammonite preparation for war. The account in *First Chronicles* seems to be the more complete one, reading: "When the Ammonites realized that they had become a stench in David's nostrils, Hanun and the Ammonites sent a thousand talents of silver to hire chariots and charioteers from Aram Naharaim, Aram Maacah and Zobah. They hired thirty-two thousand chariots and charioteers, as well as the king of Maacah with his troops, who came and camped near Medeba, while the

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<sup>72</sup> See II Sam. 8:11,12.

Ammonites were mustered from their towns and moved out for battle.”<sup>73</sup> There is, however, some confusion in comparing the two texts as to how many of those troops were infantry and how many cavalry.

Joab realized how critical the encounter would be since there was a possibility of the Israelite army being attacked on two fronts at the same time, front and back. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “The object of Joab was to prevent at all hazards the junction of the Syrians with the Ammonites, and he was only just in time to throw himself between them. This was resolute but dangerous policy, as, in case of defeat, he would have a powerful enemy in his rear. Apparently, however, he was aware that his real work lay with the Syrian mercenaries, who were dangerous enough by themselves, and would become more than a match for him if they were reinforced by the men of Rabbah. He therefore leaves Abishai with such troops as he could spare to watch the Ammonites, feeling sure that they would not hazard an attack unless they saw matters going ill with him; and, taking with him all his bravest men, ‘the choice men of Israel,’ he prepares with them to give battle to the Syrians. Joab recognized the full danger of their situation; for should he meet with any check in his attack on this vast host of mercenaries, he was well aware that the Ammonites, watching the battle with eager interest, would, on the first news of victory, rush upon Abishai with exulting fury; and the men with him, being only ordinary troops, would be disheartened by Joab’s failure, so that without extraordinary bravery on their leader’s part, they would give way, and all would be lost.”

“Be strong and let us fight bravely” is the translation of only two Hebrew words: *Chazaq w<sup>a</sup>nitchazaq*. This is basically a repetition of the same word, about which *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “The Hebrew employs two conjugations of the same verb, literally, *be strong, and let us show ourselves strong*. And need there was for bravery; for the welfare, as he went on to show, of all Israel, and the honor of Israel’s God, were in jeopardy.”

Whether Joab showed himself a man of faith, as some Bible scholars assume, is an open question. His conduct shows that he was a first class military man who could analyze strategically and use words he knew would encourage his troops and give them the needed motivation to fight with all there was in them. His private life does not give any indication of a personal relationship with God.

Although this battle was won by Israel, the war was not yet over. We read that the Arameans regrouped after having been beaten by Joab. They received reinforcements by other states on either side of the Euphrates and readied themselves for an attack upon Israel. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments: “The federation of Aramean states was too powerful to take the defeat as decisive and, reinforced by allies *beyond the Euphrates* (lit. ‘beyond the river,’ but the Euphrates is meant), Hadadezer’s army commander, *Shobach*, marched his forces to *Helam*, probably the modern ‘Alma, some thirty-five miles ... east of the Sea of Galilee. So significant was the outcome of this battle that David commanded the army in person, and won a resounding victory against their chariots and cavalry, even mortally wounding their commander. Not only the Arameans but also all their allies became subjects of David. This meant that the consolidated Israelite tribes had subjugated the powerful Aramean states to the east and north, and secured control over the main trade routes that connected Egypt and Arabia with Syria and further afield. As a result, Israel gained political dominance and economic

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<sup>73</sup> I Chron. 19:6,7

advantage, while at the same time depriving Ammon of military allies. The Ammonites, who had been observing developments from the sidelines, had had opportunity to recover their strength.”

*ii. David’s adultery 11:1-27*

*1 In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king’s men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.*

*2 One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful,*

*3 and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "Isn’t this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite?"*

*4 Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (She had purified herself from her uncleanness.) Then she went back home.*

*5 The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant."*

*6 So David sent this word to Joab: "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent him to David.*

*7 When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going.*

*8 Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him.*

*9 But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master’s servants and did not go down to his house.*

*10 When David was told, "Uriah did not go home," he asked him, "Haven’t you just come from a distance? Why didn’t you go home?"*

*11 Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my master Joab and my lord’s men are camped in the open fields. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!"*

*12 Then David said to him, "Stay here one more day, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next.*

*13 At David’s invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master’s servants; he did not go home.*

*14 In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah.*

*15 In it he wrote, "Put Uriah in the front line where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die."*

*16 So while Joab had the city under siege, he put Uriah at a place where he knew the strongest defenders were.*

*17 When the men of the city came out and fought against Joab, some of the men in David’s army fell; moreover, Uriah the Hittite died.*

*18 Joab sent David a full account of the battle.*

*19 He instructed the messenger: "When you have finished giving the king this account of the battle,*

**20 the king's anger may flare up, and he may ask you, 'Why did you get so close to the city to fight? Didn't you know they would shoot arrows from the wall?**

**21 Who killed Abimelech son of Jerub-Besheth? Didn't a woman throw an upper millstone on him from the wall, so that he died in Thebez? Why did you get so close to the wall?' If he asks you this, then say to him, 'Also, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead.'"**

**22 The messenger set out, and when he arrived he told David everything Joab had sent him to say.**

**23 The messenger said to David, "The men overpowered us and came out against us in the open, but we drove them back to the entrance to the city gate.**

**24 Then the archers shot arrows at your servants from the wall, and some of the king's men died. Moreover, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead."**

**25 David told the messenger, "Say this to Joab: 'Don't let this upset you; the sword devours one as well as another. Press the attack against the city and destroy it.' Say this to encourage Joab."**

**26 When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him.**

**27 After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the Lord.**

There can be no doubt about it that this chapter is the darkest page in David's biography. It was the vilest thing he ever did in his life and it had more far-reaching consequences than any other of his wrong choices. David had come to the point in his life where his power had corrupted him. He did what he did because he thought he could do it and not suffer the consequences. As with any act of sin, the attempt to cover up makes the injury into a festering sore. David's murder of Uriah was, obviously, a greater sin than his affair with Uriah's wife. The only antidote to sin is confession. But when confession occurred, and it did come,<sup>74</sup> it did not obliterate the fallout.

It has been suggested that David had no business being at home while his army was in the field. But that theory does not seem to hold water. David could not be expected to fight every battle in which his troops were involved. David cannot be blamed either for taking a nap in the afternoon. If that is a sin, I plead guilty myself! Joyce G. Baldwin's accusation in *1 and 2 Samuel*, that "while others spent themselves and risked their lives, he was 'killing time,' acting like one of the kings of the nations round about, and exercising a king of *droit de seigneur*" does not seem justified either.

Some Bible scholars try to pin part of the blame on Bathsheba. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* asks the question: "How could any woman of delicacy expose herself where she could be so fully and openly viewed? Did she not know that she was at least in view of the king's terrace? Was there no design in all this?" *The Pulpit Commentary*, more appropriately, states: "Considering the jealousy with which Orientals guard the female members of their family from intrusion, it was a wrong act on the king's part to spy into what was going on in the recesses of the adjoining house. But he did so, and suffered for it years of disgrace and misery. For he saw a beautiful woman, the wife of one of his high officers, bathing, probably to purify herself from some legal uncleanness, such as those mentioned in Leviticus 15. No blame, so far, must be attached to her. The place was regarded as perfectly secluded, and probably neither she nor Uriah

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<sup>74</sup> See Ps. 51.

had ever suspected that what went on there could be observed from the roof of the king's palace."

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, observes: "The account of what happened is brief and objective. The king has an afternoon siesta, followed by a stroll on the *roof*, which of necessity involves going backwards and forwards, getting nowhere, a sense conveyed by the Hebrew verb form. For his vantage-point high above the homes of his citizens (note the double mention of the roof), the king is master of all he surveys. On this occasion he catches sight of a woman, and she is *very beautiful*; the Hebrew idiom adds 'to look at.' The glance becomes the gaze. Enquiries identify her family and her husband. Ignoring the fact that she is the wife of one of his serving troops, and aware only of his own desire (which he does not yet identify as lust), he overrides her personal feelings in the matter by sending messengers to take her. The bald facts are stated, including the detail that she was not pregnant when she came to David. Indeed, she was purifying herself when he took her: 'Opposite the man who is the prey of blind passion stands Bathsheba, and by contrast her purity receives an emblematic aspect'."

It seems naïve to assume that Bathsheba had a choice in the matter. It is true that we do not read anything about her resistance, but to believe, on the basis of an omission, that this made her a willing partner, would mean misreading the circumstances of a woman being called into the presence of an absolute monarch. No one would be allowed to speak in the presence of a king unless invited to do so.

There is no indication in the record that there was more than one meeting between David and Bathsheba. Her pregnancy must have been due to the single encounter mentioned in v.4. As far as David was concerned the affair had probably ended with this single incident. But the case is reopened when Bathsheba sends word to David that she is pregnant. This makes David realize that his sins are finding him out. And he feels that he cannot afford to let that happen. Evidently, there is a limit to power, also absolute power.

David's fellowship with God had been such that he must have known that confession was the only acceptable solution. We do not read, however, of any struggle of conscience, not until Nathan's confrontation had blown off the lid. The awareness of "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge,"<sup>75</sup> ought to have become a reality immediately after the act had been committed. But, instead of following the voice of conscience, David decides upon a cover-up.

Having acted upon his own lustful tendencies, David could not imagine that Uriah would not take advantage of the opportunity to see his wife when he was called home for an interview with the king. Uriah was a Hittite, a descendant of Heth, the second son of Canaan, one of the original inhabitants of the land. It was from the Hittites that Abraham had bought the cave of Machpelah where he buried Sarah after her death.<sup>76</sup> The fact that Uriah had converted to the God of the Israelites, makes his murder even more heinous.

David must have been naïve in assuming that the real reason for calling Uriah home could remain hidden. The palace personal knew what had happened. David had sent one of them to fetch Bathsheba. One of them had received Bathsheba's message, saying she was pregnant, and passed it on to David. What made David think that this information would not be whispered into Uriah's ear? Uriah knew why he had been

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<sup>75</sup> Ps. 51:4

<sup>76</sup> Gen. 23:10-20

called home and he was not willing to comply and clear his king's name. Since David was the highest court in the land, filing a complaint against the judge was not an option. The only revenge Uriah could take upon David for the rape of his wife was to let the matter run its course. He may not have realized that this would eventually cost him his life, but a military commander had to make such costly choice almost daily. It would make David the loser and Bathsheba the victim. Uriah's answer to David when questioned about it: "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my master Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open fields. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and lie with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!" must have stung David's conscience and, at the same time, infuriated the king. They both understood the kind of chess game they were playing and Uriah's willingness to sacrifice would win him the day. Evil is overcome by those who do "not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."<sup>77</sup>

When Uriah is made drunk and even in a condition of inebriation does not go home and sleep with his wife, his doom is sealed. David writes Uriah's death sentence in a letter which the latter hand-carries to his commander Joab. How the man after God's own heart could stoop to do the vilest things, is a mystery we all have to answer to ourselves.

Joab's unquestioning obedience to David's command made him an accomplice. But that was not the only crime that stained Joab's character. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, observes: "This put Joab in the unenviable position of conflict between loyalty to the king and loyalty to his own conscience. Even his professional competence as general is put at risk by the necessity to comply against his better judgment with what the king commands. In the event there was considerable loss of life, including *some of the servants of David*, and Uriah." In our opinion we can put a question mark behind the question about Joab's conscience.

In a sense the same thing had happened to David here as to Saul in the earlier years of his reign; the Spirit of the Lord had departed from David, and an evil spirit from the Lord had taken over the reins in David's life.<sup>78</sup>

David's plan to have Uriah destroyed during the siege of the Ammonite city of Rabah was quite successful. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "To maintain the blockade, men were posted at all fit points round the city, and these were constantly assailed by the besieged. Joab then placed Uriah at a post which was especially the object of attack; and when the usual sally took place and was repulsed, Joab seems to have ordered Uriah to pursue them up to the very gate, where they would be exposed to a shower of arrows from the walls. Others fell besides Uriah, and that the loss was considerable, and the result of bad generalship, though designedly such, seems probable from the deprecation of the king's anger in ver. 20."

After the deed is done and Uriah is killed, Joab sends a report on the situation to the king, seemingly to explain the loss of so many lives in an incident that could be judged by history as poor strategy, but mainly for the purpose of letting David know that his orders had been carried out and that Uriah was dead. The letter is accompanied by oral instructions to the carrier in case David would react with anger about the poor military strategy followed. Joab showed David that he understood something of the ploy

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<sup>77</sup> Rev. 12:11

<sup>78</sup> See I Sam. 16:14.

by not mentioning Uriah's name in the letter. Although he may not have known the details, Joab knew that if Uriah had committed a crime, punishable by death, David would have had him executed on the spot in Jerusalem and not send him back to his army unit to die in a siege. This knowledge would help Joab to maintain his position as supreme commander, in case David would consider his dismissal at a future date.

There is in Joab's advice to the messenger an interesting reference to Israel's earlier history, as we find it recorded in *The Book of Judges*. Evidently, Israel's soldiers were taught examples of historic incidents that would help them to act responsibly under certain circumstances. The story referred to is about Abimelech's siege of the city of Thebez. We read: "Next Abimelech went to Thebez and besieged it and captured it. Inside the city, however, was a strong tower, to which all the men and women — all the people of the city — fled. They locked themselves in and climbed up on the tower roof. Abimelech went to the tower and stormed it. But as he approached the entrance to the tower to set it on fire, a woman dropped an upper millstone on his head and cracked his skull."<sup>79</sup> The moral of that story is "never get too close to the wall of a city under siege!" The instruction given to particularly mention Uriah's death as a means to calm David when his temper flared up, must have struck the messenger as strange and probably aroused suspicion in him. But he followed to the letter the orders given. As it turned out, the advice had been redundant; David never got angry. The way David made it sound, it was Joab whose conscience had to be put at ease, not his.

We do not know how long the period of mourning was that Bathsheba observed for Uriah. Some Bible scholars believe it was merely one week, others one month. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states: "The ordinary mourning period was seven days. Whether widows mourned longer, we do not know. David promptly took Bathsheba as his wife, so that she might be married to him as long as possible before the birth of the child. He hoped thus to forestall any suspicions of premarital relations that might otherwise arise." If, as we assumed earlier, Uriah knew the real reason for which he had been called home because of information he received from David's servants, suspicion of premarital relations in connection with the birth of the baby could not have been kept hidden either. What one servant knew, everyone knew. Most importantly, the Lord knew! And He was not pleased.

### ***iii. The prophet confronts the king 12:1-15a***

***1 The Lord sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor.***

***2 The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle,***

***3 but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.***

***4 "Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him."***

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<sup>79</sup> Judg. 9:50-53

**5 David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, "As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die!**

**6 He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity."**

**7 Then Nathan said to David, "You are the man! This is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul.**

**8 I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more.**

**9 Why did you despise the word of the Lord by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites.**

**10 Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.'**

**11 "This is what the Lord says: 'Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight.**

**12 You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.'" "**

**13 Then David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord." Nathan replied, "The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.**

**14 But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the Lord show utter contempt, the son born to you will die."**

**15 After Nathan had gone home ...**

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, observes: "Whereas in countries such as Egypt the king was regarded as divine, in Israel he had to submit to the Lord God who had chosen him, and observe all the commandments given to Israel (Deut. 17:15, 20). It was the task of the prophet of the Lord to encourage the king to fulfill these obligations, and to rebuke him in God's name if he failed to do so. The prophet Samuel had found King Saul stubbornly opposed to accepting a rebuke (1 Sam. 13:12; 15:13,20); now Nathan was to discover how David would react to hearing the truth about his behavior. Much would depend on the prophet's method of approach, which in this instance provides a model and reveals exceptional insight into human reactions to personal guilt and the failure of other people."

*The Pulpit Commentary* adds: "Though David had remained unrepentant for nearly a year, for we read in ver. 14 that the child was born, yet we are not to suppose that there had been no compunctions of conscience. A man could scarcely pass from utter callousness to a state of mind so tender as that depicted in Psalm 51. without some preparation. Assuredly David had suffered much mental distress, but he had given no outward sign of contrition, and possibly, but for Nathan's message, he might have overpowered his conscience, and his self-reproaches have become less frequent and agitating. More probably he was slowly ripening for repentance, and Nathan's words let loose the agonizing feelings which had more and more struggled within him against his baser lusts. And the prophet's apologue was exactly suited to rouse up that strong sense of justice which was so noble an element in David's character. Doubtless it was framed

for this purpose, and Nathan knew what was the right chord to touch. But we must not, because he was wise and skilful, refuse Nathan our fullest admiration for his manly courage. It is a very dangerous thing to tell princes of their sins, and especially when that prince is an absolute monarch, and his sins are adultery and murder. But the position which Nathan held in David's court made it his duty so to do, and there is no stronger testimony to the power of religion and of God's grace than that it makes men so brave in doing their duty. We may feel sure that Nathan had long grieved over David's fall, and reflected upon the steps which ought to be taken for his admonition. And now, in answer to prayer, the command came from Jehovah bidding him go and bear his testimony. Nathan's parable is admirably adapted for its purpose. While making no direct reference to adultery or murder, it puts very strongly the injustice and heartlessness of the oppression of the weak by the strong, as exemplified in the deed of the rich man. On many occasions David had shown a warm and generous indignation at injustice, and a righteous pity for those wronged. Would such a feeling be called out now? David's conduct was bad enough, and if there was no outburst of anger at the base deed reported to him, and no welling up of pity for the poor man robbed of his one joy, then was his case hopeless, and Nathan must withdraw in despair, and leave David to his fate. But his better feelings were not destroyed, and when Nathan saw them deeply stirred, he broke in with the stern application to the king's own sin, 'Thou art the man!' The courage and the skill of the prophet are alike admirable."

Nathan's parable gives an interesting insight into Israelite life in those days. The first thing we learn is that people kept pets. Animals were not merely raised for labor, consumption or any other kind of profit. This may show that worship of the Creator encourages kindness to animals. That this can lead to a going overboard, as in our present-day western society, where more money is spent on pet food than on philanthropy, is beside the point of this study. Another point is that oppression of the "have-nots" by the rich is as old as mankind itself.

The sin that is revealed in Nathan's story is theft. As *The Pulpit Commentary* observes, Nathan does not mention adultery, which might have aroused David's suspicion. We would have classified David's sin as sin against the sixth and seventh commandment: "You shall not murder," "You shall not commit adultery."<sup>80</sup> Nathan accuses David of having sinned, primarily, against the eighth commandment: "You shall not steal."<sup>81</sup> This, more than anything, emphasizes the cultural gap between us and the people of that time. Since marriage involved the payment of a considerable bride price, adultery was considered a form of theft.

In the parable the rich man is obviously David, the poor man Uriah and the lamb is Bathsheba. This makes David the sinner, Uriah the one sinned against and Bathsheba the victim of the crime. When David breaks through in confession and repentance, addressing God, he cries: "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight."<sup>82</sup> But we are not that far yet in the story.

David reacts violently to the story. The Hebrew uses the words anger and breathing, indicating that David was literally fuming, breathing rapidly because of his anger. His violent reaction suggests that David's conscience had not been quiet and that

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<sup>80</sup> Ex. 20:13,14

<sup>81</sup> Ex. 20:15

<sup>82</sup> Ps. 51:4

he had not been able to control himself and his reactions toward his own guilt. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, commenting on David's reaction, quotes an outside source that reads: "David means to occupy himself with the reality outside of himself, the rich man and his misdeed, but, in actual fact, he is involved with himself and seeks to restore his feeling of well-being in this way ... Nathan provides him with a projection screen for this very purpose, and, indeed, David projects vehemently. He means to pass verdict upon another but actually passes verdict entirely upon himself."

In passing sentence upon the man in the story, David goes beyond what the law demanded, calling the fictitious character "a man of death." The law stated: "If a man steals an ox or a sheep and slaughters it or sells it, he must pay back five head of cattle for the ox and four sheep for the sheep."<sup>83</sup> *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* correctly observes: "But the law did not sentence a sheep-stealer to death." In giving the verdict, David passes sentence upon himself, indicating his own inner turmoil. It is not unusual to judge others with the measurements of our own failure.

In a sense, this made Nathan's role easier. In any other situation, Nathan would have risked his life saying what he said here. But David may have felt relief in the fact that he had been found out. Nathan identified David with the man in the parable. From the way the story began, "There were two men in a certain town ..." David could have guessed that the case brought before him was a hypothetical one. But as Nathan kept talking, the king became so engrossed into the details that he forgot that part. Now it becomes clear that the story was more real than it seemed.

Nathan's pronouncement, "You are the man!" is followed immediately by a message from the Lord, passing God's verdict upon David.

Commenting on the requirement of the law that a stolen sheep be paid back fourfold, *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* observes: "Thou art this son of death, and thou shalt restore this lamb FOURFOLD. It is indulging fancy too much to say David was called, in the course of a just Providence to pay this fourfold debt? to lose four sons by untimely deaths, namely, this son of Bathsheba, on whom David had set his heart, was slain by the Lord; Amnon, murdered by his brother Absalom; Absalom, slain in the oak by Joab; and Adonijah, slain by the order of his brother Solomon, even at the altar of the Lord! The sword and calamity did not depart from his house, from the murder of wretched Amnon by his brother to the slaughter of the sons of Zedekiah, before their father's eyes, by the king of Babylon. His daughter was dishonored by her own brother, and his wives contaminated publicly by his own son! How dreadfully, then, was David punished for his sin! Who would repeat his transgression to share in its penalty? Can his conduct ever be an inducement to, or an encouragement in, sin? Surely not! It must forever fill the reader and the hearer with horror. Behold the goodness and severity of God!"

On the phrase "I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms" *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: "The phraseology means nothing more than that God in His providence, had given David, as king of Israel, everything that was Saul's. The history furnishes conclusive evidence that he never actually married any of the wives of Saul. But the harem of the preceding king belongs, according to Oriental notions, as a part of the regalia, to his successor."

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<sup>83</sup> Ex. 22:1

*The Pulpit Commentary* states: “The solemn anointing made David the representative of Jehovah, and thus his sin was aggravated by the degradation in the eyes of the people, both of the kingly office and also of Jehovah himself. Rank and authority are given to men that they may lead others to do right; it is a fearful misuse of them when they give prestige to sin.”

One of the most embarrassing parts of the punishment David would receive for his sin would be Absalom’s vulgar act in which he publicly raped his father’s wives at the advice of Ahithophel, Bathsheba’s grandfather.<sup>84</sup>

The worst part of the punishment, that which must have affected David most in his conscience, was the fact that David had not only lost his own testimony but that he had discredited faith in Yahweh among those who were God’s enemies. The Hebrew text of v.14 reads literally: “Because you have given occasion to the enemies of the Yahweh to blaspheme by this deed ...” The testimony to the Gospel of Jesus Christ is the lives of the Christians. In the words of the Apostle Paul, “You show that you are a letter from Christ, the result of our ministry, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”<sup>85</sup> If God’s epistles become illegible, the message of the Gospel will be lost to those who are lost. Mahatma Gandhi is supposed to have said: “I would have become a Christian if I could have found one!”

One of the most amazing parts of this story is God’s grace in response of David’s confession: “Then David said to Nathan, ‘I have sinned against the Lord.’ Nathan replied, ‘The Lord has taken away your sin. You are not going to die.’”

#### ***iv. The death of the child 12:15b-23***

***15 ... the Lord struck the child that Uriah’s wife had borne to David, and he became ill.***

***16 David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and went into his house and spent the nights lying on the ground.***

***17 The elders of his household stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he refused, and he would not eat any food with them.***

***18 On the seventh day the child died. David’s servants were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they thought, “While the child was still living, we spoke to David but he would not listen to us. How can we tell him the child is dead? He may do something desperate.”***

***19 David noticed that his servants were whispering among themselves and he realized the child was dead. “Is the child dead?” he asked. “Yes,” they replied, “he is dead.”***

***20 Then David got up from the ground. After he had washed, put on lotions and changed his clothes, he went into the house of the Lord and worshiped. Then he went to his own house, and at his request they served him food, and he ate.***

***21 His servants asked him, “Why are you acting this way? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead, you get up and eat!”***

***22 He answered, “While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, ‘Who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me and let the child live.’”***

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<sup>84</sup> II Sam. 16:20-22

<sup>85</sup> II Cor. 3:3

***23 But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me."***

The unnamed child, born from David's adulterous relation with Bathsheba, fell ill immediately after Nathan's visit. The illegitimacy of David's act is emphasized by the fact that Bathsheba is merely identified as "Uriah's wife." David is deeply affected by the baby's illness, knowing that it will lead to death. Yet, he engages in an exercise of prolonged prayer and fasting, hoping God would change the verdict.

Commenting on David's behavior, Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, writes: "David is a surprising person, so much so that those closest to him at court did not understand the way his mind worked. He knew from what Nathan had told him that the child born to Bathsheba would die, and there would be justice obvious to all in that event. In this way Israel and observers outside of Israel would take note of the evidence that the Lord was indeed a God of righteousness, by whom actions were weighed. David, however, restored to fellowship with the Lord, was overwhelmingly conscious of the Lord's loving-kindness in granting him forgiveness and reinstating him, despite his guilty past, as the covenant king of Israel. This permitted him again to approach the Lord in prayer, and he meant to explore to the full the possibility that the Lord would grant him the life of the child in answer to his petition. This is one case in which Scripture associates illness with the sin of a parent (cf. John 9:2), but, as in the case of the man born blind, the purpose was the glory of God. The biblical writer does not hesitate to attribute directly to the Lord the sickness of this child, in accordance with the prophetic word. There is nothing merely perfunctory about the prayer of David on this occasion. His love for the child, who is not even named, is so great that he will fast for a week and go without sleep in order to give himself to prayer. This passionate man understood the meaning of the word 'love' in the light of the Lord's love to him, and longed for the baby to be spared. When the child dies, for his prayer receives a negative answer, no-one dares to tell him the news for fear of his reaction, but they had misinterpreted the king's mind. Once he had established that the child was dead, David, instead of going into mourning, resumed his normal way of life; which his servants had tried unsuccessfully to induce him to do during the previous week. He even *went into the house of the Lord, and worshipped* in the tent where the ark of God had been installed (2 Sam. 6:17). This proves that David had accepted the Lord's judgment, despite his week of mourning, when he had given expression to his great grief in advance, as it were. Now that the death has occurred, he is able to break with convention, even to the extent of worshipping the God who has taken back the child. That done, he breaks his fast and asks for food."

*The Pulpit Commentary* comments on David's fasting and prayer: "His fasting does not imply that he took no food during this long interval, but that he abstained from the royal table, and ate so much only as was necessary to maintain life. Now, what was the meaning of this privacy and abstinence? Evidently it was David's acknowledgment, before all his subjects, of his iniquity, and of his sorrow for it. The sickness of the child followed immediately upon Nathan's visit, and we may feel sure that news of his rebuke, and of all that passed between him and the king, ran quickly throughout Jerusalem. And David at once takes the position of a condemned criminal, and humbles himself with that thoroughness which forms so noble a part of his character. Grieved as he was at the child's sickness, and at the mother's sorrow, yet his grief was mainly for his sin; and he

was willing that all should know how intense was his shame and self-reproach. And even when the most honorable of the rulers of his household (... Genesis 24:2), or, as [one Bible scholar] thinks, his uncles and elder brethren, came to comfort him, he persists in maintaining an attitude of heart stricken penitence.”

Evidently, David’s attitude towards death went against public opinion. The Israelites may have adhered to an animistic philosophy of life in which it was believed that the spirit of a departed person ought to be appeased by demonstrations of grief and mourning. We understand that, even in early New Testament times there were professional mourners who accompanied a funeral procession. David’s reversed actions, mourning before death occurred and resuming normal life after death, went against the grain of what was customary. That raised the question of those close to the king. They tried to tell him that he got it all wrong. David’s answer to them reveals a healthy attitude toward the mystery of life and death.

Although David does not speak about resurrection in this context, his statement that he will see the child again reveals a clear concept of life after death.

There is always something particularly tragic in the death of a child. Death of the elderly is to be expected, but when “the last enemy” claims the life of a child, we realize how far removed we are from God’s original plan with creation. Death is never natural, but premature death is even more unnatural than any other law of nature.

