



*DISCOVERING*

THE BOOK OF  
*2<sup>ND</sup> SAMUEL*

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## Forward

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After years of running from Saul, David is finally crowned king over the tribe of Judah. The rest of Israel, however, followed Ish-Bosheth, Saul's son.

David did not attempt to take the tribes by force, but placed the matter in God's hands.

After a few years Ish-Bosheth was assassinated and the rest of the tribes finally put their support behind David.

David moved the capital to Jerusalem, defeated the surrounding nations, and even showed kindness to Saul's family. We may not understand why God seems to move slowly at times, but we must trust him and be faithful with what he has given us.

David was a man who had great faith in God. He waited for God to fulfill his promises. The book of 1 Samuel tells of David's struggles as he waited to become king of Israel (Samuel had anointed David as king of Israel many years earlier).

King Saul became jealous of David because the people were praising him for his accomplishments. Eventually, Saul's jealousy became so intense that he tried to kill David.

As a result, David had to run and hide. For many years David hid from Saul in enemy territory and in the barren desert south and east of Jerusalem.

David may have wondered when God's promise that he would be king would come true, but his struggles prepared him for the great responsibilities he would later face

## **2 Samuel**

### **Chapter 1**

#### **David become king over Judah**

#### **DAVID'S SUCCESSES (1:1-10:19)**

After the death of Saul, David returned from his victory over the Amalekites and spent two days in Ziklag. On the third day after David's return, a man arrived from the Israelite battlefront. He had torn his clothes and put dirt on his head to show that he was in mourning. He fell to the ground before David in deep respect.

"Where have you come from?" David asked.

"I escaped from the Israelite camp," the man replied.

"What happened?" David demanded. "Tell me how the battle went."

The man replied, "Our entire army fled. Many men are dead and wounded on the battlefield, and Saul and his son Jonathan have been killed."

"How do you know that Saul and Jonathan are dead?" David demanded.

The young man answered, "I happened to be on Mount Gilboa. I saw Saul there leaning on his spear with the enemy chariots closing in on him. [7] When he turned and saw me, he cried out for me to come to him. 'How can I help?' I asked him.

And he said to me, 'Who are you?' I replied, 'I am an Amalekite.' Then he begged me, 'Come over here and put me out of my misery, for I am in terrible pain and want to die.'

"So I killed him," the Amalekite told David, "for I knew he couldn't live. Then I took his crown and one of his bracelets so I could bring them to you, my lord."

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For many years David hid from Saul in enemy territory and in the barren desert south and east of Jerusalem. David may have wondered when God's promise that he would be king would come true, but his struggles prepared him for the great responsibilities he would later face.

The book of 2 Samuel tells how David was finally rewarded for his patience and consistent faith in God.

When Saul died, David and his men were still living in Ziklag, a Philistine city. Because Saul had driven him out of Israel, David had pretended to be loyal to Achish, a Philistine ruler (1 Samuel 27). There he was safe from Saul.

David and his men tore their clothes in sorrow when they heard the news.

They mourned and wept and fasted all day for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the Lord's army and the nation of Israel, because so many had died that day.

“They mourned and wept and fasted till evening.” David and his men were visibly shaken over Saul’s death. Their actions showed their genuine sorrow over the loss of their king, their friend Jonathan, and the other soldiers of Israel who died that day.

They were not ashamed to grieve. Today, some people consider expressing emotions to be a sign of weakness. Those who wish to appear strong try to hide their feelings. But expressing our grief can help us deal with our intense sorrow when a loved one dies.

The man identified himself as an Amalekite from Saul’s camp (2 Samuel 1:2). He may have been an Amalekite under Israelite jurisdiction, but more likely he was a battlefield scavenger.

Obviously the man was lying both about his identity and about what happened on the battlefield. (Compare his story with the account in 1 Samuel 31:3-4.) Because he had Saul’s crown with him, something the Philistines wouldn’t have left behind, we can infer that he found Saul dead on the battlefield before the Philistines arrived (1 Samuel 31:8).

A life of deceit leads to disaster. The man lied to gain some personal reward for killing David’s rival, but he misread David’s character. If David had rewarded him for murdering the king, David would have shared his guilt.

Instead, David had the messenger killed. Lying can bring disaster upon the liar, even for something he or she has not done.

Then David said to the young man who had brought the news, "Where are you from?" And he replied, "I am a foreigner, an Amalekite, who lives in your land."

The Amalekites were a fierce nomadic tribe that frequently conducted surprise raids on Canaanite villages. They had been Israel's enemies since Moses' time. David had just destroyed an Amalekite band of raiders who had burned his city and kidnapped its women and children (1 Samuel 30:1-20).

This man was probably unaware of David's recent confrontations with Amalekites, or he may not have come. Instead, he incurred David's wrath by posing as an enemy of Israel and claiming to have killed God's chosen king. "Were you not afraid to kill the Lord's anointed one?" David asked.

Then David said to one of his men, "Kill him!" So the man thrust his sword into the Amalekite and killed him. [16] "You die self-condemned," David said, "for you yourself confessed that you killed the Lord's anointed one."

Then David composed a funeral song for Saul and Jonathan. Later he commanded that it be taught to all the people of Judah. It is known as the Song of the Bow, and it is recorded in The Book of Jashar.

Why did David consider it a crime to kill the king, even though Saul was his enemy? David believed that God anointed Saul, and only God could remove him from office. If it became casual or commonplace to assassinate the king, the whole society would become chaotic. It was God's job, not David's, to judge Saul's sins (Leviticus 19:18). We must realize that God has placed rulers in authority over us, and we should respect their positions (Romans 13:1-5).

Your pride and joy, O Israel, lies dead on the hills!  
How the mighty heroes have fallen!  
Don't announce the news in Gath,  
Or the Philistines will rejoice.  
Don't proclaim it in the streets of Ashkelon,  
Or the pagans will laugh in triumph.

O mountains of Gilboa,  
Let there be no dew or rain upon you or your slopes.

For there the shield of the mighty was defiled;  
The shield of Saul will no longer be anointed with oil.

Both Saul and Jonathan killed their strongest foes;  
They did not return from battle empty-handed.

How beloved and gracious were Saul and Jonathan!  
They were together in life and in death.  
They were swifter than eagles;  
They were stronger than lions.

O women of Israel, weep for Saul,  
For he dressed you in fine clothing and gold ornaments.

How the mighty heroes have fallen in battle!  
Jonathan lies dead upon the hills.  
How I weep for you, my brother Jonathan!  
Oh, how much I loved you!  
And your love for me was deep,  
Deeper than the love of women!

How the mighty heroes have fallen!  
Stripped of their weapons, they lie dead.

David was a talented musician. He played the harp (1 Samuel 16:23), he brought music into the worship services of the temple (1 Chron. 25), and he wrote many of the psalms. Here we are told that he wrote a lament in memory of Saul and his son Jonathan, David's closest friend. Music played an important role in Israel's history.

Saul had caused much trouble for David, but when he died, David composed a lament for the king and his son. David had every reason to hate Saul, but he chose not to. Instead, he chose to look at the good Saul had done and to ignore the times when Saul had attacked him.

It takes courage to lay aside hatred and hurt and to respect the positive side of another person, especially an enemy.



By saying that Jonathan's love was "more wonderful than that of women," David was not implying that he had a sexual relationship with Jonathan.

Homosexual acts were absolutely forbidden in Israel. Leviticus 18:22 calls homosexuality "detestable," and Leviticus 20:13 decrees the death penalty for those who practice homosexuality.

David was simply restating the deep brotherhood and faithful friendship he had with Jonathan

## **Chapter 2**

After this, David asked the Lord, "Should I move back to Judah?" And the Lord replied, "Yes." Then David asked, "Which town should I go to?" And the Lord replied, "Hebron."

Although David knew he would become king (1 Samuel 16:13; 1 Samuel 23:17; 1 Samuel 24:20), and although the time seemed right now that Saul was dead, David still asked God if he should move back to Judah, the home territory of his tribe. Before moving ahead with what seems obvious, first bring the matter to God, who alone knows the best timing.

God told David to return to Hebron, where he would soon be crowned king of Judah. David made Hebron his capital because (1) it was the largest city in Judah at that time; (2) it was secure against attack; (3) it was located near the center of Judah's territory, an ideal location for a capital city; (4) many key trade routes converged at Hebron, making it difficult for supply lines to be cut off in wartime.

David's wives were Ahinoam from Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal from Carmel. So David and his wives and his men and their families all moved to Judah, and they settled near the town of Hebron. Then Judah's leaders came to David and crowned him king over the tribe of Judah. When David heard that the men of Jabesh-gilead had buried Saul,

The men of Judah publicly anointed David as their king. David had been anointed king by Samuel years earlier (1 Samuel 16:13), but that ceremony had taken place in private. This one was like inaugurating a public official who has already been elected to office. The rest of Israel, however, didn't accept David's kingship for seven and a half years (2 Samuel 2:10-11).

He sent them this message: "May the Lord bless you for being so loyal to your king and giving him a decent burial. May the Lord be loyal to you in return and reward you with his unfailing love! And I, too, will reward you for what you have done. And now that Saul is dead, I ask you to be my strong and loyal subjects like the people of Judah, who have anointed me as their new king."

David sent a message thanking the men of Jabesh Gilead who had risked their lives to bury Saul's body (1 Samuel 31:11-13).

Saul had rescued Jabesh Gilead from certain defeat when Nahash the Ammonite surrounded the city (1 Samuel 11), so these citizens showed their gratitude and kindness. In his message, he also suggested that they follow Judah's lead and acknowledge him as their king. Jabesh Gilead was to the north in the land of Gilead, and David was seeking to gain support among the 10 remaining tribes who had not yet recognized him as king.

But Abner son of Ner, the commander of Saul's army, had already gone to Mahanaim with Saul's son Ishbosheth. [9] There he proclaimed Ishbosheth king over Gilead, Jezreel, Ephraim, Benjamin, the land of the Ashurites, and all the rest of Israel. Ishbosheth was forty years old when he became king, and he ruled from Mahanaim for two years. Meanwhile, the tribe of Judah remained loyal to David. David made Hebron his capital, and he ruled as king of Judah for seven and a half years.

David ruled over Judah for seven and a half years, while Ish-Bosheth reigned in Israel for only two years. The five-year gap may be due to Ish-Bosheth's not assuming the throne immediately after Saul's death. Because of constant danger from the Philistines in the northern part of Israel, five years may have passed before Ish-Bosheth could begin his reign.

During that time, Abner, commander of his army, probably played a principal role in driving out the Philistines and leading the northern confederacy. Regardless of when Ish-Bosheth began to rule, his control was weak and limited. The Philistines still dominated the area, and

One day Abner led some of Ishbosheth's troops from Mahanaim to Gibeon.

With Israel divided; there was constant tension between north and south. David's true rival in the north, however, was not Ish-Bosheth but Abner.

In this incident, Abner suggested a "dagger match" between the champions of his army and the champions of David's army, led by Joab.

The fact that this confrontation occurred at the pool of Gibeon (located in Saul's home territory of Benjamin) suggests that Joab's men were pushing

northward, gaining more territory. Abner may have suggested this confrontation in hopes of stopping Joab's advance.

Twelve men from each side were supposed to fight each other, and the side with the most survivors would be declared the winner. The confrontation between David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17) was a similar battle strategy—a way to avoid terrible bloodshed from an all-out war. In this case, however, all 24 champions were killed before either side could claim victory. Nothing was accomplished, and the civil war continued.

About the same time, Joab son of Zeruiah led David's troops from Hebron, and they met Abner at the pool of Gibeon. The two groups sat down there, facing each other from opposite sides of the pool.

Then Abner suggested to Joab, "Let's have a few of our warriors put on an exhibition of hand-to-hand combat."

"All right," Joab agreed, so twelve men were chosen from each side to fight against each other. Each one grabbed his opponent by the hair and thrust his sword into the other's side so that all of them died. The place has been known ever since as the Field of Swords.

The two armies then began to fight each other, and by the end of the day the forces of David had defeated Abner and the men of Israel.

Joab, Abishai, and Asahel, the three sons of Zeruiah, were among David's forces that day. Asahel could run like a deer and he began chasing Abner. He was relentless and single-minded in his pursuit. When Abner looked back and saw him coming, he called out, "Is that you, Asahel?" "Yes, it is," he replied.

"Go fight someone else!" Abner warned. "Take on one of the younger men and strip him of his weapons." But Asahel refused and kept right on chasing Abner.

Again Abner shouted to him, "Get away from here! I will never be able to face your brother Joab if I have to kill you!" But Asahel would not give up, so Abner thrust the butt end of his spear through Asahel's stomach, and the spear came out through his back. He stumbled to the ground and died there.

And everyone who came by that spot stopped and stood still when they saw Asahel lying there.

When Joab and Abishai found out what had happened, they set out after Abner. The sun was just going down as they arrived at the hill of Ammah near Giah, along the road to the wilderness of Gibeon. [25] Abner's troops from the tribe of Benjamin regrouped there at the top of the hill to take a stand. [26] Abner shouted down to Joab, "Must we always solve our differences with swords? Don't you realize the only thing we will gain is bitterness toward each other? When will you call off your men from chasing their Israelite brothers?"

Then Joab said, "God only knows what would have happened if you hadn't spoken, for we would have chased you all night if necessary."

So Joab blew his trumpet, and his men stopped chasing the troops of Israel. All that night Abner and his men retreated through the Jordan Valley. They crossed the Jordan River, traveling all through the morning, and they did not stop until they arrived at Mahanaim.

Meanwhile, Joab and his men also returned home. When Joab counted his casualties, he discovered that only nineteen men were missing, in addition to Asahel. But three hundred and sixty of Abner's men, all from the tribe of Benjamin, had been killed. Joab and his men took Asahel's body to Bethlehem and buried him there beside his father. Then they traveled all night and reached Hebron at daybreak.

Abner repeatedly warned Asahel to turn back or risk losing his life, but Asahel refused to turn from his self-imposed duty. Persistence is a good trait if it is for a worthy cause.

But if the goal is only personal honor or gain, persistence may be no more than stubbornness. Asahel's stubbornness not only cost his life, but it also spurred unfortunate disunity in David's army for years to come.

Before you decide to pursue a goal, make sure it is worthy of your devotion.

This battle ended with a victory for Joab's troops (2 Samuel 2:17), but war in the divided nation continued until David was finally crowned king over all Israel (2 Samuel 5:1-5).

### Chapter 3

That was the beginning of a long war between those who had been loyal to Saul and those who were loyal to David. As time passed David became stronger and stronger, while Saul's dynasty became weaker and weaker.

[2] These were the sons who were born to David in Hebron:

The oldest was Amnon, whose mother was Ahinoam of Jezreel.

[3] The second was Kileab, whose mother was Abigail, the widow of Nabal from Carmel.

The third was Absalom, whose mother was Maacah, the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur.

[4] The fourth was Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith.

The fifth was Shephatiah, whose mother was Abital.

[5] The sixth was Ithream, whose mother was David's wife Eglah.

David suffered much heartache because of his many wives. Polygamy was a socially acceptable practice for kings at this time, although God specifically warned against it (Deut. 17:14-17). Sadly, the numerous sons born to David's wives caused him great trouble. Rape (2 Samuel 13:14), murder (2 Samuel 13:28), rebellion (2 Samuel 15:13), and greed (1 Kings 1:5-6) all resulted from the jealous rivalries among the half brothers. Solomon, one of David's sons and his successor to the throne, also took many wives who eventually turned him away from God (1 Kings 11:3-4). These sons were all born to David in Hebron.

[6] As the war went on, Abner became a powerful leader among those who were loyal to Saul's dynasty. [7] One day Ishbosheth, Saul's son, accused Abner of sleeping with one of his father's concubines, a woman named Rizpah.

To sleep with any of the king's wives or concubines was to make a claim to the throne, and it was considered treason. Because Ish-Bosheth was a weak ruler, Abner was running the country; thus he may have felt justified in sleeping with Saul's concubine. Ish-Bosheth, however, saw that Abner's power was becoming too great.

Ish-Bosheth may have been right to speak out against Abner's behavior, but he didn't have the moral strength to maintain his authority (2 Samuel 3:11).

Lack of moral backbone became the root of Israel's troubles over the next four centuries. Only 4 of the next 40 kings of Israel were called "good." It takes courage and strength to stand firm in your convictions and to confront wrongdoing in the face of opposition. When you believe something is wrong, do not let yourself be talked out of your position. Firmly attack the wrong and uphold the right.

Abner became furious. "Am I a Judean dog to be kicked around like this?" he shouted. "After all I have done for you and your father by not betraying you to David, is this my reward—that you find fault with me about this woman?"

By saying, "Am I a dog's head?" Abner meant, "Am I a traitor for Judah?" He may have been refuting the accusation that he was trying to take over the throne, or he may have been angry that Ish-Bosheth scolded him after Abner had helped put him on the throne in the first place. Prior to this conversation, Abner realized that he could not keep David from eventually taking over Israel. Because he was angry at Ish-Bosheth, Abner devised a plan to turn over the kingdom of Israel to David.

[9] May God deal harshly with me if I don't help David get all that the Lord has promised him! [10] I should just go ahead and give David the rest of Saul's kingdom. I should set him up as king over Israel as well as Judah, from Dan to Beersheba." [11] Ishbosheth didn't dare say another word because he was afraid of what Abner might do.

[12] Then Abner sent messengers to David, saying, "Let's make an agreement, and I will help turn the entire nation of Israel over to you."

13] "All right," David replied, "but I will not negotiate with you unless you bring back my wife Michal, Saul's daughter, when you come."

[14] David then sent this message to Ishbosheth, Saul's son: "Give me back my wife Michal, for I bought her with the lives of one hundred Philistines."

Michal had been married to David. Saul had arranged the marriage as a reward for David's acts of bravery (1 Samuel 17:25; 1 Samuel 18:24-27). Later, however, in one of his jealous fits, Saul took Michal away from David and forced her to marry Paltiel (1 Samuel 25:44). Now David wanted his wife back before he would begin to negotiate peace with the northern tribes. Perhaps David still loved her (but see 2 Samuel 6:20-23 for the tension in



their relationship). More likely, he thought that marriage to Saul's daughter would strengthen his claim to rule all Israel and demonstrate that he had no animosity toward Saul's house. Paltiel was the unfortunate victim caught in the web of Saul's jealousy.

[15] So Ishbosheth took Michal away from her husband Palti son of Laish. [16] Palti followed along behind her as far as Bahurim, weeping as he went. Then Abner told him, "Go back home!" So Palti returned.

[17] Meanwhile, Abner had consulted with the leaders of Israel. "For some time now," he told them, "you have wanted to make David your king. [18] Now is the time! For the Lord has said, 'I have chosen David to save my people from the Philistines and from all their other enemies.' " [19] Abner also spoke with the leaders of the tribe of Benjamin. Then he went to Hebron to tell David that all the people of Israel and Benjamin supported him.

Because Saul, Ish-Bosheth, and Abner were all from the tribe of Benjamin, the support of the elders of that tribe meant that Abner was serious about his offer. There was a strong possibility of overcoming tribal jealousies and uniting the kingdom.

[20] When Abner came to Hebron with his twenty men; David entertained them with a great feast. [21] Then Abner said to David, "Let me go and call all the people of Israel to your side. They will make a covenant with you to make you their king. Then you will be able to rule over everything your heart desires." So David sent Abner safely on his way.

[22] But just after Abner left, Joab and some of David's troops returned from a raid, bringing much plunder with them. [23] When Joab was told that Abner had just been they're visiting the king and had been sent away in safety, [24] he rushed to see the king. "What have you done?" he demanded. "What do you mean by letting Abner get away? [25] You know perfectly well that he came to spy on you and to discover everything you are doing!"

[26] Joab then left David and sent messengers to catch up with Abner. They found him at the pool of Sirah and brought him back with them. But David knew nothing about it. [27] When Abner arrived at Hebron; Joab took him aside at the gateway as if to speak with him privately. But then he drew his dagger and killed Abner in revenge for killing his brother Asahel.

Joab took revenge for the death of his brother instead of leaving justice to God. But that revenge backfired on him (1 Kings 2:31-34). God will repay those who deserve it (Romans 12:19). Refuse to rejoice when your enemies suffer, and don't try to get revenge. Seeking revenge will ruin your own peace of mind and increase the chances of further retaliation.

Abner killed Joab's brother Asahel in self-defense. Joab then killed Abner to avenge his brother's death and also to save his position of military leadership. People who killed in self-defense were supposed to be safe in cities of refuge (Numbers 35:22-25). Joab showed his disrespect for God's laws by killing Abner out of revenge in Hebron, a city of refuge (Joshua 20:7).

[28] When David heard about it, he declared, "I vow by the Lord that I and my people are innocent of this crime against Abner. [29] Joab and his family are the guilty ones. May his family in every generation be cursed with a man who has open sores or leprosy or who walks on crutches or who dies by the sword or who begs for food!"

David was saying that Joab's descendants would be unclean, unhealthy, and in want. Why did David say such harsh words about Joab? David was upset over Abner's death for several reasons. (1) He was grieved over the loss of a skilled military officer. (2) He wanted to place the guilt of Abner's murder on Joab, not himself. (3) He was on the verge of becoming king over the entire nation, and utilizing Abner was the key to winning over the northern tribes. Abner's death could have revived the civil war. (4) Joab violated David's agreement to protect Abner. Joab's murderous act ruined David's plans, and David was especially angry that his own commander had committed the crime.

So Joab and his brother Abishai killed Abner because Abner had killed their brother Asahel at the battle of Gibeon.

[31] Then David said to Joab and all those who were with him, "Tear your clothes and put on sackcloth. Go into deep mourning for Abner." And King David himself walked behind the procession to the grave.

By walking behind the bier, or casket, David was leading the mourning.

David ordered Joab to mourn, possibly because few people were aware that Joab had committed the crime and because David did not want any further trouble. If this is true, David was thinking more about strengthening his kingdom than about justice

[32] They buried Abner in Hebron, and the king and all the people wept at his graveside. [33] Then the king sang this funeral song for Abner:

"Should Abner have died as fools die?

[34] Your hands were not bound;

Your feet were not chained.

No, you were murdered—

The victim of a wicked plot."

All the people wept again for Abner. [35] David had refused to eat anything the day of the funeral, and now everyone begged him to eat. But David had made a vow, saying, "May God kill me if I eat anything before sundown." [36] This pleased the people very much. In fact, everything the king did pleased them! [37] So everyone in Judah and Israel knew that David was not responsible for Abner's death.

Then King David said to the people, "Do you not realize that a great leader and a great man has fallen today in Israel? [39] And even though I am the anointed king, these two sons of Zeruah—Joab and Abishai—are too strong for me to control. So may the Lord repay these wicked men for their wicked deeds."

**3:39** Joab and Abishai were the two sons of Zeruah David mentioned. David had an especially hard time controlling Joab because, although he was intensely loyal, he was strong willed, preferring to do things his own way. In exchange for his loyalty, however, David was willing to give him the flexibility he craved.

Joab's murder of Abner is an example of his fierce independence. While David opposed the murder, he allowed it to remain unpunished because (1) to punish Joab could cause the troops to rebel; (2) Joab was David's nephew, and any harsh treatment could cause family problems; (3) Joab was from the tribe of Judah, and David didn't want rebellion from his own tribe; (4) to get

rid of Joab would mean losing a skilled and competent commander who had been invaluable in strengthening his army.

## **Chapter 4**

[4:1] When Ishbosheth heard about Abner's death at Hebron, he lost all courage, and his people were paralyzed with fear.

Ish-Bosheth was a man who took his courage from another man (Abner) rather than from God. When Abner died, Ish-Bosheth was left with nothing. In crisis and under pressure, he collapsed in fear. Fear can paralyze us, but faith and trust in God can overcome fear (2 Tim. 1:6-8; Hebrews 13:6). If we trust in God, we will be free to respond boldly to the events around us.

[2] Now there were two brothers, Baanah and Recab, who were captains of Ishbosheth's raiding parties. They were sons of Rimmon, a member of the tribe of Benjamin who lived in Beeroth. The town of Beeroth is now part of Benjamin's territory [3] because the original people of Beeroth fled to Gittaim, where they still live as foreigners.

[4] (Saul's son Jonathan had a son named Mephibosheth, who was crippled as a child. He was five years old when Saul and Jonathan were killed at the battle of Jezreel. When news of the battle reached the capital, the child's nurse grabbed him and fled. But she fell and dropped him as she was running, and he became crippled as a result.)

[5] One day Recab and Baanah, the sons of Rimmon from Beeroth, went to Ishbosheth's home around noon as he was taking a nap. [6] The doorkeeper, who had been sifting wheat, became drowsy and fell asleep. So Recab and Baanah slipped past the doorkeeper, went into Ishbosheth's bedroom, and stabbed him in the stomach. Then they escaped. [7] But before leaving, they cut off his head as he lay there on his bed. Taking his head with them, they fled across the Jordan Valley through the night. [8] They arrived at Hebron and presented Ishbosheth's head to David. "Look!" they exclaimed. "Here is the head of Ishbosheth, the son of your enemy Saul who tried to kill you. Today the Lord has given you revenge on Saul and his entire family!"

[9] But David said to Recab and Baanah, "As surely as the Lord lives, the one who saves me from my enemies, I will tell you the truth. [10] Once before, someone told me, 'Saul is dead,' thinking he was bringing me good news. But I seized him and killed him at Ziklag. That's the reward I gave him for his news! [11] Now what reward should I give the wicked men who have killed an innocent man in his own house and on his own bed? Should I not also demand your very lives?"

David called Ish-Bosheth an “innocent man.” As Saul’s son, Ish-Bosheth had reason to think he was in line for the throne. He was not wicked for wanting to be king; rather, he was simply too weak to stand against injustice. Although David knew Ish-Bosheth was not the strong leader needed to unite Israel, he had no intention of killing him. God had promised the kingdom to David, and he knew that God would fulfill his promise.

When David learned of Ish-Bosheth’s death, he was angry. He had never harmed Saul, and he thought the assassins’ method was cowardly. David wanted to unite Israel, not drive a permanent wedge between him and Ish-Bosheth’s supporters. To show that he had nothing to do with the extermination of Saul’s royal line, he ordered the assassins killed and gave Ish-Bosheth a proper burial. All the tribes of Israel, recognizing in David the strong leader they needed, pledged their loyalty to him. No doubt the Philistine threat and David’s military reputation (1 Samuel 18:7) also helped unify the people.

[12] So David ordered his young men to kill them, and they did. They cut off their hands and feet and hung their bodies beside the pool in Hebron. Then they took Ishbosheth's head and buried it in Abner's tomb in Hebron.

[5:1] Then all the tribes of Israel went to David at Hebron and told him, "We are all members of your family. [2] For a long time, even while Saul was our king, you were the one who really led Israel. And the Lord has told you, 'you will be the shepherd of my people Israel. You will be their leader.' " [3] So there at Hebron, David made a covenant with the leaders of Israel before the Lord. And they anointed him king of Israel.

[4] David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years in all. [5] He had reigned over Judah from Hebron for seven years and six months, and from Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah for thirty-three years.

This was the third time David was anointed king. First he was privately anointed by Samuel (1 Samuel 16:13). Then he was made king over the tribe of Judah (2 Samuel 2:4). Finally he was crowned king over all Israel. As an outlaw, life had looked bleak, but God's promise to make him king over all Israel was now being fulfilled. Although the kingdom would be divided again in less than 75 years, David's dynasty would reign over Judah, the southern kingdom, for over 400 years.

David did not become king over all Israel until he was 37 years old, although he had been promised the kingdom many years earlier (1 Samuel 16:13). During those years, David had to wait patiently for the fulfillment of God's promise. If you feel pressured to achieve instant results and success, remember David's patience. Just as his time of waiting prepared him for his important task, a waiting period may help prepare you by strengthening your character.

[6] David then led his troops to Jerusalem to fight against the Jebusites. "You'll never get in here," the Jebusites taunted. "Even the blind and lame could keep you out!" For the Jebusites thought they were safe. [7] But David captured the fortress of Zion, now called the City of David.

The fortress city of Jerusalem was located on a high ridge near the center of the united Israelite kingdom. It was considered neutral territory because it stood on the border of the territory of the tribes of Benjamin and Judah and it was still occupied by the Jebusites, a Canaanite tribe that had never been expelled from the land (Judges 1:21). Because of its strategic advantages, David made Jerusalem his capital.

The Jebusites had a clear military advantage, and they boasted of their security behind the impregnable walls of Jerusalem, also called Zion. But they soon discovered that their walls would not protect them. David caught them by surprise by entering the city through the water tunnel. Only in God are we truly safe and secure. Anything else is false security. Whether mighty walls of stone, a comfortable home, or a secure job surround you, no one can predict what tomorrow may bring. Our relationship with God is the only security that cannot be taken away.

[8] When the insulting message from the defenders of the city reached David, he told his own troops, "Go up through the water tunnel into the city and destroy those 'lame' and 'blind' Jebusites. How I hate them." That is the origin of the saying, "The blind and the lame may not enter the house." [9] So David made the fortress his home, and he called it the City of David. He built additional fortifications around the city, starting at the Millo and working inward. [10] And David became more and more powerful, because the Lord God Almighty was with him.

[11] Then King Hiram of Tyre sent messengers to David, along with carpenters and stonemasons to build him a palace. Hiram also sent many cedar logs for lumber. [12] And David realized that the Lord had made him king over Israel and had made his kingdom great for the sake of his people Israel.

“David knew that the LORD had established him . . .” Although the pagan kingdoms based their greatness on conquest, power, armies, and wealth, David knew that his greatness came only from God. To be great means keeping a close relationship with God personally and nationally. To do this, David had to keep his ambition under control. Although he was famous, successful, and well liked, he gave God first place in his life and served the people according to God’s purposes. Do you seek greatness from God or from people? In the drive for success, remember to keep your ambition under God’s control.

[13] After moving from Hebron to Jerusalem, David married more wives and concubines, and he had many sons and daughters. [14] These are the names of David's sons who were born in Jerusalem: Shimea, Shobab,



Nathan, Solomon, [15] Ithar, Elishua, Nepheg, Japhia, [16] Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet.

[17] When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king of Israel; they mobilized all their forces to capture him. But David was told they were coming and went into the stronghold.

“The stronghold” is the mountain stronghold in the Desert of Judah that David used when defending himself against Saul (see 2 Samuel 23:14 and 1 Chron. 12:8).

The Philistine oppression of Israel began in the days of Samson (Judges 13-16). The Philistines were still Israel’s most powerful enemy although David was once considered a friend and ally (1 Samuel 27; 1 Samuel 29). Because they occupied much of Israel’s northern territory, they apparently did not bother David while he was king of Judah to the south. But when they learned that David was planning to unite all Israel, they tried to stop him.

How could David get such a clear message from God? He may have prayed and been urged to action by the Holy Spirit. He may have asked God through a prophet. Most likely, however, he went to the high priest, who consulted God through the Urim and Thummim that God had told the Israelites to use for just such a purpose. (For more on the Urim and Thummim, see the notes on +Leviticus 8:8 and +1 Samuel 10:20.)

[18] The Philistines arrived and spread out across the valley of Rephaim. [19] So David asked the Lord, "Should I go out to fight the Philistines? Will you hand them over to me?"

The Lord replied, "Yes, go ahead. I will certainly give you the victory."

[20] So David went to Baal-perazim and defeated the Philistines there. "The Lord has done it!" David exclaimed. "He burst through my enemies like a raging flood!" So David named that place Baal-perazim (which means "the Lord who bursts through"). [21] The Philistines had abandoned their idols there, so David and his troops confiscated them.

[22] But after a while the Philistines returned and again spread out across the valley of Rephaim. [23] And once again David asked the Lord what to do. "Do not attack them straight on," the Lord replied. "Instead, circle around behind them and attack them near the balsam trees. [24] When you hear a sound like marching feet in the tops of the balsam trees, attack! That will be the signal that the Lord is moving ahead of you to strike down the

Philistines." [25] So David did what the Lord commanded, and he struck down the Philistines all the way from Gibeon to Gezer.

David fought his battles the way God instructed him. In each instance he (1) asked if he should fight or not, (2) followed instructions carefully, and (3) gave God the glory. We can err in our “battles” by ignoring these steps and instead: (1) do what we want without considering God’s will, (2) do things our way and ignore advice in the Bible or from other wise people, and (3) take the glory ourselves or give it to someone else without acknowledging the help we received from God. All these responses are sinful.

