

## DAVID, A MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART

*“The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people.”* (I Sam. 13:14)

### I. INTRODUCTION

God gave the unique testimony about David that he was “a man after His own heart.”<sup>1</sup> The apostle Paul quotes this Scripture verse in his sermon in the synagogue of Antioch, Asia Minor: “After removing Saul, he made David their king. He testified concerning him: ‘I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.’ From this man’s descendants God has brought to Israel the Savior Jesus, as he promised,”<sup>2</sup> linking the designation given to David to the Messiah.

As a young Christian, living in the Netherlands, I met an American preacher who paid a good deal of attention to me and showed me unusual affection. I found out that I reminded him of his son, who was the same age I was, whom he had left behind in the United States and, evidently, missed during his overseas trip. We could say that David reminded God of His own Son, Jesus Christ, and that this was the main reason why He paid so much attention to this shepherd boy.

In the popular theology of the people of Jesus’ days, the Messiah was simply called “Son of David.” The two blind people who came to Jesus for healing cried: “Have mercy on us, Son of David!”<sup>3</sup> And the people who tried to identify Jesus as the Messiah said: “Could this be the Son of David?”<sup>4</sup> At Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem, we read: “The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David!’ ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’ ‘Hosanna in the highest!’ ”<sup>5</sup>

The same identification is made in the Old Testament. Centuries after the death of David, God said to King Hezekiah: “I will defend this city and save it, for my sake and for the sake of David my servant!”<sup>6</sup> Jeremiah makes the clearest statements on this point: “ ‘The days are coming,’ declares the LORD, ‘when I will raise up to David a righteous Branch, a King who will reign wisely and do what is just and right in the land.’ ”<sup>7</sup> And: “Instead, they will serve the LORD their God and David their king, whom I will raise up for them.”<sup>8</sup> Ezekiel prophesied: “My servant David will be king over them, and they will all have one shepherd. They will follow my laws and be careful to keep my decrees. They will live in the land I gave to my servant Jacob, the land where your fathers lived. They and their children and their children’s children will live there forever, and David my servant will be their prince forever.”<sup>9</sup> And in Hosea’s prophecy we read: “Afterward the Israelites will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king. They will come trembling to the LORD and to his blessings in the last days.”<sup>10</sup>

God’s affection for David was based on His eternal love for His Son Jesus. David was loved because of the Father’s love for the Son. David’s worth was not found in himself, but outside him in Jesus Christ. Within the confines of the Gospel, God loves us all because of Jesus Christ.

David is first mentioned in the Bible in the Book of Ruth, where his genealogy is briefly stated at the end: “This, then, is the family line of Perez: Perez was the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, Boaz the father of Obed, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David.”<sup>11</sup>

### II. DAVID’S EARLY HISTORY

David was born in Bethlehem in ± 1085 B.C and died in Jerusalem in ± 1015 B.C. at the age of 70. He became king at the age of 30, first over the tribe of Judah alone and 7½ later over all of Israel, spanning a total of 40 years. He spent his youth in Bethlehem, tending the flocks of his father Jesse.

<sup>1</sup> I Sam. 13:14

<sup>2</sup> Acts 13:22,23

<sup>3</sup> Matt. 9:27

<sup>4</sup> Matt. 12:23

<sup>5</sup> Matt. 21:9

<sup>6</sup> Isa. 37:35

<sup>7</sup> Jer. 23:5

<sup>8</sup> Jer. 30:9

<sup>9</sup> Ezek. 37:24,25

<sup>10</sup> Hos. 3:5

<sup>11</sup> Ruth 4:18-22

The name David, or rather Daviyd is derived from the Hebrew word *dowd*, meaning: “loving.” As such we find it in the Song of Solomon: “Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth—for your love is more delightful than wine.”<sup>12</sup> The word *dowd* is more frequently rendered “uncle.” Some scholars believe it means “chieftain,” but the evidence for this is difficult to substantiate.

### A. David as Shepherd

The information about David’s early years as a shepherd boy is rather scant. When Samuel was sent to the house of Jesse to anoint the future king of Israel, he realized that none of Jesse’s seven sons that were presented to him was the one God wanted him to anoint. We read: “So he asked Jesse, ‘Are these all the sons you have?’ ‘There is still the youngest,’ Jesse answered, ‘but he is tending the sheep.’ Samuel said, ‘Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives.’”<sup>13</sup>

When King Saul began to suffer attacks of depression and insanity and looked for someone to play the harp for him, the young David was recommended. We read: “One of the servants answered, ‘I have seen a son of Jesse of Bethlehem who knows how to play the harp. He is a brave man and a warrior. He speaks well and is a fine-looking man. And the LORD is with him.’ Then Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, ‘Send me your son David, who is with the sheep.’”<sup>14</sup>

It is not clear why, at that point, David was spoken of as “a brave man and a warrior.” Some scholars believe that the chronology of the narrative is reversed and that David had already proven himself in warfare before he appeared at Saul’s court. Although the chronology seems confusing, there is no indication that David had fought in any battles. The more logical explanation is that the reference is to David’s combat with the wild animals that had attacked his flock, of which he made mention when he was introduced to King Saul, prior to his encounter with the giant Goliath. At that time, the following conversation took place: Saul said to David: “ ‘You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a boy, and he has been a fighting man from his youth.’ But David said to Saul, ‘Your servant has been keeping his father’s sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God.’”<sup>15</sup>

*The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* concurs with this: “The description of David as ‘a mighty man’ and ‘a man of war’ does not presuppose that David had already fought bravely in war, but may be perfectly explained from what David himself afterwards affirmed respecting his conflicts with lions and bears (1 Sam 17:34-35). The courage and strength which he had then displayed furnished sufficient proofs of heroism for any one to discern in him the future warrior.”

This combination of artistic excellence and heroism is rather unusual. The two characteristics are considered opposites and even mutually exclusive. When during a football game, a reporter mentions, as I once heard him do, that one of the players played “like a pianist,” the remark was, obviously, derogatory. There is an anecdote about the great pianist Franz Liszt, who playing at the court of the Czar of Russia, was asked by one of the czar’s generals: “Did you ever fight in a battle?” The maestro answered: “No, sir, did you every play a piano concerto?” In young David, however, the two extremes of artistic excellence and heroism seem to have been harmoniously combined.

We know very little about the instrument David played so skillfully. The Hebrew word for harp is *kinnowr*, or *kinnor*, which is the instrument invented by Lamech’s son Jubal.<sup>16</sup> *The New Unger’s Bible Dictionary* explains about this instrument: “By its translation in the LXX and the Vulgate, kinnor may be definitely identified as a species of lyre and was called kithara by the Greeks and Romans. According to rabbinic sources, to make the lyre strings the small intestines of sheep were stretched across a sounding board over a blank space and attached to a crossbar. The performer apparently drew a plectrum across the strings with his right hand and deadened the strings with his left. Pictures on Assyrian monuments portray the lyre in similar fashion, as on the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III and the musicians appearing before Sennacherib at Lachish, although the players in this case seem to be drawing the index fingers over the

<sup>12</sup> Song of Songs 1:2

<sup>13</sup> I Sam. 16:11

<sup>14</sup> I Sam. 16:18,19

<sup>15</sup> I Sam. 17:33-36

<sup>16</sup> See Gen. 4:21

strings instead of using a plectrum. David played with his hand before Saul (1 Sam 16:23).” Incidentally, the English word “guitar” is obviously derived from the Greek *kithara*.

The word *kinnowr* is usually rendered “harp” in the Book of Psalms and, from the use of poetic parallels that are so typical for Hebrew poetry, we may conclude that it had ten strings. We read, for instance: “Praise the LORD with the harp; make music to him on the ten-stringed lyre.”<sup>17</sup>

That the Jews were famous for their skill in playing the instrument is obvious from their bitter complaint during the Babylonian Captivity: “By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept when we remembered Zion. There on the poplars we hung our harps, for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, ‘Sing us one of the songs of Zion!’ How can we sing the songs of the LORD while in a foreign land?”<sup>18</sup>

We may assume that David played his harp in the field, while tending the sheep. The Twenty-third Psalm is proof of the fact that he must have drunk in the beauty of nature. The way he translated the loveliness of the world that surrounded him in the unsurpassed poetry of that hymn and transported the emotions it evoked to the level of fellowship with God has never been exceeded. Even Beethoven’s *Pastoral Symphony* does not improve on David’s “Pastoral.”

We do not know when David wrote The Twenty-third Psalm. Even if he did not compose it on the spot, while drinking in God’s nature, but wrote it down years later in his royal palace, the components date from this episode in his life. They demonstrate the intensity of his emotions and the depth of his relationship with God.

It is very difficult to determine the role of music in a person’s life and the influence it has on the human spirit and spiritual things. We see an example in the experience of King Saul and David’s introduction to him. We read: “Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him. Saul’s attendants said to him, ‘See, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. Let our lord command his servants here to search for someone who can play the harp. He will play when the evil spirit from God comes upon you, and you will feel better.’”<sup>19</sup> Then there is Elisha’s request for a harpist to allow him to enter into fellowship with God and prophesy. “While the harpist was playing, the hand of the LORD came upon Elisha and he said, ‘This is what the LORD says...’”<sup>20</sup> Words can only express a fraction of what the human spirit experiences, and music goes beyond words. Being musically, as well as poetically, gifted allowed David to deeply penetrate into the recesses of the mysteries of God and man. Here, however, we enter into a field that is well beyond the confines of our study.

Although David performed some of his greatest exploits in his youth, we cannot say that he leveled out at an early age. Even if he did write Psalm Twenty-three in the fields outside Bethlehem, he continued to develop into “Israel’s singer of songs,”<sup>21</sup> or, as the KJV calls him: “the sweet psalmist of Israel.” The same can be said about his heroism. His defeat of Goliath was, probably, the greatest military success he ever achieved, but it did not stunt his growth as the military genius he became later in life. It has been said about the composer Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy, that he composed his best piece of music, the overture to Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night’s Dream* at age 17 and never surpassed his own achievement. This cannot be said about David.

## B. David as Slinger-Marksman

Another ability David acquired and perfected was his mastery of the slingshot. The Hebrew word for “sling” is *qela`*. According to *Fausset’s Bible Dictionary*: “Two strings attached to a leather center, the hollow receptacle of the stone, composed it. It was swung round the head, then one string was let go and the stone hurled out.” The Benjamites were renowned for their skill in the use of the sling. We read about them: “Among all these soldiers there were seven hundred chosen men who were left-handed, each of whom could sling a stone at a hair and not miss.”<sup>22</sup> Although David grew up in the territory of Judah, south of the land that had been allotted the tribe of Benjamin, there may have been frequent intercourse between the two tribes and David may have learned from his neighbors.

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<sup>17</sup> Ps. 33:2

<sup>18</sup> Ps. 137:1-4

<sup>19</sup> I Sam. 16:14-16

<sup>20</sup> II Kings 3:15,16

<sup>21</sup> II Sam. 23:1

<sup>22</sup> Judg. 20:16

The shepherd did not use his sling as a weapon but as a means to keep the flock together. When a sheep tended to stray from the flock, the shepherd would sling a stone in its direction to make the animal turn back. The art of slinging in that case consisted in being able to miss the animal. One has to be a good marksman to miss accurately!

### C. David as anointed King of Israel

The story of David begins when God says to Samuel: “Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king”<sup>23</sup> and David is anointed as the future king of Israel. Interestingly, God did not tell the prophet which one of Jesse’s son was the chosen one. The anointing ceremony served also as a lesson for Samuel, who seems to have had a tendency to be impressed by the outward appearance of people. Samuel would have picked Eliab, David’s oldest brother for that reason, but God admonished him: “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”<sup>24</sup>

When, after seven misses, David is sent for and appears before Samuel, God tells the prophet that he is the man. David must have been a teenager at that time, too young to be included in the important events of Jesse’s household. He is described as “ruddy, with a fine appearance and handsome features.”<sup>25</sup> The only other person called “ruddy” in the Old Testament is Esau.<sup>26</sup> The Hebrew word is ‘*admoniy*, meaning “reddish.” *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* suggests that: “‘*admoni*, ‘ruddy,’ may refer to the youth’s physical prowess.” *The Commentary* states: “Perhaps the word ‘warrior’ would be a better translation than ruddy.” Most commentators, however, do not share this point of view. In a nation where most people have black hair and dark eyes, a redhead would be a striking person.

God’s election of David must have upset the order of Jesse’s household. David was anointed in a private ceremony with only his brothers present. >From the way the brothers passed before Samuel, we can understand that, when the purpose of Samuel’s arrival had been explained to Jesse, the general expectation was that Eliab would be chosen as the future king of Israel. David never even entered Jesse’s mind. *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* comments: “[David] was in the fields, keeping the sheep ... and was left there, though there was a sacrifice and a feast at his father’s house. The youngest are commonly the fondlings of the family, but, it should seem, David was least set by of all the sons of Jesse; either they did not discern or did not duly value his excellent spirit. Many a great genius lies buried in obscurity and contempt; and God often exalts those whom men despise and gives abundant honor to that part which lacked. The Son of David was he whom men despised, the stone which the builders refused, and yet he has a name above every name.” Thus, in occupying the very last place in the family, David foreshadowed his great Son. Asaph would later compose a psalm in which he stated: “He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel his inheritance. And David shepherded them with integrity of heart; with skillful hands he led them.”<sup>27</sup>

The honor and glory God would bestow upon David was beyond anything he, or anyone else could have imagined even at the highest point of David’s fame, let alone at the time when he was a humble shepherd boy. David would become the linchpin in God’s plan of salvation for the world. As such he foreshadowed the Messiah in a way no one else in Scripture would. God put in David the seed of glory that was to grow to completion in Jesus Christ.

We will inherit this glory, according to the words of the apostle Paul in his Epistle to the Romans: “I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.”<sup>28</sup> This reminds us of C. S. Lewis’ words: “It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a

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<sup>23</sup> I Sam. 16:1

<sup>24</sup> I Sam. 16:7

<sup>25</sup> I Sam. 16:12

<sup>26</sup> See Gen. 25:25

<sup>27</sup> Ps. 78:70-72

<sup>28</sup> Rom. 8:18

creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship, or else a horror and a corruption such as you now meet, if at all, only in a nightmare."<sup>29</sup>

The glory of David is expressed in terms such as: "the key of David," a phrase coined by Isaiah. In Isaiah's prophecy God addresses a certain Eliakim, further unknown in Scripture, with the words: "I will place on his shoulder the key to the house of David; what he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open."<sup>30</sup> Jesus borrowed Isaiah's words in addressing the church in Philadelphia: "These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open."<sup>31</sup> That key is probably the same as: "the keys of death and Hades" mentioned earlier in Revelation.<sup>32</sup> Jesus explains in John's Gospel what the holding of this key stands for. We read: "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice and come out-those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned."<sup>33</sup>

Twice in Revelation, Jesus is called "the Root of David": "Then one of the elders said to me, 'Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.' " "I, Jesus, have sent my angel to give you this testimony for the churches. I am the Root and the Offspring of David, and the bright Morning Star."<sup>34</sup> This rather mysterious expression seems to refer to a quality of manhood God had originally invested in man. God created man to be an expression of His glory. Most of this was lost in man's fall into sin. All of it was recovered when "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>35</sup> God found traces of this in the boy David, which made him "a man after His own heart."

There hangs a cloud of ambiguity over the whole principle of monarchy in Israel's history. From the time of its birth as a nation, at the exodus from Egypt, Israel had been a theocracy. Gideon understood this. We read how the people offered him the throne of Israel and he refused: "The Israelites said to Gideon, 'Rule over us-you, your son and your grandson-because you have saved us out of the hand of Midian.' But Gideon told them, 'I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The LORD will rule over you.' "<sup>36</sup> Toward the end of Samuel's life, the elders of Israel came to Samuel and said: "Appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have." We read: But when they said, 'Give us a king to lead us,' this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD. And the LORD told him: 'Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will do.' "<sup>37</sup>

Yet, God had ordered Moses to include stipulations regarding the monarchy in the law.<sup>38</sup> We cannot really say that Saul had not been God's choice, at least not initially. Had Saul been obedient, his throne would have lasted. Yet, according to Jacob's prophecy, the "Once and Future King"<sup>39</sup> was to come from the tribe of Judah. Jacob had said on his deathbed: "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>40</sup> Jesus, when standing before Pilate, declared himself to be a king. We read: "Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, 'Are you the king of the Jews?' 'Is that your own idea,' Jesus asked, 'or did others talk to you about me?' 'Am I a Jew?' Pilate replied. 'It was your people and your chief priests who handed you over to me. What is it you have done?' Jesus said, 'My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is

<sup>29</sup> C. S. Lewis - *The Weight of Glory*

<sup>30</sup> Isa. 22:22

<sup>31</sup> Rev. 3:7

<sup>32</sup> See Rev. 1:18

<sup>33</sup> John 5:28,29

<sup>34</sup> Rev. 5:5; 22:16

<sup>35</sup> John 1:14

<sup>36</sup> Judg. 8:22,23

<sup>37</sup> See I Sam. 8:5-9.

<sup>38</sup> Deut. 17:14-20

<sup>39</sup> Title of a book by White about King Arthur

<sup>40</sup> Gen. 49:10

from another place.’ ‘You are a king, then!’ said Pilate. Jesus answered, ‘You are right in saying I am a king. In fact, for this reason I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.’<sup>41</sup>

After Samuel anointed David as the future king of Israel, we read: “From that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power.”<sup>42</sup> We can only guess about the change the coming of the Holy Spirit upon David made in his life and his position in the family. One would expect that David would have risen in the eyes of his brothers. The opposite seems to have been the case, for when David, at his father’s request, visited the battlefield where Saul’s army and his brothers had been facing the Philistines and Goliath, and David commented on the situation, we read: “When Eliab, David’s oldest brother, heard him speaking with the men, he burned with anger at him and asked, ‘Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the desert? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle.’”<sup>43</sup> Those words are typical for the disdain an older brother would feel for a younger one; they are not characteristic of a soldier speaking to his future commander-in-chief. Eliab and the other older brothers may have believed that David’s anointing by Samuel had been the quirk of an old man who was becoming senile. It is not unusual for a person who experiences God in his life to face the opposition of family members.

#### **D. David as Saul’s Courtier**

David was invited to appear before Saul when the latter began to suffer from attacks of depression, which the Bible clearly attributes to demonic influences. Saul’s attacks of melancholy were the results of his disobedience. Several factors led to God’s rejection of Saul as king of Israel, but the last and most crucial one occurred during his campaign against Amalek. Amalek had been Israel’s archenemy since the days of Moses. They had attacked Israel in the rear during their desert crossing. After Joshua had defeated them, we read: “Then the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven.’ Moses built an altar and called it The LORD is my Banner. He said, ‘For hands were lifted up to the throne of the LORD. The LORD will be at war against the Amalekites from generation to generation.’”

Evidently, Saul ignored this part of Israel’s history and the injunction. After his victory over the Amalekite army, he not only failed to kill their king and all the livestock but, in his conceit, he erected a monument in his own honor. From Samuel’s rebuke: “rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry” we construe that Saul had consulted demons by means of divination. This must have opened the door for the demonic oppression from which he began to suffer.

From the fact that David’s harp playing brought relief to the king, we understand that Satan abhors music, at least some kinds of music.

David’s invitation to the palace was the beginning of God’s training for him to be the king. He must have learned some of court etiquette during these concert sessions.

The invitation is also proof of the fact that, after David’s anointing and the coming of the Holy Spirit upon him, he no longer remained the little unknown shepherd boy. We are not told what occurrences drew public attention to him. His killing of the bear and the lion may have caught “the attention of the press” and he may have been heard playing his harp when the first reporters came to interview him. But this reconstruction of facts is, of course, pure speculation.

#### **E. David as Warrior**

David’s duel with Goliath in which he killed the giant was what propelled him to instant fame. This most outstanding feat of bravery by a teenage boy is one of the highlights of biblical history.

There were many wars between Israel and Philistia and the time of this particular conflict cannot be ascertained. It must have occurred after Saul’s campaign against Amalek and his subsequent rejection by God. The Book of First Samuel states: “All the days of Saul there was bitter war with the Philistines, and whenever Saul saw a mighty or brave man, he took him into his service.”<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> John 18:33-37

<sup>42</sup> I Sam. 16:13

<sup>43</sup> I Sam. 17:28

<sup>44</sup> I Sam. 14:52

The location of this battlefield was between Socoh and Azekah about fourteen miles west of Bethlehem. The terrain was particularly suitable for the encounter as it is described for us in First Samuel. There was a valley between two mountain slopes in the midst of which ran a precipitous ravine. *The Pulpit Commentary* borrows from a book *Tent Work* by Conder, who describes the place: "In the middle of the broad, open valley we found a deep trench with vertical sides, impassable except at certain places — a valley in a valley, and a natural barrier between the two hosts. The sides and bed of this trench are strewn with rounded and water-worn pebbles, which would have been well fitted for David's sling. Here, then, we may picture to ourselves the two hosts, covering the low, rocky hills opposite to each other, and half hidden among the ... bushes. Between them was the rich expanse of ripening barley, and the red banks of the torrent, with its white shingle bed."

Goliath was probably not a native Philistine. *The Fausset's Bible Dictionary* states that he was: "Perhaps a descendant of the old Rephaim, a remnant of whom, when dispersed by Ammon, took refuge with the Philistines." Giants, such as Goliath, had been spotted by the first spies who went to survey Canaan when Israel first arrived at its border after their exodus from Egypt. They stated in their report: "We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them."<sup>45</sup>

Interpreters differ about Goliath's height. The KJV gives it as "six cubits and a span," which is a literal rendering of the Hebrew. Most modern versions translate this as "over nine feet tall." *The Pulpit Commentary* puts the cubit at 16 inches and the span at 5 inches, making him eight feet five and one third inch tall. The Septuagint and Josephus put him at a little over eight feet. Some suppose that he could have been over 11 feet tall. That this was not entirely impossible can be deducted from a note in Deuteronomy about King Og of Bashan: "Only Og king of Bashan was left of the remnant of the Rephaites. His bed was made of iron and was more than thirteen feet long and six feet wide. It is still in Rabbah of the Ammonites."<sup>46</sup>

The Philistines exploited Goliath and his height by putting him up front to wear down the resistance of Israel's army. In a conventional duel, Goliath would seem to be invincible. The psychological effect his appearance had upon the Israelites was so overwhelming that everyone, including King Saul, who "was a head taller than any of the others,"<sup>47</sup> was "dismayed and terrified."

TLB describes him heavily armed. "He wore a bronze helmet, a two-hundred-pound coat of mail, bronze leggings, and carried a bronze javelin several inches thick, tipped with a twenty-five-pound iron spearhead." "Bronze" may be the wrong rendering of the Hebrew *nechosheth*, which means: "copper," or anything made of metal. The alloy bronze probably did not yet exist at that time. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes about Goliath's military outfit: "However tall and strong Goliath may have been, yet with all this vast weight of metal his movements must have been slow and unready. He was got up, in fact, more to tell upon the imagination than for real fighting, and though, like a castle, he might have been invincible if attacked with sword and spear, he was much too encumbered with defensive armor to be capable of assuming the offensive against a light armed enemy. To David belongs the credit of seeing that the Philistine champion was a huge imposition." *The Commentary* may have underestimated the giant's agility. Goliath's armor was probably taken as a trophy after his defeat, which accounts for the exact weight given here. We at least know his sword was kept.<sup>48</sup>

*The Adam Clarke's Commentary* states about Goliath's challenge to the Israelite army: "The Targum adds much to this speech. This is the substance: 'I am Goliath the Philistine of Gath, who killed the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas the priests; and led into captivity the ark of the covenant of Yahweh, and placed it in the temple of Dagon my god; and it remained in the cities of the Philistines seven months. Also, in all our battles I have gone at the head of the army, and we conquered and cut down men, and laid them as low as the dust of the earth; and to this day the Philistines have not granted me the honor of being chief of a thousand men. And ye, men of Israel, what noble exploit has Saul, the son of Kish, of Gibeah, done, that ye should have made him king over you? If he be a hero, let him come down himself and fight with me; but if he be a weak or cowardly man, then choose you out a man that he may come down to me.' "

The taunt in either version of the giant's speech would be embarrassing enough to the Israelite army. If the extended version is correct, Goliath was careful not to mention that fact that the Philistines had

<sup>45</sup> Num.13:33

<sup>46</sup> Deut. 3:11

<sup>47</sup> See I Sam. 10:23.

<sup>48</sup> See I Sam. 21:8,9.

to admit defeat in sending the ark back to Israel. Neither did he talk about the victory Jonathan had won single-handedly in an earlier encounter.<sup>49</sup> As a matter of fact, the Philistines may have been desperate and used Goliath as a last resort in a war that turned into a battle for survival for them. It is amazing that no one in Israel recognized that Goliath's appearance was a sign of weakness and not of strength. God's rejection of Saul had left the whole army demoralized to the point where no one could analyze the situation and draw conclusions that were strategically sound. Israel was under no obligation to accept the proposal for a one-on-one duel. The Israelite army, which had defeated the Philistines before, could easily have overrun this one man. Israel's problem was that they had forgotten who they were. They did not see their war with the Philistines as part of God's plan for them to possess the Promised Land. The conflict had deteriorated into a human confrontation. It took a teenager, filled with the Spirit of God, to resolve this stalemate and ask the question: "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?"<sup>50</sup> Only the Holy Spirit makes us realize that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms."<sup>51</sup>

The description of David, as he arrived at the camp of the Israelite army, seems strangely redundant. After all, we have already been introduced to David in the previous chapter of First Samuel. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "The Vatican codex of the Septuagint omits the whole of this section, and it was inserted in the Alexandrian copy by Origen. It is found, however, in the other versions; and possibly this treatment of David's history as of a person unknown, just after the account given of him in ch. 16, did not seem so strange to readers in old time as it does to us, with whom reading is so much more easy an accomplishment. It is, nevertheless, one of the many indications that the Books of Samuel, though compiled from contemporaneous documents, were not arranged in their present form till long afterwards. It was only gradually that Samuel's schools dispersed throughout the country men trained in reading and writing, and trained up scholars capable of keeping the annals of each king's reign. The Books of Kings were, as we know, compiled from these annals; but probably at each prophetic school there would be stored up copies of Psalms written for their religious services, ballads such as those in the Book of Jashar, and in the Book of the Wars of Jehovah, narratives of stirring events like this before us, and histories both of their own chiefs, such as was Samuel, and afterwards Elijah and Elisha, and also of the kings. There is nothing remarkable, therefore, at finding information repeated; and having had in the previous narrative an account of a passing introduction of David to Saul as a musician, which led to little at the time, though subsequently David stood high in Saul's favor because of his skill upon the harp, we here have David's introduction to Saul as a warrior."

Jesse's sending of David to the war scene with supplies for his brothers indicates that the soldiers were responsible for their own rations. The Old Testament armies were made up mainly of volunteers whose pay consisted of the booty taken from the enemy. Saul's army was not the highly organized band from the time of the Roman Empire of which Paul wrote to Timothy: "No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs—he wants to please his commanding officer."<sup>52</sup> It was, therefore, perfectly normal that Jesse would send food to his sons and a present to the commander of their battalion.

For young David, the mission must have been an exiting and welcome interruption of the daily drudgery of tending sheep. We may assume that Jesse did not tell anything new to David in saying what his brothers were doing and where they were. David was to carry roasted corn, bread, and some cheese, or cuts of curd and bring back a token from his brothers that indicated that they were alive and well. The Hebrew word rendered "assurance" is *arubbah*, which usually means a collateral in financial loans. We find the word in the verse in Proverbs: "A man lacking in judgment strikes hands in pledge and puts up security for his neighbor."<sup>53</sup> Jesse's attitude toward his youngest son shows a complete lack of confidence. He would, evidently, not have taken David's oral assurance of his brothers' well being as sufficient. Jesse did not treat David as an adult son. If someone had told him at this point that "his kid" was going to kill a giant, he would not have believed it. But then, who would?

We are told that David left early in the morning, probably using a donkey to carry the supplies. He arrived at the camp as the army lined up for battle. Since this, doubtless, also occurred early in the day and

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<sup>49</sup> See I Sam. 14:1-23.

<sup>50</sup> I Sam. 17:26

<sup>51</sup> Eph. 6: 12

<sup>52</sup> II Tim. 2:4

<sup>53</sup> Prov. 17:18

David had to cover approximately fourteen miles, we may assume that he spent the night on the trail and arrived the next day.

In lining up for a battle position, the Israelite army sounded the battle cry. We are not told what they shouted. In Gideon's war with the Ammonites, his army shouted: "A sword for the LORD and for Gideon!"<sup>54</sup> This army may have cried something similar, substituting "Saul" for "Gideon." They may also have left out "the LORD." From the side of the Philistines, only one person advanced to the battle line: Goliath. When Goliath appeared, the situation turned into a scene that would be comical if it were not so tragic. Saul's brave heroes all took to their heels.

Before the giant started his shouting, some of the soldiers had already pointed him out to David and told him what would happen to the person who defeated Goliath. Although David may have been attracted to the promise of reward, his question goes much deeper. It amounts to: "Who does this man think he is?" And: "Who do you (the Israelite army) think you are?" Most people know what it means to be insulted, but very few have identified themselves so closely with the Lord that they feel that God is insulted when they are. David had a clear understanding of "his position in Christ," to use this New Testament expression. The Holy Spirit disclosed to him that he was a member of the nation God had elected to reveal Himself in this world. David may not have been able, at this point, to formulate it the way Jesus did, he understood that: "He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father, who sent him."<sup>55</sup> He knew that he and his people were as the apple of God's eye. Moses had stated: "For the LORD's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance. In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye."<sup>56</sup>

David's reaction is proof of the fact that the Spirit of the LORD had come upon him in power.<sup>57</sup> He acted in his capacity as the future king of Israel.

Eliab's unreasonable reaction to David's enquiries reveals what kind of atmosphere must have reigned in Jesse's household. We can understand that Eliab would be irritable because of the obvious stalemate between the two armies and the apparent invincibility of their opponent. Some of the anger he nourished toward the Philistines fell upon his youngest brother. But it is also obvious that there was no love among the brothers and that their relationship was governed by jealousy. The mention of "those few sheep" even demoted David to less than a fulltime shepherd. He accused David of being conceited, wicked, and possessed by an unhealthy curiosity to watch the battle. What battle?

Finally, David's persistent questioning reached Saul and he was called into the king's presence. We understand why Saul would consider David's words and his offer to go and battle Goliath ludicrous. The king must have been desperate to even let this boy try to carry out his plan. In terms of human considerations and war strategy, David's solution to Israel's problem would have seemed impossible and not worthy of consideration.

David's testimony about his experience with wild animals did, however, make an impression on Saul, who must have seen in this young boy's sincerity that he was not bragging. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments on this: "The Syrian bear is said to be especially ferocious, and appears to have been more dreaded than the lion. David had had many harrowing experiences but had been victorious in preserving the flock of his father from the evil beasts. Now he assured Saul that he could protect the flock of God from this uncircumcised Philistine. Faith in past events lends a believer courage to trust in the power of God to meet the crises of the present."

David's reference to the Israelite army as "the armies of the living God" must have stung Saul to the quick. In his backslidden condition he had lost sight of the perspective that David evinced. He could not conceive of his army as being God's army, neither did he see God as "the living God." This name for God, 'Elohim chay, was coined by Moses, who declared: "What mortal man has ever heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and survived?"<sup>58</sup>

David had come to know the Lord in his encounter with the bear and the lion in a way Saul never had. It is difficult to determine whether Saul agreed to David's proposal to meet Goliath because he believed David could do it, or whether he did not value this boy's life sufficiently to care. David did, of

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<sup>54</sup> Judg. 7:20

<sup>55</sup> John 5:23

<sup>56</sup> Deut. 32:9,10

<sup>57</sup> I Sam. 16:13

<sup>58</sup> Deut. 5:26

course, have a fifty percent chance to win, and if he did not, the Israelite army would not have been disgraced by the loss of a teenager.

At Saul's insistence, David tried on the king's armor. At home, he may have tried on some pieces of armor belonging to his brothers, but either he never dressed himself completely for battle, or never tried to walk with it. The king's armor was probably more solid and elaborate than that of the common soldier. Saul being one of the tallest men in Israel, the pieces could not have fit the younger boy, who may not even have been full-grown. But David did not need Saul's armor. He had a better armor than Saul's. His battle was, ultimately, not against flesh and blood but against the powers of darkness. His strength was God's power and his protection "the full armor of God."<sup>59</sup>

The fact that David took five stones in his bag to meet the giant may be an indication that he felt the need for some backup. He, evidently, did not believe he could kill Goliath with one stone.

David's appearance before Goliath, unarmed and unprotected, made the giant furious. He perceived David's challenge as an insult. Normally, a duel is fought by both parties with matching arms, even if one is inferior to the other. David must have had a stick in his hand; otherwise Goliath would not have made reference to it. Goliath had reasons to feel insulted. It is one thing to be defeated by an enemy who is superior; to be beaten by a mere boy is humiliating to the extreme. David's triumph points to the victory of Jesus Christ, who defeated Satan with His hands and feet nailed to a cross.

In his fury, Goliath cursed David, invoking the names of his gods. His threat to feed David to the vultures and wild animals reminds us of God's prediction of the defeat of His enemies. We read John's words in Revelation: "I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, 'Come, gather together for the great supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and mighty men, of horses and their riders, and the flesh of all people, free and slave, small and great.'"<sup>60</sup> Goliath's curse fell back upon his own head.

*The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes about duels fought in antiquity: "When two champions met, they generally made each of them a speech, and sometimes recited some verses, filled with allusions and epithets of the most opprobrious kind, and hurling contempt and defiance at one another (as in Homer's 'Iliad,' i., 4; also xxiii, 21). This kind of abusive dialogue is common among the Arab combatants still. David's speech, however, presents a striking contrast to the usual strain of those invectives. It was full of pious trust; and to God he ascribed all the glory of the triumph he anticipated."

David's reply to Goliath is a magnificent example of faith and sound reasoning. The giant based his assurance of victory upon his size and armor. He invoked the names of his idols to curse his opponent but his confidence was not in them. His carnal mind was solely focused on himself and his own strength. The thought that his physical size and power were given to him by his creator, never entered his mind. He took full credit for all he was and could do. Goliath knew nothing of the strength that comes from God, of which the psalmist sings: "Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca, they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion."<sup>61</sup> David knew who the origin of his strength was. His experience with the Holy Spirit made him see how fragile this giant was. He could be brought down with one small pebble and his own massive bulk would help in the process. Daniel would later see how all the superpowers of the world were brought down by the same little rock.<sup>62</sup>

David introduced himself to Goliath as the representative of the Lord of hosts, *Yehovah tsaba*, the supreme commander of the Israelite army. We can hardly blame Goliath for not being impressed. He had witnessed the performance of the armed forces of God Almighty and this unarmed teenage representative seemed ready to be crushed by one flick of his finger. Goliath was not the only human being ever to be deceived by the appearance of real power. No one expressed this better than the apostle Paul who wrote to the Corinthian church: "Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him."<sup>63</sup> Goliath's mistake was fatal for him.

<sup>59</sup> See Eph. 6:10-12.

<sup>60</sup> Rev. 19:17,18

<sup>61</sup> Ps. 84:5-7

<sup>62</sup> See Dan. 2:31-35.

<sup>63</sup> I Cor. 1:26-30

The exchange of challenges was obviously made within earshot but outside striking distance. We may assume that David, unimpeded as he was by armor, moved faster than Goliath and reached the battle line before the giant did. Even before Goliath reached the line, the stone had entered his forehead. He never knew what happened to him. His disgrace was completed by the fact that he was decapitated with his own sword.

In a way, what follows is a greater miracle than the slaying of Goliath. If the Philistine army had run upon the scene to attack David, they could still have won the battle and maybe the war. Their panic must have been God-induced. Yet, none of the miracles in this story were of a supernatural nature. A skeptic could have explained all as natural causes. God's miracles are often made up of this kind of material. The right amount, at the right place, at the right time, can often be explained away as coincidence. Only faith discerns the hand of God.

Goliath's sudden death broke the ban of fear that lay upon the Israelite army. As the Philistines took to their heels, the Israelites pursued them and defeated them soundly.

It seems doubtful that David would immediately have taken Goliath's head to Jerusalem, since the city was still occupied by the Jebusites at that time. The tent in which the giant's sword was placed may have been the tabernacle, which at that time was still at Kiriath Jearim, or Nob.<sup>64</sup> *Barnes' Notes* observes: "It would be quite in accordance with David's piety that he should immediately dedicate to God the arms taken from the Philistine, in acknowledgment that the victory was not his own but the Lord's." Some commentators suppose that David took the sword to his own home and only presented it later to the priests at the tabernacle.

Saul's inquiry as to the identity of David seems strange and the apparent lapse of the king's memory has, over the centuries, sent commentators scurrying for explanations. The fact that the last verses of this chapter, as well as the earlier verses in this chapter, are not found in the Septuagint has led Bible scholars to believe that they were later interpolated into the text and, therefore, cannot be considered as part of the original narrative. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* supposes that several years had elapsed between David's musical performance for Saul and this time. *The Commentary* gives several reasons for the presence of these verses:

"(1) The interval of a few years from the cessation of his early services to Saul, until his memorable engagement with Goliath, may have produced so great a change on David's appearance that the minstrel boy could not be recognized in the bearded face and homely dress of the grown shepherd.

(2) The cold and formal etiquette of an Eastern court, which placed the young musician at a humble distance from the immediate presence of the king, might keep Saul comparatively a stranger to his features; and Abner might have been absent during his attendance at court on some military expedition, so that he had no opportunity of seeing David.

(3) The king's moody temper, not to say frequent fits of insanity, would alone be sufficient to explain the circumstance of his not recognizing a youth who, during the time of his mental aberration, had been much near him, trying to soothe his distempered soul. Or,

(4) The rumor of Samuel's commission to anoint another king, and his journey to Bethlehem for that object, together with the fact that David had come from that village, and the suspicion, after the conquest of Goliath, which procured him so much glory throughout the nation, that David was destined for the throne (1 Sam 18:8), might have so excited his jealousy that he dissembled, and, pretending (1 Sam 17:56) not to know David, kept his vigilant eye upon him, with a view to accomplish the destruction of this young and formidable rival.

Any of these probabilities may account for Saul's inquiry to Abner (1 Sam 17:25); and all of them combined are sufficient to remove the difficulties of this chapter, without calling in question the integrity of the text."

## F. David as Friend

According to *The Adam Clarke's Commentary*, the first five verses of chapter eighteen are omitted in the Septuagint.

The closeness of Jonathan and David has become a proverbial friendship: friends love each other "as David and Jonathan." In spite of David's comparison of his relationship with his friend with a marriage,

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<sup>64</sup> See I Sam. 7:1; 21:1,9

we may assume that theirs was a clean, healthy, and God-honoring love between men, free from the perversion that a modern mind would attribute to it. At Jonathan's death, David wrote this elegy about his friend: "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."<sup>65</sup> The Hebrew states that Jonathan's soul was knit to David's soul, as if the two were tied together with a knot. The word *qashar* means, "to tie, physically or mentally."

*The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "The episode of Jonathan's love is as beautiful as Saul's conduct is dark, and completes our admiration for this generous and noble hero. The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David. These kindred spirits had so much in common that, as David with modest manliness answered the king's questions, an intense feeling of admiration grew up in the young warrior's heart, and a friendship was the result which ranks among the purest and noblest examples of true manly affection. The word rendered *knit* literally means *knotted*, tied together firmly by indissoluble bonds." Yet, as *Matthew Henry's Commentary* observes: "David was anointed to the crown to take it out of Saul's hand, and over Jonathan's head."

*The Biblical Illustrator* calls this friendship: "The story of a great love." The book makes a comparison between Jonathan's love for David with our love for Christ. These lines can in effect be drawn in as much as David became the savior of his nation in his victory over Goliath. Jonathan's feeling probably began as the respect of one hero for another. The admiration for David's heroism ripened into affection and love as he discovered the beautiful character of this young man, who turned out to be gifted in so many areas, some of them to the level of genius. This resulted in a covenant between the prince and the shepherd boy. This growing intimacy probably developed, as David became a permanent member of Saul's palace staff. TLB reads: "After King Saul had finished his conversation with David, David met Jonathan, the king's son, and there was an immediate bond of love between them. Jonathan swore to be his blood brother, and sealed the pact by giving him his robe, sword, bow, and belt."<sup>66</sup>

There must have been a difference of age between the two young men. Jonathan was already a seasoned warrior who had single-handedly taken on a Philistine military post.<sup>67</sup> He was a hero in his own rights. We assume that David was still a teenager when he killed Goliath.

When we take a closer look at the relationship of the two friends, we must conclude that the Bible gives us very few details. Three times we read that Jonathan made a covenant with David. The first time, as we saw above, was immediately after David's killing of Goliath. The second pact Jonathan made "with the house of David,"<sup>68</sup> in which David, evidently promised to spare Jonathan and his family once he would ascend the throne of Israel. We read: "So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, 'May the LORD call David's enemies to account.' And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself."<sup>69</sup> The third covenant was made after Saul had officially declared David an outlaw and David was fleeing for his life. We read: "While David was at Horesh in the Desert of Ziph, he learned that Saul had come out to take his life. And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God. 'Don't be afraid,' he said. 'My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this.' The two of them made a covenant before the LORD. Then Jonathan went home, but David remained at Horesh."<sup>70</sup>

These accounts leave us a lot of spaces in which we have to fill in the blanks. From the details given, we understand that Jonathan somehow learned about David's secret anointing by Samuel. We do not know if David himself told him about it or whether somehow the details had leaked out. After all, David's seven brothers had been present during that ceremony, and probably some of the servants of Jesse's household also. Such a number is too big to keep a secret safe. The fact that Jonathan not only knew but affirmed it is proof of the beautiful unselfishness of his character. He did not cherish any personal ambition but was wholly willing to give up his crown for the love of his friend. This is one of the features in this friendship that provides a rich illustration of our relationship with Jesus Christ, our Lord.

We do not know how much time elapsed between the onset of the friendship and Saul's plan to assassinate David, which was averted by Jonathan's intervention. There were probably several years in

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<sup>65</sup> II Sam. 1:26

<sup>66</sup> I Sam. 18:3

<sup>67</sup> See I Sam. 14:1-15

<sup>68</sup> I Sam. 20:16,17

<sup>69</sup> I Sam. 20:16,17

<sup>70</sup> I Sam. 23:15-18

which David worked himself up in rank in Saul's army until he became a general, thus becoming the target of Saul's insane jealousy. The NIV reads: "Saul told his son Jonathan and all the attendants to kill David." *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* interprets the Hebrew somewhat differently. We read: "When Saul spoke to his son Jonathan and all his servants about his intention to kill David (... not that they should kill David, but 'that he intended to kill him')." That seems more likely, since Young's Literal Translation of the text reads: "And Saul speaketh unto Jonathan his son, and unto all his servants, to put David to death."

Initially, Saul can hardly have known of David's anointing to the throne. As the rumor spread, the king must have been informed and consequently declared David an outlaw. But we are running ahead of our subject. We will have a closer look at the relationship between Saul and David later on in this study. What matters at this point is Jonathan's attitude in the matter. According to custom and legality, the crown would have been his but he abdicated before his ascension to the throne and renounced his claim. When David was fleeing for his life and hiding from Saul, we read: "And Saul's son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God. 'Don't be afraid,' he said. 'My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this.' The two of them made a covenant before the LORD. Then Jonathan went home, but David remained at Horesh."<sup>71</sup> That was probably the last time the two met.

At Jonathan's first intercession in behalf of David, Saul professed to have changed his mind and pledged under oath that David would not be killed. We read: "Saul listened to Jonathan and took this oath: 'As surely as the LORD lives, David will not be put to death.'" <sup>72</sup> Some kind of reconciliation took place at that time and David returned to the royal palace.

But Saul's promise turned out to be worthless. After the king personally tried to assassinate David, David went into permanent hiding. Evidently, Jonathan had been unaware of his father's first attempt to murder David when the latter was playing his harp.<sup>73</sup> He believed that he was in Saul's confidence and that, if there were a plan to kill David, he would have known about it. But David understood the situation better than the prince. When Jonathan meets David who was in hiding in Ramah, we read: "'Never!' Jonathan replied. 'You are not going to die! Look, my father doesn't do anything, great or small, without confiding in me. Why would he hide this from me? It's not so!' But David took an oath and said, 'Your father knows very well that I have found favor in your eyes, and he has said to himself, 'Jonathan must not know this or he will be grieved.' ' Yet as surely as the LORD lives and as you live, there is only a step between me and death.'" <sup>74</sup>

The two made a plan to find out Saul's intentions about David. At the New Moon Festival, which was to take place the day after this conversation, David was supposed to attend a dinner party at the palace. Jonathan would observe Saul's reaction to David's absence and report it to David "in code." The next day Jonathan went out to shoot arrows and a small boy accompanied him to pick up the arrows. Jonathan's comments to the boy about where to find the arrows, close by or farther away, provided a clue to David as to whether he should stay or flee.

Jonathan soon found out his father's feeling, as he burst out in anger at David's absence. Saul threw his spear at whom? At Jonathan or at the empty place where David should have been sitting? The Hebrew text leaves open at whom Saul's spear was aimed. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: "And Saul cast a javelin at him to smite him. The ordinary way in which commentators understand this clause is with reference to Jonathan; and accordingly the usual heading of the chapter in the English Bible is, 'Saul seeketh to kill Jonathan.' But bad as the character of Saul was, and violent his fits of furious rage, he had never attempted any act like the atrocity of taking his son's life. Supposing, however, that he had made such an unnatural attempt, how could Jonathan know by that cruelty to himself 'that it was determined of his father to slay David'? Besides, it appears from the next verse that, after this scene of violence, Jonathan arose from the table with deep but deliberate displeasure, being determined to fast, from grief on account of David. This hardly seems to harmonize with the idea of his having started up from his seat to save his own life, as we must naturally suppose him to have done, if his father aimed a deadly weapon at him across the table. There is no evidence that a javelin was thrown at Jonathan. Let the sentence be read as an interjected parenthesis, in which the sacred historian refers to former attempts upon David's life, as throwing a clear light upon what had now taken place, and all is plain: 'Now Saul had cast a javelin

<sup>71</sup> I Sam. 23:16-18

<sup>72</sup> I Sam. 19:6

<sup>73</sup> I Sam. 18:10,11; 19:9,10

<sup>74</sup> I Sam. 20:2,3

at him to smite him; whereby Jonathan knew that it was determined of his father to slay David.' That is, Jonathan, recollecting the former attempt at assassinating David, was convinced that the present threats of his father were by no means empty words; but, coupling the present with the former scene, could not now doubt that his father did really cherish the deliberate purpose of slaying David." It seems more natural to conclude that the spear was aimed at an empty seat at the table.

When Saul questioned David's absence, Jonathan answered him with a lie. We read: "Jonathan answered, 'David earnestly asked me for permission to go to Bethlehem. He said, ' 'Let me go, because our family is observing a sacrifice in the town and my brother has ordered me to be there. If I have found favor in your eyes, let me get away to see my brothers.' ' That is why he has not come to the king's table.' "<sup>75</sup> David was in Ramah, north of Jerusalem and not in Bethlehem to the south. This is an instance of a lie told to save a life. There is an ongoing debate as to whether in some instances it is permissible to tell a lie. It is difficult to be dogmatic about the issue. It seems that the dilemma is the choice between two sins: a lie or betrayal that leads to murder. When we lie, we move into the camp of him who is "the father of lies." When we speak the truth that leads to someone's murder, we find ourselves in the same custody of him who is "a murderer from the beginning."<sup>76</sup> Our best bet (if that is the correct word in this context) is to pray for God to deliver us from evil; to help us to avoid situations in which we end up to have to make a choice between two evils. We should not judge those who find themselves cornered by this predicament. The guidelines that governed the moral thinking of people in biblical times sometimes seems rather strange to us from our modern perspective. Saul, for instance, once had unwisely bound his army under oath not to eat anything until the Philistines had been defeated. Jonathan had been unaware of this and had eaten a piece of a honeycomb. When Saul found out, he was ready to have his son killed, rather than break his oath.<sup>77</sup> Jonathan's life was saved only because the whole Israelite army took his side against Saul.

Saul's outburst toward his son illustrates the vulgarity of his lifestyle. The NIV gives us a softened version: "You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don't I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you?" The RSV renders the vulgarity more closely to the Hebrew text: "You have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness." Saul made an obscene reference Jonathan's and his mother's private parts. The NLT reads: "Saul boiled with rage at Jonathan. 'You stupid son of a whore!' he swore at him. 'Do you think I don't know that you want David to be king in your place, shaming yourself and your mother?' " If it were literally true that Jonathan was the son of a prostitute, what does this say about his father? *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* observes: "[Thou son of the perverse rebellious woman] This clause is variously translated and understood. The Hebrew might be translated, Son of an unjust rebellion; that is, 'Thou art a rebel against thy own father.' The Vulgate... 'Son of the woman who, of her own accord, forces the man.' The Septuagint is equally curious... 'Son of the damsels who came of their own accord.' Were these the meaning of the Hebrew, then the bitter reflection must refer to some secret transaction between Saul and Jonathan's mother; which certainly reflects more dishonor on himself than on his brave son. Most sarcasms bear as hard upon the speaker as they do on him against whom they are spoken. Abusive language always reveals a mean, weak, and malevolent heart." And *The Pulpit Commentary* explains: "Literally, 'thou son of one perverse in rebellion.' In the East it is the greatest possible insult to a man to call his mother names; but the word rendered *perverse*, instead of being a feminine adjective, is probably an abstract noun, and 'son of perversity of rebellion' would mean one who was thoroughly perverse in his resistance to his father's will."

### G. David as Saul's enemy

David was called into Saul's presence for the first time when the king suffered a severe depression. Whether this medical term is correct or not is difficult to determine. The Bible states: "Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him."<sup>78</sup> The fact that Saul's servants called it "an evil spirit from God" does not necessarily mean that his was a case of demon possession or that the spirit originated from God.

<sup>75</sup> I Sam. 20:28,29

<sup>76</sup> See John 8:44

<sup>77</sup> I Sam. 14:24-28, 38-45

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

Saul comes to us from the pages of Scripture as a man with great qualities of character, but of unstable emotions. That such instability may have led to demonic influences upon his person seems quite probable. His initial filling with the Holy Spirit caused him to react with exuberance. Shortly after his anointing by Samuel, we read: "As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul's heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day. When they arrived at Gibeah, a procession of prophets met him; the Spirit of God came upon him in power, and he joined in their prophesying. When all those who had formerly known him saw him prophesying with the prophets, they asked each other, 'What is this that has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?'"<sup>79</sup> He had a similar experience later when he was out to kill David. As he joined a group of prophets, he stripped himself and behaved in a way that belied his royal dignity.<sup>80</sup> Saul's case resembles the person Jesus described, whose house was cleaned but left empty.<sup>81</sup> Such places easily become the abode of evil squatters.

*The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "A study of Saul's character makes it probable that, as is often the case with men of brilliant genius, there was always a touch of insanity in his mental constitution. His joining in the exercises of the prophets (1 Samuel 10:10-12) was an outburst of eccentric enthusiasm; and the excitement of his behavior in the occurrences narrated in ch. 14. indicates a mind that might easily be thrown off its balance. And now he seems to have brooded over his deposition by Samuel, and instead of repenting to have regarded himself as an ill-used man, and given himself up to despondency, until he became a prey to melancholy, and his mind was overclouded. His servants rightly regarded this as a Divine punishment, but their words are remarkable. *Behold, an evil spirit from God terrifieth thee.* And so again, in ver. 16, *the evil spirit from God*, as if they were unwilling to ascribe to Jehovah, their covenant Deity, the sending of this evil 'influence,' while rightly they saw that evil as well as good must come from the Almighty, inasmuch as all things are in his hand, and whatever is must be by his permission. The writer of the book has no such scruples; he calls it 'an evil spirit from Jehovah,' because it was Jehovah, their own theocratic King, who had dethroned Saul, and withdrawn from him his blessing and protection."

Jonathan's unselfishness stands in sharp contrast with Saul's jealousy. Saul's resentment was born shortly after David's victory over Goliath. 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 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.' Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him. 'They have credited David with tens of thousands,' he thought, 'but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?' And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David."<sup>82</sup>

One would get the impression that Saul became jealous of David on the day of Goliath's death. But *The Pulpit Commentary* notes: "The allusion is not to the combat with Goliath, but to one of the expeditions referred to in ver. 5, in which David had gained some decisive victory. The women would not have described the slaughter of one champion as the slaying of ten thousand, nor would there have been any contrast between this act and the military enterprises of Saul. Probably he too would have looked with indifference upon this Oriental exaggeration of the daring bravery of a boy; but what galled him was David's continual success in repeated campaigns. 'The Philistine' means the whole people of that name; and as the war between them and Saul lasted all the days of Saul's life, and was his main kingly work, he saw with envy the rapid growth of David's reputation; and when, after some noble achievement, the women gave David an ovation, and declared in their songs that he had achieved a success ten times as great as Saul, an outburst of ill feeling was the result. Saul suddenly became aware that the young captain on whose shoulders he had devolved the chief labors of the war had supplanted him in the popular estimation, and hatred took the place of the good feeling which he had previously entertained towards him."

Saul's jealousy towards David turned into hatred and hatred into murderous thoughts. The king's rapid mood changes are demonstrated by the fact that at one moment he agreed to take David back and even asked him to play his harp and the next instant he threw his spear at him. The evil spirit within him had, obviously, become immune to the soothing sound of David's harp. It would make an interesting study to look at the influence of music on the human mind, in this particular case the therapeutic effect of good music upon emotionally sick people. But our study is about David, not about Saul. We can only conclude that, in Saul's case, the medicine no longer worked.

<sup>79</sup> I Sam. 10:9,11

<sup>80</sup> I Sam. 19:23,24

<sup>81</sup> See Matt. 12:43-45

<sup>82</sup> I Sam. 18:6-9

Saul tried to kill David with his own hands but David was too fast for him. We read: “An evil spirit from the LORD came upon Saul as he was sitting in his house with his spear in his hand. While David was playing the harp, Saul tried to pin him to the wall with his spear, but David eluded him as Saul drove the spear into the wall.”<sup>83</sup> This was actually Saul’s third attempt on David’s life. The first time, we read: “The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully upon Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the harp, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand and he hurled it, saying to himself, ‘I’ll pin David to the wall.’ But David eluded him twice.”<sup>84</sup> The word “prophesying” is confusing. The Hebrew word *naba*’ does not always refer to prophecy under divine inspiration. In this context, it probably means that Saul was raving in his madness.

*The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* notes David’s humility in continuing to play the harp for Saul even after being promoted to army general. “[He was] as cheerful as ever in using his harp for the service of the prince. When Saul was disturbed with his former fits of melancholy David played with his hand, v. 9. He might have pleaded that this was a piece of service now below him; but a humble man will think nothing below him by which he may do good. He might have objected the danger he was in the last time he performed this service for Saul, 1 Sam 18:10. But he had learned to render good for evil, and to trust God with his safety in the way of his duty. See how David was affected when his enemy was sick (Ps. 35:13-14), which perhaps refers to Saul’s sickness.”

Although David killed Goliath, Saul seems to have been reluctant to make good on his promise of a reward. When he first arrived on the battlefield, David had been told: “The king will give great wealth to the man who kills him. He will also give him his daughter in marriage and will exempt his father’s family from taxes in Israel.”<sup>85</sup> We get the impression that Saul never took his own promises and oaths too seriously, except when his own honor was publicly jeopardized. In that case he was even willing to sacrifice the life of his own son Jonathan.<sup>86</sup> Saul’s jealousy of David must have started very early in their relationship. Jonathan’s friendship may have started it when he realized that David laid a claim upon his son’s heart that he himself had never been able to make. The king’s feelings got worse as David rose to the top in the army. Saul decided to turn David’s successes against him by increasing the danger of the campaigns, hoping that the Philistines would kill David. David would later use that strategy successfully to free himself of Bathsheba’s husband Uriah.<sup>87</sup> The victory chant: “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands”<sup>88</sup> brought Saul’s gall to the boiling point. The next day he tried to kill David twice by hurling his spear at him while David was playing the harp.<sup>89</sup>

When finally Saul promised David to give him his daughter Merab in marriage, he added a price of several victories over the Philistines to this “free gift,” hoping that David would die before the wedding date. When David professed humility by referring to his humble background, the king used this as an excuse to cancel the offer.<sup>90</sup> *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* calls the Hebrew words *chay miy* “a difficult expression.” Most Bible versions render this: “Who am I?” The meaning of it all is, probably, that David felt under obligation to pay a bride price he could not afford for the king’s daughter, although, if Saul’s promise were taken literally, the head of Goliath was payment in full. Saul must have taken David’s words as a refusal to accept the marriage proposal.

At this point, Saul must have completely forgotten his own humble origin of which he had been so conscious prior to his being anointed as king.<sup>91</sup> It is probable that Merab did not love David and that David was aware of it. If the king had banned his humble background from his mind, the princess may also have felt it below her own royal dignity to marry a shepherd boy. Israel’s new aristocracy may have been rather sensitive to any reminders of its past.

Michal’s attitude was different; she loved David and made it known. The king used the love of his daughter for David as another ploy to have David killed. In the meantime, the issue of a bride price had not died. The vulgarity of the price (one hundred foreskins of Philistine soldiers) is rather shocking to our

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<sup>83</sup> I Sam. 19:9,10

<sup>84</sup> I Sam. 18:10,11

<sup>85</sup> I Sam. 17:25

<sup>86</sup> See I Sam. 14:24-45

<sup>87</sup> See II Sam. 11:14-17

<sup>88</sup> I Sam. 18:7

<sup>89</sup> I Sam. 18:10,11

<sup>90</sup> I Sam. 18:17-19

<sup>91</sup> I Sam. 9:20,21

modern mind; to the Jewish Old Testament mind it was obviously not. David himself had stated about Goliath: "Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?"<sup>92</sup> To the Israelites, who were proud of their circumcision, the matter had great spiritual significance as it referred to God's covenant with His people. That fact gave to Saul's request a rather pious connotation, as if he had the conversion of the pagans in mind.

The biblical record provides an interesting insight into the court intrigues of that day. Not much seems to have changed over the centuries and a good deal of political matters is still settled by out-of-court parleying. Apparently, David was not aware of Saul's malicious intents behind the offer of his daughter's hand. The king judged David's character correctly when he assumed that the proposal would appeal to David's sense of adventure. David was not supposed to do anything that would cause the outbreak of a war between Israel and the Philistines; his campaign must have the character of a covert guerilla action. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on this: "As this slaughter would have to be effected not in regular warfare, but in a sort of private raid, there would be every likelihood of David being overpowered by a rapid gathering of the Philistines and slain in attempting it. It marks the unscrupulous character of ancient warfare that the lives of enemies should thus be taken, without any public provocation, for private purposes." What Saul misjudges was that David was the kind of person who could plan and pull off this kind of campaign successfully. In an excess of zeal, David and his men killed twice the number of Philistine males and, leaving their mutilated bodies behind, brought the king the double number of foreskins he had asked for. David also harvested a double portion of the king's hatred in the deal. From that time on, Saul began making definite plans to kill David.

Saul's third attempt to kill David marks the beginning of his life as a fugitive. It seems that David initially underestimated Saul's resolve to kill him. He may have thought that the king would change his mind again once his attack of insanity was past. He went home, thinking to be safe there. His wife, Michal, was a better judge of the situation. She may have seen that Saul's men watched their house, or people from the palace may have warned her. We read: "But Michal, David's wife, warned him, 'If you don't run for your life tonight, tomorrow you'll be killed.' So Michal let David down through a window, and he fled and escaped. Then Michal took an idol and laid it on the bed, covering it with a garment and putting some goats' hair at the head."<sup>93</sup> The word "idol" would make one raise his eyebrows; one would not expect a man like David to harbor idol images in his house. It could be that David was not aware of the idol's existence. Some Bible scholars believe that the Hebrew word *teraphim* can also be translated "statue" without any direct reference to idolatry. Some suppose that the *teraphim* were used in the worship of YHWH in the same way as statues in the Roman Catholic Church that represent certain saints that are adored. If the *teraph* here is an idol, Michal at least put it to good use for once. Michal made David escape from the window.

The following incident indicates how far Saul's madness had gone. Michal told the soldiers who came to arrest David that David was ill. When this was reported to Saul, Saul ordered his men to bring David, bed and all, so that he could personally kill him. When the men entered David's house, they found the *teraphim* in David's bed. When Saul questioned his daughter, she lied, saying that David threatened to kill her if she would try to hand him over to Saul. That was her second lie within a few hours. Like her brother Jonathan, she was evidently not raised in a household where truth was held in respect. David cannot be blamed for any of these lies since he was not present when they were told. As we will see later, though, David himself did not hesitate to bend the truth for his own safety.

*The Easton's Bible Dictionary* states: "To escape from the vengeance of Saul, David fled to Ramah (1 Sam 19:12-18) to Samuel, who received him, and he dwelt among the sons of the prophets, who were there under Samuel's training. It is supposed by some that the sixth, seventh, and eleventh Psalms were composed by him at this time. This place was only 3 miles from the residence of Saul, who soon discovered whither the fugitive had gone, and tried ineffectually to bring him back. Jonathan made a fruitless effort to bring his father to a better state of mind toward David (1 Sam 20), who, being made aware of the fact, saw no hope of safety but in flight to a distance. We accordingly find him first at Nob (21:1-9) and then at Gath, the chief city of the Philistines."

Saul's efforts to capture David at Ramah failed in the strangest possible manner. Three times the king sent a contingent of soldiers to capture David. Each time the men are prevented by the Spirit of God who made them "prophesy." It is difficult for us to understand, from the perspective of the dispensation in

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<sup>92</sup> I Sam. 17:26

<sup>93</sup> I Sam. 19:11-13

which we live, how this process worked. We believe that when the Holy Spirit comes upon people, He changes their inner life. Evidently, the experience of these men, and also of Saul himself who followed later, resembles more a kind of intoxication than a spiritual experience. Saul even went so far as to expose himself indecently; that is obviously not a fruit of the Spirit.

After saying goodbye to Jonathan David travels to Nob where the ark was kept and the priests performed the religious services. There were several reasons that made David decide to go to Nob first. He, obviously, had the good intention to find the will of God at the place where God had promised to live among His people. The incongruity between his anointing to be king and his flight from Saul must have created a severe crisis in David's heart. One would expect that, once God revealed His purpose for David's life, he would be led to the top by a straight way. In practice it appears that God's paths are seldom straight. Joseph, for instance, experienced that the road from the dreams God gave him to the realization of it in Egypt would lead him through the most bitter experiences of suffering, slavery, imprisonment, and separation. Neither Joseph nor David is an exception to the rule. Very often when God speaks to us, Satan answers and seems to take control.

*The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "This chapter might be called David's degradation. The determined hatred of Saul seems to have thrown him off his balance, and it was not till he got among the hills of Judah, wherein was the cave of Adullam, that he recovered his serenity."

Another reason for going to Nob was that it was not on the road to Bethlehem where Saul would first look for David. Scholars, so far, have not been able to ascertain with certainty the location of Nob. It is generally supposed to have been north of Jerusalem.

David was also in urgent need of provisions, not having had much, if anything, to eat during the Feast of New Moon, while he was in hiding.

He did not realize at that point that his brief visit to Nob would have such far-reaching and disastrous consequences for the whole family of priests there. If it were not for the presence of the Edomite, Doeg, everything would have gone well. But Doeg betrayed David to Saul and became the king's hangman in executing all the members of the priestly family at that place.<sup>94</sup> When David later heard about this atrocity, he felt personally responsible. He had not realized how much his presence would endanger the people he met.

Saul's next effort to capture David occurred after David had liberated the city of Keilah that had been attacked by the Philistines.<sup>95</sup> The citizens of that city repaid David by betraying him to Saul. The whole issue of David's capture of the city and its consequences are rather controversial. The men who had joined David were of the opinion that David's strategy was unwise, but David received God's approval by means of consulting the high priest's ephod, which Abiathar had brought with him when he escaped Doeg's massacre of the priests at Nob.<sup>96</sup> David consulted the ephod again when he heard that Saul was coming to besiege the city to capture him, and the Lord warned him that the citizens of Keilah would in fact hand him over to Saul. It seems that David would have been willing to stay in Keilah had the citizens of that city come to his side. It would have meant defending the city during a siege in which David must have thought he could be victorious. It would have given him a bridgehead for the new kingdom of which he knew God wanted him to be the king. We cannot blame the people of Keilah for not sharing his vision.

When Saul heard about David's capture of Keilah, he piously exclaimed: "God has handed him over to me."<sup>97</sup> This remark proves that Saul had never come to terms with the fact that God did no longer consider him to be the king of Israel. Samuel had issued a warning after Saul's disobedience of God's command in the war against the Philistines when Saul had brought an unauthorized sacrifice. Samuel had told him: " 'You acted foolishly. ... You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command.' "<sup>98</sup> The break with God became complete with Saul's second act of disobedience in sparing the life of Agag, king of the Amalekites. Samuel told him at that

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<sup>94</sup> I Sam. 22:9-19

<sup>95</sup> I Sam. 23:7-13

<sup>96</sup> See I Sam. 23:6

<sup>97</sup> I Sam. 23:7

<sup>98</sup> I Sam. 13:13,14

time: “Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has rejected you as king.”<sup>99</sup> Saul had no reason to believe that God would do him any favors. His words demonstrated his spiritual blindness.

Saul aborted his campaign to Keilah when he heard that David had left the city. As in his multiple escapes from Saul’s spear, from which Saul drew the conclusion that God protected David, Saul must have concluded that David had an intimate relationship with God that allowed him to know God’s will so that he could escape in time from the city. Saul may not have known that David had access to the ephod.

David then began roaming around in the desert of Ziph, doggedly persecuted by Saul. *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* explains about the place: “The ‘desert of Judah’ is the desert tract between the mountains of Judah and the Dead Sea, in its whole extent, from the northern boundary of the tribe of Judah to the Wady Fikreh in the south (see at Josh 15:61). Certain portions of this desert, however, received different names of their own, according to the names of different towns on the border of the mountains and desert. The desert of Ziph was that portion of the desert of Judah which was near to and surrounded the town of Ziph, the name of which has been retained in the ruins of Tell Zif, an hour and three-quarters to the south-east of Hebron (see at Josh 15:55).” David may have known the region from his shepherd years. It appears that the desert consisted originally in a heavily wooded area that later became deforested by means of human mismanagement. It was at this stage of his flight that David met with Jonathan for the last time, as we saw above.

The inhabitants of the town of Ziph went a step farther than the people of Keilah. They went to Saul and promised to capture David and hand him over to the king.<sup>100</sup> When Saul and his troops arrived at Ziph, David had already moved to the desert of Maon. *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* states about Maon: “Maon, now Main, is about three hours and three-quarters S.S.E. of Hebron (see at Josh 15:55), and therefore only two hours from Ziph, from which it is visible. ‘The table-land appears to terminate here; nevertheless the principal ridge of the southern mountains runs for a considerable distance towards the south-west, whereas towards the south-east the land falls off more and more into a lower table-land.’ ”<sup>101</sup> Saul followed David to Maon and came close to capturing David. At that point David was saved because a messenger came to Saul and warned him that the Philistines had invaded Israel, which forced Saul to break off his pursuit. The place where Saul turned back then received the name Hammahlekoth. According to a footnote in the NIV: “Sela Hammahlekoth means rock of parting.”

David proceeded to En Gedi.<sup>102</sup> About that place *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* comments: “Whilst Saul had gone against the Philistines, David left this dangerous place, and went to the mountain heights of Engedi, i.e., the present Ain-jidy (goat-fountain), in the middle of the western coast of the Dead Sea (see at Josh 15:62), which he could reach from Maon in six or seven hours. The soil of the neighborhood consists entirely of limestone; but the rocks contain a considerable admixture of chalk and flint. Round about there rise bare conical mountains, and even ridges of from two to four hundred feet in height, which mostly run down to the sea. The steep mountains are intersected by wadys running down in deep ravines to the sea. ‘On all sides the country is full of caverns, which might then serve as lurking-places for David and his men, as they do for outlaws at the present day’ ”<sup>103</sup>

The incident in one of the caves of Engedi is one of the most remarkable ones in Old Testament history.<sup>104</sup> A close look at what happened tends to make one chuckle. Saul went into the cavern alone for the purpose of relieving himself. Saul may have followed the law which prescribed how to proceed: “As part of your equipment have something to dig with, and when you relieve yourself, dig a hole and cover up your excrement.”<sup>105</sup> During the whole procedure, the king was in the most vulnerable condition any human being can find himself. Added to this, he must have believed he was unobserved. David and his men were hiding in the same cave and they saw Saul come in. David’s men thought they knew how to handle the situation. They whispered to him: “This is the day the LORD spoke of when he said to you, ‘I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.’ ” We do not know what part of divine prophecy they were quoting when they said this. They may have just wished God had said this.

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<sup>99</sup> I Sam. 15:23

<sup>100</sup> I Sam. 23:19

<sup>101</sup> The phrase between ‘ ’ is from a study by van de Velde

<sup>102</sup> See I Sam. 23:29

<sup>103</sup> This last phrase is from a work by “Rob” (probably “Robinson”)

<sup>104</sup> I Sam. 24:1-22

<sup>105</sup> Deut. 23:13

As David crept up behind Saul, he even hesitated to bring this humiliation upon Saul because we read: "Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe." This comment is a beautiful commendation to David's sensitive character. It shows great sensitivity to God's authority and a deep respect for fellow human beings. David could have ended his own suffering by one swift blow of his sword. He knew that Saul would not have hesitated to kill him if the roles had been reversed. But David realized that God's way to reach the goal with his life did not allow any shortcuts. (No pun intended here!)

*The Biblical Illustrator* comments on David's attitude toward Saul: "What dignity there is in truth and withal his humility must be noticed. (ver. 14). It was as if he had said, 'I shall not antedate the promise. God has said He will bring me to the throne. I shall wait.' (ver. 15). Such a time was filled with tests -- a sudden opportunity to reach the desire of the heart, and an appeal to passion in the name of religion. He stood the strain. He lost not his self-command. Nearly all our falls come from trying to go before God!"

In spite of the fact that Saul was after David's life, David still called him "my master," and "the LORD's anointed." This does not mean that David was naïve or that he believed that Saul acted solely upon some wrong information he had received from his counselors. His words: "Why do you listen when men say, 'David is bent on harming you'?" may have been intended to allow Saul to retreat with dignity. David knew fully when that Saul hated him. The sound of Saul's spears swishing by his head and missing him by a fraction of an inch was still in his ears. Yet, he still loved and respected his father-in-law.

David did, however, make the best of the situation by calling to Saul after he had left the cave and showing him the piece of his cloak he had cut off. Saul must have been too far away to call his troops to back him up and returning to the entrance of the cave with David's men in the back of the cave would have put him in a place of personal danger. The king immediately grasped the danger from which he had escaped. By pointing Saul to God as judge between the two of them, David showed him the way of salvation. Saul knew that what he did was contrary to the will and character of God. He also knew that David's act reflected God's mercy and grace.

Saul's reaction shows the instability of his character and the depth of his evil mind. David's kindness threw the king off balance emotionally. Saul began to sob out loud when he realized he could have been killed if it had not been for David's benevolence. His confessions: "You are more righteous than I," and "You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly" sound good but the words do not penetrate the core of the matter. *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* observes: "Many mourn for their sins that do not truly repent of them, weep bitterly for them, and yet continue in love and league with them." Had Saul truly repented and changed his mind about David, he would have taken him back into the palace. Men of David's integrity are worth their weight in gold, but Saul was not interested in integrity. The fact that David was more righteous did not kindle in his heart a desire to become righteous himself. Saul's confession and oath were like the promise of a drunkard never to touch a drop of alcohol again.

Saul also professed to know God's will regarding the successor to the throne of Israel. He knew God had dethroned him and, in principle, already placed David on it. Yet, he was not at all ready to act in accordance with his knowledge of the will of God. Saul's main concern was that David would not take revenge upon Saul's family after ascending the throne. The words: "wipe out my name from my father's family" may indicate traces of pagan philosophy regarding life after death, which suggest that a person's life in eternity would cease to exist if his memory on earth is no longer maintained by his offspring. Saul gives indication of having been a rather superstitious man.

Some Bible scholars believe that the report of Saul's endeavor to capture David in I Samuel 26 is merely a repeat of the incident described in Chapter 24. There is, in effect, some similarity between the two accounts, but the differences are striking enough to affirm that there were two campaigns in which Saul sought to capture David. The king's emotional instability easily accounts for the breaking of his vow made at the end of the first pursuit. The second report by the Ziphites that David had returned to their area must have triggered a new upsurge of Saul's jealousy and hatred.

The fact that David returned to the place where he had been betrayed before can be accounted for by the fact that he had married Abigail in the meantime and that this woman owned property in the area.

It appears that Saul remained in the lower area of the desert while David kept himself in the mountains. The two armies were far enough from each other that David had to send out scouts to find out whether Saul had actually arrived. Accompanied by two of his aids, David went himself by night to examine the situation. In spite of the obvious hostility of the inhabitants, it seems that David was very much in control of the place.

The following incident is wrought with divine humor. To account for the daring of David's enterprise, he must have had a strong sense of God's protection.

Arriving at the place, David finds the whole of Saul's army fast asleep. Saul would have been well protected, had it not been for the fact that those who were responsible for the king's life were sleeping also. The text states that this sleep had been divinely induced. V. 12 reads: "They were all sleeping, because the LORD had put them into a deep sleep."

It is not clear why David asked Ahimelech to accompany him to the site of Saul's camp. It could be that he had been one of the scouts that were sent initially. Since no further mention is made of him, we assume that he declined the request. Abishai, who accompanied David, was David's nephew, the son of his sister Zeruah.<sup>106</sup> He was later promoted to general in David's army, together with his brother Joab.<sup>107</sup>

It must have been this sense of enchantment that had made the whole army fall asleep that made Abishai whisper: "Today God has delivered your enemy into your hands. Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of my spear; I won't strike him twice." The Hebrew word used is *cagar*, which means literally: "to shut up." David rules again against this regicide. Killing Saul while he was asleep would indeed amount to plain murder of which David did not want to be guilty. He also maintained that Saul was God's responsibility, acknowledging at the same time that Saul was the guilty party in the conflict. David accepted his condition as an outlaw as being God's will for him for that time. He may have been familiar with God's word to Moses: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay."<sup>108</sup>

All David needed, as proof that he had been close enough to Saul to be able to kill him, was the king's spear and water jug. David then played his part with such brilliance that he managed to thoroughly embarrass the whole Israelite army. The following scene could be called hilarious. David called Saul's general, Abner, whose responsibility it was to guard the king's life. If any of the soldiers had fallen asleep while on duty, he would have been sentenced and executed. Abner forfeited his life by sleeping while on duty. To the hearing of the whole army, David's voice echoes over the value, questioning Abner's manhood: "You're a man, aren't you?"

When Saul responds to David's taunt of Abner, David gives him again the benefit of the doubt by suggesting that the king was acting upon wrong information. The purpose was, evidently, to leave him a door of honorable escape. In stating that the alternate option that the flight from his heritage left him would be idol worship, David seems rather to refer to a popular concept that YHWH would be a national or local deity than to his own conviction of God's universality, as expressed in the psalms he would write or had written. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "Saul's answer here is very different from that in ... 1 Samuel 24:17-21, where the main idea was wonder that David should with such magnanimity spare the life of an enemy so manifestly delivered into his hand. Here a sense of vexation seems uppermost, and of annoyance, not merely because his purpose was frustrated, but because his own military arrangements had been so unsoldierlike. *I have played the fool*. His first enterprise had ended in placing his life in David's power, and it was folly indeed a second time to repeat the attempt. But though the words of Saul convey the idea rather of vexation with himself than of sorrow for his maliciousness, yet in one point there is a sign of better things. He bids David return, evidently with reference to the grief expressed with such genuine feeling by David at being driven away from Jehovah's land. It was of course impossible, as Saul had given David's wife to another, and David had himself married two other women, but at least it expressed a right and kindly feeling."

It is obvious that David did not take the king's pledge seriously. He recognized Saul's promises for what they were: the products of an emotionally unbalanced mind. Although it appears that Saul never tried to capture David anymore after this incident, yet we could conclude that David did not come out as victor in this conflict with Saul. We consider his decision to take refuge in the land of the Philistines, as told in the next chapter, to be unwise and out of the will of God. Saul's perseverance, in a way, had won the day; David lost the sense of God's protection. Apparently, Saul and David never met again face to face after this incident.

David kept his reverence for Saul for the rest of his life. When Saul committed suicide during his last war with the Philistines and David received the message, we read: "Then David and all the men with him took hold of their clothes and tore them. 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."<sup>109</sup> A young Amalekite brought David the message of the death of Saul and Jonathan. The lad

<sup>106</sup> See I Chron. 2:16

<sup>107</sup> II Sam. 18:2

<sup>108</sup> Deut. 32:35

<sup>109</sup> II Sam. 1:11,12

completely misjudged David's feelings towards Saul. He thought that David would rejoice in Saul's death and consequently he told the lie that Saul had died by his hand. That lie cost the young man his life.<sup>110</sup>

David then composed a moving elegy, which he called "The Lament of the Bow." The opening words: "Your glory, O Israel, lies slain on your heights. How the mighty have fallen!" intone one of the great funeral marches in world literature. The intimate father-son relationship between Saul and Jonathan is depicted in the words: "Saul and Jonathan – in life they were loved and gracious, and in death they were not parted."<sup>111</sup> The majestic exhortation: "O daughters of Israel, weep for Saul," reminds us of the opening chorus of Bach's *St. Matthew's Passion*, which laments the suffering and death of Jesus Christ with the words: "Come, daughters (of Zion) help me lament!" We almost get the impression that David, in his sorrow over his bosom friend Jonathan, wiped clean the slate of Saul's crimes against him. David was not willing to let the evil Saul had done live after him and to have the good be interred with his bones.

## H. David as Fugitive

Some of the ground of this chapter has already been covered in the previous section. That is, obviously, inevitable since Saul was the cause of his banishment. *The Thompson Chain-Reference Bible* calls the time David fled from Saul: "a dark period in his career." In speaking with Jonathan, David characterized this new phase in his life as "only a step between me and death." Realizing his narrow escape from Saul's spear, he could have said "only one inch." That only partly describes the experience. There were moments in this stage of David's life which, in Winston Churchill's words, could be called "His finest hour."

David's life as an outlaw began when Saul told Jonathan and his palace staff that he wanted David killed. We read: "Saul told his son Jonathan and all the attendants to kill David."<sup>112</sup> This was followed by Saul's solemn oath: "As surely as the LORD lives, David will not be put to death."<sup>113</sup> But shortly afterward Saul, in a fit of insanity, tried himself to pin David to the wall of the palace by hurling his spear at him, while he was playing the harp.<sup>114</sup>

The first thing David did when he realized his life would be permanently in danger if he stayed close to Saul was to go and see Samuel. We read: "When David had fled and made his escape, he went to Samuel at Ramah and told him all that Saul had done to him. Then he and Samuel went to Naioth and stayed there."<sup>115</sup> No further details are given about his encounter with the prophet who had initially revealed God's will to him. We may suppose that the main reason for David's visit was to ask the question how fleeing for his life could be reconciled with the anointing Samuel had administered to him. We can understand that his condition as a fugitive did not correspond with the vision of ascending the throne of Israel, which David must have seen before him as the Holy Spirit came upon him after the anointing. The fact that Samuel accompanied David to Naioth suggests that Samuel understood the situation to be worse than David had feared; the prophet realized that Saul would hold him responsible for anointing David as pretender to the throne and would not hesitate to kill him also.

*Barnes' Notes* states: "No such place as Naioth (or Nevaioth) is known, but the word means 'dwellings.' Hence, it is considered that Naioth was the name of the collegiate residence of the prophets, in, or just outside, Ramah, to which Samuel removed with David from his own house, for greater safety, owing to the sanctity of the place and company."

And *The Pulpit Commentary* explains about this move to Naioth: "We have seen that there is every reason to believe that David had been taught and trained by Samuel among the sons of the prophets, and now, conscious of his innocence, he flees for refuge to his old master, trusting that Saul would reverence God's prophet, and give credence to his intercession and his pledge that David was guiltless. This is not the name of a place, but signifies 'dwellings,' 'lodgings,' and is always translated in the Chaldee 'house of study,' *i.e.* students' lodgings. Somewhere near to Ramah Samuel had erected buildings to receive his young men, who were called 'sons of the prophets,' not because their fathers were prophets, but because they were under prophetic training, with prophets for their teachers, though not necessarily

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<sup>110</sup> See II Sam. 1:1-16

<sup>111</sup> II Sam. 1:19-27

<sup>112</sup> I Sam. 19:1

<sup>113</sup> I Sam. 19:6

<sup>114</sup> I Sam. 19:9,10

<sup>115</sup> I Sam. 19:18

intended to be prophets themselves. At first Samuel, we may suppose, built one *nevath*, one simple hospice for his students, and then, as their numbers grew, another, and yet another, and so the plural, *nevayoth*, came into vogue as the name of the students' quarters." We do not know how long David enjoyed asylum in Samuel's presence. Saul's endeavor to capture David at that location failed because of direct divine intervention. As we have seen, the Spirit of God, which is not necessarily the Holy Spirit in this context, prevented the king from carrying out his evil intent.<sup>116</sup>

David's next stop was at Nob, the place where the ark resided and Ahimelech and the priests performed the religious services for Israel. We saw that this move had disastrous consequences for the whole family of priests when Doeg betrayed them to Saul and the king ordered the execution of the whole cast of priests.<sup>117</sup>

David's visit to Nob not only marked the priesthood for death, it also marked a low point in David's relationship to God. David stooped to lying, thus endangering the lives of the people he met. His statement: "The king charged me with a certain matter and said to me, 'No one is to know anything about your mission and your instructions' " and "the king's business was urgent" were motivated by fear. And fear is a poor guide for making decisions in life.

Then there is the controversial matter of David's eating of the showbread. The problem is not eased by Jesus' words to His contemporaries: "Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread-which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests."<sup>118</sup> Most commentators take the stand that David was allowed to do what he did because his life was in danger and the emergency suspended the law. But Jesus did not say that what David did was lawful. The implications of David's act and Jesus' comment on it are complicated to the extreme. The context of Jesus' reference to David's illegal act is that the disciples picked some ears of wheat while walking through the field on the Sabbath. The Pharisees interpret this as "labor," which was prohibited by the law on the Sabbath.<sup>119</sup> Jesus declared His disciples innocent because they were with Him and He proclaimed Himself to be "Lord of the Sabbath."<sup>120</sup> But we cannot say that about David. We can hardly maintain that David was allowed to eat the showbread because he was who he was. Or may we say that David was "in Christ" when he committed this illegal act? Paul says about Christ: "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes."<sup>121</sup> We cannot say this about David. What David did was wrong and the emergency did not make it right.

David's next questionable move was to seek asylum at the court of Achish, King of Gath.<sup>122</sup> This was the first time David left the territory of Israel. Gath was the birthplace of Goliath. We can picture David arriving there, carrying the sword of the giant he had slain. We do not know the reason for this seemingly unwise and desperate move. David may have had a previous relationship with Achish, which the Bible does not reveal. Toward the end of his life as a fugitive he would again seek a safe haven at this court.<sup>123</sup> It could even be that Achish owed some gratitude to David for killing Goliath. In spite of the fact that the giant had represented the whole Philistine army, he may have severely limited the king's authority at home and his demise may have been more welcome to Achish than we read about. We get the impression that the personal relationship between David and Achish was rather cordial, but that the king's servants took a different view of David's presence. Their objections, evidently, overruled the king's sympathy and David soon realized that his life would not be any safer there than in Saul's palace. As a means to save himself, he faked insanity. We read: "So he pretended to be insane in their presence; and while he was in their hands he acted like a madman, making marks on the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard. Achish said to his servants, 'Look at the man! He is insane! Why bring him to me? Am I so short of madmen that you have to bring this fellow here to carry on like this in front of me? Must this man come into my house?' "<sup>124</sup> If Achish's rather humorous remark can be taken literally, it may

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<sup>116</sup> See I Sam. 19:23,24

<sup>117</sup> See I Sam. 22:9-19

<sup>118</sup> Matt. 12:3,4

<sup>119</sup> Ex. 20:8-11

<sup>120</sup> Matt. 12:8

<sup>121</sup> Rom. 10:4

<sup>122</sup> I Sam. 21:10

<sup>123</sup> I Sam. 27:2,3

<sup>124</sup> I Sam. 21:13-15

also be that the king faked his annoyance as a sign to David that it would not be safe for him to stay. David wrote the beautiful Thirty-second Psalm in which he thanks God for his deliverance in this painful situation. The introduction to this psalm reads: "Of David. When he pretended to be insane before Abimelech, who drove him away, and he left."<sup>125</sup>

The advantage of David's short residence in Gath was that Saul, at least temporarily, ceased to pursue him. He may not have been aware of the fact that David did not remain in Gath, which provided David with a safe opportunity to take up his abode in the cave of Adullam.

Commentators disagree about the location. Some place it between Bethlehem and the Dead Sea, about 6 miles southeast of the city, others approximately 13 miles southwest. *The Easton's Bible Dictionary* states: "At this place is a hill some 500 feet high pierced with numerous caverns, in one of which David gathered together 'every one that was in distress, and every one that was in debt, and every one that was discontented' (1 Sam. 22:2). Some of these caverns are large enough to hold 200 or 300 men." And *The Fausset's Bible Dictionary* reads: "The cave's mouth can only be approached on foot across the cliff's edge; it runs in by a long winding narrow passage, with cavities on either side; a large chamber within, with very high arches, has numerous passages to all directions, joined by others at right angles, and forming a perplexing labyrinth. The air within is dry and pure. David's familiarity with it, as a Bethlehemite, would naturally lead him to it." David may have been familiar with Adullam and its layout ever since his boyhood years.

The biblical record, which states that David's parents joined him at Adullam as did a large group of men "who were in distress or in debt or discontented," indicates that conditions under Saul's reign were far from ideal. David's flight had put the lives of the members of his immediate family in danger and the group of distressed men, which David forged into a formidable group of guerillas, became a force in Israel that Saul had to reckon with. The Philistines occupied Bethlehem at that time,<sup>126</sup> which was another good reason for David to provide safety for his parents and family.

We assume that David's parents were elderly people for whom cave life would be harder to endure. David, therefore, sought asylum for them in Moab. *Barnes' Notes* comments: "It is probable that David's descent from Ruth the Moabitess may have had something to do with his seeking an asylum for Jesse, Ruth's grandson, in the land of her birth."

While David was at the cave of Adullam he had the opportunity to restore his peace of mind and pull himself together. *The Biblical Illustrator* states: "David had strangled a lion, slain a giant, and overcome two hundred Philistines; but he is himself overcome by his needless fear. The fear that terrified David arose as much from his own sin as from Saul's fury. Had David been truthful to the priest at Nob he would not have had to dissemble before the king of Gath, and hide like a traitor in the cave of Adullam. One misstep leads to another. The troubles of life frequently spring from our own folly. ... It was a place of earnest supplication. If David sinned at Nob, he sincerely repented at Adullam. David sought for forgiveness for his sin. David sought protection from his enemies. David sought deliverance from his prison. There is a cave of Adullam in every life. Doubt may be such a cave. Persecution may be such a cave. Sickness may be such a cave. Bereavement may be such a cave. There is no cave deep and dark enough to shut out God."

David probably wrote several of his psalms at this location. He felt the need to find out what God would do for him to fulfill the prophecy of his anointing. The prophet Isaiah would later say: "In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength."<sup>127</sup> David desperately needed the rest that would allow him to focus on God instead of on his circumstances. According to the heading of Psalm Fifty-seven, David wrote that psalm while in Adullam. We read: "For the director of music. [To the tune of] 'Do Not Destroy.' Of David. A miktam. When he had fled from Saul into the cave. Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed."<sup>128</sup> David saw the cave as a symbol of God's protection for his soul. Jesus' words: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest"<sup>129</sup> certainly apply to Adullam and the relief it supplied to David and "all those who were in distress or in debt or

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<sup>125</sup> Ps. 34:1

<sup>126</sup> II Sam. 23:13-17

<sup>127</sup> Isa. 30:15

<sup>128</sup> Ps. 57:1

<sup>129</sup> Matt. 11:28

discontented.” In it David and his men tasted in Old Testament fashion what New Testament salvation would be like.

When David took his parents for asylum in Moab he asked the king: “Would you let my father and mother come and stay with you until I learn what God will do for me?” *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “These words show that David had recovered his composure, and was willing calmly to leave everything to the wise disposal of God.” The words do indeed indicate that David accepted his flight from Saul as part of God’s plan for his life. He obviously could not understand at that point what the purpose of the experience was, but he understood that God was allowing this to happen and he arranged his circumstances and relations accordingly so that he could afford to wait for God. The depth of this lesson should not escape us, because once we have handed over the reins of our life into God’s hand, we will come to the point where God tells us to wait for Him. We can make such waiting as stressful or easy as we choose.

In connection with the advice of the prophet Gad, *The Pulpit Commentary* makes the observation: “This sudden appearance of the prophet suggests Stahelin’s question, How came he among such people? But, in the first place, David’s followers were not all of the sort described in ver. 2; and, next, this must be regarded as a declaration of the prophetic order in his favor. As we have a summary of David’s proceedings in ver. 4, extending over some time, during which the massacre of the priests at Nob took place, we may well suppose that Saul had alienated from him the minds of all religious people, and that Gad, probably by Samuel’s command, came to be David’s counselor. The advice he gives is most important — Abide not in the hold. *I.e.* do not remain in the land of Moab. Had David done so he probably would never have become king. By remaining in Judah, and protecting the people from the Philistines, which Saul could no longer do, David grew in reputation and power, and from the list of those who joined him at Ziklag (... 1 Chronicles 12:1-22) it is evident not only that such was the case, but that there was a strong enthusiasm for him throughout not merely Judah, but all Israel. In the happier times which followed Gad became David’s seer (... 2 Samuel 24:11), was God’s messenger to punish David for numbering the people (*ibid.* ver. 13), and finally wrote a history of his life (... 1 Chronicles 29:29). As he thus survived David, he must have been a young man when he joined him, and possibly had been a companion of David in the prophetic schools at Naioth in Ramah.”

One of the problems in the above comment, however, is that Saul did not massacre the priests of Nob until after David had returned from Moab, unless the chronology of the record is reversed, which we have no reason to suppose.

It must have been reassuring to David to be admonished by a prophetic word. God spoke to him in his circumstances and he recognized Gad’s words as the Word of God. Added to this, he had access to the ephod, which the priests had brought with them, as we already saw above. For some reason the Urim and the Thummim did not become available to David. We read that, at one point, Saul tried to consult that means of communicating with God, but received no answer.<sup>130</sup>

While David was at Adullam, Saul committed his crime against the priesthood of Nob. So Abiathar must have joined the approximately 400 men, mentioned earlier, after that incident.

The fact that David was told about the Philistine invasion of Keilah indicates that he was no longer an unknown fugitive; he had acquired a certain reputation that made people turn to him for help in times of trouble. His fame as Saul’s commander-in-chief of the army had, of course, something to do with this. His frustration about the Philistine occupation of Bethlehem, his hometown, made him turn to the Lord to ask for guidance. The looting of the threshing floors by the Philistine points to a policy of terror meant to subject neighboring nations through starvation.

In order to deliver the inhabitants of Keilah from the Philistine oppression, David had first to overrule the objection of his own men. That cannot have been easy. They would risk their lives in that campaign. But, evidently, David’s leadership was already such that he won their approval and cooperation. The occupation of the city also made them an easy target for Saul’s persecution, helped by the ingratitude of the inhabitants of Keilah who betrayed David to the king. David’s small army must have had ample reason to feel malcontent afterwards. Yet, all this was done with God’s approval and upon His guidance. David must have had enough faith to accept the fact that the consequences of his obedience would be God’s responsibility.

When David left Keilah, again because of his leaning on divine guidance, his troops had grown to about 600 men.<sup>131</sup> While roaming around in the desert of Judah, Jonathan came to see David, probably for

<sup>130</sup> I Sam. 28:6

<sup>131</sup> I Sam. 23:13

their last meeting ever. In the covenant Jonathan made with David at that time, he renounced his claim as pretender to the throne of Israel, recognizing that God had chosen David instead of his father Saul. That covenant was a definite compliment to Jonathan's spiritual insight and to the nobility of his character.

At this point Saul came close to capturing David. David was saved by another Philistine invasion which forced Saul to divert his attention to more pressing matters.<sup>132</sup>

While David was at En Gedi, the incident took place in which David cut off a slip of Saul's coat, while the latter was relieving himself in the same cave where David and his men were hiding.<sup>133</sup>

It is not clear whether the death of Samuel, mentioned in I Sam. 25:1, had any bearing upon David's movements. Some commentators believe that while Samuel was still alive, his presence kept Saul from letting loose his full fury upon David, and that the removal of Samuel from the scene gave the king a greater incentive to pursue his rival. This may or may not be true.

The numerical increase of David's army brought with it problems of logistics. Food supply for a group of more than 600 men, probably augmented by women and children and herds, must have become a matter of daily concern.

David moved south to where the territory of Judah bordered the Sinai Peninsula. Our text calls this "the desert of Maon." Evidently some fertile strips of land where herdsmen took their flocks bordered this desert area. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* explains: "Like other wildernesses, it presented large tracts of natural pasture, to which the people sent their cattle at the grazing season, but where they were liable to constant and heavy depredations by the prowling Arabs. David and his men earned their subsistence by making reprisals on the cattle of these freebooting Ishmaelites; and frequently, for their useful services, they obtained voluntary tokens of acknowledgment from the peaceful inhabitants."

The story of David and Nabal reveals that David had not yet learned to lean upon God for every situation and turn of event. In his dealings with Saul David behaved in an exemplary way that remains a model for every child of God who undergoes persecution. In facing Nabal, David evinced all the jealousy and hatred a poor outcast would feel for a rich capitalist. David showed no sign of recognizing the will of God in his position as refugee in this incident.

There was, evidently, a gentlemen's agreement between David's men and the shepherds of the area that David and his group would provide protection for the flocks both from wild animals and marauding bandits. In return, they would be paid for this with food and drink and anything that would keep both parties happy. David and his men had kept their unwritten obligation toward the herds of Nabal. The testimony of the servants was: "These men were very good to us. They did not mistreat us, and the whole time we were out in the fields near them nothing was missing. Night and day they were a wall around us all the time we were herding our sheep near them."<sup>134</sup> Nabal must have been aware of this. He probably also understood the reason for David's behavior was that David wanted to create goodwill among the people of his own territory as a preparation for his future coronation. The fact that Samuel had anointed David to be the future king of Israel may have been common knowledge at this time. This makes Nabal's behavior toward David doubly rude and unwise. Nabal's retort to David's servants who had come to collect their due: "Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days" shows that Nabal knew David quite well.

Nabal was probably the kind of fellow who had become rich by underpaying his servants. He thought he could enjoy David's protection free of charge and that David would not be able to do anything about it. The proper procedure would have been to invite David and his men to the sheep shearing festival.

Nabal was a descendant of Caleb, who had inherited the territory of southern Judah shortly after the conquest of Canaan.<sup>135</sup> It could be that there is also a play-on-words in the text, since the name *Caleb* in Hebrew means "dog." According to *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* it actually means someone "raging with canine madness." Whether the name Nabal, which means "fool," was given by birth or earned by behavior is not clear. Nabal's behavior was, undoubtedly, foolish and distempered. But David's reaction was not fitting for a future king either. Whereas he was victorious in his relation with Saul, who tried to kill him, he lost in his dealing with a man who wanted to cheat him.

If David was kept from committing the crime of killing Nabal it was not because he had prayed about it but because God stepped in. One of Nabal's servants told Nabal's wife Abigail what had happened.

<sup>132</sup> I Sam. 23:26-28

<sup>133</sup> I Sam. 24:2-22

<sup>134</sup> I Sam. 25:15,16

<sup>135</sup> See I Sam. 14:6-14

The man told Abigail that David had sent his men “to bless Nabal” but that Nabal “flew at them like a bird of prey.” The idea is, that Nabal not only refused to give anything but that he insulted David and made him lose face. The servant may have been an older man who had the confidence of his master and his master’s wife. He had judged the situation correctly and his advice to Abigail was wise. Not being able to talk sense into Nabal, he said to Nabal’s wife: “Now think it over and see what you can do, because disaster is hanging over our master and his whole household.” He felt that his own life would be at stake also.

The name Abigail means “father of joy,” or maybe more suitably in this context “source of joy.” According to the record, she was not only beautiful, but also very intelligent. She understood that David and his men would not take Nabal’s retort lightly and that her husband’s life might be in danger, as well as hers. Her faithfulness to her uncouth husband is striking. Abigail’s marriage with Nabal may not have been one of love; she may not have had any say in the matter, but that did not prevent her from keeping her marriage vows.

She must have played an important role in handling the everyday affairs of her husband, which allowed her to hastily prepare a rather large gift of food of bread, wine, meat, roasted grain, and cakes of raisins and figs. The fact that several donkeys were taken to carry the load is an indication of the quantity. This way David received more than he could initially have hoped for. Nabal was unaware of all this. He may have been busy sleeping off his intoxication.

As she entered the gorge, David and his men were just descending the mountain, bent on revenge. David had committed himself under oath to exterminate Nabal and his whole household. This would have meant killing the innocent together with the guilty. Nabal’s servant and Abigail had judged David’s reaction correctly. David’s appeal to God: “May God deal with David, be it ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive one male of all who belong to him!” only increased his guilt in the matter.

Abigail had, of course, nothing to do with the insult, but in taking the blame she probably figured that her beauty would have its effect upon David and would help to turn the tide. Again, she judged correctly.

Abigail’s speech, though couched in humility, was in reality very clever and, up to a point, rather manipulative. She takes David’s side against her husband, calling him “man of Belial,” and “a fool,” which, as we saw, is the meaning of his name. Evidently, “Belial” referred to wickedness that originates with Satan and, in the Jewish mind, it was seen as a reference to Satan. As such, the apostle Paul uses it in one of his epistles: “What harmony is there between Christ and Belial?”<sup>136</sup>

It is doubtful that Abigail would have heard the oath David swore when he promised revenge to Nabal. It must have been by divine inspiration, more than by woman’s intuition, that she used an identical expression as David had used: “as surely as the LORD lives and as you live.” Her calling upon the Lord must have cut David to the quick and made him realize that he had not consulted the Lord at all in this matter, although he had mentioned his Name. As David was becoming more powerful, some of the corruption of power had overtaken David’s mind.

It is clear that Abigail was fully aware of God’s promise to David regarding the throne of Israel. This means that Nabal knew also this. That makes Nabal’s refusal to help and his insult to David a denial of God’s guidance and an insult to God. Abigail takes her husband’s sin upon herself as she asks David for forgiveness. At the same time she makes clear to David that killing her husband and his household could not be considered part of fighting the Lord’s battles. She addresses David’s sense of insecurity in referring to Saul’s efforts to kill David with the words: “The life of my master will be bound securely in the bundle of the living by the LORD your God.”<sup>137</sup> Finally, she makes clear to David that he ought not to commit the kind of crime he was meditating upon because it would be a stain upon his conscience once he had become the king of Israel. That is a powerful speech! In reminding David of God’s call upon his life and his obligation to live up to this call, Abigail pre-echoed the words of the apostle Paul: “I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.”<sup>138</sup>

In response to Abigail’s plea, David recognized that her coming was God’s way of getting him back on track. He had strayed from God’s path, and Abigail brought him back.

Vs. 36 states that Nabal was “in the house holding a banquet like that of a king.” It is not clear whether this means a change of scene from the place where the actual shearing of the sheep took place. The important part is that the massive celebration, from which David and his men could easily have received a

<sup>136</sup> II Cor. 6:15

<sup>137</sup> I Sam. 25:29

<sup>138</sup> Eph. 4:1

share without diminishing the abundance of it, left Nabal in a drunken stupor. When Abigail found her husband, he was so drunk that she decided to tell him nothing until he had sobered up the next day. We are not told what actually caused Nabal's death. He may have become so furious and lashed out at his wife so violently, that he suffered a stroke. His reaction may also have been caused by intense fear upon hearing that he could have died by David's hand during the night. At the end of ten days "the LORD struck Nabal and he died."<sup>139</sup>

Whatever the cause of Nabal's death, God took revenge upon him and he did not die by David's hand. David recognized the Lord's hand in Nabal's death.

His reaction to this in asking Abigail to become his third wife is rather questionable, but we will have to deal with this under another topic in this study.

It was during this time, while David and his men were bivouacking in Adullam, that David showed signs of homesickness, saying: "Oh, that someone would get me a drink of water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem!"<sup>140</sup> We may assume that David was merely thinking aloud when he said this and that he never intended anybody to risk his life in order to fulfill his wish.

David's thirst was more than a thirst for water; what he longed for was the feeling of safety and comfort of his youth. But when David saw the fulfillment of his desire, he refused to drink and he poured out the water as a sacrifice to the Lord. We can understand his wish to return to his childhood, at least for one moment; this is a human trait most of us experience from time to time. David showed his frailty in this desire. In pouring out the water before God, he showed the greatness of his character and his deep understanding of human relationships.

It is one thing when someone offers to pick up a snack for us on the way; it is quite different if someone is willing to cross a minefield for us to satisfy our whim. In breaking through the Philistine lines, these three anonymous heroes indicated their willingness to give their lives for David. That is why David said: "Is it not the blood of men who went at the risk of their lives?"<sup>141</sup> When David saw this demonstration of love for him, he began to see his material needs and longings in a different light. He realized that people are more important than things. He also understood that love is more than satisfaction of desires.

The way these three men showed their love for David reminds us of John's statement: "This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers."<sup>142</sup> When David poured out this water before the Lord, he demonstrated to understand that it is ultimately only the love of God that gives meaning to all human relationships. People are more important than things, and love is more important than satisfaction of desires, but God is more important than any of these. David learned from the love of his friends that God is the ultimate fulfillment of all our desires.

This incident also shows the caliber of people David had surrounded himself with. Their heroism contributed to his success. David was not the only hero in the crowd. God blessed him in the company he kept.

After David's last encounter with Saul, at which occasion he entered Saul's camp at night and took Saul's spear and water jug, he decided for the second time to ask for asylum in Philistia. In a way, Saul was again the victor in this confrontation because he succeeded in shaking David's confidence in God's protection. We read: "But David thought to himself, 'one of these days I will be destroyed by the hand of Saul. The best thing I can do is to escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will give up searching for me anywhere in Israel, and I will slip out of his hand.'"<sup>143</sup> We saw that when David appeared at Achish's court the first time, he barely escaped by faking insanity.<sup>144</sup> There is no indication that David sought or received any divine guidance in making this decision. This step brought him and his men into situations in which their integrity was compromised and God's protection forfeited. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "On the former occasion, when David was alone, Achish had paid him but scant courtesy; but now that he came with 600 warriors, each *with his household*, and, therefore, with numerous followers, he shows him every respect, and for the time David and his men settle at Gath, and Saul gives over his pursuit, knowing that if he followed him into Philistine territory he would provoke a war, for which he was not now prepared." And *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* comments: "Was he not

<sup>139</sup> I Sam. 25:38

<sup>140</sup> II Sam. 23:15

<sup>141</sup> II Sam. 23:17

<sup>142</sup> I John 3:16

<sup>143</sup> I Sam. 27:1

<sup>144</sup> I Sam. 21:10-15

anointed to be king? Did not that imply an assurance that he should be preserved to the kingdom? Though he had no reason to trust Saul's promises, had he not all the reason in the world to trust the promises of God? His experience of the particular care Providence took of him ought to have encouraged him. He that has delivered does and will. But unbelief is a sin that easily besets even good men. When without is fightings, within are fears, it is a hard matter to get over them. Lord, increase our faith!"

Indeed, David had no reason to assume that God would not fulfill His promise to the man He had chosen to be king. David had as little basis to doubt God's faithfulness in leading him to glory as we do. David may not have written Psalm 118 but his experiences definitely corroborated the words of the psalmist: "The LORD is with me; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? The LORD is with me; he is my helper. I will look in triumph on my enemies."<sup>145</sup>

It is difficult to determine the true character of David's relationship with King Achish. It seems that their association was more governed by politics than friendship. As we saw above, it would have been difficult for Achish to refuse David's request for asylum when the latter came with an army of 600 well-trained guerilla fighters. Achish may have wished to keep David at the capital so he could keep an eye on his activities, but that would have meant a serious drain on the king's treasury. And David did not want any supervision of his covert activities, so he requested to be given a place to live where Achish's secret police would not breathe down his neck. Thus he was assigned Ziklag, the location of which modern archeology has not been able to determine. It was originally allocated to the tribe of Simeon during the division of the land,<sup>146</sup> subsequently conquered by the Philistines, and probably depleted of its inhabitants. From there David performed raids upon the surrounding nomads, ruthlessly exterminating entire tribes. The reason for this was that he wanted to give Achish the impression that he had made attacks upon Saul and the territory of Israel. This gave Achish the impression that David would be obliged to live under his perpetual protection and he hoped to be able to use the military prowess of David's little army for his own purposes. Both Achish and David believed they could use each other in this devious situation, neither of them being open and truthful. This situation went on for one year and four months.

Things came to a head when a new war broke out between Israel and Philistia, obviously initiated by the Philistines. Saul's fright at the sight of the Philistine army proves that, in this case, he was not the attacker.<sup>147</sup>

*The Pulpit Commentary* states about this war: "This was, as Josephus has observed, a war upon a much larger scale than any that had been carried on since the defeat of the Philistines in the valley of Elah; for we find that the invasion was made from the north, and the decisive battle fought not in the usual field of operations, but in the territory of the tribe of Issachar, in the neighborhood of Jezreel. We are not indeed to suppose from this that the Philistines had conquered all the central districts of the land, and, driving Saul before them, at last brought him to bay, and slew him in the north; for though Ishbosheth was compelled to withdraw to Mahanaim, a city on the eastern side of the Jordan, yet Abner is said to have made him king there not only over the trans-Jordanic tribes, but also 'over Jezreel, and over Ephraim, and over Benjamin' (... 2 Samuel 2:9). It may be said, however, that these were but titular claims; but the philistine conquests, as described in ... 1 Samuel 31:7, if not confined to the valley of Esdraelon, as in ... 1 Chronicles 10:7, were nevertheless all of them to the north of Mount Gilboa, thus leaving Ephraim, Benjamin, and Judah untouched. Nor do we find the Philistines encamped between David at Hebron and Ishbosheth at Mahanaim, or interfering in their contests; and it is only when David was made king over the whole of Israel that they again assembled their forces to dispute the empire with him, and twice suffered defeat (... 2 Samuel 5:20, 25). More probably, therefore, they marched northward through their own territory, raising the whole of the military population as they went, and then, turning eastward, broke into the Israelite territory by the valley of Jezreel. It was probably the rapid decline of Saul's power which encouraged the Philistines to attempt once again to place their yoke upon the neck of Israel; and Saul, conscious that God's blessing had departed from him, in pitiable agony sought for unholy aid, but finally, with his sons, made a last brave defense, and died a soldier's death."

When Achish prepared for this war he wanted David to accompany him. The king had, obviously, been fooled by David's previous actions, thinking that he had in fact made raids into Israel during the time he camped at Ziklag. He, therefore, thought that David would continue to fight with him against his own people. Had the king been allowed to take David with him, David would, undoubtedly, have turned against

<sup>145</sup> Ps. 118:6,7

<sup>146</sup> See Josh. 10:9

<sup>147</sup> I Sam. 28:4,5

him and the Philistine army during the height of the battle, thus assuring an Israelite victory. The king's officers showed to be better judges of the situation than Achish. We read: "As the Philistine rulers marched with their units of hundreds and thousands, David and his men were marching at the rear with Achish. The commanders of the Philistines asked, 'What about these Hebrews?' Achish replied, 'Is this not David, who was an officer of Saul king of Israel? He has already been with me for over a year, and from the day he left Saul until now, I have found no fault in him.' But the Philistine commanders were angry with him and said, 'Send the man back, that he may return to the place you assigned him. He must not go with us into battle, or he will turn against us during the fighting. How better could he regain his master's favor than by taking the heads of our own men?'"<sup>148</sup> Evidently, Achish was not an absolute monarch in his own country.

When Achish announced his intent to David that he would march with him into Israel, David, without blinking an eye, replied: "Then you will see for yourself what your servant can do."<sup>149</sup> *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments on this statement: "This answer, while it seemed to express an apparent cheerfulness in agreeing to the proposal, contained a studied ambiguity, a wary and politic generality." The king understood this to mean that David would fight on the side of the Philistines; but David intended to spring a deadly surprise on him. For once David did not tell a lie.

We may see the hand of God in the objection of Achish's officers. It kept David from getting more deeply entrenched in treachery. But when Achish apologized to David for not being able to allow him to go along with the Philistine army, David answered hypocritically: "What have you found against your servant from the day I came to you until now? Why can't I go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?"<sup>150</sup>

When David and his men returned to Ziklag, they found that the Amalekites had destroyed the city and that their wives and children had been taken captive.<sup>151</sup> It is obvious that the Lord had not been unequivocally on David's side. David's duplicity cost him dearly; it also almost cost him his life.

The first reaction of David and his men was an outburst of unrestrained grief for the loss of their wives and children. These hardened soldiers wept till no tears were left. Then the men turned against David and spoke of killing him, evidently holding him responsible for the disaster. In a way, David was responsible, although not in the way they saw it. His dishonesty and failure to consult the Lord in all his activities had made him morally responsible. It was also a serious strategic error on David's part to leave no defense force at the city when he went away for a war that would last several days. He had made enough enemies in the area to fear for retaliation. *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* observes: "He that had made so many enemies ought not to have left his own concerns so naked and defenseless. Those that make bold with others must expect that others will make as bold with them and provide accordingly." The anger of his men, which was born of despair, and the fear for his own life, drove David back to God. We read: "But David found strength in the LORD his God."<sup>152</sup>

We cannot overstate the tension of this situation: these men loved their leader; some of them had risked their lives in order to satisfy his whims, as we saw in the story about the water from the well of Bethlehem. Now their sorrow brought them to the point where they were ready to kill the one they loved. Whether they would actually have carried out the act seems doubtful, but their threat scared David sufficiently to make him flee toward God and put himself back under His protection. David's strengthening of himself in the LORD his God must have included a confession of sin and pleading for mercy. David had withdrawn from this divine protection when he sought safety from Saul at the court of Achish. Fear led to dishonesty and dishonesty to actual danger and disaster. David had a lot to confess, but when he did, the protection of God's strength was returned to him.

He then called for the ephod that was in the care of Abiathar, the priest, and consulted the Lord about the pursuit of the Amalekites. We would have expected that, in this situation where the lives of women and children were at stake, David would have acted without checking with the Lord first. What if God said: "No" Would David and his men have left their families in the hands of the marauders? How much was David willing to give up in order to receive the Lord's guidance? How expensive can it be to be strengthened in the Lord? The fact that God said: "Yes," does not invalidate these questions. Obedience to the will of God can be the most costly thing in life. Our Lord Jesus Christ set the example for us when He

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<sup>148</sup> I Sam. 29:1-4

<sup>149</sup> I Sam. 28:2

<sup>150</sup> I Sam. 29:8

<sup>151</sup> I Sam 30:1,2

<sup>152</sup> I Sam. 30:6

prayed in Gethsemane: "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."<sup>153</sup>

We do not know how far the Besor Ravine is from Ziklag and, consequently, we do not know how far David and his men had marched to get there and why 200 of David's men were suffering from exhaustion. The severe emotional shock they had suffered when they saw that their city was destroyed and their families were missing would account for some of the fatigue. Or they were possibly not able to keep up with the speed David pushed his men to in pursuit of the Amalekites. If the Besor Ravine was close to Ziklag those men may have been sent back to protect the city, although there was now nothing left to protect.

The men who continued found an Egyptian slave the marauders had left behind to die. The fact that he had not eaten for three days helped David to pinpoint the time of the attack upon Ziklag and the advance the Amalekites had upon him and his men.

This Egyptian boy was the slave of an Amalekite, which indicates that the Amalekites were in the habit of attacking neighboring countries, stealing booty and people in the act.

The Amalekites, according to the Genesis genealogy, were descendants of Esau's son, Eliphaz. We read: "Esau's son Eliphaz also had a concubine named Timna, who bore him Amalek. These were grandsons of Esau's wife Adah."<sup>154</sup> Some Bible scholars, however, believe that Amalek predated the birth of Esau, since "the whole territory of the Amalekites" is mentioned in the report of the conquest of King Kedorlaomer, whom Abraham defeated when Lot and his family had been taken captive.<sup>155</sup> Others think that the "new Amalekites" fused with the "old Amalekites" and formed the nomads that would later attack Israel on its way to Canaan.<sup>156</sup>

The reason this Egyptian slave would be able to lead David and his men to the encampment of the Amalekites was that it was assumed that they would return along the same route they had taken when they came. This assumption proved to be correct. David must have arrived at their camp in the evening, because we read: "David fought them from dusk until the evening of the next day, and none of them got away, except four hundred young men who rode off on camels and fled."<sup>157</sup> The last part of this statement shows that this army must have been considerably larger than David's band. If four hundred escaped, the Amalekites must have outnumbered David's small group of four hundred men by several times. David's surprise attack and the timing of it, as well as the intoxicated condition of the band of robbers, account for David's great victory. The presence of the Lord was, of course, the most important factor in the triumph.

Besides recovering all the members of the household of David and his men, they also captured a sizeable number of animals, which David called: "David's plunder." Some commentators interpret these words as meaning that part of the flocks and herds that were taken were animals that David had taken himself earlier when he performed his own raids. So, besides recovering what had belonged to him earlier, he and his men also acquired what the Amalekites had stolen elsewhere.

When David returned to Ziklag, a new challenge to his authority came up. The men who went out to battle were unwilling to share the booty with those who had stayed behind. The text calls them: "evil men and troublemakers among David's followers."<sup>158</sup> The ones who had partaken in the battle felt superior to those who had remained at the camp. Being proud of their victory, they were unwilling to share with those who had not fought. But David attributed their victory to the presence and help of the Lord. In a way that was a clever blend of diplomacy and authority, he issued a royal edict, saying: "The share of the man who stayed with the supplies is to be the same as that of him who went down to the battle. All will share alike."<sup>159</sup> The words: "Who will listen to what you say?" suggest some form of democracy and establishes an atmosphere of agreement reached by discussion. At the same time David acted with such an authority as if he had already become king. Actually, David was not the first one to establish this rule. When Israel fought the Midianites under Moses, God had said: "Divide the spoils between the soldiers who took part in the battle and the rest of the community."<sup>160</sup> David may have been familiar with this part of history.

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<sup>153</sup> Matt. 26:39

<sup>154</sup> Gen. 36:12

<sup>155</sup> Gen. 14:7

<sup>156</sup> See Ex. 17:8-15

<sup>157</sup> I Sam. 30:17

<sup>158</sup> I Sam. 30:22

<sup>159</sup> I Sam. 30:24

<sup>160</sup> Num. 31:27

Our text states: “David made this a statute and ordinance for Israel from that day to this.”<sup>161</sup> The decree would create the feeling in Israel that wars that were fought were in the national interest and that victories were won only with the help of God. David demonstrated to have a clear vision of what Israel ought to be in the plan of God. He understood what it would mean to live in the Promised Land by the grace of God.

David also used some of the booty, which must have been considerable, to lay the groundwork for his own ascension to the throne. He sent presents to “the elders of Judah,”<sup>162</sup> people who would eventually vote him in as their king. This was obviously a clever political move to buy influence. There is no indication that God told him to do this. David’s moving beyond divine guidance at this point may signify a lack of confidence that God would fulfill the promise of the unction he had received.

Some of the elders may have unwittingly suffered from the marauding David had done in their territory. These presents were meant to make up for the inconveniences caused earlier; they were some kind of damage repair.

### I. David as anointed King of Judah

David was at Ziklag when he heard of the death of Saul. While David had been fleeing from Saul, a number of people from other tribes, such as Gad, Benjamin, and Manasseh, had joined him.<sup>163</sup> It appears that David’s army at Ziklag may have been much larger than the 600 men earlier indicated.

The situation in Israel after the Philistine victory and the death of Saul must have been very chaotic. There was a threat that the Philistines would try to overrun the whole country. David therefore turned to the Lord for guidance in order to know whether he should move back into Judah or not. God told him to go and, consequently he settled in Hebron. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “It was a place of ancient sanctity, was well situated in the mountains of Judah for defense, and as the Philistines had not yet invaded that region, but probably would soon try to ravage it, the people would be sure to welcome the presence of one who brought with him a powerful body of trained men.”

Indeed, immediately after Saul’s death, a very large number of people from different tribes came over to David’s side, bringing the total of his fighting force to 308,300 or more. Some Bible scholars put the total at 336,600 men. There is, evidently, a textual problem here that is difficult to reconcile with other Biblical records. The Book of First Chronicles records: “These are the numbers of the men armed for battle who came to David at Hebron to turn Saul’s kingdom over to him, as the LORD had said: men of Judah, carrying shield and spear-6,800 armed for battle; men of Simeon, warriors ready for battle-7,100; men of Levi-4,600, including Jehoiada, leader of the family of Aaron, with 3,700 men, and Zadok, a brave young warrior, with 22 officers from his family; men of Benjamin, Saul’s kinsmen-3,000, most of whom had remained loyal to Saul’s house until then; men of Ephraim, brave warriors, famous in their own clans-20,800; men of half the tribe of Manasseh, designated by name to come and make David king-18,000; men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do-200 chiefs, with all their relatives under their command; men of Zebulun, experienced soldiers prepared for battle with every type of weapon, to help David with undivided loyalty-50,000; men of Naphtali-1,000 officers, together with 37,000 men carrying shields and spears; men of Dan, ready for battle-28,600; men of Asher, experienced soldiers prepared for battle-40,000; and from east of the Jordan, men of Reuben, Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh, armed with every type of weapon-120,000.”<sup>164</sup>

The record of Second Samuel states: “Then the men of Judah came to Hebron and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah.”<sup>165</sup> The statement in First Chronicles, referring to the large number of people who came to David: “They came to Hebron fully determined to make David king over all Israel. All the rest of the Israelites were also of one mind to make David king,”<sup>166</sup> must refer to a later date. David reigned in Hebron, only over the tribe of Judah, for seven-and-a-half years.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>161</sup> I Sam. 30:25

<sup>162</sup> I Sam. 30:26-31

<sup>163</sup> See I Chron. 12:1-22

<sup>164</sup> I Chron. 12:23-37

<sup>165</sup> II Sam. 2:4

<sup>166</sup> I Chron. 12:38

<sup>167</sup> II Sam. 2:11

The matter of Israel as a monarchy is an interesting study in itself. At the exodus from Egypt, Israel became a theocracy. Gideon best expressed this fact when the people of Israel wanted to make him king. We read: "The Israelites said to Gideon, 'Rule over us-you, your son and your grandson-because you have saved us out of the hand of Midian.' But Gideon told them, 'I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The LORD will rule over you.'" <sup>168</sup> Day-to-day matters were decided by judges who had been divinely appointed. But when Samuel went into retirement and wanted his sons to take over his responsibilities, the Israelites began to ask for a king. We read: "When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as judges for Israel. The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba. But his sons did not walk in his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice. So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. They said to him, 'You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.'" <sup>169</sup> The reason for the elders' request seems legitimate, especially since the law of Moses had made provisions for that kind of request. <sup>170</sup> Yet, when Samuel brings the matter before the Lord, we read: "And the LORD told him: 'Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you.'" <sup>171</sup> The objection of the elders of Israel was not merely against the corrupt character of Samuel's sons, there was a hidden desire for freedom to commit idolatry. This seems implied in the reference to "other nations" which is also found in the text in Deuteronomy.

Although God chose the candidate for the throne of Israel, He did not force him upon the nation. As in the case of Saul, so with David, there were two anointing ceremonies, one in private done at God's initiative, and a public one by the nation. God had set David apart by the hand of Samuel, but it took Israel as a whole seven-and-a-half year to accept God's choice.

David's first act as king was to send messengers to the people of Jabesh, who had risked their lives to recover the bodies of Saul and Jonathan and provide for them a decent burial. <sup>172</sup> The people of Jabesh had never forgotten that they owed their salvation to Saul, who had delivered them from the Ammonites. <sup>173</sup> *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments on this: "There can be no doubt that this message of thanks for their bold and dangerous enterprise in rescuing the bodies of Saul and his sons was an expression of David's personal and genuine feeling of satisfaction. At the same time it was a stroke of sound and timely policy. In this view the announcement of his royal power in Judah, accompanied by the pledge of his protection to the men of Jabesh-gilead, should they be exposed to danger for their adventure at Beth-shan, would bear an important significance in all parts of the country, and hold out an assurance that he would render them the same timely and energetic succor that Saul had done at the beginning of his reign."

Meanwhile, Saul's commander-in-chief, Abner, made Saul's son, Ish-Bosheth, king over the rest of Israel. This led to a civil war that lasted almost for the whole time in which David resided in Hebron.

It is not clear what was the purpose of Abner's move from Mahanaim to Gibeon, which is a few miles north of Jerusalem, about equal distance from Hebron as from Mahanaim. We must understand that the country recovered only slowly after the major onslaught by the Philistines in which Saul and Jonathan were killed. Saul's army under Abner may have made a comeback that stemmed the tide of Philistine advance, but nothing is known about that. The general condition of unrest in the country may explain why Ishbosheth reigned for only two years. <sup>174</sup> Ishbosheth, backed up by Abner and the Israelite army, may have considered Judah, under King David, to be a rogue province to be brought back under the legal authority of Saul's house. That would make Abner's move a threat to Judah.

The first meeting between the two sides took place at the pool of Gibeon, facing each other from either side of the pool. At the suggestion of Abner, the two parties engaged in what could be considered a duel carried out by 12 sets of opponents. *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests that it was rather a war game meant to be the prelude for further combat. We read: "It is by no means certain that Abner meant that this

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<sup>168</sup> Judg. 8:22,23

<sup>169</sup> I Sam. 8:1-5

<sup>170</sup> See Deut. 17:14-20

<sup>171</sup> I Sam. 8:7,8

<sup>172</sup> See I Sam. 31:11-13; II Sam. 2:5

<sup>173</sup> See I Sam. 11:1-11

<sup>174</sup> II Sam. 2:10

single combat should decide the war; for similar preludes before a battle are not uncommon among the Arabians, and serve, as this did, to put an end to the mutual unwillingness to begin the onslaught. So, too, games often preceded outbreaks of Scandinavian blood feuds. And this was probably Abner's object. He was the assailant, but now found that his men shrank from mortal combat with their brethren." It turned out to be a senseless slaughter in which 24 young men lost their lives. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* calls this a "diabolical play." The Hebrew expresses the action graphically, as in *Young's Literal Translation*: "And they lay hold, each on the head of his companion, and his sword in the side of his companion, and they fall together."

Instead of deciding any issue, the bloodshed only whetted both parties' appetite for blood and a fierce battle ensued in which David's army under Joab won. David lost 20 men in this battle, probably including the 12 that died in the duel, but on the other side 360 were killed. David's nephew, Asahel, was among those killed. His death caused a very personal feud between Abner and Joab, Asahel's brother, eventually leading to Abner's murder.<sup>175</sup>

The first confrontation between the two armies ended in a truce at the request of Abner, who, obviously, had been the aggressor. Joab answered Abner: "As surely as God lives, if you had not spoken, the men would have continued the pursuit of their brothers until morning," or as the NIV footnote states: "As surely as God lives, if you had spoken this morning, the men would not have taken up the pursuit of their brothers."<sup>176</sup> The latter reading of the text puts the blame of the battle clearly on Abner.

Abner seems to have been the major obstacle in David becoming king over all of the twelve tribes of Israel. The general's motives in supporting Ishbosheth seem to have been rather self-serving. We read: "Abner had been strengthening his own position in the house of Saul." But when his king accused him of having an affair with one of Saul's concubines, Abner made it clear that Ishbosheth merely reigned by the grace of Abner. He also revealed to be very much aware of God's choice of David as king over Israel.<sup>177</sup> Power had clearly gone to Abner's head. This is obvious from the statement in his introductory political contact with David: "Whose land is it? Make an agreement with me, and I will help you bring all Israel over to you."<sup>178</sup> Not only did Abner consider himself to be above the rules of sexual morality, he also considered himself lord of the Promised Land. The deciding factor in his mind was that switching allegiance from Ishbosheth to David would enhance his position of power. Also the fact that God had anointed David to the throne was less important to this man than his own interest.

From David's side, his condition for entering into an agreement with Abner, namely the return of his first wife, Michal to him, cannot have been a matter that he had asked the Lord's guidance about. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on this: "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."

David's remarriage to Michal is more complicated than appears on the surface. There were, obviously, considerations of affection and politics, but it meant that, although she was David's legal wife (the only one) she had also been married to someone else. The Mosaic law stipulated that if a man had been married to a woman who, subsequently, became the wife of another man, he could not take her back if the second marriage was annulled.<sup>179</sup> The text states: "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." But David never divorced Michal. The question is whether this made David's demand less detestable in the eyes of the LORD. David's mind was probably too full of the political implications of this matter to give any consideration to the will of the Lord at this point.

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<sup>175</sup> II Sam. 2:18-23; 3:27

<sup>176</sup> II Sam. 2:27

<sup>177</sup> II Sam. 3:8-11

<sup>178</sup> II Sam. 3:12

<sup>179</sup> Deut. 24:1-4

It seems that David used Abner as much as Abner used David. Abner had concluded that Ishbosheth was weak and that his kingdom had no future and, therefore, he put his bet on the winning horse. The general's intent was merely to become commander-in-chief in the army of the new king. It had been Abner's influence that had kept the elders of Israel from turning to David after the death of Saul. Now this man piously used Scripture to convince the elders that making David king would fulfill a biblical prophecy. The words: "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' "<sup>180</sup> are not found in any biblical record, but they may be a popular expression of what was generally considered to be a prophetic truth. The words: "For some time you have wanted to make David your king"<sup>181</sup> indicate that it was mostly Abner's opposition that had prevented the elders from carrying out their wish. The irony of history is that, in spite of all the intrigues, it was not Abner's doing that David became king of Israel; Joab's murder of Abner prevented this.

Ishbosheth was Abner's puppet, but David was not. David went over Abner's head straight to Ishbosheth to demand the return of Michal. But the fact that Ishbosheth was too weak to refuse David's request does not make it less respectful.

The tribe of Benjamin was the last one to be brought over to David's side. Since Saul was a Benjaminite, they had benefited most from his reign. Some of that tribe had already joined David while he was still at Ziklag.<sup>182</sup> *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "This tribe alone, probably, was really loyal to the house of Saul, their kinsman. But since the withdrawal of the court to Mahanaim, they got but little good from it, and were left to resist the predatory bands of the Philistines as best they could. So warlike a tribe too would despise Ishbosheth, and long for a braver man to aid them in fighting their enemies."

When Abner came to Hebron to negotiate with David, the latter received him and the twenty men with him with a state dinner. Abner proposed to arrange the surrender of all the northern tribes; he addressed David as "my lord the king."<sup>183</sup>

Joab had been away on a military campaign when Abner came to confer with David. When he heard about the ongoing negotiations, he expressed his mistrust of Abner's motives. Whether David had trusted Abner or considered the possibility that Abner had come as a spy, as Joab suggested, is not stated. Joab would demonstrate continual devotion to David throughout his life, but his motives in painting Abner black before David's eyes were not pure. His main purpose in retaining Abner at Hebron was revenge for the death of Asahel, his brother. Joab managed to lure Abner back to Hebron and murdered him in cold blood.<sup>184</sup> This murder set back the unification of the nation for an undetermined period.

The topic of David's relationship with Joab requires a separate study. Suffice at this point to remark that David did not have the courage or the power to punish Joab for this murder. This would tie him, as king of the nation, to a general who, although very devoted to his person, was ruthless and unscrupulous.

Although David must have been shocked by the vicious murder of Abner, his reason for ordering a state funeral and public mourning had a strong political overtone and served to convince the northern tribes that he and the southern kingdom were innocent of this crime. It could not be construed as a means to bring the other tribes over to David's side by removing the man who had been the obstacle to unification.

The curse David called over the head of Joab and over his family reeks of black magic rather than of a call for divine justice. In order for it to be effective, David must have uttered the words in public: "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."<sup>185</sup> The intent was obviously to ask the Lord to punish Joab for his crime. But asking God to make other members of Joab's family suffer for crimes they had not committed was unworthy of the man "after God's own heart"; he ought to have known better! What David ought to have done was to punish Joab, but his fear of losing the backing of the army of which Joab was the commander prevented him from doing so. Although David's imprecation may be explained by his intense anger at that moment, his handling of the matter was carefully thought out.

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<sup>180</sup> II Sam. 3:18

<sup>181</sup> II Sam. 3:17

<sup>182</sup> See I Chron. 19:1-7

<sup>183</sup> II Sam. 3:20, 21

<sup>184</sup> II Sam. 3:22-26

<sup>185</sup> II Sam. 3:29

It is not clear whether Joab was temporarily demoted. After the unification of the country, Joab became commander-in-chief because of his role in the attack upon Jerusalem.<sup>186</sup> But this may mean that Joab was promoted to leader of the combined armies of the North and the South.

David's public display of grief and his arrangement of Abner's funeral are very impressive. Even Joab was forced to participate in the ceremony. This probably meant that Joab, dressed in sackcloth had to walk in front of the bier, while David walked behind it. We read: "The king sang this lament for Abner: 'Should Abner have died as the lawless die? Your hands were not bound, your feet were not fettered. You fell as one falls before wicked men.'"<sup>187</sup> This suggests that David sang during a memorial service to commemorate Abner. David's emotions always found release in poetry.

Abner was buried at Hebron.<sup>188</sup> The death of Abner had a devastating effect upon Ishbosheth and all of the northern tribes. We may assume that Ishbosheth had not been aware of Abner's journey to Hebron and his negotiations regarding the transfer of power to David. It is true that Abner had threatened to do so in response to Ishbosheth's accusation of having an affair with one of Saul's concubines, but the king may have believed that this was merely an angry reaction, not one that would result in treason. Hearing that Abner had been murdered in David's court, he, and all the northern tribes with him, must have drawn the conclusion that David had orchestrated the murder. They probably expected that David would immediately invade their territory and declare himself king of the whole country. David's public display of grief must eventually have assuaged their fear.

The question is whether David had been right in entering into negotiations with Abner. It is doubtful that he consulted the Lord in this matter. He knew that God had anointed him as king over Israel and he ought to have waited till God's time for the fulfillment of His promise had come. But waiting was as difficult for David as it is for every human being. It is much easier to do something for the Lord than to wait for the Lord. That David eventually learned the lesson is obvious from his observation in one of his Psalms: "Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD."<sup>189</sup> Because of his eagerness and impatience, his ascension to the throne took a long and bloody path. David did not become king until another murder had taken place.

The two assassins of Ishbosheth were the brothers Baanah and Recab. They are called Beerothites. The text gives a rather cryptic explanation about Beeroth being part of Benjamin and its inhabitants fleeing to Gittaim, but being considered Benjaminites.<sup>190</sup> The Beerothites were probably Gibeonites who had been allowed to live in Israel since the days of Joshua.<sup>191</sup> Their flight to Gittaim may have been during Saul's campaign for the purpose of eradicating them from Israel.<sup>192</sup> The two men entered the palace while the king was taking a nap and murdered him in cold blood. *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* calls Ishbosheth slothful for taking naps in the middle of the day. The learned commentator, living in cold England, could not imagine a heat that would force people to stop working at certain hours of the day. I would certainly take issue with that.

Completely misjudging David, they believed that they would earn his favor by bringing him the head of their victim, King Ishbosheth. But David ordered them to be executed summarily. Their mutilated bodies were then openly displayed at the pool of Hebron.<sup>193</sup> Whether this was part of David's orders is not clear. Let us hope it was not.

## J. David as anointed King of all Israel

As Saul and Jonathan had been killed in the last war with the Philistines, Abner and Ishbosheth had been assassinated; the northern part of Israel was left without anyone to lead. So the elders of the northern tribes turned to David. We may wonder what took them so long, especially since they stated to David: "the LORD said to you, 'You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler.'"<sup>194</sup>

<sup>186</sup> See I Chron. 11:6.

<sup>187</sup> II Sam. 3:33,34

<sup>188</sup> See II Sam. 4:12.

<sup>189</sup> Ps. 27:14

<sup>190</sup> II Sam. 4:2,3

<sup>191</sup> See Josh. 9:3-27.

<sup>192</sup> This is referred to in II Sam. 21:1, but the actual account is not recorded in Scripture.

<sup>193</sup> II Sam. 4:9-12

<sup>194</sup> II Sam. 5:2

*The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* brings up the rather relevant point of David's previous association with the Philistines. We read: "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 17:15) which required that 'one from among their brethren' should be set up king over them."

*The Pulpit Commentary* notes: "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."

When the text states that "all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron," the tribe of Judah was, evidently, not part of them, since they constituted already a kingdom over which David ruled as king. The elders gave three reasons for wanting David to be their king:

1. He was of the same "flesh and blood" as they were.
2. He had proven himself as commander-in-chief of Saul's army, a feat that was of great importance in view of the Philistine threat.
3. God had already anointed David by the hand of Samuel. The Book of First Chronicles makes particular mention of Samuel.<sup>195</sup>

It is, in a way, amazing that no one ever mentioned Jacob's prophecy about the role the tribe of Judah would play in Israel's monarchy, although this knowledge must have been part of their heritage. We read in Genesis: "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>196</sup>

David was thirty years old when he became king of all Israel and he reigned for thirty-three years over the whole kingdom.<sup>197</sup>

One of the factors that threatened the unity of the nation was the fact that the city of Jerusalem was still inhabited by the Jebusites, who were part of the original inhabitants of Canaan. When Joshua invaded Canaan, we read: "The men of Judah attacked Jerusalem also and took it. They put the city to the sword and set it on fire."<sup>198</sup> But somehow, the Jebusites made a comeback and entrenched themselves in the city, probably in the fortress of Zion where they remained. When later the men of Benjamin tried to evict them, they failed.<sup>199</sup>

David recognized the strategic importance of Jerusalem and, as one of the first acts as king of the nation, he attacked it.

*The Pulpit Commentary* gives the following description about the city: "Jerusalem is situated on the edge of the precipitous wall which forms the western boundary of the valley of the Jordan, and occupies a promontory, on three sides of which are ravines so abrupt and steep that, were it not for their vast depth, they might seem to have been the work of man. On the north side alone it is open to attack, but even there, when the besieger has obtained an entrance, he finds the city divided by another ravine into two parts; whereof the western portion contains the strong citadel of Mount Zion, while the eastern and smaller portion contains the less elevated mountain of Moriah. Though actually raised above the sea level several hundred feet less than Hebron, it seems to the eye more emphatically a mountain-city; and being well nigh

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<sup>195</sup> I Chron. 11:2

<sup>196</sup> Gen. 49:10

<sup>197</sup> II Sam. 5:4,5

<sup>198</sup> Judg. 1:8

<sup>199</sup> See Judg. 1:21

encircled by the valleys of Ben-Hinnom and Jehoshaphat, it seems to sit enthroned above the Jordan valley, compared with which it enjoys a cool and refreshing climate.”

The arrogance of the Jebusites matched the loftiness of their location. They knew themselves to be impregnable and so they let David know that his efforts to capture the city would meet with failure. Although we do not read this in the text, we may assume that David sent envoys to the people of the city demanding their surrender before the attack. They answered him by saying: “You will not get in here; even the blind and the lame can ward you off.”<sup>200</sup> This response gave rise to some verbal exchanges that are not devoid of humor. We read: “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.’ Nevertheless, David captured the fortress of Zion, the City of David. 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.’”<sup>201</sup> The KJV reads: “And the king and his men went to Jerusalem unto the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land: which spake unto David, saying, Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither: thinking, David cannot come in hither. Nevertheless David took the strong hold of Zion: the same is the city of David. And David said on that day, Whosoever getteth up to the gutter, and smiteth the Jebusites, and the lame and the blind, that are hated of David’s soul, he shall be chief and captain. Wherefore they said, The blind and the lame shall not come into the house.” This reading is probably closer to the Hebrew text.

*The Pulpit Commentary* states: “These words have been a sore puzzle to commentators, and many strange explanations have been given. Rashi says that the *blind* meant Isaac, and the *lame* Jacob, and that the words referred to an old compact by which Abraham gave Jerusalem to the Jebusites, and that Isaac and Jacob had confirmed this agreement. Unless, then, David was prepared to violate this covenant, he must abstain from the attack. We get no help from...1 Chronicles 11:5, as the words are there omitted, probably because they were not supposed to have any important meaning. The Orientals delighted in dark sayings, and possibly there was here some local reference which the people of Jerusalem would understand, but which is lost for us. But evidently it was a boastful defiance, and may mean that the Jebusites pretended that it would be enough to post only their feeblest men, the blind and the lame, for defense, and that David would try in vain to break through them.”

*The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes: “Of the five heights on which the future city of Jerusalem was built (namely, Akra, Bezetha, Moriah, and Ophel), one only was at that time inhabited (Num 13:29; Josh 15:63; Judg 1:21) - namely, the hill of Zion, the loftiest and largest-and was all that the new king aimed at possessing. It was strongly fortified, and deemed so impregnable that blind and lame persons were sent to man the battlements, in derisive mockery of the Hebrew king’s attack, and to shout, ‘David cannot come hither.’ To understand the full meaning and force of this insulting taunt, it is necessary to bear in mind the depth and steepness of the valley of Gihon, and the lofty walls of the ancient Canaanite fortress. Looking down from the summit of the rock to the bottom, it appeared a dizzy height which no assailants, however adventurous, would succeed in scaling; and the inhabitants, therefore feeling themselves secure in their inaccessible position, sneered at what they considered the vain attempts of David and his army to besiege their fort.”

Several other interpretations have been offered in explanation of the statement about the blind and the lame. *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* suggests that they were the idols that protected the city. *The Commentary* quotes parts of Psalm One Hundred Fifteen to strengthen this argument: “They have mouths, but cannot speak, eyes, but they cannot see; they have ears, but cannot hear, noses, but they cannot smell; they have hands, but cannot feel, feet, but they cannot walk.”<sup>202</sup> We can hardly imagine, though, that the Jebusites would call their own deities “blind and lame.” It is very doubtful that there were actual blind and lame people at the defense ramparts. The more obvious meaning is that the city of Jerusalem needed no defense and that no able bodied people were necessary to do the job. Also, the easiest interpretation of David’s remark about hating the blind and the lame seems to be to treat it in jest. It is obvious that David did not despise people because of their physical handicap. The king treated Jonathan’s son, Mephibosheth, who was crippled in both feet, kindly.<sup>203</sup>

<sup>200</sup> II Sam. 5:6

<sup>201</sup> II Sam. 5:6-8

<sup>202</sup> Ps. 115:5-7

<sup>203</sup> See II Sam. 9:1-12.

*The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* suggests that David ordered the lame and blind to be hurled down the precipice. Although that interpretation is linguistically possible, it does not make much sense. What probably happened is that David ordered his soldiers to enter the city through the duct that brought the water inside and that a prolonged siege was thus avoided. How all this accounts for the birth of a proverb about the lame and the blind is difficult to explain. The saying may have the same meaning as the expression “a Trojan Horse” which refers to the capture of Troy by means of a similar plot David carried out in the seizure of Jerusalem.

David’s capture of Jerusalem earned him the friendship of King Hiram of Tyre.<sup>204</sup> This king provided David with building material for his palace. It is interesting to see that David considered this fact a confirmation of God establishing him as king over Israel.

In order to understand the reason for the major attack the Philistine launched against David, we must try to reconstruct the conditions of the country at that time. The Philistines had gained a major victory against Israel in the battle of Gilboa in which Saul and Jonathan were killed. In the following civil war between the kingdoms of David and Ishbosheth they remained onlookers, thinking that the power struggle would only be to their advantage. They probably consolidated their occupation of the land in the meantime. They may also still have considered David to be on their side. After all, David and his army had found asylum in their country during Saul’s reign. They may have thought that David would remain a vassal of the Philistines even as king over Israel. After the capture of Jerusalem, however, the truth of David’s strength dawned on them in full force. They considered David a traitor to their trust. We can only guess how strong the Philistine presence must have been in Israel’s territory at that time. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “Of this supremacy the Philistines have handed down a token forever in giving to the whole country the name of Palestine, the Philistines’ land.”

We read that the Philistines “had come and spread out in the Valley of Rephaim.”<sup>205</sup> According to *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary*, this valley was “a broad and fertile plain, about a mile in length, which descends gradually from the central mountains toward the northwest. It was the southern entrance into Jerusalem, extending northward until a narrow ridge of rocks, which breaks abruptly into the deep ravine of the Hinnom, intercepted further progress.” David recognized this attack as a major crisis and he wisely consulted the Lord, probably by means of the ephod, before engaging in battle.

*The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary* suggests that the Philistine attack occurred before the capture of Jerusalem. They base this on the words “David heard about it and went *down* to the stronghold,”<sup>206</sup> stating that if the stronghold Zion were meant, David would have gone up instead of down.

The Book of First Chronicles confirms that there were two subsequent Philistine attacks against David.<sup>207</sup> How long the intervening period between the two attacks was is unknown. David gained his first victory at a place called Baal Perazim. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* believes this to be “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.” David changed the name of the place from *Baal-Paraatsym* into *Yahweh Paarats*, exchanging the name of the idol into the Name of God.

The defeat of the Philistine army was so great that the men left their idols behind as they fled. These idols had probably been brought to the battlefield in the belief that they would assure victory. The Israelites had done a similar thing several decades earlier when they brought the Ark of the Covenant to the battlefield in a war against the Philistines.<sup>208</sup> The record in Second Samuel simply states that David’s men carried off the captured idols. First Chronicles clarifies that they were burned at David’s command.<sup>209</sup> Some Bible scholars see a contradiction in those two accounts. *The Pulpit Commentary*, however, states: “David and his men carried off these images as trophies, just as the Philistines carried off the ark (...I Samuel 4:11). But the ark proved mightier than the Philistine gods, and in terror the people restored it to Israel. But no avenging hand interfered to rescue these gods, and, after being paraded in triumph, they were made into a bonfire.”

When the Philistine army returned to the same place at a later date, David again consulted the Lord and received some interesting marching orders. God told him: “Do not go straight up, but circle

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<sup>204</sup> II Sam. 5:11,12

<sup>205</sup> II Sam. 5:18

<sup>206</sup> II Sam. 5:17

<sup>207</sup> I Chron. 14:8-17

<sup>208</sup> See I Sam. 4:1-11

<sup>209</sup> I Chron. 14:12

around behind them and attack them in front of the balsam trees. 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.” Bible Scholars have tried to determine the kind of tree in which David would hear this “sound of marching.” The Hebrew word is *habakaaiym*, which is only found in this story. It is derived from the word *baka*, which meanings weeping. The Septuagint renders it “pear trees.” The KJV reads: “mulberry trees,” the NIV: “balsam trees.” A rendering: “weeping willow” might capture the meaning of the word more closely. There is in Palestine a “Valley of Baca,” which is mentioned in Psalm Eighty-four.<sup>210</sup>

The sound David would hear in the tops of the trees (whatever kind they may have been) was the sound of the army of God’s angels who attacked the Philistine army. Jacob saw this army in a vision as he returned from Mesopotamia to Canaan and was about to face his brother Esau. We read: “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>211</sup> This is the army of which God is the supreme commander, for which the Name *Yahweh tsebha’oth*, “Lord of Hosts,” is giving to Him. Jesus referred to this army at the time of His arrest in Gethsemane, when He rebuked His disciples for drawing their swords to defend Him. He said: “Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?”<sup>212</sup>

What an experience this must have been for David to realize that the armies of heaven were marching ahead of him in this war! The apostle Paul would later express this kind of amazement in the realization of God’s love for us in Jesus Christ: “What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?”<sup>213</sup>

David’s maneuver required both waiting and speed. Those two elements seem to be typical for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. Waiting is by far the more difficult of the two. It was Saul’s downfall that he had not waited for the Lord. Samuel had told King Saul to wait for him to bring a sacrifice before going into battle. When Samuel did not show up in time, Saul took things in his own hand to his detriment. Had he waited one more hour, he would have changed the course of Israel’s history.<sup>214</sup> Waiting for God takes more courage and strength than acting for Him. David learned this lesson, so he could state in one of his psalms: “Wait for the LORD; be strong and take heart and wait for the LORD.”<sup>215</sup>

Waiting for God can only be done when one has the conviction that God’s timing is perfect, in spite of what our circumstances, or the enemy who manipulates them, may tell us.

*The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* pauses here and, making a spiritual application, asks the following questions: “How is it that such supernatural directions and assistances are not communicated now? Because they are not asked for; and they are not asked for because they are not expected; and they are not expected because men have no faith; and they have no faith because they are under a refined spirit of atheism, and have no spiritual conversation with their Maker. Who believes that God sees all things and is everywhere? Who supposes that He concerns Himself with the affairs of His creatures? Who acknowledges Him in all His ways? Who does not put his own wisdom, prudence, and strength, in the place of God Almighty? Reader, do you have faith in God? Then exercise it, cultivate it, and you will remove mountains.”

In following the Lord’s instructions, David won a decisive victory over the Philistines. The NIV states: “So David did as the LORD commanded him, and he struck down the Philistines all the way from Gibeon to Gezer,”<sup>216</sup> this synchronizing the text with the report in First Chronicles. The Hebrew text, however, reads: “Geba.” *The Pulpit Commentary* explains: “In ... 1 Chronicles 14:16 ‘Gibeon’ is substituted for ‘Geba,’ and it is one of those corrections which a commentator is inclined to adopt, because it makes all things easy. For Gibeon lay directly on the road from the Rephaim valley towards Gazer, and the armies must have passed it in the fight. But if ‘Geba’ be the right reading here, then the battle must have been most sternly contested. For it is the ‘Gibeah of Benjamin,’ Hebrew, ‘Geba of Benjamin,’ described in ... 1 Samuel 13:16. The Philistines had a garrison there in Saul’s time (... 1 Samuel 13:3), and had

<sup>210</sup> Ps. 84:6

<sup>211</sup> Gen. 32:1,2

<sup>212</sup> Matt. 26:53

<sup>213</sup> Rom. 8:31

<sup>214</sup> See I Sam. 13:5-11

<sup>215</sup> Ps. 27:14

<sup>216</sup> II Sam. 5:25

probably again occupied it as a military post after their victory at Gilboa. To reach it the line of retreat would go nine miles northward over difficult ground; but this was not disadvantageous to a retreating army as long as it remained unbroken, and the Philistines would expect to be able to make a successful defense at a strong citadel like Geba, held by a garrison of their own troops. But when driven by David's 'mighty men' from this fortified hill, being hemmed in by the defile of Michmash on the east, they would have no choice but to hurry down the valleys to the west, and, still passing by Gibeon, to flee to Gazer. Thus the reading 'Geba' implies a stout and long resistance ending in a most complete victory. And confessedly this was a decisive battle, fought with larger forces, and causing far larger loss to the Philistines than that at Baal-Perazim, where, attacked by only a few men, they were seized with panic, and saved themselves by a headlong flight. Gazer lay upon the border of Ephraim, and was one of the royal cities of the Canaanites, and so strong that it was left in the hands of its old possessors (... Joshua 16:3, 10; ... Judges 1:19). Subsequently Solomon fortified it (... 1 Kings 9:17), as being the key of the defiles which led from Ekron and the plain of Philistia up to Jerusalem. We also find it mentioned as an important military post in the days of the Maccabees (1 Macc. 9:52). The pursuit would naturally stop here, as the fugitives would now be in their own country, and succor would be close at hand. Probably, too, the Canaanites who held the fortress were friendly to them, and gave them shelter."

David's victory seems to have resolved the Philistine question for good. We do not read of any further attacks by this enemy.

The second greatest royal edict David ordered, as the new king, was the bringing over of the Ark of the Covenant to the new capital of the country, Jerusalem. This decision, more than any other act, is evidence of the quality of David's spiritual life. He understood that God has to be preeminent for a nation to survive. His son, Solomon, would later state: "Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a disgrace to any people."<sup>217</sup>

David's decision to move the ark to Jerusalem was more complex than it seems to be. It was, first of all, a spiritual act of worship, but, as *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests, it was also politically motivated.

One of the most baffling questions is why it took the nation of Israel more than five centuries to come to grips with God's purpose for their existence and for making Canaan The Promised Land in the real sense of the word. During the desert crossing, the ark in the tabernacle had been the focal point of Israel's attention and the reason for its existence. God had said to Moses: "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." The Ark of the Covenant embodied the presence of the Lord; it was a shadow of the incarnation to come. One of the purposes of the conquest of Canaan was to establish a place where the presence of God would be a physical reality, not only for Israel but also for the whole world.

After having given instructions about the destruction of the idol worship of the Canaanites, God had said to the people: "You must not worship the LORD your God in their way. 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. You are not to do as we do here today, everyone as he sees fit, since you have not yet reached the resting place and the inheritance the LORD your God is giving you. But you will cross the Jordan and settle in the land the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, and he will give you rest from all your enemies around you so that you will live in safety. Then to the place the LORD your God will choose as a dwelling for his Name--there you are to bring everything I command you: your burnt offerings and sacrifices, your tithes and special gifts, and all the choice possessions you have vowed to the LORD. And there rejoice before the LORD your God, you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites from your towns, who have no allotment or inheritance of their own. Be careful not to sacrifice your burnt offerings anywhere you please. Offer them only at the place the LORD will choose in one of your tribes, and there observe everything I command you."<sup>218</sup>

This text in Deuteronomy shows that the people of Israel had to play an active part in establishing the center of worship. "You are to seek the place the LORD your God will choose..." The tragedy of Israel's history was that no one ever showed enough interest in the matter of God's revelation of Himself

<sup>217</sup> Prov. 14:34

<sup>218</sup> Deut. 12:4-14

on earth to bother looking for the place. It took the greatness of David's vision of God to begin the search that would take a lifetime. The fact that he sought and eventually found made him, in spite of his many sins and failures, one of the greatest characters in the history of human civilization. Since he made God his priority, God made him His. Asaph expressed this beautifully in one of his psalms: "Then he rejected the tents of Joseph, he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim; but he chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion, which he loved. He built his sanctuary like the heights, like the earth that he established forever. He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his."<sup>219</sup>

*The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* asks the question: "But why did not David remove the Mosaic tabernacle to Mount Zion at Jerusalem at the same time as the ark of the covenant, and so restore the divinely established sanctuary in its integrity? This question can only be answered by conjectures. One of the principal motives for allowing the existing separation of the ark from the tabernacle to continue, may have been that, during the time the two sanctuaries had been separated, two high priests had arisen, one of whom officiated at the tabernacle at Gibeon, whilst the other, namely Abiathar, who escaped the massacre of the priests at Nob and fled at once to David, had been the channel of all divine communications to David during the time of his persecution by Saul, and had also officiated as high priest in his camp; so that he could no more think of deposing him from the office which he had hitherto filled, in consequence of the reorganization of the legal worship, than he could of deposing Zadok, of the line of Eleazar, the officiating high priest at Gibeon. Moreover, David may from the very first have regarded the service which he instituted in connection with the ark upon Zion as merely a provisional arrangement, which was to continue till his kingdom was more thoroughly consolidated, and the way had been thereby prepared for erecting a fixed house of God, and so establishing the worship of the nation of Jehovah upon a more durable foundation. David may also have cherished the firm belief that in the meantime the Lord would put an end to the double priesthood which had grown out of the necessities of the times, or at any rate give him some direct revelation as to the arrangements which he ought to make." Another, more obvious reason for leaving the old tabernacle untouched, may have been that it was no longer in condition to be moved after more than five centuries of disrepair. Also, David may have moved more than just the ark. The fact that Solomon could make new furniture for the temple, which was modeled after what had been placed in the tabernacle of Moses, seems to indicate that the altars, the table, and the candlestick were still known when the temple was built.

The political reason for David's move of the Ark of the Covenant was, undoubtedly, establishing a focal point of national unity. When the kingdom split into two parts after Solomon's death, Jeroboam, the new king of the northern tribes, understood this clearly. This was the reason he moved the center of worship from Jerusalem to Bethel and Dan, separating the worship of God from the place of God's revelation. We read: "Jeroboam thought to himself, 'The kingdom will now likely revert to the house of David. If these people go up to offer sacrifices at the temple of the LORD in Jerusalem, they will again give their allegiance to their lord, Rehoboam king of Judah. They will kill me and return to King Rehoboam.' After seeking advice, the king made two golden calves. He said to the people, 'It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Here are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.' One he set up in Bethel, and the other in Dan. And this thing became a sin; the people went even as far as Dan to worship the one there."<sup>220</sup>

*The Pulpit Commentary* comments on David's actions: "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."

The story of the transportation of the ark from Baalah to Jerusalem is proof of the fact that good intentions alone are insufficient in dealing with God. It is not true that "all roads lead to Rome," as the proverb suggests. There is only one way in which God can be approached, which is through Jesus Christ. Jesus' words: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me"<sup>221</sup> are as true in their Old Testament setting as in the New. God can only be approached in God's way. Any other effort amounts to a forfeit of life.

<sup>219</sup> Ps. 78:67-71

<sup>220</sup> I Kings 12:26-30

<sup>221</sup> John 14:6

David understood the supreme importance of the Ark of the Covenant, but he did not know how to handle the ark. He called it “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.”<sup>222</sup> The Hebrew reads literally: “the ark of Elohim, whereon is called the Name, the Name of Jehovah of Sabaoth.”

Although David was convinced of the vital importance of the placement of the ark, he did not impose his view on the nation as a whole and act unilaterally in this matter. The Book of First Chronicles indicates that he made this a matter of general consensus. 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.”<sup>223</sup>

One may wonder what drew David’s attention to the ark. He had had previous experiences of God’s presence. On the day of his anointing by Samuel, or shortly thereafter, we read: “>From that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power.”<sup>224</sup> That fellowship with God was not connected to the presence of the ark. David may not have been close to the ark until he went to Nob while fleeing from Saul.<sup>225</sup> His efforts to restore the ark to its place of prominence may have been the result of direct divine guidance. It also suggests that David had personal knowledge of the Pentateuch. Speaking about the change of Israel from a theocracy into a monarchy, God had said to Moses: “When he [the future king] takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left. Then he and his descendants will reign a long time over his kingdom in Israel.”<sup>226</sup> Although David may, at this point, not have possessed a personal copy of the Pentateuch, he may have studied it in the time he spent in Samuel’s school of prophets.<sup>227</sup>

So, the decision was taken to move the ark from the house of Abinadab to the city of Jerusalem where a tent had been prepared to receive the holy object. *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* explains: “The ark of the covenant had been standing in the house of Abinadab from the time when the Philistines had sent it back into the land of Israel, i.e., about seventy years (viz., twenty years to the victory at Ebenezer mentioned in 1 Sam 7:1 ff., forty years under Samuel and Saul, and about ten years under David ....). The further statement, that ‘Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, drove the cart,’ may easily be reconciled with this. These two sons were either born about the time when the ark was first taken to Abinadab’s house, or at a subsequent period; or else the term sons is used, as is frequently the case, in the sense of grandsons.”

Obviously, when the decision to move the ark was made, no one bothered to check the prerequisites regarding the mode of transport. The fact that the Philistines had returned the ark on a cart pulled by oxen may have fostered the idea that this was a safe way. God had given specific instructions to Moses regarding the moving of all the objects of the tabernacle. We read in Numbers: “When the camp is to move, Aaron and his sons are to go in and take down the shielding curtain and cover the ark of the Testimony with it. Then they are to cover this with hides of sea cows, spread a cloth of solid blue over that and put the poles in place. After Aaron and his sons have finished covering the holy furnishings and all the holy articles, and when the camp is ready to move, the Kohathites are to come to do the carrying. But they must not touch the holy things or they will die. The Kohathites are to carry those things that are in the Tent of Meeting.”<sup>228</sup> That no cart ought to have been used is also clear from the fact that none were assigned to the Kohathites. We read: “But Moses did not give any [carts] to the Kohathites, because they were to carry

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<sup>222</sup> II Sam. 6:2,3

<sup>223</sup> I Chron. 13:1-4

<sup>224</sup> I Sam. 16:13

<sup>225</sup> I Sam. 21:1-9

<sup>226</sup> Deut. 17:18-20

<sup>227</sup> See I Sam. 19:18-20.

<sup>228</sup> Num. 4:4-6,15

on their shoulders the holy things, for which they were responsible.”<sup>229</sup> The error consisted of two things: The ark ought to have been covered, and it should have been carried on the shoulders of the Levites. God wanted men, not oxen for this act of worship. The failure to do the proper research turned out to be fatal.

As the cart moved from Abinadab’s house in the direction of Jerusalem, a loud and jubilant crowd accompanied it. We read: “David and all the Israelites were celebrating with all their might before God, with songs and with harps, lyres, tambourines, cymbals and trumpets.”<sup>230</sup> This outburst of enthusiasm made the following incident even more tragic. What happened was totally unexpected and the pain of it stood in sharp contrast to joy that surrounded it.

Everything went well until the procession arrived at the threshing floor of Nacon. According to *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary*, *Goren nachon* means “the threshing-floor of the stroke.” *The Commentary* states: “In the Chronicles we have *goren chidon*, i.e., the threshing-floor of destruction or disaster. *Chidon* is probably only an explanation of *nachon*, so that the name may have been given to the threshing-floor, not from its owner, but from the incident connected with the ark which took place there. Eventually, however, this name was supplanted by the name *Perez-uzzah* (v. 8).”

It is impossible to determine from this distance what actually happened at the threshing floor of Nacon. Some commentators believe that the oxen were attracted to grain that was left over on the threshing floor and turned toward it; others that the uneven pavement made them stumble. Whether the wagon actually turned over or was in danger of tumbling, we do not know. We can hardly blame Uzzah for stretching out his hand in order to prevent, what he thought, would be a major disaster. The actual blame ought to be laid at the feet of those who had decided to use a cart and oxen to carry the ark.

*The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* comments: “Uzzah’s offence seems very small. He and his brother Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, in whose house the ark had long been lodged, having been used to attend it, to show their willingness to prefer the public benefit to their own private honor and advantage, undertook to drive the cart in which the ark was carried, this being perhaps the last service they were likely to do it; for others would be employed about it when it came to the city of David. Ahio went before, to clear the way, and, if need were, to lead the oxen. Uzzah followed close to the side of the cart. It happened that the oxen shook it, v. 6. The critics are not agreed about the signification of the original word: They stumbled (so our margin); they kicked (so some), perhaps against the goad with which Uzzah drove them; they stuck in the mire, by some. By some accident or other the ark was in danger of being overthrown. Uzzah thereupon laid hold of it, to save it from falling, we have reason to think with a very good intention, to preserve the reputation of the ark and to prevent a bad omen. Yet this was his crime. Uzzah was a Levite, but priests only might touch the ark. The law was express concerning the Kohathites, that, though they were to carry the ark by the staves, yet they must not touch any holy thing, lest they die, Num 4:15. Uzzah’s long familiarity with the ark, and the constant attendance he had given to it, might occasion his presumption, but would not excuse it.”

When Uzzah touched the ark, he died instantly. There are laws of nature and there are laws that govern holiness that cannot be broken without penalty. One cannot touch a high voltage wire without suffering the consequences. And the electricity we know is only a vague image of the charge of God’s holiness. We may call Uzzah the innocent victim in this case. The ultimate responsibility rested with those who had neglected to do their research and arranged for the transportation of the ark on a cart.

The record in Second Samuel reads: “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.”<sup>231</sup> The wording in First Chronicles is slightly different: “The LORD’s anger burned against Uzzah, and he struck him down because he had put his hand on the ark. So he died there before God.”<sup>232</sup> His sudden death meant the end of the procession. David decided to store the ark in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite, which was probably the closest option. Since Obed-Edom was a Levite, according to First Chronicles,<sup>233</sup> the choice made sense. Obed-Edom may have volunteered.

Bible scholars have puzzled over the Hebrew word *hashal*,<sup>234</sup> which the NIV renders “irreverent act.” Evidently, this is the only place in Scripture where this word occurs. The KJV reads “error,” as do

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<sup>229</sup> Num. 7:9

<sup>230</sup> I Chron. 13:8

<sup>231</sup> II Sam. 6:7

<sup>232</sup> I Chron. 13:10

<sup>233</sup> See I Chron. 26:4.

<sup>234</sup> II Sam. 6:7

most older versions. The parallel record in First Chronicles reads: “The LORD’s anger burned against Uzzah, and he struck him down because he had put his hand on the ark.”<sup>235</sup>

David’s reaction to the incident was anger and fear. We interpret David’s anger to mean that he was angry with God. David was not the only human being ever to be angry with God. Many of God’s creatures blame God for what happens in their lives. Job is a classic example. Much of our human anger is rooted in our misunderstanding of God. David may have felt that, even if mistakes were made in the arrangements for transporting the ark, God ought to have taken his good intentions into account. He may have believed that God had misunderstood him. Oswald Chambers, in his book *Still Higher For His Highest*, states: “God is the only Being who can afford to be misunderstood; we cannot, Job could not, but God can.” In the lives of many children of God there comes a time when they realize that God is not what they thought He was. When we grow in our fellowship with Him the question marks seem to grow up faster and become more frequent than our ability to grasp. We feel that an omniscient and omnipotent God could have prevented the mistakes we made. This is true, apart from the fact that we often do not consult Him before we act. The advice in the Book of Proverbs remains valid: “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>236</sup> Leaning on our own understanding and failure to acknowledge him in all our ways leads to crooked paths for which we cannot blame God.

*The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* states: “It is not for us to be displeased at anything that God does, how unpleasing soever it is to us. The death of Uzzah was indeed an eclipse to the glory of a solemnity which David valued himself upon more than anything else, and might give birth to some speculations among those that were disaffected to him, as if God were departing from him too; but he ought nevertheless to have subscribed to the righteousness and wisdom of God in it, and not to have been displeased at it. When we lie under God’s anger we must keep under our own.”

David translated his anger in the renaming of Nacon’s threshing floor *Perez Uzzah*, meaning “Outbreak against Uzzah.” Instead of erecting a monument of praise, David erected a monument of defiance. We do not read how God reacted to this, but something must have touched David’s heart in a deeper way, because his anger changed into fear. The calamity made David realize that holiness is an awesome reality that does not allow for familiarity or casualness.

There may have been a certain arrogance in David’s attitude after he had captured Jerusalem and made it the capital of the land. He may have believed that he did God a favor by taking the Ark of the Covenant out of exile and giving it again a place of prominence. The human heart can be a mixed bag of pride and humility. David may have forgotten for a moment that it was God who had taken David from the anonymity of being behind the sheep and brought him into the limelight of royalty. God does not owe us anything; we owe Him all! David’s question “How can the ark of the LORD ever come to me?”<sup>237</sup> is one of healthy discovery of reality.

The ark remained at the house of Obed-Edom for three months, in which time Obed-Edom and his family experienced the blessing of the Lord in a special way. We are not told how this blessing was evinced or in what way it came. According to *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary*, “Josephus says that, whereas before Obed-Edom was poor, on a sudden, in these three months, his estate increased, to the envy of his neighbors.” This may very well have been true but, even in Josephus’ days, the fact cannot have been substantiated. The fact that Obed-Edom did not suffer any negative consequences from harboring the Ark of the Covenant in his home proved to David that its presence was not invariably detrimental. This caused him to have a fresh look at the plan to bring the ark to the place he had prepared.

This time King David issued a general convocation of all people to Jerusalem. This probably involved all males in the age bracket that would have made them eligible to serve in the army. From among them the priests and Levites were singled out and a group of a total 862 of them was assigned to consecrate themselves to the task of transporting the ark. This consecration probably consisted of going through the prescribed rituals of purification. The record in First Chronicles states: “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

<sup>235</sup> I Chron. 13:10

<sup>236</sup> Prov. 3:5,6

<sup>237</sup> II Sam. 6:9

inquire of him about how to do it in the prescribed way.’<sup>238</sup> Obviously, this time the king had done his homework.

The moving of the ark from the house of Obed-Edom to the place prepared for it on Mount Zion was accompanied by an extraordinary pageant. The record in Second Samuel states that a bull and a fatted calf were sacrificed every time the carriers of the ark had taken six steps.<sup>239</sup> *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* comments: “These words are generally understood as meaning, that sacrifices of this kind were offered along the whole way, at the distance of six paces apart. This would certainly have been a possible thing, and there would be no necessity to assume that the procession halted every six paces, until the sacrificial ceremony was completed, but the ark might have continued in progress, whilst sacrifices were being offered at the distances mentioned.” Quoting Sime’s *Kingdom of All Israel, The Pulpit Commentary* states: “Evidently 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.”

And rejoicing there was! The contrast between the rejoicing of the king and the crowd on the one hand and the bloody streets on the other, is in essence, the paradox of the Gospel. The distance between the home of Obed-Edom and Mount Zion cannot be accurately established. Bible scholars assume that it may have been ten or twelve miles. A sacrifice at every six steps would require several thousand of bulls and calves. This would, indeed, cause a river of blood to flow on the streets. John, in Revelation, saw this image greatly magnified when the wrath of God was shown to him under the symbol of a grape harvest. We read: “The angel swung his sickle on the earth, gathered its grapes and threw them into the great winepress of God’s wrath. They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses’ bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia.”<sup>240</sup>

We may assume that God’s aversion to blood is greater than ours. The Creator of life cannot take pleasure in the shedding of blood and the death in which this results. Yet, the pain God suffers because of the human and animal blood with which this earth is soaked is small in comparison with the pain over the death of His Son. The quantity of blood of David’s massive slaughter of animals on the road to Zion pointed to the quality of the blood of Christ, which outweighed it all. Through the horror of the massacre of God on Golgotha, the blood of atonement covers the whole world. When God poured out His wrath by punishing man’s sin in Jesus, He opened for us the door into His presence in which there is joy and eternal pleasures.<sup>241</sup> The paradox of the Gospel is that His death gives an eternal depth to our life, and the pouring out of His blood is our source of eternal joy.

The accounts of the procession, as given in Second Samuel and First Chronicles, compliment each other. It is not necessary to assume that the text of First Chronicles differs from Second Samuel because of some copying errors, as some Bible scholars believe. *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* supposes that both texts are drawn from a more complete original. We read in Second Samuel: “David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the LORD with all his might, while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets.”<sup>242</sup> First Chronicles states: “Now David was clothed in a robe of fine linen, as were all the Levites who were carrying the ark, and as were the singers, and Kenaniah, who was in charge of the singing of the choirs. David also wore a linen ephod. So all Israel brought up the ark of the covenant of the LORD with shouts, with the sounding of rams’ horns and trumpets, and of cymbals, and the playing of lyres and harps.”<sup>243</sup>

David’s clothing consisted of a white robe, made, according to most versions, of fine linen. The Hebrew word is *buwts*, which simply means “bleached.” Some scholars think it stands for cotton. The material was deemed to be expensive and was worn by the priests and the Levites. By dressing himself as a Levite, David made the statement that there was a close relation between the monarchy and the priesthood. The combination of the two offices of king and priest was outlawed in the Israel in the Old Testament, but both are combined in the Messiah. David referred to this, prophetically, in Psalm One Hundred Ten, where we read: “The LORD will extend your mighty scepter from Zion; you will rule in the midst of your

<sup>238</sup> I Chron. 15:11-13

<sup>239</sup> See II Sam. 6:13.

<sup>240</sup> Rev. 14:19,20 (1600 stadia is approximately 180 miles)

<sup>241</sup> See Ps. 16:11.

<sup>242</sup> II Sam. 6:14,15

<sup>243</sup> I Chron. 15:27-28

enemies,” and “The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: ‘You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek.’”<sup>244</sup>

The exuberance of the pageant is demonstrated in both music and dance. The Second Samuel account only mentions the trumpets, but First Chronicles indicates that a whole orchestra playing was: “with the sounding of rams’ horns and trumpets, and of cymbals, and the playing of lyres and harps.”<sup>245</sup> Second Samuel adds to this that David “danced before the LORD with all his might.”<sup>246</sup> The whole picture is one of extreme ecstasy to the point that David’s wife thought that the royal decorum was lost in the outburst of joy. In the eyes of Michal, David had made a fool of himself. We read: “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. 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!’”<sup>247</sup> There is a suggestion in these words that David might have exposed himself indecently. The fact that the law had a very strict dressing code for priests and Levites makes that highly unlikely.<sup>248</sup>

Having grown up as a princess in a palace, Michal had made a point of forgetting her roots. All her life, she must have believed that when she married David, she married below her class. She probably tried to create an ambiance of style and royalty in David’s household and she doubtless spent a lot of time teaching manners to her shepherd-husband. Michal’s objections seem to have been rather to the dress David wore than to the fact that he danced in public. *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* states: “The proud daughter of Saul was offended at the fact, that the king had let himself down on this occasion to the level of the people. She availed herself of the shortness of the priests’ shoulder-dress, to make a contemptuous remark concerning David’s dancing, as an impropriety that was unbecoming in a king.” Quoting other sources, *The Commentary* adds: “Who knows whether the proud woman did not intend to sneer at the rank of the Levites, as one that was contemptible in her eyes, since their humble service may have looked very trivial to her?” *The Pulpit Commentary* adds: “The language of Michal is that of a woman vexed and irritated. After reminding David of his high office as ‘King of Israel,’ she reproaches him for appearing on a grand public occasion without the upper and becoming robe in which an Oriental enwraps himself. And this he had done before the female slaves of his own servants, with no more self-respect than that shown by the ‘vain fellows.’ ‘Vain’ is the ‘raca’ of ... Matthew 5:22, and means ‘empty,’ void of virtue, void of reputation, and void of worldly means. The Hebrews, when expressing the greatest possible contempt for a man, called him an ‘empty,’ and no word could be found better conveying the meaning of thorough worthlessness.”

In his answer to Michal, David shows what humility in our relationship with God ought to be like. God wants us to be glorious, not dignified. Human dignity, as we understand the concept, can be detrimental when placed next to the glory of God. Much of our “dignity” is a cover we put on. We make a demonstration of dignity to keep the skeletons in our closets. God’s glory opens closet doors. It is when we become undignified and humiliated before the Lord that He bestows His glory on us. In the words of James: “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.”<sup>249</sup> In humiliating himself before God, David foreshadowed his great Son, the King of kings, who “made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death- even death on a cross!” The apostle Paul adds: “Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name.”<sup>250</sup>

It should be noted that David’s demonstration of humility is called a celebration. He humbled Himself before God by dancing and shouting for joy. Those who practice genuine humility will understand the apparent contradiction.

In trying to patch together the pieces in Scripture that depict the relationship between David and Michal, we find ourselves unable to get a complete picture. When David was an upcoming star in Saul’s

<sup>244</sup> Ps. 110:2,4

<sup>245</sup> I Chron. 15:28

<sup>246</sup> II Sam. 6:14

<sup>247</sup> II Sam. 6:16,20

<sup>248</sup> See Ex. 28:42,43.

<sup>249</sup> James 4:6,10

<sup>250</sup> Phil. 2:7-9

kingdom, we read: “Now Saul’s daughter Michal was in love with David.”<sup>251</sup> She saved David’s life and helped him escape when Saul tried to kill him.<sup>252</sup> But on the day David brought the ark to Zion, we read: “She despised him in her heart.”<sup>253</sup> David responded by saying: “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. 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.”<sup>254</sup> That must have meant the end of their emotional relationship. Upon this, the author of Second Samuel states: “And Michal daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death.” *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* observes: “Probably David never took her to his bed again; or God, in His providence, might have subjected her to barrenness which in Palestine was considered both a misfortune and a reproach.”<sup>255</sup>

*The Pulpit Commentary*, on the other hand, states: “Michal’s barrenness was long antecedent to this outburst of pride, and was not a punishment for it. It is noticed as a proof that the blessing of God did not rest upon her; and as such it was regarded by the people, and doubtless it lessened David’s affection for her. We must not, however, suppose that he imposed upon her any punishment further than this verbal reproof. Nor does the interest lie in Michal’s conduct, but in the glimpse which the narrative gives us of David’s tender piety towards God, so exactly in agreement with the feelings which animate very many of the psalms. To unite with this a harsh bitterness to the woman who was his first love, who had so protected him in old time, and whom he had summoned back at the first opportunity because of his affection for her, is a thing abhorrent in itself, and contrary to David’s character. His fault in domestic matters rather was that he was over fond, not that he was unfeeling. A little more sternness towards Amnon and Absalom would have saved him much sorrow. As for Michal, the story sets her before us as caring a great deal for David, and not much for Jehovah. She could not have approved of such a number of rivals in David’s household, but she had not lost her love for him. And the narrative represents her as not having Jehovah’s blessing in a matter so greatly thought of by Hebrew women, and as valuing too highly royal state, and forgetting that above the king was God. But she did David no great wrong, and received from him nothing worse than a scolding. In the parallel place (...1 Chronicles 15:29) the matter is very lightly passed over; and the reason why it holds an important place in this book is that we have here a history of David’s piety, of his sin and his punishment. In itself a slight matter, it yet makes us clearly understand the nature of David’s feelings towards Jehovah. It is also most interesting in itself. For David is the type of a noble character under the influence of grace. Michal, too, is a noble character, but she lacked one thing, and that was ‘the one thing needful.’ ”

David’s polygamy blurs the picture to the point that it is difficult to make a general application to our spiritual life in the present time. It is, however, obvious that David made a clear choice between his God and his spouse. Grant to God that we will never be obliged to make this choice in our lives. On the other hand, grant to God that every married person has already made that choice if it must be made! Our first and foremost love must be for God, and conjugal love, with love for our neighbor ought always to take a second place. David’s marriage with Michal was, unfortunately, not the only marriage that broke up because of one of the partner’s dedication to God.

When the ark had arrived at its destination, David brought several sacrifices for its dedication. It is not clear whether David personally brought those sacrifices and thus performed the task of the priests, or whether these sacrifices were merely at his expense. *The Pulpit Commentary* understands the latter to be the case.

It is clear, however, that David pronounced the blessing upon the people, which must have been the blessing the high priest was supposed to pronounce: “The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you; the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.”<sup>256</sup> His son, Solomon, would later perform the same priestly duty at the dedication of the temple.<sup>257</sup> It is difficult to determine whether in doing this, both kings crossed the line that divided the kingship from the priesthood.

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<sup>251</sup> I Sam. 18:20

<sup>252</sup> I Sam. 19:11-17

<sup>253</sup> II Sam. 6:16

<sup>254</sup> II Sam. 6:21,22

<sup>255</sup> II Sam. 6:23

<sup>256</sup> Num. 6:24-26

<sup>257</sup> See II Chron. 6:3.

Having finished the rituals, David had gifts distributed to the people who attended the celebration. We read: "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."<sup>258</sup> The KJV reads these items to be "a cake of bread, and a good piece of flesh, and a flagon of wine." Bible scholars have no problem with the first and the third item. The Hebrew word for the second is *'eshpar*, which is only found at this place in Scripture. Its meaning in this context is unclear. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "The second word occurs only here, but the rendering of the Authorized Version is that of the Jews; and as it is some common domestic term not likely to be found in literature, but well known in every kitchen, they are most probably right. On the same sort of local authority Jerome renders it in the *Vulgate* 'a piece of beef for roasting.' As it is coupled with the bread and the raisin cake, we may feel sure that it was a portion of the flesh of the animals which had been killed in Sacrifice, and which the people were now permitted to take to their homes." Why the NIV settled on "a cake of dates" is not clear.

What amazes us is that there are relatively few passages in the Book of Psalms that refer to the bringing over of the ark, which was one of the highlights of David's life as king. The Book of First Chronicles records that David appointed some of the Levites to serve as musicians before the ark with music of praise.<sup>259</sup> *Barnes' Notes* observes: "This passage is interposed by the writer of Chronicles between two sentences of the parallel passage in Samuel. It contains a detailed account of the service which David instituted at this time, a service out of which grew the more elaborate service of the temple. The language of much of the passage is remarkably archaic, and there can be no reasonable doubt that it is in the main an extract from a record of the time of David."

These Levites were chosen from among those who had accompanied the ark when it was brought to Jerusalem.<sup>260</sup> The musicians were probably chosen on the basis of their talents. Asaph was selected to be the chief minister of music, probably again, because he was the most talented among them. He was a poet and composer in his own rights. We owe to him some of the most beautiful psalms in the Bible.<sup>261</sup>

David, probably, composed the following psalm especially for this occasion:

*"Give thanks to the LORD, call on his name; make known among the nations what he has done.  
Sing to him, sing praise to him; tell of all his wonderful acts.  
Glory in his holy name; let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.  
Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always.  
Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced,  
O descendants of Israel his servant, O sons of Jacob, his chosen ones.  
He is the LORD our God; his judgments are in all the earth.  
He remembers his covenant forever, the word he commanded, for a thousand generations,  
the covenant he made with Abraham, the oath he swore to Isaac.  
He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree, to Israel as an everlasting covenant:  
'To you I will give the land of Canaan as the portion you will inherit.'  
When they were but few in number, few indeed, and strangers in it,  
they wandered from nation to nation, from one kingdom to another.  
He allowed no man to oppress them; for their sake he rebuked kings:  
'Do not touch my anointed ones; do my prophets no harm.'  
Sing to the LORD, all the earth; proclaim his salvation day after day.  
Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples.  
For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise; he is to be feared above all gods.  
For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens.  
Splendor and majesty are before him; strength and joy in his dwelling place.  
Ascribe to the LORD, O families of nations, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength,  
ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name.  
Bring an offering and come before him; worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.  
Tremble before him, all the earth! The world is firmly established; it cannot be moved.  
Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let them say among the nations, 'The LORD reigns!'*

<sup>258</sup> II Sam. 6:19

<sup>259</sup> I Chron. 16:4-6

<sup>260</sup> I Chron. 15:16-24

<sup>261</sup> See Ps. 50, 73-83.

*Let the sea resound, and all that is in it; let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them!  
Then the trees of the forest will sing, they will sing for joy before the LORD,  
for he comes to judge the earth.*

*Give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; his love endures forever.  
Cry out, 'Save us, O God our Savior; gather us and deliver us from the nations,  
that we may give thanks to your holy name, that we may glory in your praise.'  
Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting.*<sup>262</sup>

Parts of this hymn found their place in the Book of Psalms, although broken up into several sections.<sup>263</sup> *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* observes: "It is not expressly said that this song was composed by David for this purpose; but if Asaph with his singers was to perform the service committed to him, he must have been provided with the songs of praise (psalms) which were necessary for this purpose; and if David were in any way the founder of the liturgical psalmody, he, as a richly endowed psalm-singer, would doubtless compose the necessary liturgical psalms. These considerations render it very probable that the following psalm was a hymn composed by David for the liturgical song in the public worship." Psalm Twenty-four may also have been written for the occasion of the bringing over of the ark.

David's decision to move the ark from Gibeon to Zion virtually split the religious life of Israel in two. The tabernacle Moses had built remained in Gibeon whilst the ark was stationed in Jerusalem. The brass burnt offering altar also stayed at Gibeon and all the bloody sacrifices were brought at that place. This situation remained throughout David's life. It was not until Solomon built the temple that the religious services were again performed at one place.

The Bible does not explain why this was done. Although, as we saw, David consulted the people about this decision, he took the initiative for the moving of the ark. It would take a major disaster (the breakout of the plague in Israel) for David to decide that the altar ought to be in Jerusalem also. When the plague threatened the city of Jerusalem, we read: "The angel of the LORD was then standing at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. David looked up and saw the angel of the LORD standing between heaven and earth, with a drawn sword in his hand extended over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders, clothed in sackcloth, fell facedown. David said to God, 'Was it not I who ordered the fighting men to be counted? I am the one who has sinned and done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? O LORD my God, let your hand fall upon me and my family, but do not let this plague remain on your people.' Then the angel of the LORD ordered Gad to tell David to go up and build an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. So David went up in obedience to the word that Gad had spoken in the name of the LORD."<sup>264</sup> It was after this tragedy that David concluded that the burnt offering altar ought to be moved to Zion also.<sup>265</sup>

David's decision to split up the services between Zion and Gibeon may have been partly political. There probably was, as we saw, some rivalry between certain sections of the Levites, which made David decide to divide the functions. He may have hoped that the division would be temporal. As it turned out, it lasted most of his life.

One group of Levites was appointed to the site of the ark and another remained at the tabernacle to keep the fires of the altar going. We read: "David left Asaph and his associates before the ark of the covenant of the LORD to minister there regularly, according to each day's requirements. He also left Obed-Edom and his sixty-eight associates to minister with them. Obed-Edom son of Jeduthun, and also Hosah, were gatekeepers. David left Zadok the priest and his fellow priests before the tabernacle of the LORD at the high place in Gibeon to present burnt offerings to the LORD on the altar of burnt offering regularly, morning and evening, in accordance with everything written in the Law of the LORD, which he had given Israel. With them were Heman and Jeduthun and the rest of those chosen and designated by name to give thanks to the LORD, 'for his love endures forever.' Heman and Jeduthun were responsible for the sounding of the trumpets and cymbals and for the playing of the other instruments for sacred song. The sons of Jeduthun were stationed at the gate."<sup>266</sup>

<sup>262</sup> I Chron 16:8-36

<sup>263</sup> See Ps. 96:1-13; 105:1-15.

<sup>264</sup> I Chron. 21:15-19

<sup>265</sup> See I Chron. 22:1.

<sup>266</sup> I Chron. 16:37-42

Heman and Jeduthun, with their associate, were ordered to praise the Lord as accompaniment to the sacrifices with the words “His love endures forever.” The Hebrew words are *l<sup>a</sup>owlaam chacdow*, which literally means “forever His lovingkindness.” As such it is translated in several of the psalms. At some places it is rendered “mercy.”

Both books that record the reign of David, place David’s plans for the construction of the temple immediately after the report of the bringing over of the ark to Mount Zion. In Second Samuel, we read that David talked to Nathan about his plans after “the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him.”<sup>267</sup> Most commentators agree that there must have been a lapse of time between the two events; how much time is impossible to tell. Some believe that the wars David waged against the Moabites, the Arameans, and others, which is recorded in Chapter Eight of Second Samuel, had not yet taken place. Others suppose that the sequence of the record here is not chronological. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “Its position here immediately after the account of the bringing of the ark to Zion has a higher unity than that of chronology.” The arrangement of the material in both books in the Bible strongly suggests that David had the construction of a temple in mind when he had the ark brought over to Mount Zion.

No details are given about David’s construction of his own palace, apart from the fact that it was built of cedar wood, which was, obviously, obtained from Tyre through his friendship with King Hiram. We also do not know what kind of tent David had pitched for the ark. It was, probably, not the same kind of beautiful and elaborate structure as the tabernacle Moses had built in the desert. The discrepancy between David’s own affluence and the Lord’s apparent poverty is what bothered the king. His desire to correct the incongruity is laudable indeed.

The same tension David felt is still prevalent in the lives of many of God’s children at present. Throughout the ages, Christians have been bothered by the fact that they lived a life of affluence while their Lord had “no place to lay his head.”<sup>268</sup> On the other end of the spectrum are those who propagate a gospel of “Green Power,” which declares that God wants His children to be rich. Although David was, obviously, very wealthy, he saw the discrepancy between his condition and that of the ark that represented the Lord of glory. Had David known about the incarnation, he would have understood Paul’s words: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.”<sup>269</sup>

David shared his thoughts with the prophet Nathan, probably supposing that Nathan would have the mind of God on the matter. This is the first time Nathan is mentioned. This prophet would appear at different intervals of David’s life, often at crucial moments, to bring God’s message to the king. The casualness with which he is introduced here suggests that Nathan may have already have been the king’s spiritual counselor and confidant for a while. David’s desire to know the will of God shows his spiritual maturity; Nathan’s spontaneous reaction does not necessarily indicate spiritual immaturity. His response to David’s proposal was natural and it was based on his observation of the Lord’s blessing upon David’s life in general. The only thing that can be reproached to Nathan was that he was not ready for God’s surprises. But then, who is? “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him.”<sup>270</sup> David’s plans for the construction of a temple were not bad. They would, eventually, be realized, but they did not coincide with God’s timing. God’s initial turning down of David’s plan does not downplay his obvious intention of first seeking the kingdom of God and its righteousness.

Both David’s desire and Nathan’s response were not evil; they were merely natural. If more people of God would have similar desires and responses, the church would be a better place and so would the world. We must be ready, though, to have our natural desires and responses be overruled by the supernatural. And both the king and the prophet were willing for that.

When Nathan went to sleep that night, the Lord surprised him with a message for the king. The message reads as a three-point sermon. God wanted David to know that His dwelling in a tent had a special purpose.

Although David would, eventually, though indirectly, build God a house, God would first build one for David. It would not be a house of stone and cedar wood but a house of flesh and blood: the House of David.

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<sup>267</sup> II Sam. 7:1

<sup>268</sup> Matt. 8:20

<sup>269</sup> II Cor. 8:9

<sup>270</sup> I Cor. 2:9

Thirdly, all this is, ultimately, about the Son, David's son and God's Son. Although David may have understood most of what God said, or he thought he understood, most of what God meant would remain hidden for him. David cannot have grasped what the incarnation of God would mean. "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>271</sup> In *The Amplified Bible* this verse reads: "And the Word [Christ] became flesh (human, incarnate) and tabernacled – fixed His tent of flesh, lived awhile – among us; and we [actually] saw His glory – His honor, His majesty; such glory as an only begotten son receives from his father, full of grace (favor, loving kindness) and truth."

God's Word to David contains all the elements of an eternal Gospel, such as the apostle John heard announced in the Book of Revelation. John states: "Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people. He said in a loud voice, 'Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water.'"<sup>272</sup>

When we look at the prophecy God gave to David via the prophet Nathan, we understand that, in the incarnation, God became man, man's servant, the lowest of the low, and a sin offering for man's sin. This elevates man from the lowest point in creation, to which he had fallen through sin, to the highest place in heaven. What God did for David in taking him from behind the sheep and placing him on the throne of Israel, God does on an even higher level for all who love him. David wrote in one of his psalms: "He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand. He put a new song in my mouth, a hymn of praise to our God."<sup>273</sup> Paul expresses what God does for us: "As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world and of the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient. All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our sinful nature and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved. And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."<sup>274</sup>

When David responds to God's proposal, he asks the question: "Is this your usual way of dealing with man, O Sovereign LORD?" We, who know the Gospel, must answer "yes, and much more!"

God says to Nathan: "Now then, tell my servant David..." The Hebrew word for servant is *ebed*. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments on this word: "Jehovah takes him to be 'his servant,' a word of high dignity, applied to but few persons in the Old Testament. It signifies the prime minister, or vicegerent of Jehovah, as the theocratic king, and is the special title of Moses among God's people, and, among the heathen, of Nebuchadnezzar, as one summoned to do a great work for God. But it is in the last twenty-seven chapters of Isaiah that the title reaches its full grandeur. For there, first of all, Israel is called Jehovah's servant, because it was Israel's office to be the witness for the oneness of God amidst the debasing polytheism of all the nations around. And then, finally, the servant is Messiah, as being the personal Representative of God upon earth. The title is now given to David as the type of Christ's kingly office, and also as the sweet singer, who added a new service to the worship of God, and made it more spiritual, and more like the service of angels round God's throne."

To David's desire to build a house for the Lord, God answers in the strongest possible language: "The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you." The word "house," in both sentences, is the same Hebrew word *bayith*. There seems to be a play-on-words involved. *Bayith* is an interesting word with a variety of meanings. It is derived from the word *banah*, which means "to build" or "to have children." In English, the word "house" has the same multiple meaning. When we speak of "the house of Windsor," we may refer to the British royal family or to Buckingham Palace or some other castle

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<sup>271</sup> John 1:14

<sup>272</sup> Rev. 14:6,7

<sup>273</sup> Ps. 40:2,3

<sup>274</sup> Eph. 2:1-10

in England. When David used the word “house” he spoke of a dwelling, when God uses it, it stood for “people.”

In the light of the New Testament, this whole section acquires an even deeper meaning. In John’s Gospel, the Jews argued with Jesus about the temple. We read: “Jesus said to them: ‘Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.’ The Jews replied, ‘It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?’ But the temple he had spoken of was his body. After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said.”<sup>275</sup> Ultimately, God’s house is the human body. Paul confirms this when he asks: “Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own.”<sup>276</sup> And this is not just the human body, as we know it now; in the context of Jesus’ use of the word, it refers to the resurrection. It is the new body, the new man!

David said to God: “I want to build you a house.” God answers: “No, I will build you one.” We discern a divine principle in these words. There is, first of all, the matter of initiative; we can never do for God what He does not do for us first. The apostle John hits upon the core of the matter when he states: “We love because he first loved us.”<sup>277</sup> Even Jesus referred to this when He said: “I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does.”<sup>278</sup> We can never outdo God, nor can we out-give Him. God honors those who honor Him. In Jesus’ words: “My Father will honor the one who serves me.”<sup>279</sup> Actually, we can only honor God because He honors us. This truth ought to astound us as much as it astounded David.

Obviously, God’s promise to David regarding his offspring only partially refers to Solomon. Solomon was born before David died and the words “When your days are over and you rest with your fathers” cannot be totally applied to him. The reference is primarily, and ultimately to the Messiah, the Son of David, Jesus Christ. A remarkable incident in the Book of Zechariah confirms this. Some of the people who had returned from the Babylonian captivity brought some silver and gold for the rebuilding of the temple. God gave the following strange message to Zechariah to pass on to those who received it: “Tell him this is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Here is the man whose name is the Branch, and he will branch out from his place and build the temple of the LORD. It is he who will build the temple of the LORD, and he will be clothed with majesty and will sit and rule on his throne. And he will be a priest on his throne. And there will be harmony between the two.’ ”<sup>280</sup>

None of David’s sons came up to the level that corresponds with God’s promise, “I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.”<sup>281</sup> Only Jesus would be able to fill that place. In the annunciation, the angel Gabriel says to Mary: “You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. 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>282</sup> Yet, the words “When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men” cannot be applied to our Lord Jesus Christ. God’s prophecy to David, evidently, contained elements that applied to David’s sons who would be the kings of earthly Israel, who reigned for a limited number of years, and other elements that can only be applied to the one person of the Messiah who would establish a kingdom that is not of this world.<sup>283</sup> The history of Israel as an earthly kingdom does not bear out the extent of this promise. As a matter of fact, David’s lineage on earth ended with the death of Jehoiachin. Jeremiah prophesied about him: “Is this man Jehoiachin a despised, broken pot, an object no one wants? Why will he and his children be hurled out, cast into a land they do not know? O land, land, land, hear the word of the LORD! This is what the LORD says: ‘Record this man as if childless, a man who

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<sup>275</sup> John 2:19-22

<sup>276</sup> I Cor. 6:19

<sup>277</sup> I John 4:19

<sup>278</sup> John 5:19,20

<sup>279</sup> John 12:26

<sup>280</sup> Zech. 6:12-14

<sup>281</sup> II Sam. 7:13

<sup>282</sup> Luke 1:31-33

<sup>283</sup> See John 18:36.

will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah.’ ”<sup>284</sup>

David’s reaction to this special revelation Nathan passed on to him was very fitting indeed. Thus far God had not communicated directly with David. David had consulted the means that were at the disposal of the priests. This message had come to him via the prophet Nathan with whom he had spoken about his plans for building a temple. Having received Nathan’s message, David decided to go directly to God. When David spoke to God before, he had expressed himself in poetry and music, which is in the psalms, some of which have been preserved for us. This time, David decided to speak to God directly.

This means of communication supposes equality of some sorts. Thus David entered upon a new phase in his life. He went to the place where the ark was kept and sat down in front of it. The Hebrew word *yashab* does not necessarily mean “to sit down.” In this context it may simply mean that David tarried in God’s presence, without any reference to a bodily posture. David cannot have understood all the implications of Nathan’s words, but he understood enough to be overwhelmed. As *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “Whether David understood as yet that he was now placed in the same position as Abraham of old, in that ‘in his seed all the families of the earth should be blessed,’ is uncertain.”

David was perplexed by Nathan’s message to him. The first result of God’s Word to man is usually an identity crisis. David’s question “Who am I?” is one each human being asks when God becomes a reality. As we become aware of who God is, we begin to ask questions about ourselves. We do not know ourselves until we meet the One who made us. The image of God within us will respond to the original. In most instances feelings of guilt will come to the surface because a comparison between God and us will demonstrate how far the image has strayed from the original. But the very discovery that the image is there is perplexing. David realizes the incongruity between God and himself, but he is also aware of the similarity, otherwise no communication would have been possible. This brings him to the question, which has puzzled interpreters: “Is this your usual way of dealing with man, O Sovereign LORD?” The Hebrew reads literally: “And is this the manner of man, o LORD, God?” That is also the reading of the KJV. In the parallel passage in First Chronicles the words come out as: “You have looked on me as though I were the most exalted of men, O LORD God.”<sup>285</sup>

*The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* comments on this: “That it is far beyond what we could expect: Is this the manner of men? that is, ... Can man expect to be so dealt with by his Maker? Is this the law of Adam? ... Considering what the character and condition of man are, it is very surprising and amazing that God should deal with him as he does. Man is a mean creature, and therefore under a law of distance-unprofitable to God, and therefore under a law of disesteem and disregard-guilty and obnoxious, and therefore under a law of death and damnation. But how unlike are God’s dealings with man to this law of Adam! He is brought near to God, purchased at a high rate, taken into covenant and communion with God; could this ever have been thought of? ... Do men usually deal thus with one another? No, the way of our God is far above the manner of men. Though he be high, he has respect to the lowly; and is this the manner of men? Though he is offended by us, he beseeches us to be reconciled, waits to be gracious, multiplies his pardons: and is this the manner of men? Some give another sense of this, reading it thus: And this is the law of man, the Lord Jehovah, that is, ‘This promise of one whose kingdom shall be established for ever must be understood of one that is a man and yet the Lord Jehovah, this must be the law of such a one. A Messiah from my loins must be man, but, reigning for ever, must be God.’ ”

*The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “The words are undoubtedly difficult, and we feel that David was speaking in an ejaculatory manner, in sentences but half expressed, breaking forth from him bit by bit, under the pressure of deep excitement within. We notice too that, while there is no direct reference to the Messiah in David’s words, yet that the Psalms indicate that he did connect the duration of his house with the Messiah’s advent; and this ejaculation may have sprung forth, if not from a fully formed conviction, yet from the feeling that the permanence of his house was for the purpose of a higher kingdom than that of Jerusalem; and so the promise was a ‘law of man’ and the promulgation of a decree which affected the whole human race. This may be the meaning of the Vulgate, which renders ‘a law of Adam,’ that is, one embracing within its scope all Adam’s race.”

David’s amazement is all about God’s grace. David answers Philip Yancey’s question: *What Is So Amazing About Grace?* It is the realization of what grace does to fallen man that brings out the greatness of

<sup>284</sup> Jer. 22:28-30

<sup>285</sup> I Chron. 17:17

God. The question, “Who am I?” leads to “Who is God?” The answer is in the title David gives to God: *Adonay Yahweh*, Sovereign Lord.

David also realized that God’s dealing with him was part of a greater plan as is evinced in Israel’s history of salvation. After having asked, “Who am I?” David asks, “Who is Israel?” expressing the same amazement about God’s grace to the nation as about his personal experience of God’s grace. At the same time, David realizes that God used Israel as an instrument of His own revelation in this world. The exodus from Egypt with its accompanying miracles and the conquest of Canaan had become a monument of God’s dealings with mankind: dealings of judgment and of salvation. The punishment of the opposing nations was, primarily, a punishment of the gods, the demonic powers that inspired and influenced them. God’s choice of Israel was for the purpose of establishing a kingdom of priests, of people who could build a bridge between God and all of mankind.<sup>286</sup>

David’s request for blessing must not be seen as a demonstration of unbelief but as a confirmation of trust in the validity of the promise. His request for blessing is in essence an act of surrender. Grace, in order to be effective, must be accepted. Mary’s answer to the angel who announced the coming of Christ by means of her pregnancy is of the same kind. We read: “ ‘I am the Lord’s servant,’ Mary answered. ‘May it be to me as you have said.’ ”<sup>287</sup>

At this point, David seems to have accepted the fact that he was not allowed to begin the construction of the temple. Yet, his dream never left him throughout his life. Toward the end of his life, the plan for the construction of the temple was completely put down on paper and handed over to Solomon. David claimed divine inspiration for the plan and all of its details.<sup>288</sup> By that time, David had also discovered why God did not want him to be the actual builder. We read his confession: “But God said to me, ‘You are not to build a house for my Name, because you are a warrior and have shed blood.’ ”<sup>289</sup>

David did not build the temple, but without David’s extensive preparations, no temple would ever have been built. During his lifetime, he made arrangements so that, as soon as Solomon ascended the throne, he could commence the construction. He claimed divine inspiration for the plans, as we read in the Book of First Chronicles: “Then David gave his son Solomon the plans for the portico of the temple, its buildings, its storerooms, its upper parts, its inner rooms and the place of atonement. He gave him the plans of all that the Spirit had put in his mind for the courts of the temple of the LORD and all the surrounding rooms, for the treasuries of the temple of God and for the treasuries for the dedicated things.”<sup>290</sup>

Added to this, David financed a great deal of the material needed for the building. We read his statement: “With all my resources I have provided for the temple of my God—gold for the gold work, silver for the silver, bronze for the bronze, iron for the iron and wood for the wood, as well as onyx for the settings, turquoise, stones of various colors, and all kinds of fine stone and marble—all of these in large quantities. Besides, in my devotion to the temple of my God I now give my personal treasures of gold and silver for the temple of my God, over and above everything I have provided for this holy temple: three thousand talents of gold (gold of Ophir) and seven thousand talents of refined silver, for the overlaying of the walls of the buildings, for the gold work and the silver work, and for all the work to be done by the craftsmen. Now, who is willing to consecrate himself today to the LORD?”<sup>291</sup> The king’s example inspired the leaders of the people to give their own donations, so that everything was ready for the construction by the time Solomon became king.<sup>292</sup>

David had already given elaborate instructions regarding the worship service before the ark. These were now carried over to the temple. “He gave him instructions for the divisions of the priests and Levites, and for all the work of serving in the temple of the LORD, as well as for all the articles to be used in its service.”<sup>293</sup> The temple would be known as “the temple of Solomon,” but it could as well be called “David’s temple,” since David did all of the preparatory work for it. The presence of God and His worship were the overriding priorities in David’s life. That is what made him great, one of the greatest characters in the history of this world.

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<sup>286</sup> See Ex. 19:5,6.

<sup>287</sup> Luke 1:38

<sup>288</sup> See I Chron. 28:12,19.

<sup>289</sup> I Chron. 28:3

<sup>290</sup> I Chron. 28:11-13

<sup>291</sup> I Chron. 29:2-5

<sup>292</sup> See I Chron. 29:6-9.

<sup>293</sup> I Chron. 28:13

### III. David's wars and victories

In introducing Second Samuel, Chapter Eight, *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "We have in this chapter a brief summary of the wars which raised Israel from the position of a struggling and oppressed race to the possession of widespread empire. With this narrative the first history of David ends, and in the subsequent narratives many of the events referred to here are more fully detailed, and given with additional incidents."

While David made preparations for the building of a temple to house the ark, and probably prior to it, he engaged in extensive warfare within the boundaries of Canaan and beyond. There was a job to be done as part of the mandate God had given to Joshua when Israel entered the Promised Land. God had said to Joshua: "I will give you every place where you set your foot, as I promised Moses. Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates - all the Hittite country - to the Great Sea on the west."<sup>294</sup> The Book of Judges shows that, after the initial great victories Joshua won, the various tribes lost their vision and settled comfortably in their allotted parcels, allowing several of their enemies to remain. At the end of Joshua's life, none of the territory of the Philistines yet had been conquered.<sup>295</sup> In fighting his wars, David, in a sense, rekindled the spirit of Joshua and obeyed the command of the Lord to possess the land. The capture of Jerusalem, which we studied earlier, was part of that vision.<sup>296</sup>

In Second Samuel, Chapter Eight and First Chronicles, Chapter Eighteen, we find a summary of David's conquests. The wars against the Philistines, Moabites, the Syrians of Zobah and Damascus, Toi of Hamath, the Ammonites, Amalekites, and Edomites are mentioned in outline form. Some of the details of the victories are mentioned in later chapters of both books and corroborated in some of the Psalms.

The record of David's wars is not necessarily chronological. Whereas the KJV reads: "And after this it came to pass..."<sup>297</sup> the NIV simply states "In the course of time."

In subjugating the Philistines, David took Metheg Ammah. These words stand for "the bridle of the mother", which, probably, refers to the city of Gath. The record of First Chronicles states that David took the city of Gath. The words Metheg Ammah have been variously interpreted. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* states: "That town had been 'a bridle' by which the Philistines kept the people of Judah in check. David used it now as a barrier to repress that restless enemy." Some commentators believe that it means that Gath had been the main city in Philistine country that dominated the other towns. According to *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary*, Metheg Ammah is "an Arabic idiom, in which giving up one's bridle to another is equivalent to submitting to him." *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: "David's capture of his city of political asylum and the home of his first victim, Goliath, indicated to the Israelites both his ability and his nationalistic spirit."

The Philistines had been a thorn in Israel's flesh for centuries. The Book of Judges is filled with reports of oppression of Israel by the Philistines. Shamgar, one of the first judges, is reported to have killed 600 Philistines single-handedly.<sup>298</sup> The story of Samson is replete with struggles against the Philistines. He finally succumbed to their power by means of liaison with Delilah and died when he brought down the temple of Dagon upon his own head and the heads of his capturers, killing many more when he died than while he lived.<sup>299</sup> The Philistines attacked Israel numerous times during the life of Samuel and even captured the ark, which they were, eventually, forced to return.<sup>300</sup> King Saul spent much time and energy fighting them. David's conquest of the land of the Philistines subjugated them to Israel's dominion, but did not eradicate them.

*The Easton's Bible Dictionary* states: "This powerful tribe made frequent incursions against the Hebrews. There was almost perpetual war between them. They sometimes held the tribes, especially the southern tribes, in degrading servitude (Judg 15:11; 1 Sam 13:19-22); at other times they were defeated with great slaughter (1 Sam 14:1-47; 17). These hostilities did not cease till the time of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:8), when they were entirely subdued. They still, however, occupied their territory, and always showed their old hatred to Israel (Ezek. 25:15-17). They were finally conquered by the Romans."

<sup>294</sup> Josh. 1:3,4

<sup>295</sup> See Josh. 13:1-3.

<sup>296</sup> See II Sam. 5:6-10.

<sup>297</sup> II Sam. 8:1

<sup>298</sup> Judg. 3:31

<sup>299</sup> Judg. 16:30

<sup>300</sup> See I Sam. Chapters 4-6.

David's defeat of Moab is described in the Book of First Chronicles in a few terse words: "David also defeated the Moabites, and they became subject to him and brought tribute."<sup>301</sup> The record of Second Samuel adds: "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."<sup>302</sup>

These disturbing words have been variously interpreted as if David decimated the whole population, allowing only one third to live. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* interprets it to mean "that he spared the little ones but killed the adults whose height approximated the length of two cords." *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* takes a kinder view and gives King David the benefit of the doubt. We read: "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* states: "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."

The Moabites were distantly related to Israel, both being descendants of Terah. Moab was the child born from an incestuous relationship of one of Lot's daughters with her father.<sup>303</sup> After the exodus from Egypt and on its way to Canaan, Israel requested passage through the territory of Moab, which was refused.<sup>304</sup> Balak, King of Moab, also hired the prophet Balaam to curse Israel so that God would withdraw His protection from His people.<sup>305</sup> When this design backfired, Balaam suggested a plan in which Moabite girls would seduce the men of Israel into fornication and idolatry.<sup>306</sup> Because of this, God excluded the Moabites from any association with the Israelites and from the blessing of His presence. The Lord told Moses: "No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation. For they did not come to meet you with bread and water on your way when you came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in Aram Naharaim to pronounce a curse on you."<sup>307</sup>

The story of Ruth shows that God makes exceptions for those who were willing to serve Him. When Ruth said to her mother-in-law, Naomi, "your people will be my people and your God my God,"<sup>308</sup> she was not only given a place in Israel, but she became a link in the history of God's revelation and one of the ancestors of the Messiah.<sup>309</sup> So, as we have seen, David had roots in Moab, which made him decide to seek asylum for his parents while Saul was pursuing to kill him.<sup>310</sup> If it is true, what the Jewish tradition states, that David's parents were assassinated in Moab, we can understand that David had reason to take revenge upon that nation. But it is difficult to determine how severe and cruel the punishment was that David meted out to the Moabites. We would like to give David the benefit of the doubt, but the incident with Nabal, in which David fully intended to kill the man for insulting him,<sup>311</sup> indicates that there was a ruthless streak in David's character that conflicts sharply with the picture of the man after God's own heart.

The story of David's war with Zobah contains some problems that are hard to reconcile with other parts of Scripture that deal with the same conflict. The exact location of Zobah is unknown. Most Bible

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<sup>301</sup> I Chron. 18:2

<sup>302</sup> II Sam. 8:2

<sup>303</sup> Gen. 19:30-37

<sup>304</sup> See Deut. 2:26-30.

<sup>305</sup> Num. 22:2-6

<sup>306</sup> See Num. 25:1-3; 31:16

<sup>307</sup> Deut. 23:3,4

<sup>308</sup> Ruth 1:16

<sup>309</sup> See Matt. 1:5,6

<sup>310</sup> I Sam. 22:3

<sup>311</sup> I Sam. 25:34-36

scholars suppose it was part of Syria. It is also not absolutely certain whether Chapters Eight and Ten of Second Samuel deal with the same war. Chapter Eight records: "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."<sup>312</sup> In Chapter Ten we read: "David killed seven hundred of their charioteers and forty thousand of their foot soldiers." The dissimilarity in numbers can be easily explained by the primitive way of Hebrew calculation. *The Pulpit Commentary* explains: "Until the Arabs invented our present system of notation, the ancient methods of representing numbers were so liable to error that little dependence can be placed upon them. The Hebrews used their letters for numerals, but after 400 their system breaks down. Any number higher than 400 can be represented only by long sums in arithmetic, or by an intricate system of points above and below, which were sure to get into confusion."

Supposing that Chapters Eight and Ten of Second Samuel cover the same ground, we note that the conflict began with the spurning of an act of civility by David. David had been friends with Nahash, King of Ammon. When he died and his son succeeded him, David sent a delegation to present his condolences. But David's intentions were interpreted wrongly. The counselors of the new king, Hanun, suggested that the party actually came as spies. Consequently, the king treated them in the most insulting way possible; he cut off their beards and sent them home, literally half naked. We read: "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."<sup>313</sup> The record in First Chronicles states that King Hanun shaved the men.<sup>314</sup> The cutting off of only half of the beard would make them look even more ridiculous and a clean shave, just as cutting off half of their robes served to accentuate their nakedness. The intent was, obviously, to ridicule and embarrass.

In David's personal life, the episode became disastrous because it was during Joab's campaign against Ammon that David committed adultery with Bathsheba and ordered the murder of her husband, Uriah.<sup>315</sup> We read nowhere that David consulted God in this confrontation with the Ammonites, as he had done in the war with the Philistines. David felt insulted, but he did not bring the insult before the Lord. He did not realize that God was more insulted by Hanun's act than he was. We understand that David did not react kindly to such an insult; it was directed at his person and at the nation of Israel as a whole. But it appears that a fundamental change had taken place in David's attitude toward his fellowmen, his enemies, and even toward God. The famous quote of Lord Acton, which states that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely, can be applied here to David. In an earlier encounter with God's grace, David had said: "Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?"<sup>316</sup> In the confrontation with Hanun, David sends the unspoken message to the king: "Who do you think you are that you can insult me like this?" In a way, this point in the history of David's life marks the end of the theocracy, or at least the beginning of the end. David did, however, not completely lose his vision, as is evident in several of the psalms he wrote during this time in his life.

*The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "This war is very briefly referred to in ... 2 Samuel 8:12; but we have now entered upon a narrative, the interest of which is altogether unlike all that has gone before. There we saw David crowned with earthly glory, and made the monarch of a vast empire; he is also a prophet, and, as such, not only restores, but enriches and enlarges, the worship of the sanctuary; and, as prophet and king, he becomes not only the type, but the ancestor of the Messiah. In this narrative he is a sinner, punished with terrible, though merited, severity, and must henceforth walk humbly and sorrowfully as a penitent before God."

The ensuing conflict turned out to be one of the most severe engagements in all of David's warfare. *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* comments: "This war, the occasion and early success of which are described in the present chapter<sup>317</sup> and the parallel passage in 1 Chron 19, was the fiercest struggle, and, so far as the Israelitish kingdom of God was concerned, the most dangerous, that it ever had to sustain during the reign of David. The amount of distress which fell upon Israel in consequence of this war, and still more because the first successful battles with the Syrians of the south were no sooner over than the Edomites invaded the land, and went about plundering and devastating, in the hope of destroying the people of God, is shown very clearly in the two psalms which date from this period (the 44<sup>th</sup> and 60<sup>th</sup>), in

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<sup>312</sup> II Sam. 8:4

<sup>313</sup> II Sam. 10:4

<sup>314</sup> I Chron. 19:4

<sup>315</sup> See II Sam. 11:1-27.

<sup>316</sup> II Sam. 7:18,19

<sup>317</sup> II Sam. 10

which a pious Korahite and David himself pour out their lamentations before the Lord on account of the distress of their nation, and pray for His assistance; and not less clearly in Ps 68, in which David foretells the victory of the God of Israel over all the hostile powers of the world.”

The Ammonites hired 33,000 mercenaries from the surrounding nations. The record of First Chronicles adds that King Hanun paid “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 Ammonites were mustered from their towns and moved out for battle.”<sup>318</sup> The money involved in this must have been enormous, amounting to several million dollars. Obviously, Hanun was not waiting for David to attack and take revenge. He prepared himself to make the first move and attack Israel. David reacted by sending the whole army under Joab’s command. Joab realized that the battle would be hard and decisive. He understood that he was in danger of being attacked, simultaneously, from the front and the back. So, he decided to divide his army in two, placing one part under the command of his brother, Abishai, and commanding the elite troops himself.<sup>319</sup>

*The Pulpit Commentary* explains: “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 man of Israel,’ he prepares with them to give battle to the Syrians.”

Joab’s vigor first made the Aramean mercenaries take to their heels, and when the Ammonites saw their auxiliary troops gone, and all the money they had paid for them with it, they withdrew before Abishai and boarded themselves up inside their cities. Since Joab had received no mandate for a prolonged siege, he returned the army to Jerusalem. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “It seems strange to us that Joab should have made no attempt to follow up his victory. But as the Ammonites were posted close to the gate of their city, they would withdraw into it without loss as soon as they learned that their allies were defeated. There was thus the certainty of a long siege before Rabbah could be taken. We gather from ... 2 Samuel 11:1 that it was late in the year when Joab won this victory, and it was part of the weakness of ancient warfare that a long campaign was beyond the power of either side.”

Joab’s initial victory triggered a war that involved a much larger area than Syria alone. We read: “After the Arameans saw that they had been routed by Israel, they regrouped. Hadadezer had Arameans brought from beyond the River; they went to Helam, with Shobach the commander of Hadadezer’s army leading them.”<sup>320</sup> The scope of this engagement can hardly be exaggerated. The attack upon David’s kingdom can be compared to the Israeli-Arab wars in our time, particularly the first combined invasion of the Arab nations into the newly proclaimed state of Israel in 1948.

David realized the gravity of the situation and mobilized the whole nation, personally taking charge of the operations. The result of this battle was an overwhelming victory for David, which widened the span of his influence from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates. Thus the vision the Lord had given to Joshua was realized. God had told Joshua: “Your territory will extend from the desert to Lebanon, and from the great river, the Euphrates - all the Hittite country - to the Great Sea on the west.”<sup>321</sup>

This may be a good point in our study to have a closer look at David’s army and the men who comprised it.

The commander-in-chief of David’s army was Joab. He was David’s nephew, the son of his sister Zeruah. He is first mentioned as commander of a group of men who engaged in a suicidal duel with some men of Abner’s army, in which twelve on each side were killed. At that time he must have been in charge of David’s bodyguard.<sup>322</sup> In the ensuing skirmish, Abner killed Joab’s brother, Asahel, who pursued him with the intent to kill. Partly as an act of personal revenge for the death of his brother, but also for the sake

<sup>318</sup> I Chron. 19:6,7

<sup>319</sup> See II Sam. 10:9,10.

<sup>320</sup> II Sam. 10:15,16

<sup>321</sup> Josh. 1:4

<sup>322</sup> See II Sam. 2:13-16.

of David's throne, Joab took it upon himself to assassinate Abner in a most treacherous way. Joab, evidently, could not believe that Abner had come to see David in order to bring all of Israel under his rule. He may also have been afraid that, if Abner succeeded in bringing the dissenting tribes over to David, he would become David's general and replace Joab.<sup>323</sup> Joab distinguished himself in the siege of Jerusalem and thus became David's commander in chief.<sup>324</sup>

David should have rid himself of Joab at this point, but he did not. He merely reprimanded Joab and pronounced a curse upon him and his family. We read: "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. 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.'"<sup>325</sup> David, probably, feared that he would lose the support of the army if he had Joab executed for this crime. This, he felt, he could not afford at this point in his life. Being the outstanding soldier he was, Joab, evidently, enjoyed the fierce loyalty of his men. David's failure to act decisively caused him to be stuck with Joab for the rest of his reign. He could not live with him and could not live without him.

Later in his life, after the death of Absalom, David made a rather desperate effort to replace Joab with Amasa, another of his cousins. Amasa showed himself to be inferior to Joab in his handling of the king's affairs. He also had been on Absalom's side in the latter's uprising against his father. Joab killed him in cold blood in the same way he had assassinated Abner. We read: "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. Joab said to Amasa, 'How are you, my brother?' Then Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. 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."<sup>326</sup> Since, immediately following his crime, Joab decisively won the victory for David, the king, again, found himself unable to get rid of Joab.

One matter in David's relationship with Joab that caused him to remain caught in Joab's web of crime and loyalty was that he involved Joab in his own sin with Bathsheba when he ordered Joab to have Uriah killed in battle.<sup>327</sup>

Joab possessed a brilliant mind and in some instances Joab's judgment was superior to David's. Joab correctly judged David's complicated emotions regarding Absalom, whom he had banished from his presence because of the murder of his half brother, Amnon, who had raped Absalom's sister.<sup>328</sup> Joab invented an elaborate plot in which a woman from Tekoa came to David to plead the cause of her imaginary son, who, supposedly, had killed his, also imaginary, brother and thus forfeited his own life. David recognized the hand of Joab in this charade and consented to have Absalom returned to Jerusalem, but without the privilege of coming in his presence. By setting Joab's field afire, Absalom forced Joab to ask for an audience with his father, which was then granted. Absalom's high-handed methods, probably, did not ingratiate him with Joab.

Joab also understood that David would not survive Absalom's rebellion against his father as long as he stayed alive. So, even though Joab defeated Absalom and his army, Joab made sure Absalom would not survive and he killed him with his own hands.<sup>329</sup>

Joab opposed David in the matter of the census. In that, he also had a better grasp of the principles of a theocracy than the king himself. He understood the danger to which David's impure motives for the survey would expose the people of Israel. He did, eventually, carry out David's orders, although half-heartedly and incompletely.<sup>330</sup>

What, finally, sealed Joab's downfall was his support of Adonijah as pretender to the throne of David.<sup>331</sup> It gave to Solomon a "legal" excuse to have him executed. It was not until David was on his

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<sup>323</sup> II Sam. 3:24-27

<sup>324</sup> See I Chron. 11:6.

<sup>325</sup> II Sam. 3:28,29

<sup>326</sup> II Sam. 20:8-10

<sup>327</sup> See II Sam. 11:14-25

<sup>328</sup> II Sam. 13:1-29

<sup>329</sup> II Sam. 18:9-15

<sup>330</sup> II Sam. 24:1-9; I Chron. 21:1-6

<sup>331</sup> I Kings 1:7,19,41

deathbed that he delegated to Solomon the duty to punish Joab for his crimes. We read that David gave this charge to his son: “Now you yourself know what Joab son of Zeruiah did to me—what he did to the two commanders of Israel’s armies, Abner son of Ner and Amasa son of Jether. He killed them, shedding their blood in peacetime as if in battle, and with that blood stained the belt around his waist and the sandals on his feet. Deal with him according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to the grave in peace.”<sup>332</sup> Joab died while holding the horns of the altar.<sup>333</sup>

*The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* sums up Joab’s character as follows: “That he was a most able general, there is no doubt. He was, however, very jealous of his position, and this accounts for Amasa’s murder, if not partially for that of Abner too: if he was afraid that Abner would supplant him, that fear may be held to be justified, for Amasa, who had not been too loyal to David did take Joab’s place for a time. But blood revenge for Asahel’s death was perhaps the chief cause. Yet even when judged in the light of those rough times, and in the light of eastern life, the murder of Abner was a foul, treacherous deed. Joab’s unswerving loyalty to David leads one to believe that no disloyalty was meant by his support of Adonijah, who was really the rightful heir to the throne. But their plans were defeated by those of the harem, and Joab had to pay the price with his life. He was a great man, great in military prowess and also in personal revenge, in his loyalty to the king as well as in his stern rebuke of his royal master. He was the greatest of David’s generals, and the latter’s success and glory owed much to this noblest of that noble trio whom Zeruiah bore.”

The Books of Second Samuel and First Chronicles give us a long list of heroes in David’s army, most of whom date back to the time when David was fleeing from Saul.<sup>334</sup> The list reveals the outstanding quality of the band that surrounded David during his years of exile and later formed the core of his army. A cursory glance at both lists gives evidence of inconsistencies and probable copying mistakes that have puzzled Bible scholars for centuries.

*The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “Those admitted to the list were evidently the outlaws who had been with David in his wanderings and at Ziklag. They now received their reward, and became, moreover, the stay of David’s throne. It is their past history which accounts for the strange composition of the list. A large number came from Judah, and especially from Bethlehem. Several are David’s own relatives. Seven towns or families furnish sixteen out of the whole list. We find a father and his son, and pairs of brothers. There are, moreover, numerous foreigners — Hittites, Ammonites, Moabites, a Syrian from Zobah, and Gideonites, descended from the aboriginal inhabitants of the land. Such a list would have been sorely resented had it not been formed out of men who had earned it by their past services and their fidelity to David.”

The first names mentioned are those who gave strong support to David at the moment of his ascension to the throne of Israel. The list seems to be divided in groups of three or multiples of three. The first group consists of Josheb-Basshebeth, a Tahkemomite, or Jashobeam, a Hacmonite, Eleazar son of Dodai the Ahohite, and Shammah son of Agee the Hararite. The latter is omitted in the list of Second Samuel.

*The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* comments on this list: “The *gibborim*, or heroes, numbered 600 and were divided into bands of 200 each and subdivided into smaller bands of 20 each, with a captain for each company large and small. Jashobeam had command of the first of the three bands of 200.” His name is variously given as Jashobeam, Josheb-Basshebeth, or, as in the Septuagint, Ishbaal. The NIV calls him “chief of the three”; the KJV reads “chief among the captains.” The Hebrew word *shaliysh* literally means “triple.” It has a wide meaning and it is used sometimes for a musical instrument, a triangle, or a high-ranking army officer.

Jashobeam is credited with the killing of 800 enemies, or 300 in the record of First Chronicles. Bible scholars have voiced different opinions about the discrepancy of the two numbers. *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* explains: “This is not to be understood as signifying that he killed eight hundred men at one blow, but that in a battle he threw his spear again and again at the foe, until eight hundred men had been slain. The Chronicles give three hundred instead of eight hundred; and as that number occurs again in v. 18, in the case of Abishai, it probably found its way from that verse into this in the book of Chronicles.” Some commentators believe that Jashobeam killed 300 men and that the remaining 500 fled. Others suggest that 800 were killed but not single-handedly by Jashobeam; since he is called “captain” the

<sup>332</sup> I Kings 2:5,6

<sup>333</sup> I Kings 2:28-34

<sup>334</sup> See II Sam. 23:8-39; I Chron. 11:10-47.

number may refer to the victims he and his men slaughtered. The record does not state who was the enemy that Jashobeam defeated in such a decisive manner, but since the next hero, Eleazar, distinguished himself in a battle against Philistines, the same enemy is probably present here.

Eleazar, mentioned as the second hero, stood his ground in the war against the Philistines, while the rest of David's army fled. Some commentators believe that the place where this occurred is where David earlier killed Goliath. Eleazar persisted in wielding his sword till it became fused to his hand. Eleazar's heroic feat brought those who had fled back to regroup, but by that time the battle had already been won.

Shammah's heroic defense of a field of lentils, or as First Chronicles states, a field full of barley, was similar to that of Eleazar's. Some scholars go as far as to suggest that the place was the same and that Shammah took over when Eleazar collapsed from exhaustion.

Opinions differ as to whether Jashobeam was among the three men that broke through the Philistine lines in order to fulfill David's desire for a drink of water from the well at the Bethlehem gate.<sup>335</sup>

*The Matthew Henry's Commentary* comments on David's act: "Among all the great exploits of David's mighty men, here is nothing great mentioned concerning David himself but his pouring out water before the Lord which he had longed for, v. 18, 19. Four very honorable dispositions of David appeared in that action, which, for aught I know, made it as great as any of the achievements of those worthies.

1. Repentance for his own weakness. It is really an honor to a man, when he is made sensible that he has said or done any thing unadvisedly, to unsay it and undo it again by repentance, as it is a shame to a man when he has said or done amiss to stand to it.

2. Denial of his own appetite. He longed for the water of the well of Bethlehem; but, when he had it, he would not drink it, because he would not so far humor himself and gratify a foolish fancy. He that has such a rule as this over his own spirit is better than the mighty. It is an honor to a man to have the command of himself; but he that will command himself must sometimes cross himself.

3. Devotion towards God. That water which he thought too good, too precious, for his own drinking, he poured out to the Lord for a drink offering. If we have any thing better than another, let God be honored with it, who is the best, and should have the best.

4. Tenderness of his servants. It put him into the greatest confusion imaginable to think that three brave men should hazard their lives to fetch water for him. In his account it turns the water into blood. It is the honor of great men not to be prodigal of the blood of those they employ, but in all the commands they give them, to put their own souls into their souls' stead."

The next person mentioned is Abishai, another of David's nephews. He was the brother of Joab and Asahel. He became the leader of the second group of heroes. He occurs frequently throughout the story of David's life. *The Fausset's Bible Dictionary* comments on Abishai: "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'<sup>336</sup>... 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.'<sup>337</sup>

Abishai, together with Joab, pursued Abner after the latter had killed their brother Asahel<sup>338</sup> and he may have been involved in Abner's assassination, although that is not clear since the text that states this may be spurious.<sup>339</sup> Abishai commanded the second army in the war against the Ammonites.<sup>340</sup> And, according to the record in First Chronicles, he is credited with the victory over the Edomites in the Valley of Salt, although elsewhere that feat is ascribed to David.<sup>341</sup> In the list of heroes in First Chronicles is stated: "He raised his spear against three hundred men, whom he killed, and so he became as famous as the three."<sup>342</sup> The when and where of this feat is not stated elsewhere.

<sup>335</sup> See I Chron. 11:15-19.

<sup>336</sup> I Sam. 26:8

<sup>337</sup> II Sam. 16:9

<sup>338</sup> II Sam. 2:24

<sup>339</sup> See II Sam. 3:30.

<sup>340</sup> II Sam. 10:9,10

<sup>341</sup> Compare I Chron. 18:12 with II Sam. 8:13.

<sup>342</sup> I Chron. 11:20

The statement that “he became as famous as the three” has caused various kinds of problems of interpretation. The Hebrew does not clarify which “three” are meant. The following clause “He was doubly honored above the three and became their commander, even though he was not included among them”<sup>343</sup> only adds to the confusion. TLB circumvents the problem with the paraphrase: “Abishai, Joab’s brother, was commander of The Thirty. He had gained his place among The Thirty by killing 300 men at one time with his spear. He was the chief and the most famous of The Thirty, but he was not as great as The Three.”

The next hero is Benaiah, the son of Jehoiada, of whom we read that he was over the Kerethites and Pelethites.” These Kerethites and Pelethites may have been foreign mercenaries who served as David’s bodyguard. Some Bible scholars believe that they were Philistines; others think that they originated from the island of Crete.

*Nelson’s Illustrated Bible Dictionary* states: “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.”<sup>344</sup> The Hebrew word used to describe the Moabite warriors is *‘ariy`el*, which means literally “lion of God.” According to the Hebrew Targum, Benaiah was a very righteous man, who scrupulously adhered to the Levitical law. Solomon used him later as his chief executioner, putting to death Adonijah and Joab,<sup>345</sup> and made him commander-in-chief of the army in the place of Joab. Under David’s administration he became captain of the host for the third month.<sup>346</sup>

Both in Second Samuel and First Chronicles, these individual exploits are followed by a list of thirty, thirty-one, or thirty-seven people who distinguished themselves in one way or another in David’s army.<sup>347</sup> *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* explains the confusion about the numbers in the list: “There are 31 men mentioned in the list, including Asahel; and these added to the two superior orders, make 37. Two of them, we know, were already dead—namely, Asahel and Uriah; and if the dead, at the drawing up of the list, amounted to seven, then we might suppose a legion of honor consisting of the definite number 30, and in which the vacancies, when they occurred, were replaced by fresh appointments.”

*The Pulpit Commentary* comments on this list: “This order of knighthood consisted originally of thirty-three men, of whom three were of higher rank, and presided, probably, each over ten, while Joab was chief over them all. This arrangement of men in tens, with an officer over them was, in fact, the normal rule among the Hebrews. The second triad is unusual, but is explained by the history. In honor of the exploit of bringing the water from the well of Bethlehem, this second order of three was instituted, lower than the three chiefs, but higher than the rest. The third of these is not mentioned, and the disappearance of the name is not the result of accident, but of purpose. Had it been a scribe’s error, there would have been some trace of it in the versions. But if the name was erased, it must have been blotted out for treason, and we thus have two candidates for the vacant niche: one is Amasa, and the other Ahithophel. The name of Joab we cannot for one moment admit. He never was a traitor to David, nor would the latter, though king, have ventured to degrade one so powerful, and who continued to be commander-in-chief until David’s death. Now, if Amasa is the same as the Amasai in ... 1 Chronicles 12:18, who was chief of the captains who came from Judah and Benjamin to David when he was in the hold, it is difficult to account for the absence of his name from the list of the thirty. Plainly, however, David did not regard his treason with strong displeasure, but was prepared, after Absalom’s death, to make him commander-in-chief. But we must remember that a place in this second triad was gained by one exploit. The three were those who broke through the Philistine host, and fetched the water from Bethlehem. Such a deed would account for the close attachment between David and Ahithophel. He was the king’s companion, and his familiar friend. It would account also for his suicide. His love to David had, for some unknown reason, turned to bitter hatred. He sought, not only David’s life, but his dishonor. His feelings must have been highly excited before he could have worked himself up to such a pitch; and the reaction and disappointment would be equally extreme. He never could have faced David again, remembering the warmth of former love, and the shamelessness with which he had sought, not only his life, but to bring upon him public shame and ignominy. And his name would have been totally erased, and gone down into silence. Of Ahithophel’s personal accomplishments as a brave warrior, we cannot doubt (see ... 2 Samuel 17:1), and his son Eliam was one of the mightiest.”

<sup>343</sup> I Chron. 11:21

<sup>344</sup> See II Sam. 23:20-22; I Chron. 11:22-24.

<sup>345</sup> See I Kings 2:25,34,35.

<sup>346</sup> I Chron. 27:5

<sup>347</sup> See II Sam. 23:24-39; I Chron. 11:26-47.

The bitterness of Ahithophel toward David can be easily explained when one remembers that he was the grandfather of Bathsheba, the daughter of his son Eliam.<sup>348</sup>

The list does not provide us with any further details of exploits these men endeavored and, as such, it is of little importance in our study. The various discrepancies between the two versions of the list make it a rich terrain for textual criticism, which is beyond our scope. We do realize, however, that David had surrounded himself with a band of heroes who formed an elite group of the highest quality, men willing to give their lives for their leader at any moment. The fact that David inspired such loyalty speaks highly of his own character and behavior.

*The Matthew Henry's Commentary* observes that the list serves "To show how much religion contributes to the inspiring of men with true courage. David, both by his psalms and by his offerings for the service of the temple, greatly promoted piety among the grandees of the kingdom (1 Chron 29:6), and, when they became famous for piety, they became famous for bravery." *The Commentary* concludes with the statement: "Christ, the Son of David, has his worthies too, who like David's, are influenced by his example, fight his battles against the spiritual enemies of his kingdom, and in his strength are more than conquerors. Christ's apostles were his immediate attendants, did and suffered great things for him, and at length came to reign with him. They are mentioned with honor in the New Testament, as these in the Old, especially, Rev 21:14. Nay, all the good soldiers of Jesus Christ have their names better preserved than even these worthies have; for they are written in heaven. This honor have all his saints."

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<sup>348</sup> See II Sam. 11:3; 23:34.

#### IV. David's Failures

As we noticed above, David's war against the Ammonites marks a watershed in his life. In a way, it was the beginning of the end of the theocracy. Up to that point, David considered himself to be a king by the grace of God, who reigned as His representative on earth. From that time on, David began behaving as if the power that had been given to him was his own.

In Second Samuel, Chapter Ten, we read that Joab and Abishai defeated the army of Ammon as well as the Aramean mercenaries they had hired. David had personally participated in the final phase of that campaign. The Ammonites, however, managed to withdraw into their cities and board themselves up for the winter, at which point the Israelite army returned to Jerusalem. The goal of that campaign, which was a punitive action upon Ammon for the insult heaped upon David's ambassadors, had not been achieved.<sup>349</sup>

When spring came around the next year, the campaign was resumed with the siege of Rabbah, in which David did not partake. We are not told how long this siege lasted, but the intervening episode in which David committed his adulterous crime with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband, Uriah, indicates that it must have lasted at least nine months, maybe as long as one year. When Joab conquered the city's citadel and secured the water supply, the city was doomed. Joab sent word to David to come and finish the conquest so that he would receive the credit. We read in Second Samuel: "Meanwhile Joab fought against Rabbah of the Ammonites and captured the royal citadel. Joab then sent messengers to David, saying, 'I have fought against Rabbah and taken its water supply. 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.' So David mustered the entire army and went to Rabbah, and attacked and captured it. 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 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."<sup>350</sup>

David's moral failure in the interim period made the glory Joab bestowed upon him quite meaningless. How miserable David must have felt inside when he took the crown from the head of Ammon's king and placed it on his own head!

David's sin with Bathsheba is the ultimate blotch on his character. This dastardly act, followed by the even greater crime of murder committed to cover the sin, disqualified him categorically as "a man after God's own heart." There are many mountain peaks of glorious achievements in David's life; all seem to be offset by this abyss of evil.

As far as sexual behavior and married life is concerned, David does not compare favorably with his predecessor Saul. As far as we know, Saul was monogamous, although, as he became established as king, he may have acquired some concubines. This may be concluded from God's rebuke to David by mouth of Nathan: "I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms."<sup>351</sup> It is difficult to ascertain how many wives and concubines David ultimately married, but there are indications that sexual restraint was not one of the king's qualities.

It happened in the spring, while Joab was commanding the army in the siege of the Ammonite capital Rabbah. The time of the day, "one evening," and the mention that David got up from his bed may paint the wrong picture to the western mind. The evening was probably the afternoon, since, in the Jewish time reckoning, the evening begins at 3:00 PM. David's getting up from his bed marked the end of his siesta. Matthew Henry, in his *Commentary*, chides David for this lazy indulgence. This worthy scholar judged David in terms of the cool climate of England, and he frowned upon siestas. *The Commentary* states: "There he had dozed away the afternoon in idleness, which he should have spent in some exercise for his own improvement or the good of others. He used to pray, not only morning and evening, but at noon, in the day of his trouble: it is to be feared he had, this noon, omitted to do so. Idleness gives great advantage to the tempter. Standing waters gather filth. The bed of sloth often proves the bed of lust." In the hot climate of Palestine, however, taking a nap between one and three in the afternoon is considered an act of wisdom. And relaxing on the roof of a house, which would be an even more incredible act in Matthew Henry's Great Britain, was a common practice.

<sup>349</sup> See II Sam. 10:1-4.

<sup>350</sup> II Sam. 12:26-31; I Chron. 20:1-3

<sup>351</sup> II Sam. 12:8

It was not David's siesta on the roof that was the beginning of his trouble, but his looking down upon his neighbor's property. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "We are told that it is regarded in the East as improper for one neighbor to look over the battlement of his house into the inner court of the next dwelling .... 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." This indiscretion proves that David considered himself to be above the law of common decency. Originally, sin entered the world through the human eye. We read about Eve's temptation: "When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it."<sup>352</sup> David had not adopted Job's resolve, who had said: "I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl."<sup>353</sup>

Where was God in David's life at this time? Where were the days when David wrote: "I have set the LORD always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken?"<sup>354</sup> Something had changed in his relationship with the Lord. Such changes usually come gradually. David was not one day a spiritual giant and the next an adulterer. The amazement over the blessing God had poured out upon him had long disappeared. The absolute power of the monarchy had deafened his ear to the whisper of the Holy Spirit. The Word of God had disappeared from his life. If David, at this point, had given a greater place to the Word of God in his life, he would have saved himself from the abyss in which he was about to fall. He may have written these words himself: "I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you,"<sup>355</sup> but he did not practice them at this moment.

We do not know if David had followed God's instructions regarding what the king of Israel must do with the law. Moses had stated: "When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees and not consider himself better than his brothers and turn from the law to the right or to the left."<sup>356</sup> If he had obeyed, he would also have followed the advice: "He must not take many wives, or his heart will be led astray."<sup>357</sup>

Not being used to controlling his lust, David acted upon his impulse and gave in to the desire to have sex with the beautiful woman he saw in his neighbor's courtyard. His army was about to capture a city, but the citadel at home was about to fall to another enemy. The words David's son would later pen would condemn him: "Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city."<sup>358</sup> This lack of self-control would cost David his honor, his family, and almost his life and crown.

David's sin was, obviously, the sin of carnality. It is safe to say, however, that Satan played a role in David's behavior. All sin originates with the devil. This is not to say that David was not responsible for his acts. If David's sexual desire became too strong for him, it was because he allowed himself to be overcome by it. David was not an unwilling victim in this case. He may not have recognized the enemy, but that did not keep him from making a pact with him. David, evidently, shared his palace with seven demons that caused his family to break up, in sons who followed their father's decadent role model. David never showed Ammon or Absalom what self-control was.

Much has been argued and written about Bathsheba's responsibility in the affair. In view of the above-mentioned unwritten code that safeguarded people in their own courtyard from peeping eyes, her bathing outside can hardly be considered immodest. The reason for Bathsheba's bathing outside was, most likely, that this was the only option open to her after her monthly period; Jewish houses in Palestine had no indoor plumbing. Her period had probably ended the week before, since the Levitical law considered her impure for a period of seven days after cessation. The law did not specify a requirement for ritual cleaning at that time, but that seems to be implied.<sup>359</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> Gen. 3:6

<sup>353</sup> Job 31:1

<sup>354</sup> Ps. 16:8

<sup>355</sup> Ps. 119:11

<sup>356</sup> Deut. 17:18-20

<sup>357</sup> Deut. 17:17

<sup>358</sup> Prov. 16:32

<sup>359</sup> See Lev. 15:19-23.

We do not read that Bathsheba was forced to appear before David, nor that she protested his advances. But the very fact that David was the king made his word virtually law and Bathsheba the victim. It is true that, according to the law, she and David both forfeited their lives,<sup>360</sup> but the burden of guilt in the affair clearly rested on David. He knew that she was a married woman and that she was the wife of Uriah, the Hittite. The Hittites were among the original inhabitants of Canaan who managed to survive the Israelite conquest.

We do not read that David repeated his adulterous act with Bathsheba. The two may have only met once and David may have forgotten his beautiful neighbor. Until, in informing David about her pregnancy, Bathsheba implicated David in the affair. Had she kept silent, her husband could have demanded her execution; now she appealed to David, whose life was relatively safe, since he was the king and the judge in the matter.

David sent word to Joab to send Uriah home. Uriah's name appears in the list of David's heroes.<sup>361</sup> His plan was to have Uriah come and sleep with his wife, which would give the impression that he was the father of the child to be born. The audience given to Uriah is one of the most deceitful in the records of any monarchy. Had David wanted to know how the campaign was going and how the army was doing, he would not have sent for anyone by name. His request to send Uriah must have aroused some suspicion. Even if Uriah was, initially, not apprehensive, David's overly gracious treatment of him must have aroused some misgiving. The euphemistic words: "Go down to your house and wash your feet," followed by a personal gift, must have raised in his mind the question of what the king wanted to achieve. We may also assume that the palace servants knew what had happened. The fact that David had sent for his neighbor's wife and that messages had been passed between the two cannot have remained hidden. As Uriah spent the night in the service quarters of the palace, he must have acquired some inside information, which made him resolve not to go home and see his wife.

The conversation between David and Uriah the next day was even more embarrassing and condemning for the king. We read: "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!'"<sup>362</sup>

The reference to the ark being in a tent seems confusing. The consensus of Bible scholars is that the ark traveled along with the army during the battle as it did in one known instance in a war with the Philistines, at which occasion it was captured.<sup>363</sup> *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "The presence of the ark with the army in the field is puzzling, and shows us how little we know of the religious practices of the Jews, as, but for this chance mention of it, we should have affirmed that it was never taken out of its place in Zion, and that in previous times the conduct of Eli's sons in carrying it out of the sanctuary to war was an irregular act. The Jews themselves feel the difficulty, and some of their rabbis affirm that this was not the ark of the covenant, but a chest containing the ephod whereby inquiries were made of Jehovah."

Uriah does not say, however, that the ark was traveling with the army. His statement that the ark was staying in a tent was identical to David's own observation in his conversation with the prophet Nathan: "Here I am, living in a palace of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent."<sup>364</sup> It is rather interesting that David's sentiment was shared by other members of the nation; even more so that this "foreigner" felt this way.

Even more startling are the words "Israel and Judah are staying in tents." This sweeping statement can hardly be taken literally. Most Israelites lived in houses at that time; Uriah certainly did. The words may have had a philosophical overtone, referring to the transience of life.

The last part of Uriah's answer, "My master Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open fields" shows the spirit of fraternity and camaraderie that was prevalent among David's men. It was also the final indictment of David's ease and leisure during this campaign. In saying this Uriah sealed his own doom. David made one last effort to entice this hero to spend a night at home by making him drunk. But Uriah's integrity proved to be stronger than his intoxication and he spent that second night also in the servants' quarters of the palace. So, the king condemned him to death.

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<sup>360</sup> See Lev. 20:10.

<sup>361</sup> See II Sam. 23:36

<sup>362</sup> II Sam. 11:11

<sup>363</sup> See I Sam. 4:1-11.

<sup>364</sup> II Sam. 7:2

The way David went about having Uriah executed shows how deeply he had fallen. Sending Joab a letter that demanded Uriah's death and having it carried by the victim himself shows a sadistic side to David's character that surfaces nowhere else in his life. David, probably, felt gleeful about his own treachery and the way he took revenge upon an honest man who frustrated his efforts to keep his sin covered. The story also shows Joab's callousness in participating in the murder of a hero he must have appreciated and loved. Joab carried out the king's instructions without asking any questions, thus adding to his own condemnation.

The report of the siege Joab sent back to David indicates that not only Uriah died, but some others were sacrificed with him. We read: "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. 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.'"<sup>365</sup>

Incidentally, there is in Joab's oral instructions to the courier an interesting detail that shows how the study of historical battles was practiced in the preparation of campaigns and sieges. The reference is to the death of Gideon's son, Abimelech, who was killed during the siege of Thebez. We read in the Book of Judges: "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>366</sup> The reference served to clear Joab of any charge that he had acted irresponsibly in terms of military strategy. In this, Joab sent an indirect message to the king, stating that he was not to be blamed for unsound strategy, but that he had to do this in order to rid the king of Uriah. The strange message must have raised all kinds of questions in the mind of the courier and of all who heard about it. It also served Joab to get a firmer grip on the king, which might be useful in future development. Joab, obviously, was a match for David's shrewdness. Henceforth, it would be impossible for David ever to fire his general.

The message David sent back to Joab drips with hypocrisy. We read: "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.'"<sup>367</sup> As if Joab needed encouragement!

*The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments on the exchange of messages: "The report needs no comment. It is sufficient to say that it was worthy of the quarter from which it came; and in possessing so terrible a secret as the premeditated murder of Uriah, the wily Joab perceived his advantage, not only for an understanding on account of any military errors he might have committed, but for all other delinquencies."

Most commentators are harsh in their judgment of Bathsheba and her mourning her husband's death. Since we do not know how willing or unwilling she was in the affair David had forced her into, it is better to refrain from voicing an opinion. It is not known how long widows in Israel traditionally mourned the death of their spouses; some Bible scholars believe it was no longer than seven days. If the mourning period was that brief, David's marriage to her can be seen as another effort to cover up the crime. The child that was born could appear to have been conceived after his marriage.

The chapter ends with the statement: "But the thing David had done displeased the LORD."<sup>368</sup> These words sound like a formidable understatement. The Hebrew word translated "displeased" is *`ayin*, which literally means, "eye." The word seems strange in this context. There is a suggestion that David's behavior affected God's eye, in other words that it made Him weep. A New Testament equivalent can be found in Paul's exhortation: "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption."<sup>369</sup>

God left David in his quagmire for almost nine months until shortly after the birth of Bathsheba's son. Some Bible scholars think that it was during this period that Ammon raped his half sister Tamar. It is more likely, however, that the breaking apart of David's family occurred after the prophet Nathan had announced God's punishment.

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<sup>365</sup> II Sam. 11:23,24

<sup>366</sup> Judges 9:50-53

<sup>367</sup> II Sam. 11:25

<sup>368</sup> II Sam. 11:27

<sup>369</sup> Eph. 4:30

David did not summon Nathan to the palace; God sent Nathan to the king to evoke a confession of sin. Nathan may have made frequent visits in the past in which he brought to David's attention wrongs that had been committed by the king's subject and that needed to be dealt with. David may not have had any suspicion that what the prophet told him was not a complaint but a tale.

Nathan's way of driving home to David the gravity of his sin by using a parable seems strange to us. To our Western mind, David was guilty of adultery and murder. The guilt of the rich man in the parable was theft based on a misuse of power. Having worked as missionaries among tribes' people in Papua, Indonesia, we encountered the same, to us strange, phenomenon that adultery was considered as a form of stealing. The underlying philosophy is that, since a man paid a hefty bride price for his wife, the use of her by another man infringes on his property. God considered that in raping Bathsheba, and later in marrying her, David sinned primarily against Uriah.

*The Matthew Henry's Commentary* reflects on David's sin: "Marriage is a remedy against fornication, but marrying many is not; for, when once the law of unity is transgressed, the indulged lust will hardly stint itself. Uriah, like the poor man, had only one wife, who was to him as his own soul, and always lay in his bosom, for he had no other, he desired no other, to lie there. The traveler or wayfaring man was, as bishop Patrick explains it from the Jewish writers, the evil imagination, disposition, or desire, which came into David's heart, which he might have satisfied with some of his own, yet nothing would serve but Uriah's darling. They observe that this evil disposition is called a traveler, for in the beginning it is only so, but, in time, it becomes a guest, and, in conclusion, is master of the house. For he that is called a traveler in the beginning of the verse is called a man (*ish*-a husband) in the close of it. Yet some observe that in David's breast lust was but as a wayfaring man that tarries only for a night; it did not constantly dwell and rule there."

An interesting sideline in Nathan's story is that, obviously, the Israelites kept pets. But this point has no importance in our study.

David was quick to see the guilt of the rich man in the story and slow to recognize his own. In his rash exclamation, in which he invoked the name of the Lord, he signed his own verdict. We read: "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!'"<sup>370</sup>

The Bible does not reveal whether, in the period between Uriah's murder and David's confession, the king suffered any inner turmoil. *The Pulpit Commentary* believes he did and observes: "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." Not everyone agrees with this allegorizing of the traveler, as *Matthew Henry* and some other commentators have.

The punishment David meted out to the man in the parable, that he must repay the poor man four times for stealing his lamb is based upon the Mosaic law, which states: "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>371</sup> The law did not demand the death penalty for this kind of crime; David added this because of his indignation and thus sealed his own doom.

We can hardly overstate the tension of the moment when Nathan pointed his finger at the king who was seething with rage over an imaginary rich man's greed and thundered: "You are the man!"<sup>372</sup> The prophet could have forfeited his own life at that moment. It would have been quite possible for the sparks of David's anger to fall upon Nathan and for him to order his immediate execution. But the defenses David had built up so carefully for almost a year crumbled before the Word of God, and his conscience snapped, allowing the floodgates of repentance to burst open.

<sup>370</sup> II Sam. 12:5

<sup>371</sup> Ex. 22:1

<sup>372</sup> II Sam. 12:7

God's indictment of David begins with a short overview of his life as a refugee, during which time God saved him over and over again. David had, in earlier days, responded appropriately to the incongruence of being the anointed king and having to flee for his life. And when he was established as king, David had said to God: "Who am I, O Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?"<sup>373</sup>

The words, "I gave your master's house to you, and your master's wives into your arms" probably mean that David could have acquired possession of Saul's property, lock, stock, and barrel. *The Keil & Delitzsch Commentary* comments on this: "These words refer to the fact that, according to the general custom in the East, when a king died, his successor upon the throne also succeeded to his harem, so that David was at liberty to take his predecessor's wives; though we cannot infer from this that he actually did so: in fact this is by no means probable, since, according to 1 Sam 14:50, Saul had but one wife, and according to 2 Sam 3:7 only one concubine, whom Abner appropriated to himself."

God's implied condoning of polygamy is puzzling for us, especially in the light of the New Testament condemnation of the practice. Paul's requirement, which we assume, was God's prerequisite, was that the elders and deacons of the church would model marriage to the members by being monogamous.<sup>374</sup> We believe that Jesus' words regarding the law allowing for divorce could also apply to polygamy. He said to those who brought up the first subject: "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning."<sup>375</sup> Obviously, God did not have polygamy in mind when He created Adam and Eve. Our revulsion to polygamy is rightfully based on New Testament revelation, but we are forced to modify our criticism of Old Testament conditions that belong to another dispensation.

God had given to David everything he could have wished for. The shepherd boy had become a wealthy king. David, instead of remaining humbly grateful, had come to the point where he considered himself the rightful heir to all, one who could take whatever he wanted. He had lost the most important perspective in life, which is that whatever we receive in life—except the Holy Spirit—, we have on loan from God. We are accountable for the blessings we receive. As Christians we have reason to remember this even more. We must never forget how much it has cost God to bless us. Paul's penetrating question, "He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?"<sup>376</sup> ought to keep us prayerfully aware of the need to be trustworthy administrators of God's grace.<sup>377</sup>

The heaviest weight of God's wrath fell upon David, not primarily because of his adultery—although that was not excluded—but because of his efforts to cover up his sin with murder and by his marriage to Bathsheba. It seems to be the general principle that the cover up causes more difficulties than the act of sin we commit. *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* correctly observes that David did not murder Uriah with the sword but with the pen, which amounts to the same. A Dutch poet once exclaimed that the sharp point of a pen was the deadliest weapon known to man.

Nathan announces a two-fold punishment upon David and his family: There will be murder among his children and rape of his wives or concubines. The first was realized in the death of Amnon,<sup>378</sup> Absalom,<sup>379</sup> and Adonijah,<sup>380</sup> the second in Absalom's abuse of his father's concubines.<sup>381</sup>

We see in this the terrible consequences of sin. No one ever sins alone. The ripple effect of sin goes way beyond the time and place of the act. In committing adultery, David opened the door for Satan to enter his life, his palace and his kingdom. In meting out punishment to David, God allowed this door to stay open. It is obvious that the murders committed and the disgusting acts of Absalom were contrary to God's will and character. They were the immediate effect of the presence of God's enemy in David's court. Satan would have claimed David's life, had he not immediately broken down and confessed his sin before God. But even this confession could not stem the flood of punishment and disaster.

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<sup>373</sup> II Sam. 7:18

<sup>374</sup> See I Tim. 3:2,12; Titus 1:6.

<sup>375</sup> Matt. 19:8

<sup>376</sup> Rom. 8:32

<sup>377</sup> See I Cor. 4:1,2.

<sup>378</sup> See II Sam. 13:28,29.

<sup>379</sup> See II Sam. 18:14,15.

<sup>380</sup> See II Kings 2:24,25.

<sup>381</sup> See II Sam. 16:20-22.

The question has been asked whether David's spontaneous confession constituted an act of complete repentance or whether it was the beginning of it. *Adam Clarke's Commentary* is of the opinion that David's sin was not yet forgiven at this time. He bases this upon the statement made in Psalm Fifty-one, "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me."<sup>382</sup> We must, however, not confuse God's pardon with man's assurance of being forgiven. There is a difference between God forgiving us and our forgiving ourselves. We also cannot see Psalm Fifty-one as being written before David's public confession, as an expression of the struggle of his soul that would lead to eventual repentance. The heading of the psalm clearly reads: "When the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba."

God's forgiveness is always instantaneous because it is based upon legal grounds outside us, not upon the condition of our soul. Confession of sin helps us to experience forgiveness; it does not produce it. All divine pardon rests upon the sacrifice of Jesus Christ as an atonement for all sin. In David's days, this was foreshadowed in the daily sacrifices the priests brought. David's agony of the soul shows that the atonement had not yet been applied to him. To use the image of Isaiah, the coal from the altar had not yet touched his lips.<sup>383</sup>

Nathan's reply to David's confession is "The LORD has taken away your sin." The Hebrew word rendered "taken away" is *'abar*, which literally means "to pass over," or "to cover." This does not imply the removal of sin, but a modification of punishment. This is evident from the following words "You are not going to die." What strikes us most in this exchange is the rapidity of it. There was no second of hesitation in Nathan's reply.

The second part of Nathan's pronouncement deserves a closer look. "But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt, the son born to you will die." The Hebrew reads literally: "Howbeit, because thou hast also given great occasion to blaspheme to the enemies of Yahweh by this deed, the child that is born unto thee shall surely die." The question is who are these enemies? David's crime was not public knowledge, or was it? David had made every effort to cover up the affair with Bathsheba, but his valet and some others in the palace must have known. And if Joab knew about Uriah's murder, there really was no secret to be covered up. This meant that all of David's attempts to keep the matter hidden had been in vain. In the eyes of some, this man after God's own heart was a hypocrite who gave the worship of YHWH a very bad name.

Throughout the ages, people have searched for reasons to discredit Judaism and Christianity and believers have furnished them with ample evidence. The apostle Paul would later quote Nathan's words and apply them to the Jews in general. We read in his Epistle to the Romans: "Now you, if you call yourself a Jew; if you rely on the law and brag about your relationship to God; if you know his will and approve of what is superior because you are instructed by the law; if you are convinced that you are a guide for the blind, a light for those who are in the dark, an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of infants, because you have in the law the embodiment of knowledge and truth- you, then, who teach others, do you not teach yourself? You who preach against stealing, do you steal? You who say that people should not commit adultery, do you commit adultery? You who abhor idols, do you rob temples? You who brag about the law, do you dishonor God by breaking the law? As it is written: 'God's name is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you.'"<sup>384</sup> David's sin affected the whole world of his time. The nations surrounding Israel knew the difference between their own form of government and the theocracy of their neighbor Israel. David's sin gave them fuel to reject the theocracy; that is God's rule.

David caused even greater damage to be done in heaven. We have no record of what to place above when David sinned below, but we can image the repetition of a scene as it is depicted for us in the Book of Job.<sup>385</sup> Satan must have come before God to accuse the man God had chosen to be the head of the people who were the stewards of His revelation. Zechariah's vision, in which the prophet saw the high priest Joshua standing before the Lord with Satan accusing him,<sup>386</sup> must have occurred. Our sins hand a tool to Satan to blaspheme God.

David's reaction to the sickness and death of the child Bathsheba brought into the world is deeply touching. The infant was sick for one week and then died. David spent that week in agony, fasting, and

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<sup>382</sup> Ps. 51:3

<sup>383</sup> See Isa. 6:6,7

<sup>384</sup> Rom. 2:17-24

<sup>385</sup> See Job Chapter One.

<sup>386</sup> See Zech. 3:1.

prayer. He understood that he should have died, but the child died in his place. The early death of the baby saved him, of course, from a life of infamy and shame. He would always have been known as the offspring of an adulterous relationship. God's taking the boy to Himself was a definite act of grace. But David did not understand it that way. The only thing he could see was that someone else, an innocent creature, was taking his place in death. In this, his repentance was even deeper than in the confession of his sin. It was probably during this time that he wrote his poem of repentance that we know as Psalm Fifty-one.

If we would react to the death of Jesus Christ on the cross in our stead as David reacted to the death of his son, it would enhance our repentance and testimony.

David's week-long fast for his sick boy sets him apart from the other kings of the world. *Barnes' Notes* correctly observes: "The death of the infant child of one of the numerous harem of an Oriental monarch would in general be a matter of little moment to the father. The deep feeling shown by David on this occasion is both an indication of his affectionate and tender nature, and also a proof of the strength of his passion for Bath-sheba."

The palace staff understood David's behavior during the child's sickness, but they could not comprehend his reaction after the death of the baby. Their hesitance to tell David that the child had died indicates the kind of relationship the king had with his servants. There was an ambiance of love and respect that wanted them to protect the king from hurt. We read: "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.'" <sup>387</sup>

David's behavior can only be explained by a restoration of his fellowship with God during his week of fasting and prayer. If he wrote Psalm Fifty-one during this time, the Lord heard his prayer "Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me." <sup>388</sup> David's heart and spirit were broken as he came before His God. He put himself on God's altar, as is expressed in the words: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise." <sup>389</sup> David was as passionate in his repentance as he had been in his sin.

It is almost beyond our comprehension to see what God does with our vile acts and dirty tricks once we confess them to Him. It is true what Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, said that God "gives his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins." <sup>390</sup>

As David identified himself with the animal that died on the altar for the atonement of his sins, as he died by putting himself on that altar, God raised him up. David's bouncing back to life and intimacy with God is, in fact, a picture of a resurrection from the dead. The apostle Paul would later express this divine principle with the words: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." <sup>391</sup>

This is what David's servants in the palace could not understand. They believed that David would do something desperate when he heard his son had died. In a way, they were correct; David committed the most desperate act any human being can commit, he put himself on God's altar to be consumed by God's fire. David's resurrection proves that God can heal our broken hearts and crushed spirits, whether they are the results of our own acts or not.

Theologians have seen in David's words, "I will go to him, but he will not return to me" <sup>392</sup> an indication of believe in life after death, which, at other places in the Old Testament, seems to be lacking.

David's repentance and restoration did not mean the breaking up of his marriage with Bathsheba. This may serve as a proof that she was the innocent party in the affair. It also substantiates that wrong choices cannot always be undone by repentance. Some of us have to live with the fruits of our errors. David's relationship with Bathsheba had started out as a gratification of his lust; it grew into a relationship of love and compassion.

As the guilty party, it must not have been an easy task for David to comfort Bathsheba after the death of her husband and her son. He had been the cause of both deaths. How could she accept comfort

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<sup>387</sup> II Sam. 12:18

<sup>388</sup> Ps. 51:2, 10-12

<sup>389</sup> Ps. 51:17

<sup>390</sup> Luke 1:77

<sup>391</sup> Gal. 2: 20

<sup>392</sup> II Sam. 12:23

from the murderer of the two who were most precious in her life? The healing of Bathsheba's pain was, probably, an even greater miracle of God's grace than David's restoration.

Although the birth of Solomon is mentioned at this point, it is more likely that it occurred after the fall of Rabbah, which is recorded immediately afterwards.<sup>393</sup>

The birth of Solomon rings in a period in the history of the kingdom of Israel, which is, at the same time, a golden age and an age of corruption; in it Israel reached its pinnacle and its end. In the birth of Solomon, God wanted to paint another picture of Him, of whom He would later say: "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased."<sup>394</sup> As with David, who is called "a man after God's own heart," so God loved Solomon because he reminded Him of Jesus. God even sent David and Bathsheba His birthday wishes via the prophet Nathan and He gave the baby the name Jedidiah, meaning "beloved of God." We read: "The LORD loved him; and because the LORD loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah."<sup>395</sup> *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* observes: "This love, and the noble gifts with which he was endowed, considering the criminality of the marriage from which he sprang, is a remarkable instance of divine goodness and grace."

The ultimate expression of God's forgiveness and grace is in the genealogy of Jesus, as it is found in Matthew's Gospel, where Bathsheba is mentioned in the royal line of descent that gave Jesus the right to the throne of Israel.<sup>396</sup>

As noted above, the battle of Rabbah was, probably, fought during the time David tried to cover up his sin and before his confession and restoration. The NIV accommodates the text by adding the word "meanwhile" to Verse Twenty-six, but that word is not in the Hebrew text.

Joab rightly considered the capture of Rabbah and the conquest of Ammon too important to claim the victory for himself. The taking of the royal citadel cut off the water supply to the city and, consequently, doomed the people to starvation. He invited David to come and finish the job, so the king would receive the ultimate glory and also bring the reinforcements necessary for the final assault.

The NIV reads: "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." The Hebrew word, translated "king," is *malkaam*, which is also the name of the Ammonite deity, similar to Moloch. Biblical scholars place the weight of the crown between 75 and 125 pounds, which would make it a skull-crushing object if worn by a person. For that reason most commentators believe that the crown was on the head of an idol and was only symbolically placed on David's head. But that seems strange also. If the crown belonged to an idol, it should have been dedicated to God and not to David. The fact that it was placed on David's head suggests rather that the king of Ammon had worn it, or that it had somehow been part of his glory. Some Bible scholars believe that it had been suspended above the head of the monarch.

There is also diversity of opinion about David's treatment of the Ammonites. The NIV reads that David "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."<sup>397</sup> But Darby gives a more literal rendering of the Hebrew text: "And he brought out the people that were in it, and put them under the saw, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brick kilns. And so did he to all the cities of the children of Ammon." The question is whether David simply put the captives to labor under harsh conditions or did he torture them and put them to death? There is a great difference between being ordered to saw or to be sawed! *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* states: "David put them to hard labor, not to torture. To a Bedouin this type of punishment was extreme cruelty." *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* concurs with the remark: "From this representation a great cry has been raised against 'David's unparalleled, if not diabolic, cruelty.' I believe this interpretation was chiefly taken from the parallel place, 1 Chron 20:3, where it is said, he cut them with saws, and with axes, etc. ... The meaning therefore is, He made the people slaves, and employed them in sawing, making iron hore rows, or mining (for the word means both), and in the hewing of wood, and making of brick. Sawing asunder, hacking, chopping, and hewing human beings, have no place in this text, no more than they had in David's conduct toward the Ammonites." *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary*, however, states: "This excessive severity and employment of tortures which the Hebrews on no other occasion are recorded to have practiced, must have been resorted to

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<sup>393</sup> II Sam. 12:24-31

<sup>394</sup> Luke 3:22

<sup>395</sup> II Sam 12:24,25

<sup>396</sup> See Matt. 1:6.

<sup>397</sup> II Sam. 12:31

as an act of retributive justice on a people who were infamous for their cruelties.” And Josephus, in his *Antiquities*, states that the conqueror tortured the Ammonites before putting them to death. If, as we suppose, David was in the process of keeping his sin covered up, the hardening of his heart could account for cruel and unusual punishment of his enemies. We like to think that David was not guilty of war crimes, but there is not proof either way.

Regarding the passing through the brick kiln, *Barnes’ Notes* observes: “The phrase is that always used of the cruel process of making their children pass through the fire to Moloch, and it is likely that David punished this idolatrous practice by inflicting something similar upon the worshippers of Moloch. The cruelty of these executions belongs to the barbarous manners of the age, and was provoked by the conduct of the Ammonites (2 Sam 10:1-4; 1 Sam 11:1-2), but is utterly indefensible under the light of the Gospel. If Rabbah was taken before David’s penitence, he may have been in an unusually harsh and severe frame of mind. The unpleasant recollection of Uriah’s death would be likely to sour and irritate him to the utmost.”

The next eight chapters of Second Samuel report the break up of David’s family.<sup>398</sup> In them we read about the rape of Tamar, Absalom’s sister by her half-brother Amnon, Absalom’s murder of Amnon, his banishment and return, Absalom’s coup d’état and death, and, finally, David’s return to the throne. That whole episode is omitted in the Book of First Chronicles.

The events described in these chapters give us a clear insight into the condition of David’s family. Polygamy, in general, does not create a favorable climate for a healthy, disciplined life for the children. *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* comments: “Godly parents have often been afflicted with wicked children; grace does not run in the blood, but corruption does. We do not find that David’s children imitated him in his devotion; but his false steps they trod in, and in those did much worse, and repented not. Parents know not how fatal the consequences may be if in any instance they give their children bad examples.”

Amnon was David’s oldest son. His mother was Ahinoam of Jezreel.<sup>399</sup> We read that Amnon fell in love with his half-sister Tamar. Amnon demonstrated to have even less self-discipline than his father David. His unfulfilled desire made him sick to the point where his cousin, Jonadab, noticed it and commented on it. Jonadab’s advice for Amnon to fake sickness in order to acquire David’s permission to see Tamar indicates that the communications between the children were strictly limited according to the rules of an eastern royal court.

David’s dealing with his children seems to have been a mixture of loving concern and benign neglect. He demonstrated compassion in visiting Amnon when he heard he was sick, but he did not take the time to reflect upon the cause or investigate the reason for Amnon’s wish to see his half-sister.

When Tamar visits Amnon with the father’s permission and bakes some cakes for him, Amnon asks her to go to bed with him. When she refuses, he rapes her.

Tamar’s remonstrations are to no avail. She says that she would be willing to become Amnon’s legal wife with their father’s permission. She appeals to the moral code of Israel, calling Amnon a fool if he would flout these. The Levitical law did not permit marriage between stepchildren. We read: “Do not have sexual relations with the daughter of your father’s wife, born to your father; she is your sister.”<sup>400</sup> It is, therefore, doubtful that David would have granted the permission Tamar referred to.

Amnon’s passionate love for Tamar turned into an even greater passionate hatred after he committed his crime. This fact is, first of all, an indication that Amnon’s love had never been anything but animal lust. The gratification of his desire made him hate himself, a hatred which he projected upon his stepsister. Sending Tamar away the way he did would throw the blame of the affair on her, as if she had seduced him, instead of the other way around. Amnon’s violation of Tamar and his refusal to take responsibility for his act made her a woman without any hope to enter into a meaningful marriage relationship later on. Amnon could have saved himself and his half-sister’s reputation by offering to marry her.

Absalom’s reaction to the affair sounds mild and measured, but in reality it was craftier than appears on the surface. Absalom was ready to murder, not only to revenge his sister but also to remove the pretender to the throne, making him the next in line.

We read: “When King David heard all this, he was furious.” *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* correctly observes: “He was content merely to be angry, since he himself had been guilty of adultery.

<sup>398</sup> II Sam. Chapters 13-20

<sup>399</sup> See II Sam. 3:2.

<sup>400</sup> Lev. 18:11

However, his lack of appropriate action stemmed from his indulgent affection toward his son and his habitual failure to discipline members of his family.” It is almost impossible for a father to discipline his children for the sin he is guilty of committing himself also. The Septuagint adds here the words: “But he would not grieve the soul of Amnon his son, for he loved him, because he was his first-born.” David seems to have been in the habit of excusing his children’s sins. We find the same tendency in his attitude toward Absalom, whom he merely banished after his murder of Amnon and later pardoned. And even after Absalom’s rebellion, David’s grief over his son’s death speaks louder than his sense of justice.<sup>401</sup> David should have taken his daughter’s side in this matter; instead, he chose Amnon’s. Little did he realize that, in doing so, he signed Amnon’s death sentence.

David’s indulgence with Amnon’s sin must have increased Absalom’s hatred for both his brother and father. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes that “David was a man whose conduct was generally governed by his feelings. He was a creature of warm and often generous impulse, but his character lacked the steadiness of thoughtful and consistent purpose.”

For two years Absalom never gave any indication to have been affected by Amnon’s misdeed. David misread Absalom’s silence; he obviously did not know his son. Being passionate and somewhat impulsive himself, he could not understand the crafty and cunning patience of Absalom. The outward beauty of his appearance was a perfect cover for an evil and ambitious heart.

When Absalom announced to his father that he was planning a sheep sheering party and invited David to attend with the rest of the family, David had no suspicion. Even Amnon, who could have known better if his guilty conscience had bothered him, did not give it a second thought. Amnon had probably almost forgotten the affair with Tamar and had also mistaken Absalom’s silence for indifference.

One wonders what would have happened if David had accepted Absalom’s invitation to attend the feast. Since Absalom would later try to kill his father, he might have decided for the coup at that time and try to go straight for the throne. Or he may have figured that David would refuse the invitation to attend, but extended it to take his father off guard. Absalom had judged correctly; having invited his father and then his brothers, David would not suspect any malice.

Absalom gave orders to his servants to kill Amnon when he was drunk. Evidently, wine was served lavishly at such occasions and orders were probably given that Amnon would be served more than the others. Absalom’s admonition to his servants to “be strong and brave” in order to do his dirty work, seems ironic in the context. Absalom gave the order to kill when the joy and revelry was at its highest point and no one had any suspicion of malice.

The sudden and unexpected murder of Amnon caused a stampede in which all the king’s sons, including Absalom, fled on their mules. Rumor reached the palace that Absalom had killed all of David’s sons. This can be easily explained by the chaotic conditions of the flight and also by the way rumors travel. The report has a devastating effect upon David and the whole palace staff. We read: “The king stood up, tore his clothes and lay down on the ground; and all his servants stood by with their clothes torn.”<sup>402</sup> But Jonadab, who had advised Amnon initially and was thus implemented in his crime, tells David that the rumor is false. He was the only one who had read Absalom’s attitude correctly. The NIV renders his words: “This has been Absalom’s expressed intention ever since the day Amnon raped his sister Tamar.”<sup>403</sup> The Hebrew reads literally: “for by mouth of Absalom this has been determined...” This could mean that Jonadab had seen how Absalom pinched his lips when he looked at Amnon and thus concluded his intent; it could also be that Absalom had taken Jonadab in his confidence, as Amnon had before. In that case Jonadab would be privy to two crimes of David’s sons.

Jonadab’s analysis is confirmed by the arrival of the David’s sons, who come in wailing and are joined in this expression of grief by the whole palace staff and the king.

Meanwhile, Absalom fled to Geshur and asked for asylum from his maternal grandfather Talmai. He stayed there in exile for three years.<sup>404</sup>

The effect of all this left David devastated. We read that he consoled himself about the death of Amnon, but grieved bitterly for Absalom. Any father who ever lost a son can testify to the fact that the wounds of grief heal very slowly and never completely. It, usually, takes more than three years to recover

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<sup>401</sup> See II Sam. 18:31-33

<sup>402</sup> II Sam. 13:31

<sup>403</sup> II Sam. 13:32

<sup>404</sup> See II Sam. 13:37,38.

from such a loss. In the bitter turmoil of his soul, David mourned for the wrong boy. The knowledge of his own guilt in all this must have, considerably, aggravated his depression.

David's feelings toward Absalom must have been complex and contradictory. The NIV states: "Joab son of Zeruiah knew that the king's heart longed for Absalom." A literal translation of the Hebrew text reads: "And Joab son of Zeruiah knows that the heart of the king [is] on Absalom." The preposition "on" is the rendering of the Hebrew word *`al*, which actually means "against." Most translations, however, interpret David's feelings toward Absalom to be positive, but that may be a simplification of the matter.

Whether Joab acted out of love for David, or for himself is another matter to be considered. David's emotional upheaval may have caused the affairs of the kingdom to be left in disarray. On the other hand, Joab may have looked ahead and felt that his chances of survival under Absalom as the new king would be better than under any other pretender to the throne. If Absalom succeeded to become king with a criminal record, Joab's own criminal record might not look so bad.

We do not read that Joab ever discussed the matter of Absalom's banishment with David, but the fact that David recognized Joab's ploy in the affair the wise woman from Tekoa brought before him, suggests that Joab may have spoken to David and met with a refusal. Joab, therefore, devised a stratagem that put David on the spot and made it difficult for him to refuse the request again.

Joab was born in Tekoa and he probably knew the woman personally, or at least, knew about her. She is introduced to us as "a wise woman." The Hebrew word rendered "wise" is *chakam*. The same word is used of the people whom Pharaoh consulted when he dreamed the dreams that brought Joseph to the throne of Egypt. We read: "He sent for all the magicians and wise men of Egypt."<sup>405</sup> This woman may have been more than just intelligent; she may have had a reputation for dabbling in magic.

For the second time in David's biography, we read that he was given a parable and trapped himself in its application because he failed to see the reason behind the story. In the first case, the story Nathan told about the rich man's stealing of the poor man's sheep, David condemned himself. In the faked case of the woman's predicament concerning the death of one of her sons and the danger of losing the other, the woman's conclusion is: "When the king says this, does he not convict himself, for the king has not brought back his banished son?"<sup>406</sup>

The fact that this woman could appear before the king and plead her case gainsays Absalom's accusation in the next chapter that people's cases were not heard at the palace.<sup>407</sup>

The point in the woman's parable was not that the guilty party should be declared innocent but that the memory of the deceased husband should be kept alive by remitting the death sentence of her guilty son. The underlying philosophy of life, which contends that external life is expressed in the life of a person's offspring on earth, is foreign to us. But it was an essential part of the Jewish culture and David understood the importance of it. The woman expresses this principle beautifully in the image of a fire that should be kept burning. She said: "They would put out the only burning coal I have left, leaving my husband neither name nor descendant on the face of the earth."<sup>408</sup> In considering that the murder was not premeditated, David ruled that the widow's second son could be pardoned. This judgment did not directly affect the king's actions against Absalom, whose killing of Amnon had been carefully planned and carried out. Absalom's case was clearly one of premeditated murder.

In offering to take the blame for the verdict, the woman does more than just clear David's name for a decision that could have been contested. She prepares the way for a disclosure of the intent of the parable, which was to predispose David to clear his own son. She also clears Joab as the originator of the ploy.

Actually, what David had done for Absalom in banishing him from the palace was nothing less than what he did for the widow's son. David's verdict in the widow's case put him under no obligation to allow Absalom to appear before him. That was the reason the woman kept on talking instead of taking the verdict and going home. She accuses David of sinning against the nation of Israel. We read: "Why then have you devised a thing like this against the people of God?" The thought behind this is that the banishment of Absalom would disqualify him from inheriting the throne of his father. As we saw earlier, Joab's concern was not primarily David's emotional condition or the repair of family relations but his own chances of survival in the years to come. The woman continues to use beautiful imagery. Death is

<sup>405</sup> See Gen. 41:8.

<sup>406</sup> II Sam. 14:13

<sup>407</sup> See II Sam. 15:1-4.

<sup>408</sup> II Sam. 14:7

compared to the pouring out of water on the ground. We read: “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.”<sup>409</sup> David had expressed this truth himself when he refused to drink the water from the well in Bethlehem that his soldiers had brought to him during his exile from Saul.<sup>410</sup>

It is at this point that David realizes that a trap had been set for him and he suspects the hand of Joab. The woman is wise enough to drop any further pretense; she clears herself by stating that Joab had written the text of her supposed plea for justice, thus protecting herself from any accusation that she deceived the king.

We do not read where Joab was when the woman pleaded her case. It almost sounds as if he popped up from behind a curtain when David called him in. Joab went as far as to confess that he considered the return of Absalom to be a personal favor granted to him. But Joab’s future would not be as rosy as he thought it would be.

Absalom’s return to Jerusalem, however, did not mean the end of his banishment. David refused to meet him personally. It seems that, in Jerusalem, Absalom was given house arrest. This is suggested by the fact that he was unable to go and meet Joab. As it turned out, the two years he spent in confinement at home gave him ample opportunity to plan his coup d’état.

Absalom is described in the Bible as a young man of extraordinary beauty. He must have exuded health and well-being. His yearly haircut is said to have produced “two hundred shekels by the royal standard,” which, according to a footnote in the NIV, is “about 5 pounds.” That seems like an enormous weight. Josephus records that the servants of King Solomon powdered their hair with gold dust. It could be that Absalom did this also, which would add considerable weight to his hair. Bible scholars have argued over this weight and some believe that the text is corrupted. Absalom’s physical beauty must have enhanced his public image to the point where it was not difficult for him to get a large following when he made the attempt to overthrow his father.

After two years of house arrest, Absalom decided that the time had come for an audience with David, so he summoned Joab to his house. But Joab, guessing the reason for the summons, ignored it. Absalom’s heavy-handedness broke Joab’s resistance. Absalom must have guessed that Joab’s reasons for pleading his cause with David, initially, was based upon the general’s self interest. He must have known of Joab’s criminal record and his hopes of keeping his job under Absalom’s rule as king. This allowed him to ruin Joab’s field of barley. His treatment of the army commander was much more firm than David had ever allowed himself.

When Absalom set his barley field on fire, Joab rushed to his house. Absalom complained that he had more freedom in exile than at home. He pushed the matter by emphasizing that the alternative of capital punishment was not house arrest but freedom.<sup>411</sup> Prison sentences were, evidently, unknown in Israel. People were fined, executed, or freed, according to the crime they had committed, but no one was ever imprisoned as a form of punishment in itself.

Joab informed David of Absalom’s statement. Absalom’s words, “if I am guilty of anything, let him put me to death” must have convinced David of the reasonableness of his son’s request for an audience. Absalom knew, of course, that David would not put him to death. And his reason for wanting to see his father was not for the purpose of reconciliation but to give him the liberty of movement needed to carry out his plot for a revolt.

Absalom must have hated his father as he had hated his half-brother Amnon. He considered himself not guilty for plotting and carrying out the murder of his brother. As *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “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.” But David must have felt deep emotional ties with Absalom. He was a man of very deep, but also very complicated, emotions. The separation from his son must have weighed heavily on him. The kiss he gave him was sincere, which cannot be said about Absalom’s kissing of his father. Absalom received pardon for his sin without asking for it, without feeling that he needed it.

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<sup>409</sup> II Sam. 14:14

<sup>410</sup> See 1 Chron. 11:17-19.

<sup>411</sup> See II Sam. 14:28-32.

Second Samuel, Chapters Fifteen through Eighteen, cover Absalom's rebellion and his death. All this was the fallout of David's sin with Bathsheba. When Nathan announced God's punishment for David's adultery, he said: "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>412</sup>

Before attempting the overthrow of his father, Absalom took his time to polish his public image in a way that would make a modern politician jealous. He made sure his presence would be noticed in public by surrounding himself with pomp and dignity whenever he appeared in Jerusalem. Absalom's chariot was probably the most modern means of public transportation of his day. The vehicle must have had a cachet of royalty. The fifty men running ahead of him may have been members of his palace staff posing as common people to give the impression that Absalom was very popular and that, wherever the prince went, he gathered a crowd of admirers. Some commentators think that these were lackeys dressed in palace livery. This was enhanced by a very clever campaign to increase popular support. Absalom made every effort to make it appear as if his coup d'état was inspired by popular demand.

He intercepted people who were on their way to the palace and told them that they would be denied a hearing. That was a flagrant lie as is demonstrated by the case of the widow reported in Chapter Fourteen of Second Samuel. It could be, however, that David had become slack in the carrying out of his royal duties. Absalom's question, "What town are you from?"<sup>413</sup> was probably the cultural approach for the striking up of a conversation. In some countries in the Far East, people greet each other with "From where?" in the same way we say "Good morning." There is no indication that Absalom took time to hear what people had to say about their case; he mere stated: "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."<sup>414</sup> He also perfected his image by not allowing anyone to kneel before him. He would lift people to their feet and embrace them tenderly, giving the impression of being personable and approachable to the extreme. His film star handsomeness also must have helped his rapidly rising popularity.

Yet, it took him four years of campaigning before he felt ready to strike. The Hebrew text reads "forty" but that is probably an editorial mistake. Josephus, as well as some other manuscripts, confirm that it should be four years. Absalom probably chose Hebron as the center of his revolt because it was his birthplace.<sup>415</sup> Several commentators are of the opinion that the people of Hebron had hard feelings toward David because of his moving the seat of government from there to Jerusalem. That would, in fact, give Absalom the initial support to start his movement.

The fact that Absalom asked his father's permission to go to Hebron may indicate that David kept a closer check on the members of his family than we would suspect. It could also mean that, in spite of the greater liberty granted to him since he had been pardoned, Absalom was still confined to Jerusalem.

There may have been more truth in Absalom's statement that he had made a vow to the Lord that should be fulfilled in Hebron. We tend to feel that, in view of the deviousness of his plans, Absalom would have been wiser to leave God out of this conversation with his father. It could be, however, that he felt himself to be the instrument of divine justice to set things straight in the kingdom of Israel. While in Geshur, he may, in fact, have vowed to God that he would overthrow his father and become king. Such delusion would fit Absalom's illusions of grandeur. If he felt that he could get away with murder in the literal sense of the word, why not believe that he could sway the Almighty to cooperate in his plot to overthrow his father?

In a way, Absalom's bid for the throne was a gamble. His first act was to put a network of supporters in each of the tribes of Israel to prepare the people for the sounding of the shophar, the rams-horn that would intone the proclamation of his ascension to the throne. The first trumpet would be blown at Hebron and the sound would be picked up by the next and thus the whole country would be covered. The tricky part was in the invitation of two hundred men who had not been informed about the plan. Absalom, correctly, figured that the movement would sweep them along as soon as it started. His masterstroke was to involve Ahithophel, David's trusted advisor. Absalom must have read the mind of this man correctly. He understood that, after what David had done to Bathsheba, Ahithophel's granddaughter, it would be easy to bring him over to his side. *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* observes: "When Absalom got him, he in effect got the prime minister of the kingdom to join him." And *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "The

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<sup>412</sup> II Sam. 12:10

<sup>413</sup> II Sam. 15:2

<sup>414</sup> II Sam. 15:4

<sup>415</sup> See II Sam. 3:2,3.

desertion of David by Ahithophel is in every way remarkable ... For he was far too subtle a man to have joined the conspiracy unless he had felt reasonably sure that it would be successful. Successful it would have been had his advice been followed; but so correctly did he estimate the result if David were allowed time to gather his friends, that, when his counsel was rejected, he withdrew immediately to Giloh, and committed suicide.” Ahithophel was a man with a brilliant mind but he had put himself on the wrong side of truth. His assessment of the conditions of Absalom’s revolt was correct, but his advice was immoral and demonic, as was his suicide.

As soon as David received word of the uprising, he woke up to the reality of the situation. He realized that staying in Jerusalem would mean the end of the city, of his kingdom, and of his life. We read: “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.’”<sup>416</sup>

David must have understood also that the events were part of the punishment for his sin with Bathsheba. It must have been a difficult decision for David to flee and leave everything, but it shows that David still had a mind of sound strategy. Had he been proud and conceited, he would have barricaded himself in Jerusalem and tried to put down the rebellion from there. But David figured correctly that he had better chances of victory if he would draw Absalom’s army out in the open, where he could choose where and when to attack instead of waiting to be attacked.

But sound strategy did nothing to take away the humiliation of the flight and the sadness of the realization that the son wanted to kill the father. The whole company gathered at a predetermined place, somewhere outside the city walls, where David inspected them. David’s whole family, all women and children with the exception of ten concubines who were left to keep an eye on the palace, and the whole palace staff, as well as David’s bodyguard were present. A group of six hundred men, called the Gittites, were also there. Some commentators believe that they were Philistines who had followed David from Gath when he became king. Others think that these were Israelites who gathered around David when he was fleeing from Saul and hiding in Gath. The former seems to be the more likely. One man, who was clearly a foreigner and who was also called a Gittite, was Ittai. David told him that he was under no obligation to follow him into exile. The words, “Go back, and take your countrymen”<sup>417</sup> suggest that all the Gittites were Philistines.

It was in this short period of temporary exile that David, probably, wrote some of his most moving psalms. *The Pulpit Commentary* lists several of them and observes: “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 protection.” Only Psalm Three bears, specifically, the title: “When he fled from his son Absalom,” but others originate, probably, from this time also. Great poet that he was, David set most of emotions to music. That healthy outlet kept his fellowship with God alive and precluded depression.

The reaction to the flight of the people in David’s immediate surrounding is an indication that the statement of the messenger who informed the king of the revolt with the words, “The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom,”<sup>418</sup> was incorrect. As David left the city, the people in the countryside wept when they saw him pass. *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: “This general lamentation proves that David was not really unpopular in Jerusalem, though it was there that Absalom had dazzled the people by his magnificence, and sought to win favor by his gracious ways.”

The whole priest cast joined David, carrying the ark and bringing sacrifices. The ark symbolized the presence of the Lord. In a way the Levites’ gesture was significant in that it expressed prophetically what would happen on the day Christ left Jerusalem to die on the cross. David’s Son, Jesus, would follow the same trek in the night before His crucifixion and cross the Kidron brook. David would be relatively safe on the other side of it, as the desert east of Jordan would be open to him.

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<sup>416</sup> II Sam. 15:14

<sup>417</sup> II Sam. 15:20

<sup>418</sup> II Sam. 15:13

Some Bible scholars disagree with the translation, “and Abiathar offered sacrifices,”<sup>419</sup> arguing that the Hebrew word *`alah*, which means, “to ascend,” in this context, cannot be interpreted as bringing a sacrifice.

We do not read that David had ever allowed the ark to be carried with him in his military campaigns. David did not, superstitiously, believe that the presence of the ark in itself guaranteed victory. His reaction to the action of the priests and Levites is rather moving; it shows again the greatness of David’s humble heart. As we noted before, David was very much aware of the fact that Absalom’s rebellion was part of the punishment for his sin with Bathsheba. He accepted God’s judgment with humility. He was also convinced that God does not identify Himself with any political party and that it was not up to him to tell God where and how to reveal Himself. It was this humility and contrition that, eventually, opened the way for his return to Jerusalem.

Bible scholars have also puzzled over David’s address to Zadok, “Aren’t you a seer?”<sup>420</sup> arguing that the Hebrew word *ra’ah*, which means, “to see” in various applications, usually refers to a prophet, not to a priest. David may simply have told Zadok to go back to Jerusalem and keep his eyes open and spy for him there. The mention of his son Ahimaaz and Abiathar’s son Jonathan, who would later serve as go-betweens,<sup>421</sup> seems to confirm this.

David’s ascent of the Mount of Olives provides a moving scene. The king goes barefoot and with his head covered, weeping as someone who is in mourning. His attitude illustrates the fact that the wages of sin is death. As far as he knew, this was the end of his kingdom and, maybe, the end of his life. All who followed him shared his deep grief. As it turns out, his deepest sorrow was, not for himself, but for his son Absalom. He bemoaned Absalom’s rebellion and the fact that, in the ensuing battle, his son’s life would be in danger.

At some point, David received the information that Ahithophel had joined the uprising. He immediately understood the devastating effect this could have upon the cause. And he prayed: “O LORD, turn Ahithophel’s counsel into foolishness.”<sup>422</sup> Ahithophel’s advice to Absalom would be particularly dangerous to David, as the counselor knew David intimately and he could predict what the king’s reaction and strategy would be in certain situations. David had, probably, acted upon Ahithophel’s advice in most situations. *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* observes that David reacted to the intelligence about Ahithophel, appropriately, with prayer and with policy. He asked God to turn Ahithophel’s wisdom into foolishness and he sends his spies back to Jerusalem.

It seems that this prayer was answered immediately as David reached the top of the mountain and found Hushai there. The Bible states: “Hushai the Arkite was the king’s friend.”<sup>423</sup> He was probably an elderly person, since David said to him: “If you go with me, you will be a burden to me.”<sup>424</sup> David sent him back to Jerusalem in order to spy on Ahithophel and report back to him.

It has been objected that Hushai’s feigned allegiance to Absalom was dishonest and sinful. That may be true, but then, all espionage is based upon deception. Most people would consider David’s countermeasures to the rebellion of his son to be sound strategy. Fortunately, we are not asked to take sides and choose in matters that cannot be easily divided in black and white.

It is generally supposed that the words in Psalm Forty-one, “Even my close friend, whom I trusted, he who shared my bread, has lifted up his heel against me”<sup>425</sup> refer to Ahithophel’s betrayal of David. During Jesus’ celebration of the Last Supper with His disciples, our Lord applied these words to Judas and his betrayal.<sup>426</sup> Ahithophel foreshadowed Judas in more than one way, as is evident from his death by suicide.

We read: “Hushai arrived at Jerusalem as Absalom was entering the city.”<sup>427</sup> Before continuing the narrative of events in Jerusalem, the Scriptures report David’s encounter with two characters who accompanied him on his ascent of the Mount of Olives. One is Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth, the

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<sup>419</sup> II Sam. 15:24

<sup>420</sup> II Sam. 15:27

<sup>421</sup> See II Sam 17:17.

<sup>422</sup> II Sam. 15:31

<sup>423</sup> I Chron. 27:33

<sup>424</sup> II Sam. 15:33

<sup>425</sup> Ps. 41:9

<sup>426</sup> John 13:18

<sup>427</sup> II Sam. 15:37

grandson of Saul and the other is Shimei. We are not told anything about the background of Ziba, apart from the fact that he was Mephibosheth's servant. Shimei was a member of the tribe of Benjamin. Both characters, directly or indirectly, represent the tribe of Benjamin, or the former monarchy to David.

Ziba met David and his company with a number of donkeys and refreshments. He told David that Mephibosheth had decided to remain in Jerusalem because he flattered himself with the thought that the people would turn to him to become their next king.<sup>428</sup> His story is generally believed to be a lie and Mephibosheth would later deny it.<sup>429</sup> David had been good to Mephibosheth, who had been a daily guest at David's table.<sup>430</sup> It seems that Ziba's hope was to legally acquire all of Mephibosheth's property, and David hastily accommodated him in his scheme. Under the circumstances, the king can hardly be blamed for his decision, although Ziba's story was not very plausible. A strange part of the story is that David did not reverse the decision when he learned the truth from Mephibosheth's mouth, but ordered the prince and the servant to split Saul's possessions evenly. It seems as if David did not believe either of them.<sup>431</sup> *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* describes Mephibosheth with: "It is a weary, broken, dispirited soul that speaks in all his utterances."

*The Pulpit Commentary* observes about this incident: "It is the misfortune of troubled times like those in which David found himself, that unscrupulous men use them for selfish purposes. For those in danger have no time for careful examination, nor are their minds sufficiently calm for impartial judgment, but they act on first impressions, and catch at every straw. Ziba's present would naturally raise everybody's spirits, and be taken as a good omen; for it showed that David had adherents in unlikely quarters, when thus a servant of the house of Saul of his own accord brought so timely an offering. The asses saddled for riding contradict the idea that Ziba met David by chance as he was bringing the produce of the farm for the use of Mephibosheth's household. More probably the asses had been saddled for Mephibosheth's own use ... and the provisions had been prepared as a contribution to the king's needs; but at the last moment the cunning Ziba managed to hurry away with his men, leaving his master in the lurch, and unable to get anything to ride upon in the short interval between David's escape and Absalom's entry. Moreover, possibly from being a cripple, and from the distressing circumstances of his early life, Mephibosheth always seems deficient in energy, and perhaps David's conduct in mulcting him of half his property may not really have been so unjust as it looks, supposing that it was his dilatoriness which gave Ziba the chance of going away with the whole convoy while he was wasting time. It was this apparent desertion of him by one whom he had so befriended which may have made David say, "All men are liars" (Psalm 116:11), though subsequently he learned that the lie was Ziba's."

The next person that meets David on the road is Shimei, a man from the clan of Saul, who curses David, pelting the company with stones and verbal abuse. The Hebrew sounds more vivid than any English translation can reproduce. Shimei hissed *Tsee'*, *Tsee'*, as he went along. *Tsee'* is derived from *yatsa'*, which simply means "out!" It is clear that Shimei hated David for having replaced Saul. His hatred seems to have been rooted in tribal rivalry, David being from the tribe of Judah and Shimei from Benjamin. It is not clear what murders David is accused of. Some commentators believe that this may refer to the execution of the seven descendants of Saul by the Gibeonites.<sup>432</sup> Saul had decimated that tribe in his "zeal for the Lord," although Joshua had made a covenant with them by which their lives were spared.<sup>433</sup> The story occurs much later in the Book of Second Samuel, but it has been observed that the chapters may not be in chronological order. In connection with this incident, *The Matthew Henry's Commentary* observes: "We here find how David bore Shimei's curses much better than he had borne Ziba's flatteries. By the latter he was brought to pass a wrong judgment on another, by the former to pass a right judgment on himself. The world's smiles are more dangerous than its frowns."

At least one stone and one of Shimei's words must have touched David's heart. He must have remembered his murder of Uriah, Bathsheba's ex-husband. That must have brought home to David the reason for his flight. David knew that his experience was part of God's punishment and he, naturally, assumed that Shimei's cursing was also part of the same penalty. Upon his return to Jerusalem, David would later pardon Shimei, but he never forgot the matter. On his deathbed, David gave Solomon

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<sup>428</sup> II Sam. 16:3

<sup>429</sup> II Sam. 19:26-28

<sup>430</sup> See II Sam. 9:11-13.

<sup>431</sup> See II Sam. 19:29.

<sup>432</sup> See II Sam. 21:1-9.

<sup>433</sup> See Josh. 9:3-26.

instructions to execute Shimei for his insults. Solomon put Shimei on house arrest, which the latter, initially accepted, but after three years he trespassed when looking for a runaway slave, and thus he forfeited his life.<sup>434</sup> Meanwhile David must have actually accepted Shimei's curses as God's indictment of his life. When he reached the top of the hill, he was physically and emotionally exhausted.

In the meantime, Absalom had entered Jerusalem and made arrangements for his first cabinet meeting. Hushai joined the meeting, introducing himself as a supporter of the uprising. The ensuing conversation is full of deceptions, but it make for good spy talk.<sup>435</sup>

Evidently, Ahithophel was not convinced that the break between Absalom and David had been definite enough to make it irreconcilable. Reconciliation would seriously jeopardize his position as the king's counselor. His advice to Absalom to commit adultery with his father's ten concubines, clearly, originated in the pits of hell. It is stated: "The advice Ahithophel gave was like that of one who inquires of God"; this piece of counsel, however, was an exception! We do not know if Ahithophel was acquainted with Nathan's prophecy, predicting this part of the punishment for David's sin with Bathsheba. Nathan had said: "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. You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.'" <sup>436</sup> Ahithophel's advice reveals, not only the hatred this man must have harbored in his heart toward David for the insult committed to his granddaughter, but also the darkness of his own soul. His character and demeanor made him the perfect predecessor of Judas.

Absalom's character is also clearly revealed in his willingness to comply with the advice of his new prime minister. In doing so, Absalom sinned against the Law of Moses, and thus, he signed his own death sentence. The Book of Leviticus states: "Do not have sexual relations with your father's wife; that would dishonor your father," and, "If a man sleeps with his father's wife, he has dishonored his father. Both the man and the woman must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads."<sup>437</sup>

*The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* observes: "Ahithophel advised Absalom to assume the right to the throne through a public seizure of the royal harem. This was the custom employed in ancient times to demonstrate possession of the throne. It was not actually viewed with abhorrence by the Israelites, whose feelings on such matters were blunted by the practice of polygamy. Following this counsel would cause an irreparable breach between father and son. Ahithophel's advice was to run every risk in this adventure." Although this may be true, the fact that the son acted as the conqueror of the father still made this act a deed that would not even be performed in a pagan society.

It is difficult to understand how this kind of sinful action could be part of God's plan to punish David for his sins. David had opened the door to demonic influences when he gave in to his lustful desires and tried to cover up his sin by having Uriah killed. God's punishment consisted in not closing this door for him.

Absalom asked for Ahithophel's advice for the next step to be taken. He suggests that Absalom act immediately with a surprise attack on David and his men, and instead of engaging in a battle with the whole army, concentrate alone upon assassination of David. Even Scripture itself calls it "the good advice of Ahithophel." It was morally bad, but strategically it was good advice. Had Absalom followed this counsel, he would probably have won. We read, however, "The LORD had determined to frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel in order to bring disaster on Absalom."<sup>438</sup> Absalom showed some wisdom in consulting more than one counselor. Hushai advised an action completely opposite to Ahithophel's. He used flowery language and exaggerated figures of speech, but somehow, he convinced the king-to-be and all the people who were with him. Absalom fell for his rhetoric and decided to wait, a lapse that would prove to be fatal for him. Hushai emphasized David's fame as a warrior and he mentioned the possibility that the king would anticipate Ahithophel's thought that he would be the prime prize in the battle, for which reason he would not stay with his troops but spend the night in a cave or some other hard to find place. An initial defeat of Absalom's army would, in fact, be fatal to the rebels' cause. The idea to involve the whole

<sup>434</sup> See II Sam. 19:26-31; I Kings 2:26-46.

<sup>435</sup> II Sam. 16:15-18

<sup>436</sup> II Sam. 12:11,12

<sup>437</sup> Lev. 18:8; 20:11

<sup>438</sup> II Sam. 17:14

of Israel, as if Absalom's rebellion would, in fact, be backed up by the whole nation, must have flattered Absalom's ego.<sup>439</sup>

We do not read what made Absalom hesitate. Initially, he seemed to be pleased with Ahithophel's plan. His recent orgy with the ten concubines, however, may have robbed him of the needed energy to act promptly, and he also may have felt some reluctance to kill his father. Ahithophel wanted personal revenge; Absalom only wanted the throne.

Hushai must not have felt certain that Absalom would adopt his plan, so he sent messengers to David urging the king not to spend the night west of the Jordan River. The way the message was relayed makes for an interesting spy story. Hushai sent word to the priests Zadok and Abiathar. Their two sons, Ahimaaz, Zadok's son, and Jonathan, Abiathar's son,<sup>440</sup> were hiding at En Rogel, a place called "the fuller's well," situated outside Jerusalem, where the valleys of Jehoshaphat and Hinnom meet. A servant girl went to pass the message on to them, and they began to run to David's camp with this information. Absalom, probably, had his own spies posted on the way to prevent this kind of communication, but the going of a servant girl to a well would not have raised any suspicion. When, however, Ahimaaz and Jonathan started running from En Rogel to Bahurim, they were spotted and it was reported to Absalom. In Bahurim, they found help and were able to hide in a dry well, which the farmer's wife covered with a cloth and covered with grain. When Absalom's men, who chased the spies, came by she told them that they had already left and thus they lost their trail. David received Hushai's message just in time to ford the Jordan River.<sup>441</sup>

When Ahithophel heard that his advice had not been followed, he considered that Absalom's cause was lost. His insight proves his superior intelligence and his acts the darkness of his soul. There must have been a mixture of deeply wounded pride and a premonition of what would happen to him upon David's return that made him decide to take his own life. His counsel had, probably, never been disregarded before. Absalom's defeat would be his defeat, a prospect he could not face.

The Bible mentions only four cases of suicide: of King Saul and his arm bearer,<sup>442</sup> of Zimri, king of Israel,<sup>443</sup> and of Judas.<sup>444</sup> The Hebrews had a deep respect for the dignity of human life. It is remarkable, therefore, that Ahithophel was buried in his ancestral tomb.<sup>445</sup> Some commentators conclude from this that suicide was not frowned upon, but others believe that such a conclusion is unwarranted.

We do not know how much time elapsed between David's and Absalom's crossing of the River Jordan. It appears that Absalom followed Hushai's advice literally, since we read that he "crossed the Jordan with all the men of Israel."<sup>446</sup> It also seems that he had been officially anointed as king over Israel.<sup>447</sup> David had been allowed to arrive at Mahanaim, previously the seat of Ishbosheth's government, a city well fortified. This was not the kind of settlement where, in the words of Hushai, "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."<sup>448</sup>

Absalom appointed Amasa as the commander-in-chief of the Israelite army. Amasa was related to Joab and both stood in the same family relationship to David, both being David's nephews. Bible scholars have tried to figure out without much success what these relationships actually were. It has been suggested that Amasa was an illegitimate child of David's sister and that his father was an Ishmaelite. For reasons unknown to us, David later appointed Amasa as the general of his army, replacing Joab. Joab, however, considered himself irreplaceable and assassinated Amasa, as he had assassinated Abner. But we will look at those details later in our study.

At Mahanaim, Shobi, a member of the royal family of Ammon, who may have been the governor of Gilead, met David. Makir son of Ammiel from Lo Debar, of whom nothing is known, is mentioned, and also Barzillai, an old wealthy friend of David. They brought bedding and bowls and kitchen equipment. They also brought wheat and barley, flour and roasted grain, beans and lentils, honey and curds, sheep, and

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<sup>439</sup> See II Sam. 17:7-13.

<sup>440</sup> See II Sam. 15:36.

<sup>441</sup> II Sam. 17:17-22

<sup>442</sup> I Sam. 31:4,5

<sup>443</sup> I Kings 16:18

<sup>444</sup> Matt. 27:5

<sup>445</sup> II Sam. 17:23

<sup>446</sup> II Sam. 17:24

<sup>447</sup> See II Sam. 19:10.

<sup>448</sup> See II Sam. 17:13.

cheese from cows' milk for David and his people to eat."<sup>449</sup> In doing this, they not only provided David's army with necessities but also demonstrated their deep respect for David.

David took personal charge of the campaign against Absalom. He divided his army into three detachments and placed each one under the command of three different generals, one under Joab, one under Joab's brother Abishai, and one under Ittai the Gittite, who was probably a Philistine who had joined David in the early days of his banishment. But when David told his troops that he was going into the battle with them, they strongly objected, stating, correctly, that he was too valuable and that they could not afford to lose him. David yielded to their pressure and stayed in the city with a reserve army to help wherever an emergency would occur.

As the troops filed out before him, he pleaded with the generals, in the hearing of everyone: "Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake."<sup>450</sup> David's words express well the strong inner turmoil he must have felt at that moment. He knew that Absalom's rebellion was part of the punishment for his own sins. It was also part of his failure as a father. He knew the conditions of warfare, and he saw that in sending out his troops against the troops of Absalom, his son could be killed. This his father heart could not accept. Yet, more was at stake than the survival of a family relationship; it was the survival of a nation. Joab, ruthless, unscrupulous Joab understood this better than the king.

*The Matthew Henry's Commentary* comments: "When the army was drawn out, rank and file, Josephus says, he encouraged them, and prayed for them, but withal bade them all take heed of doing Absalom any hurt. How does he render good for evil! Absalom would have David only smitten. David would have Absalom only spared. What foils are these to each other! Never was unnatural hatred to a father more strong than in Absalom; nor was ever natural affection to a child more strong than in David. Each did his utmost, and showed what man is capable of doing, how bad it is possible for a child to be to the best of fathers and how good it is possible for a father to be to the worst of children; as if it were designed to be a resemblance of man's wickedness towards God and God's mercy towards man, of which it is hard to say which is more amazing."

Bible scholars have disputed the location of the battlefield. The text states that "the battle took place in the forest of Ephraim," and that "the forest claimed more lives that day than the sword."<sup>451</sup> The problem is that, as far as we know, an impenetrable jungle covered the area east of the river, but little or none is known of a dense forest east of the Jordan River. There is a possibility that the battle began on the east side of the river and that Absalom's troops were driven back to the west where the forest began claiming its victims. The fact that Absalom's army was three times larger than David's elite troops makes this unlikely, but not impossible.

One of the victims claimed by the forest was Absalom himself. Our text reads: "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."<sup>452</sup> It is impossible to deduct from this wording whether Absalom's hair was caught in the branches or his head in a fork. Josephus states that the prince hung in the tree by his hair, but most commentators are of a different opinion. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "Evidently in the intricacies of the forest, Absalom had lost his way, and, finding himself suddenly in danger of being captured by some of David's men, he urged his mule through a thicket, as the open ground was blocked by his pursuers. But in the attempt his head was jammed between the boughs of a great terebinth, and the mule, struggling onward, left him hanging in mid-air. Nothing is said about his hair having caused the accident, and apparently it was his neck which became fixed. Probably, too, he was half stunned by the blow, and choked by the pressure; and then his hair would make it very difficult for him to extricate himself. And so, after one or two efforts, in which he would be in danger of dislocating his neck, he would remain suspended to await his fate. Now, this adventure makes the whole affair perfectly plain. Absalom was riding his mule, evidently unprepared for battle."

We could qualify Absalom's fate as one of God's coincidences. Nothing worse and more degrading could have happened to this proud and arrogant prince as being suspended by the head, or by the hair, which had been the pride of his appearance, than hanging defenselessly in a tree. The mention of his

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<sup>449</sup> See II Sam 17:27-29.

<sup>450</sup> II Sam. 18:5

<sup>451</sup> See II Sam. 18:6-8

<sup>452</sup> II Sam. 18:9

meeting some of David's troops and the fact that one man saw him hanging suggests that, initially, Absalom managed to escape and that he was out of sight when the tree caught him.

The soldier who found him reported to Joab. *The Living Bible* paraphrases the ensuing dialogue between the soldier and the general in a very vivid way: "One of David's men saw him and told Joab. 'What? You saw him there and didn't kill him?' Joab demanded. 'I would have rewarded you handsomely and made you a commissioned officer.' 'For a million dollars I wouldn't do it,' the man replied. 'We all heard the king say to you and Abishai and Ittai, 'For my sake, please don't harm young Absalom.' 'And if I had betrayed the king by killing his son (and the king would certainly find out who did it), you yourself would be the first to accuse me.' 'Enough of this nonsense,' Joab said.'"<sup>453</sup> From this exchange, it is obvious that, although Joab was respected as a brilliant commander-in-chief, he was also known to his troops as unscrupulous.

It is doubtful that Absalom would have survived, even if someone had released him from his trap. But Joab took no chances. He had him surrounded by ten of his men and then, personally, plunged three javelins into Absalom's heart. After he fell to the ground, the ten soldiers struck him. He was probably dead before he hit the ground. They may have been hitting a dead body.

Once Absalom was dead the war was over. Joab blew the trumpet to stop his troops from further pursuing the enemy. As usual, Joab evinced sound political and strategic insight. He appears to have been a better judge of what was good for the nation than David himself, whose judgment was too much influenced by his personal feelings. Joab knew that the rebellion was crushed with the death of Absalom and that David's throne was secured. He also knew what David's reaction would be to the course of events, and he intervened to prevent the king from making any disastrous moves.

Before continuing the narrative, the narrator takes us aside to show us the difference between what Absalom had planned as a memorial for himself and what actually happened to him. Absalom had erected a monument in his own honor to ensure that he would be remembered after his death. The reason for this, apart from personal pride and vanity, was expressed in a statement he made at one time: "I have no son to carry on the memory of my name."<sup>454</sup> Yet, the Scriptures state: "Three sons and a daughter were born to Absalom. The daughter's name was Tamar, and she became a beautiful woman."<sup>455</sup> Bible scholars conclude from the fact that no names of Absalom's sons are given that they all died in infancy. There still is an obelisk on the road between Jerusalem and Bethlehem that is called "Absalom's Monument." But the style is Ionic and, supposedly, dates from a later period. Some experts, however, contend that the monument is genuine and that the Doric and Ionic styles were later exported to Greece and perfected there. But Absalom's body was never put to rest in the place he had prepared for it. He was dumped in a hole in the forest and the monument erected over him was the same kind as what was put up over the body of Achan who had brought defeat to Israel in the days of Joshua.<sup>456</sup>

Somehow, the news of Absalom's death was communicated rapidly to the various ranks of his army, which broke up immediately. Everyone involved fled to his home as if to indicate that they had had no part in the insurrection. Whatever ill feelings had caused the effort to overthrow the reign of David melted as snow in the sun.

Meanwhile David waited anxiously in Mahanaim for word about the outcome of the battle. Ahimaaz volunteered to bring, what he considered to be good news, to David. He had been one of the spies who relayed the message of Hushai to David.<sup>457</sup> Evidently, he was a good and well-known runner. Joab, knowing what David's reaction to the news about Absalom's death would be, refused to let him go. Evidently, Ahimaaz was a high-ranking officer in the army and people of rank only relayed favorable news. That was the reason Joab sent an Ethiopian slave. David would understand that such a person could not bring any good news. The medium was the message! But Ahimaaz did not take "no" for an answer, and when he kept on insisting, Joab finally let him go. We get the impression that Ahimaaz' legs worked faster than his head; he did not realize that David would not consider "good news" what he thought was good. Ahimaaz outran the slave. David's watchman recognized Ahimaaz by his running while he was still a good distance away. And David concluded, incorrectly, from the fact that Ahimaaz came with news that the news must be good.

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<sup>453</sup> II Sam. 18:10-14

<sup>454</sup> II Sam. 18:18

<sup>455</sup> II Sam. 14:27

<sup>456</sup> See Josh. 7:26.

<sup>457</sup> See II Sam. 17:15-22.

While running, Ahimaaz must have realized that it would not be wise to tell David the whole story, so when he arrived he only reported that David's troops had won the war. His claim not to know about Absalom's fate was, obviously a lie. It was the Cushite who told David in guarded terms that Absalom was dead.

David's reaction to the news of Absalom's death is heartrending. His lament: "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you-O Absalom, my son, my son!"<sup>458</sup> comes to us through the centuries as a cry of such grief and despair that it cannot fail to move us deeply as it reaches our ears. All the depth of suffering of fathers and mothers who have lost sons or daughters, especially sinful children, is reechoed in this expression of grief. The same sword that would pierce Mary's heart<sup>459</sup> stabbed David's. It is the same sword that pierced the heart of God, the Father, at the sight of Golgotha.

*The Matthew Henry's Commentary* comments: "Poor David is so much a father that he forgets he is a king...I wish I could see reason to think that this arose from a concern about Absalom's everlasting state, and that the reason why he wished he had died for him was because he had good hopes of his own salvation, and of Absalom's repentance if he had lived. It rather seems to have been spoken inconsiderately, and in a passion, and it was his infirmity." *The Adam Clarke's Commentary* reflects: "Is there no hope for the soul of this profligate young man? He died in his iniquity; but is it not possible that he implored the mercy of his Maker while he hung in the tree? And is it not possible that the mercy of God was extended to him? And was not that suspension a respite, to the end that he might have time to deprecate the wrath of divine justice? This is at least a charitable conjecture and humanity will delight in such a case to lay hold even on possibilities. If there be any room for hope in such a death, who that knows the worth of an immortal soul, would not wish to indulge in it?"

David paid dearly for his sin with Bathsheba and for the murder of Uriah. If his heart had not yet been broken, it was now.

Most people do not know how to deal with the grief of others. We hardly know how to rejoice with those who rejoice, but we almost never mourn with those who mourn.<sup>460</sup> David's weeping had a devastating effect upon his troops. It made them feel guilty, as if they had lost the war through their cowardice. We read: "And for the whole army the victory that day was turned into mourning ... The men stole into the city that day as men steal in who are ashamed when they flee from battle."<sup>461</sup>

So Joab stepped in and lectured David in a way that sounds most unbecoming for a general to his king. No incident better illustrates the complicated relationship between David and Joab than this moment. Joab was brilliant and ruthless in the way he put the choice before David to either indulge in his grief and lose the nation or compose himself and carry on. He said to David: "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. 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. 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."<sup>462</sup> Those words, spoken by the one who had murdered the king's son, jolted David back into reality; he went and sat in the gate where the troops could see him and where he could inspect them. This started the process of his return.

It is interesting to note that David did not take the initiative to return to Jerusalem; he waited for the people's invitation to do so. Evidently, as he had seen the hand of God in his flight, he waited for the same hand to show him the way in his rehabilitation.

There must have been a large public gathering in which the representatives of the people discussed the situation after the death of Absalom whom they had officially anointed as king. And it seems that, at least initially, the vote in favor of David's return was not unanimous. When David heard about this, he used the old spy channel to prompt the tribe of Judah to take the lead. David understood that the backing of the army would be essential for his return, so, going over the Joab's head, he offered the position of

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<sup>458</sup> II Sam. 18:33

<sup>459</sup> See Luke 2:33-35.

<sup>460</sup> Rom. 12:15

<sup>461</sup> II Sam. 19:2,3

<sup>462</sup> II Sam. 19:5-7

commander-in-chief to Amasa.<sup>463</sup> Bible scholars have debated David's wisdom in firing Joab and hiring Amasa. As we observed before, Joab had been, at the same time, David's security and his thorn in the flesh. He had been David's brother-in-crime in having Uriah killed, but Joab also had the blood of several others on his hands. Joab's unfailing fidelity to David secured the support of David's elite troops. The large army under the command of Amasa had opposed David and, in doing so, had lost the war. In appointing Amasa as the new supreme commander, David extended the hand of reconciliation to him, to the army, and to all of Israel. Ultimately, in doing so David wanted to punish Joab for killing Absalom. But, as we will see, Joab was not replaced that easily. We could ask the question where God was in all this. It seems very doubtful that David consulted the Lord in these efforts to return to Jerusalem and to the throne of Israel. It may seem politically sound to secure the backing of the army. Earlier in his life, David had written in one of his psalms, "Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the LORD our God,"<sup>464</sup> but at this crucial point in David's life, we find no trace of this trust in the name of the LORD. What David should have done years before is putting Joab to death when Joab had murdered Abner, even at the risk of losing the army. David's throne rested upon the Name of the Lord, not upon his military might.

David's politicking bore fruit and the tribe of Judah sent him an official invitation to return to Jerusalem and to the throne. David retraced his steps to the eastern border of the Jordan River and waited for the delegation of the people to ferry him across.<sup>465</sup>

David's return has often been seen as a foreshadowing of Christ's Second Coming. The missionary effort to preach the Gospel to every nation in the whole world is being done, in the words of A. B. Simpson, the founder of the Christian and Missionary Alliance, to "Bring Back the King."

David's return spawned a sense of guilt among those who had expelled him. This is best exemplified in the person of Shimei, who crossed the river to the eastern shore to plead for David's pardon. It seems that Shimei beat the tribe of Judah to meet David. It also appears that Shimei had not been alone in condemning and insulting David. He may have been the only member of the tribe of Benjamin who had shown up when David fled for his life, but he, evidently, expressed the sentiment of, at least one thousand other members of his tribe. The incident suggests that there was a feeling among the Benjaminites that the throne of Israel legally belonged to the house of Saul and that David was, in fact, a usurper. When David returned to power, his opponents felt that it was safer to hide their opposition. Shimei feared for his own life and, consequently, went out of his way to confess his sin. He reckoned correctly that David would, probably, be in too good a mood on the day of his return, to sentence him to death.<sup>466</sup>

Ziba and Mephibosheth turned up to meet David, Ziba at the crossing of the Jordan and Mephibosheth when David arrived at Jerusalem. Ziba's concern must have been Mephibosheth's property that David had deeded to him and Mephibosheth's to prove his innocence. Mephibosheth's unkept appearance belied what Ziba had told David about his reaction to David's flight from Jerusalem. It seems that David's hasty decision in allotting the inheritance of Saul to Ziba was unfair and that, at his return, he ought to have reversed his verdict. But David did not want to punish Ziba too severely at this point. He therefore ordered that Saul's property be divided equally between the two. *The Pulpit Commentary* comments: "In neglecting his person and his dress, Mephibosheth was showing signs of heartfelt sorrow, and as he thus mourned during Absalom's tenure of power, it exposed him to the usurper's displeasure, and was a public avowal that his sympathies were with David. And his treatment was unjust; but David was in a strait. Ziba had been actively useful to him in his flight, and had also aided greatly in his recall. It was, probably, even owing to his influence that Shimei came with a thousand men of Benjamin. He deserved, therefore, a reward, but not at his master's cost." Mephibosheth was in no condition to object, and he, obviously, did not care.<sup>467</sup>

A friend of David, Barzillai, accompanied the king in his crossing of the Jordan River. We do not know anything about this man, apart from the fact that he was very rich and furnished supplies to David and his men when they arrived at Mahanaim. David wanted to reward him for his help at the vital moment of his flight and invited him to Jerusalem to live in his palace. Barzillai declined, invoking weakness because of old age. Eighty years of age was, evidently, considered exceptional in the days of David. Even Moses had declared that only the very strong could reach eighty: "The length of our days is seventy years--

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<sup>463</sup> See II Sam. 19:9-13.

<sup>464</sup> Ps. 20:7

<sup>465</sup> II Sam. 19:15

<sup>466</sup> See II Sam. 19:17-23.

<sup>467</sup> See II Sam. 19:24-30.

or eighty, if we have the strength.”<sup>468</sup> Barzillai’s description of old age is interesting for us who live in a society where many people reach eighty and remain in good health. We read: “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?”<sup>469</sup> His words equal Solomon’s description of old age in Ecclesiastes.<sup>470</sup> The fact that Barzillai’s taste buds had stopped functioning and he was hard of hearing did not him keep from crossing the Jordan. He must have earned his name, Barzillai, “man of iron” for good reasons. This scene of David’s relationship with the old man adds a note of warmth and friendliness to the story. David kissed him when they separated and took his son Kimham with him, who would represent his father at the court.

David’s return prompted a heated discussion between the ten tribes and the tribe of Judah. When we read over the exchange of arguments, they may seem amusing to us, but we can detect in them the seeds of discord that would eventually cause the break up of the nation into two separate kingdoms. As most people in the world, the members of the northern tribes conveniently forgot their own history. It took Israel all of seven years before they finally invited David, who had been king over Judah, to become their king. Now, as Absalom’s rebellion was put down, everybody acted as if no one had had any part in it. Each one wanted it to appear as if they were more zealous to bring David back than the other.

The northern tribes did remember that Saul had favored his own tribe during his forty-year reign.<sup>471</sup> Although they had no proof that David ever gave preferential treatment to the tribe of Judah, they insinuated that this was the case.

We may assume that Amasa, to whom David had promised the command of the army, took the lead in bringing Judah to meet David before anybody else arrived.

How serious the tension between the tribes was is apparent from the ease with which Sheba started a rebellion and brought all the ten northern tribes over to his side. His propaganda cry: “We have no share in David, no part in Jesse’s son! Every man to his tent, O Israel!”<sup>472</sup> hit a sensitive cord in the hearts of all the northerners. It is not clear how general the response to Sheba’s cry for insurrection was. It seems that his initial success was due to the heated discussion of the moment when the ten tribes accused the tribe of Judah of having acted unilaterally in inviting David back. Sheba still had a lot of campaigning to do before he had organized enough of an army to effectively confront David. And when he settled in the town of Abel Beth Maacah, the inhabitants did not seem to be aware of the fact that they were hiding a rebel.<sup>473</sup>

*The Pulpit Commentary* comments: “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.”

Amasa demonstrated in his first assignment as commander-in-chief that he lacked the acumen of Joab. As David understood it, time was of vital importance in the putting down of Sheba’s insurrection. We are not told why Amasa took more time than was allotted to him. Critics have questioned the wisdom of David’s appointment of Amasa, and it may be that the troops he was supposed to recruit had their doubts also. After all, Amasa had been in Absalom’s camp and it seems natural that those who had been loyal to David found it hard to pledge allegiance to this new commander.

David realized that Amasa’s delay could have disastrous consequences. He feared that Sheba would entrench himself in a fortified city and establish a headquarters from which he could direct his revolt. The words “and escape from us,” actually read in Hebrew, “and tear out our eye.”

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<sup>468</sup> Ps. 90:10

<sup>469</sup> II Sam. 19:35

<sup>470</sup> See Eccl. 12:1-5.

<sup>471</sup> See I Sam. 22:7.

<sup>472</sup> II Sam. 20:1

<sup>473</sup> See II Sam. 20:14-22.

So David sent Abishai with his elite troops. Abishai was Joab's brother. He had the command of David's bodyguard, the elite Kerethites and Pelethites. He was also able to muster the troops that adhered to Joab. When they went after Sheba, Joab went, naturally, with them.

Abishai's group met with the troops Amasa had managed to gather at the great rock in Gibeon. Gibeon is situated in the mountains of Ephraim, northwest of Jerusalem, in the territory of Benjamin. Amasa may have been on his way to Jerusalem to report back to David and he was, probably, unaware that the command to capture Sheba had been given to Abishai. Joab's meeting with Amasa may have been accidental. There seems no reason to believe that the encounter was planned. But Joab took immediate advantage of the situation and assassinated his cousin in a most treacherous manner.

The Hebrew text does not give us a clear picture of the details of this assassination. Joab must have had two weapons on him, one sword that was sheathed onto his belt outside and one sword hidden under his coat. Whether by accident or on purpose, when Joab approached Abishai, the sword on the outside fell out, giving the impression that Joab was unarmed. Joab acted as if he was greeting his cousin warmly, grabbing him by the beard and kissing him. As he did so, he stuck his sword in Abishai's abdomen and disemboweled him. Shakespeare's description, "murder most foul" is fitting here. It was Joab who invented the Judas kiss of death. The reason for this crime is obvious. Joab felt that David owed him the post of commander-in-chief of the army. He had killed Uriah for David, which gave him the grip he needed on the king, and he would not allow anyone to replace him in the supreme command of the army. One murder more or less did not make any difference for this villain.

Apparently, Joab immediately took charge of the operation, although the command had been given to Amasa. The troops were still used to look to Joab, which made the transition smooth and easy. Joab had not bothered to remove Abishai's body from the road. He had merely placed a soldier beside it to watch and encourage the passing troops to follow Joab. But the sight of the murder victim seemed to have had a bad effect upon the morale of the men, so it was moved out of sight. The cry, "Whoever favors Joab, and whoever is for David, let him follow Joab!"<sup>474</sup> suggests that the spirit of Absalom's rebellion had not yet completely died down. It also linked Joab's command to the person of David, as if an army that was not under Joab's command would have been inconceivable under David's reign. All this, although done in haste, was rather cleverly construed.

The NIV reads: "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."<sup>475</sup> The Hebrew does not use any name at this place, and some versions, consequently, insert Joab, as if he was the one who drummed up support in the region to quell the rebellion of Sheba. The NIV's reading seems more logical.

We assume, therefore, that Joab rushed to the city of Abel Beth Maacah<sup>476</sup> in an effort to prevent Sheba from entering and reinforcing himself. But David's army arrived too late to cut off the rebel leader. So David's army began a siege of the city. It must have taken a few days of building up fortifications to prepare for an attack. Then began the battering of the city wall.

While the siege was on, a woman appeared on the city wall and asked to speak to Joab. The following conversation is interesting, but the meaning of the woman's words is not easily construed.<sup>477</sup> *The Pulpit Commentary* explains: "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 declared 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

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<sup>474</sup> II Sam. 20:11

<sup>475</sup> II Sam. 20:14

<sup>476</sup> II Sam. 20:14

<sup>477</sup> See II Sam. 20:16-22.

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."

When Joab explained that the issue was only the capture of Sheba, the woman convinced the citizens of Abel Beth Maacah that giving asylum to Sheba or supporting his rebellion against David would not be worth the price of having their city destroyed and its inhabitants killed. So Sheba was executed and his head thrown over the city wall as proof for Joab that the people were not involved in the rebellion.<sup>478</sup> Joab had, once again, saved David and his throne.

The Book of Second Samuel records a famine in the country during the reign of David, of which nothing is mentioned elsewhere in Scripture.<sup>479</sup> As a matter of fact, none of the details that are given as explanation for the famine, namely Saul's efforts to stamp out the Gibeonites, are mentioned anywhere else either. And there is no indication when this episode took place during David's reign.

No record in Scripture remains either of atrocities committed by Saul against the Gibeonites. It has been remarked that a one, or two-year-long famine would be ascribed to natural factors. But if that famine is carried into a third year, people begin to search for other than natural causes. David, therefore, sought the Lord for an answer and God replied that it was on account of Saul's crimes to the Gibeonites. The mention of these crimes reveals the kind of heavy-handed reign Saul had carried on over the forty years of his tenure. In the same way as Saul had endeavored to exterminate the witches from the land,<sup>480</sup> he must have carried out a campaign of ethnic cleansing, of which the Gibeonites were the victims. In doing this, Saul disregarded the ancient treaty the Israelites had made with that Canaanite tribe. The historical background of the issue is found in the Book of Joshua, where the ruse of the Gibeonites and the treaty Joshua and the leaders of Israel made with them is recounted.<sup>481</sup>

*The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "There is an entire absence of any mark of time to show in what part of David's reign this famine took place. It does not even follow, from the mention of Mephibosheth's name, that it must have happened at a time subsequent to the sending for that prince from Machir's house; for it may have been the search after the descendants of Saul which made David remember the son of his old friend. The burial, however, of the bones of Saul and Jonathan as an act of respect to the slaughtered king makes it probable that the narrative belongs to the early part of David's reign, as also does the apparent fact that the seven victims were all young and unmarried. Mephibosheth, we read, had a young son when David sent for him. Now, he was five years old when his father was slain (...2 Samuel 4:4), and thus at the end of David's reign of seven years and a half at Hebron, he would be twelve and a half years of age. The famine lasted three years, and if David had been king four or five years when the famine began, Mephibosheth, at the age of twenty, might well have a 'young son' in a country where men marry early. We cannot believe that the famine occurred long after David had been king of all Israel, because manifestly it would have been unjust and even monstrous to punish a nation for the sins of a king who had long passed away. The sins of its rulers are visited upon a nation constantly through a long series of years, but it is always in the way of natural development. A statesman may put a nation upon a wrong track, and may involve it in serious difficulties, and even in irretrievable disaster, unless some one be raised up able to make it retrace its steps and regain the rightful direction. But this famine was a direct interference of Providence, and to justify it the sin must be still fresh in the national remembrance. Had it been an old crime long ago forgotten, instead of leading men to repentance, this long and terrible punishment would have hardened men's hearts, and made them regard the Deity as vindictive. It is even probable that the sin was still being committed; for though commenced and approved by Saul, his oppression and purpose of gradually destroying the native races was too much in accord with men's usual way of acting not to be continued, unless stopped by the justice of the ruler."

We read that David summoned the Gibeonites to enquire what they wished to be done to expiate the crimes committed against them. The subsequent arrangement looks appalling to the modern eye. Saul, by whose orders the crimes had been perpetrated, had fallen in the war with the Philistines. His grandchildren had not been personally responsible; they were, probably, not even born yet when their grandfather carried out his scheme. A modern equivalent would be if the state of Israel would demand the lives of a certain number of German citizens to expiate for the Nazi holocaust.

<sup>478</sup> II Sam. 20:22

<sup>479</sup> See II Sam. 21:1-14.

<sup>480</sup> See I Sam. 28:9.

<sup>481</sup> See Josh. 9:1-26.

The procedure, however, was not out of line with the Levitical law, which required that land polluted by bloodshed be cleansed by the blood of the guilty party. We read: "Do not pollute the land where you are. Bloodshed pollutes the land, and atonement cannot be made for the land on which blood has been shed, except by the blood of the one who shed it. Do not defile the land where you live and where I dwell, for I, the LORD, dwell among the Israelites."<sup>482</sup>

More may have been at stake than some isolated incidents. Whole segments of Israel may have been involved in crimes that stained the nation. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: "We gather from various incidental circumstances that Saul, in some part of his reign, manifested great zeal in an attempt to carry out literally the enactments of the Levitical Law; but he seems to have done so with the same ferocity as that which he displayed in slaughtering the priests at Nob with their wives and children. Thus he had put to death wizards and all who dealt with familiar spirits (...1 Samuel 28:9), in accordance with ... Exodus 22:18 and ... Leviticus 20:6. In the same way he seems to have tried to exterminate the aboriginal inhabitants of Palestine, in accordance with ... Deuteronomy 7:2, and had especially massacred a large number of Gibeonites, in violation of the covenant made with them by Joshua and all Israel (... Joshua 9:3, 15-27). And as he would thus acquire 'fields and vineyards' robbed from them to give to his captains, his conduct was probably popular, and the cause of a general system of wrong and oppression practiced upon all the natives. It had thus become a national sin, and as such was punished by a national calamity."

The Gibeonites stated that they wanted the crimes that had been committed against their tribe by Saul avenged by the death of seven of Saul's children or grandchildren. In doing so, they based themselves, at least in principle, upon the Jewish law. They said to David: "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."<sup>483</sup> The law stated: "Do not accept a ransom for the life of a murderer, who deserves to die. He must surely be put to death."<sup>484</sup>

Some Bible scholars assume that these seven members of Saul's family, who were executed for the crime of their father, or grandfather, had personally participated in Saul's extermination scheme, but this cannot be proven. The selection of the victims seems to have been random. The number seven was considered sacred, both among the Israelites and the tribes of Canaan.

The Gibeonites made the most of this rite of expiation. Their calling Saul "the Lord's chosen one," accentuated the gravity of the offence, or it may have been a stab in the direction of the service to YHWH by those who did not worship Him. The choice of the place of execution, Gibeah, which had been the place of Saul's residence and the center of his reign, added to the insult.

In choosing the seven men to be executed, David was careful to save Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth. Another Mephibosheth is mentioned, who was Saul's son, not his grandson, by his wife Rizpah, and five sons, born to Merab. The mode of execution is not stated, but it was probably not through death by hanging. The victims were, doubtless, first killed and the dead bodies hanged to demonstrate that they were cursed. The Levitical Law would not allow bodies to hang overnight. The law stipulated: "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>485</sup> The Gibeonites ignored that part of the law, since the bodies seem to have remained hanging during most of the barley harvest time, or at least, till the rains began to fall. Since we do not know when this happened, it is impossible to figure out the time of duration.

The moral justification for this atonement is difficult to explain. Ezekiel states God's principle in the matter: "The soul who sins is the one who will die. The son will not share the guilt of the father, nor will the father share the guilt of the son."<sup>486</sup> Yet, the whole matter does not seem to be one of misunderstanding of God's will on the basis of superstition. God pointed out to David that Saul had violated the rights of the Gibeonites. And when the descendants of the guilty party were executed, the famine ended. We have to leave the problem as it is.

The incident is highlighted by a moving act of mourning by Rizpah, the mother of two of the victims, who kept vigil at the execution site, to prevent vultures from desecrating the bodies. *The Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown Commentary* comments: "Thus did Rizpah, with devoted assiduity, and regardless of

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<sup>482</sup> Num. 35:33,34

<sup>483</sup> II Sam. 21:4

<sup>484</sup> Num. 35:31

<sup>485</sup> Deut. 21:22,23

<sup>486</sup> Ezek. 18:20

personal discomfort, privation, and exhausting fatigue, keep her solitary watch by day and night before the painful spectacle of the wasting relics of what were once the beloved persons of her sons. This brief and simple narrative presents a picture of maternal tenderness far more affecting than any episode that has been interwoven in tales of poetry or romance.”

When David heard about Rizpah’s act of love, he arranged for the funeral of the victims. At the same time, he had the remains of Saul and Jonathan exhumed and re-interred in the family sepulcher of Kish.<sup>487</sup> The people of Jabesh Gilead had taken the bodies of Saul and Jonathan, which the Philistines had exposed on the wall of Beth Shan. We read: “When the people of Jabesh Gilead heard of what the Philistines had done to Saul, all their valiant men journeyed through the night to Beth Shan. They took down the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Beth Shan and went to Jabesh, where they burned them. Then they took their bones and buried them under a tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and they fasted seven days.”<sup>488</sup> The citizens of Jabesh had remembered that Saul had delivered them from the hands of Nahash the Ammonite.<sup>489</sup>

As *The Pulpit Commentary* suggested, these funeral arrangements must have been carried out shortly after David had become king. It would be difficult to imagine that Saul’s and Jonathan’s bones rested in Jabesh Gilead for almost forty years before they were given an honorable burial.

The statement, “After that, God answered prayer in behalf of the land”<sup>490</sup> must refer to more than the return of the rains, since it had been mentioned earlier that Rizpah watched over the bodies of those who had been executed “from the beginning of the harvest till the rain poured down from the heavens.”

Second Samuel, Chapter Twenty-one, Verses 15-22 give us a compellation of events, some of which may have occurred earlier in David’s reign, others later. There does not seem to have been an attempt at maintaining any chronological order in the arrangement of the material. Several of the incidents mentioned here are also recorded in First Chronicles, Chapter Twenty. Bible scholars have argued which one of the two accounts is the original one and who borrowed from whom.

The Philistines had been effectively subdued in the early part of David’s reign. We read: “In the course of time, David defeated the Philistines and subdued them, and he took Metheg Ammah from the control of the Philistines.”<sup>491</sup> It seems, however, that there were subsequent outbreaks of rebellion and that David and his army frequently had to get into action against them. The incident described here, in which David narrowly escaped death because of exhaustion, would fit better in the latter than in the earlier part of his life. It reminded David that he was no longer as young as he used to be.

There were some giants left among the Philistines, some of whom were related to Goliath. They all seem to have originated in Gath. One of them, by the name of Ishbi-Benob tried to kill David and almost succeeded. Abishai, David’s nephew, saved the king’s life by killing the giant. The incident prompted David’s men to insist that he could no longer personally accompany them in their military campaigns.<sup>492</sup>

Some Bible scholars have voiced serious objections to the content of this chapter and expressed their doubt that it is part of the inspired Word of God. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary*, for instance, states: “There are evidently many places in this chapter in which the text has suffered much from the ignorance or carelessness of transcribers; and indeed I suspect the whole has suffered so materially as to distort, if not misrepresent the principal facts. It seems as if a Gibeonite has had something to do with the copies that are come down to us, or that the first fourteen verses have been inserted from a less authentic document than the rest of the book.” The author mentions several instances in this chapter that lack back up in other parts of the records of sacred history. He considers the human sacrifices that were supposedly brought to atone for the famine, too immoral to warrant divine intervention in the course of nature. There is also no record that Michal ever was the wife of Adriel or that she had any children. The author concludes: “Until I get further light on the subject, I am led to conclude that the whole chapter is not now what it would be coming from the pen of an inspired writer; and that this part of the Jewish records has suffered much from rabbinical glosses, alterations, and additions.” If the learned doctor is correct in his assumption, we could heave a sigh of relief, since it would solve all the moral objections we feel against the incidents described. Maybe there is in the Bible, what the Muslims consider to be in the Koran, “a satanic verse.” On

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<sup>487</sup> II Sam. 21:11-14

<sup>488</sup> I Sam. 31:11-13

<sup>489</sup> See I Sam. 11:1-11.

<sup>490</sup> II Sam. 21:14

<sup>491</sup> II Sam. 8:1; I Chron. 18:1

<sup>492</sup> II Sam. 21:17

the other hand, there is a danger in an approach to Scripture that allows us to pick and choose. Textual criticism is, of course, a legitimate discipline, but what is arrogantly called “Higher Criticism” can lead to removal of all limitations in dealing with the doctrine of inspiration of the Scriptures. There are places where the ice is very thin and rather slippery.

The last of David’s failures mentioned in the Scriptures is his order to take a census of the people of Israel. We find the record in Second Samuel, Chapter Twenty-four and First Chronicles, Chapter Twenty-one.

There are several questions concerning the matter of the census to which the Bible does not give us an answer. The first one is, who tempted David to commit an act that is described as sinful, and the second, why was it so sinful?

The account in Second Samuel opens with the word “again.” We read: “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.’”<sup>493</sup> “Again” is the rendering of the Hebrew word *yacaph*, which means, “to continue to do a thing.” The verse, therefore, could be read: “The anger of the LORD continued to burn against Israel.” This seems to link this episode to the last one we looked at, namely the three-year-long drought and the way this was terminated by the human sacrifice of seven of Saul’s descendants. If the Lord continued to be angry at Israel, although the famine that was caused by the dry spell came to an end, the atonement by means of the execution of Saul’s children, must not have met with God’s approval. That would certainly satisfy our sense of justice.

In the opening words of the record in Second Samuel, the Hebrew text does not have the personal pronoun “he,” but the verb is in the third person singular. Although this suggests that the subject is God, the text does not specifically state this. We read in First Chronicles: “Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel.”<sup>494</sup> The fact that that text provides Satan as the subject would make it possible to consider him as the prime mover. On the other hand, the Bible clearly teaches that God uses Satan and his subversive tactics to achieve the purpose of His glory. The Book of Job is an example of this. The plagues in the Book of Revelation are the works of the devil but they are, at the same time, the accomplishment of God’s plan for the end times. According to the prophet Amos, God takes the credit for everything that happens on earth, whether good or bad. “When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it?”<sup>495</sup> We may, therefore, safely conclude that Satan carried out what God ordained, or at least permitted.

This does not explain, though, why David’s desire to take a census was so particularly sinful. Bible scholars have debated the issue to great length. Although some scholars disagree with this, I am inclined to consider David’s failure to levy the required ransom for the life of the ones counted to be the main reason for the coming of the plague. We read in Exodus: “When you take a census of the Israelites to count them, each one must pay the LORD a ransom for his life at the time he is counted. Then no plague will come on them when you number them. Each one who crosses over to those already counted is to give a half shekel, according to the sanctuary shekel, which weighs twenty gerahs. This half shekel is an offering to the LORD. All who cross over, those twenty years old or more, are to give an offering to the LORD. The rich are not to give more than a half shekel and the poor are not to give less when you make the offering to the LORD to atone for your lives.”<sup>496</sup>

God’s reason for revealing His wrath must have been based upon legal grounds. David may have sinned in harboring pride in his heart, or he may have had plans to use a larger army for purposes of extension of his territory in a way that God disapproved of. But if God were to send pestilence whenever pride arises in the human heart, there would no longer be any world population.

Although the reason for the sinful character of the census is not too clear to us, it seems to have been abundantly clear to Joab and his staff, to whom David gave the order. One of the reasons Joab objected to a census for the purpose of military conscription may have been that enlarging of the army would diminish the quality of the elite troops of which he had charge. Joab remonstrated forcefully, but David overruled him. So the general went and, however grudgingly, started the count.

There is a gross discrepancy between the results of the count as recorded in Second Samuel and First Chronicles. The text in Second Samuel reads: “In Israel there were eight hundred thousand able-

<sup>493</sup> II Sam. 24:1

<sup>494</sup> I Chron. 21:1

<sup>495</sup> Amos 3:6

<sup>496</sup> Ex. 30:12-15

bodied men who could handle a sword, and in Judah five hundred thousand.”<sup>497</sup> First Chronicles reports: “Joab reported the number of the fighting men to David: In all Israel there were one million one hundred thousand men who could handle a sword, including four hundred and seventy thousand in Judah.”<sup>498</sup> No satisfactory explanation for the difference has ever been given. Someone, probably, made some copying mistakes. Since figures in Hebrew were represented by letters, this could easily have occurred. If the number of men of twenty and above amounted to more than one million, the total population of the land would be well over eight million. Some critics doubt that the relatively small area of Palestine could support that many. Present day Israel is, approximately, 7,800 square miles and its population is only a little more than six million. Stranger yet, First Chronicles states elsewhere that “the number was not entered in the book of the annals of King David.”<sup>499</sup>

Before the census was finished, David came under deep conviction of sin and he called upon the Lord with this confession: “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.”<sup>500</sup> We are not told what caused his change of mind on the subject. *The Matthew Henry’s Commentary* comments: “While the thing was in doing, during all those nine months, we do not find that David was sensible of his sin, for had he been so he would have countermanded the orders he had given; but, when the account was finished and laid before him, that very night his conscience was awakened, and he felt the pain of it just then when he promised himself the pleasure of it. When he was about to feast on the satisfaction of the number of his people, it was turned into the gall of asps within him; sense of the sin cast a damp upon the joy.”

In answer to this prayer of confession, God sent the prophet Gad to David with a triple choice of punishments. The NIV reads “three years of famine,” probably, to make the number coincide with the text in First Chronicles.<sup>501</sup> In one place the Hebrew uses the word *sheba*, “seven” and in the other *shalowsh*, “three.” “Seven” may be considered symbolic for a sacred unit and not intended as a literal digit. “Seven,” in Hebrew is represented by the letter *zayin*, “three” by *gimel*. We can see how easily the two symbols could be confused in copying. The sequence in Chronicles, three years of famine, three months of enemies’ invasions, or three days of plague, makes more sense.

David’s answer 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,”<sup>502</sup> has generally been construed as meaning that he chose the three days of plague. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* observes: “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.” But the text does not state a specific choice of one of the three options. One could read into it that David leaves the choice to God. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary* comments: “Sinners in the hands of an angry God have more reason for hope than does offending man in the clutches of an offended society.”

So the bubonic plague fell upon the land of Israel and claimed seventy thousand victims. It is not clear how long this plague lasted. Some commentators believe that “the appointed time” refers to the period of three days Gad announced. *The Pulpit Commentary* suggests that the pestilence may only have lasted a few hours. Several ancient versions of the text read: “from morning until the sixth hour,” which would be the hour of the evening sacrifice. It seems doubtful, however, that an epidemic, even such a terrible one as the bubonic plague, could claim seventy thousand victims in less than one day. *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “This is a vast number to fall victims of the pestilence in so short a time, as even the most dangerous forms of sickness take some days for their development. But similarly the army of Sennacherib was cut off in a night (...Isaiah 37:36); as were the firstborn in Egypt, whose visitation more nearly resembles the course of this pestilence; and the rapidity of the death blow, striking down so vast a multitude suddenly throughout all parts of the land, would be proof to every mind that the mortality was the Divine chastisement for national sin. It is possible, nevertheless, that the black death cloud, bringing with it the plague, may have been settling down upon the land previously, and have alarmed David, and brought him

<sup>497</sup> II Sam. 24:9

<sup>498</sup> I Chron. 21:5

<sup>499</sup> I Chron. 27:24

<sup>500</sup> II Sam. 24:10

<sup>501</sup> Compare II Sam. 24:13 with I Chron. 21:12

<sup>502</sup> II Sam. 24:14

to repentance; and though no new cases occurred after the offering of his burnt offerings (ver. 25), yet it by no means follows that all cases of infection were miraculously cured. The malady may have run in them its normal course. It was Jerusalem that was saved from the blow, and, after the offering of the burnt offering, the pestilence smote down no more.”

The accounts of Second Samuel and First Chronicles compliment each other. First Chronicles highlights certain points that are not specifically mentioned in Second Samuel. The Second Samuel record is more concise. The Bible paints a very vivid picture of the way the plague ravaged the Israelites. The pestilence is depicted as an angel who, with a drawn sword, went around slaying the people. To us who know about microbes and viruses, the picture seems rather primitive. But the fact that most people never see an angel does not annul the reality of a world, inhabited by spiritual beings. When David saw an angel with a drawn sword, he was not hallucinating. It is true that the scene is described in terms of human emotions and experiences. God’s reaction to seeing the angel ready to strike Jerusalem does not match our understanding of the workings of divine decrees. The point, however, is clear. If we are shocked to see the ravages of calamities and destruction, why would God not feel as we do? The picture shows God’s compassion with the sufferings of mankind, even those sufferings that man brings upon himself.

God’s change of mind was also the direct result of David’s prayer and confession of sin. First Chronicles gives us a more complete text of David’s prayer: “Was it not I who ordered the fighting men to be counted? I am the one who has sinned and done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? O LORD my God, let your hand fall upon me and my family, but do not let this plague remain on your people.”<sup>503</sup>

Although the creature that carried out the sentence of death is called “the angel of the LORD,” we must not confuse him with the Second Person of the Trinity. This angel carried out God’s orders, but he may have been an agent of Satan. The picture is complicated by the fact that it was also “the angel of the LORD” who told Gad to tell David that he should build an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah.<sup>504</sup> We do not read that Gad saw the angel of death or even that the prophet was present when David went to the Araunah’s place. We believe that there were two angels who were called by the same name.

Araunah and his sons were threshing wheat when David arrived at the threshing floor. They were unable to see the angel of death because he stood behind them in midair. The expression on David’s face must have made them turn around. At that point Araunah’s sons fled the scene but Araunah approached the king. When Araunah heard that David wanted to buy his threshing floor to build an altar, he offered the place and his threshing equipment to him as a donation. David’s answer: “I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing,”<sup>505</sup> has become the ground rule for the bringing of all sacrifices. Giving to God what does not belong to us or what costs us nothing is not worth the name “sacrifice.” To sacrifice means to give till it hurts. *The Adam Clarke’s Commentary* comments: “It is a maxim from heaven, ‘Honor the Lord with thy substance.’ He who has a religion that costs him nothing has a religion that is worth nothing; nor will any man esteem the ordinances of God, if those ordinances cost him nothing.”

We find another discrepancy between the two accounts in the amount paid for Araunah’s property. Second Samuel states, “fifty shekels of silver,”<sup>506</sup> and First Chronicles, six hundred shekels of gold.<sup>507</sup> Various explanations have been given to account for the difference. Some commentators assume that a corruption has crept into one of the two texts. A more plausible explanation is that David made two purchases. He initially only bought Araunah’s threshing floor and the equipment for the purpose of building an altar. When he realized that the site was God’s chosen place for the building of the temple, he bought the whole mountainside. *The Pulpit Commentary* explains: “There is a superficial, but no real discrepancy between these two narratives. David gave the fifty shekels for the immediate use of the place, and for the oxen and implements. He had no idea at the time of permanently occupying it, and probably the note in the LXX, interpolated by scribes from the margin into the text, is true, ‘And Solomon added to the altar afterwards, for it was small at the first.’ It was a small altar hurriedly put together for the purpose of offering one sacrifice; and fifty shekels would be full compensation. But the sacrifice had hallowed the

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<sup>503</sup> I Chron. 21:17

<sup>504</sup> See I Chron. 21:18.

<sup>505</sup> II Sam. 24:24; I Chron. 21:24

<sup>506</sup> II Sam. 24:24

<sup>507</sup> I Chron. 21:25

spot, and, when finally it was selected as the site for the temple, David bought the whole area and all that Araunah possessed there.”

To figure out how much money in modern currency would be an exercise in futility. TLB, which often puts modern figures to amounts of ancient purchases, circumvents the problem in Second Samuel by simply stating: “So David paid him for the threshing floor and the oxen.” But in the text of First Chronicles, it renders the verse: “So David paid Ornan \$4,300 in gold.” No piece of real estate has more risen in value since the time of its initial purchase than this temple mount. Wars have been fought about it and are still being fought.

## V. David’s Preparation for Building the Temple

One of the sensational aspects of David’s sacrifice is the way God responded to it 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>508</sup> God’s immediate answer must have given David to understand that, not only God accepted the sacrifice, but also that a change of venue for the altar had occurred. When the tabernacle was built in the desert, God had inaugurated the burnt offering altar by Himself lighting the fire.<sup>509</sup> David decided, on the basis of his experience, that the Lord had revealed where the temple should be built. He issued a royal edict, stating: “The house of the LORD God is to be here, and also the altar of burnt offering for Israel.”<sup>510</sup>

The search for the place of God’s revelation among the Israelites had taken several centuries. When Israel was still in the desert, God had said to Moses: “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>511</sup> After the conquest of Canaan, this search was never pursued seriously. The tabernacle was temporarily placed at Gilgal and later moved to Shiloh where it remained for several centuries. In the days of Samuel, the ark was removed from the tabernacle and taken to the battlefield during a war with the Philistines, who captured it and later returned it. It appears that, after this, the ark was never returned to its original place in the Holy of Holies.<sup>512</sup> During the reign of King Saul, the tabernacle was moved to Nob<sup>513</sup> and, probably after Saul’s massacre of the priests, again moved to Gibeon. When David ascended the throne of Israel and made Jerusalem the center of government, the ark was brought to Jerusalem, but the tabernacle remained at Gibeon. The importance of the tabernacle consisted then only in the fact that the original burnt offering altar still existed. Since the ark no longer resided in it, the golden burnt offering altar had lost its importance. It appears that David intended to go to Gibeon to bring sacrifices and plead for a cessation of the pestilence, but he was prevented from doing so by the vision of the angel. The record in First Chronicles states: “The tabernacle of the LORD, which Moses had made in the desert, and the altar of burnt offering were at that time on the high place at Gibeon. But David could not go before it to inquire of God, because he was afraid of the sword of the angel of the LORD.”<sup>514</sup> When David was ordered to build an altar on the threshing floor of Araunah, he recognized that God had finally revealed where the place “to put his Name there for his dwelling” was. The search was over!

When we consider that the outbreak of the plague was a punishment for David’s sin of ordering the census, and that God used this calamity to reveal the place of His revelation, we marvel at the way the Almighty uses evil to bring about blessing. The conquest of Canaan had been mainly for the purpose of finding a place on earth where the Creator of heaven and earth could reveal Himself. The people God had chosen to achieve this goal for Him gave every indication that they were not really interested in God’s goals; they had their own priorities.

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<sup>508</sup> I Chron. 21:26

<sup>509</sup> See Lev. 9:24.

<sup>510</sup> I Chron. 22:1

<sup>511</sup> Deut. 12:5-7

<sup>512</sup> See I Sam. 4:1-7:1.

<sup>513</sup> I Sam. 21:1-6

<sup>514</sup> I Chron. 21:29,30

God had planted a seed of revelation when He told Abraham to go to Mount Moriah and sacrifice his son Isaac to Him. Abraham recognized the importance of the place. We read: “So Abraham called that place The LORD Will Provide. And to this day it is said, ‘On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.’”<sup>515</sup> The Israelites knew where “the mountain of the LORD” was. But it took an outbreak of the bubonic plague for David to recognize the importance of the old proverb “On the mountain of the LORD it will be provided.”

To this very day, tourist guides will tell people, who enter the temple area in Jerusalem, that the rock in the center of the Muslim mosque that is called “The Dome of the Rock” is, according to the tradition, the place where Abraham sacrificed Isaac.<sup>516</sup> It was also the place where the burnt offering altar in the temple stood. A few feet from there must have been the place where the Lord Jesus Christ was nailed to a cross, the ultimate place where God provided a solution for the sin of the world.

David’s vision for the building of the temple led to the second measure for the unification of the nation of Israel. In capturing Jerusalem and in making it the capital of the nation, David endeavored to forge Israel into one people. In his efforts to build the temple as a center of worship, he tried to make it the kingdom of priests and the holy nation, which God intended it to be.<sup>517</sup>

David’s involvement in the preparation for this building, more than any other factor in his life, made him “a man after God’s own heart.” Although David’s life was marked by blatant moral and ethical failures, he never lost the vision of first seeking God’s Kingdom and its righteousness. That is the reason he still appears in history as one of the greatest human beings this world has ever known.

David set himself with great vigor to draw up the plans for the construction of the temple and the gathering of material. First Chronicles Chapter Twenty-two shows that he engaged the expertise of resident aliens to ensure the highest quality of workmanship. The LXX calls these aliens “proselytes.”

Verses 6-16 recount David’s charge to Solomon, who would oversee the construction after David’s death. And in Verses 17-19, we read how David ordered the leaders of Israel to assist Solomon in the work that was laid out for him.

David said about Solomon that he was “young and inexperienced.”<sup>518</sup> It is impossible to determine Solomon’s age at this time; Bible scholars have put it anywhere between 12 and 25. David’s vision for the greatness and splendor of the temple and the fact that the one who would have the oversight over the construction was a mere child, explains the earnestness of his charge to Solomon. It also accounts for the extensive preparations David made for the construction before his death.

In the only father-son talk, recorded in Scripture, David shared with Solomon the secret of his heart as well as the essence of Nathan’s prophecy.<sup>519</sup> As we saw earlier, this prophecy had a much wider application than to the immediate future of David’s life and to the construction of a building in Jerusalem. The ultimate fulfillment was for the One who is “greater than Solomon.”<sup>520</sup>

Every father-son talk should be modeled on David’s conversation with young Solomon. A father, who knows Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior, ought to share his vision and desire for the building of God’s temple with his son or daughter and kindle in them the fire that God wants to burn in families from one generation to another. Love for God and zeal for His kingdom are not hereditary, but parents can model them for their children. As parents, we should make every effort to leave our children that which is more precious than gold and silver.

David was only partially successful in his efforts to transfer his passion to his son. It is true that Solomon built a temple that became one of the wonders of the ancient world. But he did not keep the fire burning on the altar of his own life. But our study is about David and not about Solomon.

The plans for the temple were given to David by divine inspiration in the same manner as Moses had received the plans for the building of the tabernacle.<sup>521</sup> First Chronicles, Chapter Twenty-eight states this. “Then David gave his son Solomon the plans for the portico of the temple, its buildings, its storerooms, its upper parts, its inner rooms and the place of atonement. He gave him the plans of all that the Spirit had put in his mind for the courts of the temple of the LORD and all the surrounding rooms, for the

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<sup>515</sup> Gen. 22:14

<sup>516</sup> The Koran states that Abraham sacrificed Ishmael.

<sup>517</sup> See Ex. 19:5.

<sup>518</sup> I Chron. 22:5

<sup>519</sup> See II Sam. 7:5-16.

<sup>520</sup> See Matt. 12:42.

<sup>521</sup> See Ex. 25:40; Heb. 8:5.

treasuries of the temple of God and for the treasuries for the dedicated things. He gave him instructions for the divisions of the priests and Levites, and for all the work of serving in the temple of the LORD, as well as for all the articles to be used in its service. He designated the weight of gold for all the gold articles to be used in various kinds of service, and the weight of silver for all the silver articles to be used in various kinds of service: the weight of gold for the gold lampstands and their lamps, with the weight for each lampstand and its lamps; and the weight of silver for each silver lampstand and its lamps, according to the use of each lampstand; the weight of gold for each table for consecrated bread; the weight of silver for the silver tables; the weight of pure gold for the forks, sprinkling bowls and pitchers; the weight of gold for each gold dish; the weight of silver for each silver dish; and the weight of the refined gold for the altar of incense. He also gave him the plan for the chariot, that is, the cherubim of gold that spread their wings and shelter the ark of the covenant of the LORD. 'All this,' David said, 'I have in writing from the hand of the LORD upon me, and he gave me understanding in all the details of the plan.'<sup>522</sup>

Bible scholars have been puzzled with the enormous amount of precious metals David prepared for the construction of the temple. We read that he had stored up "a hundred thousand talents of gold, a million talents of silver, quantities of bronze and iron too great to be weighed, and wood and stone."<sup>523</sup> Various measures have been tried to determine the actual weight of the ancient talent, but at any calculation, the money value of the gold and silver would amount to billions of dollars in present-day currency. Some scholars doubt the accuracy of the Biblical account and suspect corruption of the text. Others think that the weight of the talent may have changed throughout the ages. But either way, the amount of wealth described remains staggering. A note from the prophet Haggai may well serve to indicate that huge amounts of precious metals were used. At the rebuilding of the temple after the captivity, we read: "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'In a little while I will once more shake the heavens and the earth, the sea and the dry land. I will shake all nations, and the desired of all nations will come, and I will fill this house with glory,' says the LORD Almighty. 'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the LORD Almighty. 'The glory of this present house will be greater than the glory of the former house,' says the LORD Almighty."<sup>524</sup> TLB gives us a good impression of the amounts in present-day currency: "By hard work I have collected several billion dollars worth of gold bullion, millions in silver, and so much iron and bronze that I haven't even weighed it; I have also gathered timber and stone for the walls." NLT reads: "I have worked hard to provide materials for building the Temple of the LORD--nearly four thousand tons of gold, nearly forty thousand tons of silver, and so much iron and bronze that it cannot be weighed. I have also gathered lumber and stone for the walls, though you may need to add more." Most commentators point to the fact that David accumulated enormous wealth by levying taxes from the nation he had subdued.

After giving the charge for the building of the temple to his son, David transferred his responsibility to the leaders of the nation. David knew that his earthly life was drawing to an end. He must have felt like Moses who had come to the border of the Promised Land but was not allowed to enter. For both men the journey had come to an end, but for the nation the main challenge was still ahead. Moses had brought the people to the beginning of the fulfillment of God's promise; David had led them to the completion of it.

In typical Jewish idiom, he put the confirmation of God's Word in the form of a question: "Is not the LORD your God with you? And has he not granted you rest on every side?"<sup>525</sup> *The Pulpit Commentary*, pointedly, comments: "The whole of this verse should have been suggestive of memories thrilling with interest. What David says here is equivalent to the declaration of the perfect fulfillment of the promises of nine hundred years ago. By faith of those very promises how many generations had lived! What journeyings, suspense, punishment, and struggle, the intervening centuries had witnessed! And now at last it is given to the lips of the aged David to pronounce the termination of a nation's prolonged conflict, its entrance into peace, and the fulfillment of the most impassioned wishes, imaginings, and prayers of the patriarchs, of Moses, and of a long line of the faithful. It was well for David that he could not foresee and did not know how near the culminating of a nation's glory and prosperity might be to its woeful fall and prolonged decay. The analogy that obtains in this respect between the history of an individual and of a nation is as remarkable as it should be instructive and turned to the uses of warning."

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<sup>522</sup> I Chron. 28:11-19

<sup>523</sup> I Chron. 22:14

<sup>524</sup> Hag. 2:6-9

<sup>525</sup> I Chron. 22:18

*The Commentary* is at least partially correct. For the everyday Israelite, faith in the promises had been smaller than a mustard seed. This was not the only moment in world history where God's plan for mankind came close to realization. If every Israelite had shared King David's vision, this world would have been a different place. A similar instance occurred when Jesus entered Jerusalem. There was a flare-up of enthusiasm when the people shouted "Hosanna!" But Jesus wept over the city. We read: "As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, 'If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace-but now it is hidden from your eyes.'" <sup>526</sup> A third pivotal moment came shortly after Pentecost, when Peter and John had healed a crippled beggar. Peter said to the mass of people who had gathered: "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you-even Jesus." <sup>527</sup> Instead of "times of refreshing," came persecution.

God mercifully kept the future from David's eye. As far as David was concerned, there would be a temple in Jerusalem and the Ark of the Covenant would reside in it. There would be a place in this world where God could reveal Himself in the midst of a kingdom of priests.

When David died, his flame was not burning low and became extinguished; in a way, he went out in a blaze of glory as the Twenty-ninth Chapter of First Chronicles testifies. The record in the first chapters of First Kings speak of infirmity and intrigue, but this was pushed into the background by David's glorious public testimony in which he inspired the whole nation to put their shoulders under the work of building the temple.

Before we enter into the details of David's magnificent farewell address to the leaders of the people and to his son Solomon, we must look at the intrigues that preceded the succession to the throne. We are told that David "was old and well advanced in years," <sup>528</sup> which cannot have been more than about seventy years of age. Evidently, the longevity of the patriarchs had faded into history and people in David's day did not even get as old as in our time.

The Book of First Kings introduces us to King David's bedroom, where the scene is set for the succession of David's reign by Solomon. Most of the intimate details that are given of David's physical condition and the "folk medicine" prescribed for its cure have little value for our study. The introduction of Abishag <sup>529</sup> whose duty it was to provide body heat to David has no importance, except for the fact that her person and position became the ultimate reason for the execution of Adonijah, David's oldest son at that time. <sup>530</sup> There is also a strong suggestion that David was seriously ill, which would account for Adonijah's private preparations for succession to the throne. As *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* suggests in connection with the fact that Joab and Abiathar joined the party of Adonijah: "Joab and Abiathar did not believe that David would ever do business again."

Adonijah was David's fourth son born of Haggith, <sup>531</sup> his fifth wife. David was still reigning over Judah and Benjamin in Hebron. After the death of Amnon and Absalom, he was naturally next in line as pretender to the throne. There is no indication in the Scriptures that Solomon was the heir apparent. This may be implied in the fact that David entrusted the plans for the building of the temple to him instead of to Adonijah, but it is not stated specifically. Adonijah's expectations, therefore, may not have been unreasonable. Like his brother Absalom, he surrounded himself with enough pomp to attract public attention. We read that Adonijah: "put himself forward and said, 'I will be king.' So he got chariots and horses ready, with fifty men to run ahead of him." <sup>532</sup> The fact that David never checked him in this, although his son's intentions must have been obvious to him, reinforced his plans. It is also true that Adonijah would have been expected to consult his father about the matter, which he, obviously, did not do either. He not only went behind David's back, but also avoided inviting to the coronation ceremony "Nathan the prophet or Benaiah or the special guard or his brother Solomon." <sup>533</sup> *The Pulpit Commentary* observes: "It is clear from this verse that Adonijah perfectly understood that he had in Solomon a rival. The intentions and promises (ver. 13) of his father can hardly have been unknown to him. The name Jedidiah,

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<sup>526</sup> Luke 19:41,42

<sup>527</sup> Acts 3:19,20

<sup>528</sup> I Kings 1:1

<sup>529</sup> I Kings 1:3

<sup>530</sup> I Kings 2:13-25

<sup>531</sup> See II Sam. 3:4.

<sup>532</sup> I Kings 1:5

<sup>533</sup> I Kings 1:10

too, bestowed upon Solomon by Nathan (...2 Samuel 12:25), taken in connection with the prophecy of Nathan (*ibid.* 7:12; cf. ...1 Chronicles 22:9, 10), must have proved to him that Solomon was marked out for David's successor. He seems to have been well aware also, who were Solomon's supporters. To some of them he may have made indirect overtures."

The prophet Nathan realized what the consequences would be if Adonijah would be king instead of Solomon. He must have feared that the plans for the building of the temple would be shelved indefinitely. The fact that he had not been invited to the ceremony put him in the camp of the opposition, and he was in danger of losing his life when Adonijah's reign took effect. Somehow the word of Adonijah's coronation had not reached the royal palace. Nathan figured that quick action was required.

The way Nathan proceeded indicates that he was a shrewd man. But his actions may not have been inspired by faith in God's plan for His people. If he acted on the assumption that Solomon was God's chosen one to ascend the throne after David, he must have felt that the Almighty needed some help. In approaching Bathsheba, he not only appealed to her motherly instincts, but also to the sense of rivalry she must have felt toward David's other wives. We may assume that no love was lost among the members of David's harem. It is not sure that Adonijah's ascension to the throne would mean the certain death of Solomon and his mother, but that would not have been out of character in the age in which this history evolved.

Nathan assumed that David needed some extra prodding to come to action. The king's physical condition may have given him reason for this assumption. His advice to Bathsheba was that she go to David in his bedroom and inform him about the recent events. Then Nathan himself would come in and confirm the truth. The king's wives were, probably, not supposed to know what happened in the outside world, because of their seclusion in the harem; so Nathan's confirmation would be needed to give the matter weight.

The audiences of Bathsheba and Nathan are described in full detail with the observation of all the court etiquette, which were elaborate. Bathsheba came in and reminded David of his oath to her that Solomon would be his successor to the throne. She informed David that Adonijah had been proclaimed king and she assumed that this happened without David's knowledge. She urged David to make an official proclamation to put an end to the uncertainty and confusion: "My lord the king, the eyes of all Israel are on you, to learn from you who will sit on the throne of my lord the king after him. Otherwise, as soon as my lord the king is laid to rest with his fathers, I and my son Solomon will be treated as criminals."<sup>534</sup> It must have been obvious to David what she meant with those last words.

At that moment the arrival of Nathan, who must have been eavesdropping, is announced and Bathsheba withdraws. The NIV's reading: "Have you, my lord the king, declared that Adonijah shall be king after you, and that he will sit on your throne?"<sup>535</sup> is not according to the literal Hebrew text. Nathan did not put his words in the form of a question, but as a suggestion that David must have changed his mind about Solomon and ordered the coronation of Adonijah. In that way, Nathan could expect an emphatic denial. David responds immediately by calling back in Bathsheba to whom he swears that Solomon will be made king that very day. Bathsheba answers: "May my lord King David live forever!"<sup>536</sup> In the setting of court etiquettes, the irony of those words, spoken to one who was on his deathbed, was, undoubtedly, lost.

David then called for Zadok, the high priest, Nathan, the prophet, and Benaiah, the commander of David's bodyguard, and ordered them to make Solomon ride on the royal mule and take him to Gihon for the official coronation ceremony. There seem to have been two high priests in David's day, but Abiathar had been invited to Adonijah's party. The occupation of this high office by two persons has never been explained in a satisfactory way.

*The Pulpit Commentary* states about the use of the mule: "The Rabbins tell us that it was death to ride on the king's mule without his permission. The mule would seem to have been a recent importation into Palestine – we never read of them before the time of David – and the Israelites were forbidden to breed them (...Leviticus 19:19). Their use, consequently, was naturally restricted to royal or distinguished personages (...2 Samuel 13:29)."

Solomon's consecration by anointing him with the sacred oil was done in a public ceremony. David had been anointed in a small private rite with only his immediate family present.<sup>537</sup> The sound of the

<sup>534</sup> I Kings 1:20,21

<sup>535</sup> I Kings 1:24

<sup>536</sup> I Kings 1:31

<sup>537</sup> See I Sam. 16:13.

festivities, the blowing of the trumpet and the playing of the other musical instruments, accompanied by the shouting of the public, reached the ears of those who were celebrating Adonijah's coronation. We read: "Adonijah and all the guests who were with him heard it as they were finishing their feast. On hearing the sound of the trumpet, Joab asked, 'What's the meaning of all the noise in the city?'"<sup>538</sup> This means that the two celebrations must have been carried out within earshot of each other. When Jonathan, the son of Abiathar, who had joined Adonijah's ceremony, came in with the news about Solomon's coronation, Adonijah's party came to an abrupt end. Everybody present must have realized that they would be guilty of treason if they were caught. The specifics of Solomon's ascension to the throne and the various reactions to it have only come to us from the message that Jonathan spoke at this meeting of Adonijah's party. "Solomon has taken his seat on the royal throne. Also, the royal officials have come to congratulate our lord King David, saying, 'May your God make Solomon's name more famous than yours and his throne greater than yours!' And the king bowed in worship on his bed and said, 'Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who has allowed my eyes to see a successor on my throne today.'"<sup>539</sup>

Adonijah realizes that he stands in danger of being accused of high treason and forfeiting his life. He, therefore, runs to the altar and grabs its horns in order to save himself. This is the first incident recorded in the Scriptures of a person who tries to save his life by holding on to the horns of an altar. The practice is nowhere prescribed or explained. It seems to have been understood at that time that a person who sought sanctuary in that way, could not be executed, except in case of premeditated murder. Joab would later follow Adonijah's example, but to no avail.<sup>540</sup> We are not told to which altar Adonijah fled. It was probably the original one built by Moses, which was still at the tabernacle, from which the Ark of the Covenant had been removed. Solomon showed a spirit of righteousness in sparing his brother's life at this time.

David's address to the tribal heads and the nation as a whole in First Chronicles, Chapter Twenty-nine was, most likely, given after Solomon's coronation, since he states emphatically that Solomon was "the one whom God has chosen."<sup>541</sup> The end of this chapter also states that Solomon was recognized as the next king and anointed for the second time.<sup>542</sup> It may also be assumed that this speech preceded David's personal charge to Solomon, recorded in First Kings, Chapter Two. After the transfer of power, David's health must have improved enough for him to meet with the representatives of the people and address the nation at large. And it was not until he felt he was going to die that he called Solomon to give him his final instructions.

If we marveled earlier about the enormous amount of wealth David personally donated for the construction of the temple, we have the same reason to be amazed about what the officials of the nation contributed. The people added five thousand talents of gold to the three thousand David had already pledged, thus raising, what in modern terms, would amount to several hundred billion dollars. One of the puzzling features of the text is that the sacred writer adds an amount of gold in "darics,"<sup>543</sup> a unit which was not used in David's day, but which was probably derived from Persian coinage.

The picture we get from this passage is one, not only of great prosperity, but also of unusual generosity. The two seldom coexist! There must have been a sense of expectation among the Israelites in the last days of David's life that they had arrived at the point where God wanted the nation to be when He led their ancestors out of Egypt toward Canaan. David expresses this sentiment beautifully in one of the most glorious doxologies he ever composed:

"Praise be to you, O LORD, God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Yours, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from you; you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name."<sup>544</sup>

David's prayer that follows this psalm is one of the most profound and moving prayers found in the whole Bible. David demonstrates his greatness in his deep sense of humility. The enormity of the love

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<sup>538</sup> I Kings 1:41

<sup>539</sup> I Kings 1:46-48

<sup>540</sup> See II Kings 2:28-34.

<sup>541</sup> I Chron. 29:1

<sup>542</sup> See I Chron. 29:23.

<sup>543</sup> I Chron. 29:7

<sup>544</sup> I Chron. 29:10-13

offering makes him realize that the spirit of love and generosity is a demonstration of God's grace and not the fruit of human initiative. David's question: "But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this?"<sup>545</sup> parallels the similar question, he had asked in one of the Psalms: "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?"<sup>546</sup> Those words contrast sharply with the almost desperate confession: "We are aliens and strangers in your sight, as were all our forefathers. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope."<sup>547</sup> Yet, the words "aliens and strangers" imply hope. If man is a stranger and alien on earth, his home is somewhere else. David's words draw the gaze of man from below to above.

David also realizes that honesty and integrity in the human heart are the fruit of the grace of God. He had come to the conclusion at the end of his life that, in the words of Jeremiah, "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure."<sup>548</sup> He recognizes that the display of love and integrity in his own heart and in the heart of the people is a miracle that can only be explained by divine intervention. David also understands that it could only be by God's grace that this spirit could be kept alive in the heart of Solomon and of the people in the years to come.

The next day saw a great celebration with the bringing of thousands of sacrifices, followed by a repeat of Solomon's coronation. The day would only be equaled by the actual consecration of the temple when the fire of heaven lit the sacrifice on the altar and the glory of God filled the temple.<sup>549</sup>

We do not know how long David lived after the day of Solomon's second consecration. At one point, when he felt that death was approaching, he summoned Solomon to give him his final charge about some unfinished business of his life. The words: "So be strong, show yourself a man" suggest that Solomon was still a young man, probably a teenager. David may have given his son a copy of the Law of Moses at this point, since he makes reference to it. In the section pertaining to the future kingdom, God had stipulated: "When he takes the throne of his kingdom, he is to write for himself on a scroll a copy of this law, taken from that of the priests, who are Levites. It is to be with him, and he is to read it all the days of his life so that he may learn to revere the LORD his God and follow carefully all the words of this law and these decrees."<sup>550</sup> As far as we know, Solomon did not cherish the heirloom of his father's Bible or pay attention to the rules that were to govern the private life of the king of Israel.

In David's last words, he mentions three people with whom Solomon would have to settle accounts that David had left unfinished: Joab, Barzillai, and Shimei.

In handing over the task of executing Joab for the murder of two army generals, David tried to clear his own conscience. This was really a piece of unfinished business in David's own life. Joab ought to have been put to death immediately after he had murdered Abner.<sup>551</sup> The only reason for David not ordering his execution was that he was afraid of losing the support of the army. That had been a definite lack of faith on the part of the young king. When Joab assassinated Amasa,<sup>552</sup> David was handicapped by the fact that he had ordered Joab to have Uriah, Bathsheba's husband killed.<sup>553</sup> David, therefore, had had his own secret reasons not to carry out justice in that case. The order to Solomon for Joab's execution had become easier to carry out since Joab had joined Adonijah's bid for the throne and had taken refuge in the sanctuary, thus declaring himself guilty.<sup>554</sup>

The mention of the sons of Barzillai is a reference to the help this old chief had given to David and his men during his flight from Absalom.<sup>555</sup> Barzillai had saved David's life. When David wanted him to join him in his return to Jerusalem, he declined, claiming infirmity on the basis of old age. His son Kimham and one or more other ones, whose names are not mentioned, took the father's place. David wanted to ensure their continued comfort at the palace.

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<sup>545</sup> I Chron. 29:14

<sup>546</sup> Ps. 8:4

<sup>547</sup> I Chron. 29:15

<sup>548</sup> Jer. 17:9

<sup>549</sup> See II Chron. 7:1-10.

<sup>550</sup> Deut. 17:18,19

<sup>551</sup> See II Sam. 3:27.

<sup>552</sup> See II Sam. 20:8-10.

<sup>553</sup> See II Sam. 11:14-21.

<sup>554</sup> I Kings 2:28

<sup>555</sup> See II Sam. 17:27-29; 19:31-38.

David's order to Solomon to mete out justice to Shimei seems more complicated than the two previous charges. Shimei had cursed David during his flight for Absalom and twice David had decided not to take revenge.<sup>556</sup> Bible scholars have argued the question whether David continued to harbor bitter feelings toward this man and regretted that he had not put him to death upon his return to Jerusalem, or whether the fact that he was a member of the house of Saul weighed heavier in his advice to Solomon. David may have considered him to be a threat to Solomon's reign. The words: "You are a man of wisdom; you will know what to do to him" suggest that more was involved than the settling of scores.

We would wish that David's last recorded words had been more constructive than this wish for vengeance. The words uttered during the celebration recorded in First Chronicles, Chapter Twenty-nine would have made a better line of exit for such a remarkable life.

*The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* gives us an insightful comment on David's last moments in life, referring to "Nemesis": "David was a strong believer in the power of Nemesis, and that daughter of Night played a considerable part in his life. He felt a peculiar satisfaction in being undeservedly cursed by Shimei, from a conviction that poetic justice would in the end prevail (2 Sam 16:12). He must have felt that the same unseen power was at work when his own oldest son was guilty of a crime such as his father had committed before him (2 Sam 13 and 11), and when the grandfather of the wife of Uriah the Hittite became the enemy whom he had most to fear (2 Sam 11:3; 23:34; compare Ps 41:9; 55:12 f). And David's own last hours, instead of being spent in repose and peace following upon a strenuous and successful life, were passed in meting out vengeance to those who had incurred his displeasure as well as commending those who had done him service (1 Kings 2:5 ff)."

When David died, he was buried on Mount Zion, which is called the City of David.<sup>557</sup> His tomb remained undisturbed for centuries. Peter stated at the day of Pentecost: "Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day."<sup>558</sup> The Book of First Chronicles gives us the postscript to his life: "David son of Jesse was king over all Israel. He ruled over Israel forty years-seven in Hebron and thirty-three in Jerusalem. He died at a good old age, having enjoyed long life, wealth and honor. His son Solomon succeeded him as king."

## VI. Conclusion

David appears to us in Scripture as a man greater than life. From his very youth he showed himself a fearless hero, killing a bear and a lion as well as the giant Goliath, thus delivering the whole nation of Israel. As a poet and musician he takes his place in history as unequalled, next to Shakespeare and Bach, or maybe even topping them. In his fellowship with the God of Israel he is still one of the most shining examples, next to Moses and Daniel. His vision and zeal for God's glory laid the foundation of Israel as a kingdom of priest, which guaranteed its existence to the present day. Israel may not have lived up to its high calling, but the foundation of Judaism still exists and Christianity is solidly built upon it. He was a brilliant strategist, both as supreme commander of the army and king of the nation.

This shining picture is offset by the deepest and darkest shadows that ever marred a human life. His sins almost speak as loud as his righteousness. If it were not for his genuine repentance, David would have gone down in history as one of mankind's most deprived characters. But his penitence turned his life into a monument of God's grace.

In many respects this great man remains an enigma. The fact that God qualifies him as "a man after God's own heart" may be a mystery to us, but it is also an encouragement for all who, like David, "approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

Toccoa Falls, GA, 4/20/04

<sup>556</sup> See II Sam. 16:5-13; 19:16-23.

<sup>557</sup> I Kings 2:10

<sup>558</sup> Acts 2:29