It is difficult to read the story of David’s sin with Bathsheba and not refer to the psalm he wrote to express his confession and repentance. It takes more than talent alone to express conviction of sin and repentance in the form of a poem that is so sublime that it survived the ages. Psalm Fifty-one is a masterpiece. Without the help of the Holy Spirit who groans through us in prayers of intercession,<sup>86</sup> such a poetic gem could never have been written. In it David appeals to God’s “mercy,” “lovingkindness” and “tender mercies.” The first Hebrew word is *chanan*, which refers “stooping down to an inferior.” The word is used in the verse where Queen Esther asks for mercy for her people: “Esther again pleaded with the king, falling at his feet and weeping. *She begged him* to put an end to the evil plan of Haman the Agagite, which he had devised against the Jews.”<sup>87</sup> “Lovingkindness” is the translation of the Hebrew word *cheched*, which is God’s covenant love for His people. It is like the exchange of vows in a wedding ceremony. The third word, *racham*, refers to the womb in which the child is growing in preparation for birth. The word is used in the blessing the dying Jacob gave to his son Joseph: “But his bow remained steady, his strong arms stayed limber, because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob, because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel, because of your father’s God, who helps you, because of the Almighty, who blesses you with blessings of the heavens above, blessings of the deep that lies below, blessings of the breast and *womb*.”<sup>88</sup>

David sees God stooping down to him in his misery and contrition, and expressing His love for David as a mother loves the child she is bearing. Thus he approached the judge of the whole earth, who is the measure of all justice and righteousness and confesses not only his sinful act, but his corrupted nature as well. He asks for cleansing and for a new heart in which God’s love and righteousness would become part of his human nature; in which he would experience anew the joy of salvation

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<sup>86</sup> Rom. 8:26

<sup>87</sup> Est. 8:3

<sup>88</sup> Gen. 49:24,25

that was his when the Holy Spirit filled him after his being anointed by Samuel. Like Paul, who testified: “I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life,”<sup>89</sup> David prays that God would make him an example of how God’s grace can transform a human soul.

***v. The birth of Solomon 12:24-25***

***24 Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and he went to her and lay with her. She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. The Lord loved him; 25 and because the Lord loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah.***

After working through the fallout of his own sin, we read that David turned to Bathsheba and comforted her. It is difficult to define the relationship between those two. Bathsheba was one woman among the several wives of David’s harem. There can hardly have been much personal affection for David in Bathsheba’s heart. How can one deeply love a man who rapes a woman and kills her husband? But then, what would it be like for a woman to be courted by the king of the land? Living in a different world than the one of that day makes it hard for us to pass judgment. David’s “comfort” of Bathsheba may simply mean that he continued his relationship with her.

One of the most amazing features of this whole story is the fact that Bathsheba gave birth to the boy who would be the next king. Even more amazing is the fact that this placed her in the list of the Messiah’s ancestry. We read in *Matthew’s Gospel*: “David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah’s wife.”<sup>90</sup> We note the absence of Bathsheba’s name and the hidden reference to David’s crime.

On the name Solomon, *Barnes’ Notes* comments: “[Solomon] or ‘peaceable,’ a name given to him at his circumcision. Compare Luke 1:59. The giving of the name Jedidiah, by the Lord through Nathan, signified God’s favor to the child, as in the cases of Abraham, Sarah, and Israel. The name Jedidiah (which contains the same root as the name David, namely, ‘to love’) indicated, prophetically, what God’s providence brought about actually, namely, the succession and glorious reign of Solomon over Israel.”

*The Pulpit Commentary* states: “It is rashly assumed that Solomon’s birth followed next in order after that of the deceased child. More probably there was a long interval of time, and son after son was born, with little increase of happiness to the family polluted by Amnon’s sin and troubled by its miserable consequences. While we must not lay too great stress upon Solomon calling himself ‘a little child’ (... 1 Kings 3:7) after his accession, yet it forbids our believing that he was more than just grown up. It was the remarkable ability of Solomon, his goodness and precocious talent, which made him so great a comfort to his parents, and which received Jehovah’s seal of approval in the name *Jedidiah*. This name would scarcely be given him until his good and great qualities were developing; and as it was a sort of indication that he was the chosen and elect son of David, and therefore the next king, we shall probably be right in believing that this second mission of Nathan, and this mark of Divine favor to David’s youngest child, did

<sup>89</sup> 1 Tim. 1:16

<sup>90</sup> Matt. 1:6

\*not take place until after Absalom's death, possibly not until Solomon was ten or twelve years of age. The name *Solomon* means 'the peaceful,' and answers to the German *Friedrich*. It was given to the child in recognition that David's wars were now over, and that the era of quiet had begun, which was to be consecrated to the building of Jehovah's temple. It was the name given to the infant at his birth, and was a name of hope. Alas! this peace was to be rudely broken by the rebellion of the son whom David, in vain expectation and with all a father's pride, had named *Absalom*, 'his father's peace'."

The statement that the Lord loved Solomon and gave him the name Jedidiah, raises the question as to whether God would really have favorites among the sons of men.

*The Fausset's Bible Dictionary* comments on the name Jedidiah: "Jedid-Jah = 'darling of Jehovah:' name given by God through Nathan the prophet to Solomon (2 Sam 12:25) combining David's own name (Jedid related to David 'beloved') and Jehovah's; a pledge of David's restoration to God's favor after his fall in the matter of Bathsheba, implying the union of the earthly and the heavenly king. David himself had first given him the name Solomon 'the man of peace,' because he regarded his birth as a token of his restored peace with God, and also of God's promise to give peace and rest to Israel in his days (2 Chron 22:9). God commissioned Nathan, and Nathan called his name Jedidiah 'because of Jehovah,' i.e. because Jehovah loved him; the fact of Jehovah's love (in contrast to the firstborn child, the fruit of sin, therefore taken away in God's just displeasure), not the mere name, was the object of the commission. Jedidiah was not therefore his ordinary name, but Solomon."

But God's naming of Solomon may have been more than an expression of favoritism. The Lord knew that Solomon would lead His chosen people into an age of peace and prosperity unequalled in all of its history. Solomon's reign would become a picture and a promise of the millennial age in which the Messiah will lead creation as a result of the atonement of sin by the Lamb of God who carries away the sin of the world.

#### ***vi. Conclusion of the Ammonite war 12:26-31***

***26 Meanwhile Joab fought against Rabbah of the Ammonites and captured the royal citadel.***

***27 Joab then sent messengers to David, saying, "I have fought against Rabbah and taken its water supply.***

***28 Now muster the rest of the troops and besiege the city and capture it. Otherwise I will take the city, and it will be named after me."***

***29 So David mustered the entire army and went to Rabbah, and attacked and captured it.***

***30 He took the crown from the head of their king—its weight was a talent of gold, and it was set with precious stones — and it was placed on David's head. He took a great quantity of plunder from the city 31 and brought out the people who were there, consigning them to labor with saws and with iron picks and axes, and he made them work at brickmaking. He did this to all the Ammonite towns. Then David and his entire army returned to Jerusalem.***

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel* comments: "It was usual for a city's water supply to be guarded by fortifications, and these Joab had already captured ... The

citadel, which would be the last area to fall, would include the palace, and Joab in his loyalty wanted the honor of capturing the city and its king to go to David. Strengthened by extra forces, David's army finished what Joab had almost accomplished; verse 29 repeats with David as the subject what verse 26 had attributed to Joab. It was an impressive conquest, assessed here in terms of wealth which David acquired in spoil. The transfer of the crown from the head of the Ammonite king (whose name is not mentioned now, despite its repetition in 2 Sam. 10:1-5) to the head of David symbolized the transfer of power over Ammon to the Israelite king. The weight of the gold (the talent was about ... 66 lb) and the crown jewel were indicative of the splendor of Ammon's throne. The population was subjected to forced labor, not to torture, as used to be thought (cf. 'put them under saws, and under harrows of iron ...' cf. RV. mg.). A century ago the traditional interpretation was questioned. It has now become the generally accepted view that forced labor, not torture, is implied by the text; the various tools and occupations suggest that David set up building projects throughout Ammonite territory. These would be needed in order to repair the fortifications damaged in the recent fighting, and probably also to house his own garrisons, whose task it would be to keep the conquered people subservient. The return of the king and the people to Jerusalem marks the conclusion of this episode."

*The Pulpit Commentary* adds: "As the siege of Rabbah would be conducted by the slow process of blockade, it might easily be prolonged into the second year, and so give ample space for David's sin and its punishment by the death of the child. But more probably the narrator, having commenced the history of David's sin, completes the story before returning to his account of the war. Thus the capture of Rabbah would occupy some of the interval between David's adultery and Nathan's visit of rebuke, and would lessen the difficulty, which we cannot help feeling, of David remaining for nine or ten months with the guilt of adultery and murder resting upon him, and no open act of repentance. Some short time, then, after Uriah's death, Joab captured 'the city of waters.' This is not a poetical name for Rabbah, but means the 'water city,' that is, the town upon the Jabbok, whence the supply of water was obtained. The citadel, which occupied a high rock on the northwestern side, must, therefore, soon be starved into submission, and the whole of 'the royal city,' that is, of the metropolis of the Ammonites, be in Joab's power. He therefore urges David to come in person, both that the honor of the conquest may be his, and also because probably the blockading force had been reduced to as small a body of men as was safe, and the presence of a large army was necessary for completing the subjugation of the country, which would follow upon the capture of the capital."

Joab's suggestion that Rabbah would be called "Joab-city," in case he would capture it, sounds strange to us; particularly since we do not read that it was called after David when the latter captured it.

#### **d. Like father like sons 13:1-19:40**

##### *i. Ammon rapes his half-sister, Tamar 13:1-22*

*1 In the course of time, Amnon son of David fell in love with Tamar, the beautiful sister of Absalom son of David.*

*2 Amnon became frustrated to the point of illness on account of his sister Tamar, for she was a virgin, and it seemed impossible for him to do anything to her.*

**3** Now Amnon had a friend named Jonadab son of Shimeah, David's brother. Jonadab was a very shrewd man.

**4** He asked Amnon, "Why do you, the king's son, look so haggard morning after morning? Won't you tell me?" Amnon said to him, "I'm in love with Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister."

**5** "Go to bed and pretend to be ill," Jonadab said. "When your father comes to see you, say to him, 'I would like my sister Tamar to come and give me something to eat. Let her prepare the food in my sight so I may watch her and then eat it from her hand.'"

**6** So Amnon lay down and pretended to be ill. When the king came to see him, Amnon said to him, "I would like my sister Tamar to come and make some special bread in my sight, so I may eat from her hand."

**7** David sent word to Tamar at the palace: "Go to the house of your brother Amnon and prepare some food for him."

**8** So Tamar went to the house of her brother Amnon, who was lying down. She took some dough, kneaded it, made the bread in his sight and baked it.

**9** Then she took the pan and served him the bread, but he refused to eat. "Send everyone out of here," Amnon said. So everyone left him.

**10** Then Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food here into my bedroom so I may eat from your hand." And Tamar took the bread she had prepared and brought it to her brother Amnon in his bedroom.

**11** But when she took it to him to eat, he grabbed her and said, "Come to bed with me, my sister."

**12** "Don't, my brother!" she said to him. "Don't force me. Such a thing should not be done in Israel! Don't do this wicked thing."

**13** What about me? Where could I get rid of my disgrace? And what about you? You would be like one of the wicked fools in Israel. Please speak to the king; he will not keep me from being married to you."

**14** But he refused to listen to her, and since he was stronger than she, he raped her.

**15** Then Amnon hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her. Amnon said to her, "Get up and get out!"

**16** "No!" she said to him. "Sending me away would be a greater wrong than what you have already done to me." But he refused to listen to her.

**17** He called his personal servant and said, "Get this woman out of here and bolt the door after her."

**18** So his servant put her out and bolted the door after her. She was wearing a richly ornamented robe, for this was the kind of garment the virgin daughters of the king wore.

**19** Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the ornamented robe she was wearing. She put her hand on her head and went away, weeping aloud as she went.

**20** Her brother Absalom said to her, "Has that Amnon, your brother, been with you? Be quiet now, my sister; he is your brother. Don't take this thing to heart." And Tamar lived in her brother Absalom's house, a desolate woman.

**21** When King David heard all this, he was furious.

**22** Absalom never said a word to Amnon, either good or bad; he hated Amnon because he had disgraced his sister Tamar.

There is an obvious connection between David's sin of adultery and Amnon's act of fornication, or should we say incest? Nathan had announced to David God's verdict, saying "the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own."<sup>91</sup> Absalom's murder of his half-brother, about which we will read later, would partly fulfill Nathan's prophecy. But David's own crime had opened the door for demonic influences in David's household of which this story is the first proof. Satan himself wrote the script of this narrative.

*The Pulpit Commentary* states: "Amnon was David's firstborn, the son of Ahinoam of Jezreel; and probably he would never have committed his shameless crime had not David's own sin loosed the bonds of parental authority. As it was, he hesitated, but was encouraged to it by his cousin, who was too subtle a man not to weigh David's character well before coming to the conclusion that Amnon might safely gratify his lusts. The name Tamar means 'palm tree,' and both she and Absalom were remarkable for their personal beauty."

*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes the following about David's children mentioned in this story: "Absalom and Tamar were David's children by Maacah, the daughter of the king of Geshur (2 Sam 3:3); Amnon was David's son by Ahinoam the Jezreelitess (3:2). The case of Abram and Sarai shows that marriage between the children of the same father by different mothers was sanctioned by early Hebrew custom, though forbidden by the Levitical legislation (Lev 18:9)."

*The New International Version* reads about Amnon's feelings toward Tamar: "Amnon son of David fell in love with Tamar." The Hebrew text uses the word *'ahab*, which simply means "to love" or "to have affection for." *The King James Version* remains closer to the original with: "Amnon the son of David loved her."

It is obvious that Amnon had never learned to practice self-control; neither did he examine his own emotions too closely. He thought he loved his half-sister and believed himself unable to harm her. Although Amnon was David's oldest son, it does not appear that there ever was a healthy father-son relationship between the two; some of which may serve as an excuse for Amnon's behavior. And, of course, David's own lack of self-control did not serve his son with an example to follow. One cannot expect a good role model in a polygamous household.

Amnon's fantasies about Tamar upset him so much that he began to suffer emotionally and physically. This caught the attention of Amnon's cousin, Jonadab son of Shimeah, David's brother. Jonadab's advice, upon learning the cause of Amnon's trouble was to fake illness in order to create an opportunity for Amnon to be alone with his half-sister. We do not read that Jonadab suggested that Amnon should rape Tamar, but that may have been understood. Both boys may have believed that Tamar would submit voluntarily to a sexual relationship.

One amazing feature in the story is that David seems to have no suspicion of his son's real intent in asking Tamar to come and feed him. David may have naively believed, or hoped, that his son's intentions were purer than his own.

There is a lot of pretense in this story. Amnon's love for Tamar was not a genuine form of affection. What Amnon believed to be love was only a form of lust. Genuine love considers the object of it to be honorable and worthy of respect. It has been said that there should be traces of mutual worship in every love relationship. The story proves that

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<sup>91</sup> II Sam. 12:10

Tamar was no more to Amnon than an object on which to gratify his lust. The fact that Amnon's love turned into hatred indicates absence of genuine love. The only person Amnon really loved was Amnon and his hatred was triggered by his realization that he found himself unable to love sacrificially. The fact that his sickness was merely pretense hardly is worthy of mention.

Commenting on the actual crime in vv.7-14, Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, writes: "Tamar responded to her father's message and went to Amnon's home (accompanied without doubt by at least one lady in waiting) prepared to coax the invalid to eat the appetizing food she cooked for him. The scene is vivid; Amnon is on his bed, in an adjoining room, but within sight of Tamar, and we watch (as if through his eyes) the cook at work. *She took dough ... and made cakes ... and baked the cakes*: the word for 'cakes' (Heb. *lēbibôt*) occurs only in this chapter and the word for 'baked' is more correctly 'boiled.' Some special invalid dish is implied, *but he refused to eat*. His original request (v.6) had been for a couple of *lēbibôt*; the word is derived from the Hebrew *lēbâb*, 'heart,' implying something like 'heart-shaped,' a clue which David did not pick up. Now Amnon can't touch them, he is so ill. It is all part of the act. Ill as he is, he cannot bear all these people around, and in this way he contrives to be left along with Tamar. Amnon continues to play the invalid, who has no strength even to feed himself. His dutiful sister, apparently unsuspecting, approaches his bed, only to be grabbed: *he took hold of her* (Heb. *yāhāzeq*) is a strong verb meaning 'overpowered' (cf. 1 Sam 17:50, 'prevailed'). Even so, he speaks lovingly, calling Tamar *my sister*, a term which was used figuratively of the 'beloved' (Song 5:1), though with ambiguity here since Tamar was Amnon's half-sister. Tamar, trapped, tries to reason with her brother. She refuses his suggestion on three counts: public opinion in Israel was opposed to rape, described as *hannēbālâ hazzôt* 'this folly' (cf. Gen. 34:7), she would have no future, and neither would he, because he would be regarded as *one of the wanton fools* (Heb. *hannēbālîm*; cf. the name 'Nabal' in 1 Sam. 25). Was this the sort of person Israel would want for a king, a man without principles, who took the law into his own hands and offended ordinary standards of morality in the land? Finally she makes her suggestion: Amnon should ask her father for her hand in the proper way, and marry her; the king would not refuse him. Though the law of Leviticus 18:9 forbade such a union, it was clearly to be preferred to rape; if Sarah was Abraham's half-sister, there could be a precedent, and Tamar was clutching at any escape from her plight. All argument proves useless against Amnon's intense passion, which was a travesty of love (v.1), and he raped her."

Immediately after his dastardly act, Amnon's "love" for Tamar turns into hatred. It should be observed again that Amnon's love for his half-sister had never existed. The only person Amnon ever loved was Amnon. Amnon should also have been the only person he ever hated, but this he could not allow himself to do. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on Amnon's sudden change of feeling toward Tamar: "Had he possessed any dignity of character or self-respect, he would have resisted this double wrong to one so near to him, and whom he had so terribly disgraced; but he can only remember the indignant words she had spoken — her comparison of him to 'the fools in Israel,' and her obstinate resistance to his wishes. With coarse violence he orders her away; and when, humbled and heartbroken, she begs for milder treatment, he adds insult to the wrong, and bids his manservant push her out, and bolt the door after her. By such an order the

manservant and all Amnon's people would be led to believe that she was the guilty person, and Amnon the victim of her enticements."

Tamar's reaction was partly natural and partly calculated. By putting ashes on her head and tearing her beautiful dress she made it known that she had been violated, without having to say a word. Her brother Absalom got the message and tried to downplay what happened by saying to Tamar not to take it to heart. The reason he said this was not because he did not care about his sister but because he had murdered Amnon in his heart and he did not want his sister to know that she would be avenged in that matter. But for Tamar, Absalom's words cannot have given her much consolation, even if she had understood what he intended to do. We read that she was left "a desolate woman." The Hebrew word used is *shamem*, which literally means "ruined." It is the same word God uses about the Promised Land after Israel was taken into captivity: "It will be made a wasteland, parched and *desolate* before me; the whole land will be laid waste because there is no one who cares."<sup>92</sup>

David heard what his oldest son had done to his step-sister and we read that he was furious. But we do not read that he took any disciplinary action toward Amnon. What he had done to Bathsheba made it impossible for him to punish his son for the same kind of crime he had committed. What David failed to do, Absalom would do for his father.

*ii. Absalom's revenge 13:23-39*

***23 Two years later, when Absalom's sheepshearers were at Baal Hazor near the border of Ephraim, he invited all the king's sons to come there.***

***24 Absalom went to the king and said, "Your servant has had shearers come. Will the king and his officials please join me?"***

***25 "No, my son," the king replied. "All of us should not go; we would only be a burden to you." Although Absalom urged him, he still refused to go, but gave him his blessing.***

***26 Then Absalom said, "If not, please let my brother Amnon come with us." The king asked him, "Why should he go with you?"***

***27 But Absalom urged him, so he sent with him Amnon and the rest of the king's sons.***

***28 Absalom ordered his men, "Listen! When Amnon is in high spirits from drinking wine and I say to you, 'Strike Amnon down,' then kill him. Don't be afraid. Have not I given you this order? Be strong and brave."***

***29 So Absalom's men did to Amnon what Absalom had ordered. Then all the king's sons got up, mounted their mules and fled.***

***30 While they were on their way, the report came to David: "Absalom has struck down all the king's sons; not one of them is left."***

***31 The king stood up, tore his clothes and lay down on the ground; and all his servants stood by with their clothes torn.***

***32 But Jonadab son of Shimeah, David's brother, said, "My lord should not think that they killed all the princes; only Amnon is dead. This has been Absalom's expressed intention ever since the day Amnon raped his sister Tamar.***

***33 My lord the king should not be concerned about the report that all the king's sons are dead. Only Amnon is dead."***

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<sup>92</sup> Jer. 12:8

**34** *Meanwhile, Absalom had fled. Now the man standing watch looked up and saw many people on the road west of him, coming down the side of the hill. The watchman went and told the king, "I see men in the direction of Horonaim, on the side of the hill."*

**35** *Jonadab said to the king, "See, the king's sons are here; it has happened just as your servant said."*

**36** *As he finished speaking, the king's sons came in, wailing loudly. The king, too, and all his servants wept very bitterly.*

**37** *Absalom fled and went to Talmai son of Ammihud, the king of Geshur. But King David mourned for his son every day.*

**38** *After Absalom fled and went to Geshur, he stayed there three years.*

**39** *And the spirit of the king longed to go to Absalom, for he was consoled concerning Amnon's death.*

Absalom's delay of revenge served the double purpose of avoiding suspicion and allowing time for careful preparation. The first obstacle would be David's consent to allow Amnon to attend Absalom's sheep shearing festivities. Absalom must have known that David would refuse an invitation to personally attend such a feast. It would sound therefore natural if Absalom would ask his father to send Amnon, the crown prince, in his place as a representative. The fact that two years had elapsed since the rape would minimize suspicion of foul play.

Absalom played his part well. Had David accepted the invitation to attend his sheep shearing party, the plan to kill Amnon would have to be delayed. We read that David gave Absalom his blessing. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on this: "These words, in the courtly language of the East, not only mean that David parted from Absalom with kindly feelings and good wishes, but that he made him a rich present ... David's court had evidently become lavish, when thus a visit from him to his son's farm would be too costly for the young prince's means; but had he so increased his present as to have made it reasonable for himself and his chief officers to go, Absalom must have deferred his crime."

Once everything is in place, Absalom orders his servants to kill Amnon once the crown prince would be drunk enough not to know what happened to him. Absalom's servants must have voiced their objection, because Absalom is obliged to use his authority to issue an order that cannot be refused. He tells his men to be "strong and brave." The Hebrew words are *chazaq*, for "courageous," and *ben chayil* "sons of strength." The first word has the connotation of hardening one's heart as in the verse "But the Lord *hardened* Pharaoh's heart ..." <sup>93</sup> The second is found in "Edom will be conquered; Seir, his enemy, will be conquered, but Israel will grow *strong*." <sup>94</sup> The way the order was issued, it could not be disobeyed without serious consequences. Killing the crown prince would take more than courage. Absalom's servants would become subject to David's wrath. But we do not hear that David ever took any action against these men.

When the killing takes place, all of David's sons who were present flee the scene. They may have thought that Absalom meant to finish them off also. Confusion must have

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<sup>93</sup> Ex. 9:12

<sup>94</sup> Num. 24:18

been great and since wine had been offered in large quantity, none of the members of the party were clearheaded enough to realize what was going on.

When word reaches the palace, no one there either realizes that what happened was Absalom's revenge upon Amnon for the rape of his sister. Only Jonadab son of Shimeah, who had played a major role in making the rape happen, understood what was going on. It is doubtful that Absalom would have taken Jonadab into his confidence, but Jonadab was too good a reader of people's character to have missed the signs that led up to Absalom's act of revenge. He assures David that only Amnon is dead and provides David with the clues that the king had missed himself.

David's outburst of grief was probably more than sorrow over the death of his oldest son. Nathan's verdict must have come to mind again: "You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own."<sup>95</sup> Amnon's death was part of David's punishment.

Absalom had not only planned the murder of Amnon in great detail, he had also made preparations for himself after the deed was done. The confusion among his siblings who fled for their own lives gave him ample time to get away without being observed. Whether he took his servants with him or not is not mentioned, but that was probably what happened since that would keep them out of David's jurisdiction. Talmai son of Ammihud, the king of Geshur was Absalom's maternal grandfather. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, observes: There he escaped being brought to justice, but at the same time he forfeited any likelihood of inheriting the throne of Israel. His father, meanwhile, continued in mourning for his son: for Amnon, presumably, though there is ambiguity here." The following chapter rather seems to suggest that David's mourning was more for Absalom than for Amnon. We also learn from later events that Absalom had considered the possibility of forfeiting his right of succession after his half-brother's death and that he carefully planned an insurrection that would remove his father and leave the crown to him. All in all, Absalom may have felt that Amnon's rape of Tamar had been more to his advantage than disadvantage.

The Hebrew text of v.39 is rather complicated. The literal reading is: "And [the soul of] king David longed to go forth unto Absalom: for he was comforted concerning Amnon, seeing he was dead." Obviously the words "longed to go forth" ought not to be taken to mean that David considered traveling to Geshur to see Absalom. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments: "This verse forms a transition between the events just related and new developments in the next chapter. The Hebrew has been described as 'untranslatable,' and some emendation is inevitable, but the sense is that the passing of time took the edge of bitter feelings. David had to come to terms with the loss of Amnon because he was dead. Absalom, however, might as well have been dead so far as his father was concerned. David longed to see him but did not recall him. His love and his sense of justice found no place of reconciliation, so, torn between the two, he did nothing. It is significant perhaps that David, who rightly refrained from taking action against Saul in his younger days, became blameworthy as king for failing to execute justice within his own family. One reason had to do with his own failing, which he could see being reproduced in his sons; another arose out of his love for his sons, who nevertheless had

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<sup>95</sup> II Sam. 12:9,10

no scruples over deceiving him into doing what they wanted, and involving him in their evil plans. Already the prophecy of Nathan that the sword would never depart from his house was working out in David's experience."

Finally, *The Pulpit Commentary* states this about the verse: "This translation has the support of the Jewish Targum, and, as the verb is feminine, the insertion of the added word is possible, though the sense seems to require 'anger' instead of 'the soul.' But the versions (Septuagint, Syriac, and Vulgate) all give the verb its ordinary meaning of 'ceasing,' and, though there is something harsh in taking it impersonally, yet their authority is too great for us to say that such a mode of rendering it must be wrong. And if the grammar be difficult, the sense put upon the words by the versions is excellent. Literally they are, *As to King David, there was a ceasing to go forth after Absalom; for he was comforted*, etc. At first he had demanded of Talmai the surrender of the offender, and, when Talmai refused, David tried other means; but in time, when his grief for Amnon was assuaged, he desisted from his efforts. But even so it required much subtlety on Joab's part to obtain Absalom's recall, which would scarcely have been the case if David's soul was longing for his son's return; and, even after his coming, David long maintained an unfriendly attitude. Amnon was his firstborn, and evidently dearly loved, but David's culpable leniency had borne bitter fruit. And again he acts without thoughtful sense of justice, and though at first he would have given Absalom merited punishment, yet gradually paternal feeling resumed its sway, unhappily only to be miserably abused."

### ***iii. Joab's daring initiative 14:1-33***

***1 Joab son of Zeruiah knew that the king's heart longed for Absalom.***

***2 So Joab sent someone to Tekoa and had a wise woman brought from there. He said to her, "Pretend you are in mourning. Dress in mourning clothes, and don't use any cosmetic lotions. Act like a woman who has spent many days grieving for the dead.***

***3 Then go to the king and speak these words to him." And Joab put the words in her mouth.***

***4 When the woman from Tekoa went to the king, she fell with her face to the ground to pay him honor, and she said, "Help me, O king!"***

***5 The king asked her, "What is troubling you?" She said, "I am indeed a widow; my husband is dead.***

***6 I your servant had two sons. They got into a fight with each other in the field, and no one was there to separate them. One struck the other and killed him.***

***7 Now the whole clan has risen up against your servant; they say, 'Hand over the one who struck his brother down, so that we may put him to death for the life of his brother whom he killed; then we will get rid of the heir as well.' They would put out the only burning coal I have left, leaving my husband neither name nor descendant on the face of the earth."***

***8 The king said to the woman, "Go home, and I will issue an order in your behalf."***

***9 But the woman from Tekoa said to him, "My lord the king, let the blame rest on me and on my father's family, and let the king and his throne be without guilt."***

***10 The king replied, "If anyone says anything to you, bring him to me, and he will not bother you again."***

11 She said, "Then let the king invoke the Lord his God to prevent the avenger of blood from adding to the destruction, so that my son will not be destroyed." "As surely as the Lord lives," he said, "not one hair of your son's head will fall to the ground."

12 Then the woman said, "Let your servant speak a word to my lord the king." "Speak," he replied.

13 The woman said, "Why then have you devised a thing like this against the people of God? When the king says this, does he not convict himself, for the king has not brought back his banished son?"

14 Like water spilled on the ground, which cannot be recovered, so we must die. But God does not take away life; instead, he devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from him.

15 "And now I have come to say this to my lord the king because the people have made me afraid. Your servant thought, 'I will speak to the king; perhaps he will do what his servant asks.'

16 Perhaps the king will agree to deliver his servant from the hand of the man who is trying to cut off both me and my son from the inheritance God gave us.'

