

STUDY OF THE LIFE OF DAVID
“A man after God’s own heart”

I. Introduction

- A. The three major characters of the Old Testament are Abraham, Moses, and David. God entered into a covenant relationship with each of these three giants of scripture. The covenants with Abraham (see Genesis 15-17) and with Moses were important and foundational to God’s plan for mankind, but the covenant with David was so connected to the coming Messiah that on Palm Sunday as Jesus triumphantly entered Jerusalem the shout of the crowd was, “Hosanna to the Son of David; Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.” And although Abraham was known for his faith, and Moses for leading Israel out of slavery to the promised land, only of David did God say, “He is a man after my own heart.”
- B. Next to Jesus himself, David is arguably the most accomplished man in scripture. He was a superb musician, the author of far more psalms than any other psalmist in the Bible. And those psalms speak to us even today, some three thousand years later. He was a great warrior of amazing courage; he slew Goliath with a sling; he led Israel into battle after battle, and was so idolized by the people, the catchphrase of the day was, “Saul has slain his thousands and David his ten thousands.” He was a great leader. Scripture refers often to the admiration and respect his soldiers had for him. He brought a separated Israel back together, uniting the country after the death of Saul when no one else could have done it. Under his leadership, Israel went from a small country harassed by its neighbors to the strongest nation in the region with vastly expanded borders, with all its major enemies subjugated.
- C. To fully understand how great David was and why his life is still important to us today, we need to understand David’s place in history and something of the times in which he lived. This chart gives the timeline of the lives of key people.

<u>Years</u>	<u>Event/Lives of key people</u>
2166-1991 BC	Abraham
1876 BC	Jacob and family settle in Egypt
1446-1406 BC	The exodus from Egypt to promised land
1375-1050 BC	The Judges
1050-1010 BC	King Saul
1010-970 BC	King David
586-458 BC	Jewish exile in Babylon
432-2 BC	Between the Old and New Testaments
2 BC-31 AD	Jesus Christ

- D. Note that there were about 1,000 years from the death of Abraham to David, and another 1,000 years from David to Jesus Christ.

- E. Lest you think David came from royalty, scripture makes it quite clear that he did not. Among his close ancestors are some unusual characters. His great-great grandmother was Rahab, the pagan harlot in Jericho who helped the Jewish spies before Israel destroyed Jericho. (See Joshua, chapter 2) She married Salmon, who was probably one of the spies she saved. Their son, Boaz, wound up marrying Ruth, a woman from the pagan country of Moab after she followed her mother-in-law to Israel after her first husband died. That story is told in the book of Ruth. So, neither David's great nor great-great grandmother was a Hebrew. Ruth was the mother of Obed, who was the father of Jesse, the father of David.
- F. Even in his own family, David was initially considered the least among his brothers. He was the youngest and therefore was assigned duty as a shepherd, which was not by any means a prestigious job. It was a dangerous job due to wild animals (lions and bears) and also robbers who would not hesitate to injure or kill the shepherd to get the sheep. As we will see, though, things changed dramatically while David was still young.
- G. With regard to what life was like during David's time, particularly before he became king, we need to begin with Judges 21:25: "In those days Israel had no king, so the people did whatever seemed right in their own eyes." And what seemed right in their own eyes had very little to do with God's commandments. Keep in mind, before King Saul there was no central government for Israel. They were in many ways not a country at all as we think of countries today. Each tribe was independent, and the tribes quarreled and at times fought among themselves. Furthermore, there were no clear boundaries between Israel and its various neighbors. Some Hebrew villages were quite close to Philistine villages or Moab villages, and the various villages would raid each other from time to time. Life was precarious for many reasons, and often life was short and brutal. The teachings of Jesus to love your neighbor as yourself and to turn the other cheek were far in the future. As we will see, life was far different from modern life, although there are still lessons we can learn from those times.
- H. Although David is considered one of the great men of the Bible, and certainly the greatest of Israel's kings, he was far from perfect. David could be duplicitous at times; he sinned grievously as we will see. He committed adultery and murder, conspired to keep his sinful deeds secret, and totally abused his powers as king, thereby committing mystifying moral failures that are still shocking to us today. He also failed to exercise discipline within his own family, leading to murder, rebellion and schism in his family that continued into the next generation.
- I. David lived a most unusual life, one that most people would not intentionally seek. He was still only a boy when he was anointed king secretly by the leading prophet of the time—Samuel. Keep in mind that being anointed king while King Saul was still

alive would cause Saul to view him as guilty of treason, trying to overthrow the monarch, although that was not his intent. While still a young teenager he killed Goliath and became a national hero, having to deal with instant notoriety and the jealousy of the king. The result was he was running for his life for most of his late teenage years and into his twenties. It's a stark reminder that receiving the blessing of God does not necessarily mean life will be easy and all will go well for you. He had challenges that we can only imagine, at times living in caves and running for his life with Saul, his king, in hot pursuit.

- J. One indication of how difficult his life was can be seen in his psalms. On the attachment listing his psalms notice how many of them deal with seeking deliverance from enemies or guidance for dealing with enemies. Although some of his psalms soar with words of gratitude and inspiration, more of them are desperate pleas for God to deliver him from difficult circumstances or from those out to kill him. Later in life, it was his own son who was out to kill him. Throughout our study of the life of David we will look at psalms that reflect what his emotional and spiritual condition were as he was going through the various challenges of his life.
- K. Another remarkable thing we will see in David's life was his ongoing respect for King Saul, even while Saul was doing his best to kill David. To David, Saul was "God's anointed," and it was up to God to bring judgment to Saul, not something he could do himself. Indeed, when Saul and his son Jonathan are killed by the Philistines, David wrote a beautiful lamentation for Saul and Jonathan. (See II Samuel 1:19-27).
- L. David is known as the author of many of the psalms. However, he didn't just write songs, he also played the lyre, a stringed instrument. He was so accomplished that he was recruited by Saul's staff to play the lyre when Saul was attacked by evil spirits which bedeviled him after his rebellion against God began. Keep in mind that David became an accomplished musician and psalm writer while still only a teenager. He never went to college or had any formal education other than that given to all Jewish boys. Yet his psalms had spiritual and theological insights beyond those of even the prophets and priests of his day. Indeed, Jesus often used the psalms to rebut the Pharisees when they failed to understand the purposes of God. The only other human comparison that comes to mind is Mozart, who wrote his first music at age five. And Mozart was not also a warrior and leader as David was.
- M. Two of his most beautiful psalms are 103 and 139. Read them slowly and concentrate on the words which accurately describe the greatness of our God. Keep in mind David wrote these words some 3,000 years ago.

(1) Psalm 103—Expressing thanks for God's goodness and mercy.

(2) Psalm 139—Describing the all-knowing and inescapable God.

II. I Samuel 16:1-13 David Anointed as King

- A. The background for this chapter, which introduces us to David, is that Saul has been rejected as king by the Lord due to his disobedience. The story of how Samuel told Saul he had been rejected by God and Saul's reaction is rather pitiful and is described in detail in chapter 15.
- B. At some point after Saul was rejected by God, Samuel was told by God to go to Bethlehem, to the house of Jesse, to anoint one of Jesse's sons to be the next king. Just how dangerous this was can be seen from Samuel's reaction. He was afraid Saul would kill him if he anointed another. Why? Because Saul was the duly appointed king of Israel, and anyone else claiming to be king—or anointing another to be king—was committing treason.
- C. But God provided a subterfuge for Samuel. He was told to take a heifer with him for sacrifice, invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and the Lord would provide further instructions during the sacrifice. Again, we see the danger in what was happening by the response of the city fathers. Verse 4 says, "they came to meet him (Samuel) trembling." They wanted to know if he had come peaceably or to bring the wrath of God upon them. Samuel assured them he had come peaceably and invited Jesse and his sons to the sacrifice.
- D. Once they were at the sacrifice, there was a parade of Jesse's sons passing by Samuel so Samuel could determine which of the sons God had chosen. They were all apparently impressive young men who by all outward appearances were qualified to be king. But to Samuel's surprise, God told him he had chosen none of them. God told Samuel, "You look on outward appearance, but I look upon the heart." By this, God was referring to one's character and faith. He asked Jesse whether all his sons were there, which is an interesting question. A father usually knows how many sons he has. But what this demonstrates is that Jesse couldn't imagine that Samuel would have any interest in his youngest son—the young musician who tended the sheep. Apparently neither Jesse nor any of his sons—David's brothers—saw much potential in David. Jesse had not even invited David to the sacrifice despite the invitation being issued by Samuel to Jesse and *all* his sons.
- E. Upon learning of one more son, Samuel told Jesse to send for him immediately; all of the proceedings were on hold until David got there. Just imagine what David's reaction must have been when he was summoned and told that the greatest prophet in the land was in Bethlehem and refusing to go forward with the sacrifice until David was there. As soon as David showed up, still in his shepherding clothes, Samuel anointed David as king. So, if his being summoned shocked David, imagine the shock when Samuel anointed him king.

- F. What did God see in David at this point in life that caused God to anoint David king? We can't know for sure—other than what God saw in David's heart—but Psalm 23 gives us a clue. It may have been written by David while still a youth or later, but obviously the concepts put forth in that psalm were already on David's mind. He was a shepherd over the sheep of his family. David knew and understood that sheep are perhaps the most helpless animal in existence. They can't defend themselves against a predator, and they can't outrun them. They are totally dependent on their shepherd for their lives and for their safety. The sheep are safe as long as they are with their shepherd. Somehow as a young lad David had the insight to understand that was exactly the situation he was in with respect to his relationship with God. He was totally dependent on God, and like a helpless lamb, he would allow himself to be led by God, putting his full trust in Him. **Read Psalm 23.** This was an amazing insight by a shepherd boy and gives us a glimpse as to why God choose David rather than his more outwardly impressive brothers to lead the Israelites as their king.

III. I Samuel 16:14-25 David plays the Lyre for Saul

- A. Saul's disobedience to God soon resulted in disastrous consequences for Saul. God's protection was removed, and scripture tells us evil spirits began to torment him. Although the text says these were evil spirits from God, the intent was to say God allowed the natural consequences of Saul's rebellion to play out, and he was tormented, having trouble sleeping or getting any rest. It was so bad, one of Saul's servants suggested he find a musician to play the lyre and sing for him. That sounded good to Saul, and the recommendation given to him was a son of Jesse of Bethlehem. David was so well known already for his musical talents that he was the only choice offered for the king's well-being.
- B. Once again, try to imagine what David was thinking. First, he had been summoned to a sacrifice which Samuel was conducting, and there he was anointed as king of Israel. Now he had been summoned to play for Saul to bring some peace to him. He must have been shocked and mystified by this turn of events. But his playing worked. Saul was soothed when David played. Saul even asked Jesse to allow David to stay in his service. One didn't reject the request of a king in those days, so David remained for a time. Again, this is a testament to David's abilities as a musician.

IV. I Samuel 17:1-58 David slays Goliath

- A. This story is one of the best-known in all of human history. Even people who are not Jewish or Christian have heard about it. A David-and-Goliath story means one in which one of the contestants is a significant underdog, as David was as he entered the battle. Even his Jewish brothers and King Saul, who granted permission for David to fight Goliath, had their doubts about the outcome.

- B. The story pretty much tells itself without the necessity of a lot of commentary. However, there are a few points to consider. First, we see that the Philistines had invaded Israel, as is pointed out in verse 1. The Philistines were camped on one mountain with the Israelites on another mountain, with the Valley of Elah between them. It was into the Valley of Elah that Goliath would come each day to challenge Israel to select a champion to fight him. No one from Israel's army was willing to challenge him.
- C. We see from this story how David was not well liked by his brothers. The eldest three brothers were in the army, and they—particularly the oldest—got angry with David when he started asking questions about what the reward would be for killing Goliath. David was sent by his father to take provisions to his brothers and David arrived to find the challenge by Goliath. He was amazed that no one in the army of Israel, the people of God, was willing to take on Goliath.
- D. When Saul heard of David's questions, he summoned him. Saul's initial reaction was clear; he told David, "You can't fight Goliath; you are just a boy." David's response must have surprised Saul. David essentially said, "I don't see why not; I have fought lions and bears and killed them. I can kill this uncircumcised Philistine." Saul clearly still had his doubts, but someone had to fight Goliath, and Saul wasn't about to do it himself, so he agreed to let David fight him. He put his own armor on David, but David wisely decides that wouldn't work. He didn't plan to fight Goliath hand to hand.
- E. As much of a mismatch as this seemed, David did have some advantages. First, he was not as much of a novice as a fighter as he appeared to be. He had fought wild animals, so he knew something of combat. Second, he had a potent weapon in his sling. This was no child's slingshot. It was a sling with which he could hurl a rock the size of a golf ball over 100 mph with great accuracy. It was lethal, and David apparently had confidence in his ability with a sling. Third, since he was not weighed down with armor, he had much more freedom of movement; he could dodge the spear if Goliath threw it at him. Goliath's advantage only arose when he got in very close where he could physically get his hands on David or reach him with his sword. David planned to stay out of reach of his sword.
- F. The next thing David did was taunt Goliath. As the scripture points out, Goliath had a shield bearer who went before him to protect him from arrows or a spear being thrown, but of course David had neither of these. Goliath got angry when David taunted him and ran in front of his shield bearer to get at David, which gave David a clear shot, and he moved closer to Goliath before slinging the rock. It hit Goliath in the forehead, virtually the only unguarded part of his body and stunned him. Verse 51 says David killed Goliath with his own sword, and then cut off his head, which he then brought back to Saul as a trophy. It was a brutal time, and such acts of brutality were common.

- G. Once Goliath was dead, the Philistines panicked and fled, with the Israelites in hot pursuit, killing many along the way, and plundering their camp.
- H. Verses 55-58 make an interesting point. Although David had been singing and playing the lyre for Saul, he apparently knew very little about David other than that he was a good musician. He asked his army commander whose son David was, but he didn't know either. So, Abner took David to Saul, head of Goliath in hand, and Saul asked who his father was, and David told him. Imagine what David must have felt upon being summoned before his king, with the head of Israel's biggest enemy in his hand and proudly telling his king who his father was. In an instant, David was Israel's biggest hero.
- I. Although we can't be sure that David wrote this psalm at the time he killed Goliath, Psalm 11 accurately describes David's attitude as he took on the challenge of fighting such a mighty foe. It reminds us that his faith was in God, and in the promise God had made to him that he would be king after Saul. If God had anointed him as king, he had nothing to fear from a heathen giant. **Read Psalm 11.**

V. I Samuel 18:1-9 Jonathan's covenant with David

- A. Saul wasn't the only one impressed by David's performance against Goliath. Saul's son Jonathan was also. He was impressed not just by David's ability and courage, but also with David's strong faith in God that gave him the courage to take on Goliath mano a mano. Verse 1 tells us that Jonathan loved David as he loved his own soul. Some have tried to argue they may have had a homosexual relationship, but that isn't at all what these scriptures are saying. The culture then was different, as it still is in some middle eastern and Asian countries. I remember being on an Air Force base where there were also some Vietnamese being trained as pilots. It was common to see two young Vietnamese officers walking along holding hands. It is common in that culture for the older man to take the hand of the younger. Similarly, here Jonathan admired and loved David because of his character and courage, and because he recognized David as one favored by God.
- B. These scriptures also affirm that David was no one-hit wonder. He followed up his defeat of Goliath with successful forays against Israel's enemies, earning immense approval and admiration from all of Israel, including Saul's servants. He was so successful Saul appointed him commander of Israel's army. Keep in mind, David was still just an older teenager at this point, leading men older than himself.
- C. David was so successful the women created a song saying Saul had killed his thousands and David his ten thousands. You would think Saul would be grateful to have such a warrior in his camp. After all, David had saved Saul from embarrassment, if not being killed, when he defeated Goliath. Now, David continued

to defeat Israel's biggest enemy, the Philistines. But Saul was a bitter old man, well aware that God's blessing had left him, and he was highly suspicious and jealous of anyone on whom God's favor rested. He feared David was after his kingdom, although we still have no reason to believe Saul knew David had already been anointed by Samuel. We are about to see just how jealous Saul was.

VI. I Samuel 18:10-16 Saul tries to kill David

- A. Saul had another attack from an evil spirit and apparently nearly lost his mind. He was so bad David was summoned to play the lyre for him as he still did from time to time when not out leading troops against Israel's enemies. This time, though, David's playing didn't calm Saul. Instead, he tried to pin David to the wall with his spear. Twice, David eluded him before Saul gave up and undoubtedly realized killing David would be about the worst thing he could do.
- B. Scripture is very clear regarding Saul's attitude. He realized God's blessing was resting on David, and that God's blessing had left Saul. So, he appointed David over Israel's troops, obviously hoping one of Israel's enemies would get rid of David for him. But this scheme backfired on Saul also. David had so much success that even Saul, who by now hated David, was in awe of him. Meanwhile all of Israel and Judah greatly admired David. He was their rock star, and they loved him.

VII. I Samuel 18:17-30 David marries Michal

- A. Remember that one of the perks for anyone who would kill Goliath was the privilege of marrying Saul's daughter. The eldest unmarried daughter was Merab, and Saul apparently hinted that Merab would be given to David if he would defeat the Philistines. Saul assumed the Philistines would do his dirty work for him and get rid of David in battle. But even though David continued to be successful, Saul backtracked on his promise and gave Merab to another—a man named Adriel.
- B. But that proved not to be a problem, because Saul had another, younger daughter, Michal, who was in love with David—as were probably most of the young women in Israel and Judah. David was the national hero. Again, Saul plotted to get rid of David by offering his daughter Michal to David. Interestingly, David was hesitant to marry Merab, or to marry Michal, because it was common for the groom to pay a marriage price—a dowry—to marry a woman, and David's family didn't have enough money to pay the marriage price for the king's daughter. When Saul learned of this he was delighted. He plotted again to get rid of David by having his servants tell David the king needed no marriage price of the usual kind—money or something else of value. Instead, he sent a message to David that if he would bring the foreskins of 100 Philistines to the king, he could marry Michal. He wanted David to kill and then circumcise 100 Philistine soldiers! As we see from this scheme, times were very different from today. Women were treated as chattel to be bargained for.

Furthermore, even for those times, demanding the foreskins of 100 enemy troops was gross; today, desecrating the body of enemy soldiers is considered a war crime.

- C. By any standard, Saul's duplicity was on display. First, David was *entitled* to marry the king's daughter because he killed Goliath; no further wedding price was needed. But then, Saul upped the bargain by demanding David kill 100 enemy troops and bring back rather unusual proof he had done so. You can imagine Saul's surprise and disgust when David dumped the bloody proof at Saul's feet. But once David had delivered the wedding price, Saul had no choice but to give Michal to David in marriage.
- D. Significantly, verses 28 and 29 tell us that this episode made Saul even more afraid of David, and he considered David—perhaps his most loyal servant—an enemy from that time forward. Perhaps in response to David's success in getting the wedding price by killing 100 Philistines, they came out to do battle again and once more David was successful in defeating them.
- E. At this point in David's life he was on the ascendency. His popularity continued to grow, and his favor in God's eyes was unmistakable. Although we cannot be sure, Psalm 8 reflects the attitude of David at this time in his life. **Read Psalm 8.**

VIII. I Samuel 19:1-7 Jonathan intercedes for David

- A. Saul's duplicity and increasingly irrational hatred of David are on display in these verses. Incredibly, as verse 1 shows, Saul was not secretive in his desire to kill David; he discussed it with Jonathan and with all his servants. Think about this. Saul was so deranged he wanted to kill the man who had just saved Israel and its king from embarrassment and defeat at the hands of the Philistines, the man who was a hero beyond measure with all of Israel, and the most beloved man in the country at the time. Undoubtedly, Jonathan and Saul's servants were dumbstruck that Saul would want to do such a thing.
- B. Jonathan intervened in a rational, direct way. First, he told David Saul wanted to kill him and that he should hide from Saul until he could speak to his father and try to bring him to his senses. Then he spoke to his father and very rationally pointed out that David had served him well; he had done nothing wrong that would justify Saul trying to kill David. Saul had a lucid interval in this instance; Jonathan brought David back to Saul, and they were reconciled. But, as we will see, this didn't last long.

IX. I Samuel 19:8-17 Michal helps David Escape from Saul

- A. These verses show just how deranged Saul had become, and how strange the situation was at Saul's court. There was war again with the Philistines, and David led Saul's army to a mighty victory over them. But then, after leading the army to a

great victory, David wasn't honored with a great feast; he was back in the king's palace playing the lyre and singing for Saul because Saul had another demonic attack. This time, however, David's playing didn't calm Saul; he tried to pin David to the wall with his spear. Agile as always, David eluded Saul and escaped from the palace. Just imagine the shock of Saul's servants when Saul did this. If Saul was willing to put David to death, everyone in the palace was at risk.