After David became king, his first order of business was to subdue his enemies—a task the nation had failed to complete when they first entered the land (Judges 2:1-4). David knew this had to be done in order to (1) protect the nation, (2) unify the kingdom, and (3) prepare for building the temple (which would unify religion under God and help abolish idolatrous influences).

## **Chapter 6**

[6:1] Then David mobilized thirty thousand special troops. [2] He led them to Baalah of Judah to bring home the Ark of God, which bears the name of the Lord Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim. [3] They placed the Ark of God on a new cart and brought it from the hillside home of Abinadab. Uzzah and Ahio, Abinadab's sons, were guiding the cart

The ark of God was Israel's national treasure and was ordinarily kept in the tabernacle. When the ark was returned to Israel after a brief Philistine captivity (1 Samuel 4:1-7:2), it was kept in Abinadab's home for 20 years. David saw how God blessed Abinadab, and he wanted to bring the ark to Jerusalem to ensure God's blessing on the entire nation

Uzzah was only trying to protect the ark, so was God's anger against Uzzah just? According to Numbers 4:5-15, the ark was to be moved only by the Levites, who were to carry it using the carrying poles—they were *never* to touch the ark itself. To touch it was a capital offense under Hebrew law (Numbers 4:15). God's action was directed against both David and Uzzah. David placed the ark on a cart, following the Philistines' example (1 Samuel 6:7-8) rather than God's commands. Uzzah, though sincere in his desire to protect the ark, had to face the consequences of the sin of touching it. Also, Uzzah may not have been a Levite. As David sought to bring Israel back into a relationship with God, God had to remind the nation dramatically that enthusiasm must be accompanied by obedience to his laws. The next time David tried to bring the ark to Jerusalem, he was careful to handle it correctly (1 Chron. 15:1-15).

[4] With the Ark of God on it, with Ahio walking in front. [5] David and all the people of Israel were celebrating before the Lord with all their might, singing songs and playing all kinds of musical instruments—lyres, harps, tambourines, castanets, and cymbals.

[6] But when they arrived at the threshing floor of Nacon, the oxen stumbled, and Uzzah put out his hand to steady the Ark of God. [7] Then the Lord's anger blazed out against Uzzah for doing this, and God struck him dead beside the Ark of God. [8] David was angry because the Lord's anger had blazed out against Uzzah. He named that place Perez-uzzah (which means "outbreak against Uzzah"). It is still called that today.

[9] David was now afraid of the Lord and asked, "How can I ever bring the Ark of the Lord back into my care?" [10] So David decided not to move the Ark of the Lord into the City of David. He took it instead to the home of Obed-edom of Gath. [11] The Ark of the Lord remained there with the family of Obed-edom for three months, and the Lord blessed him and his entire household.

[12] Then King David was told, "The Lord has blessed Obed-edom's home and everything he has because of the Ark of God." So David went there and brought the Ark to the City of David with a great celebration. [13] After the men who were carrying it had gone six steps, they stopped and waited so David could sacrifice an ox and a fattened calf. [14] And David danced before the Lord with all his might, wearing a priestly tunic. [15] So David and all Israel brought up the Ark of the Lord with much shouting and blowing of trumpets.

[16] But as the Ark of the Lord entered the City of David, Michal, the daughter of Saul, looked down from her window. When she saw King David leaping and dancing before the Lord, she was filled with contempt for him.

Michal was David's first wife, but here she is called daughter of Saul, possibly to show how similar her attitude was to her father's. Her contempt for David probably did not start with David's grand entrance into the city. Perhaps she thought it was undignified to be so concerned with public worship at a time when it was so unimportant in the kingdom. Or maybe she thought it was not fitting for a king to display such emotion. She may have resented David's taking her from Paltiel (see the note on +2 Samuel 3:13-14). Whatever the reason, this contempt she felt toward her husband escalated into a difficult confrontation, and Michal ended up childless for life. Feelings of bitterness and resentment that go unchecked will destroy a relationship. Deal with your feelings before they escalate into open warfare

Only a priest could place the sacrifices on the altar. Leviticus 1:2-13 indicates that anyone who was ceremonially clean could assist a priest in offering the sacrifice (see the notes on +Joshua 3:5; +1 Samuel 20:26). So David probably offered these sacrifices to God with the aid of a priest. Solomon did the same (1 Kings 8:62-65).

[17] The Ark of the Lord was placed inside the special tent that David had prepared for it. And David sacrificed burnt offerings and peace offerings to the Lord. [18] When he had finished, David blessed the people in the name

of the Lord Almighty. [19] Then he gave a gift of food to every man and woman in Israel: a loaf of bread, a cake of dates, and a cake of raisins. Then everyone went home.

[20] When David returned home to bless his family; Michal came out to meet him and said in disgust, "How glorious the king of Israel looked today! He exposed himself to the servant girls like any indecent person might do!"

[21] David retorted to Michal, "I was dancing before the Lord, who chose me above your father and his family! He appointed me as the leader of Israel, the people of the Lord. So I am willing to act like a fool in order to show my joy in the Lord. [22] Yes, and I am willing to look even more foolish than this, but I will be held in honor by the girls of whom you have spoken!" [23] So Michal, the daughter of Saul, remained childless throughout her life.

## **Chapter 7**

Only a priest could place the sacrifices on the altar. Leviticus 1:2-13 indicates that anyone who was ceremonially clean could assist a priest in offering the sacrifice (see the notes on +Joshua 3:5; +1 Samuel 20:26). So David probably offered these sacrifices to God with the aid of a priest. Solomon did the same (1 Kings 8:62-65).

[7:1] When the Lord had brought peace to the land and King David was settled in his palace, [2] David summoned Nathan the prophet. "Look!" David said. "Here I am living in this beautiful cedar palace, but the Ark of God is out in a tent!"

[3] Nathan replied, "Go ahead and do what you have in mind, for the Lord is with you."

[4] But that same night the Lord said to Nathan,

[5] "Go and tell my servant David, 'this is what the Lord says: Are you the one to build me a temple to live in? [6] I have never lived in a temple; from the day I brought the Israelites out of Egypt until now. My home has always been a tent, moving from one place to another. [7] And I have never once complained to Israel's leaders, the shepherds of my people Israel. I have never asked them, "Why haven't you built me a beautiful cedar temple?" '

In this message from Nathan, God is saying that he doesn't want David to build a "house" for him. Why didn't God want David to build the temple? God told David that his job was to unify and lead Israel and to destroy its enemies. This huge task would require David to shed a great deal of blood. In 1 Chron. 28:3, we learn that God did not want his temple built by a warrior. Therefore, David made the plans and collected the materials so that his son Solomon could begin work on the temple as soon as he became king (1 Kings 5-7). David accepted his part in God's plan and did not try to go beyond it. Sometimes God says no to our plans. When he does, we should utilize the other opportunities he gives us.

[8] "Now go and say to my servant David, 'this is what the Lord Almighty says: I chose you to lead my people Israel when you were just a shepherd boy, tending your sheep out in the pasture. [9] I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have destroyed all your enemies. Now I will make your name famous throughout the earth! [10] And I have provided a permanent homeland for my people Israel, a secure place where they will

never be disturbed. It will be their own land where wicked nations won't oppress them as they did in the past, [11] from the time I appointed judges to rule my people. And I will keep you safe from all your enemies.

" 'And now the Lord declares that he will build a house for you—a dynasty of kings! [12] For when you die, I will raise up one of your descendants, and I will make his kingdom strong. [13] He is the one who will build a house—a temple—for my name. And I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. [14] I will be his father, and he will be my son. If he sins, I will use other nations to punish him. [15] But my unfailing love will not be taken from him as I took it from Saul, whom I removed before you. [16] Your dynasty and your kingdom will continue for all time before me, and your throne will be secure forever.' "

David's request was good, but God said no. This does not mean that God rejected David. In fact, God was planning to do something even greater in David's life than allowing him the prestige of building the temple. Although God turned down David's request, he promised to continue the house (or dynasty) of David forever. David's earthly dynasty ended four centuries later, but Jesus Christ, a direct descendant of David, was the ultimate fulfillment of this promise (Acts 2:22-36). Christ will reign for eternity—now in his spiritual kingdom and in heaven, and later, on earth, in the new Jerusalem (Luke 1:30-33; Rev. 21). Have you prayed with good intentions, only to have God say no? This is God's way of directing you to a greater purpose in your life. Accepting God's no requires as great a faith as carrying out his yes.

[17] So Nathan went back to David and told him everything the Lord had said.

[18] Then King David went in and sat before the Lord and prayed, "Who am I, O Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far? [19] And now, Sovereign Lord, in addition to everything else, you speak of giving me a lasting dynasty! Do you deal with everyone this way, O Sovereign Lord? [20] What more can I say? You know what I am really like, Sovereign Lord. [21] For the sake of your promise and according to your will, you have done all these great things and have shown them to me.

[22] "How great you are, O Sovereign Lord! There is no one like you—there is no other God. We have never even heard of another god like you! [23] What other nation on earth is like Israel? What other nation, O God,

have you redeemed from slavery to be your own people? You made a great name for yourself when you rescued your people from Egypt. You performed awesome miracles and drove out the nations and gods that stood in their way. [24] You made Israel your people forever, and you, O Lord, became their God.

[25] "And now, O Lord God, do as you have promised concerning me and my family. Confirm it as a promise that will last forever. [26] And may your name be honored forever so that the entire world will say, "The Lord Almighty is God over Israel!" And may the dynasty of your servant David be established in your presence.

[27] "O Lord Almighty, God of Israel, I have been bold enough to pray this prayer because you have revealed that you will build a house for me—an eternal dynasty! [28] For you are God, O Sovereign Lord. Your words are truth, and you have promised these good things to me, your servant. [29] And now, may it please you to bless me and my family so that our dynasty may continue forever before you. For when you grant a blessing to your servant, O Sovereign Lord, it is an eternal blessing!"

This section records David's prayer expressing his humble acceptance of God's promise to extend his dynasty forever. David realized that these blessings were given to him and his descendants in order that Israel might benefit from them. They would help fulfill God's greater purpose and promises that through the nation the whole world would be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3).



[8:1] After this, David subdued and humbled the Philistines by conquering Gath, their largest city. [2] David also conquered the land of Moab. He made the people lie down on the ground in a row, and he measured them off in groups with a length of rope. He measured off two groups to be executed for every one group to be spared. The Moabites who were spared became David's servants and brought him tribute money.

[3] David also destroyed the forces of Hadadezer son of Rehob, king of Zobah, when Hadadezer marched out to strengthen his control along the Euphrates River. [4] David captured seventeen hundred charioteers and twenty thousand foot soldiers. Then he crippled all but one hundred of the chariot horses.

[5] When Arameans from Damascus arrived to help Hadadezer, David killed twenty-two thousand of them.

Part of God's covenant with David included the promise that the Israelites' enemies would be defeated and would no longer oppress them (2 Samuel 7:10-11). God fulfilled this promise by helping David defeat the opposing nations. Several enemies are listed in this chapter: (1) *The Moabites*, descendants of Lot who lived east of the Dead Sea. They posed a constant military and religious threat to Israel (Numbers 25:1-3; Judges 3:12-30; 1 Samuel 14:47). David seemed to have a good relationship with the Moabites at one time. (2) *King Hadadezer of Zobah*. His defeat at David's hands fulfilled God's promise to Abraham that Israel would control the land as far north as the Euphrates River (Genesis 15:18). (3) *The Edomites*, descendants of Esau (Genesis 36:1) who were also archenemies of Israel (see 2 Kings 8:20; Jeremiah 49:7-22; Ezekiel 25:12-14; and the note on +Genesis 36:9).

[6] Then he placed several army garrisons in Damascus, the Aramean capital, and the Arameans became David's subjects and brought him tribute money. So the Lord gave David victory wherever he went.

The *tribute* was the tax levied on conquered nations. The tax helped to support Israel's government and demonstrated that the conquered nation was under Israel's control.

David pleased the people (2 Samuel 3:36), not because he tried to please them, but because he tried to please God. Often those who try the hardest to become popular never make it. But the praise of people is not that important. Don't spend your time devising ways to become accepted in the public eye.

Instead strive to do what is right, and both God and people will respect your convictions.

[7] David brought the gold shields of Hadadezer's officers to Jerusalem, [8] along with a large amount of bronze from Hadadezer's cities of Tebah and Berothai.

[9] When King Toi of Hamath heard that David had destroyed the army of Hadadezer, [10] he sent his son Joram to congratulate David on his success. Hadadezer and Toi had long been enemies, and there had been many wars between them. Joram presented David with many gifts of silver, gold, and bronze. [11] King David dedicated all these gifts to the Lord, along with the silver and gold he had set apart from the other nations he had subdued— [12] Edom, Moab, Ammon, Philistia, and Amalek—and from Hadadezer son of Rehob, king of Zobah.

[13] So David became very famous. After his return he destroyed eighteen thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt. [14] He placed army garrisons throughout Edom, and all the Edomites became David's subjects. This was another example of how the Lord made David victorious wherever he went.

[15] David reigned over all Israel and was fair to everyone. [16] Joab son of Zeruah was commander of the army. Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was the royal historian. [17] Zadok son of Ahitub and Ahimelech son of Abiathar were the priests. Seraiah was the court secretary. [18] Benaiah son of Jehoiada was captain of the king's bodyguard. David's sons served as priestly leaders.

King David's reign was characterized by doing what was "just and right." Justice means fairness in interpreting the law, administering punishment with mercy, respect for people's rights, and recognition of people's duty toward God. Is it any wonder that almost everyone trusted and followed David? Why was it good for David to pursue justice? (1) It was God's command (Deut. 16:18-20) and his character (Deut. 32:4). God's laws were meant to establish a just society. (2) It was in the nation's best interest because times would arise when each individual would need justice. Justice should characterize the way you relate to people. Make sure you are fair in the way you treat them.

## Chapter 9

[9:1] One day David began wondering if anyone in Saul's family was still alive, for he had promised Jonathan that he would show kindness to them.

Most kings in David's day tried to wipe out the families of their rivals in order to prevent any descendants from seeking the throne. But David showed kindness to Mephibosheth, whose father was Jonathan and whose grandfather was King Saul. David was kind, partly because of his loyalty to God's previously anointed king (see the note on +1 Samuel 24:5-6); partly for political reasons—to unite Judah and Israel (see the notes on +2 Samuel 3:13-14 and +2 Samuel 3:29); and mainly because of his vow to show kindness to all of Jonathan's descendants (1 Samuel 20:14-17).

[2] He summoned a man named Ziba, who had been one of Saul's servants. "Are you Ziba?" the king asked.

"Yes sir, I am," Ziba replied.

[3] The king then asked him, "Is anyone still alive from Saul's family? If so, I want to show God's kindness to them in any way I can."

Ziba replied, "Yes, one of Jonathan's sons is still alive, but he is crippled."

[4] "Where is he?" the king asked.

"In Lo-debar," Ziba told him, "at the home of Makir son of Ammiel." [5] So David sent for him and brought him from Makir's home. [6] His name was Mephibosheth; he was Jonathan's son and Saul's grandson. When he came to David, he bowed low in great fear and said, "I am your servant."

Mephibosheth was afraid to visit the king, who wanted to treat him like a prince. Although Mephibosheth feared for his life and may have felt unworthy, that didn't mean he should refuse David's gifts. When God graciously offers us forgiveness of sins and a place in heaven, we may feel unworthy, but we will receive these gifts if we accept them. A reception even warmer than the one David gave Mephibosheth waits for all who receive God's gifts through trusting Jesus Christ, not because we deserve it, but because of God's promise (Ephes. 2:8-9).

[7] But David said, "Don't be afraid! I've asked you to come so that I can be kind to you because of my vow to your father, Jonathan. I will give you all the land that once belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you may live here with me at the palace!"

[8] Mephibosheth fell to the ground before the king. "Should the king show such kindness to a dead dog like me?" he exclaimed.

[9] Then the king summoned Saul's servant Ziba and said, "I have given your master's grandson everything that belonged to Saul and his family. [10] You and your sons and servants are to farm the land for him to produce food for his family. But Mephibosheth will live here at the palace with me."

Ziba, who had fifteen sons and twenty servants, replied, [11] "Yes, my lord; I will do all that you have commanded." And from that time on, Mephibosheth ate regularly with David, as though he were one of his own sons. [12] Mephibosheth had a young son named Mica. And from then on, all the members of Ziba's household were Mephibosheth's servants. [13] And Mephibosheth, who was crippled in both feet, moved to Jerusalem to live at the palace.

His treatment of Mephibosheth shows David's integrity as a leader who accepted his obligation to show love and mercy. His generous provision for Jonathan's son goes beyond any political benefit he might have received. Are you able to forgive those who have wronged you? Can you be generous with those less deserving? Each time we show compassion, our character is strengthened.

## Chapter 10

Some time after this, King Nahash of the Ammonites died, and his son Hanun became king. [2] David said, "I am going to show complete loyalty to

Hanun because his father, Nahash, was always completely loyal to me." So David sent ambassadors to express sympathy to Hanun about his father's death.

But when David's ambassadors arrived in the land of Ammon, [3] Hanun's advisers said to their master, "Do you really think these men are coming here to honor your father? No! David has sent them to spy out the city so that they can come in and conquer it!" [4] So Hanun seized David's ambassadors and shaved off half of each man's beard, cut off their robes at the buttocks, and sent them back to David in shame. [5] When David heard what had happened, he sent messengers to tell the men to stay at Jericho until their beards grew out, for they were very embarrassed by their appearance.

[6] Now the people of Ammon realized how seriously they had angered David, so they hired twenty thousand Aramean mercenaries from the lands of Beth-rehob and Zobah, one thousand from the king of Maacah, and twelve thousand from the land of Tob. [7] When David heard about this, he sent Joab and the entire Israelite army to fight them. [8] The Ammonite troops drew up their battle lines at the entrance of the city gates, while the Arameans from Zobah and Rehob and the men from Tob and Maacah positioned themselves to fight in the open fields.

[9] When Joab saw that he would have to fight on two fronts, he chose the best troops in his army. He placed them under his personal command and led them out to fight the Arameans in the fields. [10] He left the rest of the army under the command of his brother Abishai, who was to attack the Ammonites.

In Israelite culture, all men wore full beards. It was a sign of maturity and authority. Thus when these ambassadors had their beards half shaved, they suffered great indignity. Cutting off their garments also exposed them to ridicule.

Because Hanun took the wrong advice, he suspected the motives of the ambassadors and humiliated them. Then he realized that David was angry and immediately marshaled his forces for battle. Hanun should have thought through the advice more carefully; but even if he had not, he should have tried to negotiate with David. Instead, he refused to admit any fault and got ready for war. Often we respond angrily and defensively rather than admitting our mistakes, apologizing, and trying to diffuse the other person's anger. Instead of fighting, we should seek peace

[11] "If the Arameans are too strong for me, then come over and help me," Joab told his brother. "And if the Ammonites are too strong for you, I will come and help you. [12] Be courageous! Let us fight bravely to save our people and the cities of our God. May the Lord's will be done."

There must be a balance in life between our actions and our faith in God. David said, "Let us fight bravely." In other words, they should do what they could, using their minds to figure out the best techniques and using their resources. But he also said, "The LORD will do what is good in his sight." He knew that the outcome was in God's hands. We should use our minds and our resources to obey God, while at the same time trusting God for the outcome.

[13] When Joab and his troops attacked, the Arameans began to run away. [14] And when the Ammonites saw the Arameans running, they ran from Abishai and retreated into the city. After the battle was over, Joab returned to Jerusalem.

[15] The Arameans now realized that they were no match for Israel. So when they regrouped, [16] they were joined by additional Aramean troops summoned by Hadadezer from the other side of the Euphrates River. These troops arrived at Helam under the command of Shobach, the commander of all Hadadezer's forces. [17] When David heard what was happening, he mobilized all Israel, crossed the Jordan River, and led the army to Helam. The Arameans positioned themselves there in battle formation and then attacked David. [18] But again the Arameans fled from the Israelites. This time David's forces killed seven hundred charioteers and forty thousand horsemen, including Shobach, the commander of their army. [19] When Hadadezer and his Aramean allies realized they had been defeated by Israel; they surrendered to them and became their subjects. After that, the Arameans were afraid to help the Ammonites.

## Chapter 11

### **DAVID'S STRUGGLES**

After restoring the nation to peace and great military power, David's personal life becomes entangled in sin. He commits adultery with Bathsheba and then orders her husband killed in an attempted cover-up. David deeply regretted what he had done and sought God's forgiveness, but the child of his sinful act died. God may forgive us for our sins, but we will often experience harsh consequences.

[11:1] The following spring, the time of year when kings go to war, David sent Joab and the Israelite army to destroy the Ammonites. In the process they laid siege to the city of Rabbah. But David stayed behind in Jerusalem.

Winter is the rainy season in Israel, the time when crops are planted. Spring was a good time to go to war because the roads were dry, making travel easier for troop movements, supplies wagons, and chariots. In Israel, wheat and barley were ready to be harvested in the spring. These crops were an important food source for traveling armies.

This successful siege (see 2 Samuel 12:26-27) put an end to the Ammonites' power. From this time on, the Ammonites were subject to Israel.

in the episode with Bathsheba, David allowed himself to fall deeper and deeper into sin. (1) David abandoned his purpose by staying home from war (2 Samuel 11:1). (2) He focused on his own desires (2 Samuel 11:3). (3) When temptation came, he looked into it instead of turning away from it (2 Samuel 11:4). (4) He sinned deliberately (2 Samuel 11:4). (5) He tried to cover up his sin by deceiving others (2 Samuel 11:6-15). (6) He committed murder to continue the cover-up (2 Samuel 11:15, 17). Eventually David's sin was exposed (2 Samuel 12:9) and punished (2 Samuel 12:10-14). (7) The consequences of David's sin were far-reaching, affecting many others (2 Samuel 11:17; 2 Samuel 12:11, 14-15).

David could have chosen to stop and turn from evil at any stage along the way. But once sin gets started, it is difficult to stop (James 1:14-15). The deeper the mess, the less we want to admit having caused it. It's much easier to stop sliding down a hill when you are near the top than when you are halfway down. The best solution is to stop sin before it starts.

[2] Late one afternoon David got out of bed after taking a nap and went for a stroll on the roof of the palace. As he looked out over the city, he

noticed a woman of unusual beauty taking a bath. [3] He sent someone to find out who she was, and he was told, "She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite." [4] Then David sent for her; and when she came to the palace, he slept with her. (She had just completed the purification rites after having her menstrual period.) Then she returned home.

As David looked from the roof of the palace, he saw a beautiful woman bathing, and he was filled with lust. David should have left the roof and fled the temptation. Instead, he entertained the temptation by inquiring about Bathsheba. The results were devastating.

To flee temptation, (1) ask God in earnest prayer to help you stay away from people, places, and situations that may tempt you. (2) Memorize and meditate on portions of Scripture that combat your specific weaknesses. At the root of most temptation is a real need or desire that God can fill, but we must trust in his timing. (3) Find another believer with whom you can openly share your struggles, and call this person for help when temptation strikes.

The phrase "she had purified herself from her uncleanness" means that Bathsheba had just completed the purification rites following menstruation. Thus she could not have already been pregnant by her own husband when David slept with her. Leviticus 15:19-30 gives more information on the purification rites Bathsheba had to perform.

[5] Later, when Bathsheba discovered that she was pregnant, she sent a message to inform David.

[6] So David sent word to Joab: "Send me Uriah the Hittite." [7] When Uriah arrived; David asked him how Joab and the army were getting along and how the war was progressing. [8] Then he told Uriah, "Go on home and relax." David even sent a gift to Uriah after he had left the palace. [9] But Uriah wouldn't go home. He stayed that night at the palace entrance with some of the king's other servants.

[10] When David heard what Uriah had done; he summoned him and asked, "What's the matter with you? Why didn't you go home last night after being away for so long?"

[11] Uriah replied, "The Ark and the armies of Israel and Judah are living in tents, and Joab and his officers are camping in the open fields. How could I go home to wine and dine and sleep with my wife? I swear that I will never be guilty of acting like that."



[12] "Well, stay here tonight," David told him, "and tomorrow you may return to the army." So Uriah stayed in Jerusalem that day and the next. [13] Then David invited him to dinner and got him drunk. But even then he couldn't get Uriah to go home to his wife. Again he slept at the palace entrance.

David put both Bathsheba and Joab in difficult situations. Bathsheba knew it was wrong to commit adultery, but to refuse a king's request could mean punishment or death. Joab did not know why Uriah had to die, but it was obvious the king wanted him killed. We sometimes face situations with only two apparent choices, and both seem wrong. When that happens, we must not lose sight of what God wants. The answer may be to seek out more choices. By doing this, we are likely to find a choice that honors God.

[14] So the next morning David wrote a letter to Joab and gave it to Uriah to deliver. [15] The letter instructed Joab, "Station Uriah on the front lines where the battle is fiercest. Then pull back so that he will be killed." [16] So Joab assigned Uriah to a spot close to the city wall where he knew the enemy's strongest men were fighting. [17] And Uriah was killed along with several other Israelite soldiers.

[18] Then Joab sent a battle report to David. [19] He told his messenger, "Report all the news of the battle to the king. [20] But he might get angry and ask, 'Why did the troops go so close to the city? Didn't they know there would be shooting from the walls? [21] Wasn't Gideon's son Abimelech killed at Thebez by a woman who threw a millstone down on him?' Then tell him, 'Uriah the Hittite was killed, too.' "

[22] So the messenger went to Jerusalem and gave a complete report to David. [23] "The enemy came out against us," he said. "And as we chased them back to the city gates, [24] the archers on the wall shot arrows at us. Some of our men were killed, including Uriah the Hittite."

[25] "Well, tell Joab not to be discouraged," David said. "The sword kills one as well as another! Fight harder next time, and conquer the city!"

[26] When Bathsheba heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. [27] When the period of mourning was over, David sent for her and brought her to the palace, and she became one of his wives. Then she gave birth to a son. But the Lord was very displeased with what David had done.

David's response to Uriah's death seems flippant and insensitive. While he grieved deeply for Saul and Abner, his rivals (2 Samuel 1; 2 Samuel 3:31-39), he showed no grief for Uriah, a good man with strong spiritual

character. Why? David had become callous to his own sin. The only way he could cover up his first sin (adultery) was to sin again, and soon he no longer felt guilty for what he had done. Feelings are not reliable guides for determining right and wrong. Deliberate, repeated sinning had dulled David's sensitivity to God's laws and others' rights. The more you try to cover up a sin, the more insensitive you become toward it. Don't become hardened to sin, as David did. Confess your wrong actions to God before you forget they are sins.

## Chapter 12

[12:1] So the Lord sent Nathan the prophet to tell David this story: "There were two men in a certain town. One was rich, and one was poor. [2] The rich man owned many sheep and cattle. [3] The poor man owned nothing but a little lamb he had worked hard to buy. He raised that little lamb, and it

grew up with his children. It ate from the man's own plate and drank from his cup. He cuddled it in his arms like a baby daughter. [4] One day a guest arrived at the home of the rich man. But instead of killing a lamb from his own flocks for food, he took the poor man's lamb and killed it and served it to his guest."

as a prophet, Nathan was required to confront sin, even the sin of a king. It took great courage, skill, and tact to speak to David in a way that would make him aware of his wrong actions. When you have to confront someone with unpleasant news, pray for courage, skill, and tact. If you want that person to respond constructively, think through what you are going to say. How you present your message may be as important as what you say. Season your words with wisdom.

[5] David was furious. "As surely as the Lord lives," he vowed, "any man who would do such a thing deserves to die! [6] He must repay four lambs to the poor man for the one he stole and for having no pity."

It was a year later, and by then David had become so insensitive to his own sins that he didn't realize he was the villain in Nathan's story. The qualities we condemn in others are often our own character flaws. Which friends, associates, or family members do you find easy to criticize and hard to accept? Instead of trying to change them, ask God to help you understand their feelings and see your own flaws more clearly. You may discover that in condemning others, you have been condemning yourself.

[7] Then Nathan said to David, "You are that man! The Lord, the God of Israel, says, 'I anointed you king of Israel and saved you from the power of Saul. [8] I gave you his house and his wives and the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. And if that had not been enough, I would have given you much, much more. [9] Why, then, have you despised the word of the Lord and done this horrible deed? For you have murdered Uriah and stolen his wife. [10] From this time on, the sword will be a constant threat to your family, because you have despised me by taking Uriah's wife to be your own.

[11] " 'Because of what you have done, I, the Lord, will cause your own household to rebel against you. I will give your wives to another man, and he will go to bed with them in public view. [12] You did it secretly, but I will do this to you openly in the sight of all Israel.' "

[13] Then David confessed to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord."

Nathan replied, "Yes, but the Lord has forgiven you, and you won't die for this sin. [14] But you have given the enemies of the Lord great opportunity to despise and blaspheme him, so your child will die."

The predictions in these verses came true. Because David murdered Uriah and stole his wife, (1) murder was a constant threat in his family (2 Samuel 13:26-30; 2 Samuel 18:14-15; 1 Kings 2:23-25); (2) his household rebelled against him (2 Samuel 15:13); (3) his wives were given to another in public view (2 Samuel 16:20-23); (4) his first child by Bathsheba died (2 Samuel 12:18). If David had known the painful consequences of his sin, he might not have pursued the pleasures of the moment.

During this incident, David wrote Psalm 51, giving valuable insight into his character and offering hope for us as well. No matter how miserable guilt makes you feel or how terribly you have sinned, you can pour out your heart to God and seek his forgiveness as David did. There is forgiveness for us when we sin. David also wrote Psalm 32 to express the joy he felt after he was forgiven.

David confessed and repented of his sin (2 Samuel 12:13), but God's judgment was that his child would die. The consequences of David's sin were irreversible. Sometimes an apology isn't enough. When God forgives us and restores our relationship with him, he doesn't eliminate all the consequences of our wrongdoing. We may be tempted to say, "If this is wrong, I can always apologize to God," but we must remember that we may set into motion events with irreversible consequences.

Why did this child have to die? This was not a judgment on the child for being conceived out of wedlock, but a judgment on David for his sin. David and Bathsheba deserved to die, but God spared their lives and took the child instead. God still had work for David to do in building the kingdom. Perhaps the child's death was a greater punishment for David than his own death would have been.

It is also possible that had the child lived, God's name would have been dishonored among Israel's pagan neighbors. What would they have thought of a God who rewards murder and adultery by giving a king a new heir? A baby's death is tragic, but despising God brings death to entire nations. While God readily forgave David's sin, he did not negate all its consequences.

[15] After Nathan returned to his home, the Lord made Bathsheba's baby deathly ill. [16] David begged God to spare the child. He went without food and lay all night on the bare ground. [17] The leaders of the nation pleaded with him to get up and eat with them, but he refused. [18] Then on the seventh day the baby died. David's advisers were afraid to tell him. "He was so broken up about the baby being sick," they said. "What will he do to himself when we tell him the child is dead?"

[19] But when David saw them whispering, he realized what had happened. "Is the baby dead?" he asked.

"Yes," they replied. [20] Then David got up from the ground, washed him, put on lotions, and changed his clothes. Then he went to the Tabernacle and worshiped the Lord. After that, he returned to the palace and ate. [21] His advisers were amazed. "We don't understand you," they told him.

"While the baby was still living, you wept and refused to eat. But now that the baby is dead, you have stopped your mourning and are eating again."

[22] David replied, "I fasted and wept while the child was alive, for I said, 'Perhaps the Lord will be gracious to me and let the child live.' [23] But why should I fast when he is dead? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him one day, but he cannot return to me."

[24] Then David comforted Bathsheba, his wife, and slept with her. She became pregnant and gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. The Lord loved the child [25] and sent word through Nathan the prophet that his name should be Jedidiah—"beloved of the Lord"—because the Lord loved him.

[26] Meanwhile, Joab and the Israelite army were successfully ending their siege of Rabbah, the capital of Ammon. [27] Joab sent messengers to tell David, "I have fought against Rabbah and captured its water supply. [28] Now bring the rest of the army and finish the job, so you will get credit for the victory instead of me."

[29] So David led the rest of his army to Rabbah and captured it. [30] David removed the crown from the king's head, and it was placed on David's own head. The crown was made of gold and set with gems, and it weighed about seventy-five pounds. David took a vast amount of plunder from the city. [31] He also made slaves of the people of Rabbah and forced them to labor with saws, picks, and axes, and to work in the brick kilns. That is how he dealt with the people of all the Ammonite cities. Then David and his army returned to Jerusalem.

