"The righteous . . . shall grow
like a cedar in Lebanon"

Psalm 92:12

Reading Companion

to the Book of

II Samuel

"So they read in the book in the law of God . . .
and caused them to understand the reading"
Nehemiah 8:8

By

Bill Daniels

Preface

This book is the essence of a Bible study series taught at New Germany Baptist Church in (2011-2012). My earnest desire in putting into print things gleaned from our study of II Samuel is simply to extend a bit further the blessing I have received. Oh may the Lord be pleased to use our efforts to this end.

I am always amazed with the truly valuable, practical help that can be found from an old history book, when it is *God's* old history book. God's history is always more about transformation than mere information, more the way to good sense than a mere record of events. How often God's history is an awakening, a revealer of our true nature before the true and living God.

The book of II Samuel is the account of King David throughout the decades of his reign. He was a man whose heart was *"perfect with the LORD his God"*, who *"did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD"* (I Ki. 15:3-4). Though he, like us, was not completely consistent in his walk with his God, yet David becomes an important example for us to follow. May we proceed with open eyes and heart, ready to hear and heed.

Bill Daniels

Our **Reading Companions** are simple commentaries, covering various books of the Bible, providing easy to follow help in understanding what you read in your Bible, without becoming overly technical. These Bible study books are earnestly taught, practically applied, and have been a blessing to many.

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II Corinthians
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Ephesians
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Colossians
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Revelation

As well as; "Through the Beloved Book of Books – A Survey of the New Testament"

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"And David went on,
and grew great,
and the LORD God of hosts
was with him"

(II Sam. 5:10)

Introduction

This book of II Samuel is the historical account of the 40-year reign of Israel's greatest king, King David. Within these pages we learn how David lived for God and conquered his enemies; how he walked with his God and pushed back Israel's borders; how he wholly followed the Lord and unified the nation, leading them to the pinnacle of national victory and power. The key verse of the book summarizing the whole is found in 5:10, *"And David went on, and grew great, and the LORD God of hosts was with him."* Thus this book of II Samuel is the biography of King David on the throne. Yet far more than the record of a great man, this is the record of what God can do through a man when *"the LORD God of hosts"* is with him. It is the key to true success.

This is history. But what we have here is far more than a record of historical events. Again, God never merely traces history in His Book of books. God's history is His record of *Himself* in His dealings with man, and of *man* in his dealings with God. It is a revelation of God, of who He is. It is a revelation of man, of who and what he is.

History is in fact a very important part of God's Book. The Old Testament (O.T.) is a touch over 50%

history. That does not even take into account the fact that;

- Deuteronomy is largely a repetition of Israel's history.
- The Psalms and prophets do much repetition of historical events (Isa. 36-39).
- What is the book of Jonah but prophecy couched in the form of history?

Of the New Testament (N.T.), just short of 60% is history (Matthew to Acts), with greatest repetition around the life of Christ. Thus well over half of the Bible is an historical record of events, giving greatest indication that history is one of God's favourite subjects and therefore a subject vital to our consideration. Why such great focus on history? Partly because history is the confirmation of prophecy, and fulfilled prophecy is the confirmation of God's Book above every other. As well, history is the record of the responses and actions of God and man. It is an easy thing to make statements about who someone is. But the real proof of it is in a person's active responses to life and others. Thus history is the confirmation of who God really is and who man really is.

Author

As was mentioned in our study of I Samuel, the authorship of these books of Samuel is not an evident thing, purely through lack of clear statements on the matter in the text. Obviously our awareness of who wrote these books is not an important concern with the Lord. It is likely that Samuel, that last judge over the nation of Israel, authored most of I Samuel until his death (I Sam. 25:1). And then I Chronicles 29:29 puts the prophets Nathan and Gad together with Samuel in recording *"the acts of David"*. Thus it seems it was these men who picked up the pen with Samuel's death in continuing the record.

Basic Outline

Chapters 1-6 – Crowned.

Chapter 7 – Covenant.

Chapters 8-10 – Conquests.

Chapter 11 – Failures.

Chapters 12-18 – Family Problems.

Chapters 19-20 – Return.

Chapters 21-24 – Power Source.

- Chapters 21-23 – Dependence.
- Chapter 24 – Repentance.

Distinctives

Listed below are a few things characteristic of this book and of crucial importance;

- The city of Jerusalem established – It was David who finally took Jerusalem and set that city as the capital of the nation and then the centre of national worship (chapter 5), making Jerusalem all that it has come to mean to God and His people. From the beginning of Christ's earthly, millennial kingdom Jerusalem will become the capitol city of the whole earth.
- The Davidic Covenant – God's unconditional covenant with David to give to him a seed, a throne, and a kingdom forever. This pledge will be fulfilled in Christ in His millennial kingdom (Rev. 20), with He then continuing to reign in some sense into the ages of the ages. Through this important covenant another link is added to the blood line of Messiah;
    - Genesis 3:15 – Messiah will arise as the

seed of the woman (mankind).

  - Genesis 22:18 – From the seed of Abraham.
  - Genesis 28:13 – From the seed of Jacob.
  - Genesis 49:10 – From the tribe of Judah.
  - II Samuel 7:12 – From the seed of David.
  - Matthew 1:20-25 – *All fulfilled in Jesus Christ!*

- Sacred music – It was through David that the Lord developed the use of music and singing in worship. And through David we of course received the book of Psalms, that inspired hymnbook of the O.T. David came to the throne both as a skilled musician and with a habit of expressing his worship of God in songs or psalms. It was David who established and organised the institution of Levitical musicians and singers for the enhancement of temple worship.
- With the record of David's great victories and successes, God is faithful to also include a

record of his weaknesses and sins;

- Weak in discipline, with his sons and Joab.
- Weak in personal discipline, in his adultery with Bathsheba.
- Murder of faithful Uriah, Bathsheba's husband.
- Compare as well in the book of I Samuel David's response of rage with Nabal (chapter 25), and lying to the priest Ahimelech (chapter 21) and to Achish of Gath (chapter 27).

David and Saul Contrasted

Though David's sins are known to us, yet for the most part he could leave all outcomes to God without illegitimate efforts to force his own will (I Sam. 24 & 26). But Saul was consistently self-willed, refusing to wait on God;

- As in the matter of his burnt offering at Gilgal (I Sam. 13).
- As in his disobedience with the Amalekites (I Sam. 15).
- As in his wilful pursuit of David's life, even

against his own word (I Sam. 19:6).

- As in his treacherous massacre of the priests at Nob (I Sam. 22).
- As in his visit with the witch at Endor (I Sam. 28).
- As in his efforts against the Gibeonites (II Sam. 21)

The Lord was *central* to David's existence from the time he was a young boy. How wholeheartedly he would run back to the Lord when he failed. We hear the expression of this throughout the Psalms. One of the first things David did when coming to power over the whole nation was to set the ark of God in a place of prominence in Jerusalem. Though David was far from perfect, yet as a rule he always put the Lord and His things first! But the Lord was always secondary to Saul;

- He was never careful to keep the details of God's commands.
- He only looked to God when he was in trouble.
- He left the ark, that symbol of God's presence, sitting at Kirjath-jearim throughout the years of his reign (I Sam. 7:1-2). For it was never a matter of importance to Saul that the ark be

placed at the tabernacle where the priests could minister over it properly according to God's law.

Remember the lesson of Haggai 1, that to put the Lord and His things first is to see His help in making everything else in life work.

David's humility was real, for though he greatly yo-yoed in his spiritual walk, he always came back to clearest recognition of the Lord as King. But Saul's initial show of humility was no real humility (I Sam. 9:21), for his power soon went to his head.

When David sinned God's reproof brought him to repentance, and his repentance was genuine (Ps. 32 & 51). Thus he found the Lord's forgiveness just on the other side of true repentance. Saul's confessions were only concessions, needing to be dragged out of him (I Sam. 15), marking only surface reforms that did not last (I Sam. 19 & 25).

Survey

Chapter 1

- How David wept over the death of one who so earnestly sought his life (vs. 17-27). Compare

his mourning over the deaths of Abner and Absalom (3:31-39 & 18:33).

"Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!" (John 1:47)

Chapter 3

- David's weak discipline in handling Joab will come back to haunt him.

Chapter 4

- David established the principle early in his reign that he would not tolerate assassins (vs. 9-12). Therefore David lived a long life and died of natural causes. Compare I Samuel 24:6; 26:9-11; II Samuel 1:14-16.

Chapter 6

- The ark was at last brought up to Jerusalem. It was a good idea but the wrong method. David asked a good question in vs. 9, one he should have asked from the start. Compare I Chronicles 15, where David found the answer to his question.

Chapter 7

- The Davidic Covenant.

Chapter 8

- All of David's enemies were conquered. The reason why is found in vs. 6 & 14. Compare Hezekiah (II Kings 18:6-7). Contrast Deuteronomy 1:42-44.

  "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6).

Chapter 9

- David honoured Mephibosheth. In this we see an illustration of we who could expect destruction by God, yet because of our relation to Christ we are not only spared but are invited to eat at the King's table. In Mephibosheth we see the proper attitude of a grateful believer toward Christ (19:28).

Chapter 11

- David's adultery and murder. Uriah's supreme loyalty makes his murder all the uglier. What a sickening thing to hear David's

message in vs. 25. This marked the lowest point of David's life.

Chapter 12

- Nathan's brave rebuke and David's repentance. The truth is highlighted that the wise before God are not wise because they are faultless, but because they repent when God's fair rebuke comes. The wisdom of one willing to hear rebuke is greatly highlighted in Proverbs as well (13:18; 15:5, 12, 32; 17:10).
- Solomon's birth (a token of peace).

Chapter 13-15

- With Absalom's rise and conspiracy David was forced to flee. This was partly David's own fault for his weak discipline. Where David was strong in discipline, as with his handling of assassins, he personally benefited with peace. Where David was weak on discipline, as with his sons and with Joab, he personally suffered with great unrest.

Chapter 16

- Ahithophel's advice to Absalom to defile

David's concubines (vs. 20-21). This was a fulfilment of Nathan's prophecy (12:11).

- It seems this was a kind of revenge for Ahithophel, as he was Bathsheba's grandfather (11:3 & 23:34).

Chapter 18

- Absalom's defeat and death.

Chapter 22

- This chapter is basically a repeat of Psalm 18. Yet understand that the theme of this psalm is the recognition of man's source of strength in God. It was the essential difference between David and Saul, again highlighting the key to success (by repetition).

Chapter 23

- David's list of mighty men. Note how Joab is conspicuously missing here, though his two brothers and armour-bearer are listed (vs. 18, 24, 37). For this was not only a list of supremely courageous men, but of men of supreme loyalty to David.

Chapter 24

- David's sin in numbering Israel. It was an indication of his trust in his troops rather than trusting the Lord.
- David purchased the threshing floor of Araunah
    - That place where God's wrath against sin was appeased (vs. 25).
    - Which David understood to be the place of *"the altar of the burnt offering for Israel"*, and where he began making preparations to build the temple (I Chron. 21:28-22:2).
    - This was Mt. Moriah, where Solomon later completed the temple (I Chron. 3:1).
    - Likely the same site where Abraham nearly offered Isaac (*"one of the mountains"* in *"the land of Moriah"*, Gen. 22:2).
- Not only was Jerusalem established as the nation's capitol city within the pages of this book of II Samuel, but the future temple site was located there as well.

Ponder Points

In *Moses* we see a picture of Christ the *prophet* (Deut. 18), bringing the revelation of a new way of dealing with man.

In *Joshua* we see a picture of Christ the *conqueror*, leading his people to victory.

In *the judges* we see a picture of Christ the *deliverer*, breaking the power of all oppressors to lead His people to peace.

In *Boaz* we see a picture of Christ the *kinsman redeemer*, that close kinsman both willing and able to rescue his destitute relatives from poverty.

In *Samuel* we see a picture of Christ the godly *priest* and *prophet*, whom the living God has *"established to be a prophet of the LORD"* and whose words do not fall short of complete fulfilment (I Sam. 3:19-20).

In *David* we see a picture of Christ the godly *king*, one whose heart is after God's own heart, and one who is set to reign forever.

Chapter 1

1:1 *Now it came to pass after the death of Saul, when David was returned from the slaughter of the Amalekites, and David had abode two days in Ziklag;*

So we now begin a focus on this "SECOND BOOK OF SAMUEL", and as my Bible heading adds, "otherwise called, THE SECOND BOOK OF THE KINGS". Why? Because this now begins the record of the rise to power of the second king over the nation of Israel, King David. Let's begin with a reminder of the context coming out the end of I Samuel. Saul and three of his sons had died in battle against the Philistines and the army and nation were scattered in confusion. Meanwhile David and his men had returned to their city of Ziklag in the south to discover it burned, with their women, children, and belongings carried away. David and company immediately set out after the marauding Amalekites who had done the dirty work. They quickly caught up with them and turned their picnic to panic, slaughtering the Amalekites and recovering all. Thus it was all defeat for Saul to the north while all victory for David to the south.

1:1-10 – The Messenger's Report

1:2 *It came even to pass on the third day, that, behold, a man came out of the camp from Saul with his clothes rent, and earth upon his head: and so it was, when he came to David, that he fell to the earth, and did obeisance.*
1:3 *And David said unto him, From whence comest thou? And he said unto him, Out of the camp of Israel am I escaped.*
1:4 *And David said unto him, How went the matter? I pray thee, tell me. And he answered, That the people are fled from the battle, and many of the people also are fallen and dead; and Saul and Jonathan his son are dead also.*
1:5 *And David said unto the young man that told him, How knowest thou that Saul and Jonathan his son be dead?*

Vs. 2-4 – Then, upon David's return to Ziklag, a man showed up at their camp sporting traditional signs of mourning and asking to speak to David. Through his questioning David then heard the sad news of the tragic battle from which this man *"escaped",* and of the death of Saul and Jonathan.

Vs. 5 – When David demanded confirmation of the truth of the report, the man related his part in helping the king end his life. He stated that he discovered Saul near death on Mt. Gilboa, having tried and failed to take his own life by falling on his own spear. He said the king pled with him to help him finish the job, which he obligingly did since he was sure Saul could not live anyway. He then collected the king's crown and arm bracelet as proof, bringing them purposely to David, the recognized heir to the throne.

Deductions;

1:6 *And the young man that told him said, As I happened by chance upon mount Gilboa, behold, Saul leaned upon his spear; and, lo, the chariots and horsemen followed hard after him.*
1:7 *And when he looked behind him, he saw me, and called unto me. And I answered, Here am I.*
1:8 *And he said unto me, Who art thou? And I answered him, I am an Amalekite.*

- It seems this man was hoping to commend himself to David. He was likely expecting some reward for so "helping" Saul to the grave and David to the throne.

- He was likely lying, for the biblical text states that Saul died as a result of falling upon his sword (I Sam. 31:4-5). We must be careful about coming to conclusions that contradict the clear statement of the Bible text.

- His reasoning, *"because I was sure that he could not live"*, is that of euthanasia (mercy killing) advocates. Yet God's man brought the punishment of death to one who presumed to step into God's role as Lord of life and death (not a case of allowing one to die, but of helping one to die). Is there a message here?

- If this man spoke the truth, do not miss the irony of Saul's failure to fully execute God's will upon the Amalekites resulting in his own death at the hands of the same. David as well had just faced serious trouble from the Amalekites at Ziklag. Moses had spoken the

1:9 *He said unto me again, Stand, I pray thee, upon me, and slay me: for anguish is come upon me, because my life is yet whole in me.*
1:10 *So I stood upon him, and slew him, because I was sure that he could not live after that he was fallen: and I took the crown that was upon his head, and the bracelet that was on his arm, and have brought them hither unto my lord.*
1:11 *Then David took hold on his clothes, and rent them; and likewise all the men that were with him:*

Lord's solemn charge to His people that they must not forget to *"blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven"* for the wickedness of their actions against Israel (Deut. 25:19). When we fail to do according to the Lord's express will, for whatever reason, it comes back to haunt us and even hurt us, and others as well.

1:11-16 – David's Response

Vs. 11-12 – The mourning and fasting of David and his men shows every indication of a sorrow that was quite genuine; even though there must have been much relief with that dangerous threat removed, and though it marked the obvious break for which David had so patiently been waiting, and though there was good cause for anger at Saul, whose hardened wilfulness had brought such tragedy and death to David's people and dear friend Jonathan. Yet still this was real sorrow for the loss even of one who had twisted himself into such an enemy of David and his followers. What might have been an

1:12 *And they mourned, and wept, and fasted until even, for Saul, and for Jonathan his son, and for the people of the LORD, and for the house of Israel; because they were fallen by the sword.*
1:13 *And David said unto the young man that told him, Whence art thou? And he answered, I am the son of a stranger, an Amalekite.*
1:14 *And David said unto him, How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the LORD's anointed?*

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occasion for gloating and even celebration for a man of lesser character became an occasion only of sorrow for this one with a shepherd heart of care for the ravaged people involved. Solomon later wrote the divine principle into Proverbs, *"Rejoice not when thine enemy falleth, and let not thine heart be glad when he stumbleth: lest the Lord see it, and it displease Him, and He turn away His wrath from him"* (Prov. 24:17-18).

Vs. 13-16 – David then turned his attention to the execution of that Amalekite messenger, bringing justice upon him. Was David indeed just with this messenger? Consider the positive aspects in the Amalekites favour;

- He showed signs of mourning.
- He came to David instead of avoiding him. Though, again, this was likely because he hoped to receive honour, some appointment, or some other reward.
- He had an understanding of David's royal

1:15 *And David called one of the young men, and said, Go near, and fall upon him. And he smote him that he died.*

1:16 *And David said unto him, Thy blood be upon thy head; for thy mouth hath testified against thee, saying, I have slain the LORD's anointed.*

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appointment.

- According to what he claimed, he only did what the king told him to do.
- He did what was for Saul's best(?), putting him out of his misery.
- As he stated, it seemed certain Saul could not live anyway.
- He was only finishing the job Saul himself began.
- He did not keep the crown for himself. This he could have hidden in the sand for himself, as Gehazi.

How many aspects of this man's action could seem to be quite right and good, yet it was fundamentally wrong. How many aspects of our own decisions can seem to be quite right and good, seeming to put a fresh scent to actions that really stink before God and the wise, things quite worthy of death for the violation of God's perfect standard. Circumstances may seem to combine in amazingly confirmatory

ways, and yet offer support for the most godless choices. I have heard the stories. You too?

Consider how it will be the same with the unsaved as well when they stand before God one day. They too may be able to point to many positive aspects of their lives, which from man's perspective may have seemed quite good, and may seem to justify them before God. Yet from God's angle man's "good" deeds are only ever a filthy rag "righteousness" (Isa. 64:6). The very words the Lord will speak to those seeking to be justified by their deeds have already been written in Matthew 7:23. Though one should perform many a good deed for the Lord in his life, yet if the Lord does not know him there simply is no hope for such a one! The knowledge of the truth and of the One who is truth is available for all who want to know the true God. Only faith in the gospel of the only Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, is the indispensable deciding factor.

The point is that worthy men are afraid to touch God's appointed king or leader, even when it appears to make sense. Where Saul's armour-bearer feared, this man did not seem to hesitate (I Sam. 31:4). Where David refused, though opportunity was put right under his nose on two occasions (I Sam. 24 & 26), this one did not possess

a proper sensitivity to refrain from such an act. And though his account was likely a lie, he died for his lie. For his lie expressed his willingness to act in the way he said he did, making him one worthy of death.

Did you notice that no trauma counselling was made available to the young executioner for doing the will of God and his leader? We live in day with a largely missing message – GET OVER IT!! It is a day when human sensitivities are overly pandered to and made into "syndromes" and freighted with a "cannot-help-it" push that just does not really exist. God comes to us with boldness and slaps us into sensibility with the simplicity of a "just-stop-it!" or "just-do-it" approach.

1:17-27 – David's Lamentation

Songs and singing were David's way of expressing himself, whether in joy or sorrow. So he began composing this interesting song or lamentation in honour of Israel's fallen leaders. What does David's lamentation communicate about him? Is this what you would expect of a man's man or man of war? How does the modern cool/macho image square with this scene of great emotion?

Vs. 18 – It is difficult to get the sense of what David

1:17 *And David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son:*
1:18 *(Also he bade them teach the children of Judah the use of the bow: behold, it is written in the book of Jasher.)*

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instructed to be taught to *"the children of Judah".* Was it the use of the bow, as in bow & arrow, after the example of Jonathan's skill with this weapon (vs. 22; I Sam. 18:4; 20:19-20)? Or did this refer to the use of the bow of some musical instrument in singing such a ballad? Or did it perhaps refer to the learning of this song, perhaps titled "The Bow"?

"Behold, it is written in the book of Jasher" – This *"book of Jasher"* or "book of the upright" was not preserved and therefore obviously was not meant by God to be a part of the inspired text, though it was a significant enough writing for mention here. Joshua mentioned this book as well, as also containing the account of the day the sun stood still in answer to his prayer (Josh. 10:13). There were many other books written along with those which have come to make up the Bible (I Ki. 11:41; II Chron. 9:29; II Chron. 12:15). But the Lord superintended the composing of His Book of books, ensuring that only inspired writings have been included.

Vs. 19-27 – Things to note in David's poetic

1:19 *The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen!*
1:20 *Tell it not in Gath, publish it not in the streets of Askelon; lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.*
1:21 *Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain, upon you, nor fields of offerings: for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with oil.*
1:22 *From the blood of the slain, from the fat of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan turned not back, and the sword of Saul returned not empty.*

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expression here;

- He relates the tragic reality of the loss of their leaders (vs. 19).

- He would deny word of it to the gloating Philistine daughters (vs. 20).

- He would have the place of their deaths become a barren slope (vs. 21).

- He does some gloating of his own over the effectiveness of Saul and Jonathan in battle while living (vs. 22).

- He celebrates the sweetness of their lives and their union in death (vs. 23). Jonathan was loyal unto death to an often difficult father and king (I Sam. 14:43). Hear the words David employs in describing the nation's fallen leaders; *"beauty", "mighty", "lovely", "pleasant", "swift", "strong".* Not one negative word can be found here. See how David was secure enough in his God and in His promise

1:23 *Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided: they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions.*
1:24 *Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with other delights, who put on ornaments of gold upon your apparel.*
1:25 *How are the mighty fallen in the midst of the battle! O Jonathan, thou wast slain in thine high places.*

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of David's coming rule that he did not need to in any way run down Saul or his dynasty in order to lift himself. It was good indication of David's mature faith.

- He calls on their own daughters to weep over the loss of their great provider (vs. 24). Though Saul's wilfulness is the point of focus in the I Samuel record, still there were positive points about him as well. Saul was often an effective warrior king, providing Israel with a measure of protection and peace and plunder from conquered enemies. How tragic that one so naturally gifted would so waste himself through his wilful abuse of God's blessings. We are wise to not miss the warning.

- Mostly David was in anguish over the loss of Jonathan, his dearest and most loyal friend on earth (vs. 25-26). David speaks of Jonathan's love for him rather than his love for Jonathan, because Jonathan was the active pursuer. His earnest devotion and

1:26 *I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan: very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women.*
1:27 *How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished!*

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desire for David's best was even beyond the natural compassion of a caring woman. See how the might and strength of these tough men of war is highlighted, yet with the most passionate love for each other. Real passion and tears is not inappropriate in men who are real men.

Chapter 2

2:1 And it came to pass after this, that David enquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the LORD said unto him, Go up. And David said, Whither shall I go up? And he said, Unto Hebron.

2:1-7 – David's Reign in Hebron

Vs. 1 – David's very first response after a time of mourning was to inquire of God. The hardships he had faced and the compromise into which he had fallen were important lessons moving him to greater dependence upon his God. Both David's inquiries and God's answers here point up the stark contrast with Saul. Saul could not get any word at all from God when he was in desperate need of guidance, resulting in his foolish visit with that witch at Endor. Yet it was because Saul had never before really wanted God's word or pleasure or help. But the Lord was there for David's guidance. God is not some heavenly vending machine, ready to spit out an answer whenever any old coin is dropped in the slot. He waits and looks for those who wait on Him. He is the Keeper of those who keep themselves right with Him according to His word. He stands ready to respond in behalf of every such sincere seeker. We cannot make it our practice to ignore Him and then expect to find His help when we cry to Him out

of our trouble. Yet behold a man to whom the God of heaven readily responded. Consider carefully the reasons why.

How would David have inquired of God? Compare his use of the priest and ephod in I Samuel 23:6, 9-12 & 30:7-8.

David's prayer here is good indication of his patient waiting on God. It is an important lesson. He knew it was a turning point for the nation and that he would be a part of it, for he was anointed to be king. But still he proceeded only with the Lord's leading. Even in Hebron he waited 7½ years, not forcing himself on the whole nation. There he patiently continued to wait for things to further fall into place. Look well at David's willingness to wait for God to lead on to the next step in His time. Compare our own similar situation in faithfully, patiently waiting on God to fulfil His promises to us concerning His coming kingdom. He who is true to His word kept His promise to David concerning his reigning in his kingdom, literally, actually, physically. And the record of it here is the assurance that He will do the same concerning our involvement with the Son of David at last reigning in His coming kingdom, literally, actually, physically.

2:2 *So David went up thither, and his two wives also, Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, and Abigail Nabal's wife the Carmelite.*
2:3 *And his men that were with him did David bring up, every man with his household: and they dwelt in the cities of Hebron.*
2:4 *And the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah. And they told David, saying, That the men of Jabeshgilead were they that buried Saul.*
2:5 *And David sent messengers unto the men of Jabeshgilead, and said unto them, Blessed be ye of the LORD, that ye have shewed this kindness unto your lord, even unto Saul, and have buried him.*

"And He said, Unto Hebron" – Hebron was where Caleb and his family settled after the conquest. It was a city relatively central to Judah, along the highland ridge.

Vs. 2-3 – Better times were now beginning, with opportunity so suddenly opening before David. Yet see how he was careful to take care of those who had stood by him and taken care of him through the hard times. Do not miss the basic loyalty characteristic of a man of God. It was a loyalty missing in Saul, who was loyal only to himself. As we treat the Lord, so we treat others.

Vs. 4 – This was now the 2nd time David was anointed to be king (I Sam. 16). The leaders involved here would have been some of the same men David had impressed before with his gifts from the Amalekite spoils (I Sam. 30:26-31).

Vs. 5-7 – Words of encouragement.

2:6 *And now the LORD shew kindness and truth unto you: and I also will requite you this kindness, because ye have done this thing.*
2:7 *Therefore now let your hands be strengthened, and be ye valiant: for your master Saul is dead, and also the house of Judah have anointed me king over them.*

David's encouragements to the men of Jabesh-gilead was a kingly deed, and probably went a long way toward winning the confidence of the northern leaders. Words of praise where praise is due are an important part of any good leadership, whether in the work situation or home. We can almost feel the lift these men must have felt at such a time of great fearful insecurity. Yet this was far more than mere diplomacy. We have already seen in David's lamentation his genuine feeling for Saul and Jonathan, and therefore the sincerity of his appreciation for the noble and heroic actions of these men. In fact this was a public display of David's honouring of Saul, rather than gloating over the death of that one who had so hounded his heels.