- B. David returned to his house, but Saul sent messages to the servants at David's house to keep an eye on him so Saul could finish his murderous plan in the morning. Michal got wind of this and told David, "You need to flee tonight, or you will be killed in the morning." So, David was let down by a rope through the window—probably on the wall of the city—and he escaped. Michal put an idol in the bed, with goats' hair to make it appear David was asleep in the bed. When the messengers showed up the next morning to bring David to Saul, she told them he was sick in bed. This just further infuriated Saul. He told his messengers, "Go bring him to me, bed and all, so I can kill him." This sounds more like a story line in an Abbott and Costello movie, but it shows just how deranged Saul had become. Imagine Saul's shock when they brought the bed to Saul and learned that it was just a dummy idol with goat's hair in the bed, not David.
- C. Saul immediately turned on Michal and demanded to know why she had deceived her father, the king. This was an ideal time for her to stand up for her husband and try to reason with her father as her brother Jonathan had done earlier in this chapter. But she didn't—perhaps afraid of her deranged father, or perhaps unwilling to choose her husband over her father. Whatever the reason, her response was, "I had to do it; he threatened to kill me if I didn't." This, of course, was a lie; she was the one who warned David to escape, and there is no mention of any threat to her by David. As we will see, her unwillingness to stand up for her husband will eventually get her estranged entirely from David.
- D. David wrote a psalm when Saul ordered David's house to be watched so he could kill David. It is **Psalm 59**. Read it.

X. I Samuel 19:18-24 David joins Samuel in Ramah

- A. This is one of the stranger stories in the Old Testament. When David fled from Jerusalem, he went straight to Ramah to find Samuel, who started the incredible change in the arc of David's life when he anointed David at Bethlehem. He brought Samuel up to date on all Saul had done to him. I can picture Samuel shaking his head at the stupidity of Saul. So, Samuel took David with him to Naioth, which was in or near Ramah. As we will see, it was under God's protection, with many prophets there.

- B. The message somehow got back to Saul that David was at Naioth, and Saul sent messengers to bring David back to him. When the messengers got there, they found a group of prophets in a prophetic frenzy with Samuel leading them. Whatever this was, the messengers also fell into a frenzy, and didn't arrest David or take him back to Saul. After this happened twice more, Saul decided he would go himself to Naioth. When he got there, he fell into a prophetic frenzy himself, whereupon he stripped off his clothes and lay naked there all day and night.
- C. Don't ask me to explain exactly what happened; it is different from anything we are likely to experience. However, one thing is quite clear: David was being protected by God from Saul supernaturally. As long as David was there with Samuel and the other prophets, God protected David from Saul and all his messengers in a dramatic way. Apparently, even the Israelites recognized the unusual nature of God's protection of David. The saying that circulated in Israel, probably humorously, was, "Is Saul also a prophet now?"
- D. David's attitude during this time of being on the run from Saul is captured in many of the psalms, but I especially think Psalm 4 is appropriate. **Read Psalm 4.**

XI. I Samuel 20:1-42 The friendship of David and Jonathan

- A. As we have already seen in previous chapters, Jonathan was a man of strong character. Unlike his father, Saul, Jonathan recognized that David, rather than being an enemy of Saul, was the best thing that had happened to him to preserve his kingdom. And Jonathan was willing to defy his own father and king to be faithful to the covenant he had with David. Furthermore, Jonathan had spiritual insight. He recognized that God's hand was on David and that God's blessing had left his father. Rather than cling to the promise of becoming king himself, Jonathan was willing to humble himself and be a servant of David in his kingdom when the time came. A truly remarkable man.
- B. This chapter opens with David being totally bewildered by Saul's attitude toward him. He asked Jonathan, "What have I done to incur your father's wrath? He wants to kill me." Jonathan couldn't believe it because his father hadn't told him of his plans. Of course, he was aware of Saul's previous attempt to kill David with a spear. So, they concocted a plan to keep David out of the palace during the festival of the new moon and away from Saul's dinner table. Jonathan promised to try to determine his father's intent with respect to David. When David was absent from dinner the second night, Saul correctly perceived that David was avoiding him and that Jonathan was covering for David.
- C. Saul's response is further proof that he was certifiably insane with jealousy and hatred of David. He told Jonathan he was, "the son of a perverse, rebellious woman." This is one of Saul's wives, Jonathan's mother, whom he was calling a

pervert! When Jonathan stood up for David and protested that he had done nothing worthy of death, Saul threw his spear at Jonathan, just as he had previously thrown it at David. He was actually trying to kill his own son over his hatred of David, and in the process, Saul showed a total lack of respect for his wife.

- D. Jonathan now realized that David was correct. Saul definitely wanted to kill David, and Jonathan honored his promise to David to let him know of Saul's intent towards him. After he had sent a signal to David through his instructions to the boy collecting the arrows that Saul wanted to kill him, David and Jonathan met in the field in a scene that is one of the most poignant and heart rending in all of scripture. Jonathan and David embraced and wept uncontrollably. Jonathan recognized that God's hand was on David to become Israel's king, and he was willing to cede that role to David, a role that by earthly standards was his. He only made David promise to show kindness to Jonathan's descendants. This was no small thing in those days; a new king's first act was usually to put to death any descendants of the previous king that might have a claim to the throne, including his own brothers. Then, they each went his own way, to see each other only once more (See I Sam. 23:16-18). This was also the beginning of a period of about seven years that David was an outlaw on the run from his own king to whom he had sworn fealty.
- E. There's a lesson in this story for those who believe that if God's hand is upon us, we will face no unpleasant challenges or setbacks in life. At this point, David has been faithful to Saul, whom David recognized as God's anointed. He has met every challenge Saul has thrown at him, but all it has gotten him is Saul's envy and hatred. Now he was on the run for his life, which will be his situation for about seven years, cut off from his best friend and unable to visit his family. Keep this in mind the next time life throws you a curveball and things are not going your way. It doesn't necessarily mean that God is displeased with you. He may just be testing you—as he was testing David. How the rest of your life plays out may be determined by how you meet the test.
- F. Undoubtedly, David was mystified by this turn of events. He may have been thinking that no good deed goes unpunished. **Psalm 26** captures his pleas for justice and his declaration of righteousness. Read Palm 26.

XII. I Samuel 21:1-9 David and the Holy Bread

- A. This chapter opens as David has fled Ramah and Naioth alone to get away from Saul. Why he decided to do so isn't revealed, although it appears that David panicked. After all, he had received supernatural protection from God in Naioth. Everyone Saul sent to seize David there had been sent into a prophetic frenzy, including Saul himself, unable to do anything except lay naked on the ground. Nevertheless, David was apparently convinced he needed to flee to somewhere Saul couldn't reach him,

so off he went with no food and no weapon, which indicates this might have been a spur-of-the-moment decision.

- B. Interestingly, the priest Ahimelech was nervous and scared when David showed up alone and unarmed, but David tried to put him at ease with a fib. He said he was on a secret mission for the king, and he had to get food for his men. The priest replied that the only food available was holy bread, intended only for the priests. However, he hinted he could let David have the bread provided the men were ritually pure—meaning they had abstained from sex with women for the prescribed time. David assured Ahimelech the men were ritually pure, when in fact there were no men with David; the food was for him alone, and he got the bread. Interestingly, Jesus cited this event in chapter 12 of Matthew when his disciples were criticized for plucking grain on the sabbath. He told the Pharisees God is more interested in our showing compassion than adhering to the letter of the purity laws.
- C. The other thing David sought was a weapon since he had none with him. To David's delight, the one weapon present was one he was familiar with. It was the sword of Goliath which he had used to kill Goliath and cut off his head. As David commented, "There was none like it."
- D. In verse 7, we find a sentence inserted regarding Doeg the Edomite, who was Saul's head shepherd. He apparently learned what was going on with David's appearance and it led to disastrous results for Ahimelech and the other priests at Nob, as we will see in the next chapter.

XIII. I Samuel 21:10-15 David flees to Gath

- A. David apparently was aware of Doeg the Edomite being in Nob, or he otherwise decided he needed to keep moving to escape Saul's reach. But his next decision of where to go is mystifying. He fled to Gath, which is a Philistine city. But it's not just a Philistine city; it's the city that was Goliath's hometown. And Goliath had another brother there—also a giant. If that weren't enough, David came riding in carrying Goliath's sword. I don't know what kind of reception he thought he would get in Gath, but David apparently decided to throw himself onto the mercy of Achish, the king of Gath. Maybe he thought the king would not remember David, but the king's servants certainly remembered him. They even knew the words of the song the Israelite women sang about Saul killing his thousands but David his ten thousands.
- B. As soon as David heard the servants' comments, he knew he was in a pickle. What he did next shows about as well as anything possibly could how resourceful David was. He pretended to be insane. He must have acted it out well because he convinced the king. David chose this subterfuge because he knew that the Philistines, like most pagan tribes, feared the insane and wanted nothing to do with them. In fact, King Achish's response is humorous. He asked his servants, "Don't I

already have enough mad men around me? I don't need any more. Get this man out of here." Whereupon they threw David out of Gath. Although he got away with his life, imagine the humiliation of what he had just done. In short order he had gone from being the greatest hero in all of Israel to acting like a mad man in Gath and being thrown out of town. Whereas his life was on the ascendency shortly before, now it was descending into desperation—at least outwardly.

- C. What was David's mental state when these events occurred? Psalm 56 was written regarding his being seized in Gath. **Read Psalm 56.** And when he escaped after feigning insanity, he wrote one of the most beautiful of all the psalms. **Read Psalm 34.** His gratitude to God for his deliverance is unmistakable.

XIV. I Samuel 22:1-5 David and his followers at Adullam

- A. When David was kicked out of Gath, he was still alone; he needed to find a place to hide and decide what his next step would be. As we saw in the previous chapters, David made some decisions out of panic. He apparently did not seek direction from God, and it led him to lie to the priest Ahimelech and to put himself into the hands of his mortal enemy, the Philistines. Even someone as great as David can make mistakes when they panic and act hastily.
- B. As this chapter opens, David is alone, somewhere in the wilderness at a place called the cave of Adullam. There, David had time to consider his situation and to seek God's will for him. We know that because it was there that he wrote **Psalm 142. Read it.**
- C. Certainly, in David's mind his path to becoming the king of Israel had taken him to a place he did not expect to go. Consider his situation. He had gone from the height of success and acclaim in Israel to a scared fugitive hiding to protect his life from the king he had sworn to protect, the one he acknowledged as God's anointed. Yet, it was here at the depth of his situation that God began to bring to David those who would be essential to his eventual success. First, his family, including his brothers, learned where he was and went to him. Keep in mind that David's status as an enemy of King Saul put their lives at risk also. It was common for a king to kill not only an enemy but his entire family as well, including women and children. So, they fled to David for their own safety as well as to help protect him.
- D. But it was not long before others were drawn to David as well. Those who were persecuted by the king or others, those who were hounded by debt collectors, and those who were otherwise social outcasts decided their future would be with the one person who brought them hope—David, the one who slew Goliath and defeated their enemies. Soon, there were some 400 men plus their families who were part of David's private army. Their only loyalty was to David, and he was their undisputed leader.

- E. Once David had his small army, he had to make decisions about where to go. It was one thing to hide when it was only him, but now he had his entire family and a small army, which was much harder to hide. He went to the king of Moab, which was not one of Israel's enemies and entrusted his mother and father to him. Then he took his army to a stronghold in the wilderness, but he soon had to leave it when the prophet Gad warned David to leave there and go to the land of Judah. He followed God's advice through Gad and took his followers to the forest of Hereth in the land of Judah.

XV. I Samuel 22:6-23 Saul slaughters the priests at Nob

- A. In these verses we see clearly the depth of the demonic depression into which Saul had descended. He complained to some of his fellow Benjaminites that they had colluded with David against him. Doeg the Edomite—who was mentioned in chapter 21—piped up and told Saul about David being helped by the priest Ahimelech. Remember, David had told Ahimelech he was on a mission for the king, so he had no reason to suspect David was running from Saul. So, Saul summoned Ahimelech and accused him of conspiring with David. Ahimelech, like Jonathan, stood up for David, saying he was a faithful servant of the king. But Saul would have none of it. He commanded the servants to kill Ahimelech, but they refused his order to kill a priest, fearing God more than the king. Then, Saul told Doeg to kill Ahimelech and the other priests involved—some 85 of them. Doeg killed not only them; he also killed women, children, infants and all the animals in Nob. Only Abiathar, son of Ahimelech escaped, and he fled to David to tell him what had happened. Saul was now totally deranged and would be until his death. Today, he would be considered guilty of crimes against humanity. But in those days this kind of behavior was not unheard of, although this was grisly even for that time.
- B. When David learned what Saul had done, he accepted responsibility for what had happened, although it was Saul and Doeg who committed the crime. He said he knew Doeg would tell Saul, although it still shocked David that Saul would respond this viciously. As to what David thought about Doeg the Edomite, **Psalm 52** was written about Doeg and what he did. **Read Psalm 52.**

XVI. I Samuel 23:1-14 David saves the city of Keilah

- A. Word reached David that the Philistines were attacking an Israelite town named Keilah, and David's immediate response was to go relieve the city of Keilah. But David wisely decided to inquire of the Lord before attacking. He had learned his lesson from not seeking the Lord's direction before misleading Ahimelech and going to Gath. The word from the Lord was to go save Keilah. But that wasn't a message David's followers wanted to hear. They were already afraid of what Saul might do to them if he could get his hands on them; they certainly didn't want to take on an

- entire army of Philistines. So, David inquired of the Lord again to be sure he heard correctly the first time. The message was the same, and it is a testament to the trust David's followers had in him that this time they decided to follow him in battle against the Philistines. They defeated the Philistines and freed Keilah from the siege, taking the livestock of the Philistines as plunder.
- B. Of course, word of David's big victory soon got back to Saul, and he was delighted to learn that David and his men were in Keilah, which was a walled city. Saul anticipated surrounding the city with David in it so he could be captured and killed, along with his followers. Saul got his army together and headed to Keilah to capture David.
 - C. David heard the rumors that Saul was coming after him even if Saul had to destroy Keilah to get him. David inquired of the Lord whether Saul would actually carry through with this. The answer was, "He will." David then inquired of the Lord whether the people of Keilah would turn him and his men over to Saul. The answer was, "They will." This seems very ungracious to us, but the people of Keilah knew Saul would not hesitate to destroy the entire city to capture David and his men. After all, look what he had just done to Ahimelech and the other priests, as well as the people of Nob, just for giving David bread and a sword.
 - D. So, David and his men—now up to 600—fled from Keilah back into the strongholds in the wilderness of Ziph. **Psalm 63** is one of the psalms David wrote while hiding in the wilderness, and it expresses his confidence in the Lord, even in these circumstances. **Read Psalm 63.**

XVII. I Samuel 23:15-29 David eludes Saul in the wilderness

- A. David and his followers were still hiding out in the wilderness, and Saul was plotting once more to find him and put him to death. Again, Jonathan demonstrated his loyalty to David over his father; he took an extraordinary risk by going to find David in the wilderness. He encouraged David to be strong and not be afraid; one day David would be king, and Jonathan said he would be second to David—an amazing thing for a king's son to say to one who by human standards had no claim to the throne. In the entire Old Testament, there is no one with stronger character than Jonathan, in my opinion.
- B. Somewhat similar to what happened to David at Keilah, some of the Ziphites went to Saul and squealed on David hiding among them. They promised to turn David over to Saul. This led to a scene in which David and his men were fleeing for their lives on one side of a mountain, with Saul and his army on the other side of the mountain. Just as Saul was closing in on David and his men, a messenger arrived to tell Saul the Philistines were attacking Israel, and Saul had to call off his pursuit of David to go fight the Philistines. Once again, David was delivered from Saul's pursuit of him.

David then left that area to go to the strongholds of En-gedi. I have been to En-gedi, and it is one of the most barren places to be found on the earth, along the coast of the Dead Sea.

- C. This is another instance in which David wrote a psalm recognizing God has delivered him from peril and from unjust accusations. **Read Psalm 54.**
- D. Remember, David was still a young man at this time, perhaps in his early to mid-twenties. He was living an exciting, danger-filled life, with many risks and perils, but through it all thus far, David had put his trust in God, and God had delivered him from all his troubles.

XVIII. I Samuel 24:1-22 David spares Saul's life

- A. As the last chapter ended, David was fleeing from Saul who, with his troops, was on the other side of the mountain from David and his men. Saul was closing in on David when a messenger arrived saying the Philistines were attacking Israel. So, Saul had to abandon his pursuit of David to defend Israel. David then fled into the wilderness in the En-gedi region, which has many hiding places and caves. As this chapter opens, Saul has returned from fighting the Philistines and is looking for David in the En-gedi region.
- B. There are many deep caves in En-gedi, and as Saul and his 3,000 soldiers passed by one of them, Saul decided to go relieve himself. As it so happened, David and his men—still about 600 strong—were hiding in the cave. So, it must have been a large, deep cave. Somehow, David was able to cut off a corner of Saul's cloak unbeknown to Saul. David's men wanted to cut off much more than the corner of David's cloak—they wanted his head—but David refused. Once again, David demonstrated that he was willing to leave judgment up to God with respect to a man God chose to select and anoint as king. This attitude is remarkable at any time, but it was especially noticeable for those times, which were quite different in terms of what was acceptable behavior. The attitude of David's soldiers was in line with prevailing customs and behaviors, and they wanted Saul beheaded.
- C. David made his case passionately to his king that he meant Saul no harm and had spared his life. Realizing David could have easily killed him, Saul had another lucid interval and actually admitted that David will be king someday over Israel. Note that Saul got David to swear that he would not kill all of Saul's relatives when he becomes king, which is what usually occurred when a new king came into power. Then, Saul returned to Jerusalem, and David went to a new stronghold.

XIV. I Samuel 25:1 The death of Samuel

- A. While David was still on the run from Saul, Samuel died. This was a great tragedy for Israel, and especially for David. After all, it was Samuel who had anointed him king. Samuel was recognized throughout Israel as the great prophet of God. He was the one who announced that God had chosen Saul to lead Israel, and he was the one who anointed David as the person God had chosen to replace Saul. When David first learned that Saul intended to kill him, where did he go? To Samuel, to tell him all Saul had done to him. So, not only had David fallen from favor from the king and was running for his life, he had also lost the counsel of the man of God who anointed him, probably adding to David's sense of isolation and loneliness.

XIX. I Samuel 25:2-44 David and Abigail

- A. The story of David and Abigail is one of the more engaging stories in the Old Testament. Abigail is one of the more admirable characters to appear in the life of David, and it is somewhat disappointing that this story is the only one in which she appears. We know nothing of what influence she had on David after this episode, but given the wisdom and judgment she showed in this story, I have to believe her influence on him thereafter was positive.
- B. To get the full impact of this story, we have to understand the context. As we have discussed previously, this was a dangerous time. Israel's borders were not secure, and it was fairly common for raids to occur to Israelite towns by the Philistines, the Amalekites, or others. Additionally, common criminals would often steal sheep or other possessions of those having any wealth at all. Furthermore, when raids came, the raiders would often kill everyone at the site of the raid—men, women and children, and take the plunder. When David gathered his private army, he had to be able to keep them fed, clothed and armed. Furthermore, since they were usually on the run, they had to depend upon the populace wherever they went for support. The main way they found favor with the people was by providing protection to the villages and towns in the areas where they were temporarily based. With their fierce soldiers around, any enemy or criminal would be hesitant to attack.
- C. As this story opens, we are told of a very rich man named Nabal, which in Hebrew means "fool." His name gives a clue to the nature of the story. He was very rich, with many sheep and goats, which would be an attractive target for any raiders looking for plunder. This was a particularly attractive time for an attack because they were shearing the sheep, and the wool had great value. It was also around the time of a feast day, and David needed provisions for the feast for his soldiers and their families. Naturally, he looked to a very rich man whose sheep and goats his men had protected, and he sent men to ask Nabal for provisions for the feast day. Without David's protection he would have had considerably fewer sheep and goats, and he would have been well aware of this.

- D. But instead of giving the men the provisions they requested, as he gladly should have done, Nabal not only refused their request, he insulted them and David. When told of Nabal's response, we see a side of David we haven't previously seen—the hothead side of him. He instantly told his men—400 of them—to strap on their swords. He was heading out to destroy Nabal and all his servants and take *all* of the sheep and goats. Fortunately for Nabal, he had a servant who recognized where this situation was headed, and he immediately went to Nabal's wife Abigail—a woman Nabal clearly didn't deserve—and confirmed to her that what David's men said was true about David protecting Nabal's servants and sheep. He also told her she better intervene on their behalf because David was on his way for revenge, and Nabal was so ill-natured no one could speak to him.
- E. Abigail was a smart woman. She understood the situation and the foolishness of her husband, and she quickly put together a plan to save her family—including her clueless husband and their servants. How she did it demonstrated her wisdom and her understanding of what motivated David. First, she had her servants pull together all of the provisions for the men they had requested. She had these provisions put on donkeys and headed out with them to meet David before he got to their house.
- F. Put yourself in David's shoes now. He was on his way to brutally retaliate against a very rich man who had refused his reasonable request for payment and had insulted him. On the way, he came upon a beautiful woman with all of the provisions he had requested. She dismounted and bowed to the ground in front of him, and asked for permission to speak, which he granted—probably so surprised he just *had* to hear what this woman had to say. First, she told him to pay no mind to Nabal because he was as his name implied, and she had been unaware of the request of David's men. But she also reminded David that he should refrain from taking vengeance against Nabal and his servants, fellow Israelites, for vengeance should come from God. She would have been aware that despite Saul seeking to take David's life, he had refused to take vengeance against Saul, leaving judgment in the hands of God. In essence, she was saying that is what he should do regarding Nabal. She also reminded him that God has promised him he would be king over Israel, and he should not become king with the blood of fellow Israelites on his hands.
- G. Abigail's wise comments brought David to his senses. He realized she was absolutely correct, and but for her interference with his plan he would have made a huge mistake. He accepted the gifts she brought, and David and his men returned home.
- H. Abigail returned to Nabal to confront her husband with what almost happened as the result of his stupidity, but he was too drunk to listen. So, she waited until the following day to confront him. When she did, the scripture says he became like a stone—perhaps he had a stroke—and he died ten days later.

- I. When David heard of Nabal's death, he recognized that God's judgment was at work, and he was grateful he didn't take vengeance into his own hands, thanks to Abigail's good advice. David then wooed and married Abigail. David also married another wife—Ahinoam—apparently around this same time. But David also lost a wife—Michal—who had been given to another man by her father, Saul. Polygamy was an accepted practice in those days. Indeed, we will later hear God tell David after he has Bathsheba's husband killed that God had blessed him with success, being king, and having many wives. If what God had given David were not enough, God said he would have given David even more, apparently including wives. So, times were different then, and we have to accept that we cannot judge those of the past by what is acceptable today.

XX. I Samuel 26:1-25 David spares Saul's life a second time

- A. The story in this chapter is almost a carbon copy of what happened in chapter 24. This chapter begins with the Ziphites betraying David once more. They reported David's whereabouts to Saul, and he gathered 3000 elite warriors to join him as they pursued David. But this time David had his own spies, and he went to see where Saul and men were camped. While Saul and his men were asleep, David and Abishai sneaked into their camp and took Saul's spear and his water jug. As before, David was urged to kill Saul while he had the chance, but he refused to harm God's anointed.
- B. When confronted with the fact David could easily have killed him, Saul repented yet again. David and Saul parted ways, but David did not trust Saul enough to remain in Israel. He knew Saul would come after him again if he remained in Israel, so David sought sanctuary with someone he previously approached—King Achish of Gath.
- C. David was at a low point in his life at this time; he was a man on the run from the most powerful man in Israel—King Saul. And although David had eluded him so far, he still feared for his life. **Psalm 13** reflects the mindset of David at this time.

XXI. I Samuel 27:1-12; 28:1-2 David serves King Achish of Gath

- A. David's most recent escape from Saul convinced him it was just a matter of time before Saul would be successful in his efforts to kill him, so he decided he couldn't remain in Israel. His only hope was to escape, but where? His options were limited, and his ultimate decision on where to go shows just how limited they were. He decided to go back to King Achish of Gath. Keep in mind, this is where he had gone previously to escape from Saul, and it didn't go well. He had to feign being insane to save his life. He escaped only because the pagan Philistines feared the insane and believed they should have nothing to do with them; they were even afraid to harm them. So why did he believe it would be different this time?

- B. Actually, the circumstances were quite different this time. The first time David went to Gath, he was alone. His reputation had been established as the greatest warrior in Israel, the man who killed Goliath. But there he was—all alone seeking sanctuary with Israel’s biggest enemy—saying he was running from Saul, which the people of Gath didn’t believe. Now, however, he was not alone. He had his own private army of 600 of the most feared soldiers in the area. Furthermore, by now, his reputation was as the leader of a mercenary army that had no loyalty to Saul; indeed, Saul was pursuing David to kill him. So, David could be of considerable use to King Achish. The king probably wondered how David was able to recover so fully from his previous insanity attack, but Achish evidently wasn’t about to pass up having such a successful mercenary and his army fighting on his side.
- C. Although all the details aren’t spelled out in the text, David and Achish apparently came to a deal. Achish gave David his own city for himself, his troops and their families—Ziklag, which is just east of modern-day Gaza and away from Gath where Achish lived and reigned. In return, Achish expected David and his troops to conduct raids against the Philistines’ enemies—primarily Israel—and bring back plunder from the raids, a portion of which would go to the king. Achish liked this deal because it would make David an enemy to Israel and would ensure David would never be welcomed in Israel again. David ostensibly agreed to this, although he had no intention of raiding Israelite towns. His plan, and what he actually did, was to head out toward Israel on a raid, and then double back and attack the Amalekites, the Girzites, and other enemies of both Israel and the Philistines. David would attack them and bring back plunder, telling King Achish it all came from Israelite towns. In fact, David never attacked Hebrew cities; instead, he actually shared some of the plunder with the Judean cities where David and his men had previously been hiding out.
- D. This deceptive plan worked, but there was a dark side to it—one that is shocking to our 21st century sensibilities. The only way this plan could work was to ensure there were no witnesses left behind who might somehow get word back to the Philistines that David raided Amalekite villages, not Israelite villages, as David represented to the king. So, in whatever village they raided, they didn’t just take the plunder, they killed every man, woman and child, ensuring there would be no witnesses, and then they burned the town down. This was David the mercenary, and David the double agent who was pretending to attack Israelite towns, but instead was viciously attacking others and claiming the plunder came from Israel. We don’t like to focus on this portion of David’s life but there it is. David apparently believed he had no other choice if he were to survive, and, honestly, no other viable option for him was apparent. Furthermore, this behavior was not out of line for the times, which were shockingly brutal. So, this is how David and his band of soldiers operated for the year and a half he lived in Ziklag, and their secret was never discovered by King Achish.

- E. Finally, the day came when the Philistines were gathering their army for a full-scale attack on Israel once more. Achish informed David he expected David and his men to fight against Israel with him, and David ostensibly agreed, although as we will see, the Lord prevented David from having to fight against his own brethren.

XXII. I Samuel 28:3-25 Saul consults a medium

- A. This is perhaps the weirdest story in the Old Testament, if not all of scripture. But it shows the depths of Saul's fall from grace. Remember, Saul had been anointed just like David to be the king of Israel, and he was initially quite successful and blessed by God. But Saul became disobedient, including keeping the spoils of war for himself when God had specifically told him to destroy the plunder along with the city. He repeatedly refused God's direct commands to him, and God decided he was no longer the man to lead Israel. Saul also became insanely jealous, particularly toward David, even though David was always his faithful servant. Now, we find him so desperate he was ready to consult a medium, even though he himself had outlawed the practice of witchcraft throughout Israel.
- B. He learned where there was a medium; he went to her and, in disguise, asked her to call up Samuel from the dead so he could consult with Samuel. What happened next is a mystery for which I have no good explanation. Even the commentators differ widely in their explanations. But the text says the spirit of Samuel appeared to Saul—apparently not happy about being called up—and asked, "Why have you disturbed me?" Saul complained to Samuel that the Lord no longer answered his inquiries, so he wanted Samuel to tell him what to do regarding the Philistines. Samuel didn't give him the answer he wanted. "Tomorrow," Samuel told him, "Israel will be defeated, and you and your sons will be dead." My take on this scene is that Saul had been so disobedient and so far from God—actually trying to kill the man that he knew God had anointed to lead Israel—that the Lord granted him his request to learn how the battle will turn out, and he let Saul hear the verdict from the one man Saul trusted, even if that man had to be called up from the dead to deliver the message.
- C. Saul was stunned into silence, realizing the punishment for his disobedience was at hand. The woman finally got him to get up and take nourishment, and Saul headed back to camp to meet his destiny.

XXIII. I Samuel 29:1-11 The Philistines reject David

- A. The dilemma in which David found himself is addressed in these verses. Achish expected David to fight against Israel with him; if he didn't, Achish would likely kick him out of Ziklag, and David had nowhere else to go. David told Achish he would fight with him against Israel, and he headed out with Achish. The other commanders of the Philistines didn't trust David as much as Achish did, however; they insisted

David and his men return home. They feared David would turn against them in the heat of battle. Achish stood up for David, but he eventually gave in to the other Philistine commanders. He told David to return home. David protested—although he was actually relieved to be released from his dilemma—but then returned home, while the Philistines left to battle Saul and the Israelite army.

XXIV. I Samuel 30:1-31 David avenges the destruction of Ziklag

- A. As the last chapter ended, David had been sent back to Ziklag by the commanders of the Philistine army; they didn't trust David to be loyal to them once the battle with the army of Israel was joined. In those days, travel of any distance at all took considerable time because they mostly traveled by foot. When David and his troops arrived home after three days of travel, they found Ziklag in ruins. Just as they had raided Amalekite villages and burned them down after taking plunder, the Amalekites did so to the Philistines and to the Israelites. The Amalekites had probably heard that the Philistines and Israelites were marshaling their troops for war and knew there would be few soldiers left to defend their villages. So, they went on a raiding party. However, the Amalekites did not kill all inhabitants of Ziklag as David's men did on their raids; they took the wives and children to be their servants, together with all the spoil they could take.
- B. What happened next was highly unusual. David's men turned against him. Verse 7 says that he was in great danger; the people spoke of stoning him. How could this happen? Remember, the troops' loyalty was only to David; they had no loyalty to Saul or any other leader in Israel. But now, their loyalty to David had led to their wives and children being kidnapped and their homes being burned down. They had a mixture of anger and sorrow so great that they turned against the only man they admired and trusted as their leader. This was a time that David's leadership was being challenged as never before, and it showed the source of his strength as a leader. A lesser leader may have panicked or sought revenge against those who turned against him. But verse 6 says simply, "David strengthened himself in the Lord his God." I wish it specified just *how* he did so, but David, whose own wives had been taken, sought the Lord's will whether to pursue the kidnappers. When the message from the Lord was to pursue them, he responded. He gathered his men, and they headed out in hot pursuit.
- C. As the text explains, they found an Egyptian who was a servant to an Amalekite raider who had abandoned him, and he led David and his band to find the raiders. David was able to surprise them as they were in the middle of a great celebration, enjoying the spoils obtained from their raids. It was a complete victory for David and his troops. They recovered all the women and children, and they also recovered not only their own possessions but also the plunder the Amalekites had taken from others, including the Philistines.

- D. We also see in this story the wisdom of David's leadership. Certain of the troops were upset because some of the men had been too tired to go into battle against the Amalekites, and they argued against the troops who stayed behind getting any of the plunder—other than their own family members and possessions. But David insisted that those who protected their possessions were entitled to an equal share of the spoils of war. It added dignity to the duty of every soldier and helped pull the Israelites together as a unified army. He carried this policy over with him when he became the king of all of Israel.
- E. We also see that David was a good politician. He sent some of the spoils of the raid to those towns in Judah that had helped protect David when he was on the run from Saul. Without their help, Saul may have captured and killed David. David was looking ahead to the day he would be king of Judah before becoming king of all of Israel—a day that was now fast approaching.

XXV. I Samuel 31:1-13 The death of Saul and his sons

- A. As Samuel foretold, the battle between Saul's army and the army of the Philistines did not go well for Israel. In fact, it was a rout, with the army of Israel fleeing the battle. Saul's sons were killed, and he was badly wounded, so bad in fact that he asked his armor-bearer to kill him. The armor-bearer wasn't about to kill his king, so Saul killed himself, and the armor-bearer followed suit.
- B. The victory for the Philistines was so complete that the inhabitants of all of the nearby Israelite towns abandoned their homes to flee from the onslaught of the Philistines. Do you remember what David did when he killed Goliath? He cut off his head to show the Israelite people that victory was his. Now, it was the Philistines who had a trophy—the head of Saul. And they fastened Saul's body and those of his sons to the wall of Beth-Shan—which was an Israelite town they had captured—to gloat over their victory. They also displayed Saul's armor in their pagan temples. In an act of defiance of the Philistines, some of the valiant Israelite men of the nearby town of Jabesh-gilead recovered the bodies of Saul and his sons in the night and gave them a decent burial. It was a tragic day for all of Israel, which was soundly defeated, and it was a disastrous day for the house of Saul. But this day was to lead to the ascent of David as king, first of Judah, then all of Israel, as had been foretold by Samuel.

XXVI. 2 Samuel 1:1-27 David mourns for Saul and Jonathan

- A. As the book of Second Samuel opens, David has just returned from attacking the raiding party of the Amalekites and recovering the women, children and possessions the raiders had taken. Since chapter 30 told us the Amalekites had burned Ziklag, there was probably not a lot to return to, but there they stayed for the next few days. On the third day, a man from Saul's camp showed up with torn clothes and dirt

on his head, which was an act of mourning. David asked how the battle had gone, and the man reported Israel's defeat, together with the death of Saul and his sons. David asked how he knew this, and the man reported being there and seeing what happened. However, he embellished his role, apparently thinking he would curry favor with David by claiming that he himself killed Saul as an act of mercy. He confirmed that he was there by producing the crown from Saul's head, along with his armlet. David inquired where he was from and learned that he was an Amalekite, but one who lived in Israel. Needless to say, David was not very fond of Amalekites at that time; it was the Amalekites that had just raided Ziklag and kidnapped David's wives and children and those of his men. Rather than give the man the reward he was looking for, David had him put to death for claiming to have killed Saul—the Lord's anointed. He apparently had not heard that David had spared Saul's life—twice—and otherwise refused to lift up his hand against the Lord's anointed, and the man's duplicity led to his own destruction.

- B. This was a momentous and tragic occasion in the life of Israel. Their very first king—Saul—who despite his faults had brought Israel together as a country and set up a central government, had been killed in battle by Israel's biggest enemy. It was a time to lament what had happened, and David was up for the occasion; he wrote one of the most beautiful laments in all of literature, not just in scripture. The phrase, "How the mighty have fallen," is in use to this day. Furthermore, by writing this lament, David was speaking for all of Israel, and he expressed the sorrow of the national disaster that had befallen them. By now, David was not personally fond of Saul, but he still respected him as the king of Israel and as God's anointed, and that is the reason for the soulful language regarding Saul. With regard to Jonathan, David had lost a great friend, and the sorrow expressed is personal. He poured out his heart over the loss of his dear friend, saying, "greatly loved were you to me." And, indeed, Jonathan was an admirable man, one of the most righteous to be found in the Old Testament.
- C. No doubt, this lament over the deaths of Saul and his sons, and over the defeat of the army of Israel by the Philistines, enhanced David's status in Israel, and especially in Judah, his own tribe. David was putting into words what all of Israel was feeling, and his words reminded the people of David's service to Saul and to Israel. However, upon the death of Saul, Israel was about to come apart. Judah, the largest tribe and the tribe of David, was no longer prepared to follow the house of Saul, so the stage was set for David to finally become the king Samuel anointed him to be, although not yet over all of Israel.

XXVII. 2 Samuel 2:1-7 David Anointed King of Judah

- A. Once Saul was killed by the Philistines, the threat to David in Israel was gone. Soon after Saul's death David began to consider returning to Israel, but he didn't do anything anymore without consulting God. When he inquired of God, he was told to

return to Judah—his tribe—and go to Hebron, which was the main city of Judah. He brought all of his men with him, together with their families. Once he was there, the people of Judah anointed David king over the tribe of Judah. Remember, upon Saul's death, Judah wanted to be independent of the rest of Israel, so they did not wait around to see who would be crowned king of all Israel. They declared their independence and then crowned David as their king.

- B. Once David was anointed king of Judah, he was informed that it was the men of Jabesh-gilead who recovered the bodies of Saul and his sons. That town wasn't part of Judah, but David used this information and this opportunity to begin currying favor with other tribes of Israel. He sent messengers to the men of Jabesh-gilead congratulating them for how they treated Saul and his sons, and he informed them the house of Judah had anointed him king over them, perhaps suggesting he could be king over them someday.

XXVIII. 2 Samuel 2:8-11 Ishbaal is anointed King of Israel

- A. In these verses we see the split that has taken place among the Israelites. With Samuel dead, the most powerful man in Israel was then Abner, head of the army. He decided to have the one remaining living son of Saul crowned as king over all of Israel except Judah. As we will see, although Ishbaal was crowned king, it was Abner who was the power behind the throne. Without Abner's support, Ishbaal would never have become king. This arrangement of David being king over Judah while Ishbaal was king over the remainder of Israel remained for some years. The rest of this chapter only makes sense if you keep in mind this split, which essentially led to civil war.

XXIV. 2 Samuel 2:12-32 The battle of Gibeon

- A. Once Judah and Israel had different kings it was not long before a battle broke out between them—in effect, a civil war. You will recall what led to the battle between David and Goliath. The Philistines and Israel each put up a champion to do battle to see who would be declared the victor. But as usually happened in such arrangements, the battle still was fought after the champions fought. That is the same sort of thing that appears to have happened in these verses. Abner was the commander of Israel's army, and Joab was the commander of Judah's army. The two commanders agreed to a contest where twelve young men from each side would come together to do battle. In fact, they all killed each other, and then a full-scale battle broke out, with Joab's troops winning the battle.
- B. In verse 18 a man named Zeruiah and his three sons—Joab, Abishai, and Asahel—are mentioned. Zeruiah was one of the older brothers of David, and his sons were David's nephews, although they were close in age to David. Remember, David was the youngest of many brothers. Asahel was the youngest of the three sons, and he

demonstrated some youthful bad judgment by relentlessly pursuing Abner, who was a very capable warrior. Asahel was spoiling for a fight, and despite Abner pleading with him to turn back, he refused to do so. Finally, it appears that Asahel charged Abner and he struck Asahel with the butt end of his spear, killing him. It was an unnecessary death, but passions were high in Israel at the time, especially apparently among Joab, Abishai, and Asahel.

- C. In verses 24-28, we learn that Asahel's brothers, Joab and Abishai, then took up the chase, leading their men against Abner. But Abner reached the area of the tribe of Benjamin and was surrounded by his tribe as Joab and his followers reached them; the two sides prepared for another battle. However, Abner called out to Joab and essentially said, "How long will we fellow Israelites do battle and kill one another?" It was a good question, and Joab finally realized the folly of their continuing to fight. So, Joab returned to Judah, while Abner and his men returned to Mahanaim. The results of the battle: Judah lost 19; Israel (apparently all from the tribe of Benjamin, Saul's tribe) lost 360 men. This battle was just the beginning of the civil war that would continue within Israel until they were finally brought together again under David.

XXX. 2 Samuel 3:1-21 Abner defects to David

- A. This chapter begins with a long civil war between the two sides. David's army grew stronger as time went on, while Abner's grew weaker.
- B. Despite the civil war, David expanded his family while he was at Hebron. He married additional wives and had a number of sons. He also had some daughters, although they are not listed here. Keep in mind that women had few legal rights at the time and were often not mentioned when children were being listed.
- C. Although the civil war wasn't going well for Israel and its king, Ishbaal, it provided an opportunity for Abner to consolidate his power within Israel. Eventually, that led to conflicts between the king and his lead commander. Verses 6-12 tell of one such conflict. Saul, like David and all the Israelite kings after him, had a number of concubines as well as multiple wives. Concubines had a status inferior to wives, but they were more than a mistress and held a legally recognized position in society. The children born to concubines could be heirs, whereas children born out of wedlock could not, but children born to concubines had a lower social status than those born to a wife.
- D. As we will see later in II Samuel, when Absalom tried to overthrow his father, David, he publicly went in to David's concubines and had sex with them to show that he had taken over David's position as king. So, when Ishbaal accused Abner of having an affair with one of Saul's concubines, he was not complaining about the morality of the situation or indicating jealousy; he was accusing Abner of disloyalty to his king

and challenging his authority as king, which was also a crime. Abner didn't take kindly to this accusation. This was the final straw for Abner in a long line of disagreements with the king he put in place. Abner's response to this charge was, essentially, "After all I have done for you, you charge me with the crime of seducing your father's concubine? I've had enough. We know God has sworn to make David King. Because you have treated me this way, I'm going to make this happen for David." At this point, Ishbaal realized he had made a huge mistake. Verse 11 says he couldn't respond at all to this statement because of his fear of Abner.

- E. True to his word, Abner made overtures to David for an agreement whereby Abner would urge all of Israel to make David their king. David was receptive to Abner, but he laid down a condition that had to be met before he would meet in person with Abner. He had to get his wife Michal back. This wasn't because David was still in love with her. She was Saul's daughter, and if David was going to be the successor to Saul, David's wife Michal couldn't remain someone else's wife. Interestingly, David also made this same demand to Ishbaal, who in turn issued orders that Michal be returned to David. This led to one of the saddest and most pathetic scenes in the Old Testament. Abner's troops physically took her from her husband Paltiel to return her to David. Paltiel followed Michal as the troops carried her away, and he was crying all the way. Finally, Abner ordered him to return home, which he did, undoubtedly realizing he would be killed if he didn't obey. There is no mention anywhere in scripture that Saul got Michal divorced from David before giving her to Paltiel. He probably just decreed it and gave Michal to Paltiel as a wife. As we have noted before, customs were different then.
- F. Once that was accomplished, Abner began contacting the elders of the tribes of Israel (except Judah for whom David is already king). It can be inferred from what Abner said that many of them were already thinking they would be better off with David as their king rather than Ishbaal. To help convince them, Abner said it was the Lord's will that David become king over all Israel. Keep in mind, Abner was the one who got Ishbaal crowned as king, and he was the one who led the troops of Israel against Judah in battle. In short, Abner had seen the writing on the wall, and he was switching sides. So, he went to meet with David, who threw a feast for him. Abner promised to rally support throughout all Israel for David, and David essentially told him to go do it. Again, keep in mind this is treason by Abner against the king he had put in place—Ishbaal.

XXXI. 2 Samuel 3:22-39 Abner is killed by Joab

- A. If this were a movie, it would show Abner and his men riding their horses out of one gate of Hebron while Joab and his troops come riding into town through a gate on the other side of town. Joab didn't know of David's meeting with Abner, and when he learned of it, he was incensed and confronted David, telling him Abner was deceiving him. One of the most significant things about this scene is what doesn't

happen. As we will see in future events regarding David, he was not very diligent about disciplining those close to him such as his children or his military commanders. David was well aware that Abner had killed Asahel, and that Joab and his brother Abishai hated Abner. But there is no mention in this chapter of David warning Joab not to do anything foolish; specifically, he did not warn him against taking vengeance against Abner into his own hands. Now that it appeared there could be a reconciliation between Judah and the rest of Israel, David was primarily concerned about reuniting Israel and becoming king of all Israel.

- B. Joab simply wasn't going to let the situation persist. Without David's knowledge, Joab sent messengers after Abner to have him return to Hebron—probably claiming they needed further consultations before Abner went to the other tribes to get them to support David becoming king of all Israel. When Abner returned, verse 27 says Joab took Abner aside to speak to him privately—pretending they were all on the same side—and Joab assassinated him. Verse 27 makes clear it was to avenge Abner killing Asahel.
- C. At this point we have a first-class crisis. A potential resolution of the long-term civil war appeared to be at hand, with David about to become the leader of all of Israel, only to have the reconciliation blown up by David's right-hand man murdering Abner, who had taken the lead in trying to bring Israel back together again. What David did next was critical. A misstep would only aggravate the bitterness between Israel and Judah and bring all efforts toward reconciliation to an end.
- D. David publicly declared that he had nothing to do with the killing of Abner. In fact, he publicly declared Joab to be guilty of murdering Abner. What he didn't do was have him punished for his crime. Instead, he insisted that Joab and his brother participate in the public mourning over Abner. The public mourning included David, Joab, and other leaders, some of whom inwardly were happy over Abner's death. But David even walked behind the bier—a stand on which a casket was placed as it was carried to the grave. Think Prince Charles and his two sons walking behind the casket of Princess Diana after she died to understand what was happening. Then, verses 32-34 tell us David "lifted up his voice and wept" over Abner at the grave, followed by a lament he gave for Abner. He also refused to eat any food that day as evidence of mourning.
- E. David's public actions achieved their intended result. He gained the approval of all of Israel. With regard to Joab, David said he was powerless to take action against Joab and his brother, but the Lord would pay back the guilty. Nevertheless, as we will see much later in David's life, he does eventually repay Joab for what he did.
- F. So, what do we make of this episode in David's life. Given the fact Abner was the commander of the troops of Israel that were fighting David's troops from the tribe of Judah, we can reasonably assume David had no warm feelings for Abner. Yet Abner

held a high position in Israel, and David respected that. David also knew that God had anointed himself to be the king of Israel, and Abner was proposing to help bring about that which God had decreed, so David wasn't about to let his personal feelings prevent that from happening. He was also very conscious of what was required of himself as the king of Israel, anointed by God, and he played that public role quite well.

- G. As to why David didn't punish Joab for murdering Abner, perhaps he thought that would create too big an uproar in Israel and prevent Israel being united once more. Also, as we will see later, David was not a good disciplinarian in his own family or among his close associates, and this is further evidence of that tendency. Although, as his death approached, he advised Solomon to take certain actions toward Joab which David evidently believed he should have taken earlier.

XXXII. 2 Samuel 4:1-12 Ishbaal is assassinated

- A. The first step toward David becoming the king of *all* of Israel occurred when Abner defected from Ishbaal, Saul's son and the king of all of Israel except Judah. Remember, Abner promised David he would urge all of the tribes of Israel to declare David their king. This plan almost came undone when Joab killed Abner. But David took steps to make clear he had nothing to do with Abner's death, and those efforts were well received by Israel. In this chapter, the story deals with the second step—what to do about Israel's existing king, Ishbaal.
- B. As verse 1 points out, the death of Abner was a destabilizing event in Israel. The king—Ishbaal—was afraid and everyone else in Israel was dismayed, unsure what was going to happen next. As sometimes happens in uncertain times, some men in Israel, specifically of the tribe of Benjamin, decided that they were going to ensure how this situation would be resolved. Remember that Saul (and therefore his son) was from the tribe of Benjamin. Verse 2 tells us that Ishbaal the king had two captains of raiding bands—sort of like the cavalry of the day—that were part of the Israelite army under Abner. When Abner was killed by Joab, these two captains of raiding bands—Rechab and Baanah—apparently assessed the political situation and decided they wanted to decide the outcome of the crisis Israel was in. They would have known that Abner was the real power in Israel at the time, and with him now dead Israel had no chance to win the civil war with Judah. David's army was growing stronger; it was only a matter of time until Judah overwhelmed the Israelite army which was now without its leader. So, they came up with a plan to vacate the throne of Israel and, in their view, enable them to curry favor with David and obtain an important position in the consolidated Israelite army. They decide to assassinate Ishbaal.
- C. They found Ishbaal in his home in Hebron, taking his mid-day nap, and killed him. Following what was apparently the custom of the day, they beheaded him and

carried the decapitated head to David, expecting his approval and a reward. You would assume everyone would know by now that this was not the way to find favor with David, but these two apparently didn't. Verses 10-12 state that David recited what he did to the man who brought news of Saul's death, even though the man claimed to have killed Saul out of mercy; David had that man put to death. He then said, essentially, "If I had the man put to death who killed Saul out of mercy how much more do you deserve to die. You killed Ishbaal for selfish reasons." David had them killed, cut off their hands and feet and hung their bodies beside the pool at Hebron. Again, it was a brutal time, but rough justice was done to the two assassins.

- D. Although Ishbaal was apparently the last of Saul's sons, Jonathan had a son named Mephibosheth who was crippled by accident at a young age. We will see his name again in later chapters when David sought to honor his promise to Jonathan to deal fairly with Jonathan's family.

XXXIII. 2 Samuel 5:1-5 David anointed king of all Israel

- A. All the tribes of Israel except Judah were without a king. They were still in the middle of a civil war with Judah, and they had to decide how to proceed. Verses 1 and 2 describe what they told David when they went to him to ask him to be king of all of Israel. Before that, however, you can imagine what they discussed among themselves. It probably went something like this: "What are we doing fighting our brother Hebrews and killing one another? Even while Saul was king, it was David who defeated Goliath and led us to victories over the Philistines. We never lost to them while he led our army. Furthermore, we now know that God chose David to be our leader and Samuel anointed him while Saul was still king. We need to be united again, and David is the only one who can bring us together."
- B. So, David was crowned king of all of Israel, including Judah, and Israel was once again united. Verse 5 tells us David was only 30 years old when he became king of Judah, and he reigned over Judah for seven years, and over a united Israel for 33 years, a total of 40 years as king.

XXXIV. 2 Samuel 5:6-16 David captures Jerusalem

- A. Many people are surprised to learn that Jerusalem has not always been a part of Israel from the time Israel settled the promised land, especially because of Jerusalem's location—in the middle of modern-day Israel. However, Israel's occupation of the promised land had never been complete. There were pockets of areas in which the Hebrews had never forced out the indigenous people. One such area was the walled city of Jebus which was occupied by the Jebusites. It was only about 12 miles from Bethlehem, and it was a fortress city that the Jebusites claimed was so strong it could be defended by the blind and the lame. That claim was made

because many different people had attempted to breach the walls of the city, and all had failed.

- B. So, why did David want to conquer Jebus? There is no mention of the Jebusites being one of Israel's chief enemies. However, consider the situation David faced. He was the newly crowned king of all of Israel. Saul had been from the tribe of Benjamin, and he ruled from a city of Benjamin. His son Ishbaal reigned from there as well. When David was crowned king of Judah, his capital was in Hebron, a city in Judah. What David needed was a capital that was not viewed as part of one of the 12 tribes of Israel—much like the decision early in our history after our constitution was adopted to create a capital that was not part of one of the states, leading to the establishment of Washington, D.C.—and there was a very good candidate nearby, the city of Jebus. The problem was how to conquer it.
- C. Even David with his tough, experienced troops knew he couldn't overwhelm the walls of the city; they were indeed impregnable. However, an underground water source had been created so if the city were under siege, it could wait it out with a secure water source. David sent some troops up the water shaft to attack the city from within and open the gates, which quickly led to the surrender of the city. It was now David's, and he renamed it Jerusalem and made it the capital city of all of Israel, forever to be known as "the City of David."
- D. With David being so successful, establishing his new capital and becoming more powerful, other nations wanted to remain on friendly terms. Verse 11 tells us King Hiram of Tyre sent cedar timber and carpenters to build him a house—a palace actually—in Jerusalem. All of this convinced David he was within the Lord's will, and his success was proof of this.
- E. Verses 13-16 tell us that once he was in Jerusalem David took more wives and concubines, and he had many more sons and daughters. As we will see, all the wives and children will later become a problem for him.

XXXV. 2 Samuel 5:17-25 David defeats the Philistines

- A. Although there was joy throughout Israel that David was king, the Philistines were incensed that David was now king of their biggest enemy. Remember, it was David who killed Goliath, a national hero for the Philistines. Also, by now, King Achish of Gath, a leading Philistine city, was extremely angry because David had misled him not once but twice. The first time was when David faked being insane; the second time was when David was fleeing from Saul. Achish took him in and protected him, believing that David was forever an enemy of Israel. David promised Achish he would fight against Israel; he even took his men on raiding parties, but instead of killing and robbing Israelite towns, he raided towns of the Amelikites but kept that action secret. Only later did Achish learn he had been duped. So, when David was

crowned king of the Philistine's biggest enemy, Israel, they wanted to defeat his army and kill him, just as they did to Saul. In short, they wanted a weak Israel which would be no threat to them. So, they marshaled their army and advanced into the valley of Rephaim. That valley led straight up to Jerusalem, so David's new capital was threatened.

- B. By now, David had learned not to take any action without conferring with the Lord first. When he inquired of God whether to engage the Philistines and received approval to do so, he attacked right up the valley as the Philistines were spread out there. He overran the middle of the Philistine defensive position, and it was a great victory for Israel. Verse 21 tells us the Philistines even abandoned their idols as they retreated.
- C. But the Philistines regrouped and came back again into the valley of Rephaim. They apparently believed they had a new strategy which would defeat the Israelite army. Again, David inquired of the Lord. This time, God told David not to follow the same strategy. While a portion of the Israelite army confronted them in the valley, another portion circled around to their rear and attacked when they heard "marching in the tops of the balsam trees." It was another great victory for Israel.
- D. To understand David's attitude before these battles read **Psalm 20**. To understand David's attitude after these battles read **Psalm 21**.

XXXVI. 2 Samuel 6:1-23 David brings the ark to Jerusalem

- A. This is a story that presents a number of questions for us modern Christians because God appears to be acting in a manner that is inconsistent with our understanding of God. Uzzah was struck dead by God when he reached out to steady the ark which apparently was about to topple off the ox cart when the oxen shook it. To understand what was going on here, we have to understand the importance of the ark. First, it was a holy and sacred object that symbolized the covenant God made with Israel. In it were the tablets on which God had given the Ten Commandments to Moses. It was so holy that only priests could move it, and they had to move it by putting their hands only on poles that were built into the ark. Even they were not supposed to touch the ark, only the poles. Chapter 25 of Exodus contains the instructions God gave to Israel for the construction of the ark. The ark contained a mercy seat from which God said he would deliver all his commands for Israel. So, it was the most holy object in Israel, and it was to be treated in strict accordance with God's instructions.
- B. Once David was ensconced in Jerusalem and their primary enemy, the Philistines, was defeated, he decided to transport the ark to Jerusalem, Israel's new capital. This was a good thing. But in his enthusiasm to bring it to Jerusalem, David ignored the instructions of God. Instead of having priests transport the ark consistent with

instructions from God, it was carried on an ox cart, similar to the one Philistines used. Why David ignored the strict instructions from the Lord regarding the ark, we don't know. He was obviously excited about bringing the ark to Jerusalem because verse five tells us David and his entourage were dancing with all their might and playing musical instruments. But God expected obedience, especially with regard to this holiest of objects. When the temple was later built, the ark was placed in the holy of holies, the room in which no one entered except the high priest, and he only entered one day a year on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement.

- C. So, when Uzzah reached out and tried to steady the ark, verse 7 tells us the anger of the Lord was kindled against him and God struck him dead. David was stunned; he was angry, fearful and dismayed. He was so fearful he decided he couldn't take the ark the rest of the way to Jerusalem. Instead, he placed the ark at the home of a man named Obed-edom. Undoubtedly, David was angry and mystified because the ark was possibly about to topple off the ox cart when Uzzah attempted to steady it; he was trying to be helpful to this most sacred of objects. However, compare David's reaction here to his reaction in chapter 1 of 2 Samuel when the man told David he had killed King Saul at his request to prevent him from falling alive into the hands of the Philistines. Despite David being told it was a mercy killing, David had the man put to death for killing the Lord's anointed. In this incident, David was angry with God for punishing someone trying to be helpful. We modern Christians put all of our emphasis on God's mercy and love, often forgetting that he is also a God of Justice who expects obedience from us. Even if we don't like how this event turned out, it is a reminder that our obedience to God isn't optional; God expects it. Jesus said on the night before he was crucified, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments."
- D. In any event, three months passed. David learned that Obed-edom has been blessed by God while the ark has been with him, and David took that as a sign he could resume his plan to take the ark to Jerusalem. This time, it appears from verse 13 that priests were carrying the ark in accordance with the instructions from God—no ox cart— and brought it into the city of Jerusalem with dancing and music, with David leading the celebration, apparently not fully clothed. When it was placed in the tabernacle, sacrifices were offered, and a great celebration ensued that included a gift to every man and woman from David. It was a great day in Israel, one that everyone involved would remember for the rest of their lives.
- E. David's attitude about this day is recorded in **I Chronicles 16:8-36**. Read it.
- F. However, when David returned to his home to bless it, he learned that the events of the day were not celebratory for one of his wives—Michal. Remember, she was the daughter of a king, now married to a king. Apparently, kingly decorum was more important to her than having the ark of the covenant brought into Jerusalem, and David's dancing was repugnant to her. Instead of congratulating him, she denounced

him for “uncovering himself . . . as any vulgar fellow might. . .” David didn’t accept the criticism; he said he danced for the Lord, and the Lord had appointed him king in place of her father, Saul. Her allegiance was still more to her father than it was to her husband. Verse 23 says she died childless, apparently implying that she and David were estranged the rest of their lives. The story of David and Michal is a sad one of young love turning into mutual animosity, although they remained married.

XXXVII. 2 Samuel 7:1-17 God’s covenant with David

- A. Chapter 7 begins with the writer informing us that David had reached a new stage in his life. Remember, he was anointed to be king of Israel while he was still a shepherd boy. He was already a wonderful musician and writer of psalms; he had killed lions and bears. Then he killed the most feared soldier at the time—Goliath. Saul appointed him head of the Israelite army and he proved to be an innovative, courageous, and successful general. He eluded a deranged Saul with his wits and courage. He deceived his enemy—the Philistines—by his wits, along with a brutal strategy of killing all the people of the enemy towns he raided whether man, woman, or child. He was known for the psalms and laments he wrote. He was a strong and wise political leader as king, bringing Israel together once again with a new capital in which he now resided in his palace. Finally, he had rest from all his enemies. God’s prophecy of making him great among all the people of the world had come true.

- B. It’s at this point that he decided it wasn’t right for him to live in a palace while the ark of God remained in a tent. He decided he should build a temple for God and so informed the prophet Nathan, who initially encouraged him to pursue his plan. But that very night the Lord spoke to Nathan, directing him to tell David the privilege of building a temple would fall to David’s son. In short, God told David, “I have built you a house; you shall not build me a house. I have blessed you greatly so you could achieve all you have achieved, and I have made you a great man.”

- C. God’s response to David almost appears to be a rebuke, but it was not; it was an act of love on God’s part. Why? David was a great man, but still a man with all the weaknesses we humans are subject to. One of the weaknesses of great men—or women—is that the more they achieve, the greater is the likelihood of hubris setting in. Hubris means excessive pride, and it’s usually associated with power. The more power one has the greater the likelihood of hubris. David had achieved great power at this point in his life, and as future events will show, hubris had begun to creep into him. If he were to be the one to build the temple it would likely increase his tendency toward hubris. So, the Lord reminded him that it was God himself who had enabled him to accomplish all he had done; David did not achieve all this in his own power. The privilege of building a temple would go to David’s son. But God promised David that he would build for him a house that would extend forever—referring to his lineage that would include the Messiah. He promised that although

he would discipline David's descendants, he would not take his steadfast love from them as he did from Saul.

XXXVIII. 2 Samuel 7:18-29 David's prayer

- A. If you wonder at times why God said of David, "He is a man after my own heart," these verses are a good place to start to discover why God would say that. David would have been disappointed that God wanted David's son to build the temple rather than him, but he humbly accepted all that God said to him. He acknowledged that it was God who had enabled him to achieve all he had achieved. And he acknowledged there was no other god like the Lord. He also realized God had made a covenant with him that his house would endure forever. We, the church, are a part of that covenant, for we are part of God's house established by the Lord Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of God.

XXXVIX. 2 Samuel 8:1-18 David's wars

- A. When the Israelites were freed from slavery in Egypt, God led them by Moses to the promised land. Due to their disobedience, they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years before actually occupying the land. Even then, they didn't obey God and drive out all the inhabitants of the land, and as God predicted, it led to intermarriage between the Hebrews and foreigners and constant harassment of Israel by surrounding tribes and peoples. If you read the book of Judges, which covers a time period of about 400 years—much longer than the USA has been a nation—you see that it was one war after another with surrounding nations and tribes. Although God enabled the Israelites to fend off most of their enemies, they were constantly being harassed; they had little security. Furthermore, as we saw with Jebus and the Jebusites, their enemies were often close by. Jebus—which was renamed Jerusalem by David—was only 14 miles from Bethlehem, even though it was in the middle of territory that was mostly Hebrew country.
- B. Israel had no central government, no standing army, and no national strategy to fend off their enemies before Saul was made king. Israel was really just a collection of tribes that sort of did their own thing—somewhat like the USA was before our constitution was adopted in 1789. When Israel got a king and became a united nation, their surrounding enemies took them more seriously, and there were more wars, especially with the Philistines, but with others as well. The Philistines finally achieved their goal of getting rid of the king of Israel—Saul. So, when David was finally crowned as king of a reunited Israel, the situation with surrounding nations was untenable for Israel. There were enemies on all sides, and David realized that he would have to deal with his enemies and expand the borders of Israel if it was to be secure. And so, he went on the offensive to do exactly that.

- C. As we saw in previous chapters, David defeated the enemy to the west, the Philistines, twice, when they came against Israel. In verse 1 we find David going on the offensive against the Philistines and taking one of their chief cities, Methegammah.
- D. In verse 2, David defeated the Moabites, their enemy to the east. Remember, David's great-grandmother, Ruth, was from Moab. But she became an Israelite and married Boaz. There had been ongoing wars and skirmishes with Moab for centuries. David defeated them and then executed two-thirds of their soldiers, sparing one-third. As brutal as this seems to us, this was not unusual for that time. In fact, David was more lenient than most warriors were of that day; most kings or generals would have executed *all* of the captured soldiers. David wanted to ensure he would not have to fight the Moabites yet again. Instead, they became servants to Israel, with enough men left to allow Moab to survive.
- E. In verses 3-8, we find David dealing with Israel's enemies to the north. He defeated King Hadadezer of Zobah near the Euphrates River. And when the Arameans of Damascus came to the aid of King Hadadezer David defeated them, killing 22,000 soldiers. He also set up garrisons in Damascus and other cities of the Arameans and required tribute from them. He also plundered their gold and bronze. This victory also brought David a political ally, King Toi of Hamath, who had often fought King Hadadezer. This is an example of the enemy of my enemy becoming my friend. King Toi brought David gifts of silver, gold, and bronze which David dedicated to the Lord for the building of the temple, which his son Solomon would build.
- F. David also defeated his enemy to the south—the Edomites. He killed over 18,000 of their soldiers in the Valley of Salt, and put garrisons in Edom, making the Edomites servants of Israel. This was yet another victory in a solid line of victories in which David defeated all the enemies of Israel on all fronts. As verse 14 points out, God delivered victory to David wherever he went.
- G. David, of course, couldn't achieve all these victories on his own. Verses 15-18 list all the officers serving under David, with Joab being his head general.

XL. 2 Samuel 9:1-13 David's kindness to Mephibosheth

- A. Recall that in I Samuel, chapter 20, David and Jonathan met in the field as David was hiding from Saul. There, David promised he would be kind to Jonathan's descendants. This may seem to us to be common courtesy, but in those days a king would usually ensure he had no competition for his throne by killing anyone who had a claim to it. Since Jonathan was Saul's oldest son, he had a claim to the throne, as did his male descendants. So, Jonathan was ensuring the safety of his sons. In these verses, David remembered his promise to Jonathan and wanted to fulfill it.

- B. David learned that there remained a servant of Saul named Ziba; he summoned him to learn whether anyone remained of Saul's descendants to whom he could show kindness. Remember, all of Saul's sons, except Ishbaal, were killed by the Philistines when Saul was killed. Ishbaal was made king of Israel by Abner, but Ishbaal was later assassinated by two of Abner's officers who wanted David to be king of a united Israel and who wanted a reward for killing Ishbaal. So, none of Saul's sons remained alive, but there was a grandson, a son of Jonathan, named Mephibosheth who was a cripple, living in the house of a man named Machir. David summoned Mephibosheth who probably thought he had been summoned to be put to death because Saul tried to kill David. Much to his surprise, David informed him all of Saul's property will be returned to him and Ziba will manage it for him. Furthermore, David honored him by making a place at David's table for Mephibosheth for the rest of his life.
- C. This is a feel-good story that we like to read. David's best friend was Jonathan, with whom David had a special bond, and now David decided to take care of Jonathan's son. You would think Mephibosheth would be eternally grateful for David's kindness to him, but that was not the case. As we will see when we get to chapter 16 of 2 Samuel, Mephibosheth believed that Israel would crown him king of Israel when David's son Absalom rebelled against David. This was not to be, and Mephibosheth wound up losing all that David had given to him.

XLI. 2 Samuel 10:1-19 The Ammonites and Arameans are defeated

- A. One of the few neighbors that was not an enemy of Israel during the early portion of David's reign was Ammon. The Ammonites occupied an area east of Israel but north of Israel's other eastern neighbor, Moab. Their king, Nahash, had dealt fairly with David, and when he died David sent a delegation to console Nahash's son and new king, Hanun, over his father's death. In some of the worst advice ever given to a king, Hanun's advisors told him David's delegation was really there to scout out the land and the city for a future war with them. The advisors' stupidity was only exceeded by Hanun's who shaved off half the beard of each man and cut off their garments at the hip, apparently leaving their undergarments showing. This was an insult and a provocation that any sane king should have known would likely result in war. Given the success David had achieved at war with all of Israel's other enemies, it's particularly difficult to understand why Hanun would do such a thing.
- B. But Hanun apparently thought he could have a better result at war with David than others had. He hired troops of Arameans, who occupied the land east of the Ammonites, and others, to form a large army to oppose Israel. David sent Joab and his army to battle with Hanun and his allies. But as the armies were forming up to do battle, Joab found himself confronted with the Ammonites in front of him, just outside their city walls, and the Arameans behind him in the open countryside. So, Joab put half of his army under the command of his brother Abishai to confront the

Ammonites, while he had command of the other half of the army confronting the Arameans, with the plan that each would assist the other as necessary.

- C. Joab attacked the Arameans and they quickly lost their nerve and fled. The Ammonites saw this, and they quickly retreated into their city behind the walls. At this point, Joab saw no need to lay siege to the city and returned with his army to Jerusalem. But Hadadezer, king of the Arameans, wanted another shot at defeating Israel. So, he gathered the largest Aramean army yet and proceeded toward Israel to a city called Helam. There, the army of the Arameans was arrayed for battle against Israel's army, and when the battle was joined, it was another great victory for Israel, which destroyed the Aramean army. Verse 18 says Israel killed 700 chariot teams, 40,000 horsemen, and the commander of the Aramean army. It was a total victory. All of the allies of Hadadezer made peace with Israel and provided no further help to the Ammonites, who, as we will see, are mentioned in the next chapter of 2 Samuel.
- D. Thus far, David's life has been one of success after success. Even during the dark days when he was fleeing from Saul, he was successful in all that he undertook, and he was blessed by God in his every endeavor. With chapter 11 of 2 Samuel, we come to a change in David's life. It is the beginning of several crises he will face as the consequences of his sins multiply and complicate his life.

XLII. 2 Samuel 11:1-13 David commits adultery with Bathsheba

- A. Beginning with this chapter, we must deal with events in David's life that are hard to read and harder still to understand, particularly for a "man after God's own heart." David's humanity, with all the darkness that implies, is on full display. Although we must evaluate David's actions in the context of his times—he was a bronze-age warrior and king, the standards for whom differed greatly from today's standards—what David did, and didn't do, is still mystifying to us some three thousand years later. Yet, I suggest to you there's no other story in all of scripture that better describes the nature of sin, the nature of true repentance, and the nature and extent of God's forgiveness. In many respects it follows New Testament theology. Therefore, we will examine carefully all aspects of this story to learn the lessons that still hold true for us today.
- B. Everything in scripture is there for a purpose. In verse one we learn that it was spring, a time when kings usually led their troops into battle. This year, however, David sent Joab to lead the troops, and they were off to battle the Ammonites and besiege Rabbah, which they left unbesieged in the last chapter. The implication is that David shouldn't have remained behind in his palace. But he did, and he apparently had time on his hands; he was probably bored.
- C. It's in this context that he was walking on the roof of the palace one evening—most buildings had flat roofs—and he saw a beautiful woman bathing naked on the roof of

her nearby house in full view of the palace. We'll focus on David in our analysis of this story, but in my opinion, Bathsheba was complicit in the adulterous affair that takes place. She would have known her rooftop wasn't private; it was in plain view from the palace. She would have also known the king was in town—and her husband wasn't—and yet she chose to bath naked in the open on her roof. There's a lesson in this story for the Bathshebas of the world as well as for the Davids.

- D. David saw her and noticed that she was very beautiful. One of Billy Graham's explanations as to why he was able to avoid sexual scandals that have tripped up so many other prominent pastors was this: "It isn't the first look that gets you in trouble; it's the second or third look." David apparently took a second look and liked what he saw. It's important to note that neither David's first nor his second look was sinful; it was merely temptation. He still could have turned away, and perhaps even had a servant inform Bathsheba that although she might be unaware of it, her bathing spot was in full view from the palace. But he didn't do that; he sent someone to learn the identity of this woman. He may have been thinking she would be a good addition to his collection of wives or concubines; who knows? It was when the messenger told him the woman was Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite, that this story takes a turn for the worse. It would have been significant enough to learn the woman was married, but he learned the woman was married to Uriah who is listed in 2 Samuel 23:39 as one of David's mighty men—a man of valor and one of David's important officers. Even as David was checking out his wife, Uriah was with the army of Israel fighting the Ammonites and putting his life at risk for his king. Warning sirens should have been going off at full volume in David's head at this point. After learning who the woman was, he should have thanked the messenger and turned his attention elsewhere. Why didn't he do this? To answer this question, we have to look at the nature of sin and why people—even God-fearing kings—sometimes do what they clearly know is wrong and sinful.
- E. We see the pattern in the first sin ever committed. In Genesis, chapter 3, Adam and Eve were in the garden. They had only one rule to constrain them: don't eat the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden. But when Satan caused them to question why God would prohibit them from eating the delicious looking fruit, verse 6 says, "When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate." This process is described in the book of James. James said, "One is tempted by one's own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin. . ." In short, what both of these scriptures are saying is that we become focused on the object of our desire, whatever or whomever that may be, and we are unable to hear any other voices or even our own conscience telling us to reject that which is tempting us even though God has forbidden what we are contemplating doing. That's what happened to David. He saw that the woman was beautiful and desirable, and even the knowledge that she was the wife of one of

his lead officers engaged in battle on his behalf didn't stop him from doing what he unquestionably knew was forbidden.

- F. Why would David, who refused to lay a hand on Saul on two occasions when he could have killed Saul, get so distracted from God's instructions just by seeing a naked woman? After all, he had many wives and even more concubines. In my opinion, even though scripture doesn't explicitly say so, hubris had begun to set into David. Hubris, of course, means excessive pride; it's the opposite of humility. And it's a condition that attacks the successful—or at least those who believe themselves to be successful. David's life to this point had been one success after another; even when running from Saul, he was successful. He put together a rag-tag army that became one of the best in whole region. And as he had more success, he gained more power, and great power fuels hubris. One filled with hubris and unchecked power begins to believe the rules don't apply to him. And that's what happened to David. He saw Bathsheba and decided he wanted her. The fact she was married—even married to one of his prominent officers—didn't matter. He wanted what he wanted, and no one was going to stop him. Verse 4 says he sent messengers to get her, and she came to him (apparently without protest), and he lay with her.
- G. Scripture doesn't tell us what happened thereafter until Bathsheba discovered she was pregnant and sent word to David. But we can surmise what was going on. David was afflicted with guilt. Note that he didn't bring her back again. It would have been some weeks before she discovered she was pregnant and there is no indication they got together again. David knew he had sinned; he knew the law of God. Not only had he sinned, he had engaged in the worst kind of corruption in the government he headed. He committed adultery with the wife of one of his fellow warriors, an officer in the middle of battle on his behalf at the time of the adultery. So, guilt had set in with David. We tend to think of guilt today as a bad thing, but it isn't. Guilt is God's way of telling us we have done something wrong. The purpose of guilt is to lead us to acknowledge our sin or bad behavior, and repent, apologizing or even compensating someone we've treated badly. Guilt only becomes a bad thing after we have repented and received God's forgiveness, but the guilt lingers. In such a situation, guilt is bad because it's an indication we don't really believe God has forgiven us, which is a lack of faith on our part. So, treat guilt with the respect it deserves until you have repented and received God's forgiveness. Then, if it persists, ask God to give you more faith for the assurance you have been forgiven.
- H. Another reason we can assume David was plagued with guilt once he sinned is that this has been the pattern ever since the first sin was committed. As soon as we sin, our eyes (which is a metaphor for our conscience) are opened and we realize we have sinned. In Genesis 3:7, as soon as Adam and Eve sinned, "Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew they were naked." They hid from God because they were ashamed. God had to come looking for them. Note, however, that guilt only comes to those who still have a conscience. For those who have given

themselves over to sin completely, they no longer even consider what they have done to be sinful no matter how bad the violation is. But David was not at that stage.

- I. So, David was filled with guilt, probably trying to figure out how he could have done such a thing, and then the situation got worse. He received a message from Bathsheba, "I'm pregnant." Now, in addition to guilt, he was filled with fear. It wasn't the fear of God; it was the fear that everyone would know that he, the Lord's anointed and king, had behaved like the worst of sinners. He was trying to figure out "How this could have happened to me." Hubris was still at work in him. He wasn't about to repent; he was about to try to cover up his sinfulness with a devious plot.
- J. He instructed Joab to send Uriah back to him immediately under the pretense of David wanting a report on how the siege of Rabbah was going. If Uriah were home with his wife at this time, everyone, including Uriah, would assume the child was his, and David's shame would be covered up. Once Uriah had given him his report, David sent him home; he even sent a present along with him. Unfortunately for David, he chose the wrong man's wife to sin with. Uriah was a man of character and principle as well as being a valiant warrior. He refused to go enjoy the comforts of home and wife while his brother warriors were roughing it in the fields. Even David's urging him to go home didn't convince him.

XLIII. 2 Samuel 11:14-27 David has Uriah killed

- A. By now, David was desperate. He told Uriah to remain one more day before he sent him back to the battle. That night he got Uriah drunk, hoping he would then still stumble home—or be carried home—so there would at least be a plausible story to support the claim that the baby was Uriah's. But even in his drunken state, Uriah's character shone through. He still wouldn't go home, sleeping instead with the servants of the king.
- B. David was out of options to cover up his affair with the wife of one of his officers. The upright—the godly—thing to do at this point was to admit his sin, apologize to Uriah and vow never to do anything like this again. In other words, to repent. But in another inexplicable action by David, he decided he had to get rid of Uriah. So, he wrote a message to his commanding general, Joab, telling him to send Uriah to the front of the charge against the city and then pull back from him, making Uriah the target of all of the archers in the city. In short, he had Uriah carry his own execution order back to the general who would ensure David's order was carried out. It happened just as David ordered it, and Uriah, one of David's mighty men, was killed by the Ammonites, but really by his own king and his general.
- C. One reason what David did is so inexplicable is that once he learned Bathsheba was pregnant, he initially tried to cover up the sin by sending Uriah home so people

would believe the baby was his. But after David got him drunk, he still didn't go home, and the servants knew it, so even with Uriah dead everyone would know that the baby *couldn't* be his. At this point, David wasn't thinking clearly. His judgment had been impaired by his own sinfulness, and he acted irrationally, not to mention cruelly.

- D. Verse 26 tells us that when Bathsheba learned her husband was dead, she lamented over him and went through the prescribed period of mourning. Once the mourning period was over, David brought her to the palace and married her. By this time the rumor mill would likely have been going strong at the palace. People talk, and the servants knew Uriah never went home. They also knew Bathsheba had spent a night at the palace and was now pregnant. David seemed to be doing the honorable thing by marrying her, but tongues would have been wagging, and you can imagine the reception Bathsheba had among the other wives.
- E. Note in verses 22-25 that when David learned of Uriah's death, he expressed no regret over the loss of this loyal officer. He even told Joab not to "let this matter trouble you." David's fall was complete.
- F. When Saul was killed, David wrote a lament over Saul's death that included the words, "How the mighty have fallen!" At this point in David's life, the same could be written about him. But no one was ready to write a lament over David's sinfulness. Instead, he would face the judgment of God from the Lord's prophet and David's friend, Nathan.

XLIV. 2 Samuel 12:1–14 Nathan condemns David

- A. We don't know exactly how long it was before Nathan came to bring the judgment of God upon David. It was probably at least 10-12 months after the adultery, murder, and betrayal took place. By then, the child had been born, and from what we read in this chapter, David loved the child. It was a difficult year for David. The guilt of what he had done was constantly with him, even though it may have appeared to him he had covered up his sin—not from God, but from the people of Israel. Despite what David may have thought, this was not a well-kept secret. Remember, the palace staff knew what happened, and rumors would have been circulating, although carefully. No one wanted to speak with attribution.
- B. Somehow, Nathan got word of what had happened. It probably didn't take a divine revelation for him to learn of David's misdeeds. I suspect he heard it from servants at the palace. Once he learned of David's sin, he sought the Lord's direction. People—even prophets of God—always took their life into their own hands when they confronted a monarch of that age. Undoubtedly, Nathan was shaking with fear as he approached David. And this meeting did not take place with only David and Nathan present. There were likely others from the king's court present as well.

- C. The confrontation of David by Nathan is very New Testament, even prescient of the teaching style of Jesus. Nathan confronted David with a parable. A parable is a short tale that illustrates a universal truth. It was Jesus' chosen method of teaching a thousand years later, although parables were not as common in the Old Testament. The brilliance of using a parable in this situation was that Nathan didn't have to accuse David. David accused and passed judgment on himself. Just as David, a man with many wives and concubines, decided to take for himself the only wife Uriah had, the rich man in the story did the same regarding the poor man's lamb, and he took it without pity. After David righteously passed judgment on the rich man who took and killed the poor man's lamb, Nathan confronted David with his sin. In my mind's eye, I see Nathan thundering the words to the king, "You are the man!" The shock in the room must have been electric, and undoubtedly all present expected blood to be shed. Quickly.
- D. Given that David had acted so callously toward Uriah by deceiving him and then sending him to his death in battle, God instructed Nathan to recount all he had done for David. He anointed him king, saved him from Saul repeatedly, gave him all of Saul's house and his wives, and gave him the kingdoms of Judah and Israel. Furthermore, God said, "If that weren't enough, I would have given you even more. Despite all I have done for you, you have betrayed me." In short, the message delivered by Nathan made clear to David that it was God David had betrayed by despising God's law, and it was God to whom he now had to answer. And, as Nathan made clear, the judgment would be public for all to know.
- E. Finally, David admitted his sin and humbly submitted himself to God's judgment. Nathan told him God had forgiven him. But there were consequences for David's actions. He probably thought he was going to be struck dead on the spot, but Nathan reassured David he would not die. Nevertheless, David's sin had brought about problems in his family that would fester and be a thorn to David for the rest of his life. He was told the sword would never leave his family; his troubles would come from within his family. He took someone else's wife in secret, but another would take David's wives in public. And finally, the child would die.
- F. One reason this story is so revealing about the nature of sin and God's forgiveness is that it presents the full picture of both. We have already addressed the nature of sin. Here, we see the nature and breadth of God's forgiveness. The first element of his forgiveness was discipline or punishment. We tend to think of forgiveness as waiving all of the consequences of sin, but that's not the Biblical pattern. When Adam and Eve sinned, there were consequences. Note that God went looking for them and reconciled with them, but they were kicked out of the garden, and they would eventually die. Nathan told David, "The Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die." Yet, the consequences were immense. There would be turmoil within

David's house for the rest of his life. His own son would rebel against him and seek to have him dethroned and killed. The child born to Bathsheba died.

- G. So, how do we reconcile the presence of both punishment and forgiveness. After all, we believe that Jesus paid the price for our sins when he died on the cross. Didn't he take on all the consequences of our sin? Was the presence of both punishment and forgiveness just an Old Testament situation, or does the same pattern still apply? To answer this question, we need to understand the nature of God's love, which is quite different from our secular understanding of love. God created us and knows us. He knows we need discipline to remain obedient to him, and he knows the natural consequences of our sin will be dire if we do not remain obedient to him. This is why Jesus said we must abide in him; if we don't, our basic nature will take over and we will pursue our own desires rather than God's will. Scripture is full of this idea of God providing discipline to us for our own good.
- a. Proverbs 3:11. "My child, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, for the Lord reproves the one he loves, as a father reproves the son in whom he delights."
 - b. Hebrews 12:11. "Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."
- H. So, God's discipline is given to bring us back into a proper relationship with him, not to see us suffer. As Christians, we do believe that Jesus has taken away the penalty for our sins, which is death. Because he died and we believe in him, we will live with him in eternity. But in this life, we usually have to live with the consequences of our sins. And those consequences will often affect others, even innocent others. That is why we need to take sin seriously. As David found out, God forgave him, but the consequences of his sin were vast and painful, to the innocent as well as to the guilty.

XLV. 2 Samuel 12:15-25 Bathsheba's child dies/Solomon is born

- A. These verses are some of the most heart rending in scripture in my opinion. David was confronted with the consequences of his sin in the most personal way. He was fully aware the son was the result of the adulterous relationship that also led to murder. He knew all along that his actions had angered the Lord, and he was now confronted with God's anger and disappointment in him. Yet David loved the child greatly, and seeing the child struck ill because of his own sin was tearing him up. He pled with God to spare the child. He fasted and lay on the ground in misery, debasing himself. And he did this for seven days. His servants were afraid he was about to do himself harm. When the child died, they were afraid to tell him. Yet, to their amazement, once he learned the child was dead, he got up from the ground,

bathed for the first time in a week, put on fresh clothes, ate, and worshiped. The servants were dumbfounded, and they aren't alone. This behavior is not what we expect either. So, how are we to understand David's behavior. Was he being cynical when he said, "I shall go to him, but he will not return to me."

- B. As strange as his behavior seems at this point, I believe it shows clearly that David had truly repented, and he understood that God had truly forgiven him. David was identified by God as a "man after my own heart," not because he was perfect—as we have seen, he was far from it—but rather because when he repented, he *fully* repented. Furthermore, he understood that his sinful behavior was *fully* forgiven by God. How do we know this? He wrote Psalm 51. If you have ever wondered what God expects of us in repentance, wonder no more. The pattern is laid out clearly here.
- a. Verses 1-4. He asked God for mercy, which means he knew he was guilty. But he knew God is merciful and he could go to God to have himself cleansed of his sins.
 - b. Verse 3-5. He admitted his sin again and said it was ever before him (the sense of guilt). He acknowledged God was justified in disciplining him and faultless in his judgment. He acknowledged he was a sinner by nature.
 - c. Verses 6-9. He realized God wants truth in our inward being—our character— and that we need God's wisdom to develop Godly character. He asked God to restore joy to his life and believed he could once again be joyful after his sins have been forgiven.
 - d. Verses 10-12. He asked for his heart to be cleansed by God and that God's Holy Spirit not be taken from him. He wanted the relationship to be fully restored, and he wanted to have a willing spirit (willing to do God's will).
 - e. Verses 13-14. Once God had forgiven him, he said he would declare God's grace and mercy to sinners and sing aloud of God's forgiveness of him.
 - f. Verses 15-17. These are some of the most profound thoughts in scripture. He asked God to enable him to praise God. At a time when the law required that burnt offerings be made to atone for sin, David declared that God isn't delighted by our sacrifices; he is delighted by a repentant spirit. "A broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise."
 - g. Verses 18-19. He acknowledged that only once the person offering a sacrifice has a repentant heart would God be pleased with our sacrifices. This understanding of the necessity of a repentant heart foreshadows the teaching of Jesus and the New Testament scriptures.
- C. One thing that is so amazing to me about this psalm is that David was willing to offer this confession of his sin so publicly and to humble himself before God and in the eyes of the people. Every time this psalm was sung in Jewish worship the people fully knew what it referred to. His sin was laid bare for all to see and for the shame

of it to be a warning to all the people. Not something one expects of any monarch, and particularly not of a bronze-age king in the Middle East.

- D. In verses 24 and 25 we discover the conclusion of this episode in David's life. He and Bathsheba, who got married after an adulterous relationship that led to her husband being murdered by David through the hands of the Ammonites, have another son, and they name him Solomon. How complete is God's forgiveness of David? This son is called Jedidiah, which means loved by the Lord, a name given to no other in scripture. This son was the one who would carry on the kingly lineage that will eventually produce a son born in Bethlehem—the Lord Jesus Christ. Solomon will be declared the wisest person who ever lived, other than Jesus himself.
- E. The contrasts between the severity of the sin, the depth of the repentance, and the completeness of the grace and forgiveness in this story is dumbfounding—at least to me. The most comparable story in the Bible, in my opinion, is the parable of the prodigal son, which Jesus told to convey how much God loves us. It is an extravagant love, one that remembers our sins no more. Frankly, it amazes me, and I stand in awe that God could love us so much. Even though I am grateful beyond measure, I still struggle to understand the full extent of God's grace as depicted in this story about David.

XLVI. 2 Samuel 12:26-31 The Ammonites are crushed

- A. While all of the drama has been going on back in Jerusalem, the Israelite army has been besieging the Ammonite city of Rabbah. They were getting close to victory, and Joab sent word to David for him to come lead the final push. Otherwise, the victory would be attributed solely to Joab. David heeded his advice, rounded up additional troops for the final push against the royal city of the Ammonites, and took the city and the crown of their king. As was the practice in those days, as well as in more modern times, the victor took great amounts of spoil from the vanquished and put the people to work as Israel's servants. This victory added to the security of Israel and its domination under David of its area of the world.

XLVII. 2 Samuel 13:1-22 Amnon and Tamar

- A. When we began our study of the life of David, we talked about his genius in so many areas: military leader, political leader, outstanding musician, writer of psalms, a man of great physical courage. There is one area, however, in which he was a miserable failure—as a parent. And as the husband of eight wives, as well as many concubines, he had many opportunities to act as a parent. In addition to showing David's deficiencies as a parent, this episode and its sequel show some of the problems of polygamy. David's multiple families became the primary source of great pain that he went through in his later years.

- B. The characters in this episode are Amnon, David's eldest son by Ahinoam, who was an Israelite woman, and Tamar, David's daughter by Maacah, who was the daughter of King Talmi of Geshur. David's marriage to Maacah appears to have been a political marriage, so you can imagine the tensions in the relationships between the wives and their families. Tamar also had an older brother, Absalom, who later became a nemesis to David. So, Tamar was Amnon's half-sister.
- C. The story is sordid. Amnon fell in love—but really it was just lust—with Tamar, and he was consumed over having her. He took no action on his desire for her initially, but he had a friend, Jonadab, who was the son of David's brother Shimeah—so Jonadab was David's nephew. Scripture describes Jonadab as “a very crafty man.” He came up with a ruse to enable Amnon to seduce Tamar. The plan was for Amnon to pretend to be sick and ask David for permission to allow Tamar to come fix a meal for him at Amnon's house. Given David's history with Bathsheba, it's hard to imagine why David signed off on this plan. Warning sirens should have been exploding in his head. But it's obvious David had a blind spot when it came to his family, and he was apparently oblivious to how devious Amnon was. He ordered Tamar to go prepare a meal for Amnon. The ruse was carried out, and Amnon raped Tamar despite her protests and pleas to ask David to allow Amnon to take her as a wife.
- D. Once Amnon had raped her, his desire for her turned to hate and he kicked her out of his house. Scripture says, “his loathing was even greater than the lust he had felt for her,” which tells us something about sin. Now, out on the street, she ripped the robe that identified her as a virgin and put ashes on her head, which was a way of publicly declaring she was no longer a virgin. Her debasement was complete. Scripture says she remained a desolate woman in her brother Absalom's house.
- E. Absalom took his sister in and initially took no action against Amnon. He was waiting for David to ensure that justice was done—or at least that the law was enforced. But David, even though he was angry with Amnon, refused to take any action against him because, scripture says, David loved him because he was David's firstborn. Time passed, and Absalom's hate of Amnon continued to fester.
- F. There are a number of lessons to be learned thus far. First, be careful who your friends are. Amnon had a friend—Jonadab—who was a very crafty man. He was the one who came up with the ruse that enabled Amnon to rape Tamar. With friends like this you don't need enemies. Stay away from that kind of friend.
- G. Second, true love and true caring usually require the application of a good dose of discipline when a wrong has been committed. David did Amnon no favor by not disciplining him. When justice is ignored, people begin to take justice into their own hands, as we will see. Furthermore, as we discussed previously, God forgives completely, but he applies discipline as part of the application of tough love. The love David showed here was not a true godly love because he was unwilling to

administer the discipline called for. Under the law, Amnon could have been put to death, although David could have withheld the death penalty and applied a less harsh sentence. But he didn't even do that; he did nothing. And so, Absalom plotted his revenge.

- H. Third, there is a time to show grace, and a time to do one's duty and insist that justice is done. It takes judgment to know when to enforce discipline and when to show grace, but this was not a difficult case to decide. It clearly called for the application of discipline, and David was obligated both by being the father and being the king to see that justice was done. He failed in both roles. And as so often happens, when prompt discipline was not applied, an even worse harm occurred as an injured party sought revenge.

XLVIII. 2 Samuel 13:23-39 Absalom avenges the rape of his sister

- A. Scripture tells us that two full years went by after the rape of Tamar—two full years during which Absalom was quietly seething over his sister's rape and David's refusal to punish Amnon. Furthermore, seeing that David refused to punish Amnon, he may well have reasoned that David would likely not punish him—or if he did, only slightly—if he took revenge on Amnon.
- B. So, Absalom came up with a plan. He first invited David and his entourage to join him at a banquet he would put on following the sheep shearing at his farm near Ephraim. When David politely said, "No, thanks," Absalom asked David to allow Amnon and the other sons to attend his banquet. We know David was skeptical, because verse 26 says David asked Absalom why he wanted Amnon to go with him. Surely, David remembered that Amnon raped Absalom's sister only two years previously. Once again, warning sirens should have been at full volume in David's head. But David was once again inexplicably obtuse, and Absalom's persistence paid off. David consented for all the sons to attend the banquet.
- C. It apparently was quite a party, with lots of wine and a good time being had by all. But this was just a set-up for Absalom to finally get revenge for his sister's rape. Upon his signal, Absalom's servants murdered Amnon, who apparently suspected nothing. The initial word David received was *all* of his sons had been murdered, and David tore his robe and began to mourn. But the very crafty man, Jonadab, was at court that day, and he somehow knew that only Amnon had been killed, which was soon confirmed. In the meantime, Absalom fled to Geshur where his grandfather was king, and, scripture tells us, he stayed there three years.
- D. By now, you would think David had learned his lesson, and that he would have to take action to stop all of this violence in the family. Surely there would be repercussions for Absalom. After all, as the highest government official in Israel who was ultimately responsible for enforcement of the law, it was David's duty to hold

Absalom responsible for the death of Amnon. But, once again, he did nothing. Scripture tells us, “The heart of the king went out, yearning for Absalom; for he was now consoled over the death of Amnon.”

XLIX. 2 Samuel 14:1-24 Absalom returns to Jerusalem

- A. We were told in verse 38 of the preceding chapter that Absalom stayed in Geshur for three years. So, three years have passed during which David mourned over Absalom’s absence from his life. Undoubtedly, there was conflict in David’s mind—after all, Absalom had murdered David’s firstborn. But the overwhelming sentiment seems to be that he missed Absalom. David’s general, Joab, who was also his nephew, sensed this and came up with a plan—a ruse, really—to attempt to reconcile David with Absalom.
- B. The plan Joab concocted was somewhat similar to what Nathan did. He came up with a story to get David to pass judgment on himself without realizing it. When David declared that no one shall harm the surviving brother who had killed his own brother in the woman’s story, she asked why David didn’t take his own advice. David immediately realized that Joab was behind this, but granted his request and told him Absalom could return to Jerusalem.
- C. There is a good argument to be made that David should not have agreed to allow Absalom to return to Jerusalem—at least not without some penalty or other discipline being required first. But, as we have seen, David wasn’t very good at disciplining his children or others close to him, even though his role as king and a parent would require it. In this instance, David tried to have it both ways. He forgave the crime of murder, and he let Absalom return to Jerusalem, but he banished Absalom from his presence. So, Absalom came home to his own house but could not come into the presence of the king, which would have made him a social outcast in Jerusalem. As we shall see, this just infuriated Absalom further and increased his animosity toward David. Once again, the refusal to apply discipline or punishment to sin or a violation of the law, would have terrible consequences.

L. 2 Samuel 14:25-33 David forgives Absalom

- A. Absalom’s return to Jerusalem was frustrating to him. He was back but banished from the presence of the king. He was also a man apparently full of hubris and didn’t respond well to being treated in this fashion by the king. Verses 25-27 seem to be parenthetical to the story, but they are there for a purpose. Those verses tell us he was the most beautiful person in Israel. Even the hair on his head was remarkable. He had three sons and a daughter, Tamar, whom he named after his sister whom Amnon had raped; she was a beautiful woman. We are told all of this to paint the picture of a man full of pride who showed no humility or remorse for his crime. And he was determined to get back into the good graces of his father and king.

B. After two years he was no longer going to put up with being banished from the king's presence. Twice he asked Joab to take him before the king, but Joab ignored him, probably believing he had already done more for Absalom than he deserved. But Absalom wouldn't be deterred. When he was ignored for the second time, Absalom had his servants set Joab's adjacent barley field on fire. This finally got Joab's attention, and he took Absalom to David, and David totally forgave Absalom and kissed him. But as we will see in the next chapter, by now Absalom's anger had grown into a plot to overthrow his father and king and claim the role of monarch for himself.

LI. 2 Samuel 15:1-12 Absalom usurps the throne

A. The real reason Absalom sought to be reconciled with his father, the king, becomes evident in this chapter. By now, it has been more than seven years since Amnon raped Tamar, and more than five years since Absalom avenged his sister's rape by murdering his brother Amnon. During all of that time, Absalom's resentment and hatred of his father David had continued to grow. Absalom was someone who didn't act hastily. He waited two years to take vengeance on Amnon. He was willing to wait three years in Geshur before coming back to Jerusalem. He waited two years after returning before forcing a confrontation with David that would bring about reconciliation, permanent banishment, or worse. All of that time, he was concocting a plan to achieve his ultimate goal of becoming the king of Israel and humiliating his father David—even killing him—in the process. Remember, as the king's eldest son he would have been the heir apparent to become king after David's death, but he didn't want to wait any longer; he wanted to take the throne from his father while David was still at the peak of his power.

B. Absalom came up with a plan to draw the people to him. He began by acting like a king himself, with a chariot and men running ahead of him to announce his arrival. But he also began employing populist political tactics by going to the place where one would seek to have a claim brought before the king for justice. There was a backlog because one king couldn't keep up with all the claims asserted. Absalom bemoaned their fate and said if only he were appointed as a judge by the king, he would see they received justice. When they would attempt to show obeisance to him, he would allow none of it. He would treat them as an equal and give them a friend's kiss, as is common in the Middle East to this day. He did this for four years, and the effort achieved its purpose. He won over the hearts of a majority of the people.

C. After four years, Absalom sensed the time was right for him to try to overthrow his father, and again he planned carefully. He claimed to have made a vow while he was in exile in Geshur that if he were ever allowed to come back to Jerusalem, he would worship and offer sacrifices in Hebron where David was first crowned king.

Unsuspecting of what Absalom was up to, David told him to, “go in peace.” Peace was the last thing on Absalom’s mind. The conspiracy was in place with key players throughout the land. It even included one of David’s key counselors, Ahithophel. To make the announcement appear more official, Absalom took along two hundred of the leading men of Jerusalem, although they were apparently unaware of the seditious plan. At the appointed time, the trumpets sounded, and a loud cry came forth from the conspirators that, “Absalom has become king at Hebron.” Through the conspirators, this word spread throughout Israel quickly.

LII. 2 Samuel 15:13-31 David flees from Jerusalem

- A. Word of the rebellion got back to David, and he had a difficult decision to make, and he had to do it quickly. Should he remain in Jerusalem and try to defend himself there, or should he flee and regroup somewhere else? He wisely elected to flee and probably did so for several reasons. First, he had always fought his wars as the aggressor, not on the defensive, and he would be on the defensive in Jerusalem if he stayed. Second, he didn’t have a large standing army, and he assumed Absalom had more troops mustered than he did at that point. He needed time to gather his loyal troops and prepare for the battle ahead. Third, he wanted to have the battle take place on terrain more favorable to him than behind the walls of Jerusalem; he was very experienced in fighting in the wilderness, the desert. Fourth, David loved Jerusalem, as is evident from his psalms, and he didn’t want to see Jerusalem destroyed in a major battle fought there.
- B. So, there was a procession out of Jerusalem of all of David’s household, including all the wives and children. Only ten of his concubines were left behind to tend to the house, which Absalom would clearly want to occupy since it was the palace of the king. The scriptures describe the procession out of the city toward the wilderness, with those loyal to him leaving with him, some of whom had only been with him a short time, while others had been with David since the early days.
- C. David had Abiathar and Zadok, priests, and the Levites carry the ark of the covenant to the escape route to have all the people fleeing with him pass before it. This was a form of prayer by David, asking God to bless them and protect them as they fled from Absalom. But David didn’t take the ark with him; he instructed Zadok and Abiathar to take the ark back to Jerusalem; he didn’t want it to get caught up in the midst of the coming battle. David’s comments about why he was sending the ark back show how much he had been humbled by these events, saying that if he found favor with God, he would live to see the ark again. By this time, all hubris had been squeezed out of David.
- D. He also asked Zadok and Abiathar to be his spies and to provide him with news of when Absalom planned to pursue him. David led his followers east toward the Jordan river. Crossing it was no easy task, especially for a large group that included

women and children. So, he needed to know whether he could camp on the west side of the Jordan in safety, or whether he needed to cross the Jordan and get into the wilderness as soon as possible.

- E. The procession out of Jerusalem described in verses 30 and 31 appeared to be more like a wake than a frantic fleeing from danger. As they headed east past the Mount of Olives, David was leading the people, weeping as he went, with his head covered and walking barefoot, which was a form of mourning. All of those fleeing with him followed David's example, weeping as they went. The final indignity for David was that he was told his lead counselor, Ahithophel, who was known as perhaps the wisest man in Israel, was among the conspirators supporting Absalom. This obviously frightened David, who immediately prayed that God would counteract any advice Ahithophel gave to Absalom.

LIII. 2 Samuel 15:32-37 Hushai becomes David's spy

- A. On his way out of Jerusalem, David encountered another of his advisors, a man named Hushai. This advisor was loyal to David as evidenced by his torn coat and dirt on his head—a sign of mourning. He wanted to go with David, but David wanted Hushai where he could be helpful—as an advisor to Absalom where David hoped Hushai could counter the advice of Ahithophel. Furthermore, there was already a spy communication system in place. Whatever Hushai learned he was to pass on to Zadok and Abiathar. Zadok's son, Ahimaaz, and Abiathar's son, Jonathan, would then be the runners that would bring the intelligence information to David. So, with the plan in place, Hushai entered Jerusalem through one of the gates just as Absalom came through another gate in his triumphant entry as Israel's new king.
- B. So, what was David's mental state as he fled from his own son who was rebelling against him? We get an insight from **Psalms 3**, which was written when he fled from Absalom. Read it.

LIV. 2 Samuel 16:1-4 David's adversaries

- A. Do you remember back in chapter 9 of 2 Samuel that David inquired whether there were any descendants of Saul left to whom he could show kindness because of his love for Jonathan, Saul's eldest son? He learned of a servant of Saul's named Ziba, and Ziba informed David there remained a son of Jonathan named Mephibosheth. David summoned Mephibosheth, returned all of Saul's property to him, and appointed Ziba to manage it for Mephibosheth who would dine regularly at the king's table. It is this same Ziba who met David as he was fleeing and brought along provisions and donkeys to aid in the escape.
- B. David obviously was appreciative. He asked Ziba where Mephibosheth was, probably assuming he would be loyal to David given David's kindness to him.

Incredibly, Mephibosheth stayed behind in Jerusalem under the delusion that Israel would want the kingdom returned to the house of Saul, and the people would demand that he be anointed king. This was a fantasy of Mephibosheth who appeared to be delusional. Absalom wasn't about to defer to him, nor were the people demanding a return to the house of Saul.

- C. David's judgment on Mephibosheth was instantaneous. He gave all of the property Ziba had been managing for Mephibosheth to Ziba. So, the only son of Jonathan and grandson of Saul returned to poverty due to his own disloyalty and stupidity. This episode would seem to confirm the old adage not to bite the hand that feeds you.

LV. 2 Samuel 16:5-14 Shimei curses David

- A. This is an episode that appears to be a minor one in the midst of the monumental events taking place all around it. David and his followers had evacuated Jerusalem and were on their way to the wilderness east of the Jordan river, which is east of Jerusalem, there to make a stand against the army of Absalom. But, like everything in scripture, this story is there for a purpose. The first thing to notice is that the character Shimei is from the house of Saul. Apparently, all of Saul's relatives and descendants remained bitter over David becoming King over Israel, which occurred shortly after the death of Ishbaal, the son of Saul, who had been king over all of Israel except Judah before he was assassinated by two of his officers. Had Ishbaal remained king, Shimei would have been in a prominent position as part of the family of the king. But since David was now king, he was likely a social outcast, and he was clearly bitter about it.
- B. Shimei was clearly delighted that David was fleeing for his life, and he came out of his house cursing at David as he passed by on his retreat. David's officer Abishai, brother of Joab, wanted to decapitate him, but David prevented it, saying his own son was trying to kill him, so he could hardly blame Shimei for wanting to do the same. David seemed to be saying that Shimei's rebuke may be from the Lord, and he would leave it up to the Lord to punish Shimei. Once again, we see the humility of David whose life has been turned upside down by his own family as Nathan had prophesied. As it turns out, after David's death his son Solomon had Shimei killed after he failed to keep the terms of punishment Solomon imposed on him. (See I Kings 2:36-46)
- C. Verse 14 tells us David and his entourage reached the the western bank of the Jordan river and rested there. They were awaiting word through the spy network David had set up before determining what they should do next.

LVI. 2 Samuel 16:15-23; 17:1-4 The counsel of Ahithophel

- A. Absalom and his followers, including Ahithophel, arrived in Jerusalem and learned that David had fled the capitol. And who should be there to greet Absalom but Hushai, one of David's advisors whom he had asked to spy for him. He proclaimed, "Long live the king," referring to Absalom, not David. Absalom was dubious, inquiring why Hushai, a well-known friend of David, had not gone with him. His response was that he wanted to serve the one the Lord had appointed over Israel, and that appeared to be Absalom, so Hushai said he would serve him just as he had served David. Hushai's deception apparently worked, probably at least in part because Absalom had an exceedingly high opinion of himself and believed everyone would soon be following him instead of his father.
- B. The scene continued with Absalom asking Ahithophel's advice on how to proceed. He had to consolidate his power and secure his position as the legitimate king of Israel, and he couldn't do that while David was still at large. Undoubtedly, the majority of the people of Israel were confused about what was going on and were having difficulty deciding which team they wanted to join. Absalom would have been well aware of this, so he needed to decide what to do next, and he asked for advice from Ahithophel, purportedly the wisest man in Israel, as even David had apparently acknowledged.
- C. Ahithophel's advice seems strange to us. The first thing he recommended was that Absalom publicly have sex with all ten of David's concubines who were left behind to tend to the palace. But his reasoning had nothing to do with sex; it was a power play. The purpose of this recommendation was to send a signal to all of Israel that there would be no reconciliation between David and Absalom. He wanted anyone sitting on the fence about whom to support to understand this would be a fight to the death. By doing this, Absalom would make himself odious to his father—so the argument went—and more Israelites would follow him. So, Absalom agreed to follow this advice, pitched a tent on the roof of the palace, and scripture tells us, "Absalom went in to his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel." It's rather ironic that the rupture of the relationship between David and Absalom began with the rape of Absalom's sister, Tamar. Now, he is raping David's concubines, and he is doing it in the most public way possible.
- D. The second part of Ahithophel's advice was to pursue David immediately. He asked for 12,000 men that he would lead against David. He planned to engage David and his followers before they could get organized and muster more troops to join them. He wanted to attack before David could hide out somewhere, and they could capture and kill him. Ahithophel recognized that they would be fighting fellow Israelites, and the goal was not to kill as many as possible, but just to kill David so his troops would have no leader to follow, and then they would likely agree to follow Absalom. Ahithophel was looking ahead to unify support for Absalom throughout all of Israel. This part of the plan was clever, and the result may have been quite different if Absalom had followed it.

LVII. 2 Samuel 17:5-14 The counsel of Hushai

- A. What happened next is quite interesting. Despite Ahithophel having the reputation of being so wise as to be like an oracle, which was like getting advice from a divine source, Absalom wanted to know what Hushai thought of this advice. So, he summoned Hushai, told him what Ahithophel recommended, and inquired whether he agreed. Hushai obviously recognized the wisdom of what Ahithophel advised and quickly concocted a plan to counter that advice. He used David's reputation as a great warrior to stoke fear in Absalom and his followers, reminding them how successful David and his followers had been in battle. He warned that even Absalom's bravest warriors would have trepidations about going against David, and at the slightest reversal, which could happen in any battle, they may turn and run. He advised to gather overwhelming force by getting all of Israel behind the new king so they could overcome David and his followers no matter where they had to fight him. The purpose of giving this advice was to allow David more time to muster his troops and get organized and ready for battle, including selecting the place where the battle would be fought, although Hushai kept those thoughts to himself. Given David's reputation as a warrior and the fear he induced in those opposing him, Absalom and his followers decided they liked Hushai's counsel better.

LVIII. 2 Samuel 17:15-29 Hushai warns David to escape

- A. As soon as Hushai learned that Absalom was following his advice, he went to the spy network to get word to David. He relayed the information about what Absalom was going to do to Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, who sent their sons to get word to David. There was drama as they were spotted and followed by Absalom's servants but they hid in a well at the home of a sympathizer and lived to get the critical information to David. Once he received the information, David crossed the Jordan with all his followers immediately and headed toward Mahanaim, east of the Jordan River and close to the wilderness.
- B. Verse 23 shows just how important one's status before the king was. Ahithophel was so humiliated by the rejection of his advice and the acceptance of his rival's advice that he returned to his home city, put his affairs in order and hanged himself. It was a far different time and culture. Today, someone in that situation would write a book and work the TV interview circuit to regain their status and make some money in the process.
- C. David arrived in Mahanaim about the same time Absalom crossed the Jordan with his army. The leader of Absalom's army was Amasa, who was a nephew of David's and cousin to both Absalom and Joab. So, you can see how intertwined the family relationships were, being on both sides of this rebellion. It's also a reminder that hatred within families can equal or sometimes exceed the hatred for outsiders.

- D. Verse 26 tells us that Absalom and his army encamped in the land of Gilead, which is north and east of Mahanaim, which indicates Absalom was not yet ready to engage in battle with David and his followers. Perhaps they were still trying to muster troops from all of Israel, but whatever the reason, Absalom didn't launch his army immediately into battle. This also allowed David more time to get his troops together and organized for battle.
- E. Verses 27-29 are interesting because they recount that some of Israel's—and David's—former enemies are bringing him supplies and food for his troops. They apparently preferred to see Israel led by David than by his upstart son, which speaks highly of David's treatment of former enemies.

LIX. 2 Samuel 18:1-18 The defeat and death of Absalom

- A. As we see in this chapter, David's decision to flee Jerusalem and gain time to regroup and lure Absalom into fighting him on terrain more favorable to David paid off. He mustered his troops, and he divided his army into three groups. Two of those groups were led by Joab and his brother Abishai, both of whom were very experienced warriors and leaders. The third group was led by Itai the Gittite, which is surprising. We met him back in chapter 15, when David urged him, a foreigner and an exile from his home country, to remain in Jerusalem rather than put himself at risk by throwing his lot in with David, but Itai insisted on following David, along with a significant group of foreigners. Thus, it appears that David's army consisted of many non-Israelite warriors under the command of a foreigner. This once again shows the respect and loyalty David enjoyed even from countries he had defeated.
- B. David, of course, was ready to lead his troops into battle, but his officers wisely counseled against it. As they pointed out, Absalom was only after David, not his army, and if David were there, he would be the target of Absalom's attack. A younger David might have rebuffed this advice and led the troops anyway, but an older and wiser David accepted their advice and remained in Mahanaim.
- C. David did make one request of his commanders, however, a very strange one if anyone except David had made it. He told his officers to "Deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom." Despite Absalom leading an insurrection that put David's life and the lives of his family members at risk, with the clear intent of killing his father and usurping his throne, David still didn't want Absalom killed, although he did want to defeat him in the battle. Incredibly, David apparently believed some reconciliation was still possible. It's another example of David's unwillingness to discipline or punish his family members. We saw it with Amnon after he raped Tamar, and we saw it with Absalom after he murdered Amnon. And Absalom was clearly unwilling to repent. All of the soldiers were apparently aware of this request by David.

- D. The strategy for the battle worked. As verse 8 implies, David had lured Absalom's troops onto terrain where they were simply unprepared and unqualified to fight effectively. It was a great victory for David's army. Remember, David's troops had fought in such terrain for years and knew what they were doing. As verse 8 says, "the forest claimed more victims that day than the sword." And the victims were many—20,000 men. This was not 20,000 Philistines or other foreigners; it was 20,000 Israelites.
- E. Absalom's army was routed and fled in a panic. Among those fleeing was Absalom himself, who apparently had no military experience. You may remember back in chapter 14 we learned that Absalom was the handsomest man in Israel who only cut his hair once a year because it was so beautiful. His vanity proved to be his doom in the battle. His hair got caught in the branches of an oak tree as his mule passed under it, and he was hanging there by his beautiful hair. The troops who found him didn't harm him, recalling David's admonition to them. Joab, however, had no such compunctions; he pierced Absalom with the spear, and Joab's armor bearers finished him off. His body was thrown into a pit and covered with rocks. Absalom's hubris and his anger brought about his destruction.
- F. Joab wasn't interested in pursuing Absalom's army because they were fellow Israelites. So, he sounded the trumpet for his soldiers to return, and the defeated followers of Absalom sneaked back home, probably fearful of the consequences of trying to overthrow their king. Once Absalom was gone, however, the rebellion collapsed.
- G. By the time the battle was fought, David was, I believe, confident in victory, although he hoped Absalom would be spared death. He relied once more upon God to deliver him, as expressed in **Psalm 4**. Read it.

LX. 2 Samuel 18:19-32 David hears of Absalom's death

- A. These verses explain how David learned of the death of his son, Absalom. Looking at it objectively, it's hard to understand why David was so concerned over his son, who had no concern whatsoever over him. But Absalom was still David's son, and some parents think of their sons—or daughters—as their babies no matter what age they are.
- B. As was common in those days, a runner would be sent to bring news of the outcome of the battle. This time two runners were sent. The first to arrive didn't know whether Absalom was dead or not, but the second one did, and David learned of the death of Absalom.

LXI. 2 Samuel 18:33-19:8 David mourns for Absalom

- A. David's reaction to the death of his son Absalom overwhelmed his reaction to the great victory of his troops that saved his life, the lives of his family members, and his position on the throne of Israel. He said he wished he had died instead of his son. Obviously, word of this got around quickly, and the effect on his officers and men was immediate. They were depressed and probably angry that their sacrifice apparently meant nothing to the king whom they had served so faithfully.
- B. What we see here is David allowing his role as a father to take precedence over his role as king and leader of Israel. As parents, we can at least somewhat understand his grief that his son was dead, even though the son was trying his best to kill David. But as leader and king of Israel, there was no excuse for David's behavior. Sometimes a leader must deal with his own grief and loss privately for the sake of those he is leading. By his behavior he had belittled the bravery and sacrifice of his officers and men, and he was about to lose their backing by his behavior.
- C. Joab, David's nephew and longtime military leader, confronted David with his behavior and sternly warned him that unless he congratulated his men for their faithful service and encouraged them, the result will be worse than a victory by Absalom. Finally, David realized the impact his behavior was having, and the situation was resolved. Usually, the best thing a lieutenant can do for his leader is to tell him the unvarnished truth, even if he doesn't want to hear it. In this instance, David recognized the truth of what Joab told him, and David accepted his advice.

LXII. 2 Samuel 19:9-15 David recalled to Jerusalem

- A. The battle had been won, but David was still in Mahanaim. There had, as yet, been no clamor to bring him back to Jerusalem to once more rule over all of Israel. David wisely waited to be called back rather than just march back and take over the throne of Israel by force. Although Israel was no democracy, it is always hard to lead people that don't want to be led by whoever claims to be their leader. The rebelling soldiers had returned to their homes and tribe, and there was a lot of talk throughout Israel over what should happen next. There was debate over whether David should be recalled to Jerusalem to be their king.
- B. David took the initiative with his own tribe of Judah. He asked the priests Zadok and Abiathar—who were part of the spy network that got critical information to David—to ask Judah to be the first to call for David's return. And he offered a compromise to encourage a reconciliation. Remember that Absalom had appointed Amasa, a nephew of David and a cousin of Joab, to be the general over his army. To encourage those who supported Absalom in the rebellion, David offered to make Amasa the commander of the army instead of Joab. This convinced Amasa to support David, and verse 14 says Amasa swayed the people of Judah to call for the return of David to Jerusalem. They issue the call, and David began the trek back to Jerusalem. The

people of Judah met him at the east side of the Jordan river to help him cross back over.

LXIII. 2 Samuel 19:16-23 David's mercy to Shimei

- A. In these verses, we see many of those who turned against David in the rebellion trying to curry favor with him now that circumstances had changed. Remember Shimei, who in chapter 16 followed David along his retreat from Jerusalem and threw rocks at him? Although he was of the tribe of Benjamin rather than Judah, he led a thousand men of the tribe of Benjamin to meet David at the Jordan and assist in bringing his entourage over it. He fell down before David and asked for mercy. Abishai, Joab's brother, who wanted to behead Shimei when he was cursing and throwing rocks at David, argued against mercy for him, saying he still deserved to die. David wisely refused to follow Abishai's advice, recognizing that this was not a time for retribution but rather for mercy.

LXIV. 2 Samuel 19:24-30 David and Mephibosheth meet

- A. Remember Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan and grandson of Saul, whom David had treated generously? When Absalom initiated his rebellion, Mephibosheth stayed in Jerusalem under the delusion that all of Israel would demand his return to the throne since he was from the house of Saul. He also came to the Jordan to seek mercy from David. When he saw Mephibosheth, David asked why he didn't join him when he was fleeing Jerusalem. Mephibosheth blamed it on the servants, and asked forgiveness, which David graciously granted. He even gave half of the property of Mephibosheth, all of which David had given to Ziba, back to Mephibosheth who made a grand gesture by essentially saying, "Let Ziba keep it all because the only thing that is important is the king has arrived home safely." Scripture doesn't tell us what happened to the property, but my guess is that Mephibosheth kept the half returned to him. That would seem to be consistent with his character.

LXV. 2 Samuel 19:31-43 David's kindness to Barzillai

- A. Verses 31-40 relate the story of a man named Barzillai who had supported David while he was at Mahanaim and then escorted him to the Jordan river on his return to Jerusalem. David urged him to return to Jerusalem with him, but he demurred, offering instead a man named Chimham, apparently one of his servants, who would thereafter serve David.
- B. Verses 39 and 40 recount the crossing of the Jordan from east to west as David continued his return to Jerusalem. There is an interesting comment that *all* the people of Judah and *half* the people of Israel helped David and his followers cross over the Jordan.

- C. Verses 41-43 provide an interesting glimpse of the relationship between Judah and the ten of the tribes of Israel. Benjamin usually was aligned with Judah, although that was not true during the life of Saul, who was of the tribe of Benjamin. Remember, David was king over Judah before he became king over all of Israel, including Judah. Now, the ten tribes of Israel were jealous that more people of Judah helped David return than all of the rest of Israel. This jealous rift was kept under control by David during the rest of his reign (once the rebellion of Sheba was put down—discussed below) and during the reign of Solomon, but following Solomon’s death, Israel and Judah split into separate countries and had separate kings thereafter, never to reunite until modern times when the state of Israel was formed.

LXVI. 2 Samuel 20:1-26 The rebellion of Sheba

- A. In the midst of the jealousy between Judah and the rest of Israel, another rebellion arose. Sheba was apparently present as the jealousy-infused argument between Israel and Judah was ongoing, and when no satisfactory resolution was reached quickly, he sounded the trumpet and declared Israel would not follow David. Verse 2 tells us that it was only the people of Judah who escorted David from the Jordan to Jerusalem. The split in the country had not yet been mended, and Sheba was threatening to tear it wide open again.
- B. Upon his return to Jerusalem, David dealt with the ten concubines he left behind to tend the palace. He put them in a separate house, under guard, so they would not be attacked again. But sadly, scripture tells us, they no longer lived as concubines thereafter but rather like widows for the rest of their lives. After they had been raped by Absalom, David apparently felt he could not return them to the status of being his concubines. The times and the culture were different, and we are not going to understand everything they did.
- C. David realized the rebellion by Sheba needed to be put down immediately or it would grow into a major rebellion like Absalom’s. He told his new commander, Amasa, to gather the men of Judah within three days to go put down the rebellion. Amasa put out the word, but on the third day, with the troops all there, including Joab and his brother Abishai, Amasa failed to show up, something that was inexcusable for the leader of the king’s army. So Abishai and Joab led the troops north to pursue Sheba. When they were about a day’s travel north of Jerusalem at Gibeon, Amasa finally showed up. Joab greeted him—his cousin—and pretended to come close to give him the kiss of friendship but stabbed him instead with a short sword hidden from Amasa.
- D. Scripture doesn’t tell us precisely why Joab did this, although it was similar to the way he got rid of another rival, Abner, the former commander of Saul’s army who defected to David. Joab apparently had similar concerns over Amasa, whose loyalty

was suspect to Joab when he didn't show up to lead the troops on time. As Amasa lay dying, one of Joab's men made the choices available to the troops perfectly clear. He said, "Whoever is for David, let him follow Joab." In other words, if you aren't willing to follow Joab, you aren't for David and you might come to the same end Amasa did. Amasa didn't even get a decent burial; they tossed his body into a field and threw a garment over him. The troops got the message, and they all followed Joab. Once again, different times and different culture.

- E. In the meantime, Sheba had fled north. He went all the way to the far north of Israel, a town called Abel of Bethmaacah where Sheba took refuge within the walls of the city. Joab and the troops arrived soon thereafter, and they besieged the city. They begin battering the wall of the city to tear it down so they could get to Sheba. Not long after this began, a leading citizen of the city, a wise woman, came to the wall and asked to speak to Joab. She asked him, in effect, "Why are you trying to destroy a faithful Israelite city?" Joab denied he wanted to destroy the city; he just wanted to capture Sheba. To clarify, he said, "Turn Sheba over and we will withdraw from the city." She quickly decided how she would end the siege and told him he would have Sheba's head shortly. Faced with the choice of their city being destroyed or giving up Sheba, the citizens of Abel promptly killed him and tossed his head over the wall to Joab. He then sounded the trumpet to withdraw and returned to Jerusalem, while his troops returned to their homes.
- F. Finally, all rebellions against David's reign had been put down and he was once again the undisputed leader and king of all of Israel. One of his psalms that may have been written at this time is **Psalm 21**, which offers thanksgiving for victory. Read it.

LXVII. 2 Samuel 21:1-14 David avenges the Gibeonites

- A. This story is another one that is difficult for us to understand because the outcome is quite different than we would expect today. We are dealing with Old Covenant law and outcomes and the importance of solemn oaths. The origins of this story go all the way back to the time Israel had escaped captivity in Egypt. After wandering in the wilderness for forty years Israel finally invaded the promised land. Once they crossed over the Jordan—led by Joshua, the successor to Moses—they defeated the occupants of the land, one tribe after another. Word got around about how Israel destroyed Jericho and other cities in the region as they occupied the land, and Israel was feared by the inhabitants of the land.
- B. One of the cities that feared the Israelites and decided to try to make peace with them rather than fight them was Gibeon, located in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin. They dressed up like they had been traveling for a long time, and they presented themselves to Joshua claiming to be a migrant people who had traveled a long way and wished to make a treaty with Israel, even be their servants. According to God's command, Israel was not to make treaties with other nations living in the

promised land, but since the Gibeonites presented themselves as migrants, not residents, Joshua made a treaty with them not to harm them, and all the leaders of Israel swore an oath not to harm them. It's all recorded in the ninth chapter of Joshua. A few days later, however, Joshua realized he had been deceived, but because of the oath they had sworn, Israel couldn't harm them because oaths were binding. Instead, Joshua insisted they serve the Israelites as hewers of wood and drawers of water, which they did.

- C. Fast forward now over 400 years to the time Saul was king of Israel. Although scripture gives no details about the episode, Saul apparently tried to wipe out the Gibeonites and killed a significant number of them in violation of the oath Joshua and his leadership team had sworn so long ago. It was this action by Saul that had led to God causing a famine in Israel for Saul's sin.
- D. David inquired of the Lord the reason for the famine, and he was told it was due to Saul's violating the oath regarding the Gibeonites. Interestingly, the Lord did not tell David what action to take to atone for Saul's, and Israel's, breach of the oath. So, David wisely went to the Gibeonites himself to inquire what action they believe he should take to expiate Israel's breach. In effect, David asked them what they believe justice required.
- E. We twenty-first century westerners have difficulty understanding the obligation to abide by the oath that was originally given by Joshua because it was obtained by fraudulent misrepresentations by the Gibeonites. In our courts of law today, any promise obtained by fraud can be set aside by a court and rendered ineffective. However, in those days a solemn oath invoking the name of the Lord was deemed binding, and ignoring it or breaching it was unlawful, even sinful. The law exacted severely penalties for violating oaths.
- F. Another problem presented to our modern-day sensibilities is that the punishment was coming far later than we would expect for a violation that God considered quite serious. It was Saul's violation of the oath, acting in his capacity as king of Israel. This happened a decade or more before David became king, and David has probably been king for thirty years or so by now. So, roughly four decades have passed since the violation of the oath. Nevertheless, this story shows that unrepented sin that has never been addressed can come back to affect you later than you expect—as was evident from the impact of the famine on Israel. David seems to have been unaware of the sin against the Gibeonites, but once God told him the source of the famine, he set about to make amends.
- G. The next problem we have with this story is the remedy the Gibeonites demanded. They told David, "This isn't a violation that can be dealt with by payment of money; we want justice. That will require the death of seven of the sons (or grandsons) of Saul." This is what the law required, and David understood that. To uphold the law,

he had to abide by the law, and David didn't try to negotiate a lesser penalty than what the law demanded.

- H. But David did have one problem with this demand for justice. David himself had sworn an oath that he would let no harm come to Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth, and David was not about to violate his own oath to punish a violation of the oath protecting the Gibeonites. Instead, he delivered to the Gibeonites two sons of one of the concubines of Saul—Rizpah—and five sons of one of Saul's daughters. All seven of them were executed by the Gibeonites as payment for Saul's breach of the oath. This is another example in the Old Testament of the sins of the fathers being visited on their children. Later, in the book of Jeremiah, the Lord spoke of the days that were to come in which, "They shall no longer say: 'The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge.' But all shall die for their own sins; the teeth of everyone who eats sour grapes shall be set on edge." (Jer. 31:29-30). These verses imply that no longer would punishment for the sins of the fathers be visited on the children; rather, each would be responsible for his own sins.
- I. Verses 10-14 present one of the more heart-rending stories in the Old Testament. When someone had been executed publicly like these young men were, they would usually not be given a decent burial. But Rizpah, Saul's concubine, although distraught, was determined not to allow birds or animals to desecrate the bodies of her two dead sons. So, she stayed by their bodies day and night to prevent their desecration while in mourning, and she refused to leave. When David heard about it, he decided to honor her, as well as her sons and the other young men who had borne the penalty of Saul's sin. Remember, the people of Jabesh-gilead had buried Saul and Jonathan after the Philistines had killed them and strung them up. David took their bones and moved them to the land of Benjamin—their tribe—and buried Saul, Jonathan, and all seven of the young men who died as punishment for what Saul and Israel had done. It was an honorable burial and was testament to the persistence of Rizpah who refused to let her sons die in dishonor.

LXVIII. 2 Samuel 21:15-22 Exploits of David's men

- A. Once more, the Philistines decided to attack Israel despite David defeating them so many times. By now, David is well into middle age or beyond, and he grew weary during the battle. One of the giants in the Philistine ranks had declared he would kill David, but Abishai, Joab's brother and nephew of David, killed the giant. Apparently, this was a close call for David, and all his men declared that he should not go into battle any longer. As his men said, if he died it would quench the light of Israel. He was their essential leader, and they wisely decided they needed to protect him now in his advanced age.
- B. There were a series of additional battles with the Philistines, all of which Israel won, and all of the giants of the Philistines were eventually killed by Israel's brave

warriors. After this series of battles, the Philistines were never a threat to Israel again.

LXIX. 2 Samuel 22:1-51 David's song of thanksgiving

- A. This chapter of Second Samuel is actually a psalm of David but recorded here instead of in the book of Psalms. Given what we have already read about David, some of the statements are surprising, but the psalm gives a good picture of why David is considered great. It's obvious that for David it was all about God; it was not all about him. He recognized that he had been successful because the hand of God was upon him from his youth. He did not accomplish all that he achieved because of his inherent abilities, although he was richly blessed in so many ways.
- B. He began in verses 1-4 by admitting that God was the foundation of his life; God alone had saved him. In verses 5-20 he recounted in general terms all of the challenges he had faced and recognized that it was God who mercifully delivered him from all his enemies.
- C. Verses 21-25 seem inconsistent with what we have been studying about David. In verse 24 he said he was blameless and kept himself from guilt. We know that David sinned grievously, but we also know that he repented sincerely and usually avoided the same sin again. He understood that God required a repentant heart of us. I believe these verses must be read with that in mind.
- D. In the remainder of this psalm David recognized once more that all he had accomplished had come through the hand of the Lord. He acknowledged his successes but said they had all been blessings from God.
- E. We must always keep in mind how remarkable and how unusual this attitude was in David. When was the last time you heard of any politician or king giving credit to God rather than his own abilities and brilliance? Many kings in history have claimed to have become divine beings. Louis XIV of France famously declared, "L'Etat, c'est moi," which means "I am France, the only one who matters." Modern leaders in all nations rarely admit their own mistakes and are quick to tout whatever accomplishments they have to enhance their standing. To most of them, "it's all about me and what I can accomplish." But for David, that wasn't true. He knew he had done great things, but he also knew that without the blessings of God, he would have accomplished nothing.
- F. Having said that, however, it is still jarring for us to read about all of the bloodshed that occurred with David as the commander of Israel's forces. But we must remember the times in which David lived and recognize that the New Covenant had not yet arrived. They still lived under the law. He was God's man for the times, and

this psalm recognized that. As the Gospel of John says, “The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”

LXX. 2 Samuel 23:1-7 The last words of David

- A. “The last words of David,” doesn’t mean these are his deathbed utterances. Think of this section more as a summing up of his life, a partial last testament of what he wanted people to remember about him and those who helped him accomplish all he accomplished.
- B. In verses 1-8 David reminded the people it was God who exalted him and anointed him to lead Israel. It was God speaking through him in the words of the Psalms, and it was God telling him what to do in his leadership of Israel, which brought God’s justice and hope to Israel. He was pointing out it was God who protected him from the time he killed Goliath, through his running from Saul, to the battles he won against all Israel’s enemies once he was king. Therefore, the glory that came from all of this was due to God, not to him.
- C. Verse 5 seems somewhat confusing, but what David was saying is, “Even though my house is not with God as it ought to be, God has never broken his covenant with me.” Remember that in chapter 7 of 2 Samuel God made a covenant with David, and here he was acknowledging that although he was not always faithful to God—See Bathsheba, Uriah, Amnon, and Absalom—God had always been faithful to him. One of the things he wanted to ensure his descendants and all Israel would understand is the Lord’s unfailing faithfulness, so he emphasized it in his last testament.

LXXI. 2 Samuel 23:8-39 David’s mighty men

- A. After giving credit to God for all he accomplished, David did what any great leader would do—he gave credit to his loyal soldiers who were responsible for most of what David was able to accomplish as king when he defeated all of Israel’s enemies. Good followers give credit to their leader, but great leaders always credit their team—their followers—and give them a large portion of the credit. David was not going to pass up this final opportunity to sing their praises for their service to him and to Israel.
- B. So, here is a long list of names of David’s bravest and most accomplished soldiers, most of whom have been mentioned previously. But look who was the final person identified as one of the bravest soldiers—Uriah the Hittite, the husband of Bathsheba. Most men of great accomplishments tend to tout their victories and achievements while ignoring or minimizing their mistakes and failures. What was different about David was that he attributed all his achievements to God and his officers, while taking full responsibility for all his sins and failures. He even ensured that his sins would be remembered as long as his accomplishments. It’s the mark of a truly humble man. The humble man doesn’t pretend that he had no

accomplishments or that they were not significant. Rather, he acknowledges them but says, “But for the hand of God and the support of my comrades none of them would have occurred.” For example, when Winston Churchill was credited as being the “Lion of Great Britain” for his leadership in World War II, he deflected the credit to the people of Britain, saying, “I was not the Lion of Great Britain; I was just privileged to give the roar.”

LXXII. 2 Samuel 24:1-9 David’s census of Israel and Judah

- A. This chapter presents another episode in the life of David and of Israel that may have occurred before the events of chapter 23. Not all of scripture is necessarily presented in chronological order. The first question that strikes us is why David wanted to take a census of Israel and Judah? 1 Chronicles chapter 21 (Read it) is helpful in understanding the situation. David and all of Israel were proud of their achievements in defeating all their enemies, so much so that hubris led David to want to know how many people were in Israel and Judah, and how many soldiers were in each. Keep in mind, not all soldiers were on active duty. They were more like reserves who could be called up when necessary. David apparently wanted to know what the exact numbers were, and he wanted to revel in that number, even if God had said, “No censuses.”
- B. Of all people who might caution David not to do this—which God had apparently forbidden—it was Joab who objected. He told David this would be sinful and call judgment onto Israel. We don’t know for sure, but perhaps Joab’s behavior in murdering Abner and Amasa hurt his credibility with David. In any event, David disregarded Joab’s advice and sent the army out to conduct the census, which took nine months and twenty days.

LXXIII. 2 Samuel 24:10-17 Judgment on David’s sin

- A. You have heard the old saying, “Be careful what you ask for; you may get it.” Whereas David demanded a census even if God forbade it, once he had it, he finally recognized that he had sinned by ordering the census, and he repented, asking God to forgive him. This time, God spoke through the prophet Gad, offering David three choices of what punishment would fall on Israel for his disobedience as king. Notice that the punishment for David’s sinful act would not fall solely or even primarily upon David. The choices were famine throughout the land; three months of David fleeing his enemies, which would leave Israel without his leadership; or three days of pestilence which would fall on all the people. As we have seen demonstrated in David’s life previously—and throughout history generally—the sins of the leaders usually bring punishment upon all the people, the innocent along with the guilty. For a modern example, look at Gaza today.

- B. David's fear of the Lord was obvious in his response. Although he knew God's discipline could be difficult—an example is the death of David's first son by Bathsheba—he deferred to the Lord to decide the punishment because he recognized that God is more merciful than any human would be. God chose the three days of pestilence, and 70,000 Israelites died. Verse 16 tells us the angel of death was about to destroy Jerusalem when God prevented him. Seeing the destruction brought about by the pestilence, David petitioned God to punish only him since the people suffering from his sin are innocent.

LXXIV. 2 Samuel 24:18-25 David's alter on the threshing floor

- A. God then sent instructions for David to build an alter at a certain place, and David immediately went to buy the land to build the alter. The owner offered to give the land to him, but David insisted on paying a fair price for the alter because, as he said, "I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God that cost me nothing." In making this statement David recognized the costliness of sin and recognized he should not allow someone else to bear the cost of the sacrifice that was required of him.
- B. Another thing we should be aware of is that God is not unaware of our sins, even if we think he may not notice them, or we believe they are insignificant to God. No sin is insignificant to God and no sin is unknown to God. David recognized this and addressed this topic in **Psalm 139**. Read it.

LXXV. 1 Kings 1:1-27 The struggle for the succession

- A. By now, David was old and feeble, so much so that he often couldn't get warm. His servants had an interesting solution for this problem: they found a beautiful young woman to lie with him and provide body heat to warm him. No explanation is given why one or more of his many wives or concubines couldn't fulfill this role, but after a thorough search throughout Israel they chose a beautiful young woman named Abishag to keep him warm. Verse 4 is explicit her role did not include sex.
- B. With David in obvious decline and his death not far off, one of the questions of the day in Israel was who would succeed David as king. They apparently didn't have rules or laws that would automatically apply as democratic nations do today, or as some monarchies have. It appears it was the sitting king's prerogative to determine who the next king would be. David had apparently told Bathsheba that Solomon would be his successor, but it also appears that was not widely known. This would have been a topic of serious importance to all of David's sons since one of the first acts of a new king in those days was often to put to death anyone else having a claim to the throne.
- C. Like his half-brother Absalom before him, Adonijah, son of Haggith, another of David's wives, decided that he would succeed David. He adopted the practice of

acting like a king by traveling about in a chariot pulled by horses with many men running before him to announce his arrival. Remember, this is what Absalom did, and as with Absalom David never confronted Adonijah with the question, “Why are you doing this?” Had he done so at an appropriate time, perhaps some of the turmoil and loss of life could have been avoided.

- D. In fairness to Adonijah, he was the eldest son at this point. Absalom had been older, but of course he was now dead. In the absence of a clear directive from David that Solomon would be the next king, he had as much claim to the throne as anyone else. But rather than go to David to ask for his blessing to be the next king, he began collecting his political support to become king on the day David passed away. He got the support of David’s long term military leader, Joab, and David’s long-serving priest, Abiathar, both of whom were apparently positioning themselves for high positions in the next king’s administration. Others who had faithfully served David were in Solomon’s camp, including the priest Zadok, Benaiah, a military leader for David and Solomon, as well as the prophet Nathan, and most of David’s warriors.
- E. Things came to a head in verse 9 when Adonijah scheduled an event to offer sacrifices and invited all the royal officials, all his brothers except Solomon, and none of the prophets loyal to Solomon. It was plain to Nathan, at least, and probably others, that Adonijah had decided he wasn’t going to wait until David died; he was going to declare himself king at this event.
- F. This situation led to one of the most improbable alliances in all of scripture. Remember, it was Nathan who announced publicly to all Israel that Bathsheba had committed adultery with the king, which led to one of the biggest scandals during David’s reign and undoubtedly led to great social stigma for her. Nathan would not have been at the top of her favorite guest list. Yet, he is the one who went to the palace to tell her what was going on. Essentially, he said to her, “Look, Adonijah is about to declare himself king without David’s knowledge, and if he does, you and Solomon will soon be dead. Go remind the king of his pledge that Solomon would succeed him so he can take action before it’s too late.” The plan was that while she was still saying this to the king, Nathan would arrive and reinforce all Bathsheba had said.
- G. So, she went to the king’s quarters to confront David, and apparently Abishag was there to overhear the entire conversation. Bathsheba reminded David of his promise and then told him all that Adonijah had done and was doing to make himself king. She also reminded him that it was his prerogative to decide who the next king would be, and unless he promptly declared his preference for Solomon, she and Solomon would be “counted offenders” when Adonijah became king, which means they would be killed.

- H. As planned, Nathan came in while Bathsheba was still speaking and reinforced all she had said. Nathan basically asked David, “Did you plan all of this without telling me and your other servants?” The implication to David was if this is not being done with your consent, you better do something quickly or it will be a done deal.

LXXVI. 1 Kings 1:28-53 The accession of Solomon

- A. Nathan’s plan worked. As soon as he confronted David with the situation, David finally took action. He called Bathsheba back into his presence—he apparently asked her to leave when Nathan arrived—and in her presence called for the priest Zadok, for Benaiah, and for Nathan. He instructed them to put Solomon on the king’s mule and take him to Gihon, which was a spring just outside the gates of Jerusalem (the source of water for the city). There, Zadok and Nathan were to anoint him king, declare loudly, “Long live the king,” and then promptly take him to the palace within the city where Solomon was to sit on the throne. There was to be a public announcement that David had appointed him king over all of Israel, which made it official, so the people would know this was not an uprising against David.
- B. Remember that Adonijah and all of his guests were feasting within the city, with Adonijah planning to have the priest Abiathar anoint him king, with Joab’s blessing, at the end of the feast. But as they were about to conclude their feast and declare Adonijah king, they heard trumpets blowing and people shouting support for Solomon, making so much noise it could be heard throughout the city. Indeed, verse 41 tells us Joab asked what all the commotion was about. Just then, the son of the priest Abiathar arrived and told those present what had just happened. You can imagine how the air went out of the room as those who planned to declare Adonijah king now realized that if they proceeded with anointing Adonijah king they would be considered creating a rebellion and be subject to immediate death. It had already been publicly announced that David had approved Solomon becoming king. In fact, it was emphasized that from his bed David offered a prayer for God’s blessing on Solomon’s reign, giving thanks that he had lived to see his son succeed him. Verse 49 says, “all the guests got up trembling and went their own ways.” Indeed, they wanted no part of defying the new king.
- C. Adonijah realized the pickle he was in, and he fled immediately to grasp the horns of the alter because he thought the king would not have him killed there. He sent word to Solomon for assurance he wouldn’t be killed before he left the alter. When Solomon heard this, he summoned Adonijah and told him if there was no wickedness in him—which meant he did nothing to undermine Solomon as king—no harm would come to him, and he sent him home. As it turned out, Adonijah apparently couldn’t help himself, and he got in serious trouble, as set forth in chapter 2 of 1 Kings. He went to Bathsheba to get her to ask Solomon for permission for him to marry Abishag, the Shunammite girl who kept David warm. This wasn’t a request to marry the woman he loved; by marrying the woman who had a special

relationship with David, it would exalt him and make him a threat to Solomon's authority as king—something no monarch at that time would put up with. So, we learn in chapter 2 that rather than grant permission for Adonijah to marry Abishag, Solomon had him put to death. Different times, different customs.

LXXVII. 1 Kings 2:1-9 David's instructions to Solomon

- A. We now get to David's final advice to Solomon, recently crowned to become the last king of a united Israel. Following Solomon's death, Israel split into the northern ten tribes, called Israel and the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin, called Judah. David's initial advice was good: be strong, be courageous, be obedient to the Lord your God, and obey his law given to Moses. He reminded Solomon that if he did so, his descendants would always be on the throne of Israel as God has promised.
- B. The remainder of the advice David gave to Solomon, however, is hard to read. It sounds more like the Godfather on his deathbed giving instructions to his son how to get rid of rivals. There are a few things to keep in mind, however. They didn't have the protection of laws regarding succession that modern countries do. A king was always at risk of being overthrown and killed if he allowed competing people to undermine the king's authority. Remember, David had already had to put down the rebellion of Absalom against him, followed by the rebellion by Sheba—both at a great loss of life—and then finally the attempt by Adonijah to supplant Solomon as David's successor. So, he was telling Solomon to deal with these potential rebels before they can organize a rebellion against you. But it does sound like he was getting revenge against certain people that he didn't punish, or only lightly punished, at the time of their disloyalty.
- C. The first person he warned Solomon about was Joab. He, of course, had served David as his commanding general for many years. But he had also murdered Abner, who had been Saul's general and then general for Saul's son, Ishbaal, before he defected to David. Then, Joab also murdered Absalom's general, Amasa, who had been appointed by David as his commanding general when David was trying to get Israel united again after Absalom's death. But the final mistake by Joab was supporting Adonijah in his plan to usurp the throne for himself—so Joab would be his commanding general. As close as Joab had been to David, he almost surely knew that David wanted Solomon to be his successor, but nevertheless he supported Adonijah. David was basically telling Solomon you can't trust Joab; therefore, deal with him as you deem best, but you would do well to get rid of him. As we see later in this chapter, Solomon agreed with David that he could not trust Joab and had him killed.
- D. On the other hand, David remembered the support he received from Barzillai and his family and urged Solomon to honor them by allowing them to dine at this table.

- E. With regard to Shimei, however, who had cursed him as he fled from Jerusalem, and who had sought mercy from David as he was about to return to Jerusalem, he told Solomon to deal with him as he deemed best but suggested that Solomon should apply the punishment he deserved. In fact, later in this chapter we learn that Solomon told him to build himself a house in Jerusalem and remain there for the rest of his life, upon penalty of death if he left Jerusalem. Although admitting Solomon had dealt fairly with him, only three years later he left Jerusalem to go capture two of his runaway slaves. Solomon learned of this and applied the judgment he warned Shimei of—the death sentence.

LXXVIII. 1 Kings 2:10-12 The death of David

- A. No details are given of the death of David other than after advising Solomon he died and was buried in the city of David—Jerusalem. He whose life began as a simple shepherd boy, the youngest of eight sons of Jesse of Bethlehem, was the king of Israel for forty years, including his years of being king only of Judah. The last thirty-three years of his reign was from Jerusalem after he captured the city and made it Israel's capitol. And he successfully transitioned the throne to his son Solomon who inherited a secure kingdom, far larger and more secure than it was when David became king.
- B. Regardless of your opinion of David—and there are vastly different opinions about him—it is undisputed that he was the most consequential of Israel's kings. And his influence on Christianity and the church remains significant even to this day from his psalms and the covenant which God entered into with him.

LXXIX. Wrap up/Questions for discussion

- A. What impressed you most about David? What impressed you the least?
- B. Has this study caused you to view his psalms differently than before?
- C. Has this study impacted your view of what it means to be a spiritual person?
- D. Has it changed your view about whether someone who has sinned grievously can find favor with God?
- E. Saul sinned and was rejected by God as king. David sinned, and God forgave him. How do you explain the difference?
- F. Given all that David accomplished, how do you explain how little he was esteemed by his family before he killed Goliath? Or before he was anointed?

- G. What grade would you give David: 1) as a parent; 2) as a husband; 3) as a military leader; 4) as a king; 5) as a psalm writer; 6) as a political leader?
- H. David's life vividly presents the question of why God allows bad things to happen to good people, such as what happened to Uriah. Why do you think God "allowed" it to happen?
- I. What other questions or comments do you have about our study of the life of David?