David did not continue to dwell on his sin. He returned to God, and God forgave him, opening the way to begin life anew. Even the name God gave Solomon (*Jedidiah*, “loved by the LORD”; 2 Samuel 12:25) was a reminder of God’s grace. When we return to God, accept his forgiveness, and change our ways, he gives us a fresh start. To feel forgiven as David did, admit your sins to God and turn to him. Then move ahead with a new and fresh approach to life.

Perhaps the bitterest experience in life is the death of one’s child. For comfort in such difficult circumstances, see Psalm 16:9-11; Psalm 17:15; Psalm 139; Isaiah 40:11.

Solomon was the fourth son of David and Bathsheba (1 Chron. 3:5). Therefore several years passed between the death of their first child and Solomon’s birth. Bathsheba may still have been grieving over the child’s death.

## Chapter 13

[13:1] David's son Absalom had a beautiful sister named Tamar. And Amnon, her half brother, fell desperately in love with her. [2] Amnon became so obsessed with Tamar that he became ill. She was a virgin, and it seemed impossible that he could ever fulfill his love for her.

[3] Now Amnon had a very crafty friend—his cousin Jonadab. He was the son of David's brother Shimea. [4] One day Jonadab said to Amnon, "What's

the trouble? Why should the son of a king look so dejected morning after morning?"

So Amnon told him, "I am in love with Tamar, Absalom's sister."

[5] "Well," Jonadab said, "I'll tell you what to do. Go back to bed and pretend you are sick. When your father comes to see you, ask him to let Tamar come and prepare some food for you. Tell him you'll feel better if she feeds you."

[6] So Amnon pretended to be sick. And when the king came to see him, Amnon asked him, "Please let Tamar come to take care of me and cook something for me to eat." [7] So David agreed and sent Tamar to Amnon's house to prepare some food for him.

[8] When Tamar arrived at Amnon's house, she went to the room where he was lying down so he could watch her mix some dough. Then she baked some special bread for him. [9] But when she set the serving tray before him, he refused to eat. "Everyone get out of here," Amnon told his servants. So they all left. [10] Then he said to Tamar, "Now bring the food into my bedroom and feed it to me here." So Tamar took it to him. [11] But as she was feeding him, he grabbed her and demanded, "Come to bed with me, my darling sister."

[12] "No, my brother!" she cried. "Don't be foolish! Don't do this to me! You know what a serious crime it is to do such a thing in Israel. [13] Where could I go in my shame? And you would be called one of the greatest fools in Israel. Please, just speak to the king about it, and he will let you marry me."

[14] But Amnon wouldn't listen to her, and since he was stronger than she was, he raped her. [15] Then suddenly Amnon's love turned to hate, and he hated her even more than he had loved her. "Get out of here!" he snarled at her.

Love and lust is very different. After Amnon raped his half sister, his "love" turned to hate. Although he had claimed to be in love, he was actually overcome by lust. Love is patient; lust requires immediate satisfaction. Love is kind; lust is harsh. Love does not demand its own way; lust does. You can read about the characteristics of real love in 1 Cor. 13. Lust may feel like love at first, but when physically expressed, it results in self-disgust and hatred of the other person. If you just can't wait, what you feel is not true love.

[16] "No, no!" Tamar cried. "To reject me now is a greater wrong than what you have already done to me."

But Amnon wouldn't listen to her.

Rape was strictly forbidden by God (Deut. 22:28-29). Why was sending Tamar away an even greater crime? By throwing her out, Amnon made it look as if Tamar had made a shameful proposition to him, and there were no witnesses on her behalf because he had gotten rid of the servants. His crime destroyed her chances of marriage—because she was no longer a virgin, she could not be given in marriage.

[17] He shouted for his servant and demanded, "Throw this woman out, and lock the door behind her!"

[18] So the servant put her out. She was wearing a long, beautiful robe, as was the custom in those days for the king's virgin daughters. [19] But now Tamar tore her robe and put ashes on her head. And then, with her face in her hands, she went away crying.

[20] Her brother Absalom saw her and asked, "Is it true that Amnon has been with you? Well, don't be so upset. Since he's your brother anyway, don't worry about it." So Tamar lived as a desolate woman in Absalom's house.

Absalom tried to comfort Tamar and persuade her not to turn the incident into a public scandal. Secretly, he planned to take revenge against Amnon himself. This he did two years later (2 Samuel 13:23-33). Absalom told Tamar the crime was only a family matter. But God's standards for moral conduct are not suspended when we deal with family matters.

[21] When King David heard what had happened, he was very angry. [22] And though Absalom never spoke to Amnon about it, he hated Amnon deeply because of what he had done to his sister.

[23] Two years later, when Absalom's sheep were being sheared at Baal-hazor near Ephraim, Absalom invited all the king's sons to come to a feast. [24] He went to the king and said, "My sheep-shearers are now at work. Would the king and his servants please come to celebrate the occasion with me?"



David was angry with Amnon for raping Tamar, but David did not punish him. David probably hesitated because (1) he didn't want to cross Amnon, who was his firstborn son (1 Chron. 3:1) and therefore next in line to be king, and (2) David was guilty of a similar sin himself in his adultery with Bathsheba. While David was unsurpassed as a king and military leader, he lacked skill and sensitivity as a husband and father.

[25] The king replied, "No, my son. If we all came, we would be too much of a burden on you." Absalom pressed him, but the king wouldn't come, though he sent his thanks.

[26] "Well, then," Absalom said, "if you can't come, how about sending my brother Amnon instead?"

"Why Amnon?" the king asked. [27] But Absalom kept on pressing the king until he finally agreed to let all his sons attend, including Amnon.

[28] Absalom told his men, "Wait until Amnon gets drunk; then at my signal, kill him! Don't be afraid. I'm the one who has given the command. Take courage and do it!" [29] So at Absalom's signal they murdered Amnon. Then the other sons of the king jumped on their mules and fled.

[30] As they were on the way back to Jerusalem, this report reached David: "Absalom has killed all your sons; not one is left alive!" [31] The king jumped up, tore his robe, and fell prostrate on the ground. His advisers also tore their clothes in horror and sorrow.

[32] But just then Jonadab, the son of David's brother Shimea, arrived and said, "No, not all your sons have been killed! It was only Amnon! Absalom has been plotting this ever since Amnon raped his sister Tamar. [33] No, your sons aren't all dead! It was only Amnon." [34] Meanwhile Absalom escaped.

Then the watchman on the Jerusalem wall saw a great crowd coming toward the city from the west. He ran to tell the king, "I see a crowd of people coming from the Horonaim road along the side of the hill."

[35] "Look!" Jonadab told the king. "There they are now! Your sons are coming, just as I said." [36] They soon arrived, weeping and sobbing, and the king and his officials wept bitterly with them. [37] And David mourned many days for his son Amnon.

Absalom fled to his grandfather, Talmai son of Ammihud, the king of Geshur. [38] He stayed there in Geshur for three years. [39] And David, now reconciled to Amnon's death, longed to be reunited with his son Absalom.

Absalom fled to Geshur because King Talmai was his grandfather (1 Chron. 3:2), and he would be welcomed.

## Chapter 14

[14:1] Joab realized how much the king longed to see Absalom. [2] So he sent for a woman from Tekoa who had a reputation for great wisdom. He said to her, "Pretend you are in mourning; wear mourning clothes and don't bathe or wear any perfume. Act like a woman who has been in deep sorrow for a long time. [3] Then go to the king and tell him the story I am about to tell you." Then Joab told her what to say.

[4] When the woman approached the king, she fell with her face down to the floor in front of him and cried out, "O king! Help me!"

[5] "What's the trouble?" the king asked.

"I am a widow," she replied. [6] "My two sons had a fight out in the field. And since no one was there to stop it, one of them was killed. [7] Now the rest of the family is demanding, 'Let us have your son. We will execute him for murdering his brother. He doesn't deserve to inherit his family's property.' But if I do that, I will have no one left, and my husband's name and family will disappear from the face of the earth."

[8] "Leave it to me," the king told her. "Go home, and I'll see to it that no one touches him."

[9] "Oh, thank you, my lord," she replied. "And I'll take the responsibility if you are criticized for helping me like this."

[10] "Don't worry about that!" the king said. "If anyone objects, bring them to me. I can assure you they will never complain again!"

[11] Then she said, "Please swear to me by the Lord your God that you won't let anyone take vengeance against my son. I want no more bloodshed."

"As surely as the Lord lives," he replied, "not a hair on your son's head will be disturbed!"

The law provided for a way to avenge murder. Numbers 35:9-21 records how cities of refuge protected people from revenge and how blood avengers were to pursue murderers. This woman was asking for the king's protection against any claim against her

[12] "Please let me ask one more thing of you!" she said.

"Go ahead," he urged. "Speak!"

[13] She replied, "Why don't you do as much for all the people of God as you have promised to do for me? You have convicted yourself in making this decision, because you have refused to bring home your own banished son. [14] All of us must die eventually. Our lives are like water spilled out on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again. That is why God tries to bring us back when we have been separated from him. He does not sweep away the lives of those he cares about—and neither should you!

[15] "But I have come to plead with you for my son because my life and my son's life have been threatened. I said to myself, 'Perhaps the king will listen to me [16] and rescue us from those who would cut us off from God's people. [17] Yes, the king will give us peace of mind again.' I know that you are like an angel of God and can discern good from evil. May the Lord your God be with you."

[18] "I want to know one thing," the king replied.

"Yes, my lord?" she asked.

[19] "Did Joab send you here?"

And the woman replied, "My lord the king, how can I deny it? Nobody can hide anything from you. Yes, Joab sent me and told me what to say. [20] He did it to place the matter before you in a different light. But you are as wise as an angel of God, and you understand everything that happens among us!"

[21] So the king sent for Joab and told him, "All right, go and bring back the young man Absalom."

[22] Joab fell to the ground before the king and blessed him and said, "At last I know that I have gained your approval, for you have granted me this request!"

[23] Then Joab went to Geshur and brought Absalom back to Jerusalem. [24] But the king gave this order: "Absalom may go to his own house, but he must never come into my presence." So Absalom did not see the king.

[25] Now no one in Israel was as handsome as Absalom. From head to foot, he was the perfect specimen of a man. [26] He cut his hair only once a year, and then only because it was too heavy to carry around. When he weighed it out, it came to five pounds! [27] He had three sons and one daughter. His daughter's name was Tamar, and she was very beautiful.

By naming his daughter Tamar, Absalom was showing his love and respect for his sister Tamar. This was also a reminder to everyone of the Amnon/Tamar incident.

[28] Absalom lived in Jerusalem for two years without getting to see the king. [29] Then Absalom sent for Joab to ask him to intercede for him, but Joab refused to come. Absalom sent for him a second time, but again Joab refused to come. [30] So Absalom said to his servants, "Go and set fire to Joab's barley field, the field next to mine." So they set his field on fire, as Absalom had commanded.

Already we can see the seeds of rebellion in Absalom. As an independent and scheming young man, he took matters into his own hands and killed his brother (2 Samuel 13:22-29). Without his father or anyone else to keep him in check, he probably did whatever he wanted, as evidenced by his setting Joab's field on fire to get his attention (2 Samuel 14:30). Undoubtedly his good looks also added to his self-centeredness (2 Samuel 14:25). Children need discipline, especially those with natural abilities and beauty. Otherwise,

like Absalom, they will grow up thinking they can do whatever they want whenever they want to.

[31] Then Joab came to Absalom and demanded, "Why did your servants set my field on fire?"

[32] And Absalom replied, "Because I wanted you to ask the king why he brought me back from Geshur if he didn't intend to see me. I might as well have stayed there. Let me see the king; if he finds me guilty of anything, then let him execute me."

[33] So Joab told the king what Absalom had said. Then at last David summoned his estranged son, and Absalom came and bowed low before the king, and David kissed him.

David only made halfhearted efforts to correct his children. He did not punish Amnon for his sin against Tamar, nor did he deal decisively with Absalom's murder of Amnon. Such indecisiveness became David's undoing. When we ignore sin, we experience greater pain than if we deal with it immediately.

## Chapter 15

[15:1] After this, Absalom bought a chariot and horses, and he hired fifty footmen to run ahead of him. [2] He got up early every morning and went out to the gate of the city. When people brought a case to the king for judgment, Absalom would ask where they were from, and they would tell him their tribe.

The city gate was like city hall and a shopping center combined. Because Jerusalem was the nation's capital, both local and national leaders met there

daily to transact business and conduct government affairs. The city gate was the perfect spot for this because government and business transactions needed witnesses to be legitimate, and anyone entering or leaving the city had to enter through the gate. Merchants set up their tent-shops near the gate for the same reason. Absalom, therefore, went to the city gate to win the hearts of Israel's leaders as well as those of the common people.

[3] Then Absalom would say, "You've really got a strong case here! It's too bad the king doesn't have anyone to hear it. [4] I wish I were the judge. Then people could bring their problems to me, and I would give them justice!" [5] And when people tried to bow before him, Absalom wouldn't let them. Instead, he took them by the hand and embraced them. [6] So in this way, Absalom stole the hearts of all the people of Israel.

Absalom's political strategy was to steal the hearts of the people with his good looks, grand entrances, apparent concern for justice, and friendly embraces. Many were fooled and switched their allegiance. Later, however, Absalom proved to be an evil ruler.

We need to evaluate our leaders to make sure their charisma is not a mask covering graft, deception, or hunger for power. Make sure that underneath their style and charm, they are able to make good decisions and handle people wisely.

[7] After four years, Absalom said to the king, "Let me go to Hebron to offer a sacrifice to the Lord in fulfillment of a vow I made to him. [8] For while I was at Geshur, I promised to sacrifice to him in Hebron if he would bring me back to Jerusalem."

[9] "All right," the king told him. "Go and fulfill your vow."

So Absalom went to Hebron.

Absalom went to Hebron because it was his hometown (2 Samuel 3:2-3). Hebron was David's first capital as well, and there Absalom could expect to find loyal friends who would be proud of him.

[10] But while he was there, he sent secret messengers to every part of Israel to stir up a rebellion against the king. "As soon as you hear the trumpets," his message read, "you will know that Absalom has been crowned king in Hebron." [11] He took two hundred men from Jerusalem with him as guests, but they knew nothing of his intentions. [12] While he was offering the

sacrifices, he sent for Ahithophel, one of David's counselors who lived in Giloh. Soon many others also joined Absalom, and the conspiracy gained momentum.

[13] A messenger soon arrived in Jerusalem to tell King David, "All Israel has joined Absalom in a conspiracy against you!"

[14] "Then we must flee at once, or it will be too late!" David urged his men. "Hurry! If we get out of the city before he arrives, both we and the city of Jerusalem will be spared from disaster."

Had David not escaped from Jerusalem, the ensuing fight might have killed both him and many innocent inhabitants of the city. Some fights that we think necessary can be costly and destructive to those around us. In such cases, it may be wise to back down and save the fight for another day—even if doing so hurts our pride. It takes courage to stand and fight, but it also takes courage to back down for the sake of others.

Why couldn't David just crush this rebellion? There were several reasons he chose to flee: (1) The rebellion was widespread (2 Samuel 15:10-13) and would not have been easily suppressed; (2) David did not want the city of Jerusalem to be destroyed; (3) David still cared for his son and did not want to hurt him. We know that David expected to return to Jerusalem soon because he left ten of his concubines to take care of the palace (2 Samuel 15:16).

[15] "We are with you," his advisers replied. "Do what you think is best."  
[16] So the king and his household set out at once. He left no one behind except ten of his concubines to keep the palace in order. [17] The king and his people set out on foot, and they paused at the edge of the city [18] to let David's troops move past to lead the way. There were six hundred Gittites who had come with David from Gath, along with the king's bodyguard.

David had many loyal non-Israelites in his armed forces. The Gittites, from the Philistine city of Gath, were apparently friends David had acquired while hiding from Saul. The Kerethites and Pelethites were also from Philistine territory. Although Israel was supposed to destroy wicked enemies, the nation was to welcome foreigners who came on friendly terms (Exodus 23:9; Deut. 10:19) and to try to show them the importance of obeying God.

David needed spies in Absalom's court to inform him of Absalom's decisions. By sending Hushai to Absalom as a supposed traitor to David, Hushai could offer advice contradictory to Ahithophel's advice. Ahithophel was Absalom's adviser (he was also Bathsheba's grandfather).

[19] Then the king turned to Ittai, the captain of the Gittites, and asked, "Why are you coming with us? Go on back with your men to King Absalom, for you are a guest in Israel, a foreigner in exile. [20] You arrived only yesterday, and now should I force you to wander with us? I don't even know where we will go. Go on back and take your troops with you, and may the Lord show you his unfailing love and faithfulness."

[21] But Ittai said to the king, "I vow by the Lord and by your own life that I will go wherever you go, no matter what happens—whether it means life or death."

[22] David replied, "All right, come with us." So Ittai and his six hundred men and their families went along.

[23] There was deep sadness throughout the land as the king and his followers passed by. They crossed the Kidron Valley and then went out toward the wilderness.

[24] Abiathar and Zadok and the Levites took the Ark of the Covenant of God and set it down beside the road. Then they offered sacrifices there until everyone had passed by. [25] David instructed Zadok to take the Ark of God back into the city. "If the Lord sees fit," David said, "he will bring me back to see the Ark and the Tabernacle again. [26] But if he is through with me, then let him do what seems best to him."

[27] Then the king told Zadok the priest, "Look, here is my plan. You and Abiathar should return quietly to the city with your son Ahimaaz and Abiathar's son Jonathan. [28] I will stop at the shallows of the Jordan River and wait there for a message from you. Let me know what happens in Jerusalem before I disappear into the wilderness." [29] So Zadok and Abiathar took the Ark of God back to the city and stayed there.

[30] David walked up the road that led to the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went. His head was covered and his feet were bare as a sign of mourning. And the people who were with him covered their heads and wept as they climbed the mountain. [31] When someone told David that his adviser Ahithophel was now backing Absalom, David prayed, "O Lord, let Ahithophel give Absalom foolish advice!"

[32] As they reached the spot at the top of the Mount of Olives where people worshiped God, David found Hushai the Arkite waiting for him. Hushai had torn his clothing and put dirt on his head as a sign of mourning.



[33] But David told him, "If you go with me, you will only be a burden. [34] Return to Jerusalem and tell Absalom, 'I will now be your adviser, just as I was your father's adviser in the past.' Then you can frustrate and counter Ahithophel's advice. [35] Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, are there. Tell them the plans that are being made to capture me, [36] and they will send their sons Ahimaaz and Jonathan to find me and tell me what is going on." [37] So David's friend Hushai returned to Jerusalem, getting there just as Absalom arrived.

## Chapter 16

[16:1] David was just past the top of the hill when Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth, caught up with him. He was leading two donkeys loaded with two hundred loaves of bread, one hundred clusters of raisins, one hundred bunches of summer fruit, and a skin of wine.

[2] "What are these for?" the king asked Ziba.

And Ziba replied, "The donkeys are for your people to ride on, and the bread and summer fruit are for the young men to eat. The wine is to be taken with you into the wilderness for those who become faint."

[3] "And where is Mephibosheth?" the king asked him.

"He stayed in Jerusalem," Ziba replied. "He said, 'Today I will get back the kingdom of my grandfather Saul.' "

Saul was Mephibosheth's grandfather. Most likely Ziba was lying, hoping to receive a reward from David. (See 2 Samuel 19:24-30 for Mephibosheth's side of the story.) For the story of Mephibosheth, see 2 Samuel 9.

[4] "In that case," the king told Ziba, "I give you everything Mephibosheth owns."

"Thank you, sir," Ziba replied. "I will always do whatever you want me to do."

David believed Ziba's charge against Mephibosheth without checking into it or even being skeptical. Don't be hasty to accept someone's condemnation of another, especially when the accuser may profit from the other's downfall. David should have been skeptical of Ziba's comments until he checked them out for himself.

[5] As David and his party passed Bahurim, a man came out of the village cursing them. It was Shimei son of Gera, a member of Saul's family. [6] He threw stones at the king and the king's officers and all the mighty warriors who surrounded them. [7] "Get out of here, you murderer, you scoundrel!" he shouted at David. [8] "The Lord is paying you back for murdering Saul and his family. You stole his throne, and now the Lord has given it to your son Absalom. At last you will taste some of your own medicine, you murderer!"

[9] "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king?" Abishai son of Zeruiah demanded. "Let me go over and cut off his head!"

[10] "No!" the king said. "What am I going to do with you sons of Zeruiah! If the Lord has told him to curse me, who am I to stop him?" [11] Then David said to Abishai and the other officers, "My own son is trying to kill me. Shouldn't this relative of Saul have even more reason to do so? Leave him alone and let him curse, for the Lord has told him to do it. [12]

And perhaps the Lord will see that I am being wronged and will bless me because of these curses." [13] So David and his men continued on, and Shimei kept pace with them on a nearby hillside, cursing as he went and throwing stones at David and tossing dust into the air.

[14] The king and all who were with him grew weary along the way, so they rested when they reached the Jordan River.

Shimei kept up a steady tirade against David. Although his curses were unjustified because David had had no part in Saul's death, David and his followers quietly tolerated the abuse. Maintaining your composure in the face of unjustified criticism can be a trying experience and an emotional drain, but if you can't stop criticism, it is best just to ignore it. Remember that God knows what you are enduring, and he will vindicate you if you are in the right.

This incident fulfilled Nathan's prediction that because of David's sin, another man would sleep with his wives (2 Samuel 12:11-12). (See the note on +2 Samuel 3:6-7 for the cultural significance of this act.)

[15] Meanwhile, Absalom and his men arrived at Jerusalem, accompanied by Ahithophel. [16] When David's friend Hushai the Arkite arrived, he went immediately to see Absalom. "Long live the king!" he exclaimed. "Long live the king!"

[17] "Is this the way you treat your friend David?" Absalom asked him. "Why aren't you with him?"

[18] "I'm here because I work for the man who is chosen by the Lord and by Israel," Hushai replied. [19] "And anyway, why shouldn't I serve you? I helped your father, and now I will help you!"

[20] Then Absalom turned to Ahithophel and asked him, "What should I do next?"

[21] Ahithophel told him, "Go and sleep with your father's concubines, for he has left them here to keep the house. Then all Israel will know that you have insulted him beyond hope of reconciliation, and they will give you their support." [22] So they set up a tent on the palace roof where everyone could see it, and Absalom went into the tent to sleep with his father's concubines.

[23] Absalom followed Ahithophel's advice, just as David had done. For every word Ahithophel spoke seemed as wise as though it had come directly from the mouth of God.

Ahithophel was an adviser to Absalom. Most rulers had advisers to help them make decisions about governmental and political matters. They probably arranged the king's marriages as well because these were usually politically motivated unions. But God made Ahithophel's advice seem foolish, just as David had prayed (2 Samuel 15:31).

## Chapter 17

[17:1] Now Ahithophel urged Absalom, "Let me choose twelve thousand men to start out after David tonight. [2] I will catch up to him while he is weary and discouraged. He and his troops will panic, and everyone will run away. Then I will kill only the king, [3] and I will bring all the people back to you as a bride returns to her husband. After all, it is only this man's life that you seek. Then all the people will remain unharmed and peaceful." [4] This plan seemed good to Absalom and to all the other leaders of Israel.

[5] But then Absalom said, "Bring in Hushai the Arkite. Let's see what he thinks about this." [6] When Hushai arrived, Absalom told him what Ahithophel had said. Then he asked, "What is your opinion? Should we follow Ahithophel's advice? If not, speak up."

[7] "Well," Hushai replied, "this time I think Ahithophel has made a mistake. [8] You know your father and his men; they are mighty warriors. Right now they are probably as enraged as a mother bear that has been robbed of her cubs. And remember that your father is an experienced soldier. He won't be spending the night among the troops. [9] He has probably already hidden in some pit or cave. And when he comes out and attacks and a few of your men fall, there will be panic among your troops, and everyone will start shouting that your men are being slaughtered. [10] Then even the bravest of them, though they have the heart of a lion, will be paralyzed with fear. For all Israel knows what a mighty man your father is and how courageous his warriors are.

[11] "I suggest that you mobilize the entire army of Israel, bringing them from as far away as Dan and Beersheba. That way you will have an army as numerous as the sand on the seashore. And I think that you should personally lead the troops.

Hushai appealed to Absalom through flattery, and Absalom's vanity became his own trap. Hushai predicted great glory for Absalom if he personally led the entire army against David. "Pride goes before destruction" (Proverbs 16:18) is an appropriate comment on Absalom's ambitions.

[12] When we find David, we can descend on him like the dew that falls to the ground, so that not one of his men is left alive. [13] And if David has escaped into some city, you will have the entire army of Israel there at your command. Then we can take ropes and drag the walls of the city into the nearest valley until every stone is torn down."

[14] Then Absalom and all the leaders of Israel said, "Hushai's advice is better than Ahithophel's." For the Lord had arranged to defeat the counsel of Ahithophel, which really was the better plan, so that he could bring disaster upon Absalom!

[15] Then Hushai reported to Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, what Ahithophel had said and what he himself had suggested instead. [16] "Quick!" he told them. "Find David and urge him not to stay at the shallows of the Jordan River tonight. He must go across at once into the wilderness beyond. Otherwise he will die and his entire army with him."

[17] Jonathan and Ahimaaz had been staying at En-rogel so as not to be seen entering and leaving the city. Arrangements had been made for a servant girl to bring them the message they were to take to King David.

[18] But a boy saw them leaving En-rogel to go to David, and he told Absalom about it. Meanwhile, they escaped to Bahurim, where a man hid them inside a well in his courtyard. [19] The man's wife put a cloth over the top of the well with grain on it to dry in the sun; so no one suspected they were there.

[20] When Absalom's men arrived, they asked her, "Have you seen Ahimaaz and Jonathan?"

She replied, "They were here, but they crossed the brook." Absalom's men looked for them without success and returned to Jerusalem.

[21] Then the two men crawled out of the well and hurried on to King David. "Quick!" they told him, "cross the Jordan tonight!" And they told him how Ahithophel had advised that he be captured and killed. [22] So David and all the people with him went across the Jordan River during the night, and they were all on the other bank before dawn.

[23] Meanwhile, Ahithophel was publicly disgraced when Absalom refused his advice. So he saddled his donkey, went to his hometown, set his affairs in order, and hanged himself. He died there and was buried beside his father.

[24] David soon arrived at Mahanaim. By now, Absalom had mobilized the entire army of Israel and was leading his troops across the Jordan River. [25] Absalom had appointed Amasa as commander of his army, replacing Joab, who had been commander under David. (Amasa was Joab's cousin. His father was Jether, an Ishmaelite. His mother, Abigail daughter of Nahash, was the sister of Joab's mother, Zeruah.) [26] Absalom and the Israelite army set up camp in the land of Gilead. Joab and Amasa were David's nephews and Absalom's cousins. Because Joab had left Jerusalem with David (see 2 Samuel 18:5, 10ff), Amasa took his place as commander of Israel's troops.

[27] When David arrived at Mahanaim, he was warmly greeted by Shobi son of Nahash of Rabbah, an Ammonite, and by Makir son of Ammiel of Lo-debar, and by Barzillai of Gilead from Rogelim. [28] They brought sleeping mats, cooking pots, serving bowls, wheat and barley flour, roasted grain, beans, lentils, [29] honey, butter, sheep, and cheese for David and

those who were with him. For they said, "You must all be very tired and hungry and thirsty after your long march through the wilderness."

## **Chapter 18**

[18:1] David now appointed generals and captains to lead his troops.

David took command as he had in former days. In recent years, his life had been characterized by indecisiveness and moral paralysis. At this time he began to take charge and do his duty.

[2] One-third were placed under Joab, one-third under Joab's brother Abishai son of Zeruah, and one-third under Ittai the Gittite. The king told his troops, "I am going out with you."

[3] But his men objected strongly. "You must not go," they urged. "If we have to turn and run—and even if half of us die—it will make no difference to Absalom's troops; they will be looking only for you. You are worth ten thousand of us, and it is better that you stay here in the city and send us help if we need it."

[4] "If you think that's the best plan, I'll do it," the king finally agreed. So he stood at the gate of the city as all the divisions of troops passed by. [5] And the king gave this command to Joab, Abishai, and Ittai: "For my sake, deal gently with young Absalom." And all the troops heard the king give this order to his commanders.

[6] So the battle began in the forest of Ephraim, [7] and the Israelite troops were beaten back by David's men. There was a great slaughter, and twenty thousand men laid down their lives that day. [8] The battle raged all across the countryside, and more men died because of the forest than were killed by the sword.

[9] During the battle, Absalom came unexpectedly upon some of David's men. He tried to escape on his mule, but as he rode beneath the thick branches of a great oak, his head got caught. His mule kept going and left him dangling in the air. [10] One of David's men saw what had happened and told Joab, "I saw Absalom dangling in a tree."

[11] "What?" Joab demanded. "You saw him there and didn't kill him? I would have rewarded you with ten pieces of silver and a hero's belt!"

[12] "I wouldn't do it for a thousand pieces of silver," the man replied. "We all heard the king say to you and Abishai and Ittai, 'For my sake, please don't harm young Absalom.'" [13] And if I had betrayed the king by killing his son—and the king would certainly find out who did it—you yourself would be the first to abandon me."

[14] "Enough of this nonsense," Joab said. Then he took three daggers and plunged them into Absalom's heart as he dangled from the oak still alive.

This man had caught Joab in his hypocrisy. He knew Joab would have turned on him for killing the man if the king had found out about it. Joab could not answer, but only dismissed him. Those about to do evil often do not take the time to consider what they are about to do. They don't care whether or not it is right or lawful. Don't rush into action without thinking. Consider whether what you are about to do is right or wrong.



[15] Ten of Joab's young armor bearers then surrounded Absalom and killed him. [16] Then Joab blew the trumpet, and his men returned from chasing the army of Israel. [17] They threw Absalom's body into a deep pit in the forest and piled a great heap of stones over it. And the army of Israel fled to their homes.

[18] During his lifetime, Absalom had built a monument to himself in the King's Valley, for he had said, "I have no son to carry on my name." He named the monument after himself, and it is known as Absalom's Monument to this day.

[19] Then Zadok's son Ahimaaz said, "Let me run to the king with the good news that the Lord has saved him from his enemy Absalom."

[20] "No," Joab told him, "it wouldn't be good news to the king that his son is dead. You can be my messenger some other time, but not today."

[21] Then Joab said to a man from Cush, "Go tell the king what you have seen." The man bowed and ran off.

[22] But Ahimaaz continued to plead with Joab, "Whatever happens, please let me go, too."

"Why should you go, my son?" Joab replied. "There will be no reward for you."

[23] "Yes, but let me go anyway," he begged.

Joab finally said, "All right, go ahead." Then Ahimaaz took a shortcut across the plain of the Jordan and got to Mahanaim ahead of the man from Cush.

[24] While David was sitting at the city gate, the watchman climbed to the roof of the gateway by the wall. As he looked, he saw a lone man running toward them. [25] He shouted the news down to David, and the king replied, "If he is alone, he has news."

As the messenger came closer, [26] the watchman saw another man running toward them. He shouted down, "Here comes another one!"

The king replied, "He also will have news."

[27] "The first man runs like Ahimaaz son of Zadok," the watchman said. "He is a good man and comes with good news," the king replied.

[28] Then Ahimaaz cried out to the king, "All is well!" He bowed low with his face to the ground and said, "Blessed be the Lord your God, who has handed over the rebels who dared to stand against you."

[29] "What about young Absalom?" the king demanded. "Is he all right?"

Ahimaaz replied, "When Joab told me to come, there was a lot of commotion. But I didn't know what was happening."

Although he reached the city first, Ahimaaz was afraid to tell the king the truth about the death of his son Absalom

[30] "Wait here," the king told him. So Ahimaaz stepped aside.

[31] Then the man from Cush arrived and said, "I have good news for my lord the king. Today the Lord has rescued you from all those who rebelled against you."

[32] "What about young Absalom?" the king demanded. "Is he all right?"

And the Cushite replied, "May all of your enemies, both now and in the future, be as that young man is!"

[33] The king was overcome with emotion. He went up to his room over the gateway and burst into tears. And as he went, he cried, "O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I could have died instead of you! O Absalom, my son, my son."

Why was David so upset over the death of his rebel son? (1) David realized that he, in part, was responsible for Absalom's death. Nathan, the prophet, had said that because David had killed Uriah, his own sons would rebel against him. (2) David was angry with Joab and his officers for killing Absalom against his wishes. (3) David truly loved his son, even though Absalom did nothing to deserve his love. It would have been kinder and more loving to deal with Absalom and his runaway ego when he was younger.

## Chapter 19

[19:1] Word soon reached Joab that the king was weeping and mourning for Absalom. [2] As the troops heard of the king's deep grief for his son, the joy of that day's victory was turned into deep sadness. [3] They crept back into the city as though they were ashamed and had been beaten in battle. [4]

The king covered his face with his hands and kept on weeping, "O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!"

[5] Then Joab went to the king's room and said to him, "We saved your life today and the lives of your sons, your daughters, and your wives and concubines. Yet you act like this, making us feel ashamed, as though we had done something wrong. [6] You seem to love those who hate you and hate those who love you. You have made it clear today that we mean nothing to you. If Absalom had lived and all of us had died, you would be pleased. [7] Now go out there and congratulate the troops, for I swear by the Lord that if you don't, not a single one of them will remain here tonight. Then you will be worse off than you have ever been."

At times we must reprove those in authority over us. Joab knew he was risking the king's displeasure by confronting him, but he saw what had to be done. Joab told David that there would be dreadful consequences if he didn't commend the troops for their victory. Joab's actions are a helpful example to us when personal confrontation is necessary.

[8] So the king went out and sat at the city gate, and as the news spread throughout the city that he was there, everyone went to him.

Meanwhile, the Israelites who supported Absalom had fled to their homes.

David sat at the gateway (city gate) because that was where business was conducted and judgment rendered. His presence there showed that he was over his mourning and back in control.

[9] And throughout the tribes of Israel there was much discussion and argument going on. The people were saying, "The king saved us from our enemies, the Philistines, but Absalom chased him out of the country. [10] Now Absalom, whom we anointed to rule over us, is dead. Let's ask David to come back and be our king again."

Just a few days before, most of Israel was supporting the rebel ruler Absalom. Now the people wanted David back as their king. Because crowds are often fickle, there must be a higher moral code to follow than the pleasure of the majority. Following the moral principles given in God's Word will help you avoid being swayed by the popular opinions of the crowd.

[11] Then King David sent Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, to say to the leaders of Judah, "Why are you the last ones to reinstate the king? For I have heard that all Israel is ready, and only you are holding out. [12] Yet you are my relatives, my own tribe, and my own flesh and blood! Why are you the last ones to welcome me back?" [13] And David told them to tell Amasa, "Since you are my nephew, may God strike me dead if I do not appoint you as commander of my army in place of Joab."

David's appointment of Amasa was a shrewd political move. First, Amasa had been commander of Absalom's army; by making Amasa his commander, David would secure the allegiance of the rebel army. Second, by replacing Joab as commander in chief, David punished him for his previous crimes (2 Samuel 3:26-29). Third, Amasa had a great deal of influence over the leaders of Judah (2 Samuel 19:14). All of these moves would help to unite the kingdom.

[14] Then Amasa convinced all the leaders of Judah, and they responded unanimously. They sent word to the king, "Return to us, and bring back all those who are with you."

[15] So the king started back to Jerusalem. And when he arrived at the Jordan River, the people of Judah came to Gilgal to meet him and escort him across the river. [16] Then Shimei son of Gera, the man from Bahurim in Benjamin, hurried across with the men of Judah to welcome King David. [17] A thousand men from the tribe of Benjamin were with him, including Ziba, the servant of Saul, and Ziba's fifteen sons and twenty servants. They rushed down to the Jordan to arrive ahead of the king. [18] They all crossed the ford and worked hard ferrying the king's household across the river, helping them in every way they could.

As the king was about to cross the river, Shimei fell down before him. [19] "My lord the king, please forgive me," he pleaded. "Forget the terrible thing I did when you left Jerusalem. [20] I know how much I sinned. That is why I have come here today, the very first person in all Israel to greet you."

By admitting his wrong and asking David's forgiveness, Shimei was trying to save his own life. His plan worked for a while. This was a day of

celebration, not execution. But we read in 1 Kings 2:8-9 that David advised Solomon to execute Shimei.

[21] Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said, "Shimei should die, for he cursed the Lord's anointed king!"

David showed tremendous mercy and generosity as he returned to Jerusalem. He spared Shimei, restored Mephibosheth, and rewarded faithful Barzillai. David's fairness sets a standard for government that will be fully realized in Christ's righteous rule in the coming kingdom.

[22] "What am I going to do with you sons of Zeruiah!" David exclaimed. "This is not a day for execution but for celebration! I am once again the king of Israel!" [23] Then, turning to Shimei, David vowed, "Your life will be spared."

[24] Now Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson, arrived from Jerusalem to meet the king. He had not washed his feet or clothes nor trimmed his beard since the day the king left Jerusalem. [25] "Why didn't you come with me, Mephibosheth?" the king asked him.

[26] Mephibosheth replied, "My lord the king, my servant Ziba deceived me. I told him, 'Saddle my donkey so that I can go with the king.' For as you know I am crippled. [27] Ziba has slandered me by saying that I refused to come. But I know that you are like an angel of God, so do what you think is best. [28] All my relatives and I could expect only death from you, my lord, but instead you have honored me among those who eat at your own table! So how can I complain?"

[29] "All right," David replied. "My decision is that you and Ziba will divide your land equally between you."

[30] "Give him all of it," Mephibosheth said. "I am content just to have you back again, my lord!"

David could not be certain if Mephibosheth or Ziba was in the right, and Scripture leaves the question unanswered. (For the whole story on Mephibosheth, see also 2 Samuel 9:1-13 and 2 Samuel 16:1-4.)

[31] Barzillai of Gilead now arrived from Rogelim to conduct the king across the Jordan. [32] He was very old, about eighty, and very wealthy. He

was the one who had provided food for the king during his stay in Mahanaim. [33] "Come across with me and live in Jerusalem," the king said to Barzillai. "I will take care of you there."

[34] "No," he replied, "I am far too old for that. [35] I am eighty years old today, and I can no longer enjoy anything. Food and wine are no longer tasty, and I cannot hear the musicians as they play. I would only be a burden to my lord the king. [36] Just to go across the river with you is all the honor I need! [37] Then let me return again to die in my own town, where my father and mother are buried. But here is my son Kimham. Let him go with you and receive whatever good things you want to give him."

[38] "Good," the king agreed. "Kimham will go with me, and I will do for him whatever I would have done for you." [39] So all the people crossed the Jordan with the king. After David had blessed and embraced him, Barzillai returned to his own home. [40] The king then went on to Gilgal, taking Kimham with him. All the army of Judah and half the army of Israel escorted him across the river.

[41] But the men of Israel complained to the king that the men of Judah had gotten to do most of the work in helping him cross the Jordan. [42] "Why not?" the men of Judah replied. "The king is one of our own tribe. Why should this make you angry? We have charged him nothing. And he hasn't fed us or even given us gifts!"

[43] "But there are ten tribes in Israel," the others replied. "So we have ten times as much right to the king as you do. Why did you treat us with such contempt? Remember, we were the first to speak of bringing him back to be our king again." The argument continued back and forth, and the men of Judah were very harsh in their replies.

## Chapter 20

[20:1] Then a troublemaker named Sheba son of Bicri, a man from the tribe of Benjamin, blew a trumpet and shouted, "We have nothing to do with

David. We want no part of this son of Jesse. Come on, you men of Israel, let's all go home!"

Although Israel was a united kingdom; it was still made up of 12 separate tribes. These tribes often had difficulty agreeing on the goals of the nation as a whole. Tribal jealousies had originally kept Israel from completely conquering the promised land (read the book of Joshua), and now tribal jealousies were threatening the stability of David's reign by giving Sheba an opportunity to rebel (2 Samuel 20:1ff).

[2] So the men of Israel deserted David and followed Sheba. But the men of Judah stayed with their king and escorted him from the Jordan River to Jerusalem.

[3] When the king arrived at his palace in Jerusalem, he instructed that the ten concubines he had left to keep house should be placed in seclusion. Their needs were to be cared for, he said, but he would no longer sleep with them. So each of them lived like a widow until she died.

[4] Then the king instructed Amasa to mobilize the army of Judah within three days and to report back at that time. [5] So Amasa went out to notify the troops, but it took him longer than the three days he had been given. [6] Then David said to Abishai, "That troublemaker Sheba is going to hurt us more than Absalom did. Quick, take my troops and chase after him before he gets into a fortified city where we can't reach him."

[7] So Abishai and Joab set out after Sheba with an elite guard from Joab's army and the king's own bodyguard. [8] As they arrived at the great stone in Gibeon, Amasa met them, coming from the opposite direction. Joab was wearing his uniform with a dagger strapped to his belt. As he stepped forward to greet Amasa, he secretly slipped the dagger from its sheath. [9] "How are you, my cousin?" Joab said and took him by the beard with his right hand as though to kiss him. [10] Amasa didn't notice the dagger in his left hand, and Joab stabbed him in the stomach with it so that his insides gushed out onto the ground. Joab did not need to strike again, and Amasa soon died. Joab and his brother Abishai left him lying there and continued after Sheba.

Once again Joab's murderous act went unpunished, just as it did when he killed Abner (2 Samuel 3:26-27). Eventually, however, justice caught up with him (1 Kings 2:28-35). It may seem that sin and treachery often go unpunished, but God's justice is not limited to this life's rewards. Even if Joab had died of old age, he would have to face the Day of Judgment.

[11] One of Joab's young officers shouted to Amasa's troops, "If you are for Joab and David, come and follow Joab." [12] But Amasa lay in his blood in the middle of the road, and Joab's officer saw that a crowd was gathering around to stare at him. So he pulled him off the road into a field and threw a cloak over him. [13] With Amasa's body out of the way, everyone went on with Joab to capture Sheba.

[14] Meanwhile, Sheba had traveled across Israel to mobilize his own clan of Bicri at the city of Abel-beth-maacah. [15] When Joab's forces arrived, they attacked Abel-beth-maacah and built a ramp against the city wall and began battering it down. [16] But a wise woman in the city called out to Joab, "Listen to me, Joab. Come over here so I can talk to you."

Joab's men were attacking the city, and it looked as if it would be destroyed. Though women in that society were usually quiet in public, this woman spoke out. She stopped Joab's attack, not with weapons, but with wise words and a plan of action. Often the courage to speak a few sensible words can prevent great disaster

[17] As he approached, the woman asked, "Are you Joab?"

"I am," he replied.

So she said, "Listen carefully to your servant."

"I'm listening," he said.

[18] Then she continued, "There used to be a saying, 'If you want to settle an argument, ask advice at the city of Abel.' [19] I am one who is peace loving and faithful in Israel. But you are destroying a loyal city. Why do you want to destroy what belongs to the Lord?"

[20] And Joab replied, "Believe me, I don't want to destroy your city! [21] All I want is a man named Sheba son of Bicri from the hill country of Ephraim, who has revolted against King David. If you hand him over to me, we will leave the city in peace."

"All right," the woman replied, "we will throw his head over the wall to you." [22] Then the woman went to the people with her wise advice, and they cut off Sheba's head and threw it out to Joab. So he blew the trumpet and called his troops back from the attack, and they all returned to their homes. Joab returned to the king at Jerusalem.

[23] Joab once again became the commander of David's army. Benaiah son of Jehoiada was commander of the king's bodyguard.



Benaiah was the captain of David's bodyguard and a famous member of that special group of mighty men called "the Thirty" (2 Samuel 23:24). He remained loyal to David during Absalom's rebellion. Later he helped establish Solomon as king (1 Kings 1:32-40; 1 Kings 2:28-34) and eventually replaced Joab as commander of Israel's army (1 Kings 2:35).

[24] Adoniram was in charge of the labor force. Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was the royal historian. [25] Sheva was the court secretary. Zadok and Abiathar were the priests. [26] Ira the Jairite was David's personal priest.

## Chapter 21

[21:1] There was a famine during David's reign that lasted for three years, so David asked the Lord about it. And the Lord said, "The famine has come because Saul and his family are guilty of murdering the Gibeonites."

Farmers relied heavily on spring and fall rains for their crops. If the rains stopped or came at the wrong time, or if the plants became insect infested, there would be drastic food shortages in the coming year. Agriculture at that time was completely dependent upon natural conditions. There were no irrigation sprinklers, fertilizers, or pesticides. Even moderate variations in rainfall or insect activity could destroy an entire harvest.

The next four chapters are an appendix to the book. The events described are not presented in chronological order. They tell of David's exploits at various times during his reign.

[2] So King David summoned the Gibeonites. They were not part of Israel but were all that was left of the nation of the Amorites. Israel had sworn not to kill them, but Saul, in his zeal, had tried to wipe them out. [3] David asked them, "What can I do for you to make amends? Tell me so that the Lord will bless his people again."

[4] "Well, money won't do it," the Gibeonites replied. "And we don't want to see the Israelites executed in revenge."

"What can I do then?" David asked. "Just tell me and I will do it for you."

[5] Then they replied, "It was Saul who planned to destroy us, to keep us from having any place at all in Israel. [6] So let seven of Saul's sons or grandsons be handed over to us, and we will execute them before the Lord at Gibeon, on the mountain of the Lord."

"All right," the king said, "I will do it." [7] David spared Jonathan's son Mephibosheth, who was Saul's grandson, because of the oath David and Jonathan had sworn before the Lord. [8] But he gave them Saul's two sons Armoni and Mephibosheth, whose mother was Rizpah daughter of Aiah. He also gave them the five sons of Saul's daughter Merab, the wife of Adriel son of Barzillai from Meholah. [9] The men of Gibeon executed them on the mountain before the Lord. So all seven of them died together at the beginning of the barley harvest.

Although the Bible does not record Saul's act of vengeance against the Gibeonites, it was apparently a serious crime making him guilty of their blood. Still, why were Saul's sons killed for the murders their father committed? In many Near Eastern cultures, including Israel's, an entire family was held guilty for the crime of the father because the family was

considered an indissoluble unit. Saul broke the vow that the Israelites made to the Gibeonites (Joshua 9:16-20). This was a serious offense against God's law (Numbers 30:1-2). Either David was following the custom of treating the family as a unit, or Saul's sons were guilty of helping Saul kill the Gibeonites.

[10] Then Rizpah, the mother of two of the men, spread sackcloth on a rock and stayed there the entire harvest season. She prevented vultures from tearing at their bodies during the day and stopped wild animals from eating them at night. [11] When David learned what Rizpah, Saul's concubine, had done, [12] he went to the people of Jabesh-gilead and asked for the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan. (When Saul and Jonathan had died in a battle with the Philistines, it was the people of Jabesh-gilead who had retrieved their bodies from the public square of the Philistine city of Beth-shan.) [13] So David brought the bones of Saul and Jonathan, as well as the bones of the men the Gibeonites had executed. [14] He buried them all in the tomb of Kish, Saul's father, at the town of Zela in the land of Benjamin. After that, God ended the famine in the land of Israel.

The barley harvest was in late April and early May. Barley was similar to wheat but less suitable for bread making. Rizpah guarded the men's bodies during the entire harvest season, which lasted from April to October.

[15] Once again the Philistines were at war with Israel. And when David and his men were in the thick of battle, David became weak and exhausted. [16] Ishbi-benob was a descendant of the giants; his bronze spearhead weighed more than seven pounds, and he was armed with a new sword. He had cornered David and was about to kill him. [17] But Abishai son of Zeruiah came to his rescue and killed the Philistine. After that, David's men declared, "You are not going out to battle again! Why should we risk snuffing out the light of Israel?"

[18] After this, there was another battle against the Philistines at Gob. As they fought, Sibbecai from Hushah killed Saph, another descendant of the giants.

By calling these men "descendants of Rapha," the writer was saying that they were giants. For more information on giants, see 1 Samuel 17:4-7 and the note on +Genesis 6:4.

[19] In still another battle at Gob, Elhanan son of Jair from Bethlehem killed the brother of Goliath of Gath. The handle of his spear was as thick as a

weaver's beam! [20] In another battle with the Philistines at Gath, a huge man with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot—a descendant of the giants— [21] defied and taunted Israel. But he was killed by Jonathan, the son of David's brother Shimea. [22] These four Philistines were descended from the giants of Gath, but they were killed by David and his warriors.

## Chapter 22

[22:1] David sang this song to the Lord after the Lord had rescued him from all his enemies and from Saul.

David was a skilled musician who played his harp for Saul (1 Samuel 16:23), instituted the music programs in the temple (1 Chron. 25), and wrote more of the book of Psalms than anyone else. Writing a song like this was not unusual for David. This royal hymn of thanksgiving is almost identical to Psalm 18. (For other songs in the Bible, see the chart in Exodus 15:21.)

David calls God “the horn of my salvation,” referring to the strength and defensive protection animals have in their horns. God had helped David overcome his enemies and rescued him from his foes.

[2] These are the words he sang:

"The Lord is my rock, my fortress, and my savior;

[3] My God is my rock, in which I find protection.

He is my shield, the strength of my salvation, and my stronghold,

My high tower, my savior, the one who saves me from violence.

[4] I will call on the Lord, who is worthy of praise,

For he saves me from my enemies.

[5] "The waves of death surrounded me;

The floods of destruction swept over me.

[6] The grave wrapped its ropes around me;

Death itself stared me in the face.

[7] But in my distress I cried out to the Lord;

Yes, I called to my God for help.

He heard me from his sanctuary;

My cry reached his ears.

[8] "Then the earth quaked and trembled;

The foundations of the heavens shook;

They quaked because of his anger.

[9] Smoke poured from his nostrils;

Fierce flames leaped from his mouth;

Glowing coals flamed forth from him.

[10] He opened the heavens and came down;

dark storm clouds were beneath his feet.

[11] Mounted on a mighty angel, he flew,

soaring on the wings of the wind.

[12] He shrouded himself in darkness,

veiling his approach with dense rain clouds.

- [13] A great brightness shone before him,  
and bolts of lightning blazed forth.
- [14] The Lord thundered from heaven;  
The Most High gave a mighty shout.
- [15] He shot his arrows and scattered his enemies;  
His lightning flashed, and they were confused.
- [16] Then at the command of the Lord,  
At the blast of his breath,  
The bottom of the sea could be seen,  
and the foundations of the earth were laid bare.
- [17] "He reached down from heaven and rescued me;  
He drew me out of deep waters.
- [18] He delivered me from my powerful enemies,  
from those who hated me and were too strong for me.
- [19] They attacked me at a moment when I was weakest,  
But the Lord upheld me.
- [20] He led me to a place of safety;  
he rescued me because he delights in me.
- [21] The Lord rewarded me for doing right;  
he compensated me because of my innocence.
- [22] For I have kept the ways of the Lord;  
I have not turned from my God to follow evil.
- [23] For all his laws are constantly before me;  
I have never abandoned his principles.
- [24] I am blameless before God;  
I have kept myself from sin.
- [25] The Lord rewarded me for doing right,  
because of my innocence in his sight.
- [26] "To the faithful you show yourself faithful;  
to those with integrity you show integrity.
- [27] To the pure you show yourself pure,  
but to the wicked you show yourself hostile.
- [28] You rescue those who are humble,  
but your eyes are on the proud to humiliate them.
- [29] O Lord, you are my light;  
Yes, Lord, you light up my darkness.
- [30] In your strength I can crush an army;  
With my God I can scale any wall.

- [31] "As for God, his way is perfect.  
All the Lord's promises prove true.  
He is a shield for all who look to him for protection.
- [32] For who is God except the Lord?  
Who but our God is a solid rock?
- [33] God is my strong fortress;  
He has made my way safe.
- [34] He makes me as surefooted as a deer,  
leading me safely along the mountain heights.
- [35] He prepares me for battle;  
He strengthens me to draw a bow of bronze.
- [36] You have given me the shield of your salvation;  
Your help has made me great.
- [37] You have made a wide path for my feet  
to keep them from slipping.
- [38] "I chased my enemies and destroyed them;  
I did not stop until they were conquered.
- [39] I consumed them; I struck them down so they could not get up;  
they fell beneath my feet.
- [40] You have armed me with strength for the battle;  
You have subdued my enemies under my feet.
- [41] You made them turn and run;  
I have destroyed all who hated me.
- [42] They called for help, but no one came to rescue them.  
They cried to the Lord, but he refused to answer them.
- [43] I ground them as fine as the dust of the earth;  
I swept them into the gutter like dirt.
- [44] "You gave me victory over my accusers.  
You preserved me as the ruler over nations;  
people I don't even know now serve me.
- [45] Foreigners cringe before me;  
as soon as they hear of me, they submit.
- [46] They all lose their courage  
and come trembling from their strongholds.
- [47] "The Lord lives! Blessed be my rock!  
May God, the rock of my salvation, be exalted!

[48] He is the God who pays back those who harm me;  
he subdues the nations under me  
[49] and rescues me from my enemies.  
You hold me safe beyond the reach of my enemies;  
You save me from violent opponents.  
[50] For this, O Lord, I will praise you among the nations;  
I will sing joyfully to your name.  
[51] You give great victories to your king;  
You show unfailing love to your anointed,  
to David and all his descendants forever."

David was not denying that he had ever sinned. Psalm 51 shows his tremendous anguish over his sin against Uriah and Bathsheba. But David understood God's faithfulness and was writing this hymn from God's perspective. He knew that God had made him clean again—"whiter than snow," (Psalm 51:7) with a "pure heart" (Psalm 51:10). Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, we also are made clean and perfect. God replaces our sin with his purity, and he no longer sees our sin.

## Chapter 23

[23:1] These are the last words of David:



"David, the son of Jesse, speaks—

David, the man to whom God gave such wonderful success,  
David, the man anointed by the God of Jacob,  
David, the sweet psalmist of Israel.

[2] "The Spirit of the Lord speaks through me;  
His words are upon my tongue.

[3] The God of Israel spoke.

The Rock of Israel said to me:

"The person who rules righteously,  
Who rules in the fear of God?"

[4] He is like the light of the morning,  
Like the sunrise bursting forth in a cloudless sky,  
Like the refreshing rains that bring tender grass from the earth.'

[5] "It is my family God has chosen!

Yes, he has made an everlasting covenant with me.

His agreement is eternal, final, sealed.

He will constantly look after my safety and success.

[6] But the godless are like thorns to be thrown away,  
For they tear the hand that touches them.

[7] One must be armed to chop them down;  
They will be utterly consumed with fire."

[8] These are the names of David's mightiest men. The first was Jashobeam the Hacmonite, who was commander of the Three—the three greatest warriors among David's men. He once used his spear to kill eight hundred enemy warriors in a single battle.

[9] Next in rank among the Three was Eleazar son of Dodai, a descendant of Ahoah. Once Eleazar and David stood together against the Philistines when the entire Israelite army had fled. [10] He killed Philistines until his hand was too tired to lift his sword, and the Lord gave him a great victory that day. The rest of the army did not return until it was time to collect the plunder!

[11] Next in rank was Shammah son of Agee from Harar. One time the Philistines gathered at Lehi and attacked the Israelites in a field full of lentils. The Israelite army fled, [12] but Shammah held his ground in the middle of the field and beat back the Philistines. So the Lord brought about a great victory.

[13] Once during harvesttime, when David was at the cave of Adullam, the Philistine army was camped in the valley of Rephaim. The Three (who were among the Thirty—an elite group among David's fighting men) went down to meet him there. [14] David was staying in the stronghold at the time, and a Philistine detachment had occupied the town of Bethlehem. [15] David remarked longingly to his men, "Oh, how I would love some of that good water from the well in Bethlehem, the one by the gate." [16] So the Three broke through the Philistine lines, drew some water from the well, and brought it back to David. But he refused to drink it. Instead, he poured it out before the Lord. [17] "The Lord forbid that I should drink this!" he exclaimed. "This water is as precious as the blood of these men who risked their lives to bring it to me." So David did not drink it. This is an example of the exploits of the Three.

[18] Abishai son of Zeruah, the brother of Joab, was the leader of the Thirty. He once used his spear to kill three hundred enemy warriors in a single battle. It was by such feats that he became as famous as the Three. [19] Abishai was the most famous of the Thirty and was their commander, though he was not one of the Three.

[20] There was also Benaiah son of Jehoiada, a valiant warrior from Kabzeel. He did many heroic deeds, which included killing two of Moab's mightiest warriors. Another time he chased a lion down into a pit. Then, despite the snow and slippery ground, he caught the lion and killed it. [21] Another time, armed only with a club, he killed a great Egyptian warrior who was armed with a spear. Benaiah wrenched the spear from the Egyptian's hand and killed him with it. [22] These are some of the deeds that made Benaiah almost as famous as the Three. [23] He was more honored than the other members of the Thirty, though he was not one of the Three. And David made him commander of his bodyguard.

[24] Other members of the Thirty included:

Asahel, Joab's brother;

Elhanan son of Dodo from Bethlehem;

[25] Shammah from Harod;

Elika from Harod;

[26] Helez from Pelon;

Ira son of Ikkesh from Tekoa;

[27] Abiezer from Anathoth;

Sibbecai from Hushah;

[28] Zalmon from Ahoah;

Maharai from Netophah;  
[29] Heled son of Baanah from Netophah;  
Ithai son of Ribai from Gibeah (from the tribe of Benjamin);  
[30] Benaiah from Pirathon;  
Hurai from Nahale-gaash;  
[31] Abi-albon the Arbathite;  
Azmaveth from Bahurim;  
[32] Eliahba from Shaalbon;  
The sons of Jashen;  
[33] Jonathan son of Shagee from Harar;  
Ahiam son of Sharar from Harar;  
[34] Eliphelet son of Ahasbai from Maacah;  
Eliam son of Ahithophel from Giloh;  
[35] Hezro from Carmel;  
Paarai from Arba;  
[36] Igal son of Nathan from Zobah;  
Bani from Gad;  
[37] Zelek from Ammon;  
Naharai from Beeroth (Joab's armor bearer);  
[38] Ira from Jattir;  
Garb from Jattir;  
[39] Uriah the Hittite.

There were thirty-seven in all.

In the style of a prophet, David spoke of a just and righteous ruler. This will be fulfilled in Jesus Christ when he returns to rule in perfect justice and peace. For similar prophecies, see Isaiah 11:1-10; Jeremiah 23:5-6; Jeremiah 33:15-18; Zech. 9:9-10. For the fulfillment of some of these prophecies, see Matthew 4:14-16; Luke 24:25-27, 44-49; John 5:45-47; John 8:28-29.

These verses tell of some of the exploits that the special corps of David's army carried out. There were two elite groups of men: "the Thirty" and "the Three" (2 Samuel 23:18, 23; 1 Chron. 11:11-25). To become a member of such a group a man had to show unparalleled courage in battle as well as wisdom in leadership. "The Three" was the most elite group. The list of "the Thirty" actually contains 37 names, but it mentions some warriors known to

be dead (Uriah, for example, in 2 Samuel 23:39). Apparently, new members were appointed to replace those who had fallen in battle.

David poured out the water as an offering to God because he was so moved by the sacrifice it represented. When Hebrews offered sacrifices, they never consumed the blood. It represented life, and they poured it out before God. David would not drink this water that represented the lives of his soldiers. Instead, he offered it to God.

[24:1] Once again the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and he caused David to harm them by taking a census. "Go and count the people of Israel and Judah," the Lord told him.

Did God cause David to sin? God does not cause people to sin, but he does allow sinners to reveal the sinfulness of their hearts by their actions. God presented the opportunity to David in order to deal with a disastrous national tendency, and he wanted this desire to show itself. 1 Chron. 21:1 says Satan incited David to do it. Hebrew writers do not always distinguish between primary and secondary causes. So if God allowed Satan to tempt David, to them it is as if God did it.

[2] So the king said to Joab, the commander of his army, "Take a census of all the people in the land—from Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south—so that I may know how many people there are."

[3] But Joab replied to the king, "May the Lord your God let you live until there are a hundred times as many people in your kingdom as there are now! But why do you want to do this?"

What was wrong with taking a census? A census was commanded in Numbers to prepare an army for conquering the promised land (Numbers 1:2; Numbers 26:2). A census amounted to a draft or conscription for the army. The land was now at peace, so there was no need to enlist troops. Israel had extended its borders and become a recognized power. David's sin was pride and ambition in counting the people so that he could glory in the size of his nation and army, its power and defenses. By doing this, he put his faith in the size of his army rather than in God's ability to protect them regardless of their number. Even Joab knew a census was wrong, but David did not heed his advice. We sin in a similar way when we place our security in money, possessions, or the might of our nation.

[4] But the king insisted that they take the census, so Joab and his officers went out to count the people of Israel. [5] First they crossed the Jordan and camped at Aroer, south of the town in the valley, in the direction of Gad. Then they went on to Jazer, [6] then to Gilead in the land of Tahtim-hodshi and to Dan-jaan and around to Sidon. [7] Then they came to the stronghold of Tyre, and all the cities of the Hivites and Canaanites. Finally, they went

south to Judah as far as Beersheba. [8] Having gone through the entire land, they completed their task in nine months and twenty days and then returned to Jerusalem. [9] Joab reported the number of people to the king. There were 800,000 men of military age in Israel and 500,000 in Judah.

[10] But after he had taken the census, David's conscience began to bother him. And he said to the Lord, "I have sinned greatly and shouldn't have taken the census. Please forgive me, Lord, for doing this foolish thing."

[11] The next morning the word of the Lord came to the prophet Gad, who was David's seer. This was the message: [12] "Go and say to David, 'This is what the Lord says: I will give you three choices. Choose one of these punishments, and I will do it.' "

[13] So Gad came to David and asked him, "Will you choose three years of famine throughout the land, three months of fleeing from your enemies, or three days of severe plague throughout your land? Think this over and let me know what answer to give the Lord."

[14] "This is a desperate situation!" David replied to Gad. "But let us fall into the hands of the Lord, for his mercy is great. Do not let me fall into human hands."

Both David and the Israelites were guilty of sin (2 Samuel 24:1). David's sin was pride, but the Bible does not say why God was angry with the people of Israel. Perhaps it was due to their support of the rebellions of Absalom (2 Samuel 15-18) and Sheba (2 Samuel 20), or perhaps they put their security in military and financial prosperity rather than God, as David did. God dealt with the whole nation through David who exemplified the national sin of pride.

God gave David three choices. Each was a form of punishment God had told the people they could expect if they disobeyed his laws (disease—Deut. 28:20-22; famine—Deut. 28:23-24; war—Deut. 28:25-26). David wisely chose the form of punishment that came most directly from God. He knew how brutal and harsh men in war could be, and he also knew God's great mercy. When you sin greatly, turn back to God. To be punished by him is far better than to take your chances without him.

[15] So the Lord sent a plague upon Israel that morning, and it lasted for three days. Seventy thousand people died throughout the nation. [16] But as the death angel was preparing to destroy Jerusalem, the Lord relented and

said to the angel, "Stop! That is enough!" At that moment the angel of the Lord was by the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

[17] When David saw the angel, he said to the Lord, "I am the one who has sinned and done wrong! But these people are innocent—what have they done? Let your anger fall against me and my family."

[18] That day Gad came to David and said to him, "Go and build an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite."

Many believe that this threshing floor where David built the altar is the location where Abraham nearly sacrificed his son Isaac (Genesis 22:1-18). After David's death, Solomon built the temple on this spot. Centuries later, Jesus would teach and preach here.

[19] So David went to do what the Lord had commanded him. [20] When Araunah saw the king and his men coming toward him, he came forward and bowed before the king with his face to the ground. [21] "Why have you come, my lord?" Araunah asked.

And David replied, "I have come to buy your threshing floor and to build an altar to the Lord there, so that the Lord will stop the plague."

[22] "Take it, my lord, and use it as you wish," Araunah said to David. "Here are oxen for the burnt offering, and you can use the threshing tools and ox yokes for wood to build a fire on the altar. [23] I will give it all to you, and may the Lord your God accept your sacrifice."

[24] But the king replied to Araunah, "No, I insist on buying it, for I cannot present burnt offerings to the Lord my God that have cost me nothing." So David paid him fifty pieces of silver for the threshing floor and the oxen. [25] David built an altar there to the Lord and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. And the Lord answered his prayer, and the plague was stopped.

The book of 2 Samuel describes David's reign. Since the Israelites first entered the promised land under Joshua, they had been struggling to unite the nation and drive out the wicked inhabitants. Now, after more than 400 years, Israel was finally at peace. David had accomplished what no leader before him, judge or king, had done. His administration was run on the principle of dedication to God and to the well being of the people. Yet David also sinned. Despite his sins, however, the Bible calls David a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14; Acts 13:22) because when he sinned, he

recognized it and confessed his sins to God. David committed his life to God and remained loyal to him throughout his lifetime. Psalms gives an even deeper insight into David's love for God.

**References:**

**Holy Bible: King James Translation**

**Additional comments and charts are taken from:**

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