17 "And now your servant says, 'May the word of my lord the king bring me rest, for my lord the king is like an angel of God in discerning good and evil. May the Lord your God be with you.'"

18 Then the king said to the woman, "Do not keep from me the answer to what I am going to ask you." "Let my lord the king speak," the woman said.

19 The king asked, "Isn't the hand of Joab with you in all this?" The woman answered, "As surely as you live, my lord the king, no one can turn to the right or to the left from anything my lord the king says. Yes, it was your servant Joab who instructed me to do this and who put all these words into the mouth of your servant.

20 Your servant Joab did this to change the present situation. My lord has wisdom like that of an angel of God — he knows everything that happens in the land."

21 The king said to Joab, "Very well, I will do it. Go, bring back the young man Absalom."

22 Joab fell with his face to the ground to pay him honor, and he blessed the king. Joab said, "Today your servant knows that he has found favor in your eyes, my lord the king, because the king has granted his servant's request."

23 Then Joab went to Geshur and brought Absalom back to Jerusalem.

24 But the king said, "He must go to his own house; he must not see my face." So Absalom went to his own house and did not see the face of the king.

25 In all Israel there was not a man so highly praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. From the top of his head to the sole of his foot there was no blemish in him.

26 Whenever he cut the hair of his head — he used to cut his hair from time to time when it became too heavy for him — he would weigh it, and its weight was two hundred shekels by the royal standard.

27 Three sons and a daughter were born to Absalom. The daughter's name was Tamar, and she became a beautiful woman.

28 Absalom lived two years in Jerusalem without seeing the king's face.

29 Then Absalom sent for Joab in order to send him to the king, but Joab refused to come to him. So he sent a second time, but he refused to come.

**30 Then he said to his servants, "Look, Joab's field is next to mine, and he has barley there. Go and set it on fire." So Absalom's servants set the field on fire.**

**31 Then Joab did go to Absalom's house and he said to him, "Why have your servants set my field on fire?"**

**32 Absalom said to Joab, "Look, I sent word to you and said, 'Come here so I can send you to the king to ask, "Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me if I were still there!" 'Now then, I want to see the king's face, and if I am guilty of anything, let him put me to death."**

**33 So Joab went to the king and told him this. Then the king summoned Absalom, and he came in and bowed down with his face to the ground before the king. And the king kissed Absalom.**

This is a story filled with conflicting emotions and tensions caused by the apparent clash between justice and love. Traces of the principle of the tension between God's hatred of sin and His love for the sinner that brought God to send His Son to die for the sins of the world can be found in this situation. David's sense of justice forces him to condemn his son Absalom, but his love for him caused a deep turmoil in the king's heart. One great difference between God's "problem" and David's is, of course, that David was guilty of murder himself and God is holy.

One important question is in the role Joab plays in the events. It seems that the commander of David's army was moved by genuine affection for his king. But Joab may have had his own, more personal reasons to see tensions between David and Absalom resolved. As *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* suggests, "Joab thought Absalom had the best chance to succeed to the throne. And he felt that if he could put Absalom in the position to succeed to the throne, Absalom in turn would cancel the threat of judgment hanging over him ... Joab grew up in the vicinity of Tekoah, about six miles south of Bethlehem. He may have known this woman from earlier days."

Much has been discussed among Bible scholars about the ambiguity of David's feelings toward Absalom. The Hebrew text of v.1 reads literally: "Now Joab the son of Zeruiah perceived that the king's heart [was] toward Absalom." It depends on the interpretation given of the word "toward" as to whether David was for or against his son. In one place in the *Daniel*, the same sentence construction is rendered "his heart will be set against ..."<sup>96</sup> What David really felt about his son can be concluded from his reaction to Absalom's death, when he uttered one of the most heartrending cries: "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you — O Absalom, my son, my son!"<sup>97</sup>

As *The Pulpit Commentary* correctly observes: "David was a man of very warm affections, and while this would make him feel intense sorrow for the death of a son by his brother's hand, and stern indignation towards the murderer, there would still lie deep in the father's heart true love towards his sinning child, and Absalom's fall was sad enough to cause a strong revulsion of feeling. David's grief would be not merely for the death of his son, but that he should have died so miserably, and in an attempt so shameful. Was not, too, the natural grief of a father made the more deep by the feeling

<sup>96</sup> Dan. 11:28

<sup>97</sup> II Sam. 18:33

that this was the third stage of the penalty denounced on his own sin, and that the son's death was the result of the father's crime?"

It was this complication of conflicting emotions that Joab observed and somehow, in a show of psychological insight, understood, feeling that it ought to be resolved. One of the reasons Joab sought to help David may have been that David's grief impaired his power to govern effectively. Being the commander-in-chief of the army, this would put a heavier burden upon the troops, especially if David would not be alert to threats by surrounding nations toward Israel.

The person Joab engaged to speak to David and persuade the king to allow Absalom to return to Jerusalem needed skills of acting and intelligence to use the right words. She also had to choose the right moment to drive home the point of the matter, which is David's relationship to Absalom. The purpose of the story she tells about herself and her two sons was to make David compromise himself in his verdict by applying a rule to her case that he did not want to apply to himself.

Evidently, any Israelite citizen had the right to appeal to the king as the highest authority in the land. Whether she needed a recommendation from a lower court for this is not known; but if she did, Joab, probably, provided her with the right papers. What Absalom would later use as an argument in his own political campaign, namely that David was difficult to approach and justice was not available,<sup>98</sup> was untrue.

By starting out with the redundant statement "I am indeed a widow; my husband is dead" the woman must have given the impression of being somewhat simple and uneducated. She definitely did not want David to suspect that she was a popular person in her hometown, known for her gifts of wisdom and leadership. There is no reason to believe, as *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* suggests, that the story the woman told David had any elements of truth in them. It seems that the whole tale was something Joab had made up.

The point of the story was the believe that a man's name must be kept alive by his offspring, not only as a family name, but as a guarantee of the right of inheritance in the land of Israel. The woman said she had two sons, one of whom killed the other. The life of the murderer was on the line, because, according to the law of the "goel," the blood relative was under obligation to avenge the murder, which meant killing the murderer. The law stated that in the case of murder: "The avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death; when he meets him, he shall put him to death."<sup>99</sup> *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* states: "The law of blood-revenge ... made it the sacred duty of the nearest relative to avenge the blood of his kinsman. He was called the *go'el ha-dam*, 'the avenger of blood.' This law was based upon the command given in Gen 9:5 f: 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.'"

The whole point of the story is revealed in v.7 where the woman says: "They would put out the only burning coal I have left, leaving my husband neither name nor descendant on the face of the earth." *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* comments: "To raise up a lamp to a person signifies his having a posterity to continue his name and family upon the earth: thus, quench my coal that is left means destroying all hope of posterity, and extinguishing the family from among the people."

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<sup>98</sup> See II Sam. 15:2-4.

<sup>99</sup> Num. 35:19

Since the law demanded the death of the murderer, David compromised himself when he told the woman to go home because he would issue an order that protected the guilty son. We assume that David did not have the right to pardon a murderer, since that would mean that he could overrule the law of Moses. His promise to the woman that her son would be spared made, in fact, David guilty before the law. That is why the woman says: “My lord the king, let the blame rest on me and on my father’s family, and let the king and his throne be without guilt.” As the conversation continues in spite of David’s promise, the woman succeeds in making the king swear an oath, which binds him to his promise.

Once David has invoked the Name of the LORD, the woman has him where she wanted him so that she could make the point about Absalom, which was the whole purpose of her charade. We gather from the woman’s words that Absalom was quite popular and that public opinion was favorable toward him. His killing of Amnon was seen as a right means of avenging Amnon’s offense against Tamar. It had been “a thing [that] should not be done in Israel!”<sup>100</sup> David’s problem in all of this had been that his own rape of Bathsheba and the murder of her husband had caused him to be unable to act toward Amnon, leaving it to Absalom to avenge his sister. What the woman continues to say to David reflects more than a favorable public opinion toward Absalom, it also signals what the population thinks about David’s own crimes. By speaking about Israel as “the people of God,” she implies that David’s treatment of Absalom, who was obviously considered to be the next pretender to the throne, was a sin against the people and against God.

*The Pulpit Commentary* observes about the woman’s indictment of David’s actions: “Very skillfully, and so as for the meaning only gradually to unfold itself to the king, she represents the people of Israel as the widowed mother, who has lost one son; and David as the stern clan folk who will deprive her of a second though guilty child. But now he is bound by the solemn oath he has taken to her to remit the penalty; for literally the words are, *and by the king’s speaking this word he is as one guilty, unless he fetch home again his banished one.* She claims to have spoken in the name of all Israel, and very probably she really did express their feelings, as Absalom was very popular, and the people saw in Tamar’s wrong a sufficient reason for, and vindication of, his crime.”

The woman’s words about God and death give us a sample of her wisdom and the reason for her being considered by Joab to be right person to plead the cause. What she seems to be saying is that Absalom’s banishment is not what God wants for David or for the people. Banishment is as death. Absalom could as well be dead as banished. The image of water being poured out may have been a common expression. Or, the woman may have referred to David’s act when, during the time he was a refugee, he poured out the water from the well in Bethlehem, which some of his men had brought him, endangering their lives in the act. David had refused to drink it; instead, he poured had it out before the Lord, saying: “God forbid that I should do this! Should I drink the blood of these men who went at the risk of their lives?”<sup>101</sup>

*The Pulpit Commentary* states: “Her argument is that death is the common lot, and that there is no way of bringing back the dead to life. But though death is thus a universal law, yet God does not kill. Death is not a penalty exacted as a punishment, but,

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<sup>100</sup> II Sam. 13:12

<sup>101</sup> I Chron. 11:18,19

on the contrary, he is merciful, and when a man has sinned, instead of putting him to death, he is ready to forgive and welcome back one rejected because of his wickedness. The application is plain. The king cannot restore Amnon to life, and neither must he kill the guilty Absalom, but must recall his banished son. The argument is full of poetry, and touching to the feelings, but is not very sound. For God requires repentance and change of heart; and there was no sign of contrition on Absalom's part. The power of the woman's appeal lay in what she says of God's nature. He is not intent on punishing, nor bent on carrying out the sentences of the Law in their stern literalness; but he is ready to forgive, and 'deviseth devices' to bring home those now separate from him. There is also much that is worth pondering over in the distinction between death as a law of nature, and death as a penalty. The one is necessary, and often gentle and beneficial; but death as a penalty is stern and terrible."

Finally, David realizes that there is much more in the case the woman presents than appears on the surface. It had nothing to do with the widow's sons, but with his own sons Amnon and Absalom. And David understands that he had been tricked by the woman to commit himself to actions that he had intended to avoid. It could be that Joab had tried at an earlier stage to convince David that his banishment of Absalom was not in the interest of the nation. How David knew what Joab wanted him to do is not explained. There must have been audiences during which Joab had argued about the fate of Absalom, but they are not recorded for us.

It is not clear whether Joab was present during the woman's interview with the king. He was probably called in after she left. But as a result of the audience with her David gives his orders to Joab to bring Absalom back to Jerusalem, although David refused to see his son face to face.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, writes about the conclusion of the audience: "By this time the king had begun to wonder what lay behind this long interview. Intuitively, he sensed that he had not yet got to the bottom of the affair, and suspected the interference of his uncle, Joab. It is a tense moment as the king puts his question, and the woman acknowledges the king's astuteness before admitting that Joab had indeed been the author of her role play. But his motive had been *to change the course of affairs* by delivering the king from an impasse; thus he was acting as *your servant*, and the woman is *your handmaid*. With a flattering reference to the wisdom of the king, the woman brings her audience to an end. Her fictional story has done its work and she has achieved her purpose. Joab, who had evidently been following the whole episode closely, took her place, and heard the royal pronouncement, *Behold now; I grant this*. The king knows he has been tricked into a course of action he cannot now avoid, because it is backed by his oath, but he makes no protest at Joab's audacity; instead he gives Joab the responsibility of bringing back to Jerusalem the young man Absalom. David persists in thinking of his son as a youth (Heb. *na`ar*, cf. 2 Sam. 18:5, 12), and so failing to give him the status to which his manhood entitled him, while at the same time being too lenient in his attitude towards the crime committed by Amnon. For this reason, he cannot bring himself to accept Absalom back into his presence, but continues to show his disfavor by banishing him to *his own house*. Though in reacting to the widow's story David has allowed compassion to triumph over strict justice, in applying the principle to his own circumstances he cannot quite bring himself to go so far. As it turned out, this worked

against David's better interest, because his son resented his father's limited and reserved acceptance of him, and reacted with hostility."

The next three verses, 25-27, are devoted to a description of Absalom's handsome person. The prince had caught the country's attention because of his extraordinary beauty. He was an outstanding example of the perfect male; not the least of which was his hair. The prince submitted to a yearly haircut, at which his hair was weighed and registered as being "two hundred shekels by the royal standard." A footnote in *The New International Version* puts this on about five pounds. We further learn that Absalom had three sons and one daughter, whom he called after his sister, Tamar. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments on Absalom and his handsomeness: "David was also known for his handsome appearance. Absalom sheared his head yearly and weighed the hair according to a metric system introduced into Palestine. There may have been religious significance in this act. The LXX adds a note that this second Tamar became the wife of Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, and bore him Abia. According to 1 Kings 15:2, Maachah the daughter of Solomon married Rehoboam."

For two whole years Absalom was in his home in Jerusalem, virtually under arrest. He had enjoyed more freedom in Geshur than in his own hometown. He must have read his father's character well, knowing that David loved him and chafed under his son's banishment, but his sense of justice prevented him to act according to the dictates of his heart. From what we read in the following chapters, Absalom did not return this affection, but he used it for the advancement of his own plans.

Since Joab had been the middleman to bring him back home, Absalom chose Joab to arrange for an audience with his father. But Joab knew why Absalom called him and he must have felt that he had done all he could do in the matter. Absalom strongly resented Joab's refusal to come and see him. He was not used to being disobeyed, so he took some measures that forced Joab into coming, although for different reasons. When Absalom burns down Joab's barley crop, the general becomes furious and goes to the prince to give him a piece of his mind. In stead of apologizing, Absalom reads Joab the riot act and demands an audience with his father. His statement "if I am guilty of anything, let him put me to death" can hardly be taken at face value. Absalom knew that his father would never order his son's execution. David had never taken any actions to discipline his sons. His own criminal record had prevented him from doing so.

Joab passes on the message to the king and David receives Absalom, who enters the throne room bowing down with his face to the ground and receives a royal kiss. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "The kiss, we may feel quite sure, was preceded by a conversation between David and his son, the record of which is omitted simply for the sake of brevity. Evidently it satisfied the king, and ended in the kiss which gave the son all he desired. But whatever may have been his professions, Absalom's subsequent conduct is proof that he still regarded Amnon's death as a just retribution for his conduct to Tamar, and secretly cherished a sullen anger against his father for not having punished the wrong doer himself. It was the contrast between his own five years of punishment and the mere verbal reproof which was all that Amnon had to suffer for his shameless conduct, which rankled in Absalom's mind, and gave him an excuse for finally plotting his father's ruin."

#### ***iv. Absalom's rebellion 15:1-37***

*1 In the course of time, Absalom provided himself with a chariot and horses and with fifty men to run ahead of him.*

*2 He would get up early and stand by the side of the road leading to the city gate. Whenever anyone came with a complaint to be placed before the king for a decision, Absalom would call out to him, "What town are you from?" He would answer, "Your servant is from one of the tribes of Israel."*

*3 Then Absalom would say to him, "Look, your claims are valid and proper, but there is no representative of the king to hear you."*

*4 And Absalom would add, "If only I were appointed judge in the land! Then everyone who has a complaint or case could come to me and I would see that he gets justice."*

*5 Also, whenever anyone approached him to bow down before him, Absalom would reach out his hand, take hold of him and kiss him.*

*6 Absalom behaved in this way toward all the Israelites who came to the king asking for justice, and so he stole the hearts of the men of Israel.*

*7 At the end of four years, Absalom said to the king, "Let me go to Hebron and fulfill a vow I made to the Lord.*

*8 While your servant was living at Geshur in Aram, I made this vow: 'If the Lord takes me back to Jerusalem, I will worship the Lord in Hebron.'"*

*9 The king said to him, "Go in peace." So he went to Hebron.*

*10 Then Absalom sent secret messengers throughout the tribes of Israel to say, "As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpets, then say, 'Absalom is king in Hebron.'"*

*11 Two hundred men from Jerusalem had accompanied Absalom. They had been invited as guests and went quite innocently, knowing nothing about the matter.*

*12 While Absalom was offering sacrifices, he also sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, to come from Giloh, his hometown. And so the conspiracy gained strength, and Absalom's following kept on increasing.*

*13 A messenger came and told David, "The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom."*

*14 Then David said to all his officials who were with him in Jerusalem, "Come! We must flee, or none of us will escape from Absalom. We must leave immediately, or he will move quickly to overtake us and bring ruin upon us and put the city to the sword."*

*15 The king's officials answered him, "Your servants are ready to do whatever our lord the king chooses."*

*16 The king set out, with his entire household following him; but he left ten concubines to take care of the palace.*

*17 So the king set out, with all the people following him, and they halted at a place some distance away.*

*18 All his men marched past him, along with all the Kerethites and Pelethites; and all the six hundred Gittites who had accompanied him from Gath marched before the king.*

*19 The king said to Ittai the Gittite, "Why should you come along with us? Go back and stay with King Absalom. You are a foreigner, an exile from your homeland.*

*20 You came only yesterday. And today shall I make you wander about with us, when I do not know where I am going? Go back, and take your countrymen. May kindness and faithfulness be with you."*

**21 But Ittai replied to the king, "As surely as the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king may be, whether it means life or death, there will your servant be."**

**22 David said to Ittai, "Go ahead, march on." So Ittai the Gittite marched on with all his men and the families that were with him.**

**23 The whole countryside wept aloud as all the people passed by. The king also crossed the Kidron Valley, and all the people moved on toward the desert.**

**24 Zadok was there, too, and all the Levites who were with him were carrying the ark of the covenant of God. They set down the ark of God, and Abiathar offered sacrifices until all the people had finished leaving the city.**

**25 Then the king said to Zadok, "Take the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the Lord's eyes, he will bring me back and let me see it and his dwelling place again.**

**26 But if he says, 'I am not pleased with you,' then I am ready; let him do to me whatever seems good to him."**

**27 The king also said to Zadok the priest, "Aren't you a seer? Go back to the city in peace, with your son Ahimaaz and Jonathan son of Abiathar. You and Abiathar take your two sons with you.**

**28 I will wait at the fords in the desert until word comes from you to inform me."**

**29 So Zadok and Abiathar took the ark of God back to Jerusalem and stayed there.**

**30 But David continued up the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went; his head was covered and he was barefoot. All the people with him covered their heads too and were weeping as they went up.**

**31 Now David had been told, "Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom." So David prayed, "O Lord, turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness."**

**32 When David arrived at the summit, where people used to worship God, Hushai the Arkite was there to meet him, his robe torn and dust on his head.**

**33 David said to him, "If you go with me, you will be a burden to me.**

**34 But if you return to the city and say to Absalom, 'I will be your servant, O king; I was your father's servant in the past, but now I will be your servant,' then you can help me by frustrating Ahithophel's advice.**

**35 Won't the priests Zadok and Abiathar be there with you? Tell them anything you hear in the king's palace.**

**36 Their two sons, Ahimaaz son of Zadok and Jonathan son of Abiathar, are there with them. Send them to me with anything you hear."**

**37 So David's friend Hushai arrived at Jerusalem as Absalom was entering the city.**

This time David experiences the last phase of his punishment for the greatest sin of his life. This is what the prophet Nathan had predicted. The fact that this penalty was meted out to him by his own son, who would ultimately pay for it with his own life, made it an emotional ordeal for David from which he would never totally recover.

Absalom showed his true colors in the way he tried to inherit the throne while his father was still alive. Like the prodigal in Jesus' parable, this young man wanted his father dead so he could possess the inheritance. Quoting another source, *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* depicts Absalom's character as follows: "He was a bold, violent, revengeful, haughty, enterprising, magnificent, eloquent, and popular prince; he was also rich, ambitious, and vain of his personal accomplishments: after the death of Amnon, and

his reconciliation to his father, he saw no hindrance in his way to the throne. He despised Solomon because of the ordinariness of his birth, and his tender years. He was himself of royal blood, not only by his father David, but also by his mother Maacah, daughter to Talmai, king of Geshur: and, doubtless, in his own apprehension, of sufficient age, authority, and wisdom, to sustain the weight of government. There was properly now no competitor in his way: Amnon, David's first-born, was dead. Of Chileab, his second son by Abigail, we hear nothing; and Absalom was the third: see 2 Sam 3:2-5. He, therefore, seemed to stand nearest to the throne; but his sin was that he sought it during his father's life and attempted to dethrone him in order to sit in his place."

In a way, David's excruciating experience of rejection foreshadows the rejection of Jesus Christ, which led to His crucifixion and which will end in bringing back the king.

Absalom began his conquest with a political campaign in which he ran for the job of king of Israel. The NIV's rendering "In the course of time" is the translation of a single Hebrew word *Way<sup>a</sup>hiy*, "come to pass." It is uncertain how much time elapsed between Absalom's return from exile and his insurrection.

He began by showing himself in public as the royal person who was accessible to the public. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: "Persons of quality, who ride on horseback, and still more those who are conveyed in splendid vehicles, are preceded by one servant, or by several, who run before their masters, carrying a stick or baton, which they constantly wave about them, and strike right and left to clear the way, especially in the streets of Oriental cities, which are always narrow and crowded. These avant-couriers are called 'sais' in Egypt. They are accustomed to run, and can keep on at a rapid pace with the equipage which they precede, for many miles without stoppage, their feet covered with dust, and frequently bleeding from wounds. In ancient times fifty of these runners formed the usual attendance upon royalty ... Absalom's engagement of this number of attendants was assuming the state and equipage of a prince. The chariot, since the Hebrew [*merkaabaah*] indicates, was of a magnificent style; it is the word commonly applied to vehicles used by persons of rank and dignity (Gen 41:43; 46:29; 1 Sam 8:11); and the horses, a novelty among the Hebrew people, only introduced in that age as an appendage of royalty (Ps 32:9; 66:12), formed a splendid retinue, which would make him 'the observed of all observers.'"

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments: "In this his sense of theatre and his flair for publicity, together with his already impressive public image, ensured a high degree of success. Jerusalem's terrain was highly unsuitable for chariots and horses. Absalom's decision to use them distinguished him as an innovator, but the fifty runners ahead of his chariot prevented any great speed, and achieved instead unprecedented grandeur for an ambitious prince."

In acquiring the horses Absalom transgressed against the law Moses had laid down for Israel's kings, stating: "The king, moreover, must not acquire great numbers of horses for himself or make the people return to Egypt to get more of them, for the Lord has told you, 'You are not to go back that way again.'"<sup>102</sup> The way Absalom ran his public campaign makes it obvious that he had not consulted the Lord in it.

Absalom's way of seeking the crown is a model of the way political careers are run. He shook hands, kissed people, made campaign promises and behaved like the ideal

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<sup>102</sup> Deut. 17:16

candidate. He was successful enough to win over a large section of the population when David had to flee for his life.

Absalom began by intercepting people who were on their way to see the king in order to present their legal problems to the highest court in the land. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “It is a mistake to suppose that David altogether neglected his judicial functions. On the contrary, the woman of Tekoah obtained an audience, as a matter of course; and Absalom would not have risen up thus early unless David had also taken his seat in the early morning on the royal divan to administer justice. It was the suitors on their way to the king whom Absalom accosted, and made believe that he would be more assiduous in his duties than his father, and that he would have decided every suit in favor of the person to whom he was talking, whereas really one side alone can gain the cause. Still, we may well believe that, guilty himself of adultery and murder, and with his two older sons stained with such terrible crimes, David’s administration of justice had become half hearted. And thus his sin again found him out, and brought stern punishment. For Absalom used this weakness against his father, and, intercepting the suitors on their way, would ask their city and tribe, and listen to their complaint, and assure them of the goodness of their cause, and lament that, as the king could not hear all causes easily himself, he did not appoint others to aid him in his duties. It was delay and procrastination of which Absalom complained; and as many of the litigants had probably come day after day, and not succeeded in getting a hearing, they were already in ill humor and prepared to find fault. Now, as David possessed great powers of organization, we may well believe that he would have taken measures for the adequate administration of law had it not been for the moral malady which enfeebled his will. In the appointment of Jehoshaphat and Seraiah (... 2 Samuel 8:16, 17) he had made a beginning, but soon his hands grew feeble, and he did no more.”

The Hebrew text of v.7 states that Absalom kept his campaign going for forty years. The Hebrew word used, however, ‘*arba*’, generally means “four.” Most Bible scholars agree that a clerical error is involved. Even four years seems a long time to run a political campaign, but the period probably involved all the preparations before Absalom even began to show himself in public.

At a predetermined moment, the prince appears before his father to ask permission to travel to Hebron for the fulfillment of a vow to the Lord. Even if Absalom had made such a vow, it has nothing to do with the real reason for his travel to Hebron. On the question, why Hebron, *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states: “Hebron still bore a grudge against David because he had removed the seat of government to Jerusalem. Also, the allied clans of the Negev, through whose good offices David first mounted the throne, were jealous of the northern tribes - now the dominant partner in the united kingdom - because of their power and influence with the king ... Ahithophel was the grandfather of Bathsheba (2 Sam 11:3; 23:34). His espousal of Absalom’s cause is usually attributed to a desire to avenge the disgrace David had brought upon his family, as well as the murder of Uriah.”

*The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “Absalom chose this town, both as being his birthplace, and also because it was on the road to Geshur (... 1 Samuel 27:8), whither flight might be necessary should the enterprise fail. He hoped also to win to his cause some of the powerful tribe of Judah, though it generally was the mainstay of David’s throne. Local sacrifices were still customary ... and the visit of the king’s son for such a

purpose would be celebrated by a general holiday and much feasting at Hebron. ... David's confidence and want of suspicion were the results of a noble-minded generosity. And besides, there was no state police ever on the watch, and ready to put an unfavorable construction on all that was done; and probably David was even pleased at his son's popularity, and took his professions as proof that he would be a just and wise ruler on succeeding to his father's place. Perhaps, too, he was glad at this indication of religious feeling on Absalom's part; for a father is sure to look on the better side of his son's acts. He had been tardy enough in fulfilling his vow, but it seemed to David that conscience had at last prevailed, and that right was to be done."

Absalom went about his plan in a very careful and elaborate way. *The New International Version* states that he sent "secret messengers throughout the tribes of Israel." The Hebrew word used is *ragal*, which literally means "to walk along." But in the story of Joseph's life, it is used when Joseph meets his brothers at Pharaoh's court and says to them: "You are *spies*! You have come to see where our land is unprotected."<sup>103</sup> Evidently, before proclaiming Absalom's ascension to the throne, his envoys had to pole the people in order to assure the success of the coup d'état. The two hundred men, who had accompanied Absalom from Jerusalem, were left in the dark about the real intent of the party to which they had been invited. But as Joyce G. Baldwin observes in *1 and 2 Samuel*: "[they] suspected nothing, and therefore gave the proceedings a genuine air of normality. By the time they realized what was happening, they were swept up in the confusion of events and powerless to intervene." Some of them may have believed that Absalom acted with David's blessing. Absalom's invitation to Ahithophel to join the conspiracy, on the one hand, seemed to confirm the legitimacy, but on the other hand strengthened Absalom's case. As we will read later in the story, "In those days the advice Ahithophel gave was like that of one who inquires of God. That was how both David and Absalom regarded all of Ahithophel's advice."<sup>104</sup> Since Ahithophel was Bathsheba's grandfather, Absalom knew that he would be glad to join the opposition in order to pay back David for the sin committed to his granddaughter and grandson-in-law. Absalom thus assured himself of a powerful ally. Absalom's clever campaigning began to bear fruit and a large section of the populous joined the insurrection.

At least one person in Absalom's party must have defected and gone to David to inform the king of what happened at Hebron. David realized that Absalom would not shrink from murder in order to take the reigns of the nation and he decides to flee for his life and to save the lives of those faithful to him. David's flight would not only save his life, but also keep the city of Jerusalem from being besieged with all the miserable consequences of such. In this David shows deeper insight into the situation than some of his officials, since it seems that David had to use some strong measures to convince them that flight was the only option.

*The Pulpit Commentary* beautifully reflects on the effect David's flight had upon the literary heritage he left behind. We read: "The rebellion of Absalom, and David's humiliating flight, bring out all the better parts of the king's character, and set him once again before us as a man after God's own heart. For this period is richly illustrated by the psalms which were written under the pressure of this great affliction, and which are marked by firm confidence in God, and an assured sense of the Divine nearness and

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<sup>103</sup> Gen. 42:9

<sup>104</sup> II Sam. 16:23

protection. Psalm 41 shows how poignant was his anguish at Ahithophel's treachery, but it inspired no fear: 'As for me, thou upholdest me in mine integrity, and settest me before thy face forever' (... Psalm 41:12). It was a firm faith which prompted such words. In Psalm 63, written 'in the wilderness of Judah,' before David had reached the Jordan, he gives utterance to his grief at the loss of his religious privileges at Jerusalem; but Jehovah is still his strong Tower, and his dwelling will be in God's tabernacle forever. Psalm 3 and 4 are his morning and evening hymns written 'when he fled from Absalom his son.' Psalm 55 is one more sad even than Psalm 41. He describes in it his panic stricken feelings when the news reached him, his longing to escape from the turmoil of life, and flee into the wilderness and be at rest; and his grief at his desertion by men in whose company he had worshipped in the house of God. Upon this follows an outburst of vehement indignation, made the more bitter by the sense of the treachery whereby he had been duped into connivance with Absalom's plans (ver. 21); but amidst it all his confidence was unshaken that if he cast his burden upon God, 'he would sustain him, and never suffer the righteous to be moved.' Finally, in Psalm 27, we have the contrast between Jehovah's abiding goodness and the inconstancy of men; while Psalm 61 and 62 were probably written at Mahanaim, when David's anguish of mind was being assuaged, and a calm confidence was taking its place. Everywhere in all of them David speaks as one who had now given all his heart to God. As regards his terror and flight (... Psalm 55:5-8), it may seem strange that David should have withdrawn so hurriedly from a city so strong as Jerusalem. But we must not suppose that he had a standing army, and his few Cherethites and Pelethites could have made no head against the nation. Probably, too, the fortifications of the city were incomplete (... Psalm 51:18); and even if in good order, yet, cooped up in Jerusalem, David would have left the whole country in Absalom's power, and finally, after a long blockade, he must have been driven by famine to surrender. Away from Jerusalem he was the centre whither all who disliked Absalom's attempt would gather, and every day as it passed would make men reflect more and more upon what David had done for them, and the more steady and thoughtful of them would finally decide in his favor. There would be, moreover, the secret conviction that David, with such men round him as Joab and Abishai, if free to take his own course, would be more than a match for Absalom and his larger numbers. This was what Ahithophel foresaw, and was so convinced that, if David were not crushed at once, he would gain the day, that he did not even wait to see, but destroyed himself. [One Bible scholar] thinks that the wish of the people had never been for more than the association of Absalom with David on the throne, according to what he had himself suggested (ver. 4); and that there was a great revulsion of feeling when they saw that they must choose absolutely between father and son, and that whoever lost the crown must lose his life as well. Some commentators consider that Psalm 31 also belongs to this period, though others ascribe it to Jeremiah. Parts of it are singularly applicable to the circumstances of David's flight, as where the psalmist speaks of Jehovah as being his Fortress in contrast with Jerusalem, and adds, 'Thou hast not shut me up into the hands of the enemy, but hast set my feet in a large space,' as though 'the net which the conspirators had privily laid for him' had been the design to coop him up within the walls of the city. There are touching words, too, of distress at the slander and reproach breaking forth on every side, and at the completeness of his fall, so that whereas but a few days before he had been a king, now 'he was clean forgotten, as a dead man out of mind; and east aside as though he were now of no more

account than the shards of a broken vessel.’ But, with the calm strength of faith he adds, ‘My times are in thy hand;’ ‘Thou shalt hide all who trust in thee in the secret of thy presence;’ ‘Oh, then, love Jehovah, and be of good courage! for he shall strengthen the heart of all whose hope is fixed on him.’”

It is difficult to believe that David’s flight would have produced such an overwhelming amount of poetry. But it is not necessary to assume that David wrote all the psalms that deal with his emotions during that period while he was in flight. Some, or even most of them, may have been written in retrospect. That David was able to deal with such painful emotions in such a creative way would, in fact, constitute a very therapeutic course.

It appears that David took his whole extended family with him, with the exception of ten concubines, who were supposed to keep an eye on the palace. Whether this was a mistake or not is difficult to determine. We will read in the next chapter what happened to these poor women. They fell victim to Ahithophel’s demonic advice to Absalom. But David could not very well have let his palace without any supervision.

At one point, David halted and reviewed the army that accompanied him. Although Joab and the men under his command are not mentioned here, they must have been the first to pass David’s inspection. The Kerethites and Pelethites formed David’s bodyguard. As the name suggests they were foreigners, originating from the Mediterranean island of Crete. The Gittites were another group of foreigners who constituted part of David’s bodyguard; they originated from the Philistine city of Gath and had probably migrated to Israel. Some of these men had been with David from the time he fled from Saul.

Ittai is mentioned specifically. He was a native from Gath who had joined David and was, as some suppose, a convert to the Jewish faith. The Gittites were probably under his command. David tried to convince him to go home, but Ittai pledge his allegiance to David, swearing not to abandon him.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, writes about David’s conversation with Ittai: “David refuses to take for granted the willingness of a newcomer to endure the rough living and the danger which lie ahead for the fugitive king. Ittai the Gittite, from Gath, and therefore a Philistine is an exile who has chosen to come with a group to throw in their lot with David, who realizes that they would not have bargained for the turn of events. He therefore offers Ittai the chance to return and serve in a more normal way in the city. Such thoughtfulness in a time of stress shows David at his best. The words *steadfast love* (Heb. *hesed*) and *faithfulness* (Heb. *emet*), so reminiscent of the divine covenant and so contrary to David’s current experience, are nevertheless what he wishes for the Philistine soldier. From his response, Ittai reveals himself to be a believer, for whom love and faithfulness were paramount. His moving oath or loyalty *for death or for life* does much to make up for the treachery of the conspirators, and to encourage David at the nadir of his fortunes.”

*The Pulpit Commentary* comments on David’s passing of the Kidron brook: “This is a winter torrent, dry during most of the year, but serving at the rainy seasons to carry off the rainfall from the Valley of Jehoshaphat. It lay on the east of Jerusalem, and beyond it was Mount Olivet. The direction of David’s flight was toward the wild country on the east of the Jordan, in which Ishbosheth had found a refuge after the defeat of Gilboa. To reach it he must pass by Jericho, and thence through the Arabah (... Jeremiah

39:4) to the ford of the Jordan, after crossing which he would be in comparative safety. Ahithophel would have followed that very night, and have attacked before David had placed the river between himself and his pursuers.”

On his way, David encounters much sympathy from the side of the people living in the country. This indicates that Absalom’s influence had not affected the rural population very much.

It appears that all the Levites, who served in Jerusalem at the place where the ark had been placed, accompanied David on his flight. As they did this, they brought the ark with them. Taking the ark wherever the action was, had never been done since the days of Eli, the high priest. When it was done the first time, the ark was captured by the Philistines.<sup>105</sup> We do not read that the ark was ever taken into battle during Saul’s reign, neither during any of the wars David had fought. Evidently, the priests brought the ark with them when they joined David on his flight as a token of the presence of the Lord, to indicate that David was still the legal king and that Absalom’s declaration was illegitimate. We get the impression that what was done with the ark bordered to superstition. The ark was used as a fetish, as if the Lord could only be present if the ark was there.

The priests mentioned in connection with this event are Zadok and Abiathar. *The Fausset’s Bible Dictionary* writes about them: “Abiathar had the first place, with the ephod, Urim and Thummim, and the ark, in the tent pitched by David at Jerusalem. Zadok officiated before the tabernacle and brazen altar made by Moses and Bezaleel in the wilderness, which were now in Gibeon (1 Chron 16:1-7,37,39-40; 27:33,34; 2 Chron 1:3-5). Moreover, Zadok and Abiathar represented rival houses: Zadok that of Eleazar, the oldest son of Aaron; Abiathar that of Ithamar, the youngest (1 Chron 24:3-4; 6:8). Eli, of whose family it had been foretold 150 years before that the priesthood should pass from it, was Abiathar’s progenitor fourth backward, and Abiathar would naturally fear the coming realization of the curse. All these undesigned proprieties mark the truth of the history. His own act brought the prophecy to its consummation (1 Sam 2:31-35). Solomon banished him to Anathoth, and put Zadok as high priest in his room (1 Kings 2:35). But in 1 Kings 4:4 Abiathar is still called the ‘priest’ second to Zadok. The Septuagint, ‘the king made Zadok the first priest in the room of Abiathar,’ solves the difficulty. Abiathar had been first, priest, but henceforth he was made subordinate to Zadok. Ahimelech or Abimelech, son of Ahimelech, is substituted for Ahimelech, son of Ahimelech: 2 Sam 8:17; 1 Chron 18:16; 24:3,6,31. The Lord Jesus (Mark 2:26) names Ahimelech as the high priest in whose time David ate the shewbread. Probably the sense is: ‘in the days of Ahimelech, who was afterward high priest,’ and under whom the record of the fact would be made. Perhaps too the loaves being his perquisite (Lev 24:9) were actually handed by Ahimelech to David. Both father and son, moreover, it seems from the quotations above, bore both names, and were indifferently called by either.”

The Hebrew text of v.24 reads literally: “and Abiathar went up ...” The NIV renders this: “and Abiathar offered sacrifices,” which seems to make more sense.

David shows deep spiritual insight in commanding Zadok to take the ark back to Jerusalem. The king understood that, although, according to the law, the presence of God was connected to the ark, it was not limited to it. And the presence of the ark certainly could not force God to acknowledge David as the legal king. David knew he was king by

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<sup>105</sup> See 1 Sam. 4:3-6:21.

the grace of God and that, if God withheld His grace, David's crown would be taken from him. In this David differed greatly from Saul who refused to yield the crown after he had been told by Samuel that God had taken it from him.

As Joyce G. Baldwin observes correctly in *1 and 2 Samuel*, "For David, it was an act of faith to send the ark back, and it was at the same time an act of surrender to whatever the Lord saw fit to do."

*The New International Version's* rendering "Aren't you a seer?" is rather confusion. The Hebrew word used does not refer to the gift of prophecy, but simply to "seeing." *The New Living Translation* makes more sense with: "The king also told Zadok the priest, 'Look, here is my plan. You and Abiathar should return quietly to the city with your son Ahimaaz and Abiathar's son Jonathan.'" David sends the two priests back so they can spy on Absalom and send him word about the situation.

*The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments on the way David proceeded to travel: "The humility and resignation of David marked strongly his sanctified spirit, induced by contrition for his transgressions. He had fallen, but it was the fall of the upright; and he rose again, submitting himself meekly in the meantime to the will of God ... Walking barefoot was a token of profound distress—all the more significant that the barefooted pedestrian was of high rank. Anciently persons of station and opulence wore shoes formed of very costly materials, ornamented with gold, silver, or jewels. On the occurrence of some calamity, public or private, the mourners divested themselves of all their ornaments, down to their shoes, and walked barefoot."

What added to David's sense of rejection and suffering was the realization that he had brought this upon himself. His flight was part of the punishment for his sin with Bathsheba and the murder of Uzziah. David's tears were tears of remorse. Hearing of the defection of Ahithophel, Bathsheba's grandfather, reinforced the memory of his guilt. God did this to him and he accepted his punishment with humility.

David also realized the damage Ahithophel could do to his cause by giving counsel to Absalom, so he prayed: "O Lord, turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness." As it turned out, it was not Ahithophel's advice that was foolish but Absalom's refusal to listen. Ahithophel's foolishness was the way he ended his life, as we will see.

At the top of the Mount of Olives David encounters his old friend and advisor Hushai, who he advises to return to Jerusalem and be a spy at Absalom's court. Hushai's age would give him the respectability needed to counter Ahithophel's advice. *The Fausset's Bible Dictionary* expresses disapproval about the dishonesty in the matter, evidently disregarding the fact that spying and truth rarely go together. We read: "By David's suggestion he returned to the city, and feigned to be now Absalom's friend, as he had been that of his father. The policy was crooked and dishonorable; but it was overruled to Absalom's ruin by adopting Hushai's sinister counsel, rather than Ahithophel's satanically wise advice. He veiled his treachery with religious hypocrisy, saluting Absalom twice with 'God save the king,' and justifying his seeming desertion of 'his friend' David, which surprised even Absalom, with the pretence so flattering to Absalom's vanity, 'nay, but whom Jehovah and this people and all Israel choose, his will I be'; i.e., Jehovah's choice and the whole people's is so clear, that I had no alternative left but to accept it as a matter of duty(!); and inspiring confidence by reminding him how faithfully he had served his father, and that 'as I have served in thy father's presence, so will I be in thy presence.' How little usurpers can trust the sincerity of their courtiers!

God punished Absalom's own treachery to his father, and religious hypocrisy, in kind (2 Sam 15:7-8)."

David gave Hushai the contact address of the two priests whose sons would be couriers between Jerusalem and David's hideout.

Hushai arrived at Jerusalem at the same time as Absalom.

*v. David's encounters and Absalom's plots 16:1-17:29*

*1 When David had gone a short distance beyond the summit, there was Ziba, the steward of Mephibosheth, waiting to meet him. He had a string of donkeys saddled and loaded with two hundred loaves of bread, a hundred cakes of raisins, a hundred cakes of figs and a skin of wine.*

*2 The king asked Ziba, "Why have you brought these?" Ziba answered, "The donkeys are for the king's household to ride on, the bread and fruit are for the men to eat, and the wine is to refresh those who become exhausted in the desert."*

*3 The king then asked, "Where is your master's grandson?" Ziba said to him, "He is staying in Jerusalem, because he thinks, 'Today the house of Israel will give me back my grandfather's kingdom.'"*

*4 Then the king said to Ziba, "All that belonged to Mephibosheth is now yours." "I humbly bow," Ziba said. "May I find favor in your eyes, my lord the king."*

*5 As King David approached Bahurim, a man from the same clan as Saul's family came out from there. His name was Shimei son of Gera, and he cursed as he came out.*

*6 He pelted David and all the king's officials with stones, though all the troops and the special guard were on David's right and left.*

*7 As he cursed, Shimei said, "Get out, get out, you man of blood, you scoundrel!"*

*8 The Lord has repaid you for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul, in whose place you have reigned. The Lord has handed the kingdom over to your son Absalom. You have come to ruin because you are a man of blood!"*

*9 Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and cut off his head."*

*10 But the king said, "What do you and I have in common, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the Lord said to him, 'Curse David,' who can ask, 'Why do you do this?'"*

*11 David then said to Abishai and all his officials, "My son, who is of my own flesh, is trying to take my life. How much more, then, this Benjamite! Leave him alone; let him curse, for the Lord has told him to. 12 It may be that the Lord will see my distress and repay me with good for the cursing I am receiving today."*

*13 So David and his men continued along the road while Shimei was going along the hillside opposite him, cursing as he went and throwing stones at him and showering him with dirt.*

*14 The king and all the people with him arrived at their destination exhausted. And there he refreshed himself.*

*15 Meanwhile, Absalom and all the men of Israel came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel was with him.*

*16 Then Hushai the Arkite, David's friend, went to Absalom and said to him, "Long live the king! Long live the king!"*

*17 Absalom asked Hushai, "Is this the love you show your friend? Why didn't you go with your friend?"*

*18 Hushai said to Absalom, "No, the one chosen by the Lord, by these people, and by all the men of Israel — his I will be, and I will remain with him.*

*19 Furthermore, whom should I serve? Should I not serve the son? Just as I served your father, so I will serve you."*

*20 Absalom said to Ahithophel, "Give us your advice. What should we do?"*

*21 Ahithophel answered, "Lie with your father's concubines whom he left to take care of the palace. Then all Israel will hear that you have made yourself a stench in your father's nostrils, and the hands of everyone with you will be strengthened."*

*22 So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof, and he lay with his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.*

*23 Now in those days the advice Ahithophel gave was like that of one who inquires of God. That was how both David and Absalom regarded all of Ahithophel's advice.*

*17:1 Ahithophel said to Absalom, "I would choose twelve thousand men and set out tonight in pursuit of David.*

*2 I would attack him while he is weary and weak. I would strike him with terror, and then all the people with him will flee. I would strike down only the king*

*3 and bring all the people back to you. The death of the man you seek will mean the return of all; all the people will be unharmed."*

*4 This plan seemed good to Absalom and to all the elders of Israel.*

*5 But Absalom said, "Summon also Hushai the Arkite, so we can hear what he has to say."*

*6 When Hushai came to him, Absalom said, "Ahithophel has given this advice. Should we do what he says? If not, give us your opinion."*

*7 Hushai replied to Absalom, "The advice Ahithophel has given is not good this time.*

*8 You know your father and his men; they are fighters, and as fierce as a wild bear robbed of her cubs. Besides, your father is an experienced fighter; he will not spend the night with the troops.*

*9 Even now, he is hidden in a cave or some other place. If he should attack your troops first, whoever hears about it will say, 'There has been a slaughter among the troops who follow Absalom.'*

*10 Then even the bravest soldier, whose heart is like the heart of a lion, will melt with fear, for all Israel knows that your father is a fighter and that those with him are brave.*

*11 "So I advise you: Let all Israel, from Dan to Beersheba — as numerous as the sand on the seashore — be gathered to you, with you yourself leading them into battle.*

*12 Then we will attack him wherever he may be found, and we will fall on him as dew settles on the ground. Neither he nor any of his men will be left alive.*

*13 If he withdraws into a city, then all Israel will bring ropes to that city, and we will drag it down to the valley until not even a piece of it can be found."*

*14 Absalom and all the men of Israel said, "The advice of Hushai the Arkite is better than that of Ahithophel." For the Lord had determined to frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel in order to bring disaster on Absalom.*

*15 Hushai told Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, "Ahithophel has advised Absalom and the elders of Israel to do such and such, but I have advised them to do so and so.*

**16 Now send a message immediately and tell David, 'Do not spend the night at the fords in the desert; cross over without fail, or the king and all the people with him will be swallowed up.'**"

**17 Jonathan and Ahimaaz were staying at En Rogel. A servant girl was to go and inform them, and they were to go and tell King David, for they could not risk being seen entering the city.**

**18 But a young man saw them and told Absalom. So the two of them left quickly and went to the house of a man in Bahurim. He had a well in his courtyard, and they climbed down into it.**

**19 His wife took a covering and spread it out over the opening of the well and scattered grain over it. No one knew anything about it.**

**20 When Absalom's men came to the woman at the house, they asked, "Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?" The woman answered them, "They crossed over the brook." The men searched but found no one, so they returned to Jerusalem.**

**21 After the men had gone, the two climbed out of the well and went to inform King David. They said to him, "Set out and cross the river at once; Ahithophel has advised such and such against you."**

**22 So David and all the people with him set out and crossed the Jordan. By daybreak, no one was left who had not crossed the Jordan.**

**23 When Ahithophel saw that his advice had not been followed, he saddled his donkey and set out for his house in his hometown. He put his house in order and then hanged himself. So he died and was buried in his father's tomb.**

**24 David went to Mahanaim, and Absalom crossed the Jordan with all the men of Israel.**

**25 Absalom had appointed Amasa over the army in place of Joab. Amasa was the son of a man named Jether, an Israelite who had married Abigail, the daughter of Nahash and sister of Zeruiah the mother of Joab.**

**26 The Israelites and Absalom camped in the land of Gilead.**

**27 When David came to Mahanaim, Shobi son of Nahash from Rabbah of the Ammonites, and Makir son of Ammiel from Lo Debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim**

**28 brought bedding and bowls and articles of pottery. They also brought wheat and barley, flour and roasted grain, beans and lentils,**

**29 honey and curds, sheep, and cheese from cows' milk for David and his people to eat. For they said, "The people have become hungry and tired and thirsty in the desert."**

The general consensus of Bible scholars is that Ziba's story about Mephibosheth's hope to regain his grandfather's throne was an outright lie. It appears that the donkeys and provisions David saw were meant for Mephibosheth and that Ziba took off with them, leaving his master stranded and unable to move.<sup>106</sup> Ziba counted on a reward from David, which he received, although he ended up with only half of what was promised.

David, who generally demonstrated keen insight into people's motivation, failed to see through Ziba's deception, probably because of fatigue. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "Ziba's slander was absurd. Mephibosheth was likely to meet with no kind treatment from Absalom; but perhaps he was a visionary, and David may have thought

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<sup>106</sup> See II Sam. 19:26-28.

that he was holding back for any chance that might turn up. But upon this slander David acts with blamable impetuosity, and, indignant that the son of his old friend should so desert him, he gives Ziba all his lands. The grant would be valid only if David's cause prevailed, and Ziba so far deserves credit in that he attached himself to a ruined man; but his motive was not love to David, but selfish calculation."

A second reminder of Saul, whose crown David had taken, came from another member of the tribe of Benjamin, Shimei, who added insult to injury by throwing rocks and verbal abuse on David as he went along. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments: "A little further on, at the village of *Bahurim* in Benjamite territory (cf. 2 Sam. 3:16), David came under verbal abuse from another of Saul's relatives. *Shimei* was on a path parallel to the one being taken by David, on the opposite side of a ravine (v.13), so that he could hurl both insults and stones at David across the divide. He wishes David out of the land, calling him *you man of blood*, that is, a murderer, and *you worthless fellow*, or good-for-nothing (cf. 1 Sam. 1:16), who deserved all he was getting because he had taken Saul's place as king. Now David's son will take his place as king; *the Lord has given the kingdom to Absalom*. This angry opponent of the king, who took on single-handed all the royal retinue, was wise to keep his distance; his claim to know the Lord's mind was negated by his abusive language. Only time and events could prove the validity of such a claim, which meanwhile should have rendered him inviolable, but as he could not be sure of this he kept his distance! Nevertheless, it was to be expected that one of David's soldiers would want to defend the king, and nip in the bud such subversion. Joab's brother, *Abishai*, noted earlier for his impetuous reactions (1 Sam. 26:8), was all for decapitating the assailant without delay. The king's quiet authority and control denotes true greatness. He will not retaliate, but will instead take constructively the possibility that the Lord is speaking through Shimei, and accept the abuse in that light. The reasoning of verse 11, which all his men are to note, takes the heat out of an ugly incident. For once the sons of Zeruiah did not get the better of the king (cf. 2 Sam. 3:39), who saved the life of the one who was cursing him, and put his own case into the hands of the Lord for his judgment. Not that the abuse stopped. The pelting with stones and clods of earth continued, inflicting wounds, not least to the heads of those hit by them, but there could be no stop for rest until the end of the day's journey."

When David returned to Jerusalem, after the death of Absalom, we read that Shimei was among the first to welcome back the king. Evidently, fear for his own life changed his allegiance. David pardoned him then. It was not until the days of Solomon that Shimei paid for his crime by disregarding Solomon's travel ban.<sup>107</sup>

Meanwhile Hushai meets Absalom in Jerusalem, assuring the latter that his allegiance was with him and not with David. He offers himself as Absalom's adviser as he had been David's before. Absalom seems gullible and taken in by Hushai's flowery language, both in their first encounter and later when asking for Hushai's advice in the war with David. The idea of pulling a city, in which David would have taken refuge, into a valley by tying ropes around it, sounds ridiculous, but it appealed enough to Absalom to take Hushai's advice over Ahithophel's more level-headed counsel.

Ahithophel's advice for Absalom to "lie with your father's concubines" in public was not level-headed counsel; it was an act of personal vengeance. Absalom did not have to do such a thing to make himself "a stench in [his] father's nostrils." Ahithophel may

<sup>107</sup> See II Sam. 19:16-23; I Kings 2:36-46.

have been familiar with Nathan's prophecy about the punishment for David's sin with Bathsheba: "Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel."<sup>108</sup> *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "Ahithophel's counsel was utterly abominable, even though the deed would not be regarded by any of the Israelites as incestuous. A king inherited his predecessor's harem, and Absalom's act was a coarse and rude assertion that David's rights were at an end, and that crown and lands and property, even to his wives, now all belonged to the usurper. But, while polygamy had thus degraded the wives and concubines into mere chattels, the harem was the property most jealously guarded by its owner (... 2 Samuel 3:7; ... 1 Kings 2:22); and Absalom's act was an outrage which David could never have pardoned. And this was what Ahithophel wanted. He was afraid that if Absalom's cause began to decline, he might come to terms with his father, who would readily forgive a son if he submitted, but would certainly punish Ahithophel. For his own selfish purposes, therefore, he led Absalom on to a crime which rendered a reconciliation with David impossible, and pledged all the conspirators to carry out the matter to the bitter end; and that end could only be the death of David if the conspiracy succeeded. But this bitterness to David would vex all moderate men, and weaken Absalom's cause. It was of advantage only to such as were deeply committed to the rebellion, and bent on killing David. To him it was terrible sorrow; for he knew that this open shame was the punishment of his own secret infamy (... 2 Samuel 12:11, 12); and in it, again, he saw the meshes of the avenger's net tightening around him."

*The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: "Ahithophel's counsel appeared politic, but in reality it was most pernicious—a flagrant breach of the divine law (Lev 20:11), a greater crime than that of Reuben, who forfeited his birthright (1 Chron 5:1), and sure to draw down upon the perpetrator the execration of all good people. Thus, however, the adultery of David with Bathsheba was punished by this horrid crime of Absalom, committed apparently in the same palace, according to the denunciation of the prophet (2 Sam 12:11)."

Ahithophel may have had good reason to bear a grudge toward David, but his own attitude cannot be regarded as righteous. His advice to Absalom came straight from the pits of hell. The comment that ends this chapter about Ahithophel's counsel being regarded as the Word of the Lord is thick with sarcasm!

The second part of Ahithophel's advice regarding the way to proceed in pursuing David was strategically sound. Had Absalom accepted it, it would have meant the end of David's reign and life. The fact that Absalom chose to follow Hushai's counsel was God's answer to David's earlier prayer: "O Lord, turn Ahithophel's counsel into foolishness."<sup>109</sup> There may be a play-on-words in David's request. The name Ahithophel means "brother of foolishness."

When Absalom asks Hushai for advice, the latter counters Ahithophel's by describing David as "a wild bear robbed of her cubs," as the man who had managed to evade Saul's wrath by hiding in caves and outwitting every effort to capture him and his men. He states that quick action would not suffice, but that the whole country must be

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<sup>108</sup> II Sam. 12:11,12

<sup>109</sup> II Sam. 15:31

mobilized against David in order to secure success. Hushai knew better, having seen David fatigued and discouraged. But, by divine design, Absalom accepts the advice that would save David's life.

At this point the spy ring is activated. Hushai informs the priests Zadok and Abiathar and the message is sent to David via the boys, Jonathan and Ahimaaz, who were staying at En Rogel. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel* comments: "The spy network came into operation. Hushai wisely conveyed the advice given by both Ahithophel and himself, and advises David to prepare for the worst and cross the Jordan before nightfall. Absalom might change his mind! The priests were under suspicion of supporting David, hence the ploy of stationing the two runners, *Jonathan and Ahimaaz*, at *En-rogel*, 'the spring of the fullers' or 'wanderers' or 'spies,' outside the city, and possibly frequented daily by the maid as she fetched water (thus the journey would not arouse suspicion). But the men were spotted and reported to Absalom. The *man at Bahurim*, the place through which David had passes (2 Sam. 16:5), must have been a known sympathizer, loyal to the king in Benjamite territory, his well, covered and camouflaged, provided safety for the spies (cf. the similar, equally successful, ruse in Josh. 2:6). *Nothing was known of it*: a point worth making; a village community normally knew everything that happened, if only through the children playing in the streets. By directing Absalom's envoys to search beyond the village, the man's wife sent them on a wild goose chase. *Over the brook* (Heb. *mikāl*) is an uncertain translation, because the word occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible, hence the possibility, "They passed by the sheep pen towards the water" (NIV mg.). Though delayed, the spies safely reached David, who immediately took the advice to cross the Jordan, despite the darkness of the night. With that barrier between himself and Absalom, the king had room for maneuver. The fact that David got across the Jordan put paid to Ahithophel's plan of campaign to capture the king before he could reach Transjordan. By his delay, Absalom had forfeited the advantage, and the seasoned strategist Ahithophel knew that, since David would now regain control, there was no longer any future for him. Ahithophel would face death for treason against the king. Calmly he accepted the situation, and resolved what he would do. The steps he took all contribute to the picture of a very calculating statesman, totally aware of all that is at stake, who follows to its bitter conclusion the path of logic and reason. This man of iron coolly took the time to return to Giloh, make sure all his affairs were in order, and only after that committed suicide by hanging himself. It was a tragic end for an undoubtedly able man, who at one time had been an invaluable counselor to David (2 Sam. 16:25) but who had turned traitor."

In hanging himself, Ahithophel prefigured Judas who betrayed his master and committed suicide the same way. At the end Ahithophel lived up to the literal meaning of his name "brother of foolishness."

David arrives at Mahanaim, which was the place where Ishbosheth had tried to keep the crown of his father Saul. We read what Abner did after Saul's death: "Meanwhile, Abner son of Ner, the commander of Saul's army, had taken Ish-Bosheth son of Saul and brought him over to Mahanaim. He made him king over Gilead, Ashuri and Jezreel, and also over Ephraim, Benjamin and all Israel."<sup>110</sup> *Barnes' Notes* comments: "The same reasons which induced Abner to choose it for Ishbosheth probably made it a good rallying point for David. It was a strong city, in a well-provisioned

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<sup>110</sup> II Sam. 2:8,9

country, with a mountainous district for retreat in case of need, and with a warlike and friendly population.”

It is obvious that Absalom’s revolt had caused a split in the army. Thus far Joab had been the man to rally all the soldiers behind King David, which was the main reason why David found himself unable to rid himself of Joab, after the latter’s criminal acts. As Joab stayed with David during his flight, Absalom had to choose another general. Bible scholars have encountered problems in their search for Amasa’s identity. Here we read: “Amasa was the son of a man named Jether, an Israelite who had married Abigail, the daughter of Nahash and sister of Zeruah the mother of Joab.” In First Chronicles we read: “Their sisters were Zeruah and Abigail. Zeruah’s three sons were Abishai, Joab and Asahel. Abigail was the mother of Amasa, whose father was Jether the Ishmaelite.”<sup>111</sup>

Absalom and his men also crossed the Jordan River and the battle lines were being drawn for the decisive battle that would end in Absalom’s death and David’s return.

Before this happened David received some help and encouragement from several old friends who were not part of the nation of Israel. *The Pulpit Commentary* write about these men: “It is evident that the most powerful chieftains in Gilead were on David’s side, and supported him with men as well as with provisions. Adherents, too, would constantly cross the Jordan, and gather round the old king; and thus, when Absalom arrived, he found himself in face of an army estimated at about twenty thousand men. Among these chiefs it is interesting to find Shobi, son of Nahash, the Ammonite king, and David’s friend (... 2 Samuel 10:2). When Hanun, the elder son, on succeeding to the throne, brought ruin upon himself by his misconduct to David’s ambassadors, Shobi apparently remained faithful to David, and received the grant of a district in Gilead, where he settled with his followers ... *Machir* was the generous man who had given the crippled son of Jonathan a refuge (... 2 Samuel 9:4); and David’s honorable treatment of Mephibosheth may have won his patron’s heart. Of *Barzillai*, and his abode, *Rogelim*, nothing more is known than what is said here, and in the very interesting narrative in ... 2 Samuel 19:31, etc. David’s lasting gratitude to him is shown by his care for his sons (see ... 1 Kings 2:7). A clan of priests called themselves ‘the children of Barzillai,’ and claimed to be the descendants of his daughter. They could not, however, produce their genealogy, and were therefore degraded from the priestly office (... Ezra 2:61-63). Their claim, nevertheless, is a proof that Barzillai was a little king in Gilead, when thus a priestly race thought their alliance with him so honorable as to make them forget that they were of the lineage of Aaron.”

#### ***vi. The defeat and death of Absalom 18:1-33***

***1 David mustered the men who were with him and appointed over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds.***

***2 David sent the troops out — a third under the command of Joab, a third under Joab’s brother Abishai son of Zeruah, and a third under Ittai the Gittite. The king told the troops, "I myself will surely march out with you."***

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<sup>111</sup> I Chron. 2:16,17

*3 But the men said, "You must not go out; if we are forced to flee, they won't care about us. Even if half of us die, they won't care; but you are worth ten thousand of us. It would be better now for you to give us support from the city."*

*4 The king answered, "I will do whatever seems best to you." So the king stood beside the gate while all the men marched out in units of hundreds and of thousands.*

*5 The king commanded Joab, Abishai and Ittai, "Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake." And all the troops heard the king giving orders concerning Absalom to each of the commanders.*

*6 The army marched into the field to fight Israel, and the battle took place in the forest of Ephraim.*

*7 There the army of Israel was defeated by David's men, and the casualties that day were great — twenty thousand men.*

*8 The battle spread out over the whole countryside, and the forest claimed more lives that day than the sword.*

*9 Now Absalom happened to meet David's men. He was riding his mule, and as the mule went under the thick branches of a large oak, Absalom's head got caught in the tree. He was left hanging in midair, while the mule he was riding kept on going.*

*10 When one of the men saw this, he told Joab, "I just saw Absalom hanging in an oak tree."*

*11 Joab said to the man who had told him this, "What! You saw him? Why didn't you strike him to the ground right there? Then I would have had to give you ten shekels of silver and a warrior's belt."*

*12 But the man replied, "Even if a thousand shekels were weighed out into my hands, I would not lift my hand against the king's son. In our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, 'Protect the young man Absalom for my sake.'*

*13 And if I had put my life in jeopardy — and nothing is hidden from the king — you would have kept your distance from me."*

*14 Joab said, "I'm not going to wait like this for you." So he took three javelins in his hand and plunged them into Absalom's heart while Absalom was still alive in the oak tree.*

*15 And ten of Joab's armor-bearers surrounded Absalom, struck him and killed him.*

*16 Then Joab sounded the trumpet, and the troops stopped pursuing Israel, for Joab halted them.*

*17 They took Absalom, threw him into a big pit in the forest and piled up a large heap of rocks over him. Meanwhile, all the Israelites fled to their homes.*

*18 During his lifetime Absalom had taken a pillar and erected it in the King's Valley as a monument to himself, for he thought, "I have no son to carry on the memory of my name." He named the pillar after himself, and it is called Absalom's Monument to this day.*

*19 Now Ahimaaz son of Zadok said, "Let me run and take the news to the king that the Lord has delivered him from the hand of his enemies."*

*20 "You are not the one to take the news today," Joab told him. "You may take the news another time, but you must not do so today, because the king's son is dead."*

*21 Then Joab said to a Cushite, "Go, tell the king what you have seen." The Cushite bowed down before Joab and ran off.*

**22 Ahimaaz son of Zadok again said to Joab, "Come what may, please let me run behind the Cushite."**

**But Joab replied, "My son, why do you want to go? You don't have any news that will bring you a reward."**

**23 He said, "Come what may, I want to run." So Joab said, "Run!" Then Ahimaaz ran by way of the plain and outran the Cushite.**

**24 While David was sitting between the inner and outer gates, the watchman went up to the roof of the gateway by the wall. As he looked out, he saw a man running alone.**

**25 The watchman called out to the king and reported it. The king said, "If he is alone, he must have good news." And the man came closer and closer.**

**26 Then the watchman saw another man running, and he called down to the gatekeeper, "Look, another man running alone!" The king said, "He must be bringing good news, too."**

**27 The watchman said, "It seems to me that the first one runs like Ahimaaz son of Zadok." "He's a good man," the king said. "He comes with good news."**

**28 Then Ahimaaz called out to the king, "All is well!" He bowed down before the king with his face to the ground and said, "Praise be to the Lord your God! He has delivered up the men who lifted their hands against my lord the king."**

**29 The king asked, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" Ahimaaz answered, "I saw great confusion just as Joab was about to send the king's servant and me, your servant, but I don't know what it was."**

**30 The king said, "Stand aside and wait here." So he stepped aside and stood there.**

**31 Then the Cushite arrived and said, "My lord the king, hear the good news! The Lord has delivered you today from all who rose up against you."**

**32 The king asked the Cushite, "Is the young man Absalom safe?" The Cushite replied, "May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up to harm you be like that young man."**

**33 The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you — O Absalom, my son, my son!"**

*The New International Version* states that "David mustered the men"; *The King James Version* uses the word "numbered." The Hebrew word used is *paqad*, which has a variety of meanings ranging from "to visit," "to oversee," "to muster," etc. No number is given though. We find the same Hebrew word, for instance in the verse: "Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised."<sup>112</sup> And also in: "Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them, 'The Lord, the God of your fathers — the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob — appeared to me and said: I have watched over you and have seen what has been done to you in Egypt.'<sup>113</sup> Some Bible scholars deduct from the fact that the troops advise David not to go out with them, saying "you are worth ten thousand of us," that there were 10,000 in the whole army. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments on *David numbered the people*: "This means not merely that he counted his forces but that he mustered and reviewed them. And set captains. This was the usual military arrangement, and it corresponds to the civil

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<sup>112</sup> Gen. 21:1

<sup>113</sup> Ex. 3:16

arrangement suggested by Moses in Ex. 18:25. It is interesting that David gave one third of the army to Ittai, a man of Gath, who had proved loyal to the cause of the king in the exile.”

As the troops march by, David gave them specific instructions not to kill Absalom. Everyone heard him say: “Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake.” The words “for my sake” were an appeal to the oath of allegiance every soldier would feel bound to towards his king. The general sentiment among David’s troops would be hatred toward the person who had caused this civil war and, without David’s word of warning, no one would have had any qualms in killing Absalom at sight.

Some Bible scholars believe that David spoke these words because of the conviction that what happened was God’s punishment for his sin with Bathsheba. That was, of course, true, but there was also the fatherly fear in David’s heart that he would lose his own son in the forthcoming battle, and he feared he would be unable to handle that emotionally. From what follows we understand how deeply the outcome would affect David. Saving Absalom’s life was an order from the commander-in-chief that could not be disobeyed without serious consequences. On the other hand, as Joab evidently clearly understood, saving the life of the rebel leader would perpetuate the civil war and ruin the county and the crown.

We read that “the battle took place in the forest of Ephraim.” This sounds simple, but Bible scholars do not agree as to the meaning of the statement. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “There is a diversity of opinion as to the locality thus described. It might mean the large forest tract in the highlands of Ephraim; but if so, the battle must have been fought on the west of the Jordan, whereas the general tenor of the narrative makes it plain that it took place on the eastern side, near Mahanaim. It is true that no wood of Ephraim is ever mentioned elsewhere in the Bible as situated in Gilead, and those who cannot believe in such a wood except within the borders of the tribe, argue that, after the three divisions had marched out to battle, there was long skirmishing, in which Absalom drew David’s men across the Jordan, and there gave battle. But Absalom’s army was evidently surprised, and as we are told that ‘he pitched in the land of Gilead’ (... 2 Samuel 17:26), for him to have retired would have been a confession of weakness; and Joab, after seeing him cross the Jordan, would not have followed him, but let this retrograde movement have its effect upon his followers. Such a movement is absolutely incredible on the part of an army at least three times as numerous as those whom they attacked, and confident of victory. Moreover, armies in those days were not composed of men receiving pay, and bound to remain with their colors, but of yeomen unwilling to be kept long absent from their farms, and liable, therefore, rapidly to melt away. A quick decision was plainly necessary for Absalom, while David could afford to wait. But besides this, when his forces moved out of Mahanaim, David took his post at the gate with the reserves, and he was still there, sitting ‘between the two gates,’ when news was brought him of the victory (ver. 24). The only real argument in support of the view that the battle was fought on the west of the Jordan is that ‘Ahimaaz ran by the way of the plain’ (ver. 23), Hebrew, the *kikkar* — a name specially given to the valley of the Jordan near Jericho. But then Cushy must also have run through the same valley, and it is evident that his route was in this very respect different from that taken by Ahimaaz. Really, *kikkar*, which in Hebrew means ‘circuit,’ may be used of the country round any city, and is applied in ... Nehemiah 12:28 to the environs of Jerusalem. Here the meaning

probably is that, while the Cushite took the route back over the battlefield through the wood, Ahimaaz went to the left of it, over the more level ground, nearer the Jordan. And though the name is chiefly used of that part near Jericho, it was probably applied popularly to every stretch of level ground near the river. This argument, therefore, is inconclusive; while, on the other side, it is plain that David's army returned that same day to Mahanaim, that they knew at once of his distress, and that they were beginning to steal away home when Joab made David come forth to thank them, and encourage them to remain with him. The most probable explanation of the difficulty is that 'the wood of Ephraim' was so called because it was the spot where Jephthah defeated the Ephraimites when they invaded Gilead to punish him for daring to go to war without their consent, they being then the dominant tribe, to whose arbitrament belonged all imperial matters (... Judges 12:4-6)."

Our text states that "the forest claimed more lives that day than the sword," probably meaning that the terrain was difficult for Absalom's army to keep together and give battle to David's men. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary*, quoting Josephus, states: "David's men were conquerors, as being superior in military strength and skill; so they pursued the rebels, as they fled away through the forests and valleys; some they took prisoners, and they killed many, more in the flight than on the field, because there fell about 20,000 that day." *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* adds: "The usual explanation is that a great multitude perished in the pits and precipices. Apparently, because of the nature of the ground, more were slain in the pursuit through the forest than in the battle itself. The tradition that Absalom was caught by his hair comes from Josephus."

From the way Absalom met his end, while hanging in a tree by his hair, we understand that he had not had his periodic haircut yet.<sup>114</sup> It was ultimately Absalom's vanity that was his undoing. Some of David's men saw it happen and one of the reported it to Joab. Although Joab knew what David's wishes were concerning his son, the general had no intent to obey that part of the king's orders, knowing that it would be disastrous to the outcome of the conflict. Whether Joab would have backed up the soldier who would have killed Absalom is an open question. The discussion between the general and one of his underlings is one that could not occur in a modern-day army. But, evidently, Joab's troops felt free to argue with their commander. Instead of giving his man a direct order to go and kill Absalom, Joab decided to go and do it himself, probably knowing that David could not court-martial his general for ending a civil war.

It seems to us that what Joab does to Absalom would amount to overkill, although three javelins in into Absalom's heart did not finish him off. *The Pulpit Commentary* explains: "The weapons of the ancients were of a very inferior kind, and stakes sharpened at the end and hardened in the fire were used by the infantry, until the increasing cheapness of iron made it possible to supply them with pikes. Joab's act was not one of intentional cruelty, but, picking up the first weapons that came to hand, he hurried away to kill his victim. His thrusts with these pointed sticks were brutal, and inflicted mortal wounds; but as they were not immediately fatal, Joab's armor bearers, who had followed him, and who had with them Joab's own better weapons, were called upon to put an end to Absalom's sufferings. *His heart* does not mean that organ anatomically, but the middle

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<sup>114</sup> II Sam. 14:26

of his body. So at the end of the verse, *in the midst of the oak*, is, in the Hebrew, *in the heart of the terebinth*.” It took the effort of ten other soldiers to finish Absalom’s life.

As soon as Absalom was dead, Joab blew his horn to indicate to his troops that the war was over and that they must stop pursuing the enemy, who happened to be their fellowmen.

Absalom’s body was disposed of rather unceremoniously, by throwing it in a pit and heaping stones over it.

This kind of burial was not what Absalom had intended for himself. We read that he had already erected a monument in his own memory. What he had done seems to be more than buying a tombstone; it was an impressive monument that would keep his memory alive throughout the history of Israel. The reason given is that he thought to die childless. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: “*For he said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance.* It is elsewhere said that Absalom had three sons, and a daughter of great beauty, called Tamar (2 Sam 14:27); but this pillar was in all likelihood raised previously to the appearance of this family; because Josephus expressly asserts that it was erected with the view of keeping alive his memory, even if he should have no children ... In the valley of Jehoshaphat, on the east of Jerusalem, is a tomb or cenotaph, said to be this ‘pillar’ or monument: it is 24 feet square, dome-topped, and reaches 40 feet in height. This may occupy the spot, but cannot itself be the work of Absalom, as it evidently bears the style of a later architecture. It is substantially Doric, with an Ionian volute, and has been supposed to have been built about the time of the Maccabees ... Some, however, maintain ... that this is the very monument which Absalom constructed for himself, and that the architectural orders exhibited on it, and the other adjoining tombs, some Ionic, others Doric, were in a rude form found in Syria and Phoenicia, as well as in Egypt, long before they were imported into Greece, where they were carried to a high pitch of perfection.”

Ahimaaz, the son of Zadok, who volunteered to bring word of Absalom’s death to David, was one of the two young men who previously served as go-between to bring David word about what went on in Jerusalem at Absalom’s court. He appears not to have understood, what Joab saw clearly, that David would not take the death of his son as something to rejoice about. Some Bible scholars believe that “the Cushite,” whom Joab sent to bring the news to David, was an Ethiopian slave in Joab’s service. David would not have known him personally and it would not have mattered to this man how the king would take to news. David had previously ordered couriers, who thought to bring good news, killed as a reward to their service.<sup>115</sup>

Because of Ahimaaz’s persistence, Joab allows him to run to David also, thinking that by the time Ahimaaz would arrive, David had already received the word from the first messenger. But Ahimaaz managed to outrun the Cushite by running faster and taking another route. *The Pulpit Commentary* states the following on Ahimaaz’ effort to be the first one to arrive: “On approaching Mahanaim, Ahimaaz would strike inland, and the two routes would join one another; and one reason which made Ahimaaz go more to the west was that he did not wish the Cushite to know that he had a rival. He would thus go at a steady pace, picking his way through the forest, while Ahimaaz was using his utmost speed.”

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<sup>115</sup> II Sam. 1:2-16

We do not know how long the battle had lasted. However long the time, it must have been very difficult for David to sit and wait, hoping that his army would win, and that Absalom's life would be spared. When the watchman announced to see a courier coming, David indulged in some wishful thinking, by concluding that a single messenger means good news. The watchman recognizes Ahimaaz from the way he ran and he reports that to David. Evidently, by the time the Cushite also became visible to the watchman, Ahimaaz had not outrun him yet. He must have passed him at the last minute because he managed to arrive first.

Ahimaaz was not truthful in the way he reported the outcome of the battle. He must have realized from the way David asked the question about Absalom's safety that it would not be safe for him to report that Absalom was dead. When David asked the Cushite about Absalom's fate, he answered in an indirect way, avoiding the word "dead," and yet leaving no doubt as to what happened to the king's son.

David's reaction to the news about the death of Absalom is a portrait of parental grief that defies description. *Barnes' Notes* observes insightfully: "There is not in the whole of the Old Testament a passage of deeper pathos than this. Compare Luke 19:41. In the Hebrew Bible this verse commences the nineteenth chapter." The Hebrew text reads literally: "And the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and he said thus, as he went, O my son Absalom, my son my son, Absalom! would God I had died for you, O Absalom, my son, my son!" It is difficult to read these words, which must be a literal quotation, without feeling deeply moved.

Joyce G. Baldwin seems unable to fathom the depth of parental sorrow at the death of a child, when she writes in her commentary *1 and 2 Samuel*: "David was one degree removed from reality if he imagined that he could have saved both the throne and the life of his son. Maybe he had no such illusion, but was torn by the love which continued to well up within him at the thought of his son's great potential. Hence his passionate outburst. *Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!* There was another consideration, and that was David's own contribution through his adultery to the problems of the family. He was not without guilt himself, and consciousness of the fact will have added to his torment. [One Bible scholar] draws attention to a deep change that has taken place in David by contrasting him at the time when he withdrew from Jerusalem with the David who hears news of the battle that saved him the throne. On the Mount of Olives (2 Sam. 15:30-37), though his is under attack, 'Politically and emotionally, he is realistic and adequate. He is himself, he is whole.' But the father who had never taken steps to correct this ambitious and spoiled son is indulging in self-torment when, in 2 Samuel 18:33, he expresses the wish that he had died in Absalom's place. 'It reveals a huge and terrible hole in that part of David's soul where there should be self-confidence and where a sound feeling of self-esteem belongs.' In other words, when allowance has been made for all that a loving father goes through on the death of his son, there remains an aspect of David's behavior which is unsound. He can no longer bear to face reality, and takes refuge in a wish that he could not fulfill, and that leaves him with negative feelings that block any way forward. It is this barrier that Joab has to help the king to surmount." Trying to bring in logic in the face of death is doomed to failure.

It is true that David bore guilt in Absalom's death. His son's death was part of the punishment of his own sin, for which he ought to have paid with his own life. God had

forgiven David and given him back his life. But Absalom's death could not be separated from David's crime against Bathsheba and Uriah. Yet, in all of this, David reflected some of God's attitude toward the sin of mankind. God gave His own life for ours when the Lamb of God carried away the sin of the world. In this experience God allowed David to feel some of the emotions that belonged to God. Some of this is too deep to put in words.

Grieving demands privacy and David was not a private person; he was the king of the nation.

**vii. Breaking the deadlock 19:1-40**

**1 Joab was told, "The king is weeping and mourning for Absalom."**

**2 And for the whole army the victory that day was turned into mourning, because on that day the troops heard it said, "The king is grieving for his son."**

**3 The men stole into the city that day as men steal in who are ashamed when they flee from battle.**

**4 The king covered his face and cried aloud, "O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!"**

**5 Then Joab went into the house to the king and said, "Today you have humiliated all your men, who have just saved your life and the lives of your sons and daughters and the lives of your wives and concubines.**

**6 You love those who hate you and hate those who love you. You have made it clear today that the commanders and their men mean nothing to you. I see that you would be pleased if Absalom were alive today and all of us were dead.**

**7 Now go out and encourage your men. I swear by the Lord that if you don't go out, not a man will be left with you by nightfall. This will be worse for you than all the calamities that have come upon you from your youth till now."**

**8 So the king got up and took his seat in the gateway. When the men were told, "The king is sitting in the gateway," they all came before him. Meanwhile, the Israelites had fled to their homes.**

**9 Throughout the tribes of Israel, the people were all arguing with each other, saying, "The king delivered us from the hand of our enemies; he is the one who rescued us from the hand of the Philistines. But now he has fled the country because of Absalom; 10 and Absalom, whom we anointed to rule over us, has died in battle. So why do you say nothing about bringing the king back?"**

**11 King David sent this message to Zadok and Abiathar, the priests: "Ask the elders of Judah, 'Why should you be the last to bring the king back to his palace, since what is being said throughout Israel has reached the king at his quarters?"**

**12 You are my brothers, my own flesh and blood. So why should you be the last to bring back the king?'**

**13 And say to Amasa, 'Are you not my own flesh and blood? May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if from now on you are not the commander of my army in place of Joab.'**"

**14 He won over the hearts of all the men of Judah as though they were one man. They sent word to the king, "Return, you and all your men."**

**15 Then the king returned and went as far as the Jordan. Now the men of Judah had come to Gilgal to go out and meet the king and bring him across the Jordan.**

*16 Shimei son of Gera, the Benjamite from Bahurim, hurried down with the men of Judah to meet King David.*

*17 With him were a thousand Benjamites, along with Ziba, the steward of Saul's household, and his fifteen sons and twenty servants. They rushed to the Jordan, where the king was.*

*18 They crossed at the ford to take the king's household over and to do whatever he wished. When Shimei son of Gera crossed the Jordan, he fell prostrate before the king  
19 and said to him, "May my lord not hold me guilty. Do not remember how your servant did wrong on the day my lord the king left Jerusalem. May the king put it out of his mind.*

*20 For I your servant know that I have sinned, but today I have come here as the first of the whole house of Joseph to come down and meet my lord the king."*

*21 Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said, "Shouldn't Shimei be put to death for this? He cursed the Lord's anointed."*

*22 David replied, "What do you and I have in common, you sons of Zeruiah? This day you have become my adversaries! Should anyone be put to death in Israel today? Do I not know that today I am king over Israel?"*

*23 So the king said to Shimei, "You shall not die." And the king promised him on oath.*

*24 Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson, also went down to meet the king. He had not taken care of his feet or trimmed his mustache or washed his clothes from the day the king left until the day he returned safely. 25 When he came from Jerusalem to meet the king, the king asked him, "Why didn't you go with me, Mephibosheth?"*

*26 He said, "My lord the king, since I your servant am lame, I said, 'I will have my donkey saddled and will ride on it, so I can go with the king.' But Ziba my servant betrayed me.*

*27 And he has slandered your servant to my lord the king. My lord the king is like an angel of God; so do whatever pleases you.*

*28 All my grandfather's descendants deserved nothing but death from my lord the king, but you gave your servant a place among those who sat at your table. So what right do I have to make any more appeals to the king?"*

*29 The king said to him, "Why say more? I order you and Ziba to divide the fields."*

*30 Mephibosheth said to the king, "Let him take everything, now that my lord the king has arrived home safely."*

*31 Barzillai the Gileadite also came down from Rogelim to cross the Jordan with the king and to send him on his way from there.*

*32 Now Barzillai was a very old man, eighty years of age. He had provided for the king during his stay in Mahanaim, for he was a very wealthy man.*

*33 The king said to Barzillai, "Cross over with me and stay with me in Jerusalem, and I will provide for you."*

*34 But Barzillai answered the king, "How many more years will I live, that I should go up to Jerusalem with the king?"*

*35 I am now eighty years old. Can I tell the difference between what is good and what is not? Can your servant taste what he eats and drinks? Can I still hear the voices of men and women singers? Why should your servant be an added burden to my lord the king?"*

**36 Your servant will cross over the Jordan with the king for a short distance, but why should the king reward me in this way?**

**37 Let your servant return, that I may die in my own town near the tomb of my father and mother. But here is your servant Kimham. Let him cross over with my lord the king. Do for him whatever pleases you."**

**38 The king said, "Kimham shall cross over with me, and I will do for him whatever pleases you. And anything you desire from me I will do for you."**

**39 So all the people crossed the Jordan, and then the king crossed over. The king kissed Barzillai and gave him his blessing, and Barzillai returned to his home.**

**40 When the king crossed over to Gilgal, Kimham crossed with him. All the troops of Judah and half the troops of Israel had taken the king over.**

David was not a private person; the king had official obligations, to which he had to attend, which his intense grief prevented him from doing. David's attitude was difficult, not to say impossible, to understand by the members of his army. Joab understood, but we cannot credit this general with a tender conscience. For Joab's status was everything; he had committed murder for it and he would do so again. David might have been ready to give up the throne at this point and Joab could have allowed him to do so had it not been for the fact that this general would have lost his own army in the deal.

So Joab enters David's inner chamber and gives the king a piece of his mind, using his considerable leverage, which David had given him in making him an accomplice in the murder of Uzziah. Joab may have had sympathy for David's suffering, but he understood that David's reaction, at this critical moment would cause the loss of everything that had been gained. It was of ultimate importance that David show himself in public and congratulate his soldiers on the victory they had won for him.

*The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "Joab's speech puts the alternative in a very incisive and even rude way before the king. But what he says is true, namely, that Absalom's success would inevitably have been followed by the massacre, not only of David himself, but of his sons and daughters, and of the women who had accompanied him in his flight. Nor would it have stopped there. But the officers of his court, the captains of his army, his mightier, and all who had long cared for and loved him would have been put to the sword. It was this horrible certainty, according to Oriental usage, which made Absalom's rebellion so abominable, and which steeled the heart of Joab against him when he saw him hanging in the tree. He regarded him as a fratricide and parricide, who had plotted murder on a large scale; and Joab was not made milder by the thought that this would have included himself and the heroes who had made David's throne so great. With stern good sense he, therefore, bids the king suppress his mere personal feelings, and leave the chamber in which he had concealed himself, to go forth and 'speak to the heart of his servants,' that is, thank and praise them in a friendly manner. For otherwise they would disperse and leave him; and this would be followed by the uprising of some other claimant of the throne — some relative, perhaps, of Saul, backed by the tribes of Benjamin and Ephraim; and David, abandoned by the nation, would fall an easy victim, with all his family, of this second rebellion. Absalom's rapid success proved that David had many enemies, and without great prudence he might be left at Mahanaim as powerless as Ishbosheth had been. The long delay between the death of this puppet king and David's appointment to be sovereign of all Israel was probably owing to

the same want of enthusiasm for David which had made the nation transfer its allegiance so lightly to the handsome Absalom. But with all his good sense Joab was coarse and rude. He was, moreover, utterly incapable of understanding David's real feelings. He saw only a father giving way to an exaggerated loss for a handsome but worthless son. David really was condemning himself for having brought lust and murder into his own house by abominable sin."

There is no doubt that Joab had the good of the nation in mind, which was ultimately the good of David and of Joab himself. The war had not merely been a one-man-rebellion, but a civil war in which one part of the nation tried to kill the other part. Civil war wounds take a long time to heal. It was important that the healing process be initiated immediately. In a sense Joab's interference in the king's mourning, however rude it may have been, saved the nation.

Although *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* does not make sufficient allowance for Joab's understanding of David's emotions, the commentary is basically correct in stating: "The severe military discipline of Joab hindered his understanding the grief of a father for his son. David viewed the events as they related to himself, and felt keenly the loss of his son Absalom. Joab viewed the same events in the light of their meaning to the people of Judah and the family of David. He urged the king to conceal his personal feelings in the best interests of the political situation. Joab feared the reaction of the populace to the expressed sentiment of David for Absalom. Consequences more serious than Absalom's rebellion might follow if the mob were stirred to anger by their king's lack of appreciation for their bravery on his behalf."

As David makes a public appearance, the army is saved. Absalom's army had taken to flight and most of those men felt that the best thing to do was to go home as if nothing had happened.

The following public discussion about what to do next, presents an interesting picture. Those who had joined Absalom had felt that the country was ready for a change. Some of the phrases used would make good political statements in a modern day election campaign. The general consensus is that David ought to be asked to come back and be reinstated as the king of the nation.

*The Pulpit Commentary* comments on *Absalom, whom we anointed to rule over us, has died in battle*: "It is evident from these words that there had been some solemn anointing and appointment of Absalom, and this accounts for the manner in which his partisans are always described as 'Israel,' while David's men are simply 'his servants.' With this anointment there must also have been a formal renunciation of David's rule, and, being thus dethroned, he does not attempt to return until the nation summons him back. As the flight of David narrated in ch. 16 was extremely hurried, the conspirators must have kept their counsel well, and whatever rumors reached him apparently he disregarded. But meanwhile representatives of the tribes secretly convened at Hebron had claimed to act in the name of Israel, and, chosen a new king. The words certainly imply that, had Absalom lived, the Israelites would have considered themselves bound to obey him."

An interesting phrase in this story is the question that went around the various tribes of Israel: "So why do you say nothing about bringing the king back?" The phrase describes well the confusion and perplexity that reigned among the people. They knew something ought to be done, but no one was ready to take the initiative. David could, of

course, have marched back into Jerusalem and taken up the reins where he had left them, but he did not want to do so without an invitation by those who had forced him to flee. Part of the hesitation on the side of the people was their embarrassment about what they had done to David. David also waited for the Lord's guidance at this point. As he had fled and the priests had followed him carrying the ark, David had said: "Take the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the Lord's eyes, he will bring me back and let me see it and his dwelling place again. But if he says, 'I am not pleased with you,' then I am ready; let him do to me whatever seems good to him."<sup>116</sup> His response to Shimei's cursing had been: "It may be that the Lord will see my distress and repay me with good for the cursing I am receiving today."<sup>117</sup>

Dr. A. B. Simpson, the founder of The Christian and Missionary Alliance, coined the phrase "Bringing back the King!" in connection with world-wide evangelization. He used the event in David's life as an image for the end of time, referring to the verses "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come"<sup>118</sup> and "He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets."<sup>119</sup> The prayer that constitutes the last words of the Bible is John's prayer: "Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."<sup>120</sup> In the same way as David waited for an invitation to return and be reinstated as king, so the Lord Jesus Christ is postponing His return to earth, this all have heard the Good News and the church insists upon his coming by praying "Amen, Come, Lord Jesus!"

As the people are looking to one another to issue the request for David's return, David makes his own political moves, sending word to the priests Zadok and Abiathar in Jerusalem with a special message for the tribe of Judah.

Commenting on David's message to the elders of the tribe of Judah, Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, writes: "By taunting Judah with the readiness of the other eleven tribes to receive him, David is driving a wedge between Judah and the rest, whereas he would have been wise to unify the kingdom by rising above tribal factions and loyalties. David the king has suffered such a series of blows to his confidence that he feels in desperate need of those he knows and loves to restore his equilibrium. Joab has failed him at this level, and on his own David cannot rise above the state of shock in which he finds himself. Nevertheless, he can still take the initiative of demoting Joab, and replacing him by another of his family, his cousin Amasa (see 2 Sam. 17:25), who had commanded the army of Absalom. Thus David upheld Absalom's appointee at the expense of Joab, and at the same time offered an olive branch to those who had recently supported Absalom. The appeal of David to the tribe of Judah resulted in his unanimous recall to the throne, and a formal ceremony at the Jordan."

I find it difficult to see in David's political move a danger of, what Ms. Baldwin calls "driving a wedge between Judah and the rest." There must have been among the Judeans a strong feeling of embarrassment about joining Absalom's rebellion, especially as it turned out to be a lost cause. David's message to the tribe as a whole constituted an

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<sup>116</sup> II Sam. 15:25,26

<sup>117</sup> II Sam. 16:12

<sup>118</sup> Matt. 24:14

<sup>119</sup> Acts 3:21

<sup>120</sup> Rev. 22:20

olive branch meant for healing of relationships. Rather than driving a wedge, David's move would reunite the nation behind the king.

Amasa had been the commander of Absalom's army, the main force in the rebellion against David. To appoint this man as a replacement of Joab appears to be a move of questionable wisdom. We understand why David wanted to rid himself of Joab. Although no one had demonstrated more personal loyalty to the king than Joab, the man had a criminal mind. He had not hesitated to commit murder for the sole purpose of keeping his job as commander-in-chief of David's army. The only reason David kept him on was the fear that he would lose the whole army if he fired Joab. Since Amasa had been the commander of Absalom's army, David felt he could afford to lose a smaller army in order to gain a larger one. Actually, David had no perfect solution for his predicament. He ought to have court-martialed Joab, but the king lacked the guts to do this. Joab's involvement in Uriah's murder had given the general enough leverage to keep his post. David's promise, confirmed by an oath, brought the whole tribe of Judah over to his side and they gathered as one man at the Jordan River to ferry David back over and bring him home.

*The Pulpit Commentary* comments in David's dismissal of Joab and the appointment of Amasa as commander-in-chief of the army: "It was to some extent just, for Joab was a man stained with many murders; but politic it was not. Passing over the fact that Amasa had actually taken the command of the rebel army, he was an ambitious and selfish man, and could lay no claim to that sturdy fidelity which had characterized Joab throughout his long service. For all he had done had been for David's good, and his advice, however roughly given, had averted grave misfortunes. Joab's murder of Absalom was an act of willful disobedience; but David had used Joab for a far meaner murder, committed, not for reasons of statesmanship; but for purposes of lust. The guilt of slaying Absalom was as nothing compared with that of slaying Uriah, nor was it so base as the assassination of Abner, which David had tolerated, though made angry by it. The dismissal of Joab could have been effected only by putting him to death, and this certainly he did not deserve at David's hands; and the attempt, unless carried out secretly, would have led to tumult and insurrection. Joab, too, was a far more skilful general than Amasa, who, with larger forces, had just suffered a disastrous defeat; and if Joab was removed secretly, his brother Abishai remained to avenge him. David was, in fact, blinded by love for the son whom for so many years he had treated with coldness. There was a strong reaction now in the father's mind, and under its influence he was prepared to sacrifice the nephew who had been faithful to him and saved him, for the nephew who had joined in Absalom's rebellion. But possibly it had an immediate good effect, as Amasa, assured of forgiveness and promotion, now took David's side."

So when David arrived at the Jordan, the whole tribe of Judah was there to welcome him back. There were also two thousand Benjamites, among whom Shimei and Ziba. The first was there to plead for his life. Having cursed David as the king was on his flight, he now feared the punishment that was due to him. But David was in too good a mood to consider capital punishment for anyone on the day of his festive reentry. Shimei is pardoned, but David made sure that Solomon, upon his ascension to the throne would remember Shimei's crime.

Ziba had his own reasons for being in front of the line upon David's arrival. He had lied to David about Mephibosheth and he feared to be found out. He thought the

ferrying David across the river would avoid a sentence of having to return everything that had been given to him, which was all of Mephibosheth's property.

The general consensus of Bible scholars is that Ziba had betrayed his master Mephibosheth and that David did not treat Jonathan's son right in not restoring all of his property to him. There is some confusion as to where Mephibosheth met David. We read that Ziba was at the Jordan when David crossed, but Mephibosheth may have been in Jerusalem when he met David.

*The Pulpit Commentary* states the following: "Mephibosheth did go down to the Jordan fords to meet David, and certainly his duty required of him no less. He had been slandered and ill used, but the king believed him to be guilty, and regarded him with displeasure. To have remained, therefore, at home when all Judah and half Israel had gone to welcome David back, would have been culpable remissness. And though he was lame, yet the ride was not so long as to be very fatiguing. But he did not rush through the river, as Shimei and his thousand men had done; and when David had crossed, there was too much going on for him to get an audience. He followed, therefore, in David's suite; but in Jerusalem the meeting actually took place. Thus the verses briefly record different facts: ver. 24 that Mephibosheth went with the vast crowd to welcome the king back; ver. 25 that in due time, in Jerusalem, the explanation was given, and Mephibosheth restored to favor."

*The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments on the meeting between the two: "The neglect of this attention to his beard was an undoubted proof of the depth of Mephibosheth's grief. The king seems to have received him upbraidingly, and not to have been altogether sure either of his guilt or innocence. It is impossible to commend the cavalier treatment, any more than to approve the partial award, of David in this case. If he were too hurried and distracted by the pressure of circumstances to inquire fully into the matter, he should have postponed his decision; because if by 'dividing the land' (2 Sam 19:29) he meant that the former arrangement should be continued, by which Mephibosheth was acknowledged the proprietor, and Ziba the farmer, it was a hardship inflicted on the owner to fix him with a tenant who had so grossly slandered him. But if 'by dividing the land,' they were now to share alike, the injustice of the decision was greatly increased by his being made partner with his selfish and slanderous steward. Jerome ... says that the later Jews believed the division of David's kingdom was an act done by the retributive justice of Providence for the unequal measure awarded to Mephibosheth. Whatever may be thought of the hasty and imprudent conduct of David, in any view the generous, disinterested spirit displayed by Mephibosheth was worthy a son of the noble-hearted Jonathan."

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments on David's final meeting with Barzillai: "The third individual singled out for special attention, *Barzillai the Gileadite*, is altogether devoted to the king, having used his riches to meet the material needs of all David's household and army during their stay in Mahanaim (cf. 2 Sam. 17:27-29). Despite his age, he takes the journey to the Jordan in order to escort the king on his way, and the king, desiring to return his hospitality, invites him to a place with the king at court in Jerusalem ... This loyal but independent farmer wants to end his days in his own home, and he pleads that his increasing infirmities will burden the king unduly. Moreover, he has done nothing to deserve such a reward. On these grounds, he politely refuses the king's intended honor, and request that he may return to his city and remain

close to the family grave. But he takes the opportunity to introduce to the king *Chimham*, who according to some LXX manuscripts is his son (cf. NEB, JB mg., GNB). This is in keeping with 1 Kings 2:7; there was also a place called Geruth Chimham, near Bethlehem, meaning ‘the lodging-place of Chimham’ (Jer. 41:7). Barzillai asks the king to do for Chimham *whatever seems good to you*. The king gladly accepts Chimham, but invites Barzillai to propose *whatever seems good to you*; David offers him ‘an open check.’ The parting took place on this friendly note, and Barzillai returned home with the king’s blessing, while the king had the reassurance of a staunch ally in Gilead, and found his own well-being restored in the generous gesture he had been able to make to Chimham.”

On a personal note, I observe with gratitude and satisfaction, that having the same age as Barzillai, I still have no difficulties tasting food and drink and I am still able to “hear the voices of men and women singers.”

### **e. Discontent in Israel 19:41-20:26**

*41 Soon all the men of Israel were coming to the king and saying to him, "Why did our brothers, the men of Judah, steal the king away and bring him and his household across the Jordan, together with all his men?"*

*42 All the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, "We did this because the king is closely related to us. Why are you angry about it? Have we eaten any of the king's provisions? Have we taken anything for ourselves?"*

*43 Then the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, "We have ten shares in the king; and besides, we have a greater claim on David than you have. So why do you treat us with contempt? Were we not the first to speak of bringing back our king? "But the men of Judah responded even more harshly than the men of Israel.*

*20:1 Now a troublemaker named Sheba son of Bicri, a Benjamite, happened to be there. He sounded the trumpet and shouted, "We have no share in David, no part in Jesse's son! Every man to his tent, O Israel!"*

*2 So all the men of Israel deserted David to follow Sheba son of Bicri. But the men of Judah stayed by their king all the way from the Jordan to Jerusalem.*

*3 When David returned to his palace in Jerusalem, he took the ten concubines he had left to take care of the palace and put them in a house under guard. He provided for them, but did not lie with them. They were kept in confinement till the day of their death, living as widows.*

*4 Then the king said to Amasa, "Summon the men of Judah to come to me within three days, and be here yourself."*

*5 But when Amasa went to summon Judah, he took longer than the time the king had set for him.*

*6 David said to Abishai, "Now Sheba son of Bicri will do us more harm than Absalom did. Take your master's men and pursue him, or he will find fortified cities and escape from us."*

*7 So Joab's men and the Kerethites and Pelethites and all the mighty warriors went out under the command of Abishai. They marched out from Jerusalem to pursue Sheba son of Bicri.*

*8 While they were at the great rock in Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them. Joab was wearing his military tunic, and strapped over it at his waist was a belt with a dagger in its sheath. As he stepped forward, it dropped out of its sheath.*

*9 Joab said to Amasa, "How are you, my brother?" Then Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him.*

*10 Amasa was not on his guard against the dagger in Joab's hand, and Joab plunged it into his belly, and his intestines spilled out on the ground. Without being stabbed again, Amasa died. Then Joab and his brother Abishai pursued Sheba son of Bicri.*

*11 One of Joab's men stood beside Amasa and said, "Whoever favors Joab, and whoever is for David, let him follow Joab!"*

*12 Amasa lay wallowing in his blood in the middle of the road, and the man saw that all the troops came to a halt there. When he realized that everyone who came up to Amasa stopped, he dragged him from the road into a field and threw a garment over him.*

*13 After Amasa had been removed from the road, all the men went on with Joab to pursue Sheba son of Bicri.*

*14 Sheba passed through all the tribes of Israel to Abel Beth Maacah and through the entire region of the Berites, who gathered together and followed him.*

*15 All the troops with Joab came and besieged Sheba in Abel Beth Maacah. They built a siege ramp up to the city, and it stood against the outer fortifications. While they were battering the wall to bring it down,*

*16 a wise woman called from the city, "Listen! Listen! Tell Joab to come here so I can speak to him."*

*17 He went toward her, and she asked, "Are you Joab?" "I am," he answered. She said, "Listen to what your servant has to say." "I'm listening," he said.*

*18 She continued, "Long ago they used to say, 'Get your answer at Abel,' and that settled it.*

*19 We are the peaceful and faithful in Israel. You are trying to destroy a city that is a mother in Israel. Why do you want to swallow up the Lord's inheritance?"*

*20 "Far be it from me!" Joab replied, "Far be it from me to swallow up or destroy!"*

*21 That is not the case. A man named Sheba son of Bicri, from the hill country of Ephraim, has lifted up his hand against the king, against David. Hand over this one man, and I'll withdraw from the city." The woman said to Joab, "His head will be thrown to you from the wall."*

*22 Then the woman went to all the people with her wise advice, and they cut off the head of Sheba son of Bicri and threw it to Joab. So he sounded the trumpet, and his men dispersed from the city, each returning to his home. And Joab went back to the king in Jerusalem.*

*23 Joab was over Israel's entire army; Benaiah son of Jehoiada was over the Kerethites and Pelethites; 24 Adoniram was in charge of forced labor; Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was recorder;*

*25 Sheva was secretary; Zadok and Abiathar were priests;*

*26 and Ira the Jairite was David's priest.*

Vv.41-43 describe the heated argument that arose between the ten tribes on the one hand and the tribe of Judah on the other, as to who had had the right and obligation to

invite and reinstall David to the throne. In a way David had provided the fuel for the fire by sending the message to the elders of Judah, saying: “Why should you be the last to bring the king back to his palace, since what is being said throughout Israel has reached the king at his quarters? You are my brothers, my own flesh and blood. So why should you be the last to bring back the king?”<sup>121</sup> The confusion that had reigned briefly at the end of the civil war had developed into embarrassment. All the tribes had taken too much time to make up their minds about the possibility and the desirability of David’s return to power. Had it not been for David’s initiative, Judah might have been last instead of first. The other tribes may not have been aware of the correspondence that between the king and the tribe that had preceded his return. The heat of the argument was more fueled by embarrassment than by indignation.

The defense of the men of Judah is that David is physically related to them and that they have never taken advantage of the fact by enriching themselves at the expense of the throne. There may be an insinuation in this that while Saul was king, the tribe of Benjamin profited materially from the fact that the king was a member of their tribe. This could be deducted from a casual remark by Saul, who told his men that, if David became their monarch, their privileged position would end. He had said: “Listen, men of Benjamin! Will the son of Jesse give all of you fields and vineyards? Will he make all of you commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds?”<sup>122</sup>

At least one man of the tribe of Benjamin took advantage of the situation and declared his tribe, and all the other ones, with the exception of Judah, to be free from the Davidic yoke. The word “troublemaker” is the rendering of the Hebrew words *iysh b<sup>a</sup>liya`al*, “son of Belial.”

*The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “The fierce words of the men of Judah led to evil results. It was a time when all wise and thoughtful persons would have labored for peace, and tried to soothe and appease the angry passions fomented by the late war. Instead of this, the men of Judah irritated the Israelites with insult and contumely, and the day, intended as one of rejoicing and of the restoration of David to his throne by common consent, saw the rebellion break forth afresh. Among those who had taken part in the discussion with Judah was Sheba, a man of Belial, that is, a worthless fellow, but possibly possessed of rank and influence; for, according to many commentators, *ben-Bichri* does not mean *the son of Bichri*, but ‘a descendant of Becher,’ the second son of Benjamin (... Genesis 46:21), and possibly the representative of the mishpachah descended from him ... Evidently Sheba had come with Shimei and Ziba to welcome David back, and, with the rest of the thousand Benjamites, had rushed with loud cries of welcome across the Jordan, and, but for this altercation, would have remained faithful. But tribal jealousies were always ready to break forth, and were a permanent source of weakness; and now, stung by some jibe at Benjamin, Sheba gave orders to a trumpeter to give the signal for the breaking up of the meeting, and, as is commonly the case in large and excited gatherings, the crowd obeyed the unauthorized dictation of one man. His words are contemptuous enough. David is no king, but a private person, and the son, not of a great chief, but of Jesse merely, a yeoman of Bethlehem. *Every man to his tents*. ‘To his tent’ meant ‘to his home’ (see ... 2 Samuel 18:17). But this withdrawal home signified the rejection of David’s government. Almost the same words are used in ... 1

<sup>121</sup> II Sam. 19:11,12

<sup>122</sup> I Sam. 22:7

Kings 12:16. *Ver. 2.* — *So every man of Israel, etc.*; literally, *so all the men of Israel went up from after David after Sheba*. They had come down to Jordan to bring the king back in triumph, but, on finding that the men of Judah had forestalled them, they had a quarrel, and as no one endeavored to allay it and mediate between them, it ended in open revolt, and they transferred their allegiance to the worthless Sheba. Nothing could more clearly prove the want of cohesion among the tribes, and how little Saul and David had done to knit them together. We need not, therefore, seek for any deep reasons of state, or for proofs of failure in David's government, to account for the rapid success of Absalom's rebellion. Israel was a confused mass of discordant elements, kept in a state of repulsion by the sturdy independence of the tribes and their jealousy one of another. Even David's victories had failed to infuse into them any feeling of national unity, nor did the long glory of Solomon's reign and the magnificence of the temple succeed better. The kings were not as yet much more than the judges had been — leaders in war, but with little authority in times of peace. What is so extraordinary is that David had lost the allegiance of his own tribe; and it now, on returning to its duty, spoiled by its violence the whole matter. The day must have been a great disappointment to David. He was to have gone back conducted gloriously by all the tribes of Israel; but he had fancied that Judah was holding back, and grieving over Absalom. He had secret dealing therefore with it, in order that the day might not be marred by its absence. It came, but only to do mischief; and David went home with only its escort, and with all the rest in open rebellion."

The flow of the story is briefly interrupted, in v.3, by the mention of David's treatment of the ten concubines who had been raped by Absalom.

David's first order to Amasa, the new commander-in-chief of the army, was to mobilize the troops of Judah in order to deal with Sheba's insurrection within three days. Amasa was Joab's cousin. There is no reason given for his failure to carry out David's command. He may have lacked the ability to win the confidence of the men of Judah, or there was still too much turmoil within the tribe to ready itself for yet another civil war. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: "Was Amasa, cousin of Joab, whom Absalom had appointed captain of his host, lacking in initiative; or was the assembling of the army a more difficult task than David had expected? It is probable that some men questioned the strength of David's return to power, while others resented the change of generals, preferring Joab to Amasa. David had already promised Amasa the position of Joab (2 Sam 19:13-14). Perhaps Amasa's delay was the result of military and political hindrances set up by those who questioned the wisdom of David's rash promises."

David realized that the danger of the delay, which could result in the spreading of the insurrection beyond the tribe of Benjamin. So the king turned to Abishai, Joab's younger brother, and put him in charge of the operation. David, obviously, bypassed Joab in giving orders to his brother. But as it turns out, there would be no marching of Joab's men without Joab being present and taking charge.

At one point, Joab and Amasa meet. The place is identified as "the great rock in Gibeon." The following story portrays Joab, in full color, as the ruthless, ambitious and immoral person he was. Joab accepted no rival, and consequently, Amasa had to be removed. In the same treacherous way as he had earlier murdered Abner, he murders Amasa, his own cousin. Giving him the Judas kiss, he plunged his dagger in Amasa's belly, finishing him off with one blow. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments about Joab's dagger dropping out of its sheath: "It is generally assumed that all this was arranged

beforehand on Joab's part, who had so placed his sword that he could shake it out of the sheath. More probably it was an accident, of which he took instant advantage. He had felt that his position was insecure, and that if David had the support of Amasa, and a powerful band of the men of Judah at Jerusalem, he would probably order his execution for slaying Absalom; and Amasa would carry out the command willingly enough, as he thereby would secure the high position offered him. We know David's feelings towards Joab from his dying command to Solomon (... 1 Kings 2:5), and probably he had given various indications of his deep seated resentment. Joab, therefore, determined to stop Amasa's growth in power, and also to give David a rough lesson. And this accident gave him an early opportunity, which he used with ruthless energy."

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments on Joab's murder of Amasa and the army's initial reaction to it: "The pursuing army was aghast at the sight of general Amasa's gruesome body; everyone halted in order to weigh up what had happened and how to proceed, but Joab's man on duty made sure that all the people got the message: Joab was in control of the king's army, though unbeknown to the king! Once the corpse was removed, there was no obstacle to prevent the total army's pursuit of Sheba under Joab's leadership. Abishai disappears from the record, unable to hold his own once Joab had asserted his authority."

It is difficult to ascertain whether Sheba had any success in his insurrection or whether he ran out of support. We read that the region of the Berites followed him, but there is much uncertainty among Bible scholars as to the meaning of the phrase. Sheba ended up in Abel Beth Maacah, which, according to Ms. Baldwin, is north of the headwaters of the Jordan. Joab laid siege to the city, intending to destroy it and capture the leader of the insurrection. The following conversation between Joab and the "wise woman" in the city suggests that the inhabitants of Abel Beth Maacah were unaware of Sheba's presence or of the role he played in the revolt. The woman says to Joab: "Long ago they used to say, 'Get your answer at Abel,' and that settled it," apparently quoting a proverb. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "The Hebrew literally is, *they used to say in old time, They shall surely ask at Abel; and so they finished (the matter)*. But of these words two completely distinct interpretations are given. The Jewish Targum records the one: 'Remember now that which is written in the book of the Law, to ask a city concerning peace at the first. Hast thou done so, to ask of Abel if they will make peace?' The woman, that is, was referring to the command in ... Deuteronomy 20:10, not to besiege a city until peace had been offered to the inhabitants on condition of their paying tribute. When a city was captured the lot of the inhabitants, as the woman declares in ver. 19, was utter destruction; and the Law mercifully gave them the chance of escaping such a fate. Joab had not complied with this enactment, but had assumed that the people would support Sheba, and was proceeding to the last extremity without consulting them. This interpretation gives an excellent sense, but cannot be wrung out of the present Hebrew text without violence. The other interpretation is that of the Authorized Version, that the woman was commending her words to Joab, by reminding him that Abel had been famed in early times for its wisdom, and had probably been the seat of an oracle in the old Canaanite times. When, therefore, people had carried their dispute to Abel, both sides were content to abide by the answer given them, and so the controversy was ended. Literally, these words mean, 'they shall surely inquire at Abel,' the verb being that specially used of inquiring of God."

As a result of this conversation, the population of the city decapitated Sheba and threw his head over the wall, after which Joab and his army withdrew.

Once again Joab had shown himself to be a clever and competent commander-in-chief of David's army and David found himself unable to fire the general who had saved the country and David's throne.

The chapter ends with four short verses, giving us a list of David's cabinet of ministers who assisted him in running the country. There is some irony in the fact that Joab's name appears on top of the list without any further comment. Joab had established himself as secretary of defense, a position of which no one could dislodge him, not even the king. There is a similar list of David's cabinet from the beginning of David's reign.<sup>123</sup> It is generally assumed that Sheva and Seraiah, David's secretary, is one and the same person. Ira the Jairite is mentioned as David's priest. According to *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, "Ira was 'a Jairite,' and thus of the tribe of Manasseh (Num 32:41) and not eligible to the priesthood." This may mean that Ira served as David's chaplain. The only one left is Adoniram, who was in charge of forced labor. This may be a department that did not exist until the later years of David's reign.

## 2. EPILOGUE 21:1 – 24:25

In introducing this last section of the book, Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, writes: "A further selection of literature representing different periods of David's life brings our book to a conclusion. The six episodes here form a concentric pattern (A, B, C, C<sup>1</sup>, B<sup>1</sup>, A<sup>1</sup>) with poems written by the king at the center, on either side an account of great warriors who served the kings, and at the beginning and end natural disasters which struck during David's reign. In a skilful way, these chapters summarize what has gone before, yet without mere repetition. At a deeper level, they present Israel's greatest king as a man who both inherited problems from his predecessor and created them himself (A, A<sup>1</sup>); who fought and achieved his victories with the help of many others, who are celebrated here (B, B<sup>1</sup>), and whose joy and strength was his God, whom he praised with total abandon because everything he was and everything he had achieved was to be attributed to the faithful Lord God of Israel (C, C<sup>1</sup>)."

### a. A legacy from the past 21:1-14

***1 During the reign of David, there was a famine for three successive years; so David sought the face of the Lord. The Lord said, "It is on account of Saul and his blood-stained house; it is because he put the Gibeonites to death."***

***2 The king summoned the Gibeonites and spoke to them. (Now the Gibeonites were not a part of Israel but were survivors of the Amorites; the Israelites had sworn to [spare] them, but Saul in his zeal for Israel and Judah had tried to annihilate them.)***

***3 David asked the Gibeonites, "What shall I do for you? How shall I make amends so that you will bless the Lord's inheritance?"***

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<sup>123</sup> II Sam. 8:16-18

**4** *The Gibeonites answered him, "We have no right to demand silver or gold from Saul or his family, nor do we have the right to put anyone in Israel to death." "What do you want me to do for you?" David asked.*

**5** *They answered the king, "As for the man who destroyed us and plotted against us so that we have been decimated and have no place anywhere in Israel,*

**6** *let seven of his male descendants be given to us to be killed and exposed before the Lord at Gibeah of Saul — the Lord's chosen one." So the king said, "I will give them to you."*

**7** *The king spared Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, because of the oath before the Lord between David and Jonathan son of Saul.*

**8** *But the king took Armoni and Mephibosheth, the two sons of Aiah's daughter Rizpah, whom she had borne to Saul, together with the five sons of Saul's daughter Merab, whom she had borne to Adriel son of Barzillai the Meholathite.*

**9** *He handed them over to the Gibeonites, who killed and exposed them on a hill before the Lord. All seven of them fell together; they were put to death during the first days of the harvest, just as the barley harvest was beginning.*

**10** *Rizpah daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it out for herself on a rock. From the beginning of the harvest till the rain poured down from the heavens on the bodies, she did not let the birds of the air touch them by day or the wild animals by night.*

**11** *When David was told what Aiah's daughter Rizpah, Saul's concubine, had done,*

**12** *he went and took the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan from the citizens of Jabesh Gilead. (They had taken them secretly from the public square at Beth Shan, where the Philistines had hung them after they struck Saul down on Gilboa.)*

**13** *David brought the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan from there, and the bones of those who had been killed and exposed were gathered up.*

**14** *They buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan in the tomb of Saul's father Kish, at Zela in Benjamin, and did everything the king commanded. After that, God answered prayer in behalf of the land.*

There are several incidents, mentioned in this story, of which we find no record elsewhere in Scripture. It is, therefore, difficult to determine the time in David's reign during which this event happened. It has been suggested that it cannot have been during the later years of David's life because of the mention of the burial of the remains of Saul and Jonathan. It would make sense to assume that this happened shortly after their death. Since, however, all of Israel was affected by the drought, it seems probable that David had already been crowned as king over the whole nation.

Israel depended upon two rainy seasons a year for a successful harvest. *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* states about rainfall in Palestine: "Toward the end of October heavy rains begin to fall, at intervals, for a day or several days at a time. These are what the Bible calls the early or former rain (Heb. *yoreh*) literally the pourer. It opens the agricultural year. The soil, hardened and cracked by the long summer, is loosened, and the farmer begins plowing. Till the end of November the average rainfall is not large, but it increases through December, January, and February, begins to abate in March, and is practically over by the middle of April. The latter rains (Heb. *malqosh*) of Scripture are the heavy showers of March and April."

A three-year-long drought made the people and their king realize that more was involved than a freak of nature. So David prayed to God and asked for the reason. The answer he received was that Saul had broken the covenant with the Gibeonites by killing some of the members of that old Canaanite tribe. We do not read anything about this in the story of Saul's life. The Hebrew text reads literally: "It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites." The meaning is, obviously, that there was blood guilt upon the house of Saul.

The covenant with the Gibeonites dated from the days of Joshua, who made a treaty with the Gibeonites without consulting the Lord on the matter. The story of the deception by the Gibeonites, who told Joshua and the leaders of the people that they came from a faraway place, beyond the boundaries of Canaan, is found in *The Book of Joshua*.<sup>124</sup>

David summoned the Gibeonites and asked them how Saul's crime could be atoned for. Their reply reveals that there must have been a lot of anger that went beyond resentment about Saul's crime which decimated the tribe. The fact that they call Saul "the Lord's chosen one" contains a suggestion that Saul had the approval of the Lord for his criminal act. The Gibeonites may have wanted to do more than obtain justice; they may have wanted to indicate their anger toward God.

*The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "It has been objected that the execution of Saul's seven sons was a political crime committed to render David's throne secure. If at all to his advantage, it was so only to a very slight extent. The sons of Rizpah could never have become pretenders to the throne; nor were the sons of Merab likely to be much more dangerous. In a few years they would have married, and formed other ties, and been merged in the general population. Mephibosheth was the heir of Saul, and David protected him and Micha his son. It was quite in the spirit of the times to visit upon Saul's house the sins of its chief. The principle was the same as when all Israel stoned Achan, his sons and his daughters, his oxen and his asses, his sheep and his tent, for brining iniquity upon the people (... Joshua 7:24, 25)."

The Gibeonites asked for seven male members of Saul's family to be handed over to them to be executed and leave their bodies exposed at the place that was considered to be Saul's headquarters. The symbolism of the request is clear. It seems that the choice of the victims-to-be was random, although some Bible scholars believe that the men may have been willing accomplices to Saul's crime.

David made sure that no member of Jonathan's family would be among the victims to be handed over.

There is some confusion about "the five sons of Saul's daughter Merab," as *The New International Version* reads. In a footnote, it is stated that most Hebrew and Septuagint manuscripts have the name "Michal." *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments on this: "Michal has by an error been substituted in the text for Merab, Saul's oldest daughter, who, as appears, 1 Sam 18:19, was married to Adriel [Septuagint, Esdrieel]. Our translators, not daring to impugn the accuracy of the text, and yet finding it difficult to reconcile the passage before us with the one quoted from the First Book of Samuel, have suggested a conjectural solution by the use of the phrase 'brought up,' as if Adriel having become a widower by the death of his wife, his five young sons had been reared under the care of their aunt Michal. It is fatal however, to

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<sup>124</sup> Josh. 9:3-27

such a hypothesis that there is nothing in the original corresponding to ‘brought up.’ [The Hebrew text has *yaal<sup>a</sup>daah*, bore, gave birth; which the Septuagint version renders by the equivalent Greek word *eteke*, produced, brought forth as a mother.] There is, therefore, prima facie evidence of an error having early crept into the text of this passage (for all the ancient versions have it); and [one Bible scholar] has proved this by showing that two Hebrew manuscripts read ‘Merab’ instead of ‘Michal.’ Josephus, who admits that Michal was mother of the five lads, says that she bore them, after a second divorce from David, to Adriel.”

*The New International Version* reads v.9: “the Gibeonites, who killed and *exposed* them on a hill before the Lord.” The Hebrew text reads literally: “they hanged them in the hill before the Lord.” The Hebrew word used is *yaqa*, which literally means “to sever oneself,” or “to be dislocated.” The first time the word is used in Scripture is in the verse about Jacob’s struggle with the angel, where we read: “When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob’s hip so that his hip was *wrenched* as he wrestled with the man.”

Evidently, the Gibeonites intended the bodies of Saul’s son to remain exposed till they rotted and fell apart. In doing so, they clearly, and probably intentionally, sinned against the law, which decreed: “If a man guilty of a capital offense is put to death and his body is hung on a tree, you must not leave his body on the tree overnight. Be sure to bury him that same day, because anyone who is hung on a tree is under God’s curse. You must not desecrate the land the Lord your God is giving you as an inheritance.”<sup>125</sup> Besides taking revenge upon Saul’s family, they wanted to make a statement against Israel’s conquest of the land God had given them, by desecrating it.

It seems that Rizpah, the mother of Armoni and Mephibosheth, was the only person who acted rationally during this weird demonstration of unusual cruelty. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* poses the question: “Did God require this sacrifice of Saul’s sons, probably all innocent of the alleged crime of their father? Was there no other method of averting the divine displeasure? Was the requisition of the Gibeonites to have Saul’s sons sacrificed to God, to be considered as an oracle of God?” And answers it: “Certainly not; God will not have man’s blood for sacrifice, no more than he will have swine’s blood. The famine might have been removed, and the land properly purged, by offering the sacrifices prescribed by the law, and by a general humiliation of the people.”

Rizpah kept watch over the bodies, day and night, chasing away the birds of prey and other animals that would have feasted on them. It could be that Asaph referred to this act of desecration in the psalm in which he states: “They have given the dead bodies of your servants as food to the birds of the air, the flesh of your saints to the beasts of the earth.”<sup>126</sup> Some Bible scholars believe that Rizpah sat on the sackcloth which she had spread out as a sign of mourning, exposing herself to the heat of the day. Others believe that she had attached it to the rock and used it as a tent for protection. The amazing feat was that she did this for the whole period of time between the two rainy seasons, which would be from April till October.

Rizpah did more to counteract the desecration of the land intended by the Gibeonites than anyone else in Israel, including the king. When David finally takes action

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<sup>125</sup> Deut. 21:22,23

<sup>126</sup> Ps. 79:2

and orders the remains of the seven sons of Saul, as well as the bones of Saul and Jonathan to be buried in Kish's family grave, the rains have already begun to fall.

### **b. David's giant-killers 21:15-22**

*15 Once again there was a battle between the Philistines and Israel. David went down with his men to fight against the Philistines, and he became exhausted.*

*16 And Ishbi-Benob, one of the descendants of Rapha, whose bronze spearhead weighed three hundred shekels and who was armed with a new [sword], said he would kill David.*

*17 But Abishai son of Zeruiah came to David's rescue; he struck the Philistine down and killed him. Then David's men swore to him, saying, "Never again will you go out with us to battle, so that the lamp of Israel will not be extinguished."*

*18 In the course of time, there was another battle with the Philistines, at Gob. At that time Sibbecai the Hushathite killed Saph, one of the descendants of Rapha.*

*19 In another battle with the Philistines at Gob, Elhanan son of Jaare-Oregim the Bethlehemite killed Goliath the Gittite, who had a spear with a shaft like a weaver's rod.*

*20 In still another battle, which took place at Gath, there was a huge man with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot — twenty-four in all. He also was descended from Rapha.*

*21 When he taunted Israel, Jonathan son of Shimeah, David's brother, killed him.*

*22 These four were descendants of Rapha in Gath, and they fell at the hands of David and his men.*

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments on these verses: "This section puts a little more detail into the account of David's wars against the Philistines, described in the important summaries of 2 Samuel 5:17-25 and 8:1. Four incidents are recorded here, of which all except the first appear again, with differences of detail, in 1 Chronicles 20:4-8. It seems likely that a roll of honor was kept in which outstanding acts of bravery, some of which are quoted here, were written and handed down to posterity. The concise style of writing is appropriate for an official honors list. *The Philistines had war again* reads like and extract from such a chronicle of exploits. King David, worn out by the battle, was in danger of death. His opponent, *one of the descendants of the giants* (Heb. *rapā*, singular, cf. NIV's 'Rapha', so treating the word as a family name; the RSV assumes a connection with *rēpā'im*, plural, cf. Deut. 2:11; Josh. 17:15), expected to kill David. His spear, though heavy 7½ lb, was only half the weight of that belonging to Goliath (1 Sam. 17:7). Nevertheless, Abishai attacked the formidable soldier and killed him, so saving the king's life. David had a narrow escape, hence the ruling made by popular consent, that this was to be his last appearance as leader of the troops in battle, *lest you quench the lamp of Israel*. The king was the focus of the nation, the source of its policies, the one responsible for keeping the covenant of the Lord (cf. 1 Kgs 11:36; 15:4). The metaphor is suggested by the ever burning lamp in the sanctuary, which is itself a symbol of Israel's dependence of the favor of the Lord, but also of the light revealed by the Lord for the blessing of the people of Israel and of the nations (cf. 2 Sam. 22:29, but see also the lampstand in Zechariah's vision and its meaning, Zech. 4. esp. vv. 6, 14).

*Abishai*, Joab's brother, had had his moment of glory, despite his eclipse by the headstrong Joab."

*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments on *Rapha*: "The word for sons is used in Num. 13:22,28 of the sons of Anak, the giants of the land in the period of the Conquest. The Hebrew for giant, *Rapha*, is not a name of an individual. It is a collective, used of the *Rephaim*, a giant race that inhabited Palestine in primitive times and gave to a valley near Jerusalem the name 'Valley of *Rephaim*.'"

We do not know how old David was at the time of this battle, which turned out to be the last in which he was to lead his troops. Since he was seventy at the time of his death, the incident probably occurred during the last or fore-last decade of his life. David may have thought that he still had enough agility to be personally engaged in hand-to-hand battle and he found out, as most people do when they get older, that age creeps up on a person unawares.

There is some confusion among Bible scholars regarding the interpretation of v.19. In some texts the phrase "brother of Goliath" occurs. But "brother" is missing in the Masoretic text. It occurs, however, in the parallel text of 1 Chron. 20:5. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, suggests that the text denies David the honor of having killed Goliath. She proposes that Elhanan could be another name for David, which seems rather farfetched.

### **c. One of David's greatest psalms 22:1-51**

*1 David sang to the Lord the words of this song when the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.*

*2 He said: "The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;*

*3 my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation. He is my stronghold, my refuge and my savior — from violent men you save me.*

*4 I call to the Lord, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies.*

*5 "The waves of death swirled about me; the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me.*

*6 The cords of the grave coiled around me; the snares of death confronted me.*

*7 In my distress I called to the Lord; I called out to my God. From his temple he heard my voice; my cry came to his ears.*

*8 "The earth trembled and quaked, the foundations of the heavens shook; they trembled because he was angry.*

*9 Smoke rose from his nostrils; consuming fire came from his mouth, burning coals blazed out of it.*

*10 He parted the heavens and came down; dark clouds were under his feet.*

*11 He mounted the cherubim and flew; he soared on the wings of the wind.*

*12 He made darkness his canopy around him — the dark rain clouds of the sky.*

*13 Out of the brightness of his presence bolts of lightning blazed forth.*

*14 The Lord thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded.*

*15 He shot arrows and scattered [the enemies], bolts of lightning and routed them.*

*16 The valleys of the sea were exposed and the foundations of the earth laid bare at the rebuke of the Lord, at the blast of breath from his nostrils.*

*17 "He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters.*

*18 He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me.*

19 *They confronted me in the day of my disaster, but the Lord was my support.*  
20 *He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me.*  
21 *"The Lord has dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me.*  
22 *For I have kept the ways of the Lord; I have not done evil by turning from my God.*  
23 *All his laws are before me; I have not turned away from his decrees.*  
24 *I have been blameless before him and have kept myself from sin.*  
25 *The Lord has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to my cleanness in his sight.*  
26 *"To the faithful you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless,*  
27 *to the pure you show yourself pure, but to the crooked you show yourself shrewd.*  
28 *You save the humble, but your eyes are on the haughty to bring them low.*  
29 *You are my lamp, O Lord; the Lord turns my darkness into light.*  
30 *With your help I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall.*  
31 *"As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the Lord is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him.*  
32 *For who is God besides the Lord? And who is the Rock except our God?*  
33 *It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect.*  
34 *He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to stand on the heights.*  
35 *He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze.*  
36 *You give me your shield of victory; you stoop down to make me great.*  
37 *You broaden the path beneath me, so that my ankles do not turn.*  
38 *"I pursued my enemies and crushed them; I did not turn back till they were destroyed.*  
39 *I crushed them completely, and they could not rise; they fell beneath my feet.*  
40 *You armed me with strength for battle; you made my adversaries bow at my feet.*  
41 *You made my enemies turn their backs in flight, and I destroyed my foes.*  
42 *They cried for help, but there was no one to save them — to the Lord, but he did not answer.*  
43 *I beat them as fine as the dust of the earth; I pounded and trampled them like mud in the streets.*  
44 *"You have delivered me from the attacks of my people; you have preserved me as the head of nations. People I did not know are subject to me,*  
45 *and foreigners come cringing to me; as soon as they hear me, they obey me.*  
46 *They all lose heart; they come trembling from their strongholds.*  
47 *"The Lord lives! Praise be to my Rock! Exalted be God, the Rock, my Savior!*  
48 *He is the God who avenges me, who puts the nations under me,*  
49 *who sets me free from my enemies. You exalted me above my foes; from violent men you rescued me.*  
50 *Therefore I will praise you, O Lord, among the nations; I will sing praises to your name.*  
51 *He gives his king great victories; he shows unfailing kindness to his anointed, to David and his descendants forever."*

The text of this chapter is found in *The Book of Psalms* as Psalm Eighteen. There are some slight differences between the text here and the psalm, which most Bible scholars attribute to scribal errors. One point on which the experts disagree is the date of writing of this poem. Some believe David wrote it in the early years of his reign, others toward the end of his life. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "Of the date when David wrote this psalm there can be little doubt. It was at the close of his first great series of victories, after Tou, the Hittite King of Hamath, had sent to him an embassy of congratulation (... 2 Samuel 8:9, 10), referred to very triumphantly in vers. 45, 46. But there is no trace in it of the sorrow and shame that clouded over his latter days; and no man whose conscience was stained with sins so dark as those of adultery and murder could have written words so strongly asserting his integrity and the cleanness of his hands as are found in vers. 21-25. The psalm belongs to David's happiest time, when he had won for Israel security and empire. It is written from first to last in a tone of jubilant exultation, caused, as we may well believe, by Nathan's acceptance of his purpose to build the temple, and by the solemn appointment of David as the theocratic king. If it were arranged according to time and matter, it would be placed immediately after ch. 8, as it is evidently David's thanksgiving for the benefits and blessings just promised to him and his seed."

*The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary*, however, states: "The contents and form of this song of praise answer to the fact attested by the heading, that it was composed by David in the later years of his reign, when God had rescued him from all his foes, and helped his kingdom to victory over all the neighboring heathen nations."

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, suggests the early years, saying: "This vivid, spontaneous poem sustains to the very end its feeling of exultation at all that the Lord has done. Here is David at his best, before his lapse into adultery numbed his spiritual awareness (vv. 18-25)." Ms. Baldwin thus makes no allowance for the power of emotional healing after confession and forgiveness.

The fact that the psalm is found at this place in the book of 2 Samuel, followed by David's last words in the next chapter, seems to us to be sufficient grounds to believe that this was David's personal testimony in which he looked back of his life and concludes that he loved the Lord with all his heart.

Since we already made an extensive study of this psalm elsewhere, the above notes will be all we will say in the context of this study.

### **d<sup>1</sup>. The last words of David 23:1-7**

***1 These are the last words of David: "The oracle of David son of Jesse, the oracle of the man exalted by the Most High, the man anointed by the God of Jacob, Israel's singer of songs:***

***2 "The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; his word was on my tongue.***

***3 The God of Israel spoke, the Rock of Israel said to me: 'When one rules over men in righteousness, when he rules in the fear of God,***

***4 he is like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning, like the brightness after rain that brings the grass from the earth.'***

***5 "Is not my house right with God? Has he not made with me an everlasting covenant, arranged and secured in every part? Will he not bring to fruition my salvation and grant me my every desire?***

**6 But evil men are all to be cast aside like thorns, which are not gathered with the hand.**

**7 Whoever touches thorns uses a tool of iron or the shaft of a spear; they are burned up where they lie."**

*The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes about the introductory words: *These are the last words of David*: "Various opinions are entertained as to the precise meaning of this statement, which, it is obvious, proceeded from the compiler or collector of the sacred canon. Some think that, as there is no division of chapters in the Hebrew Scriptures, this introduction was intended to show that what follows is no part of the preceding song; others regard this as the last of the king's poetical compositions; while a third party consider it the last of his utterances as an inspired writer. The fact seems to be, that they formed the last divine communication which David received of the kingly character and glory of the Messiah; and although he probably composed some of his sacred lyrics afterward, especially Ps. 72, in which are embodied some glorious predictions of the great King, yet these were only an expansion or particular application of the 'last words.' The distinctness and fullness of the revelation left so vivid and permanent an impression, that it thenceforth formed the grand subject which filled and elevated his mental vision. His imagination dwelt upon it with increasing delight, until it eventually gave a tone to his habitual thoughts, and tinged with its golden hues his strong faith in the perpetuity of his dynastic glory. (See his dying charge to Solomon, 1 Kings 2:4) In this view the 'last words' of David were analogous to the prophetic utterances of Jacob and Moses; and like theirs, too, these appear in the poetical form, extending over seven verses, which are subdivided by the nature of their contents into sections—the one of five and the other of two verses."

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, writes about this section: "The introduction to the poem is a fourfold portrait of the writer. He describes himself not in terms of human achievements but in relation to his God, who caused him to become king. *The anointed of the God of Jacob* says much in few words: the 'God of Jacob' is the one who transforms twisted human material, so David thinks of himself as in need of transformation (not like the kings of Egypt, for example, who considered themselves divine), yet he is 'anointed' (Heb. *mēšiah*) as the Lord's designated ruler, whose attributes should match those of his God. *The sweet psalmist of Israel* or, better, 'Israel's beloved singer' (NIV mg.)."

The phrase "These are the last words of David" is, obviously, written by the editor of the book. But the opening words of the psalm, "The oracle of David son of Jesse, the oracle of the man exalted by the Most High, the man anointed by the God of Jacob, Israel's singer of songs," are from the pen of David himself. The Hebrew word rendered "oracle" is *ne'um*, which is first used in Scripture as the word of God Himself, in the verse: "The angel of the Lord called to Abraham from heaven a second time and *said*, 'I swear by myself, declares the Lord, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you and make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as the sand on the seashore.'"<sup>127</sup>

*The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* states: "The psalm of thanksgiving, in which David praised the Lord for all the deliverances and benefits that he had experienced

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<sup>127</sup> Gen. 22:15-17

throughout the whole of his life, is followed by the prophetic will and testament of the great king, unfolding the importance of his rule in relation to the sacred history of the future. And whilst the psalm may be regarded (ch. 22) as a great hallelujah, with which David passed away from the stage of life, these ‘last words’ contain the divine seal of all that he has sung and prophesied in several psalms concerning the eternal dominion of his seed, on the strength of the divine promise which he received through the prophet Nathan, that his throne should be established for ever (ch. 7). These words are not merely a lyrical expansion of that promise, but a prophetic declaration uttered by David at the close of his life and by divine inspiration, concerning the true King of the kingdom of God.” Quoting another source, the commentary continues: “The aged monarch, who was not generally endowed with the gift of prophecy, was moved by the Spirit of God at the close of his life, and beheld a just Ruler in the fear of God, under whose reign blessing and salvation sprang up for the righteous, and all the wicked were overcome. The pledge of this was the eternal covenant which God had concluded with him’.”

David was not only conscious of divine inspiration in penning these words, he recognized that his poetic and musical talents were a gift from God. What David expresses in vv.3 and 4 sounds like God’s evaluation about David’s rule over Israel. It may be better, however, to consider it to be a picture of what a Messianic rule looks like, a paradigm to which David must compare himself to see how much he has fallen short. Although David is considered to have been Israel’s greatest king, he was not perfect. The fact that he was “a man after [God]’ own heart,”<sup>128</sup> meant that he reminded God, to use a human expression, of His own Son. David was quite aware that his own greatness was the result of God’s grace, not his own merit.

When man fell into sin, God’s creation became steeped in darkness. When the Word became flesh, the light began to shine in the darkness. Through redemption in Jesus Christ, God’s creation is moving toward the dawn of a new day in which righteousness will rule the world. This is all beautifully expressed in v.4, which *The Pulpit Commentary* translates as follows:

*“He that ruleth over men righteously,  
That ruleth in the fear of God —  
And as the morning light shall he be,  
when the sun riseth,  
A morning without clouds;  
Yea, as the tender grass from the earth,  
from sunshine, from rain.”*

V.5, in typical Hebrew fashion, is given as a series of questions, each of which implies a positive answer. The reference is to God’s answer to David, when he conceived the plan to build the temple, the house of God. God answered that He would build a house for David, using the word “house” in the extended sense of “family,” or “offspring.” The message God gave David through the prophet Nathan reads: “The Lord declares to you that the Lord himself will establish a house for you: When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will

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<sup>128</sup> I Sam. 13:14

be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.”<sup>129</sup>

David’s questions do not express any doubt about his salvation or the completion of God’s promise regarding the future. He was convinced that God would faithfully fulfill what He had promised to do through David and his offspring. Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, writes: “David, meditating on the divine word, sees it in the light of Nathan’s prophecy (2 Sam. 7:12-16). David’s house, kingdom and throne had been declared sure for ever in *an everlasting covenant, as ordered and secure* as a legal document, because it depends on the word of the Lord, which cannot prove false. It follows that, since David seeks to rule justly, all his *help* (Heb. *yiš’i* from *yeša’*, ‘welfare,’ ‘salvation’) and *desire* (Heb. *hēpes*, ‘deepest longings’) will be brought to fruition according to the Lord’s promise. When Jesus went about proclaiming ‘the kingdom of God is at hand’ (Mark 1:15), David’s aspirations were at last to be realized; the very name ‘Jesus’ spoke of salvation (Matt. 1:21).”

“Evil men” in v.6, is the rendering of the Hebrew “sons of Belial.” *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* states: “There is no word in the text for sons; it is simply Belial, the good-for-nothing man, and may here refer-first to Saul and secondly to the enemies of our Lord.”

*The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments about the image of the thorns that are removed and burned: “The enemies of Israel are represented as ‘thorns,’ Num 33:55; and so the enemies of the Messiah’s kingdom are here described under the same image. ‘Shall be thrust away’ [*munaad*, participle, *Hophal, naadad*, to move, to flee away], ‘shall be put to flight;’ referring to the men, not to the thorns. Since thorns are extirpated out of a land which is about to be brought under culture, so wicked men will disappear from the kingdom of the Messiah-the wicked enemies and persecutors of this kingdom of righteousness. They resemble those prickly thorny plants which are twisted together, whose spikes point in every direction, and are so sharp and strong that they cannot be touched or approached without danger; but hard instruments and violent means must be taken to destroy or uproot them. So God will remove or destroy all who are opposed to this kingdom.”

### **e<sup>1</sup>. More citations for bravery 23:8-39**

***8 These are the names of David’s mighty men: Josheb-Basshebeth, a Tahkemonite, was chief of the Three; he raised his spear against eight hundred men, whom he killed in one encounter.***

***9 Next to him was Eleazar son of Dodai the Ahohite. As one of the three mighty men, he was with David when they taunted the Philistines gathered [at Pas Dammim] for battle. Then the men of Israel retreated, 10 but he stood his ground and struck down the Philistines till his hand grew tired and froze to the sword. The Lord brought about a great victory that day. The troops returned to Eleazar, but only to strip the dead.***

***11 Next to him was Shammah son of Agee the Hararite. When the Philistines banded together at a place where there was a field full of lentils, Israel’s troops fled from them.***

<sup>129</sup> II Sam. 17:11-16

*12 But Shammah took his stand in the middle of the field. He defended it and struck the Philistines down, and the Lord brought about a great victory.*

*13 During harvest time, three of the thirty chief men came down to David at the cave of Adullam, while a band of Philistines was encamped in the Valley of Rephaim.*

*14 At that time David was in the stronghold, and the Philistine garrison was at Bethlehem.*

*15 David longed for water and said, "Oh, that someone would get me a drink of water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem!"*

*16 So the three mighty men broke through the Philistine lines, drew water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem and carried it back to David. But he refused to drink it; instead, he poured it out before the Lord.*

*17 "Far be it from me, O Lord, to do this!" he said. "Is it not the blood of men who went at the risk of their lives?" And David would not drink it. Such were the exploits of the three mighty men.*

*18 Abishai the brother of Joab son of Zeruijah was chief of the Three. He raised his spear against three hundred men, whom he killed, and so he became as famous as the Three.*

*19 Was he not held in greater honor than the Three? He became their commander, even though he was not included among them.*

*20 Benaiah son of Jehoiada was a valiant fighter from Kabzeel, who performed great exploits. He struck down two of Moab's best men. He also went down into a pit on a snowy day and killed a lion.*

*21 And he struck down a huge Egyptian. Although the Egyptian had a spear in his hand, Benaiah went against him with a club. He snatched the spear from the Egyptian's hand and killed him with his own spear.*

*22 Such were the exploits of Benaiah son of Jehoiada; he too was as famous as the three mighty men.*

*23 He was held in greater honor than any of the Thirty, but he was not included among the Three. And David put him in charge of his bodyguard.*

*24 Among the Thirty were: Asahel the brother of Joab, Elhanan son of Dodo from Bethlehem,*

*25 Shammah the Harodite, Elikah the Harodite,*

*26 Helez the Paltiite, Ira son of Ikkesh from Tekoa,*

*27 Abiezer from Anathoth, Mebunnai the Hushathite,*

*28 Zalmon the Ahohite, Maharai the Netophathite,*

*29 Heled son of Baanah the Netophathite, Ithai son of Ribai from Gibeah in Benjamin,*

*30 Benaiah the Pirathonite, Hiddai from the ravines of Gaash,*

*31 Abi-Albon the Arbathite, Azmaveth the Barhumite,*

*32 Eliahba the Shaalbonite, the sons of Jashen, Jonathan*

*33 son of Shammah the Hararite, Ahiam son of Sharar the Hararite,*

*34 Eliphelet son of Ahasbai the Maacathite, Eliam son of Ahithophel the Gilonite,*

*35 Hezro the Carmelite, Paarai the Arbite,*

*36 Igal son of Nathan from Zobah, the son of Hagri,*

*37 Zelek the Ammonite, Naharai the Beerothite, the armor-bearer of Joab son of Zeruijah,*

**38 Ira the Ithrite, Gareb the Ithrite  
39 and Uriah the Hittite. There were thirty-seven in all.**

The list of David's men who entered the hall of fame has caused much difference of opinion among Bible scholars. The list is also found in *First Chronicles*,<sup>130</sup> where it appears in the context of David's ascension to the throne. In our text, it appears among items from David's last days as king. It is difficult to determine where it actually belongs. David's ascension to the throne was, of course, an event of major importance and it was appropriate to look at the support that had brought him that far. But it also makes sense for David to reminisce at the end of the road and to remember those who brought him there. The absence of Joab from the list would plead for the latter option. As *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: "Joab is not mentioned. Either he is in a class by himself or the disgrace of killing Absalom, and siding with the unsuccessful claimant (1 Kings 1:7) caused his name to be stricken from the honor roll. He served well, was loyal in a dog-like devotion, yet was without honor."

There seems to have been a band of three, who were considered the top rank, consisting of Josheb-Basshebeth, a Tahkemonite, Eleazar son of Dodai, and Shammah son of Agee the Hararite. Josheb-Basshebeth is mentioned as "chief of the Three." The Hebrew text reads literally: "chief among the captains." The last word is the Hebrew word *shaliysh*, which has a variety of meaning. It can be a musical instrument such as a triangle or three-stringed lute. It can also refer to a large quantity, as "a three-fold measure." And finally, it can refer to an army officer of the highest rank. We find it in the last sense in the verse where Pharaoh regrets to have let Israel go and "He took six hundred of the best chariots, along with all the other chariots of Egypt, with *officers* over all of them."<sup>131</sup> The other meaning is found in the verse: "When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with *tambourines and lutes*."<sup>132</sup>

The interesting part in the selection of David's trio of heroes is that all the others are being compared to them and, although they are recognized for their bravery, none of them measures up to the first three.

Our text reads that Josheb-Basshebeth "raised his spear against eight hundred men, whom he killed in one encounter." In the parallel list in *First Chronicles*, the number of slain is put at three hundred.<sup>133</sup> *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "The number of men whom he slew at one time is there stated as having been three hundred; but, as Abishai accomplished this feat, and yet held only inferior rank, eight hundred is probably right. And possibly it is not meant that he slew them all with his own hand, though that is quite possible."

The next one in line is Eleazar son of Dodai the Ahohite, who, single-handedly, defeated the Philistines at "Pas Dammim," when the rest of the army had fled. The text states, however, that he was with David. But this may not mean that David was bodily present when this happened. Pas Dammim was the place where David killed Goliath, but

<sup>130</sup> I Chron. 11:10-47

<sup>131</sup> Ex. 14:7

<sup>132</sup> I Sam. 18:6

<sup>133</sup> See I Chron. 11:11.

Eleazar's victory cannot have occurred that that time. "Pas Dammim" can also be translated at "gathered together."

*The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "The Hebrew has *Dodai*, and 'Dodo' is a mere correction of the Massorites to bring the name into verbal agreement with ... 1 Chronicles 11:12; but in ... 1 Chronicles 27:4 he is called *Dodai*, and we there find him in command of the second division of the army. For 'Dodai,' however, we ought to read there 'Eleazar the son of Dodai.' *Ahohite*; Hebrew, *the son of an Ahohite*, and probably a member of the family descended from Ahoah, a son of Benjamin (... 1 Chronicles 8:4). He would thus belong to the most warlike tribe of Israel, though not mentioned among the Benjamites who joined David at Ziklag (... 1 Chronicles 12:1-7). He joined him, apparently, at an earlier date. That *were there gathered together*. The word 'there' implies the previous mention of some place, and though the text in the parallel passage in Chronicles is more corrupt than that before us, it has, nevertheless, preserved the name of the spot where the encounter took place. In Chronicles the name of Shammah is omitted, and his achievement is mixed up in a strange fashion with that of Eleazar. Here the two heroes have each his separate record, and it is only on minor matters that the text there is more correct. Restored from the readings in Chronicles, the narrative is as follows: 'He was with David at Pas-dammim, and the Philistines were gathered there to battle, and the men of Israel were gone up: and he stood (that is, made a stand) and smote,' etc. *Pas-dammim* is called *Ephes-dammim* in ... 1 Samuel 17:1. It was situated in the valley of Elah, and, as being upon the border, was the scene of numerous conflicts, whence its name, 'the boundary of blood.' It was there that David slew Goliath. *Were gone away*; Hebrew, *went up*; that is, to battle. The idea that the Israelites had fled is taken from the parallel place in Chronicles, where, however, it refers to Shammah's exploit. In vers. 9 and 11 there, the phrase, 'the Philistines were gathered together,' occurs twice, and the scribe, having accidentally omitted the intervening words, has confused together the exploits of Eleazar and Shammah. In this battle Eleazar withstood the Philistine onset, and smote them till his hand clave to his sword hilt. Many such instances of cramp are recorded, and [one Bible scholar] in his commentary, quotes one in which the muscles of a warrior's hand could be relaxed, after hard fighting, only by fomentations of hot water."

Shammah son of Agee was the third member of the trio. He distinguished himself during another battle with the Philistines by holding back a band of Philistines when the rest of Israel's army fled. He did this single-handedly in a field of lentils. In the parallel section in *First Chronicles*, the crop is identified as "a field full of barley."<sup>134</sup> The record in First Chronicles also does not place Shammah alone in the field. We read: "They defended it and struck the Philistines down, and the Lord brought about a great victory." *The Fausset's Bible Dictionary* states about Shammah: "Single handed he withstood the Philistines in a field of lentils ('barley' according to 1 Chron 11:13-14,27, where also by a copyist's error Shammah is omitted and the deed attributed to Eleazar), when the rest fled before them and Jehovah by him wrought a great victory."

The incident recorded in vv.13-18 is one of great human interest in that it shows the measure of dedication of David's men to their leader and David's great appreciation of his people. It is a moving story of sacrificial love and personal devotion. David, probably unintentionally, was heard to remark: "Oh, for a drink of water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem!" It is doubtful that he meant this literally. At that point in his

<sup>134</sup> I Chron. 11:13

life, David was a hunted outlaw, who had fled from home to escape the wrath of King Saul, who intended to kill him. David's exclamation about a drink of water from the well at Bethlehem took him back to his childhood and to the love and security that had marked that period of his life. David wanted to go back in time and recapture some of the carefree happiness he knew as a boy. An actual drink from the well in Bethlehem could not quench David's thirst.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, observes: "The incident refers to the wilderness period of David's life, when his headquarters were at *the cave of Adullam*, the *stronghold* in the hills to the west of Bethlehem, his home. Some Philistines had *encamped in the valley of Rephaim* southwest of Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:17-25), and since it was *about harvest time* their intention was probably to steal food from the fields. That the Philistines could penetrate so far east as to set up their garrison at Bethlehem indicates the weakness of Israel, and explains David's discouragement. In expressing a wish for a drink from the well at Bethlehem, David was longing for normality, peace and home, but three of his thirty officers took him literally and risked their lives to bring him water from Bethlehem's well. The story of such devotion to a leader became part of Israel's literary heritage, especially as the leader was humble enough to admit that only the Lord was worthy of such sacrifice. That is why *he poured it out to the Lord* as a libation: it represented the life-blood of three brave men."

*The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "The Philistine camp was pitched in the valley of Rephaim, and to reach Bethlehem, which was more than twenty or twenty-five miles distant, these three heroes must pass close to the ground occupied by the enemy. The valley of Rephaim, in fact, extended from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, and, to guard their position, the Philistines held Bethlehem with a strong garrison. Of course the heroes would use every precaution; for to be discovered would be certain death. The story of their perils and presence of mind in danger, and hairbreadth escape, would be full of interest; but we are told only that they succeeded, and returned in safety, bearing their precious burden; but David would not drink, *and poured it out unto Jehovah*. The word is that used of a sacrificial libation; for David regarded it as holy, and consecrated to God, because it had been bought with blood — at the risk, that is, of the lives of these gallant men. Nothing is recorded in the romances of the Middle Ages, when knightly chivalry was at its height, more gallant and noble than the exploit of these men. And the very essence of its devotion lay in the fact that it was done to gratify a mere sick longing, and therefore out of pure love. Sick, no doubt, David was, and burning with fever; and even more depressed by the apparent hopelessness of his position. The exploit changed the course of his thoughts. What could he not do with such heroes! Though racked during their absence with anxiety and self-reproach, yet on their return he would be dispirited no longer, but filled with confidence. The words, 'Shall I drink?' inserted in the Revised Version, have apparently dropped out of the text by accident. They are found in the parallel place in Chronicles, and in the Septuagint and Vulgate here. The Syriac has, 'At the peril of their life's blood these men went.'" Whether David was physically ill "and burning with fever," as the commentary suggests, does not come out in the text. If David were thirsty because of fever, any water would have served the purpose.

Job's brother, Abishai, was the leader of the trio who risked their lives for David. He excelled more than once in his devotion to David. *The Fausset's Bible Dictionary* states: "Joab was more of the experienced general, Abishai the devoted champion for

David. Thus, when David proposed to Ahimelech the Hittite and Abishai the perilous visit to Saul's camp, Abishai instantly volunteered, reckless of personal danger. His impulsive nature needed occasional checking, in his zeal for David. We find the consistency of character maintained throughout the history; the same spirit prompting the request at Hachilah, 'Let me smite Saul' (1 Sam 26:8), as subsequently at Bahurim, when Shimei cursed David, prompted his exclamation 'Why should this dead dog curse my Lord the king? let me take off his head' (2 Sam 16:9). He commanded one third of David's army at the battle with Absalom (2 Sam 18), and rescued David when waxing faint and in imminent peril from the giant Ishbi-benob (2 Sam 21:15-17). In the same war probably he, as chief of the three 'mighties,' chivalrously broke through the Philistine host to procure water for David from the well of his native Bethlehem (2 Sam 23:14-17). Once he withstood 300 and slew them with his spear. In 2 Sam 8:13 the victory over the 15,000 Edomites or Syrians in the Valley of Salt is ascribed to David; in 1 Chron 18:12, to Abishai. Probably the commander in chief was David, but the victory actually gained by Abishai."

Another member of this trio was Benaiah son of Jehoiada, the chief of David's bodyguard. Solomon would later put him in charge of the whole army in the place of Joab, whom he executed at Solomon's orders.<sup>135</sup> *Nelson's Illustrated Bible Dictionary* writes about him: "Benaiah was famous for three courageous deeds: (1) climbing down into a pit and killing a lion; (2) killing two lion-like warriors of Moab; and (3) killing an Egyptian giant with the giant's own weapon (2 Sam 23:20-22; 1 Chron 11:22-24)."

*The Pulpit Commentary* comments on the fact of Benaiah becoming the head of David's bodyguard: "We have already seen (upon ... 1 Samuel 22:14) that the words mean that David made him a member of his privy council. Literally the words are, *and David appointed him to his audience*. In ... 1 Chronicles 27:34 mention is made of 'Jehoiada the son of Benaiah' as being next in the council to Ahithophel, and many commentators think that the names have been transposed, and that we ought to read, 'Benaiah the son of Jehoiada.'" As far as I can see, the name of the third member of David's trio is never mentioned.

Remains the list of thirty, about which Joyce G. Baldwin writes in *1 and 2 Samuel*: "This list of the 'thirty' illustrates the ability of David to hold the allegiance of men from very different backgrounds. As might be expected, a number of his closest supporters came from the hill country of Judah, where David fought many of his early battles. Places such as *Bethlehem*, *Tekoa* (2 Sam. 14:2) and the *Carmel* south of Hebron (1 Sam. 25) are familiar enough, but *Paltite* (v. 26) indicates Beth-pelet, near Beersheba (Josh. 15:27), *Hushathite* (v. 27) Hushah, south-west of Bethlehem, while *Netophah* (v.28) and *Gilo* (v. 34) were also in Judah. *Anathoth* (v. 27), however, was in Benjamin's territory, and *Gibeah* (v. 29) was Saul's own city, while *Pirathon* and *the brooks of Gaash* (v. 30) were probably in Ephraimite country (Josh. 24:30), and the *Ithrites* (v. 38) were connected with Kiriath-jearim, west of Jerusalem (1 Chr. 2:53). In addition, several of the 'thirty' were foreigners: *Maacah* (v. 34) and Ammon (v. 37) were allied as enemies of David (2 Sam. 10:6), and *Uriah* was a *Hittite* (v. 39), thought his name means 'Jahweh is my light.'

*Thirty-seven in all*: thirty-six names are mentioned in verses 8-39, so maybe Joab was the thirty-seventh. The *thirty* was a title rather than an exact figure, though it is likely

<sup>135</sup> 1 Kings 2:34,35

that people who fell in battle were replaced, and we know that Asahel and Uriah died untimely deaths (2 Sam. 2:23; 11:17). All these men were renowned in their lifetimes and honored by the king they served.”

### **f<sup>1</sup>. Divine judgment again falls on Israel 24:1-25**

*1 Again the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, ‘Go and take a census of Israel and Judah.’*

*2 So the king said to Joab and the army commanders with him, ‘Go throughout the tribes of Israel from Dan to Beersheba and enroll the fighting men, so that I may know how many there are.’*

*3 But Joab replied to the king, ‘May the Lord your God multiply the troops a hundred times over, and may the eyes of my lord the king see it. But why does my lord the king want to do such a thing?’*

*4 The king’s word, however, overruled Joab and the army commanders; so they left the presence of the king to enroll the fighting men of Israel.*

*5 After crossing the Jordan, they camped near Aroer, south of the town in the gorge, and then went through Gad and on to Jazer.*

*6 They went to Gilead and the region of Tahtim Hodshi, and on to Dan Jaan and around toward Sidon. 7 Then they went toward the fortress of Tyre and all the towns of the Hivites and Canaanites. Finally, they went on to Beersheba in the Negev of Judah.*

*8 After they had gone through the entire land, they came back to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days.*

*9 Joab reported the number of the fighting men to the king: In Israel there were eight hundred thousand able-bodied men who could handle a sword, and in Judah five hundred thousand.*

*10 David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the Lord, ‘I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, O Lord, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing.’*

*11 Before David got up the next morning, the word of the Lord had come to Gad the prophet, David’s seer:*

*12 ‘Go and tell David, ‘This is what the Lord says: I am giving you three options. Choose one of them for me to carry out against you.’*

*13 So Gad went to David and said to him, ‘Shall there come upon you three years of famine in your land? Or three months of fleeing from your enemies while they pursue you? Or three days of plague in your land? Now then, think it over and decide how I should answer the one who sent me.’*

*14 David said to Gad, ‘I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men.’*

*15 So the Lord sent a plague on Israel from that morning until the end of the time designated, and seventy thousand of the people from Dan to Beersheba died.*

*16 When the angel stretched out his hand to destroy Jerusalem, the Lord was grieved because of the calamity and said to the angel who was afflicting the people, ‘Enough! Withdraw your hand.’ The angel of the Lord was then at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.*

**17** *When David saw the angel who was striking down the people, he said to the Lord, ‘I am the one who has sinned and done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? Let your hand fall upon me and my family.’*

**18** *On that day Gad went to David and said to him, ‘Go up and build an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.’*

**19** *So David went up, as the Lord had commanded through Gad.*

**20** *When Araunah looked and saw the king and his men coming toward him, he went out and bowed down before the king with his face to the ground.*

**21** *Araunah said, ‘Why has my lord the king come to his servant?’ ‘To buy your threshing floor,’ David answered, ‘so I can build an altar to the Lord, that the plague on the people may be stopped.’*

**22** *Araunah said to David, ‘Let my lord the king take whatever pleases him and offer it up. Here are oxen for the burnt offering, and here are threshing sledges and ox yokes for the wood.’*

**23** *O king, Araunah gives all this to the king.’ Araunah also said to him, ‘May the Lord your God accept you.’*

**24** *But the king replied to Araunah, ‘No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.’ So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen and paid fifty shekels of silver for them.*

**25** *David built an altar to the Lord there and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then the Lord answered prayer in behalf of the land, and the plague on Israel was stopped.*

Several questions arise in connection with the story before us. The first is in the opening statement: “Again the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, ‘Go and take a census of Israel and Judah.’” In the parallel account in *First Chronicles* we read: “Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel.”<sup>136</sup> Commenting on this mention of Satan, *Barnes’ Notes* states: “In 1 Chron 21:1 the statement is, ‘and an adversary’ (not ‘Satan,’ as the King James Version, since there is no article prefixed, as in Job 1:6; 2:1, etc.) ‘stood up against Israel and moved David,’ just as (1 Kings 11:14,23,25) first Hadad, and then Rezon, is said to have been ‘an adversary’ (Satan) to Solomon and to Israel. Hence, our text should be rendered, ‘For one moved David against them.’ We are not told whose advice it was, but some one, who proved himself an enemy to the best interests of David and Israel, urged the king to number the people.”

The Hebrew text uses the word *Satan*. It is true that the word does not consistently refer to the head of fallen angels in Scripture. In the story of Balaam, for instance, we read: “But God was very angry when he went, and *the angel* of the Lord stood in the road to oppose him. Balaam was riding on his donkey, and his two servants were with him.”<sup>137</sup> But the same word is also found in *The Book of Job*, where we read: “One day the angels came to present themselves before the Lord, and *Satan* also came with them.”<sup>138</sup>

There should be little doubt in our minds as to who did the actual tempting in this case. All temptations originate with Satan and are fed by man’s own sinful nature. James

<sup>136</sup> I Chron. 21:1

<sup>137</sup> Num. 22:22

<sup>138</sup> Job 1:6

states clearly: “When tempted, no one should say, ‘God is tempting me.’ For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each one is tempted when, by his own evil desire, he is dragged away and enticed.” *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “God tempts, that is, tries, men that they may stand more firmly and advance in all that is true and good. Satan tempts men that he may find out their weaknesses and effect their ruin. Yet David fell only to rise again. Satan’s triumph was but temporary, and the result was good for king and people, who would have suffered far more terribly from the effects of their lust of war than from the pestilence. Temptation, then, has two sides, and is good or evil according to the use we make of it; but in itself it is a necessity for our probation. The trials and sorrows of life serve but to break up the fallow ground (... Jeremiah 4:3); and without them our hearts would remain hard as the roadway; and the good seed, which may spring up to eternal life, would lie unheeded upon the surface, and find no entrance into their depths.”

The reason for God’s anger toward Israel is not stated. *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests that this story may be closely related to the one about the famine caused by Saul’s sin against the Gibeonites. But there is not way to confirm this.

The foremost question to the modern mind is what was so sinful in David’s desire to know the total number of his subjects. *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* comments: “Two things here seem strange:—1. The sinfulness of this. What harm was there in it? Did not Moses twice number the people without any crime? Does not political arithmetic come in among the other policies of a prince? Should not the shepherd know the number of his sheep? Does not the Son of David know all his own by name? Might not he make good use of this calculation? What evil has he done, if he do this? Answer, It is certain that it was a sin, and a great sin; but where the evil of it lay is not so certain. (1.) Some think the fault was that he numbered those that were under twenty years old if they were but of stature and strength able to bear arms, and that this was the reason why this account was not enrolled, because it was illegal, 1 Chron 27:23,24. (2.) Others think the fault was that he did not require the half-shekel, which was to be paid for the service of the sanctuary whenever the people were numbered, as a ransom for their souls, Ex 30:12. (3.) Others think that he did it with a design to impose a tribute upon them for himself, to be put into his treasury, and this by way of poll, so that when he knew their numbers he could tell what it would amount to. But nothing of this appears, nor was David ever a raiser of taxes. (4.) This was the fault, that he had no orders from God to do it, nor was there any occasion for the doing of it. It was a needless trouble both to himself and to his people. (5.) Some think that it was an affront to the ancient promise which God made to Abraham, that his seed should be innumerable as the dust of the earth; it savored of distrust of that promise, or a design to show that it was not fulfilled in the letter of it. He would number those of whom God had said that they could not be numbered. Those know not what they do that go about to disprove the word of God. (6.) That which was the worst thing in numbering the people was that David did it in the pride of his heart, which was Hezekiah’s sin in showing his treasures to the ambassadors. [1.] It was a proud conceit of his own greatness in having the command of so numerous a people, as if their increase, which was to be ascribed purely to the blessing of God, had been owing to any conduct of his own. [2.] It was a proud confidence in his own strength. By publishing among the nations the number of his people, he thought to appear the more formidable, and doubted not that, if he should have any war, he should overpower his enemies with

the multitude of his forces, trusting in God only. God judges not of sin as we do. What appears to us harmless, or at least but a small offence, may be a great sin in the eye of God, who sees men's principles, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. But his judgment, we are sure, is according to truth.

2. The spring from which it is here said to arise is yet more strange, v. 1. It is not strange that the anger of the Lord should be kindled against Israel. There was cause enough for it. They were unthankful for the blessings of David's government, and strangely drawn in to take part with Absalom first and afterwards with Sheba. We have reason to think that their peace and plenty made them secure and sensual, and that God was therefore displeased with them. But that, in this displeasure, he should move David to number the people is very strange. We are sure that God is not the author of sin; he tempts no man: we are told (1 Chron 21:1) that Satan provoked David to number Israel. Satan, as an enemy, suggested it for a sin, as he put it into the heart of Judas to betray Christ. God, as righteous Judge, permitted it, with a design, from this sin of David, to take an occasion to punish Israel for other sins, for which he might justly have punished them without this. But, as before he brought a famine upon them for the sin of Saul, so now a pestilence for the sin of David, that princes may from these instances learn, when the judgments of God are abroad, to suspect that their sins are the ground of the controversy, and may therefore repent and reform themselves, which should have a great influence upon national repentance and reformation, and that people may learn to pray for those in authority, that God would keep them from sin, because, if they sin, the kingdom smarts."

Any reference to the requirement of the law in Exodus that every person counted must "pay the Lord a ransom for his life at the time he is counted,"<sup>139</sup> is lacking in this text. That seems to me to be the main issue that made David's executive order particularly sinful. Human pride and an obvious lack of humility must have played an important role also. But it seems strange that Joab's objection would be aimed at that. One of the ironies of biblical theology is the fact that the fourth book of the Pentateuch is called *Numbers*, in which a census is the main theme ordered by God.

Joab's main objection to the order may have been that he rather spent his time fighting wars than traveling around the whole country counting heads.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel* comments on the way the census was carried out: "The army commanders went to *number the people of Israel*, implying 'to enroll the fighting men of Israel' (NIV). The route they took started east of Jordan, where the river Arnon formed the southern border with Moab. *Aroer* was 'on the edge of the valley of the Arnon' (Deut. 2:36, where another town in the gorge is also mentioned). Reuben was the first tribe to be enrolled, therefore, followed by *Gad*, whose territory included the city of *Jazer* (Josh. 13:25) and the district of *Gilead*. Working their way northwards the officers made *Dan* a turning point (cf. v.2, but mention of *Kadesh in the land of the Hittites* would have doubled their journey northwards and is therefore an unlikely emendation of the unknown Hebrew name *Tahtim Hodshi* (NIV). *Kadesh Naphtali* is more likely, but the place in question should be to the east rather than the west of Dan. Though *Sidon*, *Tyre* and the cities of the *Hivites* and *Canaanites* were not reckoned part of Israel, David counted these cities as part of his empire (cf. 2 Sam. 5:11-12; 1 Kgs. 5:1,6), and therefore expected them to provide soldiers for his army. The

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<sup>139</sup> See Ex. 30:12.

process of enrolment, which ended at *Beersheba*, was timed precisely, and the number of troops was registered separately for Israel and Judah, so indicating an administrative division which was to become significant (1 Kgs. 12:19-20). The word *thousand* is likely to be used here in its military sense, 'contingent' ... If this is so, the figures cannot be used with any accuracy as a basis for estimating Israel's population at the time of David."

*The Adam Clarke's Commentary* comments on the discrepancy in numbers between the record here and in *First Chronicles*: "In the parallel place, 1 Chron 21:5, the sums are widely different: in Israel one million one hundred thousand, in Judah four hundred and seventy thousand. Neither of these sums is too great, but they cannot be both correct; and which is the true number is difficult to say. The former seems the most likely; but more corruptions have taken place in the numbers of the historical books of the Old Testament, than in any other part of the sacred records. To attempt to reconcile them in every part is lost labor; better at once acknowledge what cannot be successfully denied, that although the original writers of the Old Testament wrote under the influence of the divine spirit, yet we are not told that the same influence descended on all copiers of their words, so as absolutely to prevent them from making mistakes. They might mistake, and they did mistake; but a careful collation of the different historical books serves to correct all essential errors of the scribes."

Upon receiving the results of the census, David's conscience began to bother him. The Hebrew text reads literally: "David's heart smote him." *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "It appears from ... 1 Chronicles 27:24 that the census was not completed, and, though Joab had visited Judah, he had not even begun to enroll the names of the men of the tribe of Benjamin (... 1 Chronicles 21:6). It appears also that the displeasure of God was manifesting itself before David repented (... 1 Chronicles 21:7; 27:24). Some sign of this, either in public trouble, or in the brooding of the pestilential miasma over the land, brought home to David's mind the conviction of sin; and he at once humbled himself before God, for the vanity of mind which had engendered in him a wicked lust after martial glory and thirst for bloodshed."

Upon his confession of sin, David received God's answer, which consisted in a choice between three evils: famine, war, or fatal sickness. None of these would affect David personally, which would increase the weight of his guilt. The Hebrew text here has "seven years of famine," but the text in *First Chronicles* has "three."<sup>140</sup> But David refuses to choose; he throws himself and his people upon the mercy of God. "Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men" is a great statement of faith that God could not ignore. Adam Clarke comments here: "David acted nobly in this business. Had he chosen war, his own personal safety was in no danger, because there was already an ordinance preventing him from going to battle. Had he chosen famine, his own wealth would have secured his and his own family's support. But he showed the greatness of his mind in choosing the pestilence, to the ravages of which himself and household were exposed equally with the meanest of his subjects."

The punishment comes in the form of a three-day bubonic plague that claimed seventy thousand victims nationwide. There is a demonstration of a lot of emotion, both on the side of David and of God. All this is extremely difficult to explain. The text states clearly that the plague was a punishment meted out by God. Yet we know God is not the author of sickness and death. Sin, sickness and death belong to the devil. As in the story

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<sup>140</sup> 1 Chron. 21:12

of Job, we could say that God allowed the enemy to cause this havoc and it seems to hurt God as much, if not more than it did the people. The angel that caused the fatal sickness is the angel of death, an emissary of Satan, not of God. The devil saw a chance he could take in the confusion to destroy Jerusalem, the place of God's revelation on earth. When God orders this creature to stop, David sees him over the threshing floor of a Jebusite, one of the original inhabitants of Jerusalem, by the name of Araunah.

When David sees the angel he repeats his prayer for mercy upon the people, asking God to hold him personally responsible. In answer to this prayer he receives a second Word from God via the prophet Nathan, who tells him to build an altar at Araunah's threshing floor.

Joyce G. Baldwin, in *1 and 2 Samuel*, comments: "The spread of an inexplicable, incurable and fatal disease is dreaded still, and the imagery of the destroying angel bringing death but halting at Jerusalem provided a vivid picture of intense fear suddenly relieved. David's city was to be spared, as happened again in the time of Hezekiah (1 Kgs 19:34-35), so giving rise to the popular belief that the temple and city were inviolable (Jer. 7:4-15). *The Lord repented of the evil*; the verb (Heb. *yinnahem*) means 'to suffer grief over,' 'the Lord was grieved because of the calamity' (NIV). David's trust had not been misplaced, because in judgment the Lord had remembered mercy. In the Chronicles account, David is specifically said to see the angel of the Lord, sword in hand, threatening Jerusalem (1 Chr. 21:16a); our account implies as much. From his vantage-point in the city, David could see that the divine visitation had reached *the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite*, evidently one of the well-known landowners remaining in the vicinity of Jerusalem after David's capture of the city." In a footnote, Ms. Baldwin states that the name Araunah is preceded here by the definite article in Hebrew, as though it were a title. Some have argued from this that Araunah could have been the last king of Jerusalem.

Araunah, evidently, did not see the angel. When he saw David approaching he came to him to pay him respect and ask for the reason of his visit. David tells him that he wanted to buy the threshing floor to build an altar and bring a sacrifice so that the plague would stop. We do not read that he told Araunah that this was a divine order. Araunah offers David the threshing floor, the oxen and the equipment free of charge. It is doubtful that he expected David to accept this offer. As in the case where Abraham wanted to buy a burying plot for Sarah, and the owner, Ephron the Hittite, said: "No, my lord, Listen to me; I give you the field, and I give you the cave that is in it. I give it to you,"<sup>141</sup> David knew the difference between what was said and what was meant. So he insisted in paying the full price. Not every Bible scholar agrees with the above. Some think that Araunah sincerely intended to sacrifice his property to the king.

*Barnes' Notes* comments on the price of fifty shekels of silver: "In Chronicles, 'six hundred shekels of gold by weight.' In explanation, it is supposed-that the fifty shekels here mentioned were gold shekels, each worth twelve silver shekels, so that the fifty gold shekels are equal to the 600 silver; that our text should be rendered, 'David bought the threshing-floor and the oxen for money,' namely, 'fifty shekels;' and that the passage in Chronicles should be rendered, 'David gave to Ornan gold shekels of the value' (or weight) 'of 600 shekels.' What is certain is that our text represents the fifty shekels as the price of the threshing-floor and the oxen."

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<sup>141</sup> Gen. 23:10,11

In his answer to Araunah David redefined the concept of sacrifice. “I will not sacrifice to the Lord my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.” He understood that a gift that does not hurt cannot be called a sacrifice. In His comment on the gift of the poor widow, Jesus defined sacrifice, saying: “I tell you the truth ... this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”<sup>142</sup>

Having paid Araunah for his property, David built the altar and brought several sacrifices. *First Chronicles* adds that God answered David by lighting the fire on the altar. We read: “He called on the Lord, and the Lord answered him with fire from heaven on the altar of burnt offering.”<sup>143</sup> David also realized that the plague stopped at that moment. This dramatic realization revealed to him that he had come to the place God had chosen for the building of the temple. According to *First Chronicles*, he proclaimed: “The house of the Lord God is to be here, and also the altar of burnt offering for Israel.”<sup>144</sup> Thus was fulfilled what Moses had said to Israel in the desert: “You are to seek the place the Lord your God will choose from among all your tribes to put his Name there for his dwelling. To that place you must go; there bring your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, what you have vowed to give and your freewill offerings, and the firstborn of your herds and flocks. There, in the presence of the Lord your God, you and your families shall eat and shall rejoice in everything you have put your hand to, because the Lord your God has blessed you.”<sup>145</sup> It would be at this place where Solomon would build the temple, as we read: “Then Solomon began to build the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah, where the Lord had appeared to his father David. It was on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite, the place provided by David.”<sup>146</sup>

Thus ends the book of *Second Samuel*. The first chapters of *First Kings* will recount David’s last days, but there is no reference to any of that in this book. The end of this book amazes us more by what it does not say than by what it says. Without *First Chronicles* we would be left in the dark as to the mystery of God’s dealing with human disasters. The plague, which is the last catastrophe described here, was a disaster of major proportions. It could have devastated the nation, wiping it out and bring God’s plan of salvation of the world to a grievous halt. There were obvious demonic forces at work in this event. Yet God uses disaster to bring about one of the most glorious fulfillments of His intent for His chosen people: the revelation of the place where the temple would be build. Satan tried to kill off God’s people, God turned this around and prepared the place where He could reveal His glory and lead His people into His rest.

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.”<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Luke 21:3,4

<sup>143</sup> I Chron. 21:26

<sup>144</sup> I Chron. 22:1

<sup>145</sup> Deut. 12:5-7

<sup>146</sup> II Chron. 3:1

<sup>147</sup> Rom. 8:28