It is lessons in good (and bad) leadership here. David would draw men after himself by honouring men and waiting on God. He wisely, patiently won their hearts and approval and following, rather than attempting to force himself on others.

David's words here suggest the nature of what Jesus will speak to all who are valiant for truth

2:8 *But Abner the son of Ner, captain of Saul's host, took Ishbosheth the son of Saul, and brought him over to Mahanaim;*
2:9 *And made him king over Gilead, and over the Ashurites, and over Jezreel, and over Ephraim, and over Benjamin, and over all Israel.*

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upon earth, when He too returns to claim His earthly domain, bringing rewards with Him. Oh to hear such words of praise from Him! *"And, behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be"* (Rev. 22:12).

2:8-11 – Ishbosheth's Reign over Israel

Ishbosheth is an interesting study, a puppet king really. His name means "man of shame". Why such a name? He was Eshbaal at first (I Chron. 8:33; 9:39). Did his name change take place after his death, based upon his shameful conduct during his brief reign?

Did you notice the apparent contradiction in vs. 10-11? Obviously Abner, the driving force to the north, was several years restoring some semblance of order to the northern kingdom before actually installing Ishbosheth as king, while David had begun immediately to rule over Judah.

2:10 *Ishbosheth Saul's son was forty years old when he began to reign over Israel, and reigned two years. But the house of Judah followed David.*
2:11 *And the time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months.*

Ponder Points

It is a principle we do well to remember. The one who is wilful against God suffers and falls. The one who is walking with God prospers and soars. God-*rejecters* are on their way out. God-*respecters* are on their way in and up.

The Lord gives the reasons why Saul died in I Chronicles 10:13-14;

- Because of *"his transgression which he committed against the Lord"*. He disregarded God.
- Because he transgressed the word of the LORD in not keeping it. He disregarded God's words.
- And because he asked counsel of a witch rather than of the Lord. He instead regarded what is forbidden.

He disregarded the tree of life and chose rather to

2:12 *And Abner the son of Ner, and the servants of Ishbosheth the son of Saul, went out from Mahanaim to Gibeon.*

2:13 *And Joab the son of Zeruiah, and the servants of David, went out, and met together by the pool of Gibeon: and they sat down, the one on the one side of the pool, and the other on the other side of the pool.*

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regard the forbidden tree.

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As David took over the throne of wilful King Saul, even so Jesus, the Son of David, will take over the throne of the kingdoms of earth from antichrist, that wilful king (Dan. 11:36ff), at the last. As David patiently awaited that day so does the Lord. As Saul's fall from power and David's rise was a step-by-step process, so is Satan's fall;

- He was defeated at Calvary (Col. 2:15).
- He will be cast from any further access to heaven at the mid-point of the coming Tribulation period (Rev. 12:7-10).
- He will be cast to the abyss during the 1000 years of Christ's earthly reign (Rev. 20:1-3).
- He will be cast at last to the Lake of Fire (Rev. 20:10).

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2:12-39 – North vs. South; First Blood

Vs. 12-13 – There is an obvious question here. What was Abner doing in Gibeon? Abner had made Mahanaim the capital city of the northern tribes after the nation fell to the Philistines. Mahanaim was well over a 100 km hike to the north and across the Jordan Valley. Gibeon on the other hand was a mere 6-7 kms from the northern border of Judah, within the tribe of Benjamin (Josh. 18:25). What was this general doing there with his army? What would South Africa think if Zimbabwe gathered their army ("vets" and all) just across the northern border of South Africa? Would it not seem clear that there was some hostile intent? Abner appears to be initiating a confrontation by this approach, perhaps thinking it time to assert themselves against David's rule, hoping to bring the whole nation back under Saul's house. Such an action would have been anticipated and watched for from Judah's side.

Notice that for the first time we see David's men here without David himself leading. Now it is Joab in the lead, a man with a very different spirit than his king. Another intriguing question is what was Joab doing at Gibeon? He actually crossed the border onto ground claimed for Ishbosheth to meet Abner there. It is clear that this confrontation involved bristling challenge from both sides; Abner in bringing his army to such a threatening position, and Joab in

2:14 *And Abner said to Joab, Let the young men now arise, and play before us. And Joab said, Let them arise.*

2:15 *Then there arose and went over by number twelve of Benjamin, which pertained to Ishbosheth the son of Saul, and twelve of the servants of David.*

2:16 *And they caught every one his fellow by the head, and thrust his sword in his fellow's side; so they fell down together: wherefore that place was called Helkathhazzurim, which is in Gibeon.*

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actually crossing the border to meet Abner at Gibeon. It appears both men were spoiling for a fight, feeling their side sufficiently strong to force the issue.

Vs. 14-16 – Again it was Abner pushing things, now proposing a deadly contest between 12 chosen men from each side. What would be the point of this challenge of champions beyond reckless bravado? Was this after the manner of Goliath's challenge, having some measure of a deciding factor involved? Deciding what? Joab could have no authority to gamble with the fate of the southern kingdom over such a deadly dual! What else could this be but men with a feel of power wishing to test their strength against another? Against *brothers* in fact! And yet hazarding lives in the process! This was so completely out of line. Could we perhaps see a measure of faith motivating Joab, knowing God had anointed David to reign? Joab would pay dearly for his thoughtless rashness there that day with the loss of his own brother, and Abner with the loss of

2:17 *And there was a very sore battle that day; and Abner was beaten, and the men of Israel, before the servants of David.*
2:18 *And there were three sons of Zeruiah there, Joab, and Abishai, and Asahel: and Asahel was as light of foot as a wild roe.*

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360 men, and ultimately his own life for the death of Asahel. God's kingdom does not run well on testosterone!

"Wherefore that place was called Helkath-hazzurim" – Hĕl´kăth-hăzzū´rĭm means "field of swords", after the amazing event taking place there that day, with all 24 challengers killing each other together, leaving none to claim victory for his side. Abner's use of the term *"play"* (vs. 14) is a euphemism, meaning they were "playing" with swords, playing for keeps!

Vs. 17-32 – The indecisive contest immediately escalated into an all-out battle, which quickly turned to Judah's favour, with Abner and company put to flight before Joab's hot pursuit. Why pursuit? Why did Joab not blow his trumpet to end it right there and then?

It is here in this section that we are more formally introduced to the *"sons of Zeruiah"*; Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. Zeruiah was David's sister (I Chron. 2:16), making these three brothers nephews of

2:19 *And Asahel pursued after Abner; and in going he turned not to the right hand nor to the left from following Abner.*
2:20 *Then Abner looked behind him, and said, Art thou Asahel? And he answered, I am.*

David. We have met only Abishai before this in I Samuel 26. He was the one at David's elbow during their midnight venture into Saul's camp, making a nasty suggestion of what might be done to the sleeping king. Though these three brothers sometimes lacked for prudence and caution, they never lacked for passion and courage. We begin here to discover their character, with Joab willingly pressing the matter, meeting Abner's challenge head-on and without hesitation. Joab and his brothers were men given to taking things quite personally, often carrying things too far. Examples;

- Why did Joab's side need to go any further than defence of their border? They should not have met Abner on his own ground in the first place. And when it broke into a running battle as the north retreated, they should have simply let them go! Why pursue the conflict as if dealing with real enemies?

- Asahel would not leave it when warned away by Abner (vs. 19-23). Asahel knew he was fast (vs. 18), perhaps prided himself so, and thus he was going for none but the big fish. It was

2:21 *And Abner said to him, Turn thee aside to thy right hand or to thy left, and lay thee hold on one of the young men, and take thee his armour. But Asahel would not turn aside from following of him.*

2:22 *And Abner said again to Asahel, Turn thee aside from following me: wherefore should I smite thee to the ground? how then should I hold up my face to Joab thy brother?*

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a time for men to prove themselves in those early days of David's reign, perhaps jockeying for positions of honour through bravery and ability. Abner was now left with no choice but to strike with the sharpened butt of his spear as Asahel came up on him. It was a sudden, unexpected move. Perhaps Abner was hoping only to wound his pursuer.

- Understand how it was Joab's earlier bad decisions that led now to this unfortunate situation. How quickly thoughtless incaution can lead from bad to worse! By playing with fire things so quickly got out of hand. A man with a measure of wise caution in the lead might have saved the day (Eccl. 9:13-18). The hot-headed, impetuous nature of those brothers became evident from this first engagement with them at the helm. They were the O.T. "sons of thunder".

- Again, in our first introduction to these brothers it was Abishai incensed with Saul's pursuit of them, and quickly reading

2:23 *Howbeit he refused to turn aside: wherefore Abner with the hinder end of the spear smote him under the fifth rib, that the spear came out behind him; and he fell down there, and died in the same place: and it came to pass, that as many as came to the place where Asahel fell down and died stood still.*

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opportunity as the Lord's cue to assassinate (I Sam. 26:6-8).

- It was Abishai who later wanted to remove Shimei's head for his caustic words against David when they were escaping from Absalom. And later, when they returned, he wished to refuse Shimei's apologies (16:9; 19:21). He was often at David's side to suggest offence and aggression, to the point where David even aimed the word *"adversaries"* at them (19:22).

- Joab personally killed Abner, Absalom, and Amasa, easily treading where king-fearing men dared not go. All of these deaths were deliberate and defiant, clearly against David's will. All because Joab felt some personal offence in each case.

Where was David in this incident? Did he know where Joab and his men were? Was he consulted on this matter? Why do we not read that David sent Joab and company as per vs. 5? And how would David have handled this situation? Would he so

engage his own people in civil war? It is not likely. There is a great lack of David's patience here in his readiness to wait on God. He certainly would have handled things more cautiously against their northern brothers. This was in fact the beginning of what became long-standing hostility between north and south. These sons of Zeruiah, though brave and valuable warriors in many ways, seldom showed the patience of David to wait on God for His time. Could it be that David was not consulted at all in this situation, and that because Joab was tired of the patient tolerance of his king? Tired of waiting? Wanting to handle things in his own more reckless manner? Those who are impetuous or intolerant often tend to have a rather negative opinion of God's more gracious way and those who show it.

Consider how David's slower, more patient approach was much more effective in winning a following over the long term. Consider how men of lesser faith and patience cause hurts and troubles through their unbridled, selfish responses. It is God's Spirit that takes impetuousness out of us and moulds us into more patient and tolerant souls.

On the other hand David's patience often shaded to permissiveness, in not taking firm action when he

2:24 *Joab also and Abishai pursued after Abner: and the sun went down when they were come to the hill of Ammah, that lieth before Giah by the way of the wilderness of Gibeon.*

2:25 *And the children of Benjamin gathered themselves together after Abner, and became one troop, and stood on the top of an hill.*

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should have, particularly against Joab. There is a careful balance somewhere between impetuosity and permissiveness, between intolerance and over-tolerance. It is a precious balance we are wise to seek.

The interesting term *"under the fifth rib"* in the Kings Jame Version (KJV) features here in chapters 2 & 3. It is the mark Abner hit when spearing Asahel (vs. 23), and it is where Joab later returned the favour to Abner in avenging his brother (vs. 3:27). It speaks of a particularly deadly entry point for a weapon.

Vs. 25 – It may be that the Benjamites feature here because Saul was of the tribe of Benjamin. Therefore they were more motivated to preserve Saul's house and name. We are never wise to seek to preserve our own interests against the Lord's direction or leading. This was Abner's failing as well, and the nasty results of it in this account are far too many and great;

- It just did not work in the long run.

- Serious trouble eventually developed between Abner and Ishbosheth, the arrangement imploding from within.
- Civil war resulted, with the loss of many lives on both sides.
- A rift was ignited and fanned between the north and south of the nation.
- It ended in death for both of the principal players in Abner and Ishbosheth.

Vs. 26 – *"Knowest thou not that it shall be bitterness in the latter end?"* – Abner and those with him positioned themselves to take a stand against their pursuers at the top of a hill, and from there Abner managed to talk his way out of trouble. Abner was certainly correct in that the way things were handled between them that day did contribute to trouble between the tribes into the following decades. And see how Abner played up the brotherhood story when on the losing end of things, when he needed Joab to act like a brother. His thoughts were far less brotherly in the morning when initiating the trouble that so backfired on him.

2:27 *And Joab said, As God liveth, unless thou hadst spoken, surely then in the morning the people had gone up every one from following his brother.*
2:28 *So Joab blew a trumpet, and all the people stood still, and pursued after Israel no more, neither fought they any more.*

Perhaps this is something of the meaning in Joab's response.

Vs. 27 – Joab would point the finger of blame at Abner for starting the conflict with his bold dare at the well of Gibeon, as if to suggest that if Abner had not said anything both sides would have long since trotted home in peace. There of course was a measure of truth to this, for it was Abner's presence in Gibeon and his words of challenge that got the ball rolling. But we must remember *where* the trouble began – on *Abner's* ground. It was Joab who put his ears there to hear Abner's challenge. He was doing his own pushing as well in getting that ball rolling. The fault was far from a one-sided thing.

Hey this is people! It is always easier to point the finger of blame elsewhere, to see the fault weighted to the side of the other rather than being honestly fair in seeing our own fault as well. *Both* men were at fault, and both suffered dearly for it. And so many others would die through the following decades as a result of what began here. Again it is

2:29 *And Abner and his men walked all that night through the plain, and passed over Jordan, and went through all Bithron, and they came to Mahanaim.*
2:30 *And Joab returned from following Abner: and when he had gathered all the people together, there lacked of David's servants nineteen men and Asahel.*
2:31 *But the servants of David had smitten of Benjamin, and of Abner's men, so that three hundred and threescore men died.*
2:32 *And they took up Asahel, and buried him in the sepulchre of his father, which was in Bethlehem. And Joab and his men went all night, and they came to Hebron at break of day*

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a reminder of how very far-reaching and destructive the results of our choices to sin, the results even of the words we choose to speak. As James said of the tongue, *"Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it…setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell"* (3:5-6). Remember how the book of Proverbs often points out the deadly power of the tongue (12:18; 18:21; 21:23).

Vs. 30-31 – The resulting deaths were 18-1 in favour of David's side. It was God continuing to affirm David, gradually lifting him to rule over the whole kingdom of Israel, according to His promise.

Chapter 3

3:1 *Now there was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David: but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker.*

3:1-5 – Wives and Sons

Vs. 1 – Compare the ideas here with the ongoing battle between our old and new nature. Before Christ came into our lives with our salvation there was an inward fight in us against Him. It was as Saul's pursuit of David because he recognized deep down David's pre-eminence and right to reign. Dominated by our old nature we refused Christ's right to reign in us, illustrated as well in Saul of Tarsus so vehemently raging against Jesus and pursuing Christians at the first. But with our bow at last to Him and His entrance He ascended to the throne of our lives. Yet only actually over a portion of our heart does He reign, for the old nature is still alive and well within us. In a sense Jesus reigns only at our Hebron now, only over as much as we give Him. Still there remains an inward resistance in us to His complete rule. Still there is an effort to hold onto the cherished territory of our old ways and thoughts and haunts and direction. It is the growing Christian life described here in vs. 1, the process of allowing our new nature to gradually gain

3:2 *And unto David were sons born in Hebron: and his firstborn was Amnon, of Ahinoam the Jezreelitess;*
3:3 *And his second, Chileab, of Abigail the wife of Nabal the Carmelite; and the third, Absalom the son of Maacah the daughter of Talmai king of Geshur;*

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strength and dominance over the old inward administration. This *"long war"* describes the Christian experience, as we seek to bring *"into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ"* (II Cor. 10:5). It is only when we cease the inward fight for Christ's dominance within that we are in danger of our old nature returning to the throne of our heart. It is ours to continue that fight toward the purpose of Christ becoming Lord over the entire nation of our existence.

"For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that He might be Lord both of the dead and living" (Rom. 14:9).

Vs. 2-5 – These six sons of David were all born within the 7½ years he reigned in Hebron (2:11), involving four additional marriages. David had only the two wives of Abigail and Ahinoam when going up to Hebron (I Sam. 25:39-43). Of course several daughters would have been born during the same period as well. Things were happening pretty fast, suggesting David's preoccupation with these nuptial and natal projects during that era. Perhaps this is given in explanation of the troubles Joab and

3:4 *And the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; and the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital;*
3:5 *And the sixth, Ithream, by Eglah David's wife. These were born to David in Hebron.*

Abner fell into in the preceding chapter, with David's conspicuous absence. While David's focus was distracted by the kingly perks of female availability vital things were happening out there in the kingdom. His men were making serious mistakes in circumstances that greatly needed his wisdom and gifts. Thus this becomes a first indication of what later led to David's fall to more serious sin with Bathsheba, at a *"time when kings go forth to battle",* while David was lounging at home (11:1). Note the same point highlighted in this nursery news portion sandwiched between mention of ongoing war in vs. 1 & 6.

Look well at the application here. When we are distracted from what and where we should be, we not only end up in the wrong place but our presence and influence is sorely missed in the right place. It may have seemed a small thing for David to leave the lead to another while allowing himself to become distracted with other things, but it resulted in the most serious and long-lasting damage to the national fabric. We are wise to make sure that we are *what* and *where* we ought to be for the Lord, engaged in the battles we should be fighting in His

name and for His cause. And we are wise to stay right there until the Lord makes the need for change clear to us.

Obviously David was far more amply endowed with finance in those days to support many wives and a nursery full of sons and daughters. See how as soon as he was established and enjoying a greater ease of situation his weakness for women came to the surface. I wonder what Abigail thought of all this multiplying of fellow-wives. What might have seemed a dream come true at the first had likely lost some if its charm. David was certainly doing wrong in so multiplying wives, for the law of God had spoken against this very thing (Deut. 17:17). It is one positive aspect of King Saul that he seemed only to have one wife (I Sam. 14:50), though he had a concubine as well (vs. 7).

Consider the important point that this was the rise of a righteous king, yet one who was far from perfect. God underscores this point for us right here at the outset of David's rise. We see both commendable and corrupt character traits in this man. It is what God sees when He looks upon us as well, traits both commendable and corrupt. How much farther David could have gone for the Lord, how much trouble and loss he might have avoided,

3:6 *And it came to pass, while there was war between the house of Saul and the house of David, that Abner made himself strong for the house of Saul.*
3:7 *And Saul had a concubine, whose name was Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah: and Ishbosheth said to Abner, Wherefore hast thou gone in unto my father's concubine?*

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had he kept himself right in the areas of his weakness. But he was still greatly used of the Lord through his faith and faithfulness. God is able to use men of faith who are far from perfect. This is a vital lesson of David. God could not use Saul because there was no faith in him to ever run to God. There was only selfishness and stubborn rebellion in Saul. But God could use David because there was a genuine, faithful heart of worship in him, though he was indeed a man given to moral weakness. God does not dismiss people as lightly as we tend to do. Hopes of useful ministry are not ended just because we are weak or because we stumble. It is ever a question of what our sincere, core interests are before the Lord right now!

3:6-16 – Abner's turn to David

Vs. 6-8 – *"Abner made himself strong for the house of Saul"* – Note how it is all about Abner's strength in this portion, and his ability to deliver things over to David if he wished (vs. 8).

"Wherefore hast thou gone in unto my father's

3:8 *Then was Abner very wroth for the words of Ishbosheth, and said, Am I a dog's head, which against Judah do shew kindness this day unto the house of Saul thy father, to his brethren, and to his friends, and have not delivered thee into the hand of David, that thou chargest me to day with a fault concerning this woman?*

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concubine" – A concubine was a mistress with some legal connection to a man, yet not as an heir to his name or possessions. Saul had two sons by Rizpah (21:8). If Abner was sexually involved with Rizpah, as Isbosheth accused, it might suggest a bid for the throne. Compare 16:21 and II Kings 2:22.

"Then was Abner very wroth" – A humble, honest man who knows he has done no wrong would not respond like this. It speaks of some truth in the accusation, of something to hide. It certainly speaks of a great deal of pride in Abner, that there was more the heart of a master than of a servant in him. And notice that we hear no denials from Abner, only reference to all the good he was doing. He put quite a high value on his service, as if to justify a bit of indulgence in wrong by his much good.

Folks handle God in the same way. "But I have done You many a good turn in serving You. Surely my favours deserve favours from You in return! Surely I therefore do not deserve to be judged or so afflicted or diseased or troubled! Surely You do not have the

3:9 *So do God to Abner, and more also, except, as the LORD hath sworn to David, even so I do to him;*
3:10 *To translate the kingdom from the house of Saul, and to set up the throne of David over Israel and over Judah, from Dan even to Beersheba.*
3:11 *And he could not answer Abner a word again, because he feared him.*

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right to make an issue of a few particular wrongs or indulgences on my part. With all of the brighter things I do for You, why would You take issue with a couple things of a darker shade?" But of course the true and living God is a holy God who demands perfection, an absolute perfection of character that no man can possibly live up to. And therefore we must *receive* the free gift of justification through believing in Jesus Christ if we would find acceptance with God.

"Am I a dog's head?" – Abner's question is essentially, "Am I not a fool to be fighting your cause for you, or to be doing you any favours?"

Vs. 9-11 – Abner had now made the decision that he was done fighting, certainly for the sake of Ishbosheth. That he would so easily turn implies there was perhaps only a tenuous hold in him to the cause in the first place. Abner's words, *"as the Lord has sworn to David"*, seem to suggest his recognition that his efforts in holding the northern kingdom were really against the Lord's purpose.

3:12 *And Abner sent messengers to David on his behalf, saying, Whose is the land? saying also, Make thy league with me, and, behold, my hand shall be with thee, to bring about all Israel unto thee.*

3:13 *And he said, Well; I will make a league with thee: but one thing I require of thee, that is, Thou shalt not see my face, except thou first bring Michal Saul's daughter, when thou comest to see my face.*

Thus the first real bump into trouble and out pops this awareness of his own trampled conscience. There were other factors involved as well. Abner obviously could see that they were losing the battle (vs. 1), and thus the hand-writing was on the wall. And now with insult added to injury he had had enough. When the purpose is not of God the wheels eventually fall off for one reason or another. It seems Abner was moved to this turn mostly through an angry purpose to get even. Yet his irritable vengeance against his king will be his undoing.

"And he could not answer…because he feared him" – Ishbosheth was a mouse! He had no ability to resist because he had no strength of character in himself. Abner was his only real strength. Take Abner out of the equation and this man essentially folded into a foetal position (4:1). We need to be strong in the Lord on our own. And it is very hard to do this when inwardly aware that we are not standing on a righteous footing, as these men.

Vs. 12-13 – By making a league with David, Abner

was seeking David's protection. He was looking for a guarantee that there would be a place for him in David's kingdom, among the living rather than among the dead.

Abner's actions here (and David's as well) raise a question of propriety. Were the negotiations of these two according to integrity? Was Abner acting behind the back of Ishbosheth? There is a sense in which Abner was not really back-stabbing his king, for he had been up front with Ishbosheth in suggesting to his face what he might do. Yet his actions were treasonous in under-cutting the authority of his "king". David was only agreeing to stand with Abner (*"with me"*). He was not really taking personal action against Ishbosheth, but was allowing Abner to do so in his behalf. Perhaps we could compare David's role in this with God allowing a demon to lead Ahab to his grave through a lie (I Ki. 22:19-22). See how David had only to quietly wait and it all came to him in God's good time, just as God had promised.

"Thou shalt not see my face, except thou first bring Michal Saul's daughter" – Remember that Saul had reluctantly given Michal to David in marriage, and then later gave her to another man after David was on the run from Saul (I Sam. 18:27; 25:44). David's

3:14 *And David sent messengers to Ishbosheth Saul's son, saying, Deliver me my wife Michal, which I espoused to me for an hundred foreskins of the Philistines.*
3:15 *And Ishbosheth sent, and took her from her husband, even from Phaltiel the son of Laish.*
3:16 *And her husband went with her along weeping behind her to Bahurim. Then said Abner unto him, Go, return. And he returned.*

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request for his wife was only reasonable, serving to remind Abner and the elders of Israel of Saul's wrongs against David.

Vs. 14-16 – Ishbosheth's ready compliance again speaks of his weakness and fear. He was a man in desperate need of friends somewhere. This son of Saul was really just a pawn caught between strong men. But it was his own doing, his just desserts for his willingness to go along with something he too must have known was against God's purpose. Again, it seems there was a common understanding that they were fighting God's appointment of David to the throne (vs. 9, 17-18).

This man, Phaltiel, was another who must have known he was doing wrong in ever agreeing to take Michal for his wife. David's heroism leading up to his marriage to Michal and the way he actually won her hand had been a matter of public knowledge (I Sam. 18), at a time when young David was a chief celebrity throughout the land in Saul's service.

There must have been more than a fleeting thought in this man that such a pay-day as this must one day come for his impropriety in taking David's wife, even though he had the king's consent.

Consider that with the rise of a godly man to power, not only do the righteous rejoice (Prov. 29:2), but those living in wrongs, no matter how long established their wrongs, begin to tremble and worry, fearing the loss of illegitimate gains. How much wiser to never base anything on wrongs in your life. It will help you sleep at night and enjoy life. As God's Wisdom suggests, *"In the transgression of an evil man there is a snare: but the righteous doth sing and rejoice"* (Prov. 29:6). The practice of evil puts us into a kind of bondage or snare, while living right leaves us free to enjoy life, to *"sing and rejoice"*. With time every unadvisable choice is going to catch up with us anyway. It is a bit like building our house in a floodplain. Eventually the big one will come.

N.B. this prominent lesson underscored in this context, that when we base our actions on aspects that are fundamentally wrong the result is our eventual undoing;

- The kingdom set up by Abner and Ishbosheth against God's purpose in David soon fell to

3:17 *And Abner had communication with the elders of Israel, saying, Ye sought for David in times past to be king over you:*

3:18 *Now then do it: for the LORD hath spoken of David, saying, By the hand of my servant David I will save my people Israel out of the hand of the Philistines, and out of the hand of all their enemies.*

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pieces and landed in David's lap anyway, with both Abner and Ishbosheth landing in the grave.

- Phaltiel's choice to take Michal for his wife, when she was rightfully David's, ended in his most painful loss.

- If David in his marriage to Maacah, daughter of the king of Geshur, was seeking an earthly alliance to strengthen him against Saul's house, his arm-of-flesh effort eventually backfired with Absalom's treacherous bid for the throne (3:3).

Vs. 17-19 – We get the impression here that the elders had previously leaned toward making David their king, and Abner had resisted this direction in propping things for the house of Saul.

"For the LORD hath spoken of David" – When did the Lord say this about David? We have no record of this. It seems Abner was embellishing here in talking David up. Consider the danger of either adding or taking away from the Lord's words. For

3:19 *And Abner also spake in the ears of Benjamin: and Abner went also to speak in the ears of David in Hebron all that seemed good to Israel, and that seemed good to the whole house of Benjamin.*

3:20 *So Abner came to David to Hebron, and twenty men with him. And David made Abner and the men that were with him a feast.*

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here was a man who was soon dead! Could there be a connection? It is true that the Lord had indeed anointed David to be king as Abner suggests. But it is *not* true that this was really what was motivating Abner. He was running far more on the bitter fuel of revenge than on the righteous convictions he implies here. How very common for proud men to doll up their true motives with more presentable window-dressings (I Ki. 12:28). As if Abner had seen the error of his ways in resisting the Lord's perfect will for his nation, and now wished to put things right. There is the hypocrisy of a pretender here. Compare the Jewish leaders feigning themselves protectors of Caesar's interests in forcing Christ's death, saying, *"We have no king but Caesar"* (Jn. 19:15).

"Abner also spake in the ears of Benjamin" – The Benjamites were the hard-sell. For they must give up the honour of having the reigning house of Saul among them.

Vs. 20-21 – *"So Abner came to David to Hebron"* –

3:21 *And Abner said unto David, I will arise and go, and will gather all Israel unto my lord the king, that they may make a league with thee, and that thou mayest reign over all that thine heart desireth. And David sent Abner away; and he went in peace.*

When Abner and company came to David they of course came escorting Michal back to her first husband, for this had been David's one condition (vs. 13). This mission offered Abner the perfect cover in his purpose to discuss with David his progress in bringing all under David's rule.

Consider how Abner came to David in good faith in David's word, presuming David in full control to exercise his will. He was in league with David and thus presumed himself safe in David's care. Yet Abner ended up dead in David's own city! Joab's murderous action was of far greater concern than David's response suggests, for his own trustworthiness fell with Abner. Joab actually trampled David's good name by his treachery, as well as spurning his authority. In preserving Joab, David failed to preserve his own reputation. The same principle applies whenever we preserve or fail to properly punish evil. Did Abner perhaps think himself betrayed by David as he died? See how David's weakness in failing to keep a firm hand on the controls hurt others again, as at Gibeon. Even so weak parental leadership fires missiles of

3:22 *And, behold, the servants of David and Joab came from pursuing a troop, and brought in a great spoil with them: but Abner was not with David in Hebron; for he had sent him away, and he was gone in peace.*
3:23 *When Joab and all the host that was with him were come, they told Joab, saying, Abner the son of Ner came to the king, and he hath sent him away, and he is gone in peace.*
3:24 *Then Joab came to the king, and said, What hast thou done? behold, Abner came unto thee; why is it that thou hast sent him away, and he is quite gone?*

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destruction into the world in wayward children released on society.

Vs. 22-25 – *"What hast thou done?"* – It was the same question the Lord demanded of Cain when he had killed Abel (Gen. 4:10), this time the rebel asking it of the righteous. Joab was unhappy with David's easy tolerance of an enemy. Again, Joab took things too personally to be a good leader. There was just too little nobility or graciousness in him, too much in the way of pride and pettiness. Joab was likely unaware of previous communications between David and Abner to know the background of this visit. Could it be that there were other things involved, serving to work bitterness or insecurity in Joab's heart? Consider the factors that might have even qualified Abner above Joab in the event of a union;

- Abner was an older and more experienced general than Joab.
- Abner was a popular man with the tribes to

the north, involving the vast majority of the nation's people, while Joab was relatively unknown on a national scale.

- Abner had great influence among the elders of Israel, able even to move them to such a major shift in allegiance.

- If Abner could swing a national union imagine the fine light in which that would set him before David! What else but that he should become the general of the combined army of Israel.

An Abner left living might actually result in Joab demoted to a lesser role, serving under a man he was quite determined to hate! Thus there may very well have been personal reasons beyond only revenge motivating Joab.

"Thou knowest Abner…that he came to deceive thee" – Note how Joab presumed underhanded motives, perhaps assuming his own nature in Abner. Abner was far from the image of honesty to be sure, but Joab himself was in fact the deceiver. We soon find him pretending good intentions with Abner yet with

3:26 *And when Joab was come out from David, he sent messengers after Abner, which brought him again from the well of Sirah: but David knew it not.*

3:27 *And when Abner was returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside in the gate to speak with him quietly, and smote him there under the fifth rib, that he died, for the blood of Asahel his brother.*

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a dagger in his cloak (vs. 27). Behold another common tendency of human nature, to suspect and accuse others of faults that are in fact our own. What we suspect in others can often be a revelation of our own purposes.

Vs. 26-27 – Joab expressed his anger to David's face and then went out and acted against David's will. He was much like Abner in this. In fact the two were much alike. Perhaps in another setting they might have been best of friends for their similarities.

What of those 20 men who came with Abner? (vs. 20) There is no indication of a struggle, no ambush and massacre along the road. Obviously Abner could not have been captured and returned to Hebron by force. It seems there must have been some pretence or lying story told, as Gehazi with Naaman (II Ki. 5:22), very likely using David's name. What else would convince Abner to easily return? Again it is indication of the deception in Joab, of which he would accuse Abner!

Consider the additional treachery involved in Abner's murder in that the city of Hebron was one of the cities of refuge. The law of Moses allowed that if someone should be killed by another then the near relative of the dead (Heb. "goel", sometimes referred to as *"the avenger of blood"*) was free to take the life of the killer. However there were six cities throughout the land, three on either side of the Jordan, designated as cities of refuge (Num. 35:9ff; Josh. 20). To one of these cities the killer could flee and find refuge from the avenger, until it could be determined by trial whether the killing was premeditated or accidental. If the death was accidental or justifiable, as in Abner's killing of Asahel in the context of war, the killer would be allowed to live. If purposeful murder, the killer must die (Ex. 21:13-14). Thus no near kin or *"avenger of blood"* could take a life within the walls of a city of refuge without there first being a hearing before the city elders. See how the point is made here in vs. 27 that it was in fact *"in the gate"* of this city of refuge that Joab took Abner's life. His actions were not only against the will of his king but against God's law as well!

3:29 *Let it rest on the head of Joab, and on all his father's house; and let there not fail from the house of Joab one that hath an issue, or that is a leper, or that leaneth on a staff, or that falleth on the sword, or that lacketh bread.*

Vs. 28-29 – *"I and my kingdom are guiltless before the LORD for ever"* – Unfortunately this was not entirely true, for though David would throw the whole blame on Joab he was partly to blame for the context that killed Abner. Consider how David shows a bit of the mousey nature of Ishbosheth here. Compared to his good leadership when on the run in the days of Saul, David was becoming distracted and relaxed in his leadership, leaving too much to Joab. And thus Joab was acting within this leadership void left by David. Therefore David could not fairly proclaim himself completely without fault for what happened within his own gates.

It is a good lesson for us. Where we fail to lead as strongly as we should there will be others to step into the void we allow. Others who may very well lead in a way we are not comfortable with, doing and allowing things we would not allow. And it is partly our own fault for not simply declaring ourselves and boldly flying our flag and showing resolute, diligent determination to do right come what may. The true God-pleaser is willing to be a man-displeaser. Where I fearfully fail to take a stand for what is right

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I am soon forced by others to things offensive to me. For example, suppose there is talk of the year-end work party being a burlesque, strip-tease theme. Everybody is all for it and talking it up, and you fearfully fail to speak in opposition when you have the chance. With the result that you are later forced to endure offensive, uncomfortable scenes. Yes it is the fault of others who suggested such a foolish plan. But it is your fault as well, for not speaking up and leading when you should have done so. Take and hold the opportunities to lead made available to you, and determine to lead well by God's grace and for His glory.

Vs. 30 – *"Because he had slain their brother Asahel at Gibeon in battle"* – Whose fault was it that their brother Asahel was killed?

- Joab put his troops in Abner's face on Abner's ground at Gibeon (2:13).
- Joab gave his consent to begin hostilities with Abner's suggested challenge there (2:14).
- Joab went far beyond mere defence, in actually pursuing Abner (2:24). Therefore

Asahel would not quit in pursuing Abner's life (2:19). It was Joab who allowed it to escalate into a fight to the finish.

David would see all blame in Joab, and unfairly so. Even so Joab would see all blame in Abner for his brother's death, and unfairly so. Perhaps it was men attempting to escape their awareness of their own blame by throwing all the blame on another, seeking to play down their own guilt by underscoring the guilt of another. It is a reminder again of the common human tendency to see only the fault of the other. Abner suggested that Joab was not behaving in a brotherly manner, when Abner himself had been guilty of the same earlier in the day (2:26). Joab blamed Abner for the death of his brother, when the fault lay largely with those hot-headed sons of Zeruiah. David blamed Joab for Abner's death when the loose leash was David's failure. When we stand before the Lord we will understand in a moment where every blame for every wrong really lies. There will be nothing hidden then. And not only will all be fully exposed but fully understood such that none can deny. Compare Ecclesiastes 12:4; Lk. 8:17; 12:3-4; Romans 2:16; I Corinthians 4:5.

Vs. 31-34 – Though Abner was not a personal friend

3:31 *And David said to Joab, and to all the people that were with him, Rend your clothes, and gird you with sackcloth, and mourn before Abner. And king David himself followed the bier.*
3:32 *And they buried Abner in Hebron: and the king lifted up his voice, and wept at the grave of Abner; and all the people wept.*
3:33 *And the king lamented over Abner, and said, Died Abner as a fool dieth?*
3:34 *Thy hands were not bound, nor thy feet put into fetters: as a man falleth before wicked men, so fellest thou. And all the people wept again over him.*

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yet David's sorrow again appears quite sincere, and again he held nothing back in the expression of it. In this it was made quite evident that it was not according to David's will that Abner was killed. Yet David's weakness would have become evident to all as well, that such treachery could happen under his administration and that there was no answer for it of any real consequence. Compare David's words in vs. 39, perhaps expressing some recognition of his own weakness to adequately deal with Joab. David was a godly man, a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22; I Sam. 13:14; I Ki. 15:4-5), but he was like us, a fallible man. He was no unreachable, halo-encircled demi-god, but a real man, with real problems and weaknesses. Yet he was a man honoured and blessed by God simply for his tender heart.

"As a man falleth before wicked men, so fellest thou" – Such strong words David publicly spoke against Joab and Abishai, suggesting them *"wicked men"* who acted as evil assassins. Abner killed Asahel

when he had no choice, and in the context of war where other men died on both sides as well. This important point is perhaps hinted at in vs. 30 (*"in the battle"*). But Joab's killing of Abner was premeditated murder! Thus his act of vengeance was considered a wicked thing by David, shedding *"the blood of war in peace"* as David later explained it to Solomon (I Ki. 2:5).

Though Joab did wrong before God and his king yet consider the fact that over long years in David's service Joab had opportunity to repent and put his wrongs right with David. But he never took that opportunity, with the result that Joab's evil eventually caught up with him when David's son came to the throne (I Ki. 2:28-34). Do you see the obvious parallels here? We all have opportunity now throughout the long years of our lives on this earth, to repent of our wickedness before the King of kings, for every one of us is a sinner and an offender of God's holiness. Ours is not to try to do good things for God's cause to make up for the bad (as Abner's way of thinking in 3:8), but to recognize the true badness of our bad and repent before the God we have offended. If we so repent with godly sorrow and believe on that Son of David, the Lord Jesus Christ, we have the Lord's promise that our sin will be forgiven and removed from us as far as

3:35 *And when all the people came to cause David to eat meat while it was yet day, David sware, saying, So do God to me, and more also, if I taste bread, or ought else, till the sun be down.*
3:36 *And all the people took notice of it, and it pleased them: as whatsoever the king did pleased all the people.*
3:37 *For all the people and all Israel understood that day that it was not of the king to slay Abner the son of Ner.*

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the east is from the west. Compare Acts 10:43. Most people of earth refuse to take the opportunity to be made right with God, refusing to willingly acknowledge and repent of their wrong before the Lord and others, choosing rather to remain self-preserving, self-protective, self-defensive. With the result that their evil will most certainly catch up with them eventually, when David's Son comes to His throne. Jesus came the first time as the gentle Saviour. He comes the second time as King of kings and Judge of all men (Acts 10:42).

Vs. 35-37 – *"And when all the people came to cause David to eat"* – Perhaps their custom was similar to ours in serving a meal or tea after the funeral ceremony. But David refused to partake of the good things prepared, displaying his genuine grief.

Notice the focus on *"all the people"* in these verses (4 times, *"all Israel"* once). It was God sending the popularity of David more widely. David needed only to respond naturally, according to what God put in him, and God did all the rest in lifting his influence

before all. It is God's work to lift and send the impact of a life.

"And all the people took notice of it, and it pleased them" – This appears to be genuine, not just a mindless, fawning following. It was a situation that certainly looked bad for David, but instead he won the hearts of the people through the simplicity of his genuine care expressed openly. Oh that the Lord would make us people who really care, and openly so. It was a winning way in David (1:17ff). Yet as well it was a work of God in lifting David to prominence before his people, similar to Joshua's rise (Josh. 4:14). Compare Daniel 2:20-23; I Samuel 2:1-10; Luke 1:52. See how the Lord took the treacherous act of Joab and made it an occasion to take the popularity of David to new heights and lengths. What might have been David's undoing God turned to set him in an even better light before the people. By his heart-felt response David not only removed any suspicion of guilt, but stirred the popular sympathies of the people. And see how the way was now cleared for David to reign over the whole nation on a more honourable footing than through any doubtful, secret manoeuvrings against Abner.

Even so the Lord has turned man's very greatest

3:38 *And the king said unto his servants, Know ye not that there is a prince and a great man fallen this day in Israel?*
3:39 *And I am this day weak, though anointed king; and these men the sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me: the LORD shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness.*

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treachery in his fall to sin to an occasion to display His loving-kindness toward mankind in Jesus Christ. By the sacrifice of His own Son on Calvary the Lord has removed all doubt of His gracious purposes toward sinful mankind.

"Great is our Lord, and of great power: His understanding is infinite" (Ps. 147:5).

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Rom. 11:33).

3:39 – *"These sons of Zeruiah be too hard for me"* – It was certainly a wrong approach to slander Joab in an effort to point the finger of blame, rather than dealing with him directly as he should, and even confessing his own part in it. Perhaps David did not feel free to deal strongly with Joab because he was aware of his own fault in the matter. Our own unconfessed involvement in wrong will rob us of the ability to freely deal with the wrong of others as we should.

Not dealing with Joab appropriately only left him free to do worse later, as in his assassination of

Amasa (20:10). Avoiding difficult matters of discipline does not really avoid those matters of discipline. It only delays and prolongs the agony and worsens the harm and draws others into the net of loss and hurt. The hard but right things we fail to do in our weakness will later surely come back to haunt us (and others).

"The LORD shall reward the doer of evil according to his wickedness" – Though David's words here might sound profound and faithful, it was really a cowardly dodge to leave it to the Lord to handle these wrong-doers. Like a judge allowing a known thug to go free, while affirming, "The Lord will get him for his crime some day". But *this* is the day, and *that judge* is the appointed means! Or like the father with a ratty child, saying "the Lord will catch up with that child one day", when he was meant to catch it in the home! The Lord meant to *"reward"* Joab through His righteous leaders on the ground. Remember the confirming point made in I Kings 2:46, with Solomon's kingdom established through his firm, fair leadership. David was obviously uncomfortable with the situation. Thus while it was within his power to do something about it, it was his to do. And because he would not do what he knew he should, the hard thing his heart so resisted, he doomed himself to suffer further and dearly. And

he destined others to suffer the same with him. No man can make such weak-willed decisions without pulling others into the pit of disaster as well, even those he loves.

"Correct thy son, and he shall give thee rest; yea, he shall give delight unto thy soul" (Prov. 29:17).

Chapter 4

4:1 *And when Saul's son heard that Abner was dead in Hebron, his hands were feeble, and all the Israelites were troubled.*

Last Obstacle Removed

Vs. 1 – *"His hands were feeble"* – Abner was Ishbosheth's strength. Compare Jehoiada as the spiritual strength of Joash (II Chron. 24). Take the strong out of the way and the weak are left without a backbone. To not be independently strong in the Lord leaves us dependent on fallible people. To not be independently strong in the Lord is to fail to positively impact those we might lead in the way of His righteousness. You and I need to know the Lord for ourselves, to know that He is our God personally and that He is strong to guide us in His right way through His Word. Ishbosheth was weak in himself, strong only in the strength of another, and therefore he fell with Abner's fall. He was not a man with his hope personally pegged in a God who lifts and lowers men according to His will. In fact Ishbosheth was running against God in helping to lead that northern split. There is a supernatural strength in one who knows he is living for God, doing what is right before Him. There is a weakness fuelled by

4:2 *And Saul's son had two men that were captains of bands: the name of the one was Baanah, and the name of the other Rechab, the sons of Rimmon a Beerothite, of the children of Benjamin: (for Beeroth also was reckoned to Benjamin.*
4:3 *And the Beerothites fled to Gittaim, and were sojourners there until this day.)*
4:4 *And Jonathan, Saul's son, had a son that was lame of his feet. He was five years old when the tidings came of Saul and Jonathan out of Jezreel, and his nurse took him up, and fled: and it came to pass, as she made haste to flee, that he fell, and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth.*

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guilt in one who knows he is running against God's purpose.

Vs. 2-3 – The city of Beeroth was in the tribal area of Benjamin, thus these brothers were Benjamites. So it was actually men of Benjamin helping to turn the kingdom over from Saul's house to David now. Beeroth seems to be associated with Gibeon (Josh. 18:25). The flight described in vs. 3 may refer to the time when Saul *"slew the Gibeonites"* (21:1). Thus perhaps there was a measure of vengeance in this act against Saul's house, for his actions against the Gibeonites to whom Joshua promised safety in the land (Josh. 9).

Vs. 4 – This little parenthesis concerning Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth, may have been placed here to show why he was considered ineligible to reign. The focus here is on the fact of his lameness and why he was lame, before he was even named in fact. That Mephibosheth was lame made him less of the fine figure of a man suitable

4:5 *And the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, Rechab and Baanah, went, and came about the heat of the day to the house of Ishbosheth, who lay on a bed at noon.*
4:6 *And they came thither into the midst of the house, as though they would have fetched wheat; and they smote him under the fifth rib: and Rechab and Baanah his brother escaped.*
4:7 *For when they came into the house, he lay on his bed in his bedchamber, and they smote him, and slew him, and beheaded him, and took his head, and gat them away through the plain all night.*

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for the office of king, in a day of strong warrior-kings more than intellectuals or statesmen. Perhaps the priesthood prohibitions were thought to apply to the throne as well (Lev. 21:16ff).

Vs. 5-7 – Ishbosheth Assassinated – Apparently it was their practice in that day that such *"captains of bands"* would receive a daily portion of grain from the king's supply for distribution to the men under them. They were the king's servants and therefore he supplied their keep. Thus these two came as if to collect grain for their men, pretending to be busy with legitimate business, yet with murder in their hearts. Compare Psalm 55:21. They were men responsible for the king's protection, yet they used this office with its privileges as a means to actually do the king harm in seeking their own advantage. While living off the king's supply they served themselves in lifting their hand against their source of supply.

We might look upon the actions of these men as the

most treacherous wickedness. Yet are we not guilty of the same whenever we fail to live without reserve for the King of kings, from whom we receive such wonderful privileges and a continual supply for our needs? Instead we often use Jesus, serving our own purposes, willing to hurt Him in seeking our own advantage in His name. We hurt Him and use Him and then expect Him to serve our own gains and glories here below, rather than seeing ourselves as His unreserving, undeserving servants.

How easy the Lord made it for these assassins. The king was utterly defenceless and careless, alone and unprotected on his bed.

Vs. 8 – *"And they brought the head of Ishbosheth unto David"* – Perhaps they brought the head to David after the pattern of David's handling of Goliath, an added touch in seeking to impress David. It was about promoting themselves in David's kingdom. And note how these men spoke as if the Lord was with them in their evil. God certainly is able to use even the wicked actions of men to promote His purposes, but David had a very

4:9 *And David answered Rechab and Baanah his brother, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, and said unto them, As the LORD liveth, who hath redeemed my soul out of all adversity,*

4:10 *When one told me, saying, Behold, Saul is dead, thinking to have brought good tidings, I took hold of him, and slew him in Ziklag, who thought that I would have given him a reward for his tidings:*

4:11 *How much more, when wicked men have slain a righteous person in his own house upon his bed? shall I not therefore now require his blood of your hand, and take you away from the earth?*

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different opinion about such actions.

Note how they spoke all about *Saul's* evil against David. But where was Ishbosheth's crime? This was not according to God's way of justice. *"The soul that sinneth it shall die".*

Vs. 9-12 – Killers Killed – David's actions were of course quite fair and appropriate. Yet there is a distinct sense of a double standard here in his failure to respond in a similar way with Joab. These men had more than the Amalekite had in chapter 1. They had the advantage of the obvious hint of David's anguish over Abner's death and hard words against Joab. Had they been more careful listeners they might even have known of David's earlier execution of the Amalekite at Ziklag. They came to their shameful end due to their careless ignorance of what pleased and displeased the king. Do not miss the warning here. In the same way souls will come to Christ's judgment thinking themselves

pleasing to Him by their self-seeking and self-righteous actions here, only to be so terribly disappointed when they discover Him proceeding with them according to a different standard, *His* standard! It is a standard He has made quite available to mankind, yet a standard men so continually ignore, thinking they know best how to please Him. They will be judged because they just did not carefully listen to the details of His words of what pleases Him! Here is an earthly scene foreshadowing a heavenly; here before David, later before the Son of David, Jesus Christ. It is a shocking surprise to wilfully ignorant men when their quest for favour is called *"wicked"* by the very one they wished to impress. Our good deeds are *"as filthy rags"*, says the God whom men might wish to impress by their righteous deeds (Isa. 64:6). God will work according to His own stated standard of right. It is not our own righteousness that wins an entrance with Him. It is not our own interpretation of what is righteous. It is only the righteousness that God is willing to give to all who ask by faith, that cleansing and righteousness available only in Jesus Christ. This only fits us for heaven. What these men thought would please David only brought his wrath and judgment upon them. What men think will please God only brings the same. Compare Matthew 7:21-23.

Consider how it was a time to come down hard on such actions and put a stop to them. How easily the situation could have run to wildfire in mass genocide. If David had expressed any pleasure or even softness in this situation there could have followed an entire purge of all of Saul's house and all who were involved in the northern administration. Therefore David's severe response was a wise public display of his great displeasure in their actions. Hard, fair, brutal action is often required to put a stop to evil and bring peace and purity. Such is the way of capital punishment and church discipline, and corporeal punishment. These are godly concepts that are right and good. Such actions are not to be labelled barbaric just because selfish men have abused them, or because thoughtless, short-sighted folks are made uncomfortable.

Consider how Ephesians 4:26-27 might express David's response here; *"Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: neither give place to the devil"*. Let your anger toward evil burn within you and be displayed through your outward attitude and responses, that there might be an ending of evil both in you and around you through your righteous influence.

4:12 *And David commanded his young men, and they slew them, and cut off their hands and their feet, and hanged them up over the pool in Hebron. But they took the head of Ishbosheth, and buried it in the sepulchre of Abner in Hebron.*

David was no supporter of the notion, *"Let us do evil that good may come"* (Rom. 3:8). Did the actions of these men lead to the good end to which God was aiming? Yes. Did God then approve of the means they used to that good end? No, it was evil and they were *"wicked men"*. Therefore it comes clear that a good end does not justify a doubtful means. This man of God was no advocate of such a policy and neither should we be if we would be God's men. We do not need less than noble means or the world's tainted manners to lead souls to the good end of salvation or growth in Christ. We ever move with integrity and purity, regardless of whether this results in a less "attractive" atmosphere in the context of modern society. Though the world may like it "hot" or "rocking" or bizarre, that is the way of the world, not the way of God's church and people.

Notice in vs. 9-10 that David spoke only of the Amalekite bringing news, with no mention of his claim to have killed Saul. Maybe David knew the man had lied.

Vs. 12 – Based on the law (Deut. 21:22-23; Gal. 3:13) there was particular shame and indication of God's curse in a body hung up in public display after execution. Again, it was an added anguish of death by crucifixion that the one condemned was so hung up while still alive, forced to live their shame as they died. These were hung over the pool, in the most public place, that all might see when coming for water. Perhaps the hands and feet were cut off because these were the particular instruments of their murder and flight, an added underscore to show the reason for their end.

Again, consider how "barbaric" this action was in comparison to our modern way of thinking. Imagine if men killed a policeman in New Germany and fled. But then they were caught and convicted and executed, their hands and feet were cut off and their bodies were hung up publicly in the library parking lot. I would be shouting "Amen!" Yet what a hue and cry such would raise from the liberal, "educated", thug-hugging element of our society. But would *you* drive by that way? Would you take your kids or grandkids to the library? Would you make it a Home School or Christian School field trip? Would you stand the children under that gruesome sight and discuss with them the hard but fair end of a life of crime and what leads men to it?

And yet there is no indication of wrong in this action. Only the suggestion of what was right and good. Our God stands with us in a harder view of sin and the handling of it than most sinners are comfortable with. It is God's purpose that murderers should be killed and disobedient children should receive a hiding (Prov. 23:13-14) and sinning church members who refuse to hear reproof should be removed from the church (Matt. 18; I Cor. 5). Difficult though such actions may be, they are right and good and make for peace and purity in society, church, and family.

Chapter 5

5:1 *Then came all the tribes of Israel to David unto Hebron, and spake, saying, Behold, we are thy bone and thy flesh.*
5:2 *Also in time past, when Saul was king over us, thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel: and the LORD said to thee, Thou shalt feed my people Israel, and thou shalt be a captain over Israel.*

Jerusalem as the Civil Capital

5:1-5 – David over All Israel

Vs. 1-2 – *"Thou wast he that leddest out and broughtest in Israel"* – David's success as a soldier and thus as an effective protector is what qualified him in the eyes of the people. Even so it was Saul's victory at Jabesh-Gilead that finally won the hearts of the people to willingly follow him as their king (I Sam. 11).

"And the LORD said to thee…" – Again their words were beyond what the Lord actually spoke, for we have no record of this (3:18). But it seems they were willing to believe anything supportive of David at this point. The Lord's words to Samuel in I Samuel 16:1, *"I have provided Me a king among his* [Jesse's] *sons"*, are as close as we get to this supposed proclamation of the Lord. Compare Psalm 78:70-72.

The important thing here is that all the people were now ready to give David their united support.

Vs. 3 – *"So all the elders of Israel came to the king"* – First the people came (vs. 1), then *"all the elders of Israel"* came to David in Hebron. David's support arose from every sector of Israel's society, and from the common people up to the leaders. Again it was a testimony to God's working behind such a universal response. For this David had waited and at last the crowning day came, just as God had promised. It is a testimony to the wisdom of David's patience as well. Because he had so patiently waited he therefore received such united acclaim from *"all the tribes"*. Had he hastily forced the issue he would have formed more significant pockets of resistance or enemies along the way. He would have had triumph mingled with trouble. The blessing is always the best and highest and greatest when it comes in God's perfect way and timing.

As David, even so Jesus waits for us. He does not force Himself on us. He waits for us to come to Him and make Him our King. He waits until our life falls apart without Him, as did the northern kingdom.

He reigns in a partial way now, in heaven, as David in Hebron. But He waits for us to come to Him and make Him King of all in our own heart. As David was meant to be king over all Israel so Jesus came not only to be Saviour but to be *"Lord both of the dead and living"* (Rom. 14:9).

Notice how before they called him *"David"* for the most part (3:1-2, 20-22; 4:8-9; 5:1). But now it is *"the king"*, and *"king David"*. Though David had been referred to in this way prior, now it was the whole nation acknowledging him as king. And notice that even as they *came* to him he was *"the king",* even before they officially appointed him as such. The following ceremony did not make David their king, as much as did their decision or attitude in coming to him. Even so with our approach to Jesus. Ceremonies, rituals, or events do not crown Jesus King of our lives. It is all about our *decision* or *attitude* toward Him today. Even as we turn to Him to crown Him King we have already made Him such in our own life.

"And they anointed David king over Israel" – This was now David's 3rd anointing (2:4; I Sam. 16:13). It was a three-fold confirmation that God had indeed turned from the house of Saul to the house of David.

5:4 *David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years.*
5:5 *In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months: and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty and three years over all Israel and Judah.*

Vs. 4-5 – We are given the over-all timing here, further on 2:11. Though we do not know David's age when he killed Goliath he was referred to then as a *"youth"* and a *"stripling"* (I Sam. 17:55-26). Behind *"youth"* is a word (nă'ăr) that can be used of a newly born boy up to a 20 year old young man. Behind *"stripling"* is a word (ēlĕm) generally used of a boy at the age of puberty, or from about 14 years of age (I Sam. 20:22). So David must have been about 15-16 years old when he killed Goliath. He then enjoyed a few good years in Saul's service while he proved himself and married Saul's daughter Michal. It does not seem likely that David would have married and led the army as a teenager. Perhaps he was at least 20 years old at the later end of his good days under Saul. Therefore David must have been 8-10 years on the run from Saul. So he killed Goliath in his mid to later teens, served Saul into his early 20's, ran from Saul through his 20's, became king in Hebron at 30, and became king over all Israel at 37. Though a young man, David showed wisdom and patience to wait on God throughout the decade of his tumultuous twenties. Jesus was also 30 years old when He began His earthly ministry

(Lk. 3:23). How very difficult it must have been for Him as well to wait through long decades for God's time while looking upon the great need for spiritual reforms in His day. Surely every Passover He wanted to clear that temple of the buyers and sellers and money-changers.

5:6-16 – Jerusalem the Capital City

Vs. 6 – *"And the king and his men went to Jerusalem"* – Again it was *"the king"*, and the king doing what a king is meant to do, leading in victory. It was like old times again with David at the helm. And see how David wasted no time in turning his eyes toward Jerusalem. It was as if he already had a plan, already had his sights set on that city. Remember young David carrying Goliath's head to Jerusalem (I Sam. 17:54). Why? It is as if he wanted to demonstrate what was to come for those Jebusites in a few years time, as if he understood even at that early age the place that city would hold for him and the nation under him.

The city of Jerusalem was first mentioned when its king, Adonizedek, initiated the southern

confederacy against Gibeon and Israel in the conquest (Josh. 10). The confederacy was thoroughly crushed by Joshua on the day the sun stood still. Yet somehow the city of Jerusalem was left unconquered and still occupied by the Jebusites. After the tribes of Judah and Benjamin were assigned their territories they at first saw success against the inhabitants of Jerusalem (Judges 1:8), which was situated on the border between the two tribes. But apparently they later lost control of the city, or perhaps never controlled the whole of it (Josh. 15:63; Judges 1:21). Coming out the end of the book of Judges, Jerusalem was still occupied by Jebusites and referred to as Jebus [Jē′bŭs] or Jebusi [Jĕb′ūsī] (Judges 19:10, Josh. 18:28). So David was now actually continuing the work of Joshua in conquering the land, taking dominion over the Canaanites.

Consider how the people had only to appoint David as their king, and he then immediately led them to greater dominion, conquering Jerusalem, "the city of peace". It seems the conquest of this city was what David had always wanted to do, but could not do, until the day they at last appointed him as their king. Even so when we give Jesus the throne of our heart "the King" then immediately begins to lead in rooting out the rot spots, taking dominion over the

aspects in us foreign to His own holy nature. It is what Jesus has always wished to do in us, but cannot, until we at last make Him the unquestioned King of our entire existence. It is as if Jesus "displays the head of Goliath" to Satan when first a soul is saved. And then when He is given free reign in us, He fully follows through on His threat to root out Satan's influence in such a surrendered life. Paul said *"walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh"* (Gal. 5:16). And so "King Jesus" leads the consecrated soul from victory to victory, turning his life to a "city of peace". Who is He in your life? "Jesus" or "King Jesus"?

Jerusalem made a lot of sense as a capital city. It had been a stubborn thorn in Israel's flesh for decades, a token of her failure to follow through on God's assignment to conquer the land. The defeat of these tough Jebusites would further demonstrate God's blessing on David to lead his people to victory, even against the most stubborn resistance, seemingly impossible foes. As well, that hill fort of Jerusalem was unclaimed ground from the perspective of David's people. It did not belong to any tribe at that time and was situated on the line of division between Israel and Judah. Therefore David establishing his throne there suggested no favouritism or taking of sides or preference of either

north or south.

"Except thou take away the blind and the lame, thou shalt not come in hither" – Over many decades of effective endurance the Jebusites dwelling there had come to think of their city as too well fortified to ever be taken. Their words were a boast of defences so strong even the lame and blind could hold out against attack. With valleys on all sides except the north and strong walls it was an easily defensible fortress. This was surely another factor causing David to want it for his own. But as so many impressive fortresses, their position was strong only until their weak point was discovered, until it was God's time to take them down. Note how matter-of-fact the report of the city's fall in vs. 7, as if God sighs with the ease of lowering lofty man.

Vs. 7 – *"Nevertheless David took the strong hold of Zion"* – Here is the first mention of the name *"Zion"* in the Bible. Though it is a name we often hear, read, or use, and one now central to the Jewish psyche, yet it is rather an uncertain concept from the start. It is unclear what the word actually

5:8 *And David said on that day, Whosoever getteth up to the gutter, and smiteth the Jebusites, and the lame and the blind that are hated of David's soul, he shall be chief and captain. Wherefore they said, The blind and the lame shall not come into the house.*

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means. English and Hebrew dictionaries suggest "hill" or "sunny place" or "sunny mountain" or "citadel". So it seems something of the idea of a hill or high place is behind the word. The question of *which* particular high place is a subject open to debate as well. There are three prominent hills within the "Y" of the Kidron and Hinnom valleys; the south-eastern hill between the Kidron and Central Valleys (called the lower city in Jesus' day), the large swell of ground to the west of this (called the upper city in Jesus' day), and then the mount called Moriah to the north where the temple was eventually built. Most scholars point to the south-eastern hill as being Zion, though the term later came to be used more broadly.

Vs. 8 – David put the challenge to his men that the first one to find a way to conquer the city would become the captain of his army. Perhaps he wished to use this as a way to publicly replace Joab with another valiant man. Even to suggest this challenge might imply he was looking for a new leader. Certainly he was looking to the Lord to make His choice clear by this means.

It is uncertain what is meant by *"getteth up to the gutter"* here. Some feel David was referring to a way into the city via a passage through the Gihon spring down in the Kidron, which could perhaps be accessed from outside the wall as well. I Chronicles 11:6 adds the detail that *"Joab the son of Zeruiah went first up, and was chief"*. Joab proved to be the one most resourceful. Through his determination and wit he found the way into the city and thus secured his position as captain of David's host. And consider that David put out the challenge and stuck to his words in spite of the outcome, unlike Saul with his giving of his daughter Michal. The righteous man *"swears to his hurt and changeth not"*.

"The lame and the blind, that are hated of David's soul" – It is not that David hated the handicapped. He later loved and cared for crippled Mephibosheth, inviting him into his own house to eat with him (chapter 9). David's words seem to be a play on the Jebusite taunt that even the blind and lame on the walls could hold off David's attack.

Vs. 9 – *"And David built round about from Millo and*

inward" – It is made clear in I Chronicles 11:8 that this refers to work on the city of Jerusalem, as David made that city his own, becoming known from this point as *"the city of David"*. How very significant was this point in history. Here was the birth of Jerusalem as the capital city of the Jewish people, the capital city of David's kingdom. Even so the Son of David, the Lord Jesus Christ, will make the same city the focal point of His Millennial kingdom as well. Thus it has become the most important place on earth from God's perspective. Jerusalem was a key arena for Christ's earthly ministry, the place where He died and rose from death, and the point from which He ascended and to which He will return. It is that *"city which the LORD did choose out of all the tribes of Israel, to put His name there"* (I Ki. 14:21). God Himself has *"set watchmen"* to *"give Him no rest, till He…make Jerusalem a praise in the earth"* (Isa. 62:6-7). And of days yet to come and into eternity the Lord says *"I will rejoice in Jerusalem"* (Isa. 65:19). From this point began an eternal entity that has become the very keynote site of all of human existence upon earth.

Vs. 10 – *"And the LORD God of hosts was with him"*

– Here is perhaps the key verse of the whole book. We find here a title of the Lord that highlights His power to overcome all odds. Here was the reason for David's greatness, because the Almighty was with him. There were many other "great" men and events happening around the world at that time (around 1,000 B.C.);

- Zoroaster, the great Persian prophet was forming a religion.
- The Latins were moving into Italy, from which the great Roman Empire would eventually be spawned.
- The Greeks were developing their pantheon of gods.

These are great events remembered in the history books. Yet only greatness in God's sight, within the spotlight of His focus, is true greatness. Indeed this is *everything*, while all else pales in significance. It is not that David was an exceptionally gifted man. He was an exceptionally dependent saint on an exceptionally adequate God. With the hand of *"the LORD God of hosts"* upon us we are adequate for anything, even though the way of God's work through us may often not be as we might expect or prefer. Paul was made weak that through his life of afflictions his God might appear strong. While some

5:11 *And Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, and carpenters, and masons: and they built David an house.*
5:12 *And David perceived that the LORD had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for his people Israel's sake.*

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among men or among human institutions might attract our attention because they appear exceptionally strong in themselves, rather look to the one who appears weak if you would find the God of glory at work.

Vs. 11 – Hiram was wisely making friends with one who could become a bad enemy. Tyre was pinned against the coast by a strong Israel and had no choice but to befriend her. It was a happy association that extended into the days of Solomon as well (I Ki. 9:11-14).

Vs. 12 – *"He had exalted his kingdom for His people Israel's sake"* – David understood that it was not for his own sake that God's blessing was riding him. It was God showing His care for His people in giving them a good leader and stable government (Eph. 4). Remember the image in Revelation 1, of Jesus walking among his churches, tending them, examining them, talking to them, rebuking, commanding, and commending. He tends or shepherds His churches by assigning His leaders, promoting and demoting them according to His will.

5:13 *And David took him more concubines and wives out of Jerusalem, after he was come from Hebron: and there were yet sons and daughters born to David.*
5:14 *And these be the names of those that were born unto him in Jerusalem; Shammuah, and Shobab, and Nathan, and Solomon,*
5:15 *Ibhar also, and Elishua, and Nepheg, and Japhia,*
5:16 *And Elishama, and Eliada, and Eliphalet.*

Vs. 13-16 – Here is another report on David's nuptial pursuits and nursery news (3:2-5). Again, when David was settled and established in leadership his mind turned to women. And again there must have been many daughters born to David as well, but only 11 sons are mentioned here. Added to the 6 mentioned in chapter 3 we find17 sons of David named in these early chapters, through a rather large harem of wives and concubines. We know of 10 concubines left in Jerusalem when David fled from Absalom (15:16).

5:17-25 – Philistines Defeated

As soon as David was established as king in Jerusalem the Philistines attacked. Right at the crest of the wave, at David's high point, the promised victory for which he had waited so long, here was a most serious threat coming against him. As if the evil one anticipated the vast significance of what Jerusalem would become. Watch for Satan's attack at the wave crests. Watch there at the high points of life for the most serious threats. Lest

David grow too high-minded or independent through his great victories, God allowed trouble to meet him there and keep him close. Even so Paul's impressive experiences with God brought on his thorn in the flesh to buffet him and keep him humble (II Cor. 12). Even so King Hezekiah was met by the terrifying threat of King Sennacherib of Assyria right at the crest of his successful reforms in Judah (II Ki. 18). The evil one fears the most and works the hardest when we are seeing spiritual victories. But for those who depend entirely on their God, such times of threat only become opportunities for even greater victory in the Lord's strength. Compare David's double victory against the Philistines here and Hezekiah's miraculous deliverance from Assyria, simply because they prayed in simple dependence. Do not be surprised by such attacks, as if it is the Lord coming against you. Expect them. And as with these great men, let it only drive you back to the great hand of our God, who is strong against any threat.

As well, as soon as the divided nation was united under David they were attacked. The Philistines did not seem to be concerned as long as north and south were lined up against each other (for 7 years). But as soon as the internal conflict was resolved and it was union and peace under David, the enemy

came. Even so, as long as a *church* is split and bickering among themselves they are of little threat to Satan's purposes and of little use to God. Do we ever hear of the word of the Lord sounding out from the troubled church at Corinth, as we do from the church at Thessalonica (I Thess. 1:6-8)? But as soon as hearts are put right and all are pulling and praying together *"with one accord"* things begin to happen (Acts 1; 4:24ff). Yet the evil one will be right there attempting to knock it down. As well, as long as an *individual believer* is divided within himself, a double-minded soul, wanting Jesus but wishing to hold the throne of his heart for himself, Satan is little concerned with such a one. But the moment one is able to sing "I surrender all" and mean it, uniting his heart under the single banner of the King of kings, the Devil will be on the war-path. Expect it. Again, do not be surprised by such attacks, as if it is the Lord against you. Let it drive you to the stronghold of *"the LORD God of hosts"*, He who is strong against any threat.

Vs. 17-19 – *"The Philistines came up to seek David"* – It is likely this was partly a grudge matter, because of David's victory over Goliath, and for his turning

"traitor" on them in a sense. This was a fearful situation, for of course the last time the Philistines came the results were disastrous for Israel. Remember Israel's trembling fear before Samuel prayed them to victory over the attacking Philistines after Eli's death (I Sam. 7:7-8). This small nation of Philistia was no small threat, for they came with no small force. When coming against Saul they were described as a *"people as the sand which is on the sea shore in multitude"* (I Sam. 13:5). As well they were notable for their fearful chariots (30,000) and horsemen (6,000). These terrifying factors were noted with Saul's account, presumably because this is what filled the eyes and heart of Saul. But have you noticed that there is not even a mention here of whatever fearful forces these enemies brought against Israel this time? When *"the LORD God of hosts"* is with a man (vs. 10) it just does not matter what the enemy brings or what we face on the ground. Such "impressive" things among men are of such small concern with God and His man that they do not even warrant a mention.

Vs. 17 – *"David heard of it, and went down to the hold"* – It is uncertain what *"hold"* this was. The word behind "fort" in vs. 9, referring to Jerusalem, is the same as that behind *"hold"* here, suggesting David was perhaps working out of Jerusalem in

5:18 *The Philistines also came and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim.*
5:19 *And David enquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up to the Philistines? wilt thou deliver them into mine hand? And the LORD said unto David, Go up: for I will doubtless deliver the Philistines into thine hand.*
5:20 *And David came to Baalperazim, and David smote them there, and said, The LORD hath broken forth upon mine enemies before me, as the breach of waters. Therefore he called the name of that place Baalperazim.*

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facing this attack. Yet a comparison of 23:13-14, which seems to recount the same battle, suggests that the reference is to the old cave at Adullam where David once hid from Saul. We might wish we had more historical details. Yet such lack only turns our attention to what we *do* have and why. N.B. the key feature here, that with the Philistine threat David prayed and found help.

Vs. 19 – *"And David inquired of the LORD"* – Again David began with prayer, and God was there for him, responding to his query (2:1). The Lord's word *"doubtless"* was a gracious little feature added for David's benefit. The Lord does not need to embellish His words with such adverbs of emphasis. But in His grace He would offer added comfort to David's heart in view of the magnitude of the threat.

Vs. 20 – *"The LORD hath broken forth upon mine enemies before me"* – It seems the way the battle developed before David reminded him of the wall of a dam forming a leak or breach and then breaking

loose into an overwhelming flood. It was so significant a feature that David named the place Baal-perazim, meaning "Lord of breaches". David gave all glory to God for their victory.

Vs. 21 – *"And there they left their images"* – The Philistines brought their idols to the battle as good luck charms, trusting these to give them victory. Understand that Israel was following the world's example when earlier bringing the ark to the field of battle. And they did wrong to do it. We do wrong to follow the world's foolish example folks. But see how in their hasty retreat they left their poor helpless gods to fend for themselves. Shame man! And notice that in burning their idols David suffered none of the adverse effects the Philistines experienced while holding the ark of God (I Sam. 5). All of the empty superstitious follies of men ultimately fall before the true God. Even so every false religion and superstition of rebellious men falls before the truth of God claimed and proclaimed by God's people.

"And David and his men burned them" – They dealt with these abominations after the instruction of

5:22 *And the Philistines came up yet again, and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim.*
5:23 *And when David enquired of the LORD, he said, Thou shalt not go up; but fetch a compass behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees.*
5:24 *And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of a going in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself: for then shall the LORD go out before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines.*
5:25 *And David did so, as the LORD had commanded him; and smote the Philistines from Geba until thou come to Gazer.*

Moses in Deuteronomy 7:5 & 25. They were not even to desire the precious metals with which such idols were made. The Lord did not even want the materials among His people, lest by any means they should lose track of God as their one and only Strong One.

Vs. 22-25 – *"And the Philistines came up yet again"* – They must have come this time with a plan up their sleeve, something they thought to be an adequate answer to David's direct attack in the first round. Yet David was wise to not assume victory would come in the same way the next time. Contrast Joshua's experience when self-confidence caused them to forget to seek the Lord's guidance at Ai after great victory at Jericho (Josh. 7:2-5). To his credit David did not forget.

The point is the Lord's will and way may not be the same every time, for every individual, in every circumstance. It is His will that we ever be dependent upon Him for our direction. The Lord

knows and can make known to us even the enemy's secret plans. Compare Syria coming after Elisha for this reason in II Kings 6, because *"Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber"* (vs. 12).

"David was afraid
of the LORD that day,
and said,
How shall the ark
of the LORD
come to me?"

(II Sam. 6:9)

Chapter 6

6:1 Again, David gathered together all the chosen men of Israel, thirty thousand.

Jerusalem as the Religious Capital

6:1-11 – Ark to Jerusalem – Failure

Vs. 1 – *"David gathered together all the chosen men of Israel"* – These were all the leaders and elders from across the land (I Chron. 13:1). It was an excellent idea for David to involve all, for it would serve to put the focus of the whole nation where it should be and should always have been, on the central place of God's things and worship.

Notice as well that the timing for this was not when they were facing trouble, but in a time of victory and ease. Understand the great significance of this factor. David did not forget the Lord in the good times, on the wave crests. That he would so follow through at such a time indicates the great importance of this concern to him, the great intensity of his own interest in the Lord, and that his nation should be minded the same. Compare the same approach under Joshua after they had entered into the Promised Land, when all were

circumcised at Gilgal and then led in rededication at Ebal and Gerizim (Josh. 5 & 8). Though in the context of war and enemies, God wanted His place in the hearts of the nation to be first and foremost. He could easily take care of the enemies, this He would prove. Now under David's godly leadership as well the Lord was returned to His rightful place of prominence before the people, and He took care of all the rest. This is a vital principle of the Christian life as well. Consider how opposite David was from Saul, who ignored the Lord except for times of greatest threat.

Though David immediately began to turn the hearts of his people to his God, yet see the humanness in him as well. We are told in I Chronicles 13:1 that *"David consulted with the captains of thousands and hundreds, and with every leader"* on this matter, yet we never hear of his inquiring of the Lord concerning His will in this. We have just seen the overwhelming success David experienced when he twice inquired concerning the attacking Philistines (5:19, 23). Yet no word of a similar dependence here. He was running on presumption now, and it ran him straight into trouble, just as Joshua and the elders at Ai (Josh. 7:2-5). Previous victories led to a measure of over-confidence, and over-confidence tends to move the heart away from

6:2 *And David arose, and went with all the people that were with him from Baale of Judah, to bring up from thence the ark of God, whose name is called by the name of the LORD of hosts that dwelleth between the cherubims.*

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dependence on the Lord, even when involved in His work. As well David did not check with God's Word either as to the proper way to do what was in his heart. He did not concern himself with either the Lord's *will* or His *way* in this purpose, presuming it was a right thing to do and that he knew well enough how to do it.

Vs. 2 – Do not miss the great importance placed upon the ark. Though there was no representation in it of the Lord's appearance, yet it was that sacred piece of furniture especially associated with *"the name of the LORD of hosts"*. Behind *"the LORD"* is of course the name Jehovah. And the particular purpose of Jehovah is the redemption of mankind. As we have before seen, Jesus is none other than Jehovah Himself. He is the Redeemer, that exalted One who has been working His purpose since man's fall, to rescue man from the dilemma of sin. It is in the ark with its mercy seat that we see a representation of the rescuing work of Jesus Christ in behalf of sinful mankind;

- Jesus <u>*is*</u> the mercy seat, that place where

God's wrath toward sinful mankind is satisfied (propitiated).

- Christ's own blood would be sprinkled there, pictured in the work of the high priest on the Day of Atonement.
- Jesus *is* the perfect covering of the violated law (within the ark).
- And Jesus *is* that place where God's presence resides, and where God meets with His people (Ex. 25:21-22). He is Emmanuel.

Think about the mercy seat as that place where the presence of the Lord particularly dwelt *"between the cherubims".* Where is the place of God's meeting with His people now in this N.T. era? Is it not within the church through the Spirit of God dwelling within believers? Now consider what those angels portray in the way they were configured over the mercy seat, with their faces *"toward the mercy seat"* and with *"their wings on high, covering the mercy seat with their wings"* (Ex. 25:17-22). It is an image of all attention to that place of God's presence at the mercy seat. And it is a picture of the angels' protection, with their wings arched over in a covering, protecting way. All attention and protection of that place of God's presence, that place where God would work out man's rescue and meet

with man. And again, what is the seat of God's presence on earth in this era? All attention and protection over God's saints, in whom God dwells. It is what those *"ministering spirits"* of God are busy with even now (Heb. 1:14), pictured there on the mercy seat.

Vs. 3 – *"And they set the ark of God upon a new cart"* – God had given the responsibility of transporting the ark and tabernacle accessories only to the sons of Kohath of the Levites (Num.4:15). And even they were not to actually touch the ark. It could only be handled by means of the poles (staves) through the rings on the four corners of the ark. And those poles were not to be removed from the rings of the ark (Ex. 25:15). When transported it was to be carried on the shoulders of the descendants of Kohath (Num. 7:8-9). The poles must have remained in their rings or the ark could not have been handled at all without touching it, even in Philistia. God allowed the ox wagon to work for the Philistines because they did not have what Israel had, His written instructions concerning the way His things were to be handled. But for God's covenant people to handle things in the same way was to disobey His

words, and therefore it did not work for them. Any way of disobedience will not work for God's people, even though it might seem to be working for the children of disobedience, and even though it might seem to be working for us for the moment. When we see the way the world does things, and that it seems to work for them for the moment, this can easily lead us to the same without thinking to look to the Book. It is what our God means when He commands His people to *"be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind"* (Rom. 12:2). There is the world's way and there is God's way. And God's way can only be found *"by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost"* (Titus 3:5), through a mind renewed by *"the washing of the water by the word"* (Eph. 5:26).

"The house of Abinadab that was in Gibeah" – In "Gibeah"? But is this not the city of Kirjath-jearim, some 14 kms away from Gibeah? The literal meaning of Gibeah is "the hill". Could it be that this literal meaning is meant here? In I Samuel 6:21 we see that Kirjath-jearim was up from Bethshemesh, and then we read in I Samuel 7:1 that the ark was brought *"into the house of Abinadab in the hill"*. The same word behind *"the hill"* in I Samuel 7:1 is translated *"Gibeah"* here (exact same construction

6:4 *And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab which was at Gibeah, accompanying the ark of God: and Ahio went before the ark.*
6:5 *And David and all the house of Israel played before the LORD on all manner of instruments made of fir wood, even on harps, and on psalteries, and on timbrels, and on cornets, and on cymbals.*
6:6 *And when they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it.*
6:7 *And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God.*

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in the Hebrew).

Vs. 4-5 – It was a vibrant, happy celebration. Abinadab's sons, Ahio and Uzzah, were guiding the ox wagon carrying the ark, and all others were either playing musical instruments or shouting and singing their joy along the way.

Vs. 6-7 – *"Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God"* – The oxen pulling the cart stumbled or moved too strongly in some way (I Chron. 13:9), and Uzzah very naturally, and probably without even thinking, put his hand to the ark to steady it. It was a protective action arising out of genuine concern for the ark rather than any disrespect for it. But alas, as his hand touched the ark death met him immediately, and in such a way that it was obviously from the hand of God. It was a tragedy resulting from ignorance of God's words of instruction. Uzzah should have known the wrong of this, and all should have been aware of the right

way to transport that ark (Hos. 4:6). Thus for Abinadab's decades of service to the Lord in sheltering the ark his son ended up dead, adding a particular twist of irony and anguish to this loss. Yet it was because what they were doing was not right. As with Asahel's death, the context wrongly allowed by leadership created the circumstance that killed him. And though it was a celebration of praise to the Lord, in His honour, yet the Lord was not moved away from His strict demand of the right way to do things. Though it be sincerest praise and worship yet it must be right, according to God's way, if we would please Him. It cannot be any old way, as long as it is praise and worship in God's name.

The true and living God is not like men, who are given to justifying violation of God's standard based on the situation. Men believe that standards must be interpreted through the lens of current circumstance. Today some action may be wrong, but tomorrow under different circumstances it may be alright they would insist. For example;

- Immoral relationships may be wrong, but if love and loyalty are involved or if necessity dictates, then immorality may be allowable as man sees it.

- Dishonesty is wrong and murder is evil, but if

our cause or end is a truly noble one, then dishonesty and even murder may be acceptable options saith mankind.

- Sexual perversion is wickedness, but if it seems to be a natural leaning then sexual perversion may be redefined as a viable alternative says man.

- Drunkenness is surely a wrong, but in my circumstance, with the pressures I endure, it might be allowable.

But God just is not as given to making allowances for sin as man is. With God, wrongs are wrong and rights are right, regardless of the pressures circumstance might bring. With the Lord, good purposes do not make a wrong ok. Good motives do not atone for wicked works. God does not bless sincerity. He blesses what is sincerely done according to His truth.

Abinadab and his people, with their Canaanite (Gibeonite) background, were perhaps not as much in a position to understand the rights and wrongs in handling the ark as were the Israelites. Yet they too were responsible to know the Lord's words, just as any immigrant when coming to a new land is responsible to know the laws of the road if he wants

6:8 *And David was displeased, because the LORD had made a breach upon Uzzah: and he called the name of the place Perezuzzah to this day.*
6:9 *And David was afraid of the LORD that day, and said, How shall the ark of the LORD come to me?*

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to drive. But where were the priests and Levites to set things right and to teach the right way and to stand in the way of wrong. It is the key question overshadowing this whole sad account of Uzzah's tragic death.

Vs. 8 – *"And David was displeased"* – David was upset with God for this. But he really had only himself and his people to blame for this heartache coming upon them. Others always suffer as well whenever we choose to do wrong or fail to do right. Yet understand again by this example that when we find ourselves angry at God for what He allows it is time to consider *our* ways according to His words, asking where we have turned from His truth. David was in the wrong here in this. And he was wrong to be angry at God for the anguish his wrong brought.

Vs. 9 – *"How shall the ark of God come to me?"* – David landed where he should have taken off, with the fear of the Lord, with all attention upon Him and how best to do all in a way pleasing to Him, asking the right questions. Man seldom begins there. But the Lord is quite able to use such hard knocks to

6:10 *So David would not remove the ark of the LORD unto him into the city of David: but David carried it aside into the house of Obededom the Gittite.*
6:11 *And the ark of the LORD continued in the house of Obededom the Gittite three months: and the LORD blessed Obededom, and all his household.*

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point our attention to our inattention, as here.

Vs. 10 – *"So David would not remove the ark of the LORD unto him"* – Consider David's response;

- Vs. 8 – Displeased, upset.
- Vs. 9 – Afraid and confused.
- Vs. 10 – No longer wishing to bring the ark to Jerusalem. Their effort was aborted and all sent home.

Here would have been the obvious place for David to inquire of the Lord, asking Him why. Even as Joshua immediately *"fell to the earth upon his face before the ark of the LORD until the eventide"* with their defeat at Ai (Josh. 7:6-9). Yet it seems David was too upset at this point to turn to the Lord for help. He seemed more inclined to avoid the Lord. And so he simply stopped the whole procession and quickly turned the ark aside to the house of Obed-edom. Neglect following omission following oversight led God's man to an ugly, disappointed suspicion of His God. There is an important lesson

here. Be very careful in blaming God. Be very thoughtful when finding yourself leaning in this direction. Job learned the same important truth.

6:12-19 – Ark to Jerusalem – Success

Vs. 12 – *"The LORD hath blessed the house of Obed-edom"* – Within the 3 months that the ark was there at the house of Obed-edom God's blessing was with them, and so much so that it was an evident thing to others looking on. And so the report was carried back to David. It is an interesting thought that God is quite able to bless a house or a man or a family such that His blessing becomes obvious to all. And this within a very brief period of time! It seems they saw some sort of tangible, visible increase. It could not have been an increase of flocks in so short a period of 3 months, but perhaps a notable increase in their pregnancies and produce (milk, cream, wool, etc.). Perhaps they saw perfect rains over the fields of Obed-edom, with crops and orchards greener and fuller and growing taller than all others around. Perhaps there were gifts given by folks who wished to show their appreciation for this family so honouring the ark. Maybe there was an inheritance

received. Whatever it was, it was clearly God's good hand on the man. So God's hand can so evidently be on a life that others can see it within the space of 3 months!

David was moved to action with this news, for he wanted that blessing on his house and city. As well, this evident blessing was surely God sending encouragement to David to carry on in his good purpose, that he was not wrong in *what* he was proposing to do in bringing the ark up to Jerusalem, only in the thoughtless *way* they tried to do it at the first. God was keeping their attention upon the ark by this indication that His blessing was indeed with it, and that He wished to bless His people as He was blessing the house of Obed-edom. As if to say, "Yes, My blessing is here. Come and get it. But with studied attention to the right way I have told you to do it". So David was moved, the news serving to send him back to a re-think, to consider again why the tragedy in their first effort.

Now think about it. Why this subtle approach? Why did the Lord not just communicate to David what the concern here was? He made His way clear in the matter of going up to Hebron and in how to approach the Philistines. Well for one thing, we do not hear David asking. *"Ye have not because ye ask*

not", James said. When we choose the way of independence from the Lord He quietly stands back and lets us go, to suffer the inevitable consequences. For another thing the Lord had *already spoken* on the matter. He had long before explained through Moses precisely how the ark was to be handled and carried. And though that was many long centuries before, yet still God considered His instruction every bit as relevant as when He first spoke it. It did not need to be spoken again. It did not need to be emblazoned across the sky or affirmed to David personally in a dream or through any other form of further revelation. Simply because He had already spoken and thus fully expected that David and the other leaders would access that written record. Again, according to His command in Deuteronomy 17:18-20.

See and understand the important application here for us and for all mankind. God holds men accountable for what He has written! Long ago! David was upset. He had an issue with God. Yet it was *David's* fault, because he had neglected what God had spoken in His Word. When we have some issue with God we are wise to look for our own failing rather than God's. Where have we failed Him? "No, but He will not tell me, He does not show me what the problem is!" Maybe He already did,

long ago. Maybe it has already been spoken and you are just not hearing it or willing to hear. Our right response is always to return to His words, and with a heart open to Him to show us our fault according to what He has written. Not according to visions or feelings or impressions or convictions in ourselves or in others. Not according to psychics or astrologers. "Lord, show me your will according to your Word. Make evident to me in the lines of your Book things that are a problem or praiseworthy in me, and I will follow."

"So David went and brought up the ark of God" – Now this is typical biblical brevity or summary. There of course are significant details missing here. They did not just hook up the ox wagon again and go back and give it another go. From the parallel account in I Chronicles 15:1-15 we see that David found the solution in the old book of Moses. And see how it was not some subtle, subjective sort of truth (Ex. 25:14; Num. 4:15). It was not some allegorical view or one formed by twisting Bible texts together in some complex interpretive method. It was not through numerology or computer generated sequences or bits of text plucked out of context. It was in fact an obvious statement written clearly by the hand of Moses, according to a simple understanding of what was long before written. By

means of His Word the Lord was faithful to communicate to David the right way and to expose their wrong way. *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness"* (II Tim. 3:16). Here is a prime example of this outworking.

Vs. 13 – *"He sacrificed oxen and fatlings"* – We are told in I Chronicles 15:26 the reason why these sacrifices were made along the way like this. It was because God helped the Levites in carrying the ark. So it worked! When done according to God's way, His hand is in it. And when God's hand is in it, it works! *Life* works! It was the blessing of His help that He did *not* give in their effort to transport the ark with the ox wagon in the first round, resulting in such tragedy and heartache. Again His help and blessing is upon those who do things according to His way, while there is no help for those who do things their own way, without aligning themselves to God's Word. Compare Ezra 8:22.

In comparing the parallel account in I Chronicles (15:26 & 16:1) it seems the sons of Levi were doing

the actual sacrificing. The point seems to be that it was the king who initiated the action out of his devotion and thanks to the Lord, while the appropriate men carried out the work.

Vs. 14 – *"And David danced before the LORD with all his might"* – The root of the word translated *"danced"* here is the idea of leaping and twirling, relating the nature of David's dance. This was not any kind of organized dance step, but just the uninhibited physical expression of unbounded joy. Done *"with all his might"*, this must have been quite an impressive show, involving a great deal of energy, perhaps even supplemented by the Lord's supernatural enabling. Yet there is no indication of any showmanship in David in his exuberance. He seems all sincerity, both in his actions and in defence of his actions before Michal (vs. 21).

Now David's dancing is neither presented as a pattern to follow nor is the like of it ever seen again in either Old or New Testaments. Never do we see any indication of either Jesus or the apostles or any of the early church dancing before the Lord. Never do we see a biblical example of a worship service as

an arena for dancing "in the Spirit". There are dangers on both sides of this matter. On the one hand using such as support for bizarre extremes in "worship", and on the other denying sincere outward expressions of joy in the Lord.

As well, this dancing was an expression of joy and praise before the Lord. Thus this could not in any way be used to justify Christian involvement in secular forms of dancing (square, line, ballroom, disco, etc.).

"And David was girded with a linen ephod" – Not that David wore only a short linen ephod. I Chronicles 15:27 indicates that he also wore a robe of fine linen. The nakedness Michal later spoke of (vs. 20) did not refer to David's physical exposure, but to what she considered his playing the fool in exposing himself to ridicule, discarding his kingly dignity.

The point here is that David was wearing a priestly garment depicting his humility and willing service for the Lord.

6:16 *And as the ark of the LORD came into the city of David, Michal Saul's daughter looked through a window, and saw king David leaping and dancing before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart.*

6:17 *And they brought in the ark of the LORD, and set it in his place, in the midst of the tabernacle that David had pitched for it: and David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings before the LORD.*

6:18 *And as soon as David had made an end of offering burnt offerings and peace offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of hosts.*

Vs. 16 – *"Michal Saul's daughter looked through a window, and saw King David"* – So what was Michal doing up in her house instead of down in the street with those worshipping? This national festival of worship was obviously not important to her. She is peeping and assessing and despising instead of praising and worshipping and rejoicing before the Lord. Three times in this context she is designated as the daughter of Saul (vs. 16, 20, 23), perhaps suggesting her a chip off the old block in esteeming the Lord and His things of small concern, certainly not worth acting a buffoon over. How this thought puts a higher premium on our own walk when we see the strong influence of parents on their children. Michal's heart was at opposite poles from her husband's. She was thinking only of how David conducted himself, of keeping proper etiquette and dignity above all thought of abandoning self to the Lord. She was like many Christians who would not think of being a fool for Christ, and who secretly despise those willing to be such. Oh we must be careful to not play the role of Michal, in despising

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those who sacrifice status and acceptance before men for the privilege of speaking for Christ, and in despising those who sincerely worship in a way different from ours.

Vs. 19 – Can you imagine the vast preparations behind this national braai? Imagine;

- The army of bakers to prepare bread in the days leading up to this event.
- The huge herd of cattle butchered and cooked.
- The multiplied thousands of litres of wine to be secured and made readily available for distribution.
- The countless tables and the host of distributers and suppliers to dole out these gifts to the gathered multitudes.
- Some system of checking to ensure some folks were not collecting double and triple?

Yet all was done through David's initiative it seems, out of his desire to give and to bless his people (I

6:20 *Then David returned to bless his household. And Michal the daughter of Saul came out to meet David, and said, How glorious was the king of Israel to day, who uncovered himself to day in the eyes of the handmaids of his servants, as one of the vain fellows shamelessly uncovereth himself!*

6:21 *And David said unto Michal, It was before the LORD, which chose me before thy father, and before all his house, to appoint me ruler over the people of the LORD, over Israel: therefore will I play before the LORD.*

6:22 *And I will yet be more vile than thus, and will be base in mine own sight: and of the maidservants which thou hast spoken of, of them shall I be had in honour.*

Sam. 30:26).

<u>6:20-23</u> – Michal's Offence

Vs. 20 – *"How glorious was the king of Israel to day"* – Michal's words here were dripping with sarcasm. Behind her word *"glorious"* is the Hebrew word *kaboth*, speaking of things weighty. What a weight of character David forfeited that day before all, she suggests. Her concern seemed to be focused particularly on the female servants (*"handmaids"*) of the palace. How could she hold her head (nose?) up before the lowly women around her in a dignity consistent with her office as first lady after such an outrageous public performance by her hopping husband? Alas, it seems Michal's concern was centred where her father's was before her, with what the *people* thought, rather than with what *God* thought (I Sam. 15:30).

Vs. 21-22 – David's response was without apology

and all for *"the LORD"* (mentioned 3 times in vs. 21). In his humility he was quite willing to be a fool for the Lord before his fellow man (and woman). And he was confident that in so honouring the Lord, even with such abandon, he would be honoured in return by the Lord, even before his people. Time of course proved David correct in his expectations, for we immediately come to God's special covenant with David in chapter 7, where He so greatly honoured David in establishing his dynasty forever.

Vs. 23 – *"Therefore Michal the daughter of Saul had no child"* – Whether this was by God's design or David's is not given (likely the former). Certainly it was a matter of greatest disgrace for a Jewish woman to be childless. The question remains what might have been for Michal had she recognized and acknowledged her evil attitude, repenting and confessing her shackling pride before God and her husband.

Chapter 7

7:1 And it came to pass, when the king sat in his house, and the LORD had given him rest round about from all his enemies;
7:2 That the king said unto Nathan the prophet, See now, I dwell in an house of cedar, but the ark of God dwelleth within curtains.

We come now to a chapter of greatest prophetic importance. For we find here in chapter 7 God's unconditional promise to David that Messiah would be his descendant. And do not miss how so great a blessing came to David immediately following his earnest worship of the Lord in chapter 6 and his wish to further honour the Lord with a house here in chapter 7. On both counts it was much more a matter of David's *attitude* than any surpassing accomplishments in focus. God honours those who honour Him, even if only in their attitude.

7:1-11 – God Blessed and Blessing

Vs. 1-2 – David's suggestion

It was a time of rest and peace for David and his nation. His people were united in standing behind him. His enemies were scattered before him. His God was restored to a place of honour, with the way of His worship re-established. The fortress of Jerusalem was his. He dwelt in a palace of cedar

built for him by Hiram (5:11). His prospects were all thumbs up! Yet at such a hopeful and happy hour see how David's thoughts again concerned the Lord and honouring Him, in the best of times when most folks might tend to forget God. Remember how chapter 6 began with the same. God was no mere fire-escape for David, to run to only when in danger. Rather He was ever his heavenly Friend and Father, One to whom his thoughts ran whether in good times or bad.

Do not miss the significance of Nathan the prophet there with David as his comrade and confidant. This is the first mention of Nathan. He seems to have been God's key spokesman throughout the reign of David and Solomon. How wise to draw a godly man close as counsellor. Nathan was no yes-man as Ahab's insipid "prophets" (II Sam. 12). The quality of the counsellor suggests the calibre of the king. Be very careful of the kind of friends and counsellors you allow close, for their character is good indication of your own. And now we are actually allowed into the fellowship of these men as they discuss together things of the Lord, with David's suggestion of a temple and Nathan's immediate positive response.

Vs. 3 – *"Go, do all that is in thine heart"* – Nathan

spoke too soon here. Out of a good heart for the Lord he advised action without checking David's suggestion with the Lord. His response was a bit like David's sincere yet thoughtless effort to collect the ark the first time. Again we are reminded that if we would proceed according to a right way with God it is not enough only to have a right heart. We must *want* what pleases the Lord and we must *know* what pleases Him as well. Finding God's will is not a case of just "love God and do as we please". For this is a view that essentially ignores God's ongoing communication through His words. The fact is the Spirit of God uses the Word of God in making the will of God known to us. He works in us according to our knowledge of His truth. Thus we must live in moment-by-moment dependence upon our God through His Word, actively seeking Him for His particular will in each situation.

Understand that Nathan's error did not make him a false prophet because he did not suggest that his word of permission was from the Lord. Compare in I Samuel 16:6 Samuel's initial wrong appraisal of Jesse's son Eliab. Being God's prophet did not make a man without error. Only when he spoke *"in*

the name of the LORD" must his words prove to be true (Deut. 18:20-22).

Vs. 4 – *"The word of the LORD came to Nathan"* – Though Nathan spoke out of turn, before he knew the Lord's will, yet he and David both were men with an ear for God. Therefore the Lord knew He could speak His will to Nathan and His words would be faithfully carried to the hearing heart of David. How good to see like-minded men, wholly open to the Lord's leading. How good to see godly men encouraging each other in the things of God. How good to see the Lord stepping in to lead aright those who wish for His guidance.

Vs. 5 – *"Go and tell My servant David"* – How the Lord honoured David in calling him *"My servant"*. It is the same title so commonly used of Messiah in Isaiah (52:13; 53:11).

"Shalt thou build Me an house for Me to dwell in?" – When we think of how small the earth is compared to the grandeur of the universe, how insignificant is an earthly house for the Creator! Compare Isaiah

7:6 Whereas I have not dwelt in any house since the time that I brought up the children of Israel out of Egypt, even to this day, but have walked in a tent and in a tabernacle.
7:7 In all the places wherein I have walked with all the children of Israel spake I a word with any of the tribes of Israel, whom I commanded to feed my people Israel, saying, Why build ye not me an house of cedar?

66:1-2. For God the important thing was to dwell among His people, not the splendour of His dwelling place.

In the parallel account of I Chronicles 17 the Lord told David at this point that he was not to build Him a house (vs. 4), and later that it was because David had *"shed blood abundantly, and hast made great wars"* (I Chron. 22:8).

David was both right and wrong to be concerned about a house for God. The design of the tabernacle was given by the Lord Himself directly to Moses on the mount. Thus, as the Lord points out in vs. 7, He was not asking for any changes. But on the other hand, by His very positive response to follow, God was clearly impressed with David's interest. Compare I King 8:18, where Solomon expressed the Lord's feeling concerning this desire in David, that *"thou didst well that it was in thine heart"*. Though the Lord did not allow David to carry out his desire, He was so pleased the desire was in David's heart.

7:8 *Now therefore so shalt thou say unto my servant David, Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I took thee from the sheepcote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel:*

7:9 *And I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies out of thy sight, and have made thee a great name, like unto the name of the great men that are in the earth.*

Vs. 8-9 – *"I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest"* – In the parallel account of I Chronicles 17 the Lord speaks perhaps even more pointedly of having been with David *"whithersoever thou hast walked"* (vs. 8). Through all of David's many and varied experiences he had never once walked without God beside him, whether in the caves of hiding or on the mount of division and or when creeping into Saul's camp at night the Lord went with him always (I Sam. 23-26). *"Whithersoever thou hast walked"* can only mean there was never a single moment when the Lord was not close, never a single good deed or bad, good thought or bad, that the Lord missed.

Note the things mentioned in this chapter from the hand of the God who was ever with David;

- Lifted from pasture to throne (vs. 8).
- Defeated all enemies (vs. 9).
- Gave rest on every side (vs. 1).
- Made him a man of renown (vs. 9).

7:10 Moreover I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own, and move no more; neither shall the children of wickedness afflict them any more, as beforetime,

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Every step, from lowly to lofty, it was the Lord who made it happen.

Vs. 10 – The Lord's prophetic eye now lifted and looked beyond that current era of peace under David's rule to the final restoration of Israel to settled peace in their land under Messiah, the Son of David, in the coming days of His earthly kingdom.

Now understand a couple of important items here. See firstly how the promises and covenant of the following portion fits with the context. This was all about David making a place for the Lord among His people, after Saul and his people had neglected the Lord for decades. Do you remember when Jesus walked with the two discouraged disciples on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24? They did not recognize Jesus at first or understand yet that He had risen from the dead, as He walked along with them opening their understanding of the Bible and of current events as He spoke. As they walked home He revealed to them from the O.T. how all that had so sadly transpired with His death was just as God had long before prophesied. And then as they came

to their stopping place Jesus, still unknown to them, pretended as if He would travel on. But they pled with Him to stay and eat with them, and He gladly did so. He then rewarded their interest and invitation in the course of the meal with the opening of their eyes to recognize Him for who He is, that it was indeed Him alive from the dead. The point is that the Lord did want to be with them. But without an invitation He would have left them and passed on. And when invited in He brought reward with Him for those wanting His presence. Even so here it was David and the people of his generation inviting the Lord into their city as an honoured guest, wanting Him close, making a place for Him among them. And again the Lord's immediate response was to reward such an invitation and interest in Him. When God was given a place, rightly restored to His central place, and David wanted even to take it the step further and more permanently establish God's place among them, God returned that honour by promising an eternal place for His *"people Israel"* (vs. 10). And then He promised His *"servant David"*, the initiator of this move, a forever house/place and throne and kingdom (the highest place). Do you see? *"Them that honour Me I will honour"* (I Sam. 2:30). "Would you see to My place of honour?" asks the Lord. "Then I will see to yours!" He rewards every sincere

desire to invite Him in, every soul who really wants Him. *"But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God"* (Jn. 1:12). *"As many as received Him, to them gave He"*. To receivers He gives!

Then secondly understand what we have here in vs. 10. What would we call these words but a *promise*? Is this not a clear promise from God of the nation of Israel (remnant) restored to their land in the last days, with every enemy at last removed? Now imagine promising your 16 year old daughter that when she successfully graduated from high school you would buy her a car. And so, after the hard slog through her matric year, the day finally came when she had put a finish to that era and was looking toward university, and of course she was waiting expectantly for the gift you had promised. So at breakfast one morning in December, with a flourish you present her with a small brightly wrapped package. With hard-earned joy she rips open the package, thinking of course that it is a set of keys to her promised car. But instead she finds in the box a little toy car! She looks at you hoping to see the joke of it. But alas, with the shrug of your shoulders she discovers that you are quite serious. And she bursts into tears and runs from the room, to your confusion. Can you imagine such inept

indiscretion in a father? That is all you ever meant in promising her a car. You knew what you meant by that promise. And you knew what she thought you meant. But so it was left, without further clarifications, until she was so terribly disappointed. Can you see that it would be the very same kind of daft indiscretion for the Lord to speak such a glowing promise to *"My people Israel"* while knowing that He actually meant something other than the obvious? Can you imagine how *dishonest* the Lord would appear if He was not really referring this promise to the actual sons of Jacob? Yet that is the way much of Christianity reads this promise, that the Lord was actually referring here to the *church* rather than to national Israel, that He never meant the nation of Israel as a distinct entity at all. Compare vs. 24. Compare Luke 1:32-33, where Jesus is named as the fulfilment of the Davidic Covenant. Consider how all would read vs. 32 there quite normally or literally, yet some would then read vs. 33, *"He shall reign over <u>the</u> <u>house</u> <u>of</u> <u>Jacob</u> for ever",* in an allegorical sense, as referring to the church. Seems to me that to so deny the obvious speaks of a good bit of desperation. Perhaps to escape a more normal reading of a book like Revelation? Or to accommodate Israel's "lost" tribal lineages? Beware such thinking, for many good folks are taken by this foolishness. God's promise

here in II Samuel 7:10 can of course refer to nothing else but national Israel's earthly kingdom to come, ruled by the returning Son of David, the Lord Jesus Christ (Rev. 20), when at last the believing remnant of Israel will be permanently placed in their land, with every enemy removed.

Obvious conclusions can therefore be drawn from this;

- The nation of Israel must be *preserved* and *restored* to their land (Jer. 31:35-37; Deut.30:1-5).
- Israel's Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ, must actually *return* to earth (Rev. 19-20).
- There will be both earthly and eternal aspects to Christ's reign (I Cor. 15:24; Rev. 21-22).

For all of these points we of course find clear promises in the Bible.

Vs. 11 – *"The LORD telleth thee that He will make thee an house"* – Understand the two meanings for the word *"house"* in this context. David wished to

7:12 And when thy days be fulfilled, and thou shalt sleep with thy fathers, I will set up thy seed after thee, which shall proceed out of thy bowels, and I will establish his kingdom.
7:13 He shall build an house for my name, and I will stablish the throne of his kingdom for ever.

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honour the Lord by building for Him a physical structure or temple. In response the Lord said "Because of your desire to so honour Me with a house I will build *you* a house". But in speaking of a "house" the Lord referred not to a structure, but to David's ruling family or descendants. The Lord was going to honour David by upholding his dynasty, the reigning family of his descendants into the ages to come. How exceedingly the Lord honoured David for his desire to honour Him! For the teaspoon of blessing with which David would honour God, he was honoured back by the shovel full! And for David's *desire*, God *did* it!

7:12-17 – God's Covenant with David

In vs. 12-16 is the Lord's explanation of His promise to *"make thee an house"* in vs. 11.

Vs. 12-13 – There are both near and far aspects to this covenant, partial and complete fulfilments. Obviously Solomon was the seed of David who was *"set up"* after him, who built the temple, with his kingdom established for a time. Yet Jesus Christ is

the ultimate seed of David, who would *"build an house for My name"* through His death and resurrection (Jn. 2:18-22). Compare in Hebrews 3:5-6, *"whose house we are"*. Only concerning Jesus can it be said, *"I will stablish the throne of His kingdom for ever"*. Compare again in Luke 1:32-33 the very same terms used, *"house", "throne",* and *"kingdom",* in naming Jesus as the fulfilment of the Davidic Covenant. Compare Hebrews 1:8.

The Lord makes it clear in vs. 13 as well that David would not be the one to build the temple, but only the son to follow on his throne would build. Compare I Chronicles 22:6-13.

Vs. 14 – *"I will chasten him with the rod of men"* – This is precisely what the Lord did to Solomon. In the same chapter that records Solomon's fall to sin (I Ki. 11) human enemies suddenly began rising up on every sides;

- Hadad the Edomite (I Ki. 11:14-22).
- Rezon of Syria (11:23-25).
- Jeroboam (11:26ff).

7:15 *But my mercy shall not depart away from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee.*
7:16 *And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.*
7:17 *According to all these words, and according to all this vision, so did Nathan speak unto David.*

Consider how trouble for our choice to live in sin ever waits in the wings, ready to emerge at God's bidding.

Vs. 15-16 – *"But My mercy shall not depart away from him"* – See how God's covenant concerning David's *"house"* and *"kingdom"* and *"throne…established for ever"* is both eternal and unconditional. See Psalm 89:20-37. This important covenant affirmed that Israel's Messiah would indeed come through David's line, and that His kingdom would be everlasting upon David's throne. The great repetition in these verses puts the promise beyond any doubt. Yet though the Lord spoke of the eternal reign of David's descendants, history clarifies that He did not refer to a continuous or uninterrupted reign, or that it would always be over all the tribes of Israel. Though the Lord has promised to never break His covenant with David, yet at the same time He promised He would punish David's wayward descendants. This punishment has often been through captivity and thus removal from their Promised Land.

On the Side

Throughout the O.T. we hear the divine drum-roll of the ages, announcing the narrowing channel through which Messiah would be ushered into the world, serving to identify Him when He came. That One who would be great and all of the answer to man's need would be;

- Seed of the woman (Gen. 3:15). He would be human, born of a woman with human nature.
- Descendant of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3).
- Descendant of Isaac (Gen. 22:18). His birth would be miraculous rather than man-devised.
- Descendant of Jacob (Gen. 28:14). His way would be a way of faith (Jacob) rather than of man's prowess or customs (Esau the first born).
- From the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:10). His way would be a way of sacrifice, as Judah offering himself before Joseph in Benjamin's place.
- From the house of David (II Sam. 7; Rom. 1:3). His way would be according to the devotion of

David.

Therefore the importance of Christ's genealogy heading the gospel accounts (Matthew 1 and Luke 3). For Jesus must be shown to be the descendant of David, in fulfilment of this vital covenant. This would be a less significant matter to the Gentiles, but aimed more at the Jew, displaying again God's determined grace in seeking by all means to convince His people.

7:18-29 – David's Thanksgiving

Vs. 18-21 – Wonder in God's grace

Understand why David is praying here. See how he responded to the Lord's words through His prophet as if the Lord had spoken to him directly. He approached God with full confidence in His words, that they were indeed His words. And David was right to do it! No doubts or questions. No delay to see if it began to prove true. David responded on the basis of the words alone. And he pleased God to so respond (Heb. 11:6).

Vs. 18 – *"Who am I, O Lord God?"* – Such humility! Even after the Lord allowed David to so rise to the throne and to the popular support of his entire nation, yet still David carried the same lowly attitude concerning himself that he so often expressed in Saul's day many years before;

- *"Seemeth it to you a light thing to be a king's son in law, seeing that I am a poor man, and lightly esteemed?"* (I Sam. 18:23)
- *"After whom is the king of Israel come out? After whom dost thou pursue? After a dead dog, after a flea"* (I Sam. 24:14).
- *"For the king of Israel is come out to seek a flea, as when one doth hunt a partridge in the mountains"* (I Sam. 26:20).

"I am a poor man, and lightly esteemed…a dead dog…a flea…a partridge in the mountains". Was this a serious case of low self-esteem? With the Apostle Paul, who considered himself *"less than the least of all saints"* and *"the chief of sinners"*, or with Job who called himself *"vile"*, is this a psychological mess perhaps, in desperate need of the counsellor's couch? No, just a man who rightly saw no worthiness in himself, but wondered only in the God of grace who had so loved him and lifted him. Never are we led of God to say "Look at me!" Only, "Look

at my God!"

Note David's prominent use of the title *"Lord GOD"* or *"LORD God"*, found 8 times in this prayer. Except for vs. 25, behind this title is the Hebrew name "Adonai Jehovah". Adonai means Lord in the sense of Master. Jehovah is the common name of the Lord suggesting His self-existence. Behind this title in vs. 25 is the Hebrew title Jehovah Elohim, or Jehovah God.

Vs. 19 – *"And is this the manner of man, O Lord GOD"* – David marvelled at the contrast between God and man, that One so great would show such condescension to one so lowly. Men do not respond in this way with others. It is not their manner. In the parallel account in I Chronicles 17:17, David's words are, *"Thou…hast regarded me according to the estate of a man of high degree, O LORD God"*. David was amazed that the Lord would so handle him as if he were some great one in the earth. It seems obvious that he never considered *himself* to be some great one. Though it was a small thing from the Lord's perspective to so honour David, yet such a

gift was truly huge as David saw it. He was so full of appreciation, both with such honour received from the Lord, and that it was the Lord so honouring him.

Contrast profane Esau, who saw no value in a blessing from God that did not benefit him immediately (Heb. 12:16-17). Esau expressed his true heart when he said *"What profit shall this birthright do to me?"* (Gen. 25:33) Compare Hezekiah in II Kings 20:19, saying essentially "as long as trouble does not come in my day". Only a spiritual man can grasp the true worth of spiritual, eternal things. All David actually had were words, and *it was enough*. Only faith sees this benefit (II Cor. 4:17-18). While the natural man sees only the value of temporal, earthly benefits.

Vs. 20 – *"And what can David say more unto thee?"* – His thoughts and feelings were beyond expressing with words. It was an *"unspeakable gift"* to him.

"For Thou, Lord GOD, knowest Thy servant" – How could David talk of deserving or not deserving since the Lord had made His promise with fullest

knowledge of David, warts and all. David was saying, "Though You know me You have done this!!"

Vs. 21 – *"According to Thine own heart"* – David understood that it was through God's great heart, not David's great qualities that he had so received from God, both to give to David and to make it known to David. He recognized that not only had God so greatly blessed him into the future with such *"great things"*, but through His promise God had blessed His servant in the present as well, by making His purpose known to David, that by faith he might have the immediate benefit of expectant awareness! Again, this marks the key difference between the natural man and the spiritual. The natural man has no faith to be able to find benefit now from things yet future. Without faith there is no substance in *"things hoped for"* or *"evidence of things unseen"* (Heb. 11:1). Even so the Lord handles us in the same way of grace. In the fullness of His grace He wants to fully bless His children in eternal glory, and He further wishes their faith to lead them into the joy of it even now through the sure promise of His words. *Grace upon grace!* Only faith understands this.

7:22 *Wherefore thou art great, O LORD God: for there is none like thee, neither is there any God beside thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears.*
7:23 *And what one nation in the earth is like thy people, even like Israel, whom God went to redeem for a people to himself, and to make him a name, and to do for you great things and terrible, for thy land, before thy people, which thou redeemedst to thee from Egypt, from the nations and their gods?*
7:24 *For thou hast confirmed to thyself thy people Israel to be a people unto thee for ever: and thou, LORD, art become their God.*
7:25 *And now, O LORD God, the word that thou hast spoken concerning thy servant, and concerning his house, establish it for ever, and do as thou hast said.*
7:26 *And let thy name be magnified for ever, saying, The LORD of hosts is the God over Israel: and let the house of thy servant David be established before thee.*
7:27 *For thou, O LORD of hosts, God of Israel, hast revealed to thy servant, saying, I will build thee an house: therefore hath thy servant found in his heart to pray this prayer unto thee.*
7:28 *And now, O Lord GOD, thou art that God, and thy words be true, and thou hast promised this goodness unto thy servant:*
7:29 *Therefore now let it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may continue for ever before thee: for thou, O Lord GOD, hast spoken it: and with thy blessing let the house of thy servant be blessed for ever.*

Vs. 22-29 – Wonder in God

- Vs. 22 – Praise to God for His singular greatness.

- Vs. 23-24 – It is Israel's greatest good fortune to be God's people. In Christ we share in the same richness of relation to Him.

  Vs. 25-29 – David's great fortune. The joy of his blessed *"house"* is mentioned 5 times in the last 5 verses. The *"for ever"* nature of God's promise is mentioned 5 times in the last 6 verses. The basic theme here is, "Lord, may it come to pass as You have promised".

David's humility is evident throughout referring to

himself 10 times as *"thy servant"*.

David merely invited the Lord in, to a central place in his life and their national life and wished to honour Him further with a house. And how God so *"exceeding abundantly"* blessed His servant in return, with an eternal house and throne and kingdom!!

Chapter 8

8:1 *And after this it came to pass that David smote the Philistines, and subdued them: and David took Methegammah out of the hand of the Philistines.*

Vs. 1 – *"And after this it came to pass…"* – The timing is distinctly given as *"after this"*. After what?

- God had been honoured, His people drawing Him close.
- God had responded with His promises of a place for Israel and David into the future.
- David, through his faithful confidence in God's words, had expressed his sincere appreciation and worship.

Therefore God's blessing on them now extended to more immediate, tangible benefits. Do you see the bigger picture of what is happening here? When God's people acknowledge the true worth of spiritual benefits, when their faith fills them with sincere joy and thanks in future, intangible benefits, when they just believe God for His promises and rejoice in them as if already realized, this draws from God further, fuller, more immediate benefits. Appreciation does that. As Ruth with Boaz, her genuine, humble appreciation moved her

admirer to greater and greater benefits (Ruth 2). Even so, here are further gifts from the God who loves to give to sincerely thankful, believing receivers. As well, they had invited God in, onto their side, and He does not come as an uninvolved by-stander. He came with His power to exercise in behalf of His people.

These victories over all potential enemies were surely a gift from God. Yet consider how they as well were a result of fearlessness in David and his people. For God's covenant with David ensured Israel's indestructibility as well. This they simply believed, now conducting themselves as if they believed it, resulting in victory on every side.

Is it any different with us? Are we not commanded to take the gospel of Christ to our world? Are we not promised ultimate victory as well? The gates of hell shall not prevail against the forward marching church of God (Matt. 16:18). As the Lord's words to Joshua, *"There shall not any man be able to stand before thee"* (Josh. 1:5). We too, as Joshua of old, have the clear promise that the Captain of the Lord's Host goes with us. *"And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age. Amen"* (Matt. 28:20). It is a lie of the devil that God's church is meant to go forth timidly, sheepishly, apologetically with His

message of truth, or that we have no right to contradict beliefs based on something other than the Bible, or that we must treat the spiritual lies of false religions with a measure of respect. We respect people, to be sure, but we roll right over the top of unbiblical error without apology, like a Sherman tank over enemy troops.

Perhaps David's aggressions in this chapter arose out of the thinking that if he could not build the temple because he had already shed too much blood, then what is the use in holding back on further conflicts. He seemed determined to beat back every potential clash point, in order that his son to follow him might come into an era of peace, with no need to be the man of blood David was, and thus free to build the house David longed to see built for God.

"David smote the Philistines, and subdued them" – The Philistines were actually *"subdued"* in their own land, not just beaten back across the border as in previous encounters with them. I believe this was the first time since Samson that Israel actually took the attack to Philistine turf. This was beyond mere defence, but Israel on the offence, on the move, running on promises!

8:2 *And he smote Moab, and measured them with a line, casting them down to the ground; even with two lines measured he to put to death, and with one full line to keep alive. And so the Moabites became David's servants, and brought gifts.*

"David took Methegammah out of the hand of the Philistines" – This is the only mention in the Bible of a place (?) called Methegammah, leaving uncertainty as to the where of it, or whether the word was even meant to be read as the proper name of a place. In the parallel account of I Chronicles 18:1 the city of Gath is mentioned rather than this tongue-twister of a name. It would seem then that this was another name for Gath or an area of that major Philistine city.

Vs. 2 – *"And he smote Moab"* – Again it is David the aggressor, bringing a bloodbath now upon Moab. What seems to be described here is the systematic execution of 2/3 of Moab's captured army. Why such severe handling of Moab? Remember that David had ancestral roots there through Ruth. And he had left some of his family there when running from Saul, indicating a friendly, trustful relationship (I Sam. 22:3-4). We can only assume that some serious offence took place, or that there was some particular threat from Moab. One commentator spoke of some Jewish writers who suggest that David's parents and family were

massacred while in exile there, perhaps out of fear of Saul, before David came to power, and therefore this especially harsh action against them.

Compare Balaam's prophecy of Christ, the Son of David, in Numbers 24:17, who *"shall smite the corners of Moab"*. We see the token beginning of it here in David, that sceptre arising out of Judah (Gen. 49:10). It seems Moab was held under tribute until they rebelled against Ahab's son Jehoram many decades later (II Ki. 3). Yet even there they were crushed by a confederacy of Israel and Judah, and then they just slipped off the stage of Bible history.

Vs. 3 – *"As he went to recover his border at the river Euphrates"* – This is an interesting thought. It seems David was reading his Bible now, as a king was meant to do (Deut. 17:18-20). He had earlier landed in serious trouble out of neglect of that vital task. But now it seems he had gotten busy in this regard through the painful thump he received with the death of Uzzah. And David apparently found in the old books of Moses God's oft-repeated promise of the extent of the land He would ultimately give to

His people, *"From the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates"* (Gen. 15:18; Ex. 23:31; Deut. 1:7; 11:24; Josh. 1:4), from the Euphrates in the north to the border of Egypt in the southwest. And so David, feeling quite invincible by faith in God's promises of the previous chapter, was simply going to get it! Hear how it is referred to as *"<u>his</u> border"*. It was David's by God's promise, and therefore his for the taking. Thus David first secured their southern borders before he took his campaign so far afield to the north. He was taking it about 1½ times the full length of their nation farther north. But he was going for it! "That is what God said. That is the land He promised. He said it repeatedly for emphasis. I believe what God says. Come on boys, let's go take what is ours! What are we waiting for?" It was the old bold abandon again, that led David into Saul's night camp with Abishai, because he was anointed by God to be king (thus invincible). Now again he was basing his actions on the promises of God. He abandoned himself to full trust in God's promises. And what happened? Well, he got it did he not!

Zobah was north of Damascus, about 120 kms northeast of the Sea of Galilee. In those days this area to the south and west of the Euphrates was ruled by small kingdoms, all later combined to form

the nation of Syria. The kingdom of Zobah was prominent among these kingdoms at that time.

Vs. 4 – *"David houghed all the chariot horses"* – To *"hough"* (hock) a horse is to hamstring it or cut the tendons at the back of the hind legs, thus crippling the animal, rendering it useless for battle. Joshua had followed this practice as well when facing the northern confederacy, and that by the Lord's instruction (Josh. 11:6). Further evidence that David was proceeding according to his reading of the Bible.

Again, the kings of Israel were not to multiply horses to themselves (Deut. 17:14-16). Rather than their keeping such captured "weapons" of war, the Lord required their destruction, that *He* might remain the strength of His people, who were ever to remain completely dependent upon Him for victory. Though *"some trust in chariots, and some in horses"*, He would have His people *"remember the name of the Lord our God"* (Ps. 20:7). Isaiah later pronounced, *"Woe"* upon *"them that…stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many;*

and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD!" (Isa. 31:1) Even so they who stay on annuities or retirement plans or property or unit trusts (mutual funds) or…or… Anything that becomes our trust, in the place of God alone, draws the same woe.

"If I have made gold my hope, or have said to the fine gold, Thou art my confidence; if I rejoiced because my wealth was great, and because mine hand had gotten much…this also were an iniquity to be punished by the judge: for I should have denied the God that is above" (Job 31:24-25, 28).

"…but reserved of them for an hundred chariots" – Should they have been keeping even these few horses and chariots? Consider the fact that where David here disobeyed in a small measure, Solomon later carried it to the extreme (I Ki. 4:26; 10:26, 28-29). It may have seemed to David a very small thing to keep only a hundred. But every wrong step has the potential of leading others further down that wrong path. You may be able to handle alcohol in moderation, but others emboldened by your example may not have the ability to use such in moderation. Of course this does not justify the follies of the follower, but it adds weight to our responsibility to make right choices, even in the

8:5 *And when the Syrians of Damascus came to succour Hadadezer king of Zobah, David slew of the Syrians two and twenty thousand men.*
8:6 *Then David put garrisons in Syria of Damascus: and the Syrians became servants to David, and brought gifts. And the LORD preserved David whithersoever he went.*

"little" things of our Christian walk.

Vs. 5-6 – Behind the word "Syrians" is the Hebrew word "Aram", referring to the Aramean (Aramēʹan) people. This was another small nation of that area, centred around the city of Damascus. This was not the larger nation of Syria as we later know it. Recognizing the threat to their own people with David's successful invasion of their strong neighbour, these came to their aid, but also fell before Israel's greater strength, thus joining the growing list of nations subservient to Israel.

"And the LORD preserved David withersoever he went" – Here was all of the reason for David's success. Words repeated in vs. 14, underscoring the only true source of power. Do we really understand this? Maybe we never do until we have no choice but to utterly depend. In fact, did you notice that in all of this long list of David's many victories there is no mention of military tactics or cleverness or ploys or superior weapons or even weapons at all, except those David took from defeated enemies. This highlights the point that

8:7 *And David took the shields of gold that were on the servants of Hadadezer, and brought them to Jerusalem.*
8:8 *And from Betah, and from Berothai, cities of Hadadezer, king David took exceeding much brass.*

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this great success story was not a matter of human ability. Compare II Kings 18:6-7. Except the Lord build the house, city, nation, etc. they labour in vain who build.

Vs. 7-8 – David obviously was using his conquests as a means to collect precious metals in order to beautify the future temple. By the time David handed over to Solomon he had amassed 3000 talents or 102 metric tonnes of gold and 7000 talents or 238 tonnes of silver (I Chron. 29:4-8). A talent = 34 kgs = 75.5 lbs. Combined with the giving of others toward the temple project they collected;

- Gold – 272 tonnes.
- Silver – 578 tonnes.
- Brass – 612 tonnes.
- Iron – 3400 tonnes.
- As well as a treasure of precious stones.

Yet how would David's collection align with Deuteronomy 17:17? Did that temple of God really

8:9 *When Toi king of Hamath heard that David had smitten all the host of Hadadezer,*
8:10 *Then Toi sent Joram his son unto king David, to salute him, and to bless him, because he had fought against Hadadezer, and smitten him: for Hadadezer had wars with Toi. And Joram brought with him vessels of silver, and vessels of gold, and vessels of brass:*

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need to be so gilded with gold and silver? Was this another step David took unadvisedly, leading down to a point of stumbling for later generations, as with Solomon's horses? God was later happy with a house *"in comparison of it as nothing"* after the return of His people from captivity in Babylon (Hag. 2:3). And because the old ones were weeping over the plainness of the restored house compared to the glory of the old (Ezra 3:12), the significant point was made in Haggai that the *true* glory of the house was the Lord's presence in it, not the excessive earthly splendour with which David and Solomon provided and built (2:7).

The same principle applies to us. Though the outward "tabernacle" of your body may be *"in comparison as nothing"* beside the beauty or splendour of some other guy or gal, the core question is always the same. Does your house hold the true glory of the Lord's abiding presence within?

Vs. 9-10 – Toi of Hamath saw the hand-writing on the wall and brought gifts of peace to this new power in the area. Hamath was farther to the north and

8:11 *Which also king David did dedicate unto the LORD, with the silver and gold that he had dedicated of all nations which he subdued;*
8:12 *Of Syria, and of Moab, and of the children of Ammon, and of the Philistines, and of Amalek, and of the spoil of Hadadezer, son of Rehob, king of Zobah.*

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bordering on the Euphrates River. So David's influence reached to the Euphrates. In a sense David fulfilled God's promises of the land area His people would one day possess, and in a sense he did not. David's people never actually *owned* these lands, but held them only as tributaries for a time. Then Israel began to lose sovereignty over them in the closing days of Solomon. Yet God had promised permanent possession. That era of victory under David and Solomon foreshadowed a coming day when all the land promised to Abraham will indeed actually belong to his people, under the rule of the Son of David, Jesus Christ.

Vs. 10-12 – Storing up for the temple project. It seems it had become known what made David happy, that he was collecting precious metals for a temple.

Vs. 11 – *"Which also king David did dedicate unto the LORD"* – Again it is a reminder of Joshua's actions in the conquest. Again the suggestion that David was reading his Bible and following in the footsteps of Joshua.

8:13 *And David gat him a name when he returned from smiting of the Syrians in the valley of salt, being eighteen thousand men.*

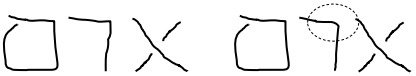
Vs. 13 – *"And David gat him a name"* – When David finally returned to Jerusalem loaded down with great treasures, it was likely with greatest fanfare and national celebration for their wide-ranging victories. David's reputation only grew, with the Lord among them, a reminder of his early years under Saul. But of course David was acquiring a name among those defeated as well, a name of a very different kind. Yet did you notice that there is not a word here of the attitude or concerns of those conquered. What of the news broadcasts of those left maimed and butchered by the "heartless", "bloodthirsty" Jews, and of the resulting hardships left in their wake? What of the bitter feeling with the destroying of beautiful, majestic horses? What of the irritating impact of Jewish garrisons or forts built in their cities throughout foreign lands? All of these things did not matter it seems. God's eye and blessing was on His servant. The land was promised to the Jewish people, and it seems all of the bitter moaning and cursing of those so touched and hurt and offended was of lesser concern to God. Only that His truth and true servants prevail. Not even a nod to the other side of these aggressions. There appears to be no concern with placating or

explaining. There are no apologies or concessions recorded here. The Lord was with David in his aggressions, in taking what God considered His own.

Does not the same principle apply to we who are a part of His church in this age? God's concern is that His truth and true servants prevail, right over the top of all of the lying false teachers and prophets and dreamers of this age. The feelings and fumings of those so terribly offended are of small concern. No hesitations, no apologies or concessions for our earnest teaching against error. No sympathies with those concerned that we are "proselytizing" their people. God's eye and blessing is with His faith and followers. God is in the business of robbing Satan's nest. He has no concerns with making waves among the living dead, spoiling the evil one, delivering his people from the bondage of lying beliefs, taking Satan's ground by force.

"Smiting the Syrians in the valley of salt" – When we compare the parallel account in I Chronicles 18:12 we are left with the question of whether this was Edomites or Arameans? In the Hebrew the only difference between "Edomite" and "Aramean" is the exchanging of the Hebrew letter resh with the letter daleth in the middle letter of the word. And the only

difference between these two Hebrew letter is the sharper corner on the daleth;



Edom Aram

Could we allow for the possibility of a copyist error? Many are those quick to suggest it. The Valley of Salt is south of the Dead Sea, far from the Arameans. Yet it could be that the Edomites hired Arameans to fight with them. Compare the heading or title of Psalm 60. Was it 18,000 or 12,000? Was it Joab or Abishai who led? It was apparently Abishai who led this victory under Joab as captain. We must remember as well that the chapter headings of Psalms come to us through human tradition rather than through divine inspiration. Please consider the wisdom of awaiting explanation for such apparent errors, rather than jumping to the conclusion of errors in the Bible text.

Compare as well the numbers discrepancies in vs. 4. The Kings Jame Version translators supplied *"chariots"* here after *"a thousand"*, but the word is not in the Hebrew original. The Hebrew reads "a thousand and seven hundred horsemen". The "correction" of this insertion of "chariots" comes

8:14 *And he put garrisons in Edom; throughout all Edom put he garrisons, and all they of Edom became David's servants. And the LORD preserved David whithersoever he went.*

8:15 *And David reigned over all Israel; and David executed judgment and justice unto all his people.*

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from the parallel account in I Chronicles 18:4. And was it seven *hundred* or seven *thousand* horsemen? Scribal errors in the process of copying? Doubters and unbelievers scour the Scriptures to find such seeming errors in order to fuel their scorning mockery of Christians, and to bolster their own lying belief systems. Is there some other explanation here? The witness of the Spirit and the word within us testify to the truth of the Bible. Therefore we are willing to await God's further explanation of the difficult spots. God has left the odd live land-mine of such minor difficulties lying around in the pages of His sacred text for rebels and sceptics to pick up, to their destruction.

Vs. 15 – *"David executed judgment and justice unto all his people"* – David set up fair government. Not only was he an effective leader outside his borders, but among his own people as well. The Spirit of God working in and through a man makes him adequate, phenomenal, an all-rounder.

"So David waxed greater and greater: for the LORD of hosts was with him" (I Chron.11:9).

This again is good indication that David was reading his Bible. The law has much to say on the matter of justice and the work of judges in executing judgment, and their appropriate hatred of bribes, unfairness, and dishonesty. Here is what the world has seldom seen, what the world needs so desperately. David was the image of the benevolent dictator, a foreshadow of the nature and blessing of Christ's rule, where there is a central head who is wise with God's wisdom and concerned for others and just, where there is efficient and fair government, a strong protector and avenger as well as a caring king.

"Judgment" – Bringing decisions in judicial cases, involving the execution of judgment. Things were brought to a proper conclusion, rather than being left unhandled.

"Justice" – Righteousness or fairness in a case or cause. Things were handled fairly. This is displayed in the holy God punishing the wicked (Isa. 5:14-16; 10:22), and it is displayed in releasing the innocent and rewarding the godly (Ps. 24:5; 36:10-11). The word is used of Christ's government in Isaiah 9:7. The good and godly judge does not just avoid deceitful gains, he *despises* them. The command of God for those in the place of judge

8:16 *And Joab the son of Zeruiah was over the host; and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder;*
8:17 *And Zadok the son of Ahitub, and Ahimelech the son of Abiathar, were the priests; and Seraiah was the scribe;*

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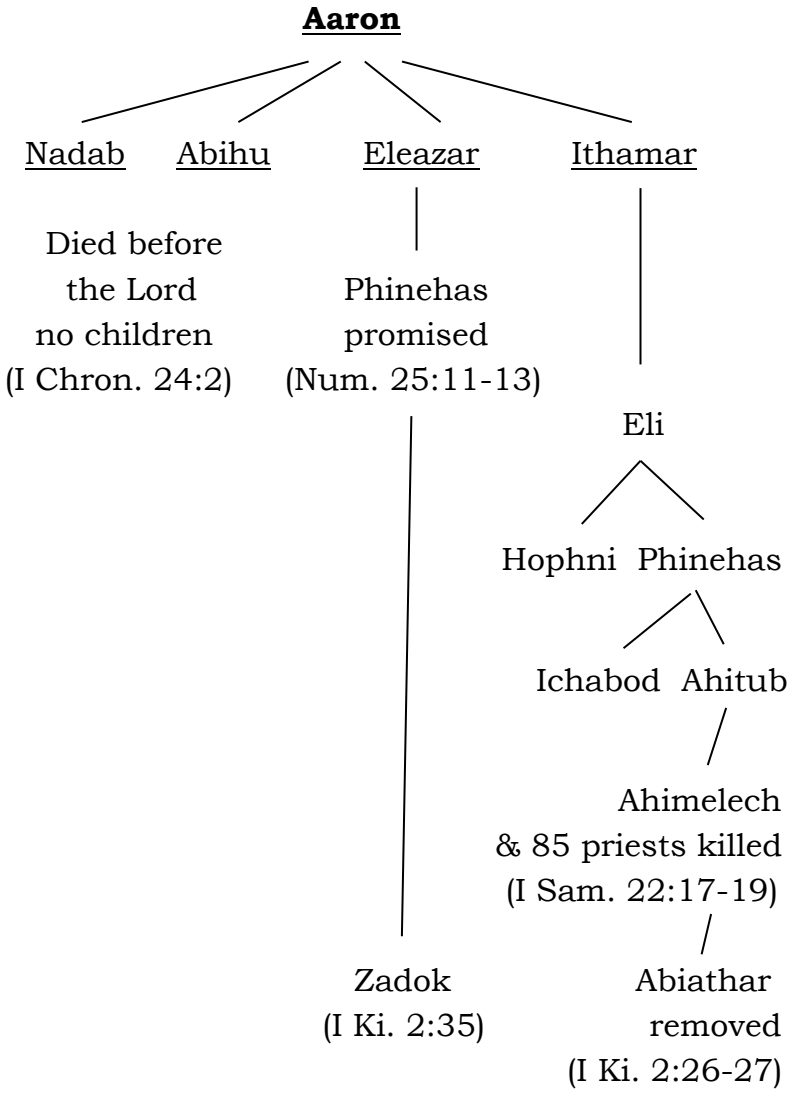
was/is to avoid unrighteousness (Lev. 19:15).

Vs. 17 – Now there are some interesting first mentions in the last couple verses of this chapter. This is the first mention of this man Zadok as priest. We do not know where this man came from or how he came to share the priestly office with Abiathar and Ahimelech his son. Remember how Abiathar came to serve in this role under David (I Sam. 22). His father's name was Ahimelech, and apparently his son was named the same. Now suddenly Zadok was on the scene as well, sharing this priestly function. Do you know the significance of this entrance of Zadok? For the sins of Eli's house God said He would remove his line from the privilege of priestly office (I Sam. 2). Thus toward this end Hophni, Phinehas, and Eli died on the same day, as a sign (I Sam. 4). Then most of Eli's descendants (85 men) were later executed by Saul at Nob (I Sam. 22). Abiathar, son of Ahimelech, fled to David (I Sam. 22:20-23). But Abiathar later joined David's son, Adonijah, in his effort to take David's throne before Solomon (I Ki. 1:7). Solomon replaced Abiathar with Zadok, shifting the priesthood to

Eleazar's line (I Ki. 2). Thus Zadok's appearance here marks the soon end of Eli's line serving as priest (see chart next page).

In I Chronicles 12:29 Zadok is described as "*a young man mighty of valour",* among those who came down to appoint David king in Hebron over the tribe of Judah. He remained loyal to David through both of the treasonous efforts of David's sons, Absalom and Adonijah. Therefore he and his descendants served as priests through the rest of the O.T. era.

"Seraiah was the scribe" – This is the first mention of the office of scribe. A scribe might have been many things in that day. The other translations use the word "secretary" here, as if this individual was involved only in writing and governmental administration and such. But the prominent role of this office of scribe later comes clear in a man like Ezra, that *"ready scribe in the law of Moses"* (Ez. 7:6), whose work it was to know the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach it in Israel (Ez. 7:10). It is the same word used in the Hebrew in both cases. These were men whose profession was to study and interpret the Bible, the O.T. law. They were a class of learned men who came to be much looked up to by the Jewish people, especially rising to prominence after the return of the remnant from


Aaron
Nadab
Abihu
Eleazar
Ithamar
Died before the Lord no children (I Chron. 24:2)
Phinehas promised (Num. 25:11-13)
Eli
Hophni
Phinehas
Ichabod
Ahitub
Ahimelech & 85 priests killed (I Sam. 22:17-19)
Zadok (I Ki. 2:35)
Abiathar removed (I Ki. 2:26-27)

Babylon, largely due to the very positive influence of Ezra. Of course by the time Jesus came the role of scribe had fallen to little more than defenders of their Jewish traditions. Therefore they as a group bitterly opposed Jesus, who clung to God's Book to the exclusion of tradition. Therefore we often find Jesus denouncing them in the gospel accounts for making the Scriptures of no effect by their manmade traditions.

Do you understand the significance of this scribe appearing here for the first time in David's administration? Do you see how it was again the same lesson David had learned so well. He was hearing God's words, even appointing a man to help him in this important task it seems, thus establishing an office that would continue for centuries. Seraiah the scribe probably began by making a careful copy of the law for the king. Then he would have been given the task of compiling biblical instruction and support for each new need or endeavour in David's life; tracing Joshua's approach when lining up on his northern conquest and collecting biblical instruction as he set up fair government over his people according to the law, etc. See well the place of the Bible in the life of a godly man and king. In fact I as a pastor have the happy privilege of following in this same line of

professional learners and interpreters and teachers of the Book of books. Our church has contracted me to this same role in their behalf and for the benefit of others.

Vs. 18 – This is the first mention of Benaiah as well. We learn here of his appointment over the Cherethites and the Pelethites, which may have been David's personal guard (I Ki. 1:38; I Chron. 11:25), displaying David's supreme trust in the man. Compare Benaiah's godly expression of loyalty when Solomon was appointed in David's place in the midst of Adonijah's treason in I Kings 1:36-37. We catch a glimpse of his heart in this portion. When Solomon rose to the throne Benaiah acted as executioner in I Kings 2, even executing Joab, his captain. And then he was appointed captain of the army with Joab's death (I Ki. 2:34-35). His mighty deeds are given in I Chronicles 11:22-25.

Pelethi in Hebrew means public courier. Perhaps the role of the Pelethites was that of runners or messengers. These were only mentioned together with the Cherethites in the Bible. Some believe the

Pelethites were Philistines, since the word is very similar (philesti). *Cherethi* in Hebrew is perhaps executioner. As well, there was a nation of people along the sea coast, perhaps south of Philistia, called Cherethites (Zeph. 2:5; I Sam. 30:14).

"And David said,
Is there yet any that is left
of the house of Saul,
that I may shew him kindness
for Jonathan's sake?"

(II Sam. 9:1)

Chapter 9

9:1 *And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake?*

It was now the plateau days for David, with his kingdom fully established and all of his borders secured. Thus he had time to remember his good friend, Jonathan, and the covenant of protection David had made with him and his descendants (I Sam. 20:14-17, 42).

Vs. 1 – *"Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul"* – We can well imagine the initial suspicion rising in some with this query. Did David really wish to show kindness? Or was it a case of locate and liquidate? Could it be that success and power had now gone to David's head? With every potential threat from the *outside* subdued, was David now turning his attention to possible *internal* threats? Had the many years of violent self-defence and aggression now led David's heart to insecurity or paranoia? Now perhaps they would find out who they really had for king. But in reality David was of a much simpler nature than any such conniving subtlety. He simply, sincerely wished to show kindness, to show his love for Jonathan through his

9:2 *And there was of the house of Saul a servant whose name was Ziba. And when they had called him unto David, the king said unto him, Art thou Ziba? And he said, Thy servant is he.*

9:3 *And the king said, Is there not yet any of the house of Saul, that I may shew the kindness of God unto him? And Ziba said unto the king, Jonathan hath yet a son, which is lame on his feet.*

9:4 *And the king said unto him, Where is he? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he is in the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, in Lodebar.*

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living relatives. David was a man without guile. He was a man who remembered his friends, rather than living only for himself. It was the loyalty of David's love that is now revealed here.

Vs. 2-4 – It seems Ziba was the head servant who was working Saul's estate. Mephibosheth was the only son of Jonathan, and being a grandson of King Saul he was a possible heir to the throne. But David was the Lord's appointed and anointed king. Under normal circumstances this could mean great threat on Mephibosheth's life, his presence representing a danger to David's rule, a potential gathering point for those loyal to Saul. It is why Mephibosheth was in hiding. But the surprise was that David was not looking to curse Saul's house but to bless. It is what the unsaved seeker discovers about God as well. To sincerely seek God is to find Him quite willing to bless rather than to condemn.

"Behold, he is in the house of Machir…in Lo-debar" – Lo-debar was a town over in Gilead, east of the

9:5 *Then king David sent, and fetched him out of the house of Machir, the son of Ammiel, from Lodebar.*
9:6 *Now when Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, was come unto David, he fell on his face, and did reverence. And David said, Mephibosheth. And he answered, Behold thy servant!*

Jordan, up close to the Sea of Galilee, and thus well away from David's centre of activity in Jerusalem. It would seem that Mephibosheth lived a life of hiding in the home of Machir, perhaps fearing the day word should get to David of where he could be found.

Little is known of his host, Machir. He perhaps cared for Saul's descendant out of respect for Saul, due to his early deliverance of Jabesh in Gilead from the Ammonites (I Sam. 11). This man was later very helpful to David and his followers as well when fleeing from Absalom (17:27-29), perhaps due to David's kindness shown now to Mephibosheth.

Vs. 5-6 – *"He fell on his face, and did reverence"* – So the fateful, fearful day finally came, with the knock of the king's messengers at the door, requiring Mephibosheth's presence before the king. His actions before David display his fear, for he was surely thinking his worst nightmare had at last come. It was surely the day of his execution!

9:7 *And David said unto him, Fear not: for I will surely shew thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually.*
9:8 *And he bowed himself, and said, What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?*
9:9 *Then the king called to Ziba, Saul's servant, and said unto him, I have given unto thy master's son all that pertained to Saul and to all his house.*

Vs. 7 – *"Fear not"* – Where condemnation was expected according to man's custom, comfort was instead given according to grace. Rather than the expected death, David gave Mephibosheth the entire inheritance of Saul's estate, and the happy honour of ever after eating with the king at his own table. Oh hear the whisper of the Lord's words here. To every sinner who has believed in Jesus He says *"Fear not".* Where condemnation is due, only comfort in Christ.

Vs. 8 – "Who am I that you would even look upon me, let alone grace me so abundantly?" Mephibosheth's humility is an example to us, an expression of what should be in the heart of every believer blessed in Jesus.

Vs. 9 – Ziba had likely worked the land for many years since the tragic death of Saul and sons. He was probably profiting from the property and perhaps entertaining the hope that he and his sons could keep it. This may have been the subtle hope

9:10 *Thou therefore, and thy sons, and thy servants, shall till the land for him, and thou shalt bring in the fruits, that thy master's son may have food to eat: but Mephibosheth thy master's son shall eat bread alway at my table. Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.*

9:11 *Then said Ziba unto the king, According to all that my lord the king hath commanded his servant, so shall thy servant do. As for Mephibosheth, said the king, he shall eat at my table, as one of the king's sons.*

9:12 *And Mephibosheth had a young son, whose name was Micha. And all that dwelt in the house of Ziba were servants unto Mephibosheth.*

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in his heart when revealing to David where Mephibosheth was living.

Vs. 10 – *"Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants"* – Saul's estate must have been a large one to require so many labourers to work it. There was great wealth at stake here, a lordly inheritance.

Now consider with me the sudden and amazing change in the landscape of life for Mephibosheth;

- Not only was he freed from hiding, but now he was free to go anywhere, holding his head high. He had not only been spared, but had received a privileged status among the friends of the king.

- Not only was he released from fear of the king, but now he was actually under the king's protection! No longer was he as if a criminal, but now honoured to the highest, protected by the highest among men.

- No longer was he a pauper living in somebody else's house, but now gifted to the max!

Understand how beautifully this situation pictures the position of the saved in Jesus Christ;

- As David might rightfully destroy Mephibosheth, so we are worthy of destruction from God's hand.

- As David did the unnatural in honouring Mephibosheth, so God would honour us, the dishonourable, who are crippled, maimed, disfigured as well in our sin.

- As Mephibosheth's good fortune was not due to who he was personally but solely to his relation to his father, even so the blessing of God available to man has nothing to do with what we are or do. It solely depends on whether we are related to Jesus Christ. In Christ we are loved by God through His love for His Son. God was illustrating through this event what He would do through His Son. All who accept Jesus will find favour with the Father in heaven because of their union with the Son.

- As Mephibosheth was not only spared death but invited to eat at the king's table, so we

who are in Christ are not only spared but are invited to eat at the King's table. Compare Psalm 23 *"Thou hast prepared a table before me"*. With the words of the Shulamite in Song of Solomon we marvel that the King of kings Himself *"brought me to the banqueting house, and His banner over me was love"!!*

- As Mephibosheth was given the inheritance of a kingly estate, so Peter speaks of the unfading inheritance *"reserved in heaven"* for all who are safe in Christ (I Pet. 1:4; Eph. 1:11).

In Mephibosheth we see the proper, humble attitude of a grateful believer toward Christ (19:28). Compare again the humble response of Ruth (chapter 2), bowing with surprise and relief before the kindness of Boaz, and asking, *"Why have I found grace in thine eyes, that thou shouldest take knowledge of me, seeing I am a stranger?"* In our modern man-exalting, self-esteem-soaked societies such a response seems so very strange. But it is the proper response of a humble, unassuming heart. *"What is thy servant, that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?"* Such is our self-effacing expression when finally a clear vision of the unmerited grace of Christ breaks in upon our soul. We are indeed unworthy of the *least* of His favour.

Instead of the eternal death we are so worthy of at the King's hand, we have been granted the grace of a place of honour and privilege and eternal wealth, eating always at the King's own table. From utterly "undone" to utterly enriched! Oh the wonder that the most lordly of all would love the most lowly of all! That the most holy would love the most unholy! *Oh the unspeakable grace of God!!*

Consider further the wonder of what is pictured here. It has been the Lord's grace throughout the ages to willingly invite fallen man into communion with Himself. He has been the initiator of this, the seeker, even as David sought, found, and invited Mephibosheth. In Romans 11:9-10 Paul quotes from Psalms 69:22-23, describing God's response to those who stubbornly refuse His grace; *"Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompence unto them". "Their table"* speaks of the privileged place of close communion the Jewish nation enjoyed with the Lord, receiving provision from His hand, as if eating at His table. Of all people of earth they were chosen to eat with the King at His own table. As with Mephibosheth, this they received not because of

some special worthiness in them but because of their connection to Abraham, whom God loved. Mephibosheth with David is a picture or illustration of Israel with God. Israel is loved and preserved and privileged and provisioned *"for the fathers' sakes"* (vs. Rom. 11:28). Israel's yearly feasts as well were a visual representation of this *"table"* or provision of the Lord, for all the feasts were celebrated *"unto the Lord"*. Those feasts were all memorials of the Lord's past, present, and future goodness to them as His chosen nation. Praise God we have entered into the same! The church ordinance of Communion carries a similar notion, feasting together with the Lord around His surpassing grace seen in Christ's death in the past, and the grace of what He has promised and prepared for our eternal future.

Oh there is such tragic irony in the Jewish nation slapping away the Lord's hand in putting their own Messiah to death *on the feast day of Passover!* It was on that very day of celebrating their deliverance from Egypt that they put their Deliverer to death. With a surface show of celebrating God's goodness to them they actually displayed their inward hatred for Him. As Jesus had said to them, it is impossible to honour the true God and not honour Jesus His Son (Jn. 5:23). David's prayer in Psalm 69 to that One so willing and able to be their very best Friend

and Bread of Life, is that the Lord would "turn the table" on them. Because of Israel's ingratitude David asks that their greatest Friend might turn to their worst Enemy, trapping and tripping and hastening them to the slaughter! And so God has done as a result of the treachery of Calvary.

Chapter 10

Let's put this chapter in its context. Consider what we have seen in more recent chapters;

- Chapters 6-7 – David desired to bless the Lord, first restoring Him to a central place of worship among his people, then seeking to honour Him with a temple rather than a tent.
- Chapter 9 – David blessed Jonathan in his kindness to Mephibosheth, blessing his fellow countryman.
- Chapter 10 – David now attempted to bless a foreigner, in his kindly approach to Hanun, the new king of Ammon.

It was an era of David blessed and blessing; both God and men, both citizens and stranger. Perhaps we have a picture here of Jesus the Son of David in His earthly life. His foremost desire was to honour His Father, as He came to seek the welfare first of His fellow countrymen (Gospels). Then, with His rejection, He turned to seek the welfare of the foreign Gentiles (Acts). Yet tucked in the middle of these displays of David's kindness is chapter 8, the record of his fierce conquest of the surrounding nations, lands promised by God to Israel. David

was merely claiming what was theirs. Where a nation resisted they were crushed. Where a people willingly bowed they were received (8:9-11). It all depended on their attitude or response to the conquest. Behold in David *"the goodness and severity of God"* (Rom. 11:22), His severe justice hand-in-glove with His gracious goodness. The Lord is hard as brass and unstoppable like David and Joshua against His enemies, relentlessly taking all that is His without hiccup or set-back. Yet He is quite willing to receive those coming to Him in humility, with a genuine desire even to bless them!

Vs. 1 – *"And it came to pass after this"* – Some suggest the events of this chapter coincide with chapter 8, thus this being further detail on the brief mention of Ammon in 8:12. But with the point made here in vs. 1 that these things took place *"after this",* it would seem the events here describe a later attempt by the Ammonites and Arameans to rebel against David's rule, rather than referring again to their initial fall to David.

"The king of the children of Ammon died" – The Ammonite people came from the incestuous union

10:2 *Then said David, I will shew kindness unto Hanun the son of Nahash, as his father shewed kindness unto me. And David sent to comfort him by the hand of his servants for his father. And David's servants came into the land of the children of Ammon.*
10:3 *And the princes of the children of Ammon said unto Hanun their lord, Thinkest thou that David doth honour thy father, that he hath sent comforters unto thee? hath not David rather sent his servants unto thee, to search the city, and to spy it out, and to overthrow it?*
10:4 *Wherefore Hanun took David's servants, and shaved off the one half of their beards, and cut off their garments in the middle, even to their buttocks, and sent them away.*
10:5 *When they told it unto David, he sent to meet them, because the men were greatly ashamed: and the king said, Tarry at Jericho until your beards be grown, and then return.*

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of Lot with his youngest daughter, resulting in the son/grandson Benammi, father of the Ammonite nation (Gen. 19:38). The land of the Ammonites was situated east of the Jordan beyond Gilead. Their king who had died was Nahash, the same who threatened Jabesh-Gilead some 50 years before, in the early days of Saul's reign (I Sam. 11). Nahash lived to a good old age, therefore his son, Hanun, could not have been a youngster. Yet he comes across as a man without discretion in this situation.

Vs. 2 – *"Then said David, I will shew kindness unto Hanun"* – There is no biblical record of the kindness Nahash showed to David, referred to here. Perhaps it was something relating to their mutual enemy in Saul.

Vs. 3-5 – Due to their suspicions, Ammon humiliated David's ambassadors, shaving a portion of their beards and partially exposing them by

cutting their robes short, up to their hips. To handle David's ambassadors in such a manner was to handle David the same. Ammon's action was a deliberate insult. It could only have been an intentional declaration of war. Perhaps they were using this as an occasion to form a united revolt.

Even so, the way we handle the Lord's ambassadors, those who come faithfully carrying His words, is to handle the Lord the same. Remember how Jesus sent His messengers to the cities of Israel in Luke 10, and the way they were handled was to handle the Lord the same, as if He Himself had come to them. Jesus said to His disciples, *"he that heareth you heareth Me; and he that despiseth you despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me"* (Lk. 10:16). To despise the messenger is to despise the God who sent him. To despise their word is to despise the Spirit who gave it.

We saw evidence of fear in Mephibosheth before David (9:6-7), displaying his suspicion of murderous purpose in his king. Even so Hanun was easily convinced by his counsellors to suspect malicious designs in David. On both counts men misread David's sincerity. Do we have any indication that David in his conquests was ever

given to the kind of sly trickery these were suspecting of him? Seems his way was to be much more up front.

Perhaps we have here another lesson in the rashness of inexperienced leadership, as with Rehoboam's decision to accept the harsh advice of his younger counsellors (I Ki. 12), a decision that badly back-fired on him as well. Thoughtless indiscretion can be an expensive business. It cost Ammon 1000 talents of silver (I Chron. 19:6) and much more besides, and it cost Rehoboam 5/6 of the tribes.

We can understand as well the difficult situation Hanun was in. David was not one to have for an enemy. He had massacred 2/3 of the Moabite men (8:2). He had wiped out nearly every Edomite male (I Ki. 11:15-16). To a foreigner such as Hanun, David could easily come across as a doubtful friend. Put yourself in Hanun's shoes. What would have been his best move at this point, rather than the obvious declaration of war that he chose? What else but complete humble submission, as Nineveh before the Lord's warning? Mephibosheth might have fled from David's request to come to him. In fear, he too might have assumed the worst and tried to rally popular support for himself against David.

But instead he went and humbled himself before his king. And what did he discover? The amazing truth that David only longed to bless him and lift him to honour and free him from all fear and…and…and… What would Hanun of the Ammonites have discovered? That David really did want to show him kindness. That he really was not a shifty-eyed, vicious tyrant, exploring only for means to destroy them. Again it is as many suspect of the Lord, that He seeks only to destroy sinners. Some might look upon the destruction the Lord has brought upon people (Flood, Sodom) and see Him in the same way some looked upon David in his day. As the most terrible of enemies. To be sure God is the most terrible Enemy one could ever have. Yet if they would just humble themselves and come to Him they would find in Him so much more than Hanun would have found in David. But alas, instead of receiving David's kindness, Hanun listened to those around him and was convinced instead to reject and even revile his offered grace. In the same way many listen to the voice or attitude of those around them concerning the Lord, rather than hearing the Lord's words. Hanun would have had to resist the attitude of those around him in order to find the way of blessing. He must deny one or the other. The point was made in vs. 3 that he was *"their lord"*. So it was his call, as with Pilate, to lead in an appropriate

way. Even so that thief on the cross who received paradise had to run against the doubting attitude concerning Jesus all around him. And in doing so he was *eternally blessed* for it!! Humble submission was the only proper option for Hanun. Just as it is the only proper option for all men before God, opening the door to life and blessing. David, as God, was poised and ready to bless. Yet because Hanun chose resistance he chose the way of death and destruction for himself and his nation. Even so it will be for rejecting, unsaved man.

As humble submission was the only way, not only to preservation, but to blessing before David, so it will be the same before the Son of David in Christ's coming kingdom. And as one rising up in rebellion here caused others (the Arameans) to climb on board and join them, even so it will be the same at the end of the Christ's 1000-year reign (Rev. 20). As this resistance was easily squashed by David's (the Lord's) superior power, so will that last one be as well. Man cannot resist God's will.

Though they had suspicions concerning David, it would have been far better even to just remain cautiously, quietly observant. This is usually always a better response than aggressions, or even

quickly coming to conclusions, as Rehoboam's rash choice. How much better to exercise cautious patience than a more aggressive stance, waiting and watching until greater clarity comes. We are always wise, in dealing with each other, to give to the other the benefit of any doubt and observe until God makes things clear. We can lay ourselves open to blame while suspecting blame in others by jumping to conclusions too quickly.

So the tragic story here is that when King David would have willingly shown kindness, he instead crushed these who refused in their suspicion to simply believe and receive. So it is with God! We see God in his dealings with man here in this account of David with Ammon. He comes to show His kindness, and His desire is sincere. He really would show His wonderful grace to any soul willing to receive Him. But man in his sin concludes that it cannot be true. There must some twist, some subterfuge, some sting in the tail, some design to fleece him of his hard-earned goods. And so he doubts and denies it and even blasphemes. He perhaps even hates and mocks and abuses the Lord's messengers who bring the word to him, the good news of the master's desire to grace. Fortunately God's fuse is much longer than David's. For He sent prophets through the ages who were

10:6 *And when the children of Ammon saw that they stank before David, the children of Ammon sent and hired the Syrians of Bethrehob and the Syrians of Zoba, twenty thousand footmen, and of king Maacah a thousand men, and of Ishtob twelve thousand men.*

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hated and ignored and abused and put to death. Then He sent His own Son, only for Him to be rejected and abused and murdered as well. And even then He sent further to His rejecting people Peter and Stephen and Paul to seek again for those among them who would recognize God's desire to bless. And He sends further the message of Hebrews, aimed particularly at Jewish concerns, pleading *"why will ye die O house of Israel?!"*

Vs. 6-14 – Campaign Against Ammon.

Vs. 6 – It is unclear whether the possibility of war was a realization that only hit Ammon's leaders afterward or if that was their purpose from the start. But it soon became evident to them that David would not let this incident stand unanswered. It seems reasonable that there might have been some previous discussion with nations to the north to ensure that they would side with Ammon in the event of conflict. Compare Christ's words in Luke 14:25-33 concerning a king first assessing his strength before going to war.

Beth-rehob – This was the house ("beth") of Rehob, father of Hadadezer, king of Zobah (8:3). Thus this presumably was the capital city of Zobah.

Zoba – Appears to be the same as Zobah in 8:3. Again this was a small nation about 120 kms northeast of the Sea of Galilee, in one of the large valley regions west and perhaps north of Damascus. It seems Zobah, under Hadadezer, had been prominent among the small kingdoms of that region before David's rise to conquest.

Maacah – A small nation north of Gilead, east of the northern end of the Sea of Galilee.

Ish-tob – "Ish" is Hebrew for "man". Thus this likely refers to the men of Tob. The small kingdom of Tob was east of Galilee and a bit south of Maacah. This was the area where Jephthah lived before he became a more responsible citizen as captain of Israel's army, when Ammon attacked in the days of the judges (Judges 11:5).

Do you remember what Ammon paid for this help from the north? We find in the parallel account in I Chronicles 19:6 that the price tag was 1000 talents of silver. Let's put this figure into modern terms. 1 talent = 34 kgs. Thus 1,000 talents = 34,000 kgs of

10:7 *And when David heard of it, he sent Joab, and all the host of the mighty men.*
10:8 *And the children of Ammon came out, and put the battle in array at the entering in of the gate: and the Syrians of Zoba, and of Rehob, and Ishtob, and Maacah, were by themselves in the field.*

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silver. The current value of silver is about R300/oz, which = R1,058/kg. Multiplying this figure by 34,000 kgs = R36 million!! This price was paid for 33,000 soldiers, equalling only about R1,090/man.

Vs. 7 – *"When David heard of it, he sent Joab"* – The action of Ammon was a personal affront against David, with all Israel. Therefore it seems David should have been a part of this effort. Perhaps it was indication of his enjoying ease too much? In the next chapter David's choice to stay home *"at the time when kings go forth to battle"* will land him in the most serious trouble. We are always wise to just be where we *should* be, doing what we *should* be doing. The process of decline begins slowly, and as insignificantly as this passing comment of David's failure to lead this attack against rebellion.

Vs. 8 – The battle took place outside the city of Medeba (I Chron. 19:7), about 20 kms east of the northern end of the Dead Sea, near Mt. Nebo. It was a city that had belonged to the tribe of Reuben, but Ammon held possession of it at this point it seems. The Ammonites aligned themselves before the city

10:9 *When Joab saw that the front of the battle was against him before and behind, he chose of all the choice men of Israel, and put them in array against the Syrians:*
10:10 *And the rest of the people he delivered into the hand of Abishai his brother, that he might put them in array against the children of Ammon.*

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walls, while the Aramean mercenaries were positioned separately. Ammon seemed to anticipate defeat, placing themselves before a way of easy escape into the city, and leaving the Arameans to fend for themselves in the open. The result of this set-up was to form a battle line on two sides.

Vs. 9-11 – Immediately upon seeing the situation, Joab knew he must divide his troops to face both fronts at the same time. So he separated out a large band of elite troops and faced off against the large Syrian host, giving the bulk of his troops over to the command of his brother Abishai to face the Ammonites near the city. They agreed together that each must keep an eye to the welfare of the other and be ready to run to the aid of the other if one was unable to cope with his front.

Consider this arrangement as a principle of mutual help that applies to us in life's battles as well. We all have our own battlefront for which we are responsible, involving work, home, church, being a good child, parent, spouse, worker, etc. Yet we all must ever be mindful of our brothers and how they

10:11 *And he said, If the Syrians be too strong for me, then thou shalt help me: but if the children of Ammon be too strong for thee, then I will come and help thee.*
10:12 *Be of good courage, and let us play the men for our people, and for the cities of our God: and the LORD do that which seemeth him good.*

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are faring on their personal battlefronts as well. *"Look not every man on his own things, but every man also upon the things of others"*, Paul said in Philippians 2:3. We must be ready to bear with each other in our burdens, quick to run to the aid, to lend a hand or Rand according to need. It might be a word of encouragement or reproof we need to speak. When I am strong, and in the areas where I am strong, I must be there to help my brother, who is struggling in a weaker situation or with lesser abilities. That when he is strong, and in the areas where he is better equipped, he might help me in my times of weakness. Compare the principle of equality or "sanctified socialism" in II Corinthians 8:14. As we help others in our times of greater financial strength so the Lord will see that there are others to help us in our lean times.

Vs. 12 – We hear good words of courage from Joab here, even giving the outcome over to the Lord, as if his trust was really there. Joab does not come across as a man dependent on God, calling on the Lord for His help. But there was in him some nod to God as the Master of every outcome. It is about

10:13 *And Joab drew nigh, and the people that were with him, unto the battle against the Syrians: and they fled before him.*
10:14 *And when the children of Ammon saw that the Syrians were fled, then fled they also before Abishai, and entered into the city. So Joab returned from the children of Ammon, and came to Jerusalem.*

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as far as we ever see this man go with the Lord. Consider how it is the same with many folks. Lives are lived mostly as if God does not exist, with only some mention of the Lord, some nod to Him at the stress points when we really need Him. But there is no real bow to Him as Lord of all, and of all times. Compare Psalm 107.

Vs. 13 – These Aramean mercenaries were of course paid soldiers, and were likely already holding their money. They had no personal interest in what was at stake, apart from their honour, which would soon be severely wounded. So they very quickly proved to be of no real value to Ammon. We get the impression they fled as soon as Joab approached them. Later we are at least told that they *"fought with him"* (vs. 17).

Vs. 14 – How weak the Ammonites considered themselves on their own before Israel's forces! Obviously they never should have been sabre-rattling in the first place if they knew they were no match in their own strength. True wisdom adopts

a far more thoughtful approach.

Why did Joab not finish the job? Rather than besiege the walled city, now harbouring the rebellious Ammonite army, Joab returned to Jerusalem to report back to David. He only returned to finish the job against Ammon the following year (11:1). Perhaps it was not the best besieging season? Thus they later returned *"at the time when kings go forth to battle"* (11:1), suggesting a better season for such work from a weather or crops perspective. Far wiser to besiege walled cities when the springs and rivers were flowing for their thirst (and coffee) and the crops were ripening for their hunger. Perhaps they needed clarity from King David as to how far they should pursue things with these "friends". Though a fast, fit runner would have solved this problem. Maybe they anticipated the further trouble that came from the north. Even the fleeing Arameans might attack Israel while their army was still besieging Ammon.

Consider Ammon now thoroughly defeated, with all of their outside supports knocked away as well, with the next chapter yet to come when their destruction would be completed. Even so it is with Satan and those who are his. He too has been defeated (Col. 2:15), with the job yet to be finished properly.

Though his power is broken;

- He will yet be cast *down* to earth from all contact with heaven in the middle of the Great Tribulation (Rev. 12).
- He will be chained and cast *down* to the abyss during Christ's 1000-year earthly kingdom (Rev. 20:1-3).
- He will be cast finally and forever to the Lake of Fire after his release and revolt at the close of the kingdom era (Rev. 20:10).

It is all *down, down, down* from the moment any soul turns from God in rejection. Remember Jonah running from God, *down* to Joppa, and *down* into the ship, and *down* into the hold of the ship (Jonah 1).

Vs. 15-19 – Campaign Against Arameans

Vs. 15 – It is probably not too difficult to understand the motivations behind events here. The honour of the Arameans had been wounded. Though we do not get the impression they had tried very hard to preserve their honour in fighting beside the

Ammonites. But then we must remember that the Ammonites had faced off against Israel by putting themselves in front of the city gates (vs. 8), poised and ready to duck inside the city walls as soon as the need arose. Their Aramean hired helpers of course could see this. Being men of war and experienced in the ways of men in war, they would have understood perfectly well what Ammon was planning. They could see that the Ammonites themselves were only in that encounter half-heartedly. The Arameans were perhaps suspecting that Ammon wanted *them* to win their battle for them! "If that is their attitude, the people with everything at stake in this, then what are *we* doing here risking our necks for that lot? Look at them! They are all ready to run like jackrabbits into their hole, and leave us out here on our own against Israel!" If Ammon had displayed commitment and courage from the start, if they had thrown themselves into the battle with abandon, their example may have made a tremendous impact on the resolve of those Arameans, though only hired help. There is powerful influence in example. If there is no sold-out resolve evident in you and me, if we are lined up just outside the city gates, then nobody else will be moved or attracted to join our purpose. But where there is *passion* in our purpose others are drawn and stick.

Perhaps it was all a bluff anyway. Maybe they were just trying to intimidate Israel with numbers and scare them away from any conflict. But Israel did not scare! It was something they learned under David's leadership, from his first fearless encounter with Goliath, to be afraid of nothing in the Lord's battle, to tackle anything! The leader sets the tone for his people.

Though for the Ammonites the Arameans were not prepared to risk anything, yet to avenge their honour they were now determined to press the matter. We can well imagine how they wished to regain control of their own land and lives lost to Israel. They longed for the old days when they were their own masters. They had been the great power of that area for some time and liked it that way, liked holding the reins. It was pride and the demand for their freedom that was driving them. If they would just stay down and happily live in submission their lives would be peace. But their pride would not allow it! With the result that they were thoroughly crushed again with a great slaughter. When prideful rebellion raises its ugly head, terrible losses are always suffered, with unrest and frustration the result. But when one just gives up the fight and allows God's anointed and appointed leader to lead, there is rest. For

these it was necessary to be twice thrashed, until they were forced at last to quiet and rest under Israel's rule. What type are you? The type who needs to be thrashed? Twice thrashed?

The same principle is true of the old nature within us. If we chose to fight the authority of the Lord and of those He has appointed over us, there is only unrest and loss, until we at last give up the fight. Only in submission is there rest. Yet the determined pride of man, as with the Arameans and Ammonites, will not rest under the authority of another. It is determined to have the old way of self-rule. Churches and families are rocked because of this in us. Many a marriage or home is ruined or made much less than it might have been through this same prideful rebellion.

Vs. 16 – This Hadarezer must be the same as Hadadezer of chapter 8. They enlisted the help of those of their race in the area of Mesopotamia between the rivers, and they began moving to the south, off to the east of the Sea of Galilee, with Shobach as their captain.

10:17 *And when it was told David, he gathered all Israel together, and passed over Jordan, and came to Helam. And the Syrians set themselves in array against David, and fought with him.*

10:18 *And the Syrians fled before Israel; and David slew the men of seven hundred chariots of the Syrians, and forty thousand horsemen, and smote Shobach the captain of their host, who died there.*

Vs. 17 – They got as far as Helam, near the border of Manasseh, about 65 kms due east of the Sea of Galilee. This time it was David leading his army out against them. And he met the Arameans there before they crossed the border of Manasseh, thus hitting them before they touched his own people. He, as the good shepherd and protector of his people, would not let the attacker cross their border to ravage among his own flock.

Vs. 18 – Again the attackers soon faltered and fled before Israel's army, and there remained only the matter of counting the dead; 700 chariots, 40,000 horsemen, and Shobach their captain. Again we find textual uncertainties here. The I Chronicles record of the same event (19:18) gives the stats as 7000 chariots and 40,000 footmen (vs. 18). The Hebrew words for hundred (me'a) and thousand (eleph) are not even close. The Hebrew words for horsemen (parashim, from parash) and footmen (ragli, from regel) are in no way similar either. "Copyist errors" seems to be the response of most Bible scholars at this point. And again, perhaps

God does have a lesson for the more radical text preservationists by allowing such difficult questions in the text. Yet consider some other possible suggestions;

- The chariot force was divided into companies of 10, of which there were 700, with a captain over each company. Thus the Samuel account refers to the 700 captains and their companies while the Chronicles account refers to all the men involved.

- Perhaps there was a team of 10 men per each chariot, as back up drivers and archers, mechanics, spare horse tenders, etc. Compare the difference in wording in the italics of II Samuel 10:18 & I Chronicles 19:18 (KJV).

- In those days horsemen did not fight from horseback but on the ground, using their horses only as a means to move around the battlefield more quickly, then dismounting to fight as footmen. By the time I Chronicles was written horsemen had begun to fight from horseback. Thus the later Chronicles account calls them footmen because they were not really the same as the horsemen of later times.

10:19 *And when all the kings that were servants to Hadarezer saw that they were smitten before Israel, they made peace with Israel, and served them. So the Syrians feared to help the children of Ammon any more.*

- Perhaps some footmen were also trained as horsemen and could be classified as either. Thus 700 on horseback were killed and 6,300 potential horsemen were killed as well.

Angazi. If we accept the idea of copyist errors, can we talk of a Bible without error? The Greek Septuagint was a poor copy of the Hebrew original, yet this was the Bible God allowed into popular use in the apostles' day and the one from which they commonly quoted. Does God have a slightly different view of the preservation of His word than some among Christians today?

Vs. 19 – All dissenters landed where they should have begun, with humble submission before God's chosen and anointed king. There were no further arguments or alliances against David, because David dealt firmly and consistently.

Even so it is in the home. If parents will deal firmly and decisively early on, in the way God demands in His Word, they preserve themselves from the need to fight skirmishes all the rest of their days on earth.

Even so it is for mankind today. We may choose the way of rebellion and resistance before God's Anointed King of kings, or we may humbly submit to Him and find rest in his pleasure.

"But the thing
that David had done
displeased the LORD"

(II Sam. 11:27)

Chapter 11

11:1 *And it came to pass, after the year was expired, at the time when kings go forth to battle, that David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel; and they destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah. But David tarried still at Jerusalem.*

<u>11:1-5</u> – David and Bathsheba

Vs. 1 – *"They destroyed the children of Ammon, and besieged Rabbah"* – It is easy to lose sight of the background event happening here, for the juicy bit of soap opera with David's tumble to adultery. What was the circumstance that led to David's fall? It was Israel's army over in Ammon finishing the job begun the year before, with David staying behind at a *"time when kings go forth to battle"*. Where was Bathsheba's husband Uriah later killed? Before the walls of the city of Rabbah (răb′a), the chief city of Ammon. Rabbah is now Amman (äm′än), the capital city of Jordan. Chapter 12 gives the fuller account of the massacre Israel brought upon the nation of Ammon. So before we turn to David's famous fall to adultery, let's finish the job with Ammon first.

Think with me of what leads a soul to eternal rescue in Jesus Christ. It is his faith in God's assurance of destruction, yet with rescue available only through

the word of God's appointed leader. It is what spared the Gibeonites. They correctly became convinced that they were indeed doomed. They believed in their certain destruction if they resisted. But if they could just get the word of Joshua they would be safe. They got it, and they were delivered. Compare Israel when Babylon was coming against Jerusalem. Through the prophet Jeremiah God promised that Jerusalem would be taken, that their destruction was certain, and that the only way for His people was to submit to Babylon (Jer. 27). They must not hold out hope that the city would be miraculously preserved as in Hezekiah's day. It would *not* be! It was the message that made Jeremiah so unpopular in his day. It just was not the kind of word they wished to hear. In fact such a message was considered *criminal* at such a time of rising threat. Even so one carrying God's message of judgment today is also considered wrong, evil, negative, psychotic, twisted, using manipulation techniques in an effort to control. But God's message to them was that if they would bow to the attacking enemy there would be some hope for them. If they would resist, there would be only certain destruction. Jesus later prophesied that Jerusalem would again be destroyed (Lk. 21). And He gave instruction for any who would listen, of the signs indicating the time to flee. They must not hold

out hope that the city would be preserved. It would *not* be! In each new generation it seemed *impossible* that such an ancient city of God like Jerusalem could ever be destroyed. But Jesus promised that Rome would thoroughly sack it. The only answer was to escape ahead of time, to believe in God's warning of ruin. It all depended on what God's prophet said;

- Because Isaiah had promised that Assyria would not take Jerusalem, therefore Jerusalem was delivered in Hezekiah's day.
- Because Jeremiah said it would fall, it fell to Babylon.
- Because Jesus warned of the same, so it came to pass again under Rome.

As Israel cowering in Jerusalem and Ammon cowering in Rabbah, so man clings to his hope for the best, that all will work out as it always has before, that God's threat of destruction will never come, that such ancient, long-standing things could never come down or come to an end. But alas, it always happens *as God says!*

Our God now warns mankind to flee from the wrath to come. Flee to Jesus Christ as our only hope for salvation from God's judgment upon sin. Man

tends to think the fall of his "city" or civilization impossible, and so he holds out in his desperate hope, and perishes with the rest. But faith believes the threat and responds accordingly. Believing God's warning is the starting place. Noah believed God's warning and built an ark to the saving of their lives. Lot believed God's warning and fled the city, while the rest mocked and perished. Nineveh believed God's warning through Jonah and repented in sackcloth and ashes, and was spared. So again, the key to rescue is faith in God's promise of what seems impossible destruction of things that have "always" been. Even so it is in the matter of sin in the believer. We too can begin to think it impossible that the "city" of our lives could ever come down. But God says your sin will find you out. *"He that being often reproved hardens his neck shall suddenly be destroyed and that without remedy"* (Prov. 29:1).

So now consider Hanun and the nation of Ammon in their situation here. What should Hanun's response have been? Israel had begun to deal with them. Ammon had been proven too weak on their own. They had seen that there is no useful help from paid soldiers, no help from anyone. What would have been the wise thing for Ammon to do in between times? What else? Again, Hanun should

have done as the king in Christ's parable (Lk. 14:31-32). He should have recognized that he was not strong enough to face the offended king coming at him. He should have sent ambassadors seeking conditions of peace, and this while David was a great way off, *before* he was forced to the trouble of coming to attack, and thus becoming further provoked. But pride can lock a stubborn man into a course that is ruinous, even though he knows it is a hopeless way. Through his pride he would rather die a terrible death, and bring the same upon his whole nation. Pride prefers even the risk of eternal death, rather than to repent in humility. So it is with man before God. What is man's best and only valid response toward God except to repent in humility? But Ammon probably thought it impossible that their great and ancient civilization could ever come down. Yet they too were crushed by God's anointed king. Beware the very natural refusal to believe the possibility of destruction. God's Anointed One will indeed bring down ancient institutions. He will bring the unrepentant sinner to book, to ruin and shame in the end. He has spoken and so He will do. God's prophets have spoken! Beware the scoffer heart in believing that all things have always been the same and will always be the same (II Pet. 3). Some awareness of history should be enough to cure man of this

notion. Where is Ammon now? Where are Moab and Edom and Babylon and Assyria and Tyre? A life is gone and opportunity really is lost, and that forever! Sin is exposed and a reputation really is ruined. Repentance is refused and God really does visit with devastation. See well the lesson of Ammon here. What else for them but to humble themselves before David, like the Gibeonites before Joshua, and plead for terms of peace? But their stubborn pride drove them down to terrible judgment, when they could see the hand-writing on the wall, when they knew David would be back. What else for the sinner, but to believe God's promise of an answering for sin? We asked the question why Joab did not finish the job on Ammon the year before. We guess at reasons, but none are given. Perhaps it was only to illustrate God's space of grace…*refused!* The same that God allows mankind today. Time had passed, with opportunity, and Ammon *did <u>nothing</u>!!* Until it was TOO LATE! Still grace was available for the one who would come with a right heart. Until it was TOO LATE!

See Ammon as a picture of man. We as they have violated God's righteous sense of propriety, as they violated David's. And unsaved man waits in a dazed, hopeless manner, blinded by pride, until

God's judgment finally falls, refusing the mercy and life that stood available for the one who would come with a right heart and bow before the King of glory.

"But David tarried still at Jerusalem" – This now begins the lengthy portion of this book relating David's time of great troubles, all beginning here with Bathsheba. But it did not really begin with her, did it? All actually began with David hanging back at Jerusalem at a time when it was expected that he would be going to battle with his men. We are not told it was a time when *armies* go forth to battle, but *"when <u>kings</u> go forth to battle"*. We cannot really know all of what moved David to respond as he did in this chapter. Some things are obvious, some are not. Many aspects do not seem reasonable for a man who had God, and had just about everything else as well. Yet we can safely do some sanctified surmising. David had come to the extent of things. He could not build God's house, for that must wait. His borders were all secure. His kingdom was thoroughly established. Nothing really remained to be done. No threats, no challenges, no frontiers, with deserts to the south and east, and the sea to the west, and all pacified in between, and extending north right up to the great river and beyond. The Ammon campaign was just a mopping up exercise and did not need David's involvement. He could

easily leave it to underlings. In fact where was he really *needed* at all? Now what? Perhaps it was a low point for David, with little real meaning or purpose left from an earthly angle?

Regardless of the reasons involved, and whether or not it was a low time for David, what was the right way forward for him? What else but to just get up and keep going, doing what was right for him to do for that day? The disciplines of doing what is right, even when there is a "what is it all for" moaning like a sorrowful wind deep within our heart, will keep us from a world of fiery trouble and regret. It is a classic place where Satan can hit us, taking advantage of our self-focus, our "woe is me" attitude, our idleness, our depression. There is great reward in simple, steadfast endurance at the hard times, the low times, the dry times, the meaningless times. *"Blessed is the man that endureth temptation: for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him"* (James 1:12).

Vs. 2 – *"In an eventide"* – It was not necessarily dark.

In the Jewish culture their day ran from 6 to 6. After 6 p.m. was considered "night". The "evening sacrifice" was at the 9th hour or 3 p.m. So this was sometime before 6 p.m. And we presume it was the summer season, when days are longer in the northern hemisphere. But whether by daylight or lamp light, David was able to see clearly enough.

"And from the roof he saw a woman washing herself" – It was not inappropriate for David to be on the roof of his house. Their houses had flat roofs, and folks would tend to relax up there in the evening breeze to escape the heat of the sun-baked brick house.

Bathsheba was of course in the privacy of her own home. Yet surely she had an enclosed room with curtains somewhere in her house that she could use for bathing. Surely this would have been a wiser plan. She was close enough and visible enough that David could not only see her, but that she was a beautiful woman as well.

Now she might have made the point that what she did in *her* house and the way she did it was *her* business, and anybody within sight should just mind their own affairs. Just as the common attitude that what a woman wears on her body and what she chooses to expose is her business, and

anybody looking on must mind their own business and keep a leash on their own thoughts. But when we see what resulted here, we are led back to the question of the wisdom of such actions. One gets the impression from Bathsheba's later dealings that she was not a dull woman, which lends to the thought that there was a measure of knowing in her of what she was doing here, suggesting that part of the fault for this was hers. Perhaps it was not treachery in her, but at the least there was a great lack of discretion. Compare Proverbs 11:22 & 31:30. Bathsheba had a favourable appearance, but was she a woman who feared the Lord? She had a good man in Uriah, but was she gunning for David in a measure, making herself visible to him while her husband was away? Had she thought through what it would mean for her husband, who would be in the way if something developed with the king?

Vs. 3 – *"And David sent and inquired after the woman"* – David's interest was stirred and he began making inquiries concerning her. This in itself was not an evil. David was a man given to marrying multiple wives. Thus she was another possibility if

available. But when he discovered that she was a married woman that of course should have been the end of it.

"The daughter of Eliam" – Eliam was the son of Ahithophel (23:34), and Ahithophel we later learn was one of David's trusted counsellors (15:12). This factor adds to the treachery of David's further actions against trusted men in his service.

Vs. 4 – *"And David sent messengers, and took her"* – Here is the point where it turned to sin. David chose to not leave it, even though he knew her married status. The threat of God's law should have been enough to turn David away, for adultery was clearly punishable by death (Lev. 20:10).

"She came in unto him" – Though David took the initiative and *"took her,"* Bathsheba willingly *"came"* as well. Both were involved in this. While Uriah was faithfully serving David in his army, David was treacherously messing with his wife.

Oh how David needed Bathsheba to be an Abigail at that critical moment, to stand up to him and

suggest the ugly blemish this would splash across his good record (I Sam. 25). Compare I Kings 15:4-5. But alas, Bathsheba was no Abigail. And it was wise and faithful Abigail that David trampled in this action as well.

"For she was purified from her uncleanness" – This may refer to the two weeks of the month when it was not uncleanness according to the law for a married woman to be sexually active (Lev. 15:19, 28). Or it may refer to cleansing after a physical encounter according to the law, which specified washing and being unclean until evening (Lev. 15:18). Either way, there was some thought of adhering to God's law even while in the most obvious violation of it! They were going in two directions. Compare Proverbs 7:14, where we see the proverbial adulteress making herself available in violation of the law, while suggesting her fitness according to the law. Compare the similar idea of Jesus accusing the religious leaders of tithing to the nth degree while violating weightier matters of the law. We too can advertise our purity in lesser matters (which of course tend to be a lot easier), while trampling all over God's righteousness.

Vs. 5 – *"And the woman conceived"* – This of course would have become evident weeks later. The army would have been many months in dealing with Ammon and breaking into their cities. So there was time for things to develop. Pregnancy was a death sentence for her, without the king's intervention.

Compare sin's progression in James 1:14-15;

- *"Drawn away of his own lust"* – The evil one seeks through our own lust to get us alone, *"away"* from helpful encouragement and accountability to fellow believers. Yet it really is *our own lust* that drives us. The word behind *"drawn away"* here is taken from fishing or hunting. As game is lured from hiding, so a man is allured from the safety of his self-restraint or refuge in Christ or Christian fellowship. David allowed himself to be alone with idle time on his hands, rather than keeping active with his responsibilities, or holding himself responsible to God as Joseph did.

- *"Enticed"* – The opportunity to sin presents itself with all of its alluring charm. The victim is baited or beguiled to take the bait. It wiggles and flutters and flatters and whispers its promising charms. Compare Proverbs 5,

6, & 7 where specifics are given in the words, ways, and looks of the temptress. David was confronted with the attractiveness of evil, being alone and vulnerable.

- *"Then when lust hath conceived"* – After the figure of involvement in an illicit relationship, conception takes place through union, through pursuing and embracing rather than avoiding and fleeing, getting closer and entertaining lust, rather than getting away. David approached Bathsheba rather than fleeing from temptation. Here was the point when it became sin in David, when he chose to linger, to *"think upon a maid"* (Job 31:1). God tells us to *"flee youthful lusts"*. Compare I Corinthians 10:13, *"But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape"* (I Cor. 10:13).

- *"It bringeth forth sin"* – Lust acted on, bears the offspring of sin, of offence against God. David fell into an immoral relationship that was all wrong before his God.

- *"Sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death"* – When sin grows to maturity as a growing child it results in death. Compare the rest of the story in Proverbs 7:22-27; 5:3-23; 2:18-

19. People began dying as a result of this. First Uriah, with other soldiers as well (vs. 17 & 24), then the baby. Further sins of immorality in David's family (after his example) led to the death of Amnon and then Absalom.

Let me suggest to you that women know what they're doing in displaying themselves, though they may not fully understand the *power* of it. And they do it for one main reason, to show themselves off or available to men. It is a bit like pheromones in animals I expect. And then they are surprised when men act like animals and treat them like animals. Yes, the failure of men is of course involved as well. Men are certainly given to falling to Satan's standard approach with *"the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes"* (I Jn. 2:16). The principal fault here was David's, for allowing this progression, even as Eve did the same in the Garden. David's fleshly lust was motivated by what he was allowed to see, and it was *he* who failed to control that passion. God has given answers for just this sort of thing;

- God's answer is to flee, to get away. David should have turned on his heels and just walked away rather than lingering, with a cry to God for help in his heart.

- God's answer is to refuse to continue looking. Compare Job's covenant with his eyes (Job 31).

- God's answer for a man is to find his satisfaction in the wife God has given (Prov. 5:18-20; I Cor. 7).

But as well, a woman is simply not wise to give men something to look at, either in herself or in her daughter. Jesus said that to look on a woman in lust is to commit adultery with her in the heart. If a woman would not wish to become an adulteress or her daughter a fornicator in the hearts of men, then why would they in any way make themselves a lust feast for those looking on? It is an easy thing to claim your freedom and put all the blame on undisciplined men, but that is not the way of wisdom, any more than it would be the way of wisdom to roll in blood and then walk among timber wolves or swim with sharks. David needed Bathsheba's help there, in not making herself available for his eyes. Yes, it was David, but yes, it was her too! Yes, it is undisciplined men. But yes, it is undiscerning women as well, flashing flesh and form before the eyes of men, and not understanding the power of what they are messing with. And it is weak-willed parents, who are afraid they are going to lose their daughter if they take a strong,

11:6 *And David sent to Joab, saying, Send me Uriah the Hittite. And Joab sent Uriah to David.*
11:7 *And when Uriah was come unto him, David demanded of him how Joab did, and how the people did, and how the war prospered.*

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consistent stand against her desire to dress like the world. They do not realize that they actually lead her away by failing to just stand. And by this means they walk right into the same baiting approach with which the world is so consumed. Take a good look at the history record, at what is actually happening out there, and here among us as well. What has become of those girls who were allowed by parents to dress like the world? Are they walking in the love of God now for those concessions allowed to them back then?

11:6-13 – David with Uriah

Vs. 6 – *"Send me Uriah the Hittite"* – Could it be that David was less concerned about messing with Uriah's wife because he was a Hittite, a foreigner, rather than a Jew? His foreignness is mentioned 5 times in this chapter (vs. 3, 6, 17, 21, 24).

Vs. 7 – We have no indication that Uriah had any kind of higher rank, or that he was a messenger for Joab. Would this not make David's special attentions and questions of battle progress rather

11:8 *And David said to Uriah, Go down to thy house, and wash thy feet. And Uriah departed out of the king's house, and there followed him a mess of meat from the king.*
11:9 *But Uriah slept at the door of the king's house with all the servants of his lord, and went not down to his house.*

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irregular and strange? As if Uriah was qualified to know or report on these things. Do you not think this would have been enough to arouse the man's suspicions? Like what is this all about? Why this strange attention and summons from the field? Why all these questions? David's chit-chat appears false, all a front, lining up on his vs. 8 suggestion.

Vs. 8-9 – *"Go <u>down</u> to thy house"* – So obviously the house of Uriah and Bathsheba was *"down"* the hill from David's, thus his ability to see into their house from his roof.

"Wash thy feet" was an idiom for relaxing at home, much the same as we might speak by our own idioms of putting your feet up or letting your hair down or taking it easy.

After Uriah was sent *"a mess of meat"* as well by the king's command. Now it is not that it was a messy plate of eats. "Mess" is an old word for a course of food. Maybe a champagne on ice went along as well? But Uriah would not go down to his house to see his wife. He slept with David's servants in their

11:10 *And when they had told David, saying, Uriah went not down unto his house, David said unto Uriah, Camest thou not from thy journey? why then didst thou not go down unto thine house?*

11:11 *And Uriah said unto David, The ark, and Israel, and Judah, abide in tents; and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into mine house, to eat and to drink, and to lie with my wife? as thou livest, and as thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing.*

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khaya or hostel or whatever facility was made available to them near David's house. Seems it was the servants who happily shared that *"mess of meat"* with Uriah.

Vs. 10-11 – *"Why then didst thou not go down unto thine house?"* – When David queried Uriah's actions the next morning he was confronted with a loyalty greater than his own. Uriah was determined to relax only when his fellow soldiers were able to join him. How could he enjoy the comforts of home when they could not? He, even as a foreigner, a Hittite, saw himself so in union with them that he refused ease without them. It is hard to miss the sharp contrast with David's selfish indulgence in this context.

Compare Christians who are so given to living in ease, when Jesus suffered as He did and continues to labour for the souls of men. If we really believed that He ever lives to intercede for us could we comfortably refrain from labouring with Him in

intercession? If we really believe that Christ's passion and mission and present earnest work is to reach the lost and feed His sheep could we easily refrain from joining Him in that mission? Do you see the application of this man's faithfulness to our own situation? The captain of the host and all of his faithful soldiers were out there in the king's battle suffering all the inconveniences and dangers that involved, and he was expected to relax at home? He could *never* be comfortable there under those circumstances! It would be like your father and brothers out labouring in the field, while you sit at home with your feet up. Could you do that quite comfortably? Would there not be a pang in your heart? Should there not be the same in us when we do little to forward Christ's work on earth? You see, we too are foreigners, having entered into the blessing of close relation with the true God, that which was once more exclusively Israel's. We are enlisted as soldiers in His cause. Having found a home among the blessed, can we so easily do little for Christ's cause, while our Master and faithful brothers are hard at the work out there on the battlefield of the world even now?

Did you notice here that Uriah even mentioned lying with his wife? Makes me wonder if he already suspected the truth, since their house was close to

David's and David was a lover of women and he was home and bored and Uriah's wife was on her own and available and she was pretty and the king was now acting mighty strange. Maybe Uriah did not really want to see his wife, afraid of what he might discover.

Vs. 10 – *"And when they told David"* – Do you see how some in David's house were now aware of what he was about? It seems some could easily see through this effort to call Uriah home to sleep with his wife, as David attempted to cover his tracks. So it appears word of greatