



## FROM HANNAH TO SHILOH

1 Samuel 1–3

The birth of Samuel in the midst of spiritual apostasy in Israel marked a turning point for the nation. Standing in contrast to the corrupt priesthood of his day, the godly Samuel was established as a bold prophet who would lead the nation into a new era.

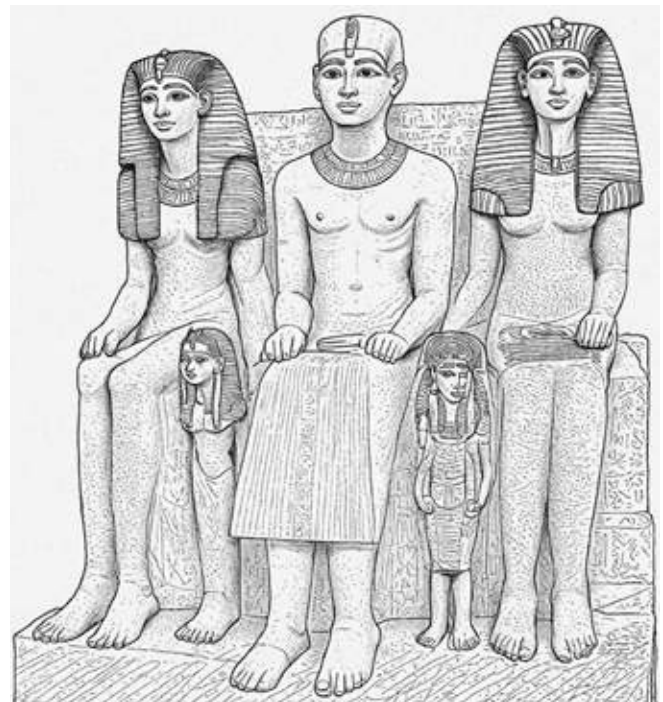
We begin our journey through 1 Samuel during a desperate time in the days of the judges when Israel is oppressed by the Philistines. Israel's greatest enemy, however, is their own spiritual rebellion against God.

Israel is in need of God's help, and help is going to come through the ministry and influence of Samuel. His biography is recorded in 1 Samuel—in fact, it's really an autobiography, because Samuel is the author.

The book opens as follows:

*There was a certain man . . . of Ephraim whose name was Elkanah . . . He had two wives. The name of the one was Hannah, and the name of the other, Peninnah. And Peninnah had children, but Hannah had no children.* (1 Samuel 1:1-2)

Hannah was more than likely Elkanah's first wife; but since she was barren, he adopted the polygamy of his day in order to have an heir.



Family group statue from the thirteenth century

Verse 3 says Elkanah went to Shiloh to worship the Lord every year. This is where the tabernacle was located at that time, and where, we're told, "the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests of the LORD."

Now every year, Peninnah uses the opportunity of this trip to ridicule Hannah for not being able to bear children. Finally, Hannah can't take it anymore. She



goes to the tabernacle alone and according to verse 10, “she prayed to the LORD and wept bitterly.”

It’s wonderful that Hannah runs toward the Lord and not away from Him in her sorrow. She makes a vow here in verse 11:

*“O LORD of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and . . . give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life.”*

She longs for a son, but she’s also longing for her son to serve the Lord.

Eli the priest comes on the scene and eventually hears Hannah’s deep longing. He even asks the Lord to grant her request. And God does. In verse 20 we read that Hannah bears a son and names him Samuel, which means “heard of God,” a reminder that God heard her prayer.

Hannah then keeps her promise. In verse 27, she takes him to Eli and says:

*“The LORD has granted me my petition that I made to him. Therefore I have lent him to the LORD. As long as he lives, he is lent to the LORD.”*

And let me tell you, the nation of Israel will be incredibly blessed because of her sacrifice to the Lord.

Chapter 2 records the prayer Hannah now offers at Shiloh, and it’s a beautiful expression of praise focused on the character of God: “There is none holy like the LORD” (verse 2); He is “a God of knowledge” (verse 3), the one who “brings low and . . . exalts” (verse 7), and He guards “his faithful ones” (verse 9).

Now notice that Hannah’s prayer is offered *after* giving Samuel away. She’s going home to an empty nursery once again as Samuel stays behind to serve the Lord.

However, the nursery doesn’t stay empty for long because verse 21 tells us that Hannah will have five more

children. But Hannah is fulfilled, beloved, not because she has more children, but because she has come to rest in the faithfulness of God, no matter what.

Back in verse 12, we discover that little Samuel has been deposited in a rather ungodly environment. Eli’s sons are described here as “worthless men” who do not know the Lord.

Hophni and Phinehas are taking the best of the meat of the sacrificial animals, which was to be offered to the Lord (verses 13-17). Verse 22 even informs us that they “lay with the women who were serving at the entrance to the tent of meeting.” Here these men are, supposedly serving God in this sacred office but using it for their own sinful appetites.

Now we immediately wonder, “Where is Eli?” Why isn’t he doing something about his sons’ ungodly conduct?

Well, Eli has been unwilling to discipline his sons. Verse 22 says Eli “kept hearing” about his sons’ immoral behavior, indicating he had been hearing about it for a long time. Finally—*finally*, here in verse 23, he gives them a little rebuke, asking them, “Why do you do such things?” He should have removed them from office, but he refused to do so.

*Eli was responsible, not for his sons’ unbelief or immorality, but for basically ignoring their wicked behavior.*

Well, God isn’t going to ignore it any longer. In verse 25 we are told, “It was the will of the LORD to put them to death.” They are so hardened in their sin that God has determined to judge them.



Sometimes children choose ungodly paths despite the prayers, the discipline, and the instruction of their godly parents. But that's not the case here! Over in chapter 3, verse 13, God Himself testifies that Eli would not "restrain" his sons. Eli was responsible, not for his sons' unbelief or immorality, but for basically ignoring their wicked behavior.

The Lord speaks to Eli through an unnamed prophet who shows up in verse 27 to warn him about his sons' wickedness. He even accuses Eli of honoring his sons above God. But Eli refuses to change. And now the stage is set for what happens next in chapter 3.

Verse 1 says, "Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD in the presence of Eli." He's around twelve years of age, according to the Jewish historian, Josephus.

Now notice this telling statement in verse 1: "The word of the LORD was rare in those days; there was no frequent vision." A "vision" is a divine revelation given through a prophet.

God had promised to speak through His prophets. During this wicked time in Israel, however, revelation from God was rare—and probably not welcomed, if you want to know the truth.

One night, verse 4 says, "the LORD called Samuel, and [Samuel] said, 'Here I am!'" Samuel thinks Eli called him, but sleepy Eli had not done so. The call from God comes a second time, and again Eli tells Samuel it wasn't him.

Now when this happens a third time, verse 8 says, "Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the young man." So, he tells Samuel, "Go lie down, and if He calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant hears.'"

Well, the Lord calls again and delivers a very disturbing message to young Samuel:

*"I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken . . . I am about to punish his house forever, for the*

*iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them."*

(verses 12-13)

In the morning, Samuel is afraid to deliver the message to Eli, but Eli insists. So, we read in verse 18, "Samuel told him everything and hid nothing from him." Eli realizes God has spoken—there's no turning back now.

Verse 19 tells us that as Samuel grew, "the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground." That is, everything Samuel revealed prophetically came true. And with that, Samuel becomes established as a "prophet of the LORD" (verse 20) who continually hears from God.

These opening chapters remind us of at least two timeless truths. First, unrestrained sin always leads to terrible consequences. Second, what our world needs today are people like you and me who are willing to say, "Speak, Lord. I'm listening. I'll deliver your message. I'll do whatever you want me to do."

And let me add, we also need parents like Hannah who say to God, "Here's my child; use him for Your glory."

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Consider a time that you displayed godly qualities like those of Hannah. What heart-attitudes and habits assisted you in making those choices? How might your "Hannah-like" story stir in others that faith in God is the way through hardship?

Little Samuel was willing to obey God even though his faith was not mature. Why is it important for believers to understand that obedience is how faith becomes mature?

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## TREATING GOD LIKE A LUCKY CHARM

1 Samuel 4:1–7:2

When people seek to “use” God rather than seek to be used by Him, tragedy is assured. Israel saw God’s ark as nothing more than a good-luck charm. The Philistines saw it as a trophy of war. Both suffered for failing to honor the Lord as the one true God.

In 1 Samuel chapter 4, we are going to witness the tragic conclusion of the lives of Eli and his two sons. We’re also going to witness God’s judgment on Israel because of their rebellion against God.

The prophet Samuel has been delivering God’s revelation to Israel, but they haven’t been listening. Their only concern is the Philistine threat. When the Israelites engage the Philistines in battle, they suffer a devastating defeat. Verse 2 reports that they lost four thousand soldiers. But notice their response in verse 3:

*The elders of Israel said, “Why has the LORD defeated us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD here from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies.”*

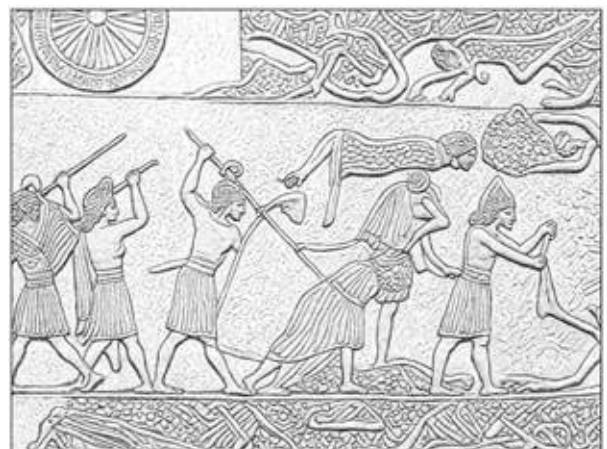
They recognize their failure has something to do with lacking the power of God. “So, let’s get the ark,” someone suggests. “Let’s take that golden box and get God on our side!”

They are going to take this object, which represents the presence of God, and treat it like a lucky charm. They are not going to repent before the Lord at all.

People today still use religion like a charm, hoping they can get God on their side in order to succeed in life. My friend, that’s just superstition—that has nothing to do with trusting God.

So, what do the Israelites do? Look at verse 4:

*The people sent to Shiloh and brought from there the ark of the covenant . . . And the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were*



Relief depicting the Assyrian victory at Til-Tuba





*there with the ark of the covenant of God.*

Hophni and Phineas offer no objections. In fact, it appears *they* carry the ark into the Israelite camp.

We read in verse 5 that “as soon as the ark . . . came into the camp, all Israel gave a mighty shout.” Of course, just because everybody is jumping up and down and shouting “Hallelujah” does not mean God is pleased with what they’re doing.

*Just because everybody is jumping up and down and shouting “Hallelujah” does not mean God is pleased with what they’re doing.*

The Philistines are close enough to hear the noise. We see their response in verse 7: “The Philistines were afraid, for they said, ‘A god has come into the camp.’ And they said, ‘Woe to us!’”

It’s interesting that the Israelites and Philistines have the same view of God. The Philistines would box up their idols and bring them along. Well, now they are fearful because the Israelites evidently brought a box with their God inside!

Israel mistakes the *symbol* of God’s presence—the ark—for the *reality* of His presence. This ark is only a symbol; it isn’t a magic wand.

The outcome of this battle is described here in verses 10 and 11:

*Israel was defeated, and they fled, every man to his home. And there was a very great slaughter, for thirty thousand foot soldiers of Is-*

*rael fell. And the ark of God was captured, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.*

Meanwhile, Eli is at Shiloh, where verse 13 says he is “sitting on his seat by the road,” waiting for news of the battle. We are told that “his heart trembled for the ark of God,” knowing it was being misused.

A soldier who has fled from the battle delivers a four-fold message to Eli: Israel has lost the battle; many Israelites have died; Eli’s two sons are dead; and the ark has been taken by the Philistines.

Verse 18 records:

*As soon as he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell over backward from his seat by the side of the gate, and his neck was broken and he died.*

He is shocked by his personal loss, but it is the nation’s loss of the ark that is too much for Eli. He knows what it means: it’s as if God is saying, “My presence has been absent for years. Now I am taking away the symbol of My presence as well.”

The tragedy doesn’t end there. Verse 19:

*Now his daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant, about to give birth. And when she heard the news that the ark of God was captured, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed and gave birth.*

Her husband was a wicked priest, but she is a godly woman. This is evident from her deep concern over the loss of the ark and the name she gives her son, even as she is dying in childbirth. Verse 21 says, “She named the child Ichabod, saying, ‘The glory has departed from Israel!’” With her last breath she just puts it all together for the nation. The meaning of her son’s name will remind everyone of this day: “The glory of God is gone!”



God judged Israel because they had abandoned Him and treated the ark like a good-luck charm. But the Philistines also will experience God's judgment, for they think that because of their victory and the capture of the ark, their gods are superior to the true God.

So, here in chapter 5, the Philistines place the ark in the temple of their chief god, Dagon, in the city of Ashdod. But notice what happens:

*“The next day, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the LORD. So they took Dagon and put him back in his place.”* (verse 3)

The following day, they find their idol again on his face. This time his head and hands have been cut off.

After that, it just gets worse for the Philistines. Verse 6 says, “The hand of the LORD was heavy against the people of Ashdod, and he terrified and afflicted them with tumors.” This is accompanied by a plague of mice, or rats, according to chapter 6 (verses 4-5), perhaps indicating an outbreak of the bubonic plague.

The ark is not a lucky charm at all; in fact, it becomes a hot potato. It's taken to the city of Gath, (5:8), but the same things happen; so, they take it away to the city of Ekron, and the plague comes to that Philistine city.

After seven months of this, the Philistines get their magicians together to figure out what to do. Evidently nobody suggests they should fall down in repentance and worship the God of Israel.

Instead, we learn in chapter 6 that they yoke two cows together to pull a cart with the ark on it. And verse 4 says they also put on the cart some golden replicas of mice. This is what's called “sympathetic magic”; they are hoping that when this ark rolls out of Philistine territory, the real mice will leave too.

Now verse 12 tells us, “The cows went straight in the direction of Beth-shemesh.” In other words, they weren't driven there—this is the work of God.

Tragically, some of the men of Beth-shemesh are just as pagan as the Philistines, and they treat the ark with disrespect. God puts some of them to death (verse 19), and just like the Philistines, the people want the ark taken away.

Chapter 7 tells us they take the ark to Kiriath-jearim, where it is finally treated with some reverence. In verse 2, we are told the ark remained there “some twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.”

God's acts of judgment have made an impression on the people. They sense something is deeply wrong. The ark has returned, but it's not in use. Beloved, God is setting the stage for Israel's national repentance, but that won't happen for another twenty years.

Sometimes God's work is accomplished slowly, and sometimes He moves quickly. The important thing is that we keep pace with Him as we walk with Him in obedience and trust.

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Instead of repenting and letting God battle for them, the Israelites chose to let religious symbols fight their battle.

What objects do you wear, or rituals do you practice that are actually your way of manipulating God to favor you in some way? How do such choices interfere with a believer's reliance upon God?

How has God used spiritual tragedies to get your attention and humble you before Him? Why were those divine actions necessary for you? From what you've learned during such times, how would you encourage a fellow believer who's just begun a time of humbling?

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## VERBS OF ACTION AND REPENTANCE

1 Samuel 7:3–8:22

Why would people surrender the sure protection of God for the uncertain hope that a human leader would protect them and provide for them? When people are focused on earthly concerns, they tend to seek earthly solutions. This was Israel in Samuel's day.

After the Philistines returned the ark of the covenant to Israel, the Lord gave His people twenty years to think about what had happened. The ark was back in Israel but not in the tabernacle. In fact, Shiloh, where the ark had resided, apparently had been destroyed by the Philistines. And keep in mind that the Philistine threat had not gone away. All this was the result of Israel's rebellion against the Lord.

Samuel eventually calls the people together and says here in 1 Samuel 7:3:

*“If you are returning to the LORD with all your heart, then*



Baal above the waters with lightning bolt

*put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroath from among you and direct your heart to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.”*

I want you to notice several action verbs here. We could call these “verbs of revival.” First, Samuel says they need to “return”—that is, turn back to the kind of life that pleased God.

The second verb is “put away,” or “remove.” They can't return to walk with God unless they remove all the foreign gods and idols they have been following. These gods supposedly promised them success, but the only real success in life is in following the only real God.

The third required action here is “direct your heart to the Lord.” True repentance and commitment to the Lord is not superficial; it goes all the way to the heart. The internal passion of life becomes one of pursuing the character of God.



The fourth and final action verb here is “serve.” Israel must “serve” the Lord. This has to do with making God’s glory the primary reason they get up in the morning and go through the day.

Samuel sounds a lot like Joshua, doesn’t he? “Choose this day whom you will serve” (Joshua 24:15).

Through Samuel, God promises that if Israel repents, He will deliver them from the Philistines. The people’s response is given in verse 4: they “put away the Baals and the Ashtaroth, and they served the LORD only.”

The interaction continues in verses 5 and 6:

*Then Samuel said, “Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you.” So they gathered at Mizpah and drew water and poured it out before the LORD and fasted on that day and said there, “We have sinned against the LORD.”*

The pouring out of water here is a picture of humility. They are emptying themselves of pride and acknowledging their need of God’s help.

Well, the Philistines hear about this great gathering of Israelites and assume they are getting ready to attack, so they gather their army and prepare for battle.

As the Philistines approach the fearful Israelites, we read this:

*Samuel took a nursing lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. And Samuel cried out to the LORD for Israel, and the LORD answered him.*

(verse 9)

How does the Lord answer? The next verse tells us:

*The LORD thundered with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were defeated before Israel.*

This supernatural thunderstorm terrifies the Philistines and confuses their battle plan, as they obviously see that some kind of supernatural power is on the side of Israel. And the army of the Israelites defeats them in battle.

But don’t miss something very important here. What brought about this divine intervention was Israel repenting and turning to the Lord. This battle already had been fought and won on their knees, so to speak.

After this victory, verse 12 tells us: “Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer.” Ebenezer means “stone of help.” This is a memorial stone that will be a reminder of Israel’s revival and God’s response in giving them victory.

The final verses of chapter 7 tell us Samuel continued to lead Israel as a judge. But sadly, while he had a godly influence on the nation, his own sons did not follow the Lord.

Samuel had appointed them as judges, but we read here in chapter 8 and verse 3 that Samuel’s sons “took bribes and perverted justice.” As hard as it is to imagine, the sons of Samuel acted like the sons of Eli.

*Teach your children the gospel—you must.*

Beloved, here we are reminded again that godly parents can have ungodly children. Parents today want some ironclad formula that will produce a godly child. But that is not what the Bible gives us. Rather, it gives us godly guidelines for raising our children. So, teach your children the gospel—you must.





Teach them the truths of God. Urge them to obey the teachings of Scripture, and model for them what that looks like. And never stop praying for them. But remember, mom and dad, that only God can open their eyes. You can't *make* them believe and obey.

That's why, as I have said before, if your children turn out to be godly, you can't take the credit for that; but if they turn out to be ungodly, make sure you don't take the blame for that either. Too many parents today are either taking the blame or taking the credit.

Now following this revelation about Samuel's sons, we are told that the people begin to demand a king like other nations have.

*The elders of Israel ... came to Samuel at Ramah and said to him, "Behold, you are old and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now appoint for us a king to judge us like all the nations."*

(verses 4-5)

Samuel is advancing in age, and his sons offer no hope for continuing his wise, godly, and honest leadership. So, the people ask Samuel to appoint a king for them.

On the surface this seems like a reasonable request, but there's a serious spiritual issue at play here. Behind this request for a king is the rejection of God's leadership. Later, in chapter 12, Samuel will remind the Israelites, "You said ... 'A king shall reign over us,' when the LORD your God was your king" (verse 12).

God was Israel's King, and as long as they followed Him, He would lead, protect, provide, and fight for them. Israel was a unique nation. It was a *theocracy*—ruled directly by God. But the people want a *monarchy*—rule by an earthly king. They want to set God aside and have a human king instead.

Note what God tells Samuel here in verse 7: "Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them."

The Lord isn't surprised by any of this. In fact, in His sovereign plan, He is going to use Israel's sinful desire to establish a monarchy to raise up King David, who will picture the King of Kings who will one day sit on David's throne. God's perfect plan throughout all of history cannot be destroyed by sinful mankind.

But don't miss the tragedy of Israel's desire here to be like other nations. They had all the benefits of a King who was gracious and loving and powerful. But they want a visible, impressive, human king like other nations. And let me tell you, kingship is going to bring them plenty of hardship, as Samuel warns in the following verses.

Let me ask you today, beloved, What's your desire? Who will be the King in your heart and life today? There is only one King who can offer you forgiveness and satisfaction and purpose and meaning in life. He is none other than King Jesus.

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Why is it important for you to have "Ebenezers" in your life? Why is it important to share your "Ebenezers" with other believers? Who should always be the main character in your "Ebenezers?" Why?

Israel wanted a king like all the nations had. To what degree does the church today, as well as you personally, look to the world for examples to follow? How does 1 John 2:15-17 and John 15:18-27 affect your heart towards the world's influence and reaction to you?

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## THE WRONG CHOICE FOR THE WRONG REASON

1 Samuel 9–12

People are enamored with impressive appearances. But the Bible is consistent in teaching that it is character—what is in the heart—that counts. This was true of the underappreciated Samuel and the impressive new king, Saul.

Israel is clamoring for a king so they can be like all the nations around them. Samuel has and will continue to warn them of the bitter consequences of this decision. Kingship will bring hardship.

The people of Israel are making the wrong choice for the wrong reason. They are rejecting God's leadership. They are trading in a theocracy (the rule of God) for a monarchy (the rule of man).

Now let's pick up our study here in chapter 9:

*There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish . . . a man of wealth. And he had a son whose name was Saul, a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.*

(verses 1-2)

Why does Samuel emphasize Saul's impressive physical attributes? Well, I think it's because the Israelites were looking for somebody who was impressive. They were a lot like people today—more interested in charisma than character. Nations so often choose leaders on the basis of how they look, instead of how they live.

Saul is this big, handsome young man, from a wealthy, influential family, but Saul is also a young man with some amazing potential. You might already know that Saul will ultimately fail both God and Israel, but at the outset here, let me point out some qualities that could have made him an honorable king.



Philistine-era anointing vessel



First, Saul was a *sensitive* son. Verse 3 says, “The donkeys of Kish, Saul’s father, were lost. So Kish said to Saul his son, ‘Take one of the young men with you, and arise, go and look for the donkeys.’” Now you might expect this wealthy young son to refuse this demeaning assignment, but he immediately obeys.

After searching over a large area without finding the donkeys, verse 5 informs us that Saul says to the servant who is with him, “Come, let us go back, lest my father cease to care about the donkeys and become anxious about us.” Here’s a son who is sensitive to his father’s feelings and doesn’t want him to worry. Don’t you wish every son was sensitive enough to not want his parents to worry about him?

Now at this point the young man says to Saul here in verse 6 that they ought to go ask the man of God in the nearby city for some help. Well, that man of God is none other than Samuel. And in verses 15 and 16 we learn that God told Samuel that Saul was going to come looking for him, and the Lord instructed Samuel, “You shall anoint him to be prince over my people Israel. He shall save my people from the hand of the Philistines.”

When we come to chapter 10, we find that is exactly what Samuel does:

*Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on his head and kissed him and said ... “You shall reign over the people of the LORD and you will save them from the hand of their surrounding enemies.”* (verse 1)

Now let me give you a second positive quality of Saul—*modesty*. Samuel tells Saul God will give him three signs to reassure him that he is to be king. In verse 2 he says two men will meet Saul and tell him the donkeys have been found. Then in verses 3 and 4 it’s revealed that three men will give Saul food to eat. And the final sign, given in verse 6, is that Saul will actually join in with a group of prophets and experience the anointing of the Spirit of God.

All these signs come to pass, but when Saul returns home and his uncle asks him where he’s been, the text says, “But about the matter of the kingdom, of which Samuel had spoken, [Saul] did not tell him anything” (verse 16). Most people would have published their promotion near and far.

Saul’s modesty is probably mixed with a third quality, which we will call *healthy fear*. When Samuel brings all Israel’s tribes together to crown Saul, verse 21 says, “But when they sought him, he could not be found.”

*Praying for others  
isn’t an option; it’s  
an opportunity to  
make a difference  
for eternity.*

Here’s the public coronation of Israel’s king. The lot is taken to confirm God’s choice. But where is Saul? Verse 22 tells us that Saul was hiding “among the baggage”—all the utensils and vessels and supplies brought by the tribes as they have journeyed to Mizpah. Saul is hiding there behind the wagons. When they bring him out before the people, verse 24 says “And all the people shouted, ‘Long live the king!’”

The fourth admirable quality in Saul is *humility*. Verse 27 informs us: “Some worthless fellows said, ‘How can this man save us?’ And they despised him.” Notice Saul’s response: “He held his peace.”

Now is Saul seething on the inside or leaving this in God’s hands? Well, we find out after Saul leads the Israelite army to victory here in chapter 11. Under Saul’s leadership, Israel rescues the city of Jabesh-gilead, which is surrounded by an Ammonite army. Verse 11 tells us Saul’s army “struck down the Ammonites until the heat of the day.”

And now the Israelites remember those men who had scoffed at Saul’s kingship. They say to Samuel, “Who



is it that said, ‘Shall Saul reign over us?’ Bring the men, that we may put them to death” (verse 12).

Samuel doesn’t respond here, but Saul does. He says, “Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the LORD has worked salvation in Israel” (verse 13). I believe this kind of humility galvanized a divided people into a strong nation.

In chapter 12, the focus shifts back to Samuel in what is essentially his farewell address to the nation of Israel. First, Samuel reassures the nation in verses 1-6 that he has led them without taking bribes or pursuing the perks of power and greed. He is effectively saying, “My hands are clean.”

Second, in verses 7-11 Samuel reminds the people of God’s faithfulness by recounting events from Israel’s history. Samuel wants God to receive all the glory.

Third, in verses 12-13, Samuel rebukes the people for wanting a human king rather than following God as their king. So, even to his last sermon, Samuel is telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

Fourth, Samuel restates the primary responsibility of Israel. Even though they have a king, they are still accountable to God. He says:

*“If both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God, it will be well. But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD . . . then the hand of the LORD will be against you and your king.”* (verses 14-15)

Samuel’s passion and concern for Israel is beautifully expressed in verse 23: “Far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by ceasing to pray for you.” What a great man Samuel was. He wasn’t perfect, but he was passionate in his priorities before God and these people.

We have covered a lot of territory in these chapters. Let me wrap it up by giving three quick principles of application. First, from Saul: A good beginning doesn’t guarantee a good ending, as we will see. From the nation: Seeking the wrong thing may hinder us from receiving the best thing. And then from Samuel: Praying for others isn’t an option; it’s an opportunity to make a difference for eternity.

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Saul was born with God-given potential, just as you were. Why is it unwise to rely solely on your God-given potential? How does your God-given potential work alongside God Himself? What heart attitudes interfere with this necessity of working alongside of God?

To which of the three quick principles above can you most relate? Explain why. Who can you share your insights with that may need encouragement in their walk with God?

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## THE FALL OF KING SAUL

1 Samuel 13–15

Impatience with God's timing leads to disobeying God. And disobedience, without genuine repentance, leads to more disobedience and arrogant self-exaltation. This was the course King Saul followed, and he never recovered from it.

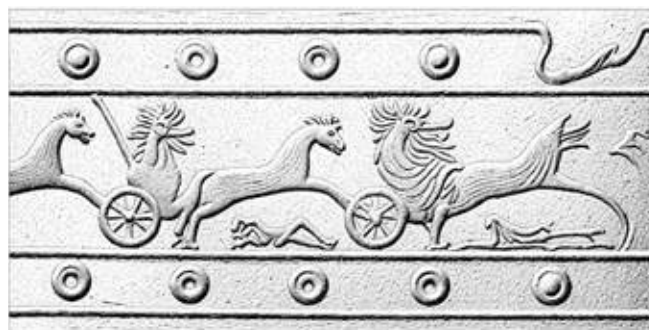
You might remember that King Saul began his reign with humility and modesty and trust, and God gave him a great military victory. However, Saul will become arrogant and defiant; and as a result, we are about to witness the fall of King Saul.

Chapter 13 introduces us to Saul's son, Jonathan. And let me tell you, Jonathan is nothing like his father. In fact, we read here in verse 3 that "Jonathan defeated the garrison of the Philistines that was at Geba." In response, verse 5 tells us the Philistines gather a massive army to fight Israel—"thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen and troops."

That is a long way of telling us the Israelites are greatly outnumbered. They have inferior weapons as well, as verses 19-22 explain. Consequently, many of the Israelite soldiers fear for their lives and go into hiding, deserting the army.

So, Saul is here at Gilgal with his dwindling army, waiting for Samuel to arrive. Saul has been told to wait for seven days; and then, only after Samuel offers sacrifices and blessings, is Saul to go into battle (see 1 Samuel 10:8).

Seven days is a long time to wait. You see, Saul is being tested here by the Lord. Someone has said that a test doesn't make you; it exposes you—it reveals who



Chariots portrayed on the Balawat Gate

you are. Well, Saul is not about to wait on God's timing, so he offers the sacrifices himself in defiance of the divine instruction through the prophet Samuel.

And as soon as Saul finishes, guess who shows up. Samuel. And he asks Saul a simple question: "What have you done?" (verse 11).

Saul responds in verse 12:

*I said [to myself], 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the favor of the LORD.' So I forced myself, and offered the burnt offering."*



"I forced myself!" In other words, he is saying, "I knew it was wrong, but I just couldn't help it." Well, Samuel doesn't buy it. He delivers this stunning rebuke: "You have done foolishly." Then he adds, "The LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever. But now your kingdom shall not continue" (verses 13-14). With that Samuel leaves, and Saul prepares for battle against the Philistines.

*A test doesn't make you; it exposes you.*

Now chapter 14 is going to emphasize the differences between Jonathan and his father, Saul. For one thing, Saul is afraid to trust the Lord and actually go into battle. But Jonathan steps out in courageous faith. With only his armor bearer with him, Jonathan attacks a Philistine garrison of some twenty enemy soldiers—and defeats them! As a result, God throws the entire Philistine army into a panic, and they begin to flee.

There is a principle here that is true to this very day, beloved: there's no telling what God will do when someone steps out in courageous faith. Saul is unwilling to move forward, while Jonathan moves out in faith. Let me tell you, even God cannot steer a parked car. He is looking for people who will put it into drive and take a step of faith.

Now, with the Philistines on the run, Saul and his men chase after them. With his army in pursuit of the Philistines, Saul gives a ridiculous command recorded in verse 24: he "laid an oath on the people, saying, 'Cursed be the man who eats food until it is evening and I am avenged on my enemies.'"

The Philistines are on the run, and the Israelites are going to spend the entire day chasing them down, and Saul foolishly forbids anyone to eat anything until that evening. What he's doing here is attempting to look spiritual. He orders this fast (verse 24); he builds an altar (verse 35); he makes a vow (verse 39), and he even attempts to consult the Lord (verse 41). Is God impressed? Not on your life. God is not impressed by people making a show of looking spiritual.

In fact, the man impressing God here is Jonathan, even though he breaks his father's oath when he comes across a beehive.

*Jonathan had not heard his father charge the people with the oath, so he put out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and dipped it in the honeycomb and put his hand to his mouth, and his eyes became bright.* (verse 27)

Only then is he told of his father's foolish command.

That evening Saul determines that someone has violated his command. And when Jonathan is revealed to be that person, Saul says to him, "You shall surely die" (verse 44). How foolish and thickheaded can you be?

Fortunately, the people intervene and save Jonathan's life. But in the process, Saul loses his credibility before the nation. And from this point on, Saul digresses even faster into a paranoid, suspicious, angry, jealous man.

The final nail in the coffin, so to speak, takes place in chapter 15. God issues a command to Saul to carry out His judgment by utterly destroying the king and nation of the Amalekites (verse 3).

The Amalekites, an extremely wicked people, had ruthlessly attacked Israel in the past. In fact, God already had told Moses years earlier, in Exodus 17:14, "I will utterly blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven." That day has arrived. Saul is not to take any possessions belonging to the Amalekites and is to put to death every member of this evil tribe as an act of divine judgment.

So, what does Saul do? He defeats the Amalekites, but then verse 9 says:

*But Saul and the people spared Agag [the king] and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them.*



When they return home, Saul meets up with Samuel and says to him in verse 13, “I have performed the commandment of the LORD.” Well, that’s a big fat lie. This is saying something with your lips that you are not doing in your life. And Samuel’s response essentially is, “Oh really?” He says, “What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?” (verse 14).

Now notice this: Saul admits to only partial obedience, but he then places the blame on his people. Look at verses 20-21:

*“I have obeyed the voice of the LORD. . . . I have brought Agag the king [alive], but the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen . . . to sacrifice to the LORD.”*

He is saying, “Why kill their king? Why not let the people keep these animals? I’m sure they’re going to sacrifice them to the Lord. Come on, Samuel, lighten up! What’s the big deal?”

Well, Samuel tells him what the big deal is:

*“Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice . . . rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry.”* (verses 22-23)

In other words, making sacrifices to God while disobeying God is false worship. And disobedience is as wicked as idolatry.

And with that Samuel delivers the verdict in verse 23: “Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king.”

The chapter ends on a sad note in verse 35, as Samuel leaves Saul and grieves over him. Though Saul will continue as king for some time, his fall is established.

Beloved, the same things that brought about his fall will bring failure in your life: lip service instead of genuine service, partial obedience instead of total obedience, and unwillingness to obey the word of the Lord.

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Saul’s defiance had devastating on his God-given potential. In what ways can you relate to Saul’s choice? What advice would you give a fellow believer who’s struggling as they wait on the LORD’s timing?

Which one letter word in verse 24 reveals who was at the center of Saul’s universe? How does this work against his God-given potential? In what way can you relate to the potential-crushing power of too much “I”?

In your own words, add to Stephen’s thoughts to “what is the ‘big deal’” when we go against God’s word?” What biblical principles and practical steps can you make daily to effectively address the sinful tendency to exalt yourself?

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## DAVID AND GOLIATH

1 Samuel 16–17

David first appears in the Bible as a young man with a great faith. While overlooked and dismissed by others, he has a heart for God that soon becomes apparent. He reminds us that it is our willingness to be used by God, not our usefulness to God, that makes a difference.

The Lord has judged King Saul as unfit to rule the nation of Israel. Now as 1 Samuel chapter 16 opens, God nudges Samuel to stop grieving over Saul and get back into action. God says to him in verse 1:

*“How long will you grieve over Saul, since I have rejected him from being king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil, and go. I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons.”*



Remains of a Philistine jug

Although King Saul has failed, the King of Kings has not lost control. Let me tell you, beloved, there is not any panic in heaven because of something happening down here on earth.

So off to Bethlehem Samuel goes to offer a sacrifice and quietly identify Israel's next king. As God instructed, Samuel ends up at the home of Jesse to meet his sons, beginning with the eldest. Jesse probably assumes Samuel is looking for an apprentice to help him. Look at verses 6-7:

*[Samuel] looked on Eliab and thought, “Surely the LORD’S anointed is before him.” But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature . . . the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”*

Samuel is looking for another king like Saul. Tall, handsome Eliab must be the guy. But God says, “I’m not looking at his height; I’m looking at his heart.”





After meeting all the sons Jesse brings before him, Samuel concludes, “The LORD has not chosen these” (verse 10). Then we read in verse 11, “Samuel said to Jesse, ‘Are all your sons here?’ And he said, ‘There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep.’” In other words, he’s not worth your time.

But as soon as young David is fetched, the Lord whispers to Samuel that this boy is the future king of Israel. So, “Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. And the Spirit of the LORD rushed upon David from that day forward” (verse 13).

There doesn’t seem to be any specific announcement here about David’s future. He probably goes back to tending the sheep. From the clues we can put together, David is somewhere around twelve to fifteen years of age here, and everybody but Samuel appears to be oblivious to what this anointing will one day mean.

*Find a way to  
remember the  
faithfulness of God.*

Now immediately, David is contrasted with Saul. David is empowered by the Spirit, but in verse 14 we are told, “A harmful spirit from the LORD tormented [Saul].” This “harmful spirit” refers to a despairing conviction of sin from God that brought Saul great terror. The only relief he finds is when he is distracted by soothing music, as we see in verse 23.

In God’s perfect plan, young David is recommended to come into Saul’s service to play his lyre—a little handheld harp, the forerunner of the guitar. All this simply sets the stage for the drama in chapter 17.

This chapter opens with the Philistine and Israelite armies stationed on either side of the Valley of Elah. Neither army has an advantage, so the Philistines offer a common challenge of that day—to decide the outcome by a fight to the death between two repre-

sentative soldiers. And the Philistines send out their representative: “a champion named Goliath” (verse 4).

Goliath is a giant! Verse 4 says his “height was six cubits and a span”—that is more than nine feet tall! He’s wearing “a coat of mail” weighing “five thousand shekels of bronze,” which is a little more than 100 pounds (verse 5).

Every day, Goliath comes out and repeats his challenge:

*“Choose a man for yourselves  
and let him come down to me.  
If he is able to fight with me and  
kill me, then we will be your ser-  
vants. But if I prevail against  
him and kill him, then you shall  
be our servants.”* (verses 8-9)

Well, David shows up with some cheese and crackers for his older brothers in Saul’s army, and he overhears Goliath’s challenge. He asks the soldiers in verse 26, “Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?”

The soldiers see a giant insulting Israel; David sees a blasphemer insulting the living God. They see the size of this giant; David sees the size of God. Eventually, David’s courageous words reach Saul, who says to David, “You are not able to go against this Philistine to fight with him, for you are but a youth” (verse 33).

David recounts his victories protecting his sheep from lions and bears by the power of God. Saul is evidently convicted by David’s genuine faith, and he says to David in verse 37, “Go, and the LORD be with you.”

Saul tries to put David into a suit of armor. He thinks David has to fight Goliath like Goliath fights. But David rejects the armor and goes out instead to the brook to pick out five smooth stones for his sling.

By the way, there’s some evidence in 1 Chronicles 20 and 2 Samuel 21 that Goliath had brothers. So, in



gathering up five stones, David may be preparing to take them on as well, if necessary.

I have stood there on the hillside overlooking the Valley of Elah, and I have tried to imagine the Israelite soldiers holding their breaths as they watched this teenager walk toward the giant.

Goliath lets out a roar in verse 43: “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” He might have seen the shepherd’s staff in David’s hand and probably the rod stuck in his belt. Israel has sent forth a shepherd boy—as if Goliath is a stray dog to be frightened away!

Goliath bellows that he’s going to feed David to the birds (verse 44); and David responds:

*“You come to me with a sword and with a spear . . . but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day the LORD will deliver you into my hand . . . that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel.”* (verses 45–46)

And with that, David lets that smooth stone fly through the air toward its target. The Israelite army thought Goliath was too big to kill; David believed Goliath was too big to miss.

That stone finds an open spot under Goliath’s helmet—right at his forehead—and verse 49 says, “[Goliath] fell on his face to the ground.” Then “David . . . took [Goliath’s] sword and drew it out of its sheath and killed him and cut off his head” (verse 51).

David next does two things that are often overlooked. We read in verse 54 that, first, David takes Goliath’s

head to Jerusalem, where it will serve as a warning to the enemies of Israel.

Second, he puts Goliath’s armor “in his tent.” He keeps Goliath’s armor as his plunder. We learn later in chapter 21 that David puts the sword of Goliath in the Lord’s sanctuary but eventually gets it back. These become wonderful mementos of faith. I imagine David had Goliath’s sword up on the fireplace mantle; and hanging from a peg nearby was his old slingshot—mementos of God’s faithfulness.

Let me recommend that you keep a mental trophy case or write down in a journal those steps of faith, those moments of victory, those experiences of God’s rescue at just the right moment. Find a way to remember the faithfulness of God.

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How does the Lord’s statement that He looks on the heart (1 Samuel 16:7) spur you to invest in the condition of your own heart? If you don’t know how to invest in your own heart for God, why is prayer an excellent first step?

What of David’s words and actions in 1 Samuel 17 reveal that he understood his potential in God’s hands was a powerful combination? How did God prepare David to confront Goliath? How has He prepared you for your current situation in life?

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## DODGING SPEARS

1 Samuel 18–20

To know God and walk with Him is to become the target of God's enemies. David suffered injustice and opposition because he did the right things. His faith, humility, and grace through it all inspire us to trust the Lord and persevere through tough times.

Young David is now a national hero—he's the giant killer. But he doesn't let this go to his head. Unlike King Saul, David remains a humble, gracious young man. As we begin chapter 18 of 1 Samuel, he has a new best friend:

*The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him . . . Then Jonathan made a covenant with David . . . And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David.* (verses 1, 3–4)

When Jonathan gives his robe to David here, it symbolizes a transfer of loyalty to the heir apparent. Jonathan is acknowledging that David will soon be king.

Well, what does Saul do now with David? Verse 5 says, "Saul set him over the men of war." In other words, David is now a commander.

Verse 6 takes us back to when Saul and his army are returning home after David killed Goliath. "The women came out . . . singing and dancing, to meet King Saul." But notice what they're singing here in

verse 7: "Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands." And Saul complains:

*"They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands, and what more can he have but the kingdom?"* (verse 8)

David doesn't say anything, and he doesn't start humming this song around Saul. He remains committed to a spirit of humility, while Saul develops a spirit of jealousy.

In verse 10 we read, "The next day, a harmful spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his



Musicians greeting a king on his return from battle



house while David was playing the lyre.” “Spirit” here can be translated “breath.” This is the breath of God’s presence—and it brings Saul a deep conviction of his sin against God.

Verse 11 tells us Saul erupts in a rage and throws his spear at David—twice! Listen, I would have stopped showing up at that palace after dodging the first spear.

But the most surprising thing here is that David does not pick up that spear and throw it back. He responds with the grace of God, and that is really amazing to me. Beloved, you might be under attack today by enemies of the gospel. Well, imitate David here and don’t retaliate.

*You might be under  
attack today by  
enemies of the gospel.  
Well, imitate David  
here and don’t  
retaliate.*

Now Saul had promised his daughter to anyone who defeated Goliath, but when the time comes to give his daughter Merab to David, she is given to another man (verse 19). Again, David doesn’t start throwing a fit. Instead, he simply waits on God to work things out.

Then comes this interesting twist: Saul’s other daughter, Michal, falls in love with David. And suddenly Saul seems happy to give her away in marriage. That’s because when David indicates he cannot afford the bridal dowry for a princess, Saul says that *all* David has to do is kill 100 Philistines. Verse 25 tells us Saul is hoping David will “fall by the hand of the Philistines.” So, what does David do? He goes out and defeats 200 Philistines, and Saul is now forced to give Michal to David (verse 27).

However, verse 29 reports, “Saul was David’s enemy continually.” His envy and jealousy are well known. In fact, we read in verse 1 of chapter 19, “Saul spoke to Jonathan his son and to all his servants, that they should kill David.”

Jonathan immediately warns David, telling him to run and hide (verse 2). Then Jonathan confronts his father, and it takes a lot of courage to speak these words:

*“Let not the king sin against his servant David, because he has not sinned against you ... he struck down the Philistine [Goliath] and the LORD worked a great salvation for all Israel. You saw it, and rejoiced. Why then will you sin against innocent blood by killing David without cause?”* (verses 4-5)

Jonathan doesn’t pull any punches here. He tells his father that his attitude and actions are sinful.

Note Saul’s response in verse 6: “Saul listened to the voice of Jonathan. Saul swore, ‘As the LORD lives, he shall not be put to death.’”

I wish I could tell you this peace treaty lasted a long time, but it is not long at all before Saul explodes with jealousy and throws another spear at David. Verse 10 tells us that this time David runs for his life. In fact, he races home to tell his wife, Michal, who offers both a warning and her aid:

*Michal . . . told him, “If you do not escape with your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed.” So Michal let David down through the window, and he fled.* (verses 11-12)





Now although she's helping David, Michal doesn't share his love for God. She has an idol there in the house that is used for good luck. Verse 13 tells us she puts this "image" on the bed with goats' hair around the head to make it look like David is sick in bed. That gives David time to escape. Later when Saul confronts Michal in verse 17, instead of defending David, she says David threatened to kill her: "He said to me, 'Let me go, Why should I kill you?'"

David flees to Samuel and tells him, "all that Saul had done to him. And he and Samuel went and lived at Naioth" (verse 18).

When Saul learns where David is hiding, he sends soldiers to arrest him, probably on the false charge of attempting to murder his daughter. Well, when they arrive, God's Spirit comes on them and causes them to prophesy. They literally worship the Lord. Saul sends two more groups of men to take David, and the same thing happens to them. Finally, Saul decides he is going to have to go himself, and when he shows up, God's Spirit overwhelms him too, and he also breaks out into praising God (verse 23).

All this gives David time to flee for his life. He eventually finds his best friend, Jonathan, and we are able to listen in on this heart-wrenching conversation as David just spills out his confusion and pain here in chapter 20, saying in verse 1, "What have I done? What is my guilt? And what is my sin before your father, that he seeks my life?" Then in verse 3 he says, "There is but a step between me and death." Or to put it another way, "Jonathan, I'm just one step ahead of being arrested and killed—and for doing the right things!"

The remainder of chapter 20 lays out the plan for Jonathan to determine his father's intentions. In verse 27, Saul asks Jonathan where David is, and Jonathan offers up an excuse. Saul knows better, though, and he explodes with anger and throws his spear at Jonathan (verse 33). There is no doubt Saul will not stop until David is dead.

With that, the final paragraph here in chapter 20 finds Jonathan and David weeping together over all that has happened in their lives because of Saul's ungodly jealousy and anger. Oh, the sin of other people can certainly bring grief and sorrow to the life of the believer. For David, he is now going to live the life of a fugitive on the run for several years, but we know this is not the end of David's story.

Let me tell you something, beloved. Sometimes people will throw spears at you when everything you have done was the right thing; sometimes life just does not seem fair. Just wait. Your story isn't over yet either. And one day—maybe not right away and maybe not here on earth, but one day—everything will make sense in God's plan, and God will make everything right.

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In these verses David and Saul's reactions to their life circumstances are contrasted - describe what you see from chapter 18. In what ways can you relate to either of them? Why? is it important to embrace the difficult circumstances from the sinful choices of others against us?

How does Proverbs 3:5-6 fit both Saul and David's circumstances? Whether you're being a "Saul" or a "David" right now, what would the LORD have you forsake or do to fulfill your God-given potential?

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## ISRAEL'S MOST WANTED

1 Samuel 21–24

David's experiences as he fled from Saul remind us that adversity and opposition can challenge our commitment to the Lord. But they also afford us opportunities to act in gracious, unexpected ways that will make a lasting impact for the Lord.

David is now Israel's most wanted fugitive. He's running for his life from King Saul. And sadly, David is going to fail to demonstrate trust in the Lord.

The opening scene here in 1 Samuel 21 finds David deceiving the priest Ahimelech at the city of Nob, where the tabernacle now resides. He doesn't want to reveal that he's running from Saul, so he claims to be on a secret mission. Then he asks for food for him and his men.

The priest gives David the old bread from the tabernacle, which has just been replaced with fresh bread. David then asks for weapons in verse 8:

*“Have you not here a spear or a sword at hand? For I have brought neither my sword nor my weapons with me, because the king's business required haste.”*

That's another lie.

Ahimelech offers David the sword of Goliath. Apparently, ever since David had killed Goliath, the giant's sword had been kept in the tabernacle. But now that David is on the run, he welcomes this sword and says in verse 9, “There is none like [this sword].”



Statue of King Idrimi of Alalakh

Listen, David is slipping here in his fear. He's going to trust the sword of Goliath instead of God.

And things only get worse as David flees to the Philistine city of Gath, Goliath's hometown. Verse 10 tells us David flees to “Achish the king of Gath,” and people there recognize him.

Now why in the world would David go to a Philistine city—Goliath's hometown—carrying Goliath's sword? We don't know what he is thinking, other than that he knows Saul would never look for him there.

Realizing now that he's been recognized as Israel's hero and his life is in danger, we're told in verse 13:



*[David] changed his behavior before them and pretended to be insane in their hands and made marks on the doors of the gate and let his spittle run down his beard.*

David is pretending to be out of his mind. And evidently, he is convincing because the king says in verse 15, “Do I lack madmen?” In other words, “I have enough insanity around me; I don’t need anymore.”

So, instead of killing David, they let him go. Ultimately, beloved, it is God’s grace that allows David to escape. Let me make the point that trusting the Lord in the past does not mean you will automatically trust the Lord in the present. It’s a daily decision to trust and obey.

David flees to the cave of Adullam in chapter 22. He’s discouraged, defeated, and alone, but let me tell you this: here in this cave, God is at work. We read in verses 1–2:

*And when his brothers and all his father’s house heard it, they went down there to him. And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul, gathered to him. And he became commander over them. . . . about four hundred men.*

Part of God’s solution for David’s despair is to show him the desperate lives of other people so that his eyes are off himself and focused on others who need his encouragement and leadership. That’s an important principle for anyone who is disheartened by circumstances.

Verse 3 gives an indication that David is again trusting the Lord. He takes his parents to Moab for protection—remember, David’s great-grandmother Ruth was a Moabite—and says to the king of Moab, “Let my father and my mother stay with you, till I know

what God will do for me.” This is a great statement of faith. David is still hated and hunted by Saul, but he is willing to wait for whatever God chooses to do.

King Saul, on the other hand, is wandering farther from God. His heart is so filled with hate and paranoia that here at the end of chapter 22, he kills all the priests of Nob, whom he accuses of conspiring against him.

Chapter 23 opens with trouble in the city of Keilah. Verse 1 informs us that the Philistines “are robbing the threshing floors.” After the Israelites have planted, harvested, and threshed the grain, Philistine raiding parties take it all away.

When David hears of this, he attacks the Philistines and liberates this city. There is little time to celebrate because Saul finds out and comes after David. Verse 13 tells us David slips out of town, and he and his men hide away “in the wilderness of Ziph” (verse 15).

While David is hiding, his good friend Jonathan, the king’s son, pays him a visit. He says something really interesting to David here in verse 17: “You shall be king over Israel . . . Saul my father also knows this.”

That’s what this is all about. Saul will not surrender to the will of God for his life—or for David’s life.

It’s not long before the Ziphites betray David to King Saul, and the chase is on again. In chapter 24, we are told that David finds another hideout “in the wilderness of Engedi” (verse 1). One author describes this area as “an oasis in the desert wilderness, where there were . . . waterfalls, lush vegetation, and countless caves in the rocky limestone cliffs.”<sup>1</sup>

At this point, something unbelievable happens. Saul has chosen three thousand men to search for David. Frankly, David is surrounded, and he and his men are hiding. Then, if you can imagine it, verse 3 says, “There was a cave, and Saul went in to relieve himself.” In other words, he is alone and totally vulnerable.

He has no idea David and his men are hiding in this same cave. And the men are whispering to David, “Here is the day of which the LORD said to you, ‘Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand’” (verse 4). They are ready to start singing, “God is so good.” But instead, “David arose and [quietly] cut off a corner of Saul’s robe.” He’s supposed to take Saul’s life, not a piece of his robe!



Even more surprising is verse 5: “Afterward David’s heart struck him.” In other words, his conscience convicted him of doing even that much to King Saul.

Learn this from David: One mark of growing in grace is a sensitive conscience; even the smallest offense becomes a weight too heavy to carry for long without confessing. David feels guilty for even touching the king’s robe.

However, David confronts Saul to prove his innocence. Look at verses 8-9:

*Afterward David . . . went out of the cave, and called after Saul, “My lord the king!” And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the earth and paid homage. And David said to Saul, “Why do you listen to the words of men who say, ‘Behold, David seeks your harm?’”*

“Look, I’ve got a piece of your robe. I could have killed you.”

David says, “There is no wrong or treason in my hands” (verse 11). The result is surprising:

*Saul lifted up his voice and wept. He said to David, “You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil.”* (verse 16)

Saul realizes how close he came to dying, and he is overwhelmed. He admits his sinful heart and returns home. Saul’s repentant attitude will not last long, though; he will be chasing David again in a matter of weeks.

Beloved, following the Lord does not guarantee an easy path; in fact, it just might guarantee opposi-

tion and persecution. Let’s respond with unexpected grace, as David did. Let’s make it clear we are trusting the Lord and that our lives are in His hands.

*Following the Lord  
does not guarantee  
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it just might  
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and persecution.*

How does David’s deceptive, faithless behavior and the resulting awful consequences serve as a warning to you? Though it may differ from person to person, what heart-attitudes and spiritual habits contribute to any believer’s daily decision to trust and obey God?

How does the above principal challenge or encourage your walking with God under difficult circumstances?

A barrel, a bucket, a cup, or a thimble. Which one represents how much unconfessed sin you’re currently storing up? Why this one? Consider James 4:8-10, Why is a quick and thorough confession helpful to you, your ministry and to glorifying to God with your life?

<sup>1</sup> Charles R. Swindoll, *David: A Man of Passion & Destiny* (W Publishing Group, 2000), 138.







## THE FOOL AND THE WITCH OF ENDOR

1 Samuel 25–28

David's life as a fugitive was marked by ups and downs, but because his heart was turned toward God, his trials would mold him spiritually and prepare him to lead a nation. Because Saul had turned away from God, his experiences only drove him to greater despair and evil.

As chapter 25 opens, we are given the sad news of the death of God's faithful prophet, Samuel. The impact of his death echoes throughout Israel and certainly affects David. We can almost feel the sadness in David as we read in verse 1 that he "rose and went down to the wilderness of Paran."

Now verse 2 introduces us to a wealthy man named Nabal. His name literally means "fool," and he's going to live up to his name.

There could not be a more mismatched couple than Nabal and his sweet wife, Abigail. She is described in verse 3 as "discerning and beautiful." Her later actions reveal she has a love for God as well.



Depiction of flocks captured by invaders

David and his men have been unofficially protecting Nabal's shepherds, according to verse 16. But when David eventually sends messengers to Nabal asking for some food, Nabal insults them and implies that David is a traitor to King Saul.

Well, that does it. David tells his men in verse 13, "Every man strap on his sword."

Now David refused to kill Saul; but now he's determined to wipe out an entire clan because he's been insulted. David has handled some pretty big tests in life, but he's about to fail in this one.

When Nabal's wife hears that David is marching toward their home, she springs into action in verse 18. She loads up donkeys with "two hundred loaves and two skins of wine and five sheep already prepared . . . clusters of raisins and . . . cakes of figs."

When she intercepts David and his army, Abigail delivers one of the most tactful speeches in Scripture. In verse 25 she admits that her husband is a foolish man, but she then urges David not to take matters into his own hands. She says here in verse 30:

*"When the LORD has done . . .  
all the good that he has spoken*



*concerning you and has appointed you prince over Israel, [you] shall have no . . . pangs of conscience for having shed blood without cause.”*

In other words, “David, God has great things planned for you; don’t ruin it all over my foolish husband.”

Well, David is impressed and humbled, and he turns back. When Abigail returns home and the next day tells her husband what happened, he has some kind of stroke and ten days later he dies (verse 38).

Not long after that, David proposes marriage to Abigail, and she agrees. But before the wedding is barely over, here in chapter 26, Saul is after David again.

One night David and two of his men sneak into Saul’s camp. Once again, David can easily kill his chief enemy, who is fast asleep. Instead, David takes Saul’s spear and water jar and leaves. He says in verse 11, “The LORD forbid that I should put out my hand against the LORD’s anointed.”

Once David and his men reach a hilltop some distance away, David shouts out and wakes up the camp and informs Saul of what just happened. Again, Saul makes a show of an apology, but this time David is not fooled. He knows Saul is not going to give up.

In fact, as we come to chapter 27, David is exhausted and discouraged; and he decides to go back to the Philistine city of Gath and hide out. Notice that David makes this decision *without* talking to God. He is frankly tired of running and wrongly assumes that God has gone on vacation somewhere in the universe.

Verse 2 tells us David and his men go to “Achish . . . king of Gath.” You might remember the last time David showed up here he had to act like he was insane in order to escape. But not this time. The king knows David has been running from Saul, and he assumes David and his men have defected from Israel’s army.

So, Achish gives David the town of Ziklag to live in (verse 6). And from there, David and his men conduct raids against other enemies of Israel, all the

while telling King Achish they are fighting against Israel. David is playing with fire here.

Chapter 28 opens with the Philistine army gathering for a major campaign against Israel. King Achish expects David and his men to join him. We will learn later that in God’s providence, the other Philistine generals oppose David’s participation, which probably saves David’s life.

*Following the Lord  
does not guarantee  
an easy path; in fact,  
it just might  
guarantee opposition  
and persecution.*

At this point, Saul gathers *his* army and verse 5 tells us, “He was afraid, and his heart trembled greatly.” In desperation, Saul seeks guidance from the Lord, but God is silent. Of course He is; Saul hasn’t listened to God for years.

So, Saul tells his servants in verse 7, “Seek out for me a woman who is a medium, that I may . . . inquire of her.” This is in direct defiance of God’s command back in Leviticus 19:31. Mediums and necromancers were those who sought to make contact with the spirit world in order to obtain information about the future.

Saul disguises himself as he goes to meet a witch, essentially, an occultic practitioner, living in the nearby village of En-dor. At first she doesn’t recognize Saul, and she reminds him that mediums are forbidden in Israel. She’s afraid she will be turned in.

Saul tells her in verse 10: “As the LORD lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing.” Isn’t it fascinating that Saul uses the name of the Lord, even as he is defying the Lord.



Now Saul tells this medium he wants to make a spirit connection with Samuel (verse 11). And to her total shock, Samuel appears to her. Then Saul explains to Samuel in verse 15:

*“I am in great distress, for the Philistines are warring against me, and God has turned away from me and answers me no more . . . Therefore I have summoned you to tell me what I shall do.”*

Now this is a really strange event here. Some have sought to explain it away as deception or even a demon masquerading as Samuel. I think the best explanation is to take this passage at face value—Samuel actually appears, as the Bible says. And this woman’s surprise reveals she has no power to make it happen!

But why would God allow this? I believe this is a moment of *vindication* for the prophet Samuel, whom Saul has ignored for decades. But it is also a moment of *revelation*. There is indeed life after death; and God alone, not some medium or anyone else, has the power to control the spirit world.

Samuel’s final words to Saul are found here in verse 19: “Tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me. The LORD will give the army of Israel also into the hand of the Philistines.” You will notice that Samuel never answers Saul’s question about what *he* should do; he tells Saul what *God* is going to do. The cold hard truth that he and his sons are going to die the next day causes Saul to fall down—not in repentance, but in fear.

Beloved, every single day, millions of people are consulting horoscopes, mediums, and palm readers

because they are desperate for answers. But just like King Saul, they are rejecting the Lord of life—of *everlasting* life—and His word He’s given to us.

They are eagerly pursuing any knowledge they can, except the knowledge of the gospel and the truth about Jesus Christ. What they need to do—and what we invite them to do—is to fall to their knees and repent of their sin and turn to the Lord Jesus Christ before it is forever too late.

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The LORD’s “anointed” today would be Pastors and Elders in the church.

Why is it important for David’s principle of honoring the “office” of God’s “anointed” to be lived out in the church even when they may not execute their office with perfect righteousness?

What parallels do you see between David’s going to the Philistines in chapter 27 and Saul’s going to the medium in chapter 28? Why did the future of these two men differ so drastically in spite of these similarities? What warnings and encouragements does this offer you?

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## THE FINAL DAYS OF KING SAUL

1 Samuel 29–31; 1 Chronicles 10

David recognized his unwise and desperate acts and turned again to the Lord. Saul did neither. The last chapters of 1 Samuel record the sad end of Saul's reign, and the continuing preparation of David to succeed him as king. Their experiences provide important lessons for us.

As Saul is facing the day of his death, promised back in chapter 28, David is now hemmed in by his own plans. In our last study, David had gone over to the Philistines and convinced the king of Gath of his allegiance to them.

The problem is, the king of Gath now joins his fellow Philistines as they prepare to attack Saul and his army. David has already indicated he will fight with the Philistines, so what in the world is he going to do to get out of it?

If he fights with them against Israel, he will lose his credibility by killing fellow Israelites; but if he refuses to join the Philistines, they will realize he's been lying to them all along, and he will lose his life.

Satan must be wringing his hands in delight. This will end God's plan for His anointed, David, to sit on Israel's throne.

How did David get stuck in the middle of this? Well, he made some wrong decisions instead of trusting the Lord. But let me tell you, his failure did not cripple God's plans. And that's good news for us too, for even when we are unfaithful to our Lord, He is faithful to us.

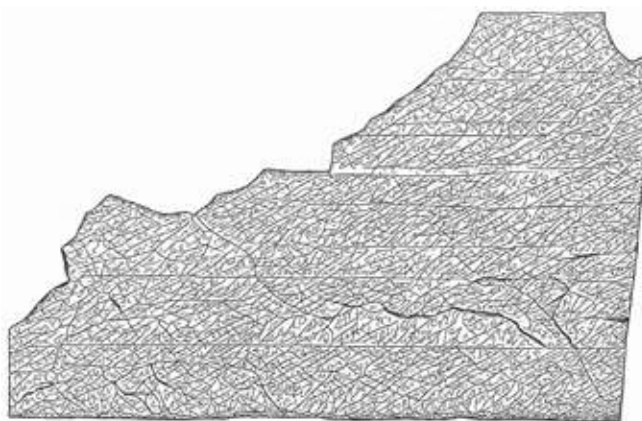
Fortunately, the other Philistine military leaders do not trust David, and here in the opening verses of chapter 29, they refuse to allow David to come along.

And with that, the Lord allows David to escape from this terrible dilemma.

David and his men are forced to return home to Ziklag. David pretends to be disappointed and even offended by this rejection (verse 8). He earns another Oscar for acting.

But things are about to get worse for them when they return to Ziklag. Chapter 30 describes the scene:

*Now when David and his men came to Ziklag on the third day, the Amalekites had made a raid against . . . Ziklag and burned*



Inscription of booty and tribute being presented to Ashurbanipal after the capture of Babylon





*it with fire and taken captive the women and all who were in it, both small and great. They killed no one but carried them off and went their way. And when David and his men came to the city, they found it burned with fire, and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive.* (verses 1-3)

Imagine this scene. These battle-hardened soldiers all burst into tears. Verse 4 says they “wept until they had no more strength to weep.”

Once they stop crying, though, they start accusing David. In verse 6, they even start talking about stoning David to death. But in the last part of the verse, we read, “But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.” For the first time in many months, David talks to God.

His clever plans have collapsed. He’s been telling himself that he can handle King Achish, that he knows what he’s doing. He’s told his men that it will all work out; it won’t be long before the nation is at peace, and he will be on the throne of Israel. But now look: their families are gone, and these loyal followers have turned against him.

So, David calls the priest to lead him in seeking the wisdom of God:

*And David inquired of the LORD, “Shall I pursue after this band? Shall I overtake them?” He answered him, “Pursue, for you shall surely overtake and shall surely rescue.”* (verse 8)

Now David’s natural instincts must be screaming, “Chase after those Amalekites, and rescue your families. That’s the only way you will get your credibility back. Go!”

But David is no longer listening to his instincts. Those have caused him enough trouble already. He now wants to hear from God. And when he does hear from the Lord, he sets out with godly confidence and wisdom.

In their pursuit of the Amalekites, they come across a young Egyptian slave who had gotten sick and was left behind on the trail. With his help, David is able to surprise the Amalekites and defeat them, plunder their camp, and rescue all their families.

Verse 26 informs us that “David . . . sent part of the spoil to his friends, the elders of Judah, saying, ‘Here is a present for you from the spoil of the enemies of the LORD.’” He’s demonstrating his loyalty to his own tribe in southern Israel.

There are a couple of lessons here for us. First, we need to be slow to listen to our own hearts. No matter how clever our plans might seem, we need to remember that we can talk our hearts into doing just about anything. Our instincts and decisions need to be guided and guarded by God’s Word and godly desires.

*Even when we are  
unfaithful to our  
Lord, He is faithful  
to us.*

Second, we need to be quick to thank the Lord for His forgiveness. The Lord remained silent with King Saul, because Saul was not repentant and sought help from a witch. But David sought wisdom from a priest, and God responded by providing guidance. Let me tell you, God is forever gracious to respond to a repentant, humbled child of His and to give more victories to enjoy.

First Samuel chapter 31 returns to the battlefield as the Philistines begin to fight the Israelites. Verse 1 says, “The men of Israel fled before the Philistines and fell slain on Mount Gilboa.” Israel suffers a crushing defeat. Jonathan and two other sons of Saul are killed in battle.



And as for Saul, verse 3 says he is struck by an arrow and “badly wounded.” Fearing what the Philistines might do to him if they find him alive, Saul orders his armor bearer to kill him. When he refuses to do that, Saul falls on his sword, taking his own life.

The next day, the Philistines find the bodies of Saul and his sons on the battlefield. The details here in chapter 31 of 1 Samuel are repeated in 1 Chronicles chapter 10; and whenever we have repeated narratives like these, I will be combining them.

In 1 Chronicles 10:8-10, the tragic news is recorded:

*The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the slain, they found Saul and his sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. And they stripped him and took his head and his armor and sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines to carry the good news to their idols and to the people. And they put his armor in the temple of their gods and fastened his head in the temple of Dagon.*

The Philistines believe their victory is proof that their gods are more powerful than Israel’s God.

Saul began well but ended in tragic defeat. And the issue wasn’t military, and it wasn’t political; it was spiritual. His defeat came from within. His death had been foretold just the day before, but Saul went ahead to the very end, not obeying the word and the will of God.

But let me tell you, behind all this bad news, God is still at work. He is not finished with Israel. In fact, He is just beginning.

You see, when Saul died, many people must have thought that was the end of Israel. But the death of

King Saul ushers in David’s kingly line, which will lead to the birth of the Messiah.

So, with the death of King Saul, the book of 1 Samuel ends. But a second book—2 Samuel—is about to begin, and it will introduce the reign of King David.

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What life lessons can you draw from this incident of David’s carelessness with God? What would “strengthening yourself in the LORD” look and sound like if you were doing it? Why is it important to share with other believers the wisdom you’ve learned “strengthening yourself?”

What factors typically play into the decisions you make? What heart-attitudes would you think are necessary to override natural instincts with God-ward instincts? Why is a consistent reliance upon God’s word and prayer so critical in making decisions?

How does the life of Saul influence the way you think about and live out your God-given potential? What did you learn about God’s heart as he interacted with Saul and David? How might the life of Saul help a yet to be saved friend of yours better understand God’s heart toward sinful ways?

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## NEVER FORGOTTEN

1 Chronicles 1–9

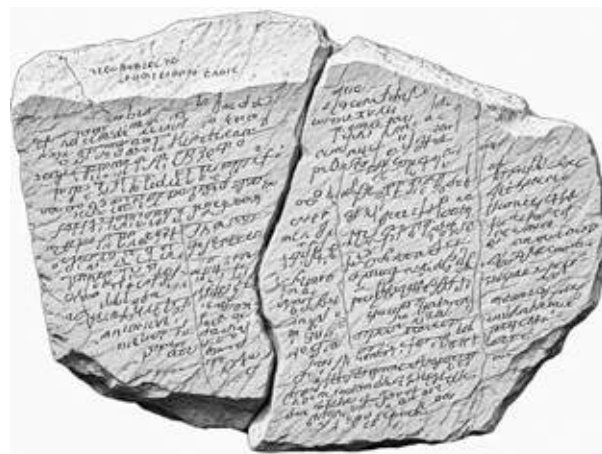
The Bible records God's use of otherwise unknown people to teach us valuable lessons. Even in a long, long list of names like we encounter in the book of 1 Chronicles, we find individuals who serve as worthy examples of faith and the rewards of faith.

We have concluded our Wisdom Journey through the book of 1 Samuel, which ends with the death of Israel's first king—King Saul. The next book we come to is 2 Samuel, which continues the history of Israel. However, between these two books we must place the opening chapters of the book of 1 Chronicles.

The book of 1 Chronicles gives us the transition from Saul's reign to David's and then provides a historical narrative that continues all the way through 2 Chronicles. On our Wisdom Journey through the Bible, we need to understand that much of what we read in 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, and 2 Kings is repeated in the two books of Chronicles.<sup>1</sup>

This is similar to what we find in the New Testament Gospels, which give us four separate accounts of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. Much of the material is repeated in these Gospel accounts, but sometimes one Gospel will give us some additional and unique information.

So, as we begin our Wisdom Journey through 2 Samuel and then on into the books of Kings, keep in mind that we will be referring frequently to the parallel accounts in 1 and 2 Chronicles. And a few times, we will interrupt our journey to focus on some



Assyrian King List

unique material from Chronicles that fits into the timeline. And that's exactly what we are doing now.

What we find here in the first nine chapters of 1 Chronicles takes place before the beginning of 2 Samuel. The content of these nine chapters is not found anywhere else, but they set the stage in a unique way for what is about to happen next in 2 Samuel. So, let's stop and take a closer look.

Now if you start reading in the first chapter of 1 Chronicles and continue all the way through the ninth chapter, you will read *hundreds* of names. This is a long list of genealogies. And if you can stay awake



through it all, you're probably still going to wonder what in the world it's all about.

Well, these nine chapters have some very definite purposes for Israel. For one thing, they provide a reminder of Israel's heritage, going all the way back to Adam. They also demonstrate God's choice of Israel as His special people. These genealogies give us a closer look at the priestly tribe of Levi and the tribe of Judah, emphasizing David's royal family tree. And we're also given a closer look at the tribe of Benjamin, from which came King Saul.

But there are also some important things for us to learn from these nine chapters about genealogies. Think about it: For God to give this much space in His inspired Word to make sure everybody's name got included gives us some wonderful insights.

Let me give you three examples that highlight some important truths for us today. First, we're given the account of *Jabez and his painful past*. We find here in 1 Chronicles chapter 4 and verse 9 this statement: "Jabez was more honorable than his brothers; and his mother called his name Jabez, saying, 'Because I bore him in pain.'"

Jabez is just one of many names in this long list, but the text pauses and highlights his story. His name means he was born in sorrow or pain. Now there is pain in every childbirth—at least there was for my wife, and I was in the delivery room with her when all our children were born. And frankly, I was amazed she was always willing to endure the pain again.

But the birth of Jabez was not just painful; it was sorrowful, and we are not told why. But imagine that whenever he introduced himself, his name reminded people of something painful from his past.

That's why the first part of verse 9 sends an interesting message: "Jabez was more honorable than his brothers." That Hebrew word translated "honorable" means "influential, powerful, heavy." What happened?

Well, in verse 10 we read this:

*Jabez called upon the God of Israel, saying, "Oh that you would*

*bless me and enlarge my border, and that your hand might be with me, and that you would keep me from harm so that it might not bring me pain!" And God granted what he asked.*

Jabez was praying what some of us have prayed—and what all of us in varying degrees *should* pray—"Lord, make a difference in my future; I don't want to be handicapped by my past!"

That's a great prayer. Now some have turned it into some kind of mystical guarantee of prosperity, and, frankly, that is nonsense. What Jabez is praying here—and we can pray it too—is, "Lord, I don't want to live up to my name. I want to live differently! I don't want my past to dictate my future." And we are told that God answered his prayer.

This brief text on Jabez is a wonderful reminder that our lives do not have to be defined by the sorrow of the past. Let's obey God as we walk into His will for our future.

Now in chapter 5, we find a second important principle illustrated in verse 18 with the *victory of valiant men* from the tribes of Reuben and Gad and Manasseh. They were victorious over some Arab armies, but it had nothing to do with their military power. Verse 20 reads: "They cried out to God in the battle, and he granted their urgent plea because they trusted in him."

*Success in life is  
defined as  
faithfulness to God.*

Listen, beloved, this is a timeless principle running throughout the Bible: Success in life is defined as





faithfulness to God. And whatever success you might have, God deserves the glory.

*The temple and its dedicated servants* illustrate a third principle to follow. In chapter 9 of 1 Chronicles, beginning in verse 17 and going down through verse 34, is a list of Levites who served in a variety of ways. We are given the names of the gatekeepers, the utensil counters, the furniture polishers, the spice mixers, the bread bakers, and the music makers.

And what's fascinating here is that God is not just recording what these people did; in most cases, He gives us their names. Names matter because people matter to God—and they should matter to us.

Listen, beloved, who people *are* is more important than what people do. In fact, the moment you begin to think it's more important what God does *through* you than what God does *in* you is the moment you begin to place more value on results, status, and position rather than on character, integrity, and a close walk with God.

And by the way, these people here are not going to make it onto VIP lists in the world—they opened gates, counted forks and knives, and sang in the choir. But let this remind us all that whatever service we do for the Lord matters to Him. It might not be recognized or applauded on earth, but it is never overlooked or forgotten in heaven. The writer of Hebrews 6:10 put it this way: “God is not unjust so as to overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving the saints.”

If God can remember the names of the furniture polishers and spice makers, if He can answer the prayer

of Jabez to get beyond his painful past, and if God can respond to the dependency of desperate people on the battlefield, He will certainly remember you, hear your prayer, and one day reward your service to others—because ultimately you were serving Him.

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How might you have allowed your past to limit your faithful service for the Lord today? What encouragement and insight does Jabez give you for overcoming a painful past? Who in your life might benefit from hearing your “Jabez” story, particularly the part where God’s grace came to your rescue?

What do your daily choices, priorities and heart-attitudes reveal about the value you place on people? Particularly, what value do you place on people who hurt you, whose living standard is well below or above yours, or whose culture or religion is different than yours? What in your own life is valuable to God, but overlooked by you?

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<sup>1</sup> The books of 1 and 2 Chronicles were written after Judah’s exile and much later than the books of Samuel and Kings. These two books of Chronicles focus on David and his successors in the southern kingdom of Judah. They serve as a historical warning to God’s people that He judges apostasy, and they give the people encouragement that despite past sins and divine judgment, God has not abandoned them.

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## CIVIL WAR

2 Samuel 1–2

God had chosen David to succeed Saul as Israel's king. Yet when David's opportunity came with Saul's death, he mourned Saul's passing and quietly sought God's direction for his next step. David understood an important truth: There is no place for self-promotion in God's program.

We now turn to the book of 2 Samuel. This book follows immediately on the death of King Saul and begins to narrate the reign of King David, first over Judah and then later over all Israel.

Now we need to note again that here in 2 Samuel, as well as in the books of 1 and 2 Kings, there is much overlap with the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles. These books cover the same historical period; so, we will be referring to Chronicles at times, even as we follow the historical narrative in 2 Samuel and Kings.

Now David has been running for his life from King Saul for years. So, you might think that the news of Saul's death in battle would be a cause for celebra-

tion. David is finally free to take the throne as Israel's new king. But there is no rejoicing from David.

In fact, an Amalekite arrives in Ziklag, where David is still living, and reports that he has come from the battlefield. Here in 2 Samuel 1:4, he tells David:

*“The people fled from the battle, and also many of the people have fallen and are dead, and Saul and his son Jonathan are also dead.”*

He goes on to claim that he came across Saul on the battlefield, gravely wounded, and Saul begged him to kill him. He says in verse 10 that he agreed, since there seemed to be no hope of Saul surviving. The man then shows David Saul's crown and royal bracelet as proof.

Now it's clear this man is expecting to receive a handsome reward. But David surprises this man—and probably everybody else—by *executing* him for striking down the Lord's anointed.

Furthermore, verse 12 says of David and all his men:



Bronze figurine with gold is a warrior leaning on a spear from the temple of Baalat-Gebal



*They mourned and wept and fasted until evening for Saul and for Jonathan his son and for all the people of the LORD . . . because they had fallen by the sword.*

From verse 19 through the rest of the chapter, we read a song of lament David composed. It expresses his anguish over the loss of Saul and Jonathan and features this refrain: “How the mighty have fallen!”

The first stanza, so to speak, is in verses 19 through 24, where David’s lyrics focus on King Saul and his son Jonathan. He agonizes over knowing the Philistines will gloat over their deaths.

David recounts the military skill of Saul and Jonathan, saying, “The bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty” (verse 22). He knows they would have fought to the very end.

The last three verses of this song focus on Jonathan, whom David describes as more faithful and loving and loyal than anyone he has ever known.

And what really amazes me here is David’s attitude. We would expect him to grieve over the loss of his best friend, the king’s son Jonathan. But grieving over King Saul is another matter. This was the man who relentlessly pursued him, slandered him, and sought to kill him.

This song demonstrates that David truly is a man after God’s own heart. He understood that God had reasons for raising up Saul to be king. David never returned evil for Saul’s evil; and he honored the Lord’s timing—he did not try to seize the throne that God promised would one day be his.

What a picture we see in David of our Lord, the Son of God. He did not return evil for evil; and He bore the suffering inflicted by mankind, though He knew the throne of the universe belonged to Him.

Proverbs 24:17 reads, “Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles.” This is the attitude of a godly believer, and David exemplified it for decades.

With the throne of Israel vacant, someone seeking power would make his move. But David knows God chose him to be king and God would make him king at the right time. So, we read at the beginning of chapter 2 that David asks the Lord for direction, no doubt through the high priest: “Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah?” (verse 1).

God responds by instructing him to go to Hebron, about twenty miles south of Jerusalem. So, David and his followers leave the Philistine city of Ziklag and go to this city of Judah to live, and they are welcomed by this southern tribe. In fact, verse 4 says the people of Judah “anointed David king over the house of Judah.” According to verse 11, David will be “king . . . over the house of Judah . . . seven years and six months.”

You need to understand that Ish-bosheth, Saul’s son, is crowned king of Israel. Most people assume that David immediately ruled over the whole nation of Israel. No, that will take seven more years to fully take place.

So, while David is at Hebron, waiting for the Lord to fulfill His promises to him regarding the throne, we read that Abner, the “commander of Saul’s army, took Ish-bosheth the son of Saul and . . . made him king over . . . all Israel” (verses 8-9).

Abner is attempting to continue the dynasty of Saul, but verse 10 tells us that “the house of Judah followed David.” This leads to civil war among Israel’s tribes.

Abner takes a contingent of his army out to confront David’s men; David’s soldiers are commanded by a man named Joab. The armies meet by the pool of Gibeon to the northwest of Jerusalem (verse 13)—that large pool cut into the rock is still there.

With the two armies facing one another on opposite sides of this pool, Abner proposes a hand-to-hand combat between twelve of his soldiers and twelve of David’s men. But there’s no winner in this contest, as all the participants die! A fierce battle follows, and David’s men gain the advantage and put Abner’s army to flight. When it’s all over, verse 31 reports that David lost 20 men in the fighting while Abner lost 360.



The sad reality here is that Israel has been fighting the Philistines for many years but now they are fighting each other. And the Philistines, who still have dominance in this region, must have been watching it all with wicked delight.

David is not pushing to become king over the whole nation; he's simply waiting on the Lord and responding to the actions of others. Abner and Ish-bosheth, on the other hand, are seeking position and power. In fact, most of the Israelites at this point would rather follow them and the house of Saul than follow a king like David, who is following after God.

Even among Christians today, we find many who crave position and power. They will do anything to gain the advantage over another. The church today has lost a tremendous amount of credibility because of the selfish greed and lust for power and popularity among its leaders. The church is acting no differently than the world. While the church has told the world to repent, the world can easily tell the church today to repent as well.

*While the church  
has told the world  
to repent, the world  
can easily tell the  
church today to  
repent as well.*

Beloved, we need to be more like David—let's wait on the Lord; let's follow the will of God; let's be pa-

tient; let's be willing to be overlooked and unappreciated. But let's stay at our task as we represent the Lord, for we know what is coming. There is a crown coming, and there is a kingdom coming where we will one day live with and serve our Lord and King, and He shall reign forever and ever.

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What does David's overall attitude toward Saul teach you about living through conflict? What role did God's promise of a special kingship to David play in David's choices? What value is there in knowing God's promises as you navigate through your conflicts?

There are those who wait on the LORD and those who don't. Which of the two are you most likely to be during times of transition, and why? Why is it important to understand that God has sovereign control over all things? How should this affect your daily life? It is also important to know your heart's motivations in waiting. Are you waiting out of fear of a misstep, or are you waiting because you trust God's timing over your own?

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## HOW TO TREAT BOTH FRIEND AND FOE

2 Samuel 3–4

Saul and his son Ish-bosheth were typical kings. They pursued power and control and sought to destroy rivals. David, God's anointed king, was anything but typical. His attitude and actions remind us that the world's priorities and ethics should never characterize God's people.

As we dive deeper into the biography of David, we discover a man who thought very differently from the world around him. People who believed they would earn his favor by doing something wrong were in for a surprise. And people who expected David to rejoice at the destruction of his enemies were surprised to see him weeping instead.

David reminds us that as followers of Jesus Christ, our thinking—our priorities and perspectives—should be very different from the world's. Our minds are to be focused on “things that are above, not on things that are on earth” (Colossians 3:2).

Now by no means was David perfect. He was, in fact, a sinner, just like you and me. And that is going to come out here in these opening chapters of 2 Samuel.

As the third chapter of 2 Samuel opens, verse 1 begins with this news:

*There was a long war between the house of Saul and house of David. And David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker.*

David's family also is expanding during these years. Six sons are born to him while he is in Hebron. Sadly, this is the result of David having taken six different wives. Now some people try to defend his polygamy here, but David is violating God's ideal for marriage between a husband and one wife. Just keep reading, and you will see that some of David's sons listed here in verses 2 through 5 will bring rape, murder, revenge, and treason into the royal family. Indeed, polygamy always brings suffering and jealousy and division into a family.

We are told here that the house of Saul, under Saul's son Ish-bosheth, is becoming weaker. But his general is becoming more influential. When General Abner



Laws of Eshunna



is confronted by Ish-bosheth for taking Saul's concubine, Abner gets angry and changes sides. He writes to David here in verse 12:

*Abner sent messengers to David . . . saying, "To whom does the land belong? Make your covenant with me, and behold, my hand shall be with you to bring over all Israel to you."*

David agrees to Abner's proposal on one condition—that Abner bring David his first wife, Michal. And tragically, that's what Abner does; he literally takes Michal from her current husband and sends her to David. Abner then encourages leaders in Israel to give their allegiance to David. And this leads to a conference of leaders at Hebron, where Abner makes this promise to David:

*"I will arise and go and will gather all Israel to my lord the king, that they may make a covenant with you, and that you may reign over all that your heart desires."* (verse 21)

David, we are told, then "sent Abner away, and he went in peace."

When David's general, Joab, returns to Hebron and finds out what has happened, he is not at all happy because Abner had killed Joab's brother in battle. Joab tries to convince David that Abner is up to no good.

Apparently, he is unsuccessful in convincing David, because he immediately hatches a plan to lure Abner back to Hebron without David's knowledge. When Abner shows up, assuming Joab is willing to let bygones be bygones, Joab murders him. Joab has gained vengeance, but he has also eliminated a potential competitor for his position as general in David's army.

When David learns what Joab has done, he wants everybody to know that Joab is guilty of this murder.

He also wants everybody to know that he had nothing to do with it.

David says to his people in verse 31, "Tear your clothes and put on sackcloth and mourn before Abner." And verse 37 records, "All Israel understood that day that it had not been the king's will to put to death Abner."

David's sorrow was genuine, but it was also politically important that everyone know he had nothing to do with the murder of Israel's great general. That might have caused the northern tribes of Israel to refuse to follow David as their king.

The death of General Abner guarantees the downfall of King Ish-bosheth. As chapter 4 begins, verse 1 tells us, "His courage failed, and all Israel was dismayed."

Now if we haven't had enough murder and intrigue for one lesson, there's more here. Two Israelite soldiers decide that David is going to become the king and it will be to their benefit to kill Ish-bosheth themselves. They enter the king's house at midday when he is resting, and they kill him:

*They . . . put him to death and beheaded him. They . . . brought the head of Ish-bosheth to David at Hebron. And they said to the king, "Here is the head of Ish-bosheth, the son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life. The LORD has avenged my lord the king this day on Saul and on his offspring."* (verses 7-8)

They have misjudged King David. David tells them in verse 11 that they "have killed a righteous man in his own house," and he gives them the death penalty.

David is a warrior, but he is also a man of justice and honor. Murder is murder. Whether David stands to benefit from it is irrelevant. He isn't about to allow this assassination to go unpunished.



Beloved, the driving ethic in the world today is that the end justifies the means. Do whatever you have to do to get ahead. Step on people or move them out of your way—just make it to the top of the ladder.

*Beloved, the driving ethic in the world today is that the end justifies the means.*

David is not immune to this temptation, but we see him here demonstrate a godly perspective and an absolute trust in God's timing. He is confident the Lord will fulfill His promises to him and establish him as Israel's king. And more important, David knows God does not need his help.

Since that day when Samuel anointed young David to be Saul's successor as king of Israel, David showed the utmost respect for those in positions of leadership, even when they did little to earn that respect. You remember how he refused to raise his hand against Saul, even when Saul wanted to kill him.

And now that King Ish-bosheth has been killed, watch David demonstrate rather amazing grace here in chapter 4. Let me go back to verse 4, which reads:

*Jonathan, the son of Saul, had a son who was crippled in his feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel, and his nurse took him up and fled, and as she fled in her haste, he fell and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth.*

This verse is loaded with meaning. Although Saul and his son Ish-bosheth had opposed David, David refused to take revenge on the house of Saul when he became king. Saul's son Jonathan had been David's closest friend, and now we learn that Jonathan had a son who had survived all these years, though he had been injured in an accident. David now shows kindness to this disabled young man named Mephibosheth, and he will eventually invite him to live in the palace with David and his family.

Imagine the strong sons of David coming to eat at the dinner table, and then here comes the shuffling sound of Mephibosheth's crutches as he limps into the dining room and joins the king's family for dinner. What a picture this is of you and me. We have been disabled by sin but delivered by the grace of God and invited to the King's table as a member of His family—a family that will last forever.

How does 2 Corinthians 6:14 influence your thinking about making agreements with people who are ungodly and self-serving? What spiritual discipline is missing from David's interaction with Abner? What does this teach you about the importance of this discipline?

What would your yet-to-be saved friends and family say most shapes the way you think—the surrounding culture or God's Word? Why is it important to have and live by a plan to cultivate a consistent biblical worldview?

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## DAVID REIGNS AND THE ARK RETURNS

2 Samuel 5-6; 1 Chronicles 11:1-9; 12-16

Like anyone who enters a position of leadership, David had to deal wisely with pressing needs and the expectations of others. But David also understood that true success, personally and for Israel, would come through following the Lord and making him central to all of life.

I did a little research online and found that over one thousand books are published every year on the subject of leadership. I typically don't buy any of them because they have little to do with the biblical definition of effective leadership.

And as we dive again into the biography of King David, we are going to discover some leadership traits that, frankly, are overlooked. Leadership qualities like humility, patience, and faithfulness are not going to be featured at leadership seminars today.

As we arrive now at 2 Samuel chapter 5, Ish-bosheth, Israel's king, has died. And this creates the perfect opportunity for David to step in and assume the throne. But he patiently waits.

Eventually, the leaders from the northern tribes of Israel approach David, acknowledging his past military success under Saul. They also acknowledge something else in verse 2, saying, "The LORD said to you, 'You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and . . . prince over Israel.'" They finally realize that David is God's man to be their shepherd-king.

So, we read in verse 3, "King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel." Verse 4 informs us that David is thirty years old at this time. He has



Fragment of a cult object  
perhaps portraying a Jebusite

reigned in Hebron for seven and a half years over Judah, and now he will reign over the united kingdom for another thirty-three years.

Just think about the fact that Samuel had anointed David some fifteen years earlier. This is a good reminder for us that God has His own timetable. David was wise in refusing to run ahead of God and waiting for the Lord to determine the time and place to make him king.

Now, as Israel's new king, David chooses Jerusalem as his new capital city. This walled city was centrally located, but it was occupied by the Jebusites; and go-





ing clear back to the days of Joshua (Joshua 15:63), the Israelites had been unable to conquer Jerusalem. The Jebusites are so confident that they inform David that “the blind and the lame” within their city could hold off the Israelites (verse 6).

In the parallel text in 1 Chronicles 11:6, David tells his men, “Whoever strikes the Jebusites first shall be chief and commander.” And we’re told that Joab “went up first, so he became chief.” In 2 Samuel chapter 5, verse 8 indicates that Joab got into the city through a “water shaft,” a tunnel that brought water into the city from an outside source.

With this victory, David built up the city, including his own royal palace. And verse 10 tells us David “became greater and greater, for the LORD ... was with him.” Verse 12 adds:

*David knew that the LORD had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel.*

David knew that God alone deserved the credit!

Now I have to tell you that David’s spiritual discernment did not seem to spill over into family matters. In fact, he followed the practice of other ancient kings by multiplying wives and fathering “more sons and daughters” (verse 13). And they are going to cause a trainload of trouble down the road.

The rest of chapter 5 tells us that the Philistines are not happy about David becoming king over all Israel, and they decide to overthrow him. Twice here David ends up defeating them in battle, bringing stability to his people. And don’t miss the fact that in verse 19 and then again in verse 23, David asks the Lord for direction before engaging in battle.

Now in order to lead the nation spiritually, David has a major issue to deal with. The ark of the covenant—that little golden box containing the law—which represented God’s presence among His people, is still

in Kiriath-jearim. It’s been there since the days of Eli, the priest (1 Samuel 7:1).

David is determined to bring it to Jerusalem. In 1 Chronicles 13 he talks it over with the elders of Israel, and they all agree.

For some reason, none of them went back to the law of Moses to find out *how* to transport the ark. The instructions in Exodus 25 and Numbers 4 clearly spelled out that the ark was to be carried by Levites. But here in 2 Samuel 6:3, they are putting the ark on a cart.

They are all singing and rejoicing, but the celebration is interrupted by the actions a man named Uzzah:

*Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God.* (verses 6-7)

Verse 8 tells us that David gets upset with the Lord about this. After all, what did this fellow do to deserve judgment?

*The Lord is not to be taken for granted. The details of His Word are not to be ignored.*

The problem is that the details of God’s instructions were ignored. No matter how sincere everybody was, God’s presence was associated with this ark, and it



was never to be treated like some ordinary piece of furniture.

This is a sad but important lesson for David and the people. The Lord is not to be taken for granted. The details of His Word are not to be ignored, no matter how good you feel about what you are doing.

How does this impact how a watching and unsaved world understands who God is?

Verse 9 says, “David was afraid of the LORD that day, and he said, ‘How can the ark of the LORD come to me?’” So, he leaves the ark at the house of Obed-edom. It remains there three months, and verse 11 records, “The Lord blessed Obed-edom and all his household.”

Well, David learns his lesson. He returns after three months, and 1 Chronicles 15:2 tells us, “David said that no one but the Levites may carry the ark of God.” David has finally read the instruction manual. And with that, the ark comes to Jerusalem with much rejoicing.

We read here in 2 Samuel 6:16 that David led the way, “leaping and dancing before the LORD.” The ark is set inside a tent David had set up for it, and sacrifices are offered. Over in 1 Chronicles 16 we are given the lyrics to David’s song of thanksgiving on this grand occasion.

Not everybody is celebrating, however. David’s first wife, Michal, the daughter of King Saul, despises David’s love for the Lord and the significance of the ark. She accuses him of making a fool of himself, and David replies in 2 Samuel 6:21:

*“It was before the LORD, who chose me above your father and above all his house, to appoint me as prince over Israel, the people of the LORD—and I will celebrate before the LORD.”*

Verse 23 records that Michal “had no child to the day of her death.” Her lack of respect for David and the God he loved guaranteed she would not bear David the heir to his throne.

Apart from this sad encounter, this was really a time of great joy. David is off to an amazing start as the leader and king of the nation of Israel—military victory, a new capital city, national unity, and the return of the ark to God’s chosen people.

And through all of this, David realized that effective leadership—true leadership—involves allegiance to the Lord, surrender to the detailed instructions of God’s Word, and a public testimony of joyfully worshipping the Lord. Let me tell you, that will make anyone a leader worth following.

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David was divinely selected to be king but had to wait years before assuming the throne. How did he benefit from this long delay? What insight might this give to your own experience of waiting on God to fulfill His promises to you?

The tragedy of Uzzah’s death is a reminder that God is concerned with obedience to His word. What is at stake when you follow your good intentions over obedience to God’s word? How does this impact how a watching and unsaved world understands who God is?

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## GOD'S COVENANT WITH DAVID

2 Samuel 7; 1 Chronicles 17

In 2 Samuel 7, we find David's God-honoring desire replaced by God's perfect plan. Here we find the great covenant the Lord made with David and his descendants. Most prominent among those descendants is Jesus Christ, through whom all the promises to David will be realized.

David is now king over all the tribes of Israel. He has already experienced great success in conquering Jerusalem and making it his capital, uniting the divided nation, and defeating his Philistine enemies. He has even brought the ark of the covenant to Jerusalem, making it again central to Israel's worship and life.

As for David himself, he is living in a mansion of cedar, built for him as a gift from another king. Yet as 2 Samuel chapter 7 opens, it becomes clear that David believes something is still missing. Here are the first two verses:

*Now when the king lived in his house and the LORD had given*



Gudea Temple Cylinder

*him rest from all his surrounding enemies, the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent."*

The implication is obvious: he wants to build a "house" for the ark of the Lord. At the moment, that ark is sitting in a makeshift tent nearby.

Nathan is introduced here for the first time; he's a prophet and a trusted adviser. His immediate response to David in verse 3 is, "Go, do all that is in your heart, for the LORD is with you."

But that same night, the Lord speaks to Nathan and tells him to give David a different message. Verses 5-7:

*"Go and tell my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD: Would you build me a house to dwell in? I have not lived in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day*



*... Did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel ... saying, “Why have you not built me a house of cedar?””*

You get the idea that God does not want a temple. But over in the parallel passage in 1 Chronicles 17:4, Nathan is told, “Go and tell my servant David, ‘Thus says the LORD: It is not you who will build me a house to dwell in.’”

Even though this is an honorable desire, the Lord never asked David to build Him a temple. Over in 1 Chronicles 22:8, David tells his son Solomon why:

*“The word of the LORD came to me, saying, ‘You have shed much blood and have waged great wars. You shall not build a house to my name, because you have shed so much blood before me on the earth.’”*

So, Nathan relays this discouraging answer to David; but he has some encouraging news as well. Here in verses 12 through 16 David receives what we call the Davidic covenant, in which God promises David three things: a *house*, a *kingdom*, and a *throne*. The house—the house of David—will begin a dynasty of kings, beginning with his son Solomon. Solomon is the “offspring” mentioned in verse 12. Verse 13 says of Solomon, “He shall build a house for my name.” So, the temple is going to be constructed, not by David, but by Solomon.

The Lord also says in this covenant, regarding Solomon, He will “establish the throne of his kingdom forever” (verse 13). This promise is repeated in verse 16 in reference to David. Solomon marks the beginning of David’s “house” and kingdom.

Verse 16 now gives us the heart of the great Davidic covenant in the words of the Lord: “Your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever.”

Again, “house” refers to David’s descendants. In other words, the line of David will always exist and will always be the true royal line. “Kingdom” refers to a political kingdom. And the “throne” speaks of the authority of a king. Now beloved, there is no reason to spiritualize this covenant and make it anything less than literal promises of a literal house, a literal kingdom, and a literal throne.

Even though the succession of David’s royal descendants will be interrupted, his house, kingdom, and throne are now established forever. And let me tell you, we know what David here did not know—that ultimately this covenant is going to be fulfilled through David’s Descendant, Jesus Christ.

Indeed, this promise through Nathan is confirmed a thousand years later when an angel shows up in Luke chapter 1 and announces to a young virgin named Mary—a descendant of David—that she will give birth to Jesus the Messiah. The angel says to her:

*And the Lord God will give to him [Jesus] the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”* (verses 32-33)

So, David’s kingdom will be reestablished by David’s royal Descendant, Jesus. Has that happened yet? Last time I looked Jesus wasn’t reigning in Jerusalem on a throne. No, this is ultimately fulfilled when Jesus returns to earth one day, according to Revelation 19, and reigns on earth in His millennial kingdom.

Beloved, it’s important to grasp this irrevocable, unconditional covenant with David. One day we will see it all fulfilled.

Now David’s dream was to build a temple for the Lord. But God said no because He had bigger plans for David than a temporary temple.

You may have had some dreams of your own that were God-honoring, but God said no and didn’t explain why that door remained closed. Well, take heart





from David here; his response to God is quite an example for us. He doesn't argue. In fact, we are told that David "went in and sat before the LORD" (verse 18). I love that. David goes into that tent where the ark is sitting, and he spends a long time alone, talking with the Lord, surrendering to the Lord's will. Then he says, "Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?"

*Instead of focusing on what God would not let him do, He focuses on who God is and what God's grace has already done in his life.*

Wow! What humility and gratitude and joyful surrender to God we see here. David even turns that prayer meeting into a praise meeting in verse 22, declaring, "There is none like you, and there is no God besides you." Instead of focusing on what God would not let him do, He focuses on who God is and what God's grace has already done in his life.

This is convicting, isn't it? How do we respond when God shuts a door or says no to some dream or desire? Do we really trust the Lord when He says no; or no, not yet; or no, not that? Do we sit around feeling sorry for ourselves or surrender to His will for our lives?

Well, look at David here. He now knows that his son Solomon, not him, is going to build the magnificent temple for the Lord, and instead of pouting, he starts planning.

Over in 1 Chronicles 22, we read this:

*David . . . set stonecutters to prepare dressed stones for building the house of God. David also provided great quantities of iron for nails for the doors of the gates . . . as well as bronze in quantities beyond weighing, and cedar timbers without number . . . So David provided materials in great quantity. (verses 2-5)*

Let's imitate David here. Let's not try to get God to change His mind and open a door that He has closed. Let's look for the door He has opened; let's walk through it with humility and trust and joy for His grace in our lives today and say with David, there is no one like the Lord our God!

Why does God sometimes say no to our good desires and plans? Can you cite examples of this from your own life and what have you learned from them? How could wisely sharing such stories help your yet-to-be-saved friends and family better understand God's grace?

What bearing does God's covenant promises to David have on your life? What do they teach you about God and His ways? What does this truth being anchored in the Old Testament reveal about the importance the Old Testament has in the bible as a whole?

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## MILITARY VICTORY AND A TOUCH OF GRACE

2 Samuel 8–10; 1 Chronicles 18–19

David's early reign as king of Israel was marked by military success as the Lord gave him victory after victory. But we are reminded in 2 Samuel 8–10 that the truly great person is not merely one who possesses power and prestige, but the one who is gracious to others.

Now in 2 Samuel 7, we listened in as God promised to bless the house of David—his descendants—forever. Of course, this all looked forward to the coming Messiah, the greater Son of David.

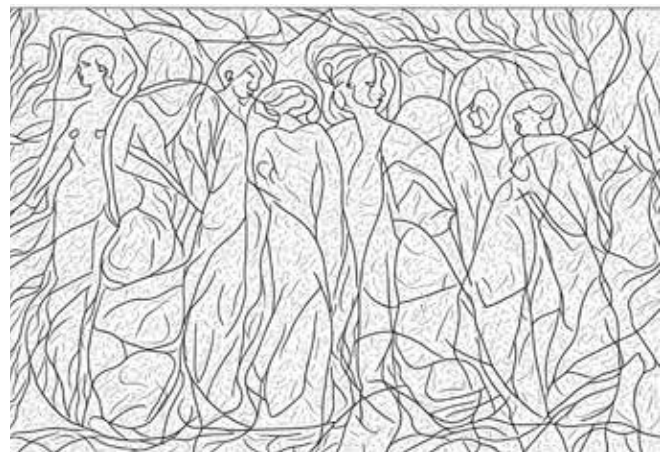
Now here in chapter 8, we are told of one military victory after another for King David. These victories expanded Israel's borders and strengthened the kingdom rule of David. Twice in this chapter, at verse 6 and again in verse 14, we read, "The LORD gave victory to David wherever he went."

David defeated the Philistines, and then he defeated the Moabites. Now you might remember that David had been on good terms with Moab and even sent his parents to live there for their protection during Saul's reign (1 Samuel 22). So, something has clearly changed since then, though we don't know what brought that about. There is an extra-biblical tradition that says David's parents were killed by the Moabites, but there is no historical confirmation of this.

Now we read here in 2 Samuel chapter 8:3 that David defeats Hadadezer, king of the small territory of Zobah. Then verse 5 tells us that "when the Syrians of Damascus came to help Hadadezer king of Zobah, David struck down 22,000 men of the Syrians." This

means Israel's power expands to Damascus, which pays tribute to Israel. So, as a result of these victories, David's kingdom is enriched with gold, silver, and bronze, which verse 11 says David "dedicated to the LORD."

Next, David gains victory over Edom in the south, adding more territory to the kingdom of Israel. Then, as I said earlier, verse 14 reminds us that "the LORD gave victory to David wherever he went." And by the way, he is not successful only with a sword; he's a capable leader as well. Verse 15 says, "David administered justice and equity to all his people."



Subdued enemies lined up on ground under Ramesses II



Over in 1 Chronicles 18–19, we are given the same information that Samuel gives us here—it is one victory after another for David. But 2 Samuel interrupts all these victories to show us a wonderful touch of grace on the part of David.

The ninth chapter of 2 Samuel opens with David asking, “Is there still anyone left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” Now think about this: David is at the height of his power, enjoying success on every front, building his fame and fortune. Usually, such people aren’t interested in showing grace, especially to the family of a former enemy.

David is no doubt remembering a vow he had made to his best friend, Prince Jonathan, years before in 1 Samuel 20. David promised King Saul’s son that he would deal kindly with his descendants when he ascended the throne of Israel. David is sincere in his desire. He has been blessed by God, and he wants to bless someone else now. In fact, he says in verse 3, “Is there not still someone of the house of Saul, that I may show the kindness of God to him?”

Well, a former staff member of King Saul’s household named Ziba is brought forward, and he tells David about Mephibosheth. Mephibosheth is Jonathan’s own son and the grandson of King Saul.

Ziba tells David that Mephibosheth is alive, but Ziba is quick to add in verse 3, “He is crippled in his feet.” Back in chapter 4 we were told that Mephibosheth was injured accidentally at age five when his nurse was fleeing with him following the news that Saul and Jonathan had been killed in battle.

Why was she running with this little boy in her arms? Well, the custom was for the new king to kill all the family members of the previous king to get rid of any rivals. And since Saul and Jonathan were dead, Mephibosheth was a potential heir to the throne. She was thinking that David would do what Saul would have done.

So, this nurse was running away with this little boy to save his life. And while running, she dropped him, permanently injuring his legs. That boy is now a young man.

When called before David, Mephibosheth is terrified. When he arrives, he bows and proclaims himself David’s servant. David’s response here in chapter 9 and verse 7 must have shocked him:

*“Do not fear, for I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan, and I will restore to you all the land of Saul your father, and you shall eat at my table always.”*

Mephibosheth has absolutely nothing to offer David. There is no benefit to David in showing favor to this young man. But that is exactly what David does. This is an illustration of grace.

Grace is unmerited favor. Grace is not earned; it’s simply received. Grace is showing favor and compassion to someone who cannot pay you back.

*Grace is unmerited favor. Grace is not earned; it’s simply received.*

Grace is treating people like God has treated us. While we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). We didn’t earn this or deserve it, but God has given us forgiveness and eternal life with Him.

David restores to Mephibosheth the land that had belonged to Saul, and then he appoints Ziba and his sons and servants as caretakers of his fields. Verse 11 tells us, “Mephibosheth ate at David’s table, like one of the king’s sons.” As the song lyrics go, we were once enemies of God the Father, but we are now seated at His table of grace.



Now with that, we come to chapter 10 of 2 Samuel, where David now attempts to show grace and kindness to another king.

David learns of the death of the reigning king of Ammon, which lay well to the east of the Jordan River. David wants to express his respect for the late king, Nahash, and offer his condolences because, as he says in verse 2, Nahash had “dealt loyally,” or with kindness, toward him. More than likely, Nahash had offered David protection at times when Saul was pursuing him.

So, David sends a friendly delegation to the new king, Hanun, the son of Nahash. But verse 3 informs us that Hanun’s advisers see this as an attempt to “search the city and to spy it out and to overthrow it.”

They think David’s delegation is up to no good here. So, instead of a warm welcome, verse 4 tells us they “took David’s servants and shaved off half the beard of each and cut off their garments in the middle, at their hips, and sent them away.” In the ancient world this was the humiliating treatment someone gave to prisoners of war.

If that is not enough to provoke the wrath of David, King Hunan proceeds to hire 33,000 Syrian soldiers to join the Ammonites in fighting Israel. But under General Joab’s leadership, the Israelites defeat both armies.

Then there is yet another battle with the Syrians. Verse 19 records that they are defeated once again, and David allows them to sign a peace treaty with Israel.

These chapters reveal in King David a victorious and powerful king, but also a kind and gracious man. Let’s become a little more like David in showing grace to others, since we have received amazing grace from our Heavenly Father.

When you treat others with grace, it will probably surprise a lot of people, but it will point them to a victorious Lord and Savior who offers them what they could never earn and they do not deserve—an invitation to the table and membership in the family of God.

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Based on the text so far, what perspective should we have on the “victories” we experience in life? Why do we as believers sometimes leave God out of “our” victories? How does such a perspective affect an unbeliever’s view of God?

What actions of God should motivate you to extend grace to others? Why is grace sometimes so hard to give to others? From whom in your life are you withholding grace? Why?

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## MURDER, ADULTERY, AND TRUE CONFESSION

2 Samuel 11–12; 1 Chronicles 20:1–3

David's fall into sin is a solemn reminder that none of us—at any time or any age—is immune to temptation. We must be ever vigilant. It also reminds us of the amazing grace of God, who offers forgiveness for any and every sin when we come to Him in faith and repentance.

Well-known and tragic events in King David's life are recorded here in 2 Samuel chapters 11 and 12, and the consequences of them are going to last a lifetime. These two chapters spell the end of David's triumphs and the beginning of David's tragedies.

The narrative slips into slow motion as these two chapters rehearse less than one year in David's life. God obviously wants us to learn some important lessons from this brief, sad period.

David had just won a decisive victory over the Syrians and Ammonites in chapter 10. All that remained was to take the Ammonite capital city of Rabbah. Although it was springtime, when kings typically accompanied their armies into battle, David remained in Jerusalem and sent his commander Joab to wrap things up (2 Samuel 11:1).

His general was happy with that, by the way, because nobody wanted David in any danger. But David is about to face a far greater danger than enemy armies.

One afternoon, he takes a walk out on the flat roof of his palace and from that vantage point sees a woman bathing. Instead of turning away, he lingers. Then he asks who she is and is told in verse 3 that this is "Bathsheba . . . the wife of Uriah the Hittite."



Wall of what is believed by some archaeologists to be the palace of David in Jerusalem

That's a loaded answer by the way. First, Bathsheba is married, so case closed. And second, she is married to Uriah, one of David's most faithful soldiers (2 Samuel 23:39). But none of that seems to matter now, and David has Bathsheba brought to him. Verse 4 says David "lay with her . . . and the woman conceived."

Deuteronomy 17 lists three prohibitions for Israel's kings: they were not to multiply horses, acquire excessive wealth, or multiply wives—these were all characteristic of pagan kings. David obeyed the first two but had repeatedly disobeyed the third.



David first married Michal, then Abigail, and then Ahinoam. When he moved to Hebron, he married four more women. Then he began his reign in Jerusalem and added even more wives and a harem filled with concubines. Or as one little boy misread it, “cucumber vines.” And let me tell you, David is about to get tangled up here. While Bathsheba is not entirely innocent, David is the *king*, and kings aren’t typically turned down.

The problem here is that this one-night stand gets complicated when Bathsheba sends David a note that she is expecting. And with that, David has a decision to make: confess his sin or cover it up.

He decides to cover it up by having Uriah brought home from the battlefield. But despite David’s best efforts to get Uriah to go home to his wife, he refuses, saying in verse 11:

*“My lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house, to eat and to drink and to lie with my wife?”*

Frankly, Uriah has more character than David! With that, David sends Uriah back into battle with a message for General Joab. David tells Joab to expose Uriah to the fiercest fighting and then withdraw support from him. The message is clear: Let’s make sure Uriah never comes home again.

Verse 17 records: “The men of the city came out and fought with Joab, and some of the servants of David among the people fell. Uriah the Hittite also died.” David has added murder to his adultery!

Sometime after the funeral, verse 27 tells us David took Bathsheba into his house as his wife. From all appearances, it looks like David is going to get away with it. But Psalm 32 is a poem David composes during this period of time when he is hiding his sin. He writes there, “When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me” (verses 3-4). David is under deep conviction from God.

Finally, the Lord sends Nathan the prophet to confront David. Chapter 12 begins with Nathan telling David a story about a rich man who didn’t want to barbecue one of his own sheep to serve a special guest, so he took the only lamb of his poor neighbor and fed it to his guest.

Now David assumes Nathan is giving an actual account, and he explodes with anger here in verse 5: “The man who has done this deserves to die, and he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing.” David thinks this man should die for stealing a lamb, when he has stolen another man’s wife, as well as the man’s life!

Nathan probably pauses before he says to David here in verse 7, “*You are the man!*” The truth suddenly hits David with incredible conviction.

He doesn’t argue or interrupt as Nathan lays out the consequences. In verse 11 Nathan prophesies that there will be trouble and turmoil in David’s house from then on:

*“Thus says the LORD, ‘Behold, I will raise up evil against you out of your own house. And I will take your wives before your eyes and give them to your neighbor.’”*

And let me tell you ahead of time, the following chapters will demonstrate the truth of Nathan’s words.

David responds in verse 13, saying simply, “I have sinned against the LORD.” In the Hebrew language, this sentence is only two words. But these two words say it all. This is true confession and genuine repentance. And with that, Nathan informs David that God has heard his confession and has forgiven his sin.

And just like David, beloved, we can be forgiven on the basis of Christ’s substitutionary death for us when we confess our sin to the Lord. But even though our sins are forgiven, there might be long-lasting consequences.



*But even though  
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forgiven, there  
might be long-  
lasting consequences.*

In fact, Nathan gives David one more immediate consequence of his sin in verse 14: “Because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child who is born to you shall die.”

Now why did David and Bathsheba’s innocent baby have to die? Well, we are simply not told—other than the fact that this baby was connected to their sin together. But let me tell you that this child will be spared intrigue and future bloodshed by being taken so early to heaven.

But there is more here. This child’s death has given us one of the greatest and most comforting promises regarding babies and children who die.

When David and Bathsheba’s baby died, we are told that David “went into the house of the LORD and worshiped” (verse 20). The palace officials and staff members are shocked that David would begin eating again, and he seemed contented in the Lord. David explains in verse 23, “I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.” David effectively says, “I know that one day I will go to live with my God; and when I do, I will be reunited with my baby boy again.”

Beloved, the gospel has not yet reached every part of this world. Billions still have never heard of Jesus. But if you have ever wondered how there can be citizens of heaven from every language, people group,

tribe, and nation standing before the Lamb, singing praise to God (Revelation 7:9), this is part of the answer. Babies who die—aborted babies, miscarried babies, stillborn babies, children who die young—from every family group, tribe, language, and nation go immediately to be with the Lord, safe and sound and satisfied in the presence of God.

Chapter 12 concludes with mention of a later child born to David and Bathsheba, a son named Solomon, and notes the final conquest of the city of Rabbah—more reminders of God’s grace.

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*In all the events leading up to David’s sin with Bathsheba, the LORD wasn’t consulted. How does that fact explain David’s actions? Complete this principle using your own life experiences: When we leave God out of our choices...*

*What consequences of sin can you count from David’s experience with Bathsheba? Are these things you consider when you’re faced with temptation? Why is it wise to have godly accountability partners to assist you during times of temptation?*

*How do these verses influence your thinking about preparing for temptation in your life? Proverbs 4:23, Jeremiah 17:9, 1 Thessalonians 4:4-7, James 1:13-14*

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## ANOTHER FAMILY FEUD

2 Samuel 13–14

As Israel's king and with his own failures to draw on, David had a unique opportunity to warn others to resist temptation and avoid sin. Instead, his life became a sad example of the consequences of sin, and the powerful king proved to be a weak father.

When David had confessed his sin in taking Bathsheba and having her husband Uriah killed, the Lord had forgiven him. Yet as the prophet Nathan had warned, there would be far-reaching consequences of family turmoil. Indeed, David is going to witness a family feud like no other.

It seems to me that David's sons were drawn more to their father's failures than to his faith. We are given the tragic account here in chapter 13 of the brutal sin of Amnon, David's oldest son.

Verse 1 sets the stage:

*Now Absalom, David's son, had a beautiful sister, whose name*



A mourning woman puts dust on her head

*was Tamar. And after a time Amnon, David's son, loved her.*

We learned back in chapter 3 that Amnon was the son of David's wife Ahinoam, while the mother of Absalom and Tamar was Maacah. So, Amnon is in love with his half-sister. However, this "love" is nothing more than lust.

Acting on the advice of his cousin, Amnon pretends to be sick. Then we read in verse 6:

*When the king came to see him, Amnon said to the king, "Please let my sister Tamar come and make a couple of cakes in my sight, that I may eat from her hand."*

David appears oblivious to Amnon's deception and the danger to Tamar and instructs her to go to Amnon's house.

When Amnon's intentions become clear to Tamar, she pleads with him to speak to their father, King David, and arrange a marriage. But Amnon is not interested in marriage; he's consumed with lust. And tragically, he rapes Tamar. Verse 15 tells us that af-





terward, his love quickly turns to hate. There is no doubt her presence condemns his conscience, and he wants her to leave him.

She tears her robe and puts ashes on her head, signifying grief over her lost virginity and what it might mean for her future. Her brother Absalom finds out and quietly takes Tamar into his house to live with his family, while he plots revenge (verse 20).

Verse 21 tells us that when David hears what happened, he is angry but doesn't do anything about it. According to Old Testament law, rape called for the death penalty, but more than likely David feels the guilt of his own capital offenses and, tragically, does nothing. He actually becomes like Eli, a passive, indulgent father who will not discipline his son.

Absalom, on the other hand, waits two years for the right moment to take revenge for his sister against Amnon. He invites his father, King David, as well as all of David's sons to celebrate with him at the time of sheep-shearing.

I agree with those Bible scholars who believe Absalom's invitation to David might very well have been an early attempt to take his father's life as well and seize the throne. David, however, declines the invitation but allows his sons to attend the festival.

Now verse 28 reveals Absalom's plot:

*Then Absalom commanded his servants, "Mark when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say to you, 'Strike Amnon,' then kill him. Do not fear; have I not commanded you?"*

And just as he planned, his servants carry out his wishes. Fearing retaliation, we read in verse 37 that Absalom, "fled and went to Talmai . . . king of Geshur." This was the home of his maternal grandfather, and he finds refuge with him for three years, until his father's mourning over Amnon finally subsides.

Now at this point, as chapter 14 opens, General Joab steps into the picture. He understands that David

longs to see Absalom but under the circumstances cannot just invite his murderous son to return to Jerusalem. Joab is not just a warrior but a shrewd politician. He knows that it is not good for Israel or the army to suffer through conflict and tension in the royal family. So, he sets a plan in motion, as we read in verses 2-3:

*Joab sent to Tekoa and brought from there a wise woman and said to her, "Pretend to be a mourner and put on mourning garments. . . . Go to the king and speak thus to him." So Joab put the words in her mouth.*

This woman relates to David a story in which she claims to be a widow who had two sons. But in an argument, one son killed the other. Now the family wants to take her surviving son and put him to death for murder. But she wants her remaining son protected as the only heir of her late husband. David assures her with an oath that he will protect her son, saying in verse 11, "As the LORD lives, not one hair of your son shall fall to the ground."

*Let's imitate our perfect Heavenly Father, who is consistent in discipline, quick to forgive, and ready to reconcile.*

The woman then reveals the whole meaning of her story. If David is willing to protect a murderer from her family, why will he not grant the same protection to his own son, Absalom?



David immediately suspects that Joab is behind this woman's story, and she confirms it. Instead of getting upset with Joab, however, King David tells him in verse 21, "Behold now, I grant this; go, bring back the young man Absalom." So, Absalom returns to Jerusalem, but he lives in his own house, and David refuses to see him for two more years.

Now verse 25 gives us some information that sets the stage for Absalom's rise in popularity in Israel. It says, "Now in all Israel there was no one so much to be praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom."

Well, after two years of absence from the royal court, Absalom wants Joab to intercede on his behalf to King David, but Joab just ignores him. So, Absalom sets Joab's fields on fire to get his attention (verse 30)—and it works!

Joab convinces David to summon Absalom, and Absalom comes before the king, humbly bowing his face to the ground. Chapter 14 ends with the simple statement that "the king kissed Absalom."

The tragedy here is that we find no recognition of sin, expression of repentance, or desire for reconciliation on the part of either man. This kiss is just a royal formality. What is missing is a relationship. Family terms such as *father* and *son* are absent here. This is more like a king-servant relationship. And it will not be long before Absalom is plotting to reverse the roles and become Israel's future king.

Beloved, these rather tragic chapters in 2 Samuel reveal to us a universal principle that is stated in the New Testament book of Galatians: "Whatever one sows, that will he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). The lust, rape, murder, intrigue and deception in David's family grew from the seeds sown by David's own adultery, polygamy, murder, and cover-up.

Perhaps David no longer believes he has any moral authority to discipline his children because of his own sins. Beloved, we don't discipline our children because we are perfect; and we don't serve the Lord and do the right thing because we have never failed miserably.

No failure is fatal. Every sin can be forgiven. So, let's imitate our perfect Heavenly Father, who is consistent in discipline, quick to forgive, and ready to reconcile.

The apostle John wrote these words:

*If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* (1 John 1:8-9).

Let's not forget the consequences of sin—let's allow them to keep us in careful obedience. But let's not forget the cleansing we have in Christ.

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David's passivity is evidence of his failure to embrace the full consequences of his sin. What actions of David as a parent and king in these circumstances would have shown that his walk with the LORD was strong? What life lessons can you find in David's response to these consequences?

"Whatever one sows, that will he also reap." Why is it important for you as a believer to keep this truth on the forefront of your heart? How does living by this truth impact your ministry to fellow believers and your yet-to-be-saved friends and family?

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## THE RISE AND RUIN OF ABSALOM

2 Samuel 15–18

At a low point in life, betrayed by his son and abandoned by much of Israel, David discovered who his true friends were. They not only saved his life, but also helped him turn back an insurrection. The importance of having faithful friends and being one can hardly be overstated.

There's an old proverb that says, "Lust for power is the strongest of all passions." You will find this passion for power in the workplace, on the university campus, and parading across the world stage.

Here in 2 Samuel chapter 15, we are going to watch this lust for power ruin the life of David's son Absalom. He sets in motion a threefold strategy to steal the throne of Israel from his father.

First, Absalom starts *acting like a king*. "Absalom got himself a chariot and horses, and fifty men to run before him" (verse 1). He's essentially acting like a victorious ruler.

Second, he begins to *criticize his father's administration*. He goes to the city gate, where people come to have their grievances heard and legal cases settled, and this is what he tells these people:

*"Your claims are good and right, but there is no man designated by the king to hear you." Then Absalom would say, "Oh that I were judge in the land! Then every man with a dispute or cause*

*might come to me, and I would give him justice."* (verses 3-4)

In other words, he is saying, "It's too bad I'm not in charge around here."

Third, he *creates favorable impressions*. We read in verse 5, "Whenever a man came near to pay homage to him, he would put out his hand and take hold of him and kiss him." Absalom is showing personal attention to people who treat him as royalty.

Let me tell you, this strategy is effective. Verse 6 puts it bluntly here: "Absalom stole the hearts of the men



Qumran War Scroll



of Israel.” And after four years of this, he is ready to make his move.

Absalom tells his father he is going to Hebron for religious purposes, but he has something else in mind. He gathers many supporters about him, and they declare him king. Even Ahithophel, David’s longtime trusted counselor, joins Absalom.

Finally, the insurrection reaches a point that David realizes he cannot maintain power in Jerusalem and his life is in danger. We read in verse 14:

*Then David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, “Arise, and let us flee, or else there will be no escape for us from Absalom.”*

With that, David is running for his life. And as he flees Jerusalem, I want to point out some people he encounters along the way.

First, a general named Ittai and six hundred of his soldiers offer to assist David. But in verse 19, David tells this man he would be better off serving Absalom. David seems to believe he has lost the throne for good.

But Ittai refuses and says to David, “As the LORD lives . . . wherever my lord the king shall be, whether for death or for life, there also will your servant be” (verse 21). If you have a loyal friend like that, you are incredibly blessed.

Next, the priests Abiathar and Zadok come out of the city with the Levites carrying the ark of the covenant. But David tells them to return the ark to Jerusalem. He is going to leave this matter in the Lord’s hands; and if it is the Lord’s will, he will return to Jerusalem. However, David does ask these priests to report to him through their two sons what they learn of Absalom’s plans.

As David reaches the top of the Mount of Olives, weeping as he goes, he meets another advisor by the name of Hushai. David asks him to remain behind

and serve as a counselor to Absalom. David is hoping that Hushai’s counsel will counter the traitorous advice of Ahithophel—and we will see that take place shortly.

David encounters two more men in chapter 16. The first is Ziba, the man David had appointed to serve Mephibosheth, Jonathan’s son. Ziba takes advantage of this moment and claims that Mephibosheth has sided with Absalom. David takes his word for it and immediately transfers all that Mephibosheth owns to him, which is exactly what Ziba had hoped for.

Finally, a man named Shimei appears on the scene. He is a descendant of King Saul and undoubtedly has always resented David. He begins to curse David and throws stones at him. Instead of retaliating, though, David leaves his vindication in the hands of God. Maybe you need to do that today as well. Instead of picking up those stones and throwing them back, leave it all in the Lord’s hands.

*Instead of picking up those stones and throwing them back, leave it all in the Lord’s hands.*

Now with that we come to chapter 17. Absalom has reached Jerusalem, and Ahithophel counsels him to immediately go after David and kill him before he can organize a defense.

But Hushai counters, saying that Absalom should wait until he is established on his throne. And we are told here in verse 14, “Absalom and all the men of Israel said, ‘The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel.’” The author then adds this little insight: “For the LORD had ordained to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, so that the LORD might bring harm upon Absalom.”





Hushai's counsel will save David's life by giving him time to prepare for battle. Ahithophel knows this too—he knows David will now have the time he needs to succeed. Verse 23 tells us that Ahithophel goes home, puts his affairs in order, and then takes his own life.

Now in chapter 18, David's men prepare to attack Absalom's forces, and David makes one request of his soldiers: "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom" (verse 5). In other words, spare his life if at all possible.

The Bible gives us a very brief description of the battle in verse 7: "The men of Israel were defeated there by the servants of David, and the loss there was great on that day, twenty thousand men." Most of chapter 18 focuses on the death of Absalom. We are given the rather unusual details here in verses 9–10:

*Absalom was riding on his mule,  
and the mule went under the  
thick branches of a great oak,  
and his head caught fast in the  
oak, and he was suspended be-  
tween heaven and earth, while  
the mule that was under him  
went on. And a certain man saw  
it and told Joab, "Behold, I saw  
Absalom hanging in an oak."*

When Joab asks this soldier why he did not kill Absalom, he repeats David's request to spare Absalom's life. Well, General Joab knows the danger Absalom will be to David's throne if left alive. So, Joab goes out and personally spears Absalom through the heart (verse 14).

When David learns of all that happened, he doesn't rejoice over this victory. Instead, he grieves the death

of Absalom. David might have regained his throne, but he has lost his son. He cries out in verse 33, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you!"

Now let me emphasize something here: David and his men were outnumbered and on the run. Absalom had won just about everybody over to his side. David's side didn't seem to be the best one to choose. But David's friends were supporting God's chosen king, even though it did not look so good at the moment.

Well, does it look like God's side is winning today? Does it look like following Christ is the best choice right now? It might not look so good at times, but in following Him you are choosing the winning side. You are serving the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. And one day your loyalty and service will be personally rewarded by your Commander—your King, the Lord Jesus Christ.

---

2 Samuel 12:10 records the dreadful news that David's sin with Bathsheba would result in total dysfunction in David's family. How are you encouraged that God kept this promise? What was God's intent with David in keeping His promise?

How does the application of David's friends and your choice to follow Jesus during difficult times, encourage you to stay the course with God? How can you use this part of David's life to encourage a struggling believer? A curious unbeliever?

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## GOOD GRIEF AND BAD

2 Samuel 19

Grief is a natural and appropriate response to loss. Yet if it keeps us from ever focusing on the future, it can be debilitating. With Joab's help, David realized this and began to direct his thoughts and efforts toward others as he reestablished his kingship.

You have probably discovered by now that grief is unavoidable. One author wrote that you simply “cannot live without experiencing [grief] in a thousand different ways.”<sup>1</sup> Perhaps you have suffered the loss of a loved one, and you are discovering what it means to be ambushed by grief. There are times when it just comes out of nowhere when you least expect it.

There is nothing wrong with experiencing feelings of grief. Ecclesiastes 3:4 tells us there is “a time to mourn”—that is, there's a time to weep and grieve and then to put the pieces of your heart and life back together with the Lord's help.

This is what we could call good grief—you are moving forward as you continue trusting in the wisdom of God. But as we come to 2 Samuel chapter 19, I want to show you an example of bad grief—grief that doesn't move forward like it should.

David's traitorous son Absalom tried to overthrow David's kingdom and seize the throne. But in our last study, in 2 Samuel chapter 18, we saw that Absalom died in the attempt. And with that tragic loss of his son, David slips into grieving in an unhealthy manner.

Here in chapter 19, we are told in verse 2:

*The victory that day was turned  
into mourning for all the people,  
for the people heard that day,  
“The king is grieving for his son.”*

Grief is contagious. The people had a great victory, but their joy is now turned to mourning. Verse 3 says they “stole into the city that day as people steal in who are ashamed when they flee in battle.”

A big part of this was because David did not give them any word of appreciation or commendation for their loyalty and courage. He is consumed with his



Depiction of a siege ramp and battering ram



own personal grief, and he isolates himself from everyone else. Here in verse 4, we read, “The king covered his face and . . . cried with a loud voice, ‘O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!’”

We would expect these bitter tears of grief, but the problem is, David refuses to see anybody or hear anybody. He pulls away from those who care about him.

Now don’t misunderstand; there is nothing wrong with wanting to be alone at certain points in your grief. That is a natural stage in grieving. Just don’t stay there. God never intended you to become a hermit, physically or emotionally. In fact, God’s solution—His therapy, so to speak—is for those who are grieving to be involved in the lives of other people.

What makes David’s grief so crippling to him is that it’s combined with guilt. In the last few years of Absalom’s life, David had been very disappointed in Absalom, but instead of dealing with the issue, David refused to meet with his son for five full years. And even when David allowed Absalom back into the city, he would not allow Absalom back into his home. Deep resentment had developed, and David knew it was his fault. So, David is grieving, not just the death of his son, but also his own failure as a father.

Now General Joab takes it upon himself to confront David. He points out that David is overlooking other people, as well as God’s blessing. Joab says in verse 5:

*“You have today covered with shame the faces of all your servants, who have this day saved your life and the lives of your sons and your daughters.”*

When we become consumed with our loss and grief, we all could use somebody like Joab, who comes along to challenge us and remind us of what God *has* done for us and *has* given to us.

Joab challenges David here in verse 7: “Arise, go out and speak kindly to your [people].” In other words, “You might not feel like it, but you need to go out and congratulate your troops and thank all the people

who risked their lives for you.” David follows Joab’s advice, and verse 8 says, “All the people came before the king.” They are reunited at last.

Now let us learn from this account that grief is a God-given way to respond to loss. But there is good grief and bad grief. Good grief refuses the temptation to isolate yourself from people and hide from the future and forget what God has done in your life. Good grief gets around to refocusing on living. And that is exactly what David does here as he begins to lead his divided nation back together.

*Good grief refuses  
the temptation to  
isolate yourself from  
people and hide  
from the future and  
forget what God has  
done in your life.*

Reunifying the nation is going to require David to forgive a lot of people who sided with Absalom. Rather than seek revenge, David humbly urges the leaders of Judah to join the rest of the people in bringing him back to Jerusalem (verse 12). He even forgives Amasa, Absalom’s general, and in verse 13 he replaces Joab as commander of the army with Amasa. This might seem strange, but David is not only being gracious to Amasa but also demoting Joab for disobeying his direct order to keep Absalom alive. You might remember that Joab personally killed Absalom.

Perhaps David’s most gracious moment takes place now as he crosses back over the Jordan River. He is met by Shimei, the man who had come out and cursed David and thrown stones at him as David was fleeing from Jerusalem.

Well, now Shimei comes to ask forgiveness, saying here in verses 19-20:



*“Let not my lord hold me guilty or remember how your servant did wrong on the day my lord the king left Jerusalem . . . for [I know] that I have sinned.”*

Even though David is counseled to put Shimei to death, he allows him to live.

We are also told in verse 17 that Ziba rushes out to the Jordan to affirm his allegiance to David. He wanted to get there ahead of Mephibosheth, no doubt. Remember that as David was fleeing Jerusalem, Ziba had told David that Mephibosheth had sided with Absalom. Well, that was a lie—Ziba just wanted all that property back that David had given to Mephibosheth.

Well, Mephibosheth then comes to David to tell his side of the story here in verse 27:

*“[Ziba] has slandered your servant to my lord the king. But my lord the king is like the angel of God; do therefore what seems good to you.”*

What David does is gracious to both men; he divides the land between Ziba and Mephibosheth. This decision probably comes from the fact that he is unable to determine which man is telling the truth, so he simply divides the land between them.

Another man who welcomes David back to his throne is Barzillai. This faithful warrior had provided David and his men with food and supplies while they were hiding out in Gilead, east of the Jordan.

David invites this man to join him, saying, “Come over with me, and I will provide for you with me in Jerusalem” (verse 33). But Barzillai turns down this gracious offer. He is old, and he is just not interested in moving to Jerusalem.

David’s reactions to these various people as he returns to Jerusalem demonstrate a godly spirit of generosity and forgiveness. He is still grieving, by the way—that will never entirely go away—but he is refocused on serving other people.

Now not everybody is happy with how things are turning out here. Chapter 19 ends with the northern tribes getting upset over the fact that the southern tribes seem to be favored by the king. They are like a bunch of squabbling children trying to be first in line. And this is going to set the stage for more problems to come.

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Why is long term *isolated* grief counter-productive to living as a representative of Jesus Christ’s offer of grace to a lost world? How does Jesus’ call for believers to make disciples contribute to processing through grief?

What can you do to more consistently model generosity and forgiveness in your relationships? What heart attitudes contribute to being able to graciously interact with others when you’re hurting?

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<sup>1</sup> Granger Westberg, *Good Grief*, updated and expanded edition (Fortress, 2018), 2.







## FACING MORE THAN ONE GIANT

2 Samuel 20-21; 1 Chronicles 20:4-8

David's experiences remind us that sin brings consequences and life brings us a wide array of problems and challenges. Through them all, we should be careful to seek the Lord and honor him by pursuing righteousness and justice.

When the prophet Nathan confronted David about his adultery with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah, he prophesied, "The sword shall never depart from [David's] house" (2 Samuel 12:10). Although David repented and was forgiven, the consequences of those sins and many others, including polygamy, will continue staining his reign in Jerusalem with jealousy, intrigue, conflict, and bloodshed.

God's Word isn't interested in polishing David's halo; it gives us the truth. God wants to remind us all, that sin can have devastating consequences, not only for us, but also for those around us.



Impalement as punishment at Lachish

David has returned to Jerusalem as Israel's king. He has put down the rebellion of Absalom, but he now faces another uprising. The first verse of 2 Samuel 20 tells us that a man named Sheba calls for the northern tribes of Israel to break away from the tribe of Judah. He says, "We have no portion in David . . . every man to his tents, O Israel."

Sheba wants to take advantage of the tension between the northern and southern tribes so that he can make a run for the palace and become king. Initially, he has some success; verse 2 says, "All the men of Israel withdrew from David and followed Sheba."

David responds by calling on his new commander, Amasa, to gather troops from Judah to deal with this rebellion. But when Amasa fails to take care of the matter swiftly, David turns to Abishai, one of his officers:

*And David said to Abishai,  
"Now Sheba . . . will do us more  
harm than Absalom. . . . pursue  
him, lest he get himself to forti-  
fied cities and escape from us."*

(verse 6)



So, they set out after Sheba. Abishai is accompanied by his brother Joab, the former general, along with a small army. Joab has not been happy about being demoted. He is a proven military leader, but he's also devious and cunning. Now Amasa joins this force as they make their way in pursuit of Sheba. And Joab sees his chance for revenge. We read here in verse 10:

*Amasa did not observe the sword that was in Joab's hand. So Joab struck him with it in the stomach and spilled his entrails to the ground without striking a second blow, and he died.*

Earlier Joab had murdered Abner because he saw him as a threat to his position. Now he murders Amasa, the man David had promoted. But there are no apparent consequences for his actions. In verse 23 we are told that Joab is back "in command of all the army of Israel."

Well, Sheba and his men take refuge in the city of Abel, north of the Sea of Galilee. Joab's army lays siege to this city and begins to batter the wall. A wise woman who lives in the city calls down from the wall and asks Joab why they are attacking the city. When Joab explains that they will leave if Sheba is given up to them, this woman promises in verse 21, "His head shall be thrown to you over the wall." I don't know who this woman was, but she was able to convince the city's leaders to do that very thing. And in verse 22, we're told that "Joab returned to Jerusalem to the king."

Now we arrive at chapter 21, where Israel is in the grip of a three-year famine. David discerns that there is a spiritual cause behind the calamity, so we read in verse 1:

*David sought the face of the LORD. And the LORD said, "There is bloodguilt on Saul and on his house, because he put the Gibeonites to death."*

It's not clear from Scripture when this took place, but it violated the treaty Joshua had made with the Gibeonites back in Joshua chapter 9. Saul did not honor the treaty and evidently killed many of the Gibeonites.

So in verse 2, David asks the Gibeonites what he can do to make things right. And they respond with a rather straightforward solution here in verse 6: "Let seven of [Saul's] sons be given to us, so that we may hang them before the LORD at Gibeah." David replies, "I will give them."

"Sons" here simply means descendants of Saul. Keep in mind there's no suggestion that innocent men are handed over for the death penalty. We have every reason to believe that these seven men had been personally involved in this unjust killing of Gibeonites.

The mention of rain coming in verse 10 indicates the famine has ended because justice has been served. And only then are the bodies taken down. The mother of two of those executed protected their bodies from animals, day and night, until they were taken down.

Her actions move David to retrieve the bones of Saul and Jonathan, and verse 14 tells us he gave them a proper burial in the tomb of Saul's father.

Now the rest of 2 Samuel chapter 21—as well as 1 Chronicles 20:4-8—records further conflicts with the Philistines. And in each conflict, a single Israelite is highlighted for his heroics in striking down a Philistine giant.

David takes part in the first battle, but 21:15 says, "David grew weary." He is not the young, giant-killer he used to be. In fact, verses 16-17 tell us that one of the descendants of the giants tried to kill David, but Abashai "came to his aid and attacked the Philistine and killed him." After this close call, David's men insist that he no longer go with them into battle. They refer to him as the "the lamp of Israel" (verse 17), and they are afraid that lamp will be extinguished—that David will be killed.

So now, in further conflicts with the Philistines, we find these Israelite warriors killing a number of gi-



ants. Sibbecai kills a giant in verse 18. Elhanan of Bethlehem kills another giant here in verse 19.

Finally, as if to dramatically conclude all these giant slayings, we are told that a giant “who had six fingers on each hand, and six toes on each foot” is killed by David’s own nephew (verses 20-21).

*Goliath had relatives.  
So do problems that  
face us today, and  
they come in all sizes  
and shapes.*

Let me make a few observations here. First, there was clearly an entire clan of giants among the Philistines, and they rose to become great warriors. Verse 22 says that “these four were descended from the giants in Gath,” and among them was the giant Goliath, whom David had killed years earlier (1 Samuel 17).

Second, verse 22 tells us that these giants were killed “by the hand of David and by the hand of his servants.” In other words, just as David had earlier killed Goliath, so these Israelite soldiers defeated the giants because of the protection and faithfulness of God.

Third, even though this text tells us that Israel experienced these victories as a *nation*, do not overlook the fact that *individuals* with faith and courage were uniquely instrumental in these victories. Let’s not underestimate what God can do through one person putting his or her life on the line for the glory of God.

This is a great lesson for us today. Facing these giants was not a one-time event. Goliath had relatives. So do problems that face us today, and they come in all sizes and shapes.

So, let’s keep walking by faith, trusting the Lord, and asking Him to empower us to face the challenges of this day. No matter how big, how intimidating, or how great, let’s trust His wisdom and His Word and His power in our lives today.

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Since his sin with Bathsheba, we’re not told why David’s actions and reactions as King became passive and suspect. Severe consequences to sin (2 Samuel 12:10) are not intended to defeat us as believers. From your experience, explain why David might have acted as he did.

Notice the famine had been in effect for three years before David sought the LORD. What heart-attitudes contribute to your delaying seeking the LORD’s remedy to your suffering?

The LORD would not allow Saul’s sin to go unpunished. What does that fact reveal about God’s heart for justice? How can this truth be an encouragement to you?

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## A FINAL POEM AND A HALL OF FAME

2 Samuel 22-23; 1 Chronicles 11:10-47

The hardships we encounter should never distract us from the gracious blessings God has poured out on us. David had the proper perspective. He had faced many difficulties—some of his own making—but as he reflected on his life, he was filled with thanksgiving and praise to God.

King David is entering his golden years, and we now have the opportunity to listen to him reflect on what God has done for him as he composes a hymn of praise and thanksgiving. We are in 2 Samuel chapter 22, and by the way, we will come across this same song later in our Wisdom Journey, when we arrive at Psalm 18.

I want to highlight four major ideas David sings about here in this great song. First, David sings of the Lord's *sovereign protection*. Notice how 2 Samuel 22 opens:

*And David spoke to the LORD  
the words of this song on the day  
when the LORD delivered him  
from the hand of all his enemies,  
and from the hand of Saul. He  
said, "The LORD is my rock and  
my fortress and my deliverer, my  
God, my rock, in whom I take  
refuge, my shield, and the horn  
of my salvation, my stronghold*



King's guards

*and my refuge, my savior; you  
save me from violence." (verses 1-3)*

David refers to the Lord as his rock, fortress, deliverer, shield, horn of salvation, stronghold, refuge, and savior. This is all part of David's testimony as he looks back over his life—there has been one moment after another of sovereign protection.

Second, David sings of the Lord's *saving power*. He writes these lyrics in verse 4: "I call upon the LORD, who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies." I have sung these same words in a little





chorus I learned as a child: “I call upon the Lord ... and I am saved.”

You might notice down in verse 18 that David sings of God, “He rescued me from my strong enemy, from those who hated me.” And why did the Lord rescue David? It was not because he deserved it or because he was some kind of special case that got preferential treatment. No, David was saved because it was God’s delight to do so (verse 20). This is a reference to the grace of God demonstrated through His saving power.

Now, I need to slow down and explain the next few verses because, on the surface, they sound like David thinks he is without sin. Note especially verses 24–25:

*“I was blameless before him, and  
I kept myself from guilt. And the  
LORD has rewarded me accord-  
ing to my righteousness, accord-  
ing to my cleanness in his sight.”*

How does David sing this with Bathsheba in the next room and the memory of Uriah haunting his past? You need to understand that David is not claiming to be sinless here; he’s claiming God’s forgiveness. Here is a wonderful theological truth: when God forgives our sin, it’s as if the slate is wiped perfectly clean. God views us as blameless only because His Son took our blame.

And David’s future son, the Messiah, will pay the penalty for David’s sins—and yours and mine too. And from that vantage point, we can view ourselves as blameless—no longer condemned but forgiven.

My friend, if you have received Jesus Christ as your Savior, your sins—all of them, past, present, and future—are forgiven. Your status has changed from sinner to saint. You still sin, but God sees you through the atoning blood of Christ. As the apostle John writes, “The blood of Jesus . . . cleanses us [continually] from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Like David, we too can sing of God’s saving power.

Now third, David sings of God’s *significant provision*. David acknowledges that God provides wisdom and

direction: “For you are my lamp, O LORD, and my God lightens my darkness” (verse 29). God also provides strength and victory. David says in verse 40, “You equipped me with strength for the battle.” Every day, every battle, every problem can be met with God’s significant provision.

Finally, King David wraps up this psalm with a *sincere pledge* in verse 50: “For this I will praise you, O LORD, among the nations, and sing praises to your name.” In other words, he’s saying, “I want to praise God before everybody I know.”

Now with that we come to chapter 23, where we are told, “Now these are the last words of David.” These are not the last words David spoke to others, but they represent his final formal writing. Like the previous chapter, they are written in poetic form.

David describes himself here in verse 1 as “the anointed of the God of Jacob, the sweet psalmist of Israel.” As a psalmist, David wrote one song after another, marveling at the greatness of God and the need for us all to walk with God in true worship. As troubling as our lives might be at times, David’s poetry urges us to trust and wait on the Lord—our rock and our refuge.

The rest of 2 Samuel 23 shifts rather suddenly to the names of David’s mighty men. Their names are listed here, along with some of their military accomplishments. But this is absolutely appropriate. This is like the credits that scroll at the end of a movie. These are the men who effectively made David’s life and reign possible. These are the men God used to rescue David and provide for him. They fought alongside David and brought great blessing to his life, so let’s not skip the credits.

Thirty plus men are named in this chapter. They were the core of David’s army. Their names are also recorded in the parallel passage in 1 Chronicles 11:10–47. The list there is introduced with these words:

*These are the chiefs of David’s  
mighty men, who gave him  
strong support in his kingdom,  
together with all Israel, to make*



*him king, according to the word of the LORD.* (verse 10)

Now three men here in David's Hall of Fame in 2 Samuel 23 stand out with special honor. The first is Josheb-basshebeth, who is called in verse 8 "chief of the three." He is known for the incredible feat of killing eight hundred men "at one time."

*Have you ever  
considered that your  
victories in life—  
your successes—are  
dependent on  
faithful people  
around you?*

Second is "Eleazer, the son of Dodo." He is described here as boldly standing with David against the Philistines, striking down the enemy "until his hand was weary, and his hand clung to the sword" (verse 10). Through him "the LORD brought about a great victory."

The third man specially honored here is Shammah. Verses 11 and 12 describe how he stood against the Philistines on "a plot of ground full of lentils" while his fellow Israelites fled, leaving him alone to face these enemy warriors. But again, the emphasis is that through him "the LORD worked a great victory."

Now I don't know for sure, but these might have been the same three men who once broke through enemy lines to bring David some water to drink from the well of Bethlehem (verses 13-17). What I do know is that all of these men here made the life and ministry and kingdom of David possible.

Also listed in these credits are other notable men, like Abishai, who killed three hundred enemy soldiers (verse 18); and Benaiah, who defeated a famous Egyptian warrior, and as verse 20 tells us, also killed a lion that was evidently threatening his comrades.

I think it is interesting that in this list of mighty men is Uriah the Hittite (verse 39). His name stands as a silent and sad reminder that David's adultery led him even to the murder of one of his finest soldiers.

Have you ever considered that your victories in life—your successes—are dependent on faithful people around you? No one is an island unto himself. Make sure you act like David here and give credit where credit is due.

Read chapter 22 in full. What truths particularly encourage you? Challenge you? How did David's song reshape your perspective on God's work in your life? David said he would praise God "among the nations." What form does this, or should this, take in your life?

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## THE BLESSING OF A SENSITIVE CONSCIENCE

2 Samuel 24; 1 Chronicles 21:1–22:1

Temptation is ever present and unrelenting. To the very end of his remarkable reign, David never escaped it—and neither will we. His life gives substance to the appeal of James 4:7: “Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.”

As the book of 2 Samuel comes to a close and recounts the later days of King David’s life, we might expect some kind of glowing account of David’s faith, or poetry, or military victories. But instead, we are given the details of yet another sin he committed.

That is not how I would end the book of 2 Samuel, but God doesn’t staple wings on His people or put halos around their heads. His people are presented for who they are, and they happen to be sinners.

Here’s how chapter 24 begins:

*Again the anger of the LORD  
was kindled against Israel, and*



The modern Temple Mount in Jerusalem is the location of the ancient threshing floor purchased by David, on which Solomon built the Temple

*he incited David against them,  
saying, “Go, number Israel and  
Judah.”*

This immediately presents us with a problem. If taking the census is wrong—and David will be judged for doing it—then how could God incite him to do it? After all, in the New Testament, James 1:13 tells us God does not tempt anyone.

The parallel account begins this way in 1 Chronicles 21:1: “Then Satan ... incited David to number Israel.” So, who motivated David to take the census—God or Satan?

Remember, 1 Chronicles and 2 Samuel present parallel accounts of the same events, much like we see with the New Testament Gospels. The Gospel writers take photographs of the same thing from different angles. Together, they give us a fuller picture of Jesus.

I believe that is what we have here. Samuel is viewing this “telescopically.” He is looking at everything from the beginning to the end, and he sees that God is at work. The chronicler views it “microscopically.” He is looking at the immediate issue at hand, and he knows that Satan is tempting David.

So, we can understand it this way: 1 Chronicles is focusing on the scene at hand; 2 Samuel is focusing



on the hand behind the scene. Satan is the immediate tempter; God permits it for His own purposes.

One other question comes to mind here: Why is taking this census a sin? Verse 2 seems innocent enough:

*The king said to Joab, the commander of the army, who was with him, “Go through all the tribes of Israel . . . and number the people, that I may know the number of the people.”*

When Joab completes the mission, however, the numbers he gives down in verse 9 are of the “men who drew the sword.” So, what is actually happening here is that David wants to know how many men are able to go to war. Satan has found a chink in David’s armor—it is called self-confidence.

David should have known by now that his confidence should not be in military might but in the Almighty. He could look back and see his little army had overcome large enemy armies, and he knew it was by the power of God. But now he is saying, “Oh my, if Israel is going to survive into the future, I had better make sure we have enough men who know how to use a sword.”

Listen, we tend to think the same way in the church today—we think God uses people because they are powerful. The reality is that God uses people who know they are powerless.

I think it’s interesting here that even crusty old General Joab objects to taking this census. He asks David here in verse 3, “Why does my lord the king delight in this thing?” That is, “Why are you doing this?”

But David will not be stopped. When Joab and his officers finish the census, they report back that Israel has 1.3 million men available for military duty, and David puffs up with pride. Wow, 1.3 million men!

But immediately David’s conscience smites him with guilt, and he realizes his sinful pride. He says to the Lord here in verse 10:

*“I have sinned greatly in what I have done. . . . O LORD, please take away the iniquity of your servant, for I have done very foolishly.”*

This was the wonderful work of a sensitive conscience. David listened and immediately asked for forgiveness.

And forgiveness was available to David. But remember that even though there is forgiveness, there may be lasting consequences of our sin. Keep in mind we were given the inside scoop back in verse 1 that God was going to judge Israel for their rebellion. With David’s sin, that discipline is now going to take place.

*But remember that even though there is forgiveness, there may be lasting consequences of our sin.*

A prophet named Gad comes to David and gives him a choice of punishments (verses 11-13). David can choose three years of famine, three months of defeat in battle, or three days of a pestilence. There are no good choices here, but David chooses the epidemic; and verse 15 informs us that 70,000 men die.

In the parallel passage of 1 Chronicles 21:16, David sees an angel holding “a drawn sword stretched out over Jerusalem,” which represents the epidemic. The elders, along with King David, fall down and plead with God for mercy.

God responds with something that will have eternal impact. He tells David by way of the prophet Gad,





“Go up, raise an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite” (2 Samuel 24:18), a man known as Ornan in 1 Chronicles.

It was at this threshing floor where David had seen the angel. David connects the dots and understands that his offerings on this altar will bring the plague to an end. He also knows this threshing floor will become a very special place. In fact, David buys the threshing floor from this farmer, as we see in verse 24. David then builds an altar and offers burnt offerings and peace offerings, and verse 25 concludes, “So the LORD responded to the plea for the land, and the plague was averted from Israel.”

Over in the parallel account of 1 Chronicles 22, we are told in verse 1, “Then David said, ‘Here shall be the house of the LORD God and here the altar of burnt offering for Israel.’” So, while David wasn’t permitted to build the temple, as you recall, God does allow him to pick out the parcel of land upon which it will be built.

Araunah’s threshing floor was the perfect spot; it was situated on a flat, elevated area just beyond the northern walls of Jerusalem at that time. This was Mount Moriah, where Abraham had taken his son Isaac to offer him to the Lord in Genesis 22. This is where David’s son Solomon will build the magnificent temple of the Lord (2 Chronicles 3:1).

Let me quickly draw three lessons from this last chapter of the book of 2 Samuel. **First**, you will never outgrow the attraction of sin. You will never outlive temptation, and it will be unrelenting. No matter how old you are or how long you have walked with the Lord, you need to stay alert and on guard—dressed out in your armor—to fight against the appeal of sin.

**Second**, never underestimate the destructive effects of sin. David’s private sins had tremendous public

consequences that affected many more people than just David himself. Our sin doesn’t just hurt ourselves.

**Third**, don’t ignore the whispers of conscience. Remain sensitive to what God is telling you through the gift of His Word and that special little creation He put into all of us that we call the conscience.

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What subtle appeals to your pride do you frequently encounter? Why these? What resources has the Lord already given you to resist these enticements? Conversely, what “training” or tools are you convinced you need to be effective in ministry? When can such training or tools actually interfere with ministry effectiveness?

What does this account of David’s sin and its aftermath tell you about God, David, and humanity in general?

Review the three principles above. Which one can you most relate to and why? Which one challenges you most and why? How can you take what you’ve learned from the life of David and help an unbeliever in your life become more informed about the grace of God?

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## THE ONLY WAY TO LIVE

1 Chronicles 22:6—29:19

David understood that preparing to build the temple was not simply a matter of gathering supplies and organizing the workers. It meant preparing *people* for ongoing worship of the Lord. Worship that honors God comes from obedient and thankful hearts focused on glorifying Him.

We are going to cover several chapters now, beginning in 1 Chronicles chapter 22, where we're given details about David's preparation for his son Solomon to build the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem. David had wanted to build this great temple for God's glory, but he was forbidden to do so back in 2 Samuel 7.

You might remember that the two books of Chronicles repeat much of the material we find in the books of 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings. But whenever 1 and 2 Chronicles give us some additional information, well, we want to take note of that in our Wisdom Journey. And that is exactly what's happening here now in 1 Chronicles 22, as some unique information is given to us in this account.

We read here in verse 6: "Then he [David] called for Solomon his son and charged him to build a house for the LORD, the God of Israel."

Down in verses 9-10 we read God's promise to David:

*"Behold, a son shall be born to you who shall be a man of rest [peace]. I will give him rest from all his surrounding enemies. For*

*his name shall be Solomon, and I will give peace and quiet to Israel in his days. He shall build a house for my name. He shall be my son, and I will be his father, and I will establish his royal throne in Israel forever."*

What I find amazing here is that instead of getting upset that God is not going to use him to build the temple and instead of getting jealous over his son's opportunity from the Lord, David responds by do-



Egyptian harpist



ing everything he can do to encourage his son. David goes on to prepare and collect materials for his son to use when it comes time to build the temple. If you can imagine it, David will end up collecting 40,000 tons of gold and silver—along with massive amounts of wood and stone.

To put that in terms we can understand, the 40,000 tons of gold and silver, along with wood and stone, would fill 1,000 semi-trailer trucks—what we call eighteen-wheelers today. Well, it would take 1,000 of these trucks to hold all the material David collects for his son's building project.

Not only that, but the workmen are ready and available. David even fires the starter pistol on the project as he urges Solomon here in verse 16, "Arise and work! The LORD be with you!" In other words, "Let's get these eighteen-wheelers unloaded and the project underway."

Keep in mind that preparing to build the temple is only half the story. Preparing for the worship of God is part of this as well. So, for the next five chapters—1 Chronicles 23 through 26—we are given the details surrounding the Levites and the priests, who will lead the nation in worship. Now at first glance, this is a long list of names you can't pronounce. But if you look closely, some changes in the duties of the Levites are being given as David divides the Levites into four special groups.

One group is to serve in the temple. We read of them in chapter 23:

*Their duty was to assist the sons of Aaron for the service of the house of the LORD, having the care of the courts and the chambers, the cleansing of all that is holy, and any work for the service of the house of God.* (verse 28)

If you look over at chapters 25 and 26, the other three groups of Levites are organized. One group are musicians, who know how to play on the lyres, harps, and

cymbals. These are the choir directors and composers and orchestral members in this great music program in Israel's worship.

Another group serve as gatekeepers, or temple guards. This group apparently includes the treasurers as well. Finally, the Levites in the fourth group serve as magistrates and teachers of the law. So that takes care of organizing the Levites.

Now back in 1 Chronicles 24, the priests are organized. They are descendants of Aaron—and they are placed into twenty-four divisions—twenty-four different shifts, so to speak. They will rotate on and off duty, offering sacrifices and performing much of the labor in the temple.

The obvious question here is why all these details are given to us. Well, they demonstrate how critically important worshiping God is as a community of believers. I know far too many people who say they are Christians but choose a golf game or a child's sports travel team over worshiping with their church family.

Well, we're not through with the lists quite yet. Chapter 27 names various civil officials: military leaders (verses 1-15), leaders of Israel's tribes (verses 16-24), bookkeepers and administrators over the king's properties (verses 25-31), and finally the king's cabinet of counselors at the end of the chapter (verses 32-34).

Now here in chapter 28, King David addresses all the leaders of Israel and gives quite a speech on the promise of God to build a temple through Solomon. Then David turns again to Solomon and offers one of the best father-son challenges you will ever hear:

*"Solomon my son, know the God of your father and serve him with a whole heart and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches all hearts and understands every plan and thought."* (verse 9)

Listen, many fathers will tell their children, "Get good grades, get a good job, marry a nice person, invest in the right stock, and buy a house in a good



neighborhood for value.” But how many will tell their children, “What matters most in life is that you follow God with your whole heart and a willing mind”?

That’s the father-son conversation that needs to happen today. Was David saying this because he was perfect? Far from it. But he knew how to confess his sin, and God was his highest priority.

This fantastic father-son challenge continues in verse 20:

*“Do not be afraid and do not be dismayed, for the LORD God, even my God, is with you. He will not leave you or forsake you, until all the work for the service of the house of the LORD is finished.”*

David is assuring Solomon that this great task isn’t just on his shoulders. In fact, in chapter 29 David also encourages the entire nation to consecrate themselves to the Lord (verse 5).

And like most preachers today, when David finishes his message to the nation and this encouragement to his son, he passes the offering plate. He literally invites everyone to give to this great building project.

*Lord, give me a heart that is entirely devoted to you.*

We are told here in chapter 29 that people were excited to give what they could—gold, silver, bronze, iron, and precious stones—to the temple treasury.

And with that, David now leads his nation in prayer:

*“O LORD our God, all this abundance that we have provided for building you a house for your holy name comes from your hand and is all your own. . . . I have seen your people, who are present here, offering freely and joyously to you. O LORD . . . Grant to Solomon my son a whole heart that he may keep your commandments.”* (verses 16-19)

Oh, let this be the prayer we pray for our own lives: “Lord, everything I have is already yours; take me. I offer everything freely and joyously to you, O Lord.”

Wow! What a way to live. Beloved, this is the *only* way to live.

Lord, give me a heart that is entirely devoted to you.

How does 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 influence your thinking about your value in the life of a local church that teaches God’s word faithfully? What do you see as your role in your church’s public worship? How do you prepare yourself for it?

What principles of encouragement do you see in David’s words to his son Solomon? Who in your life may need encouragement that you could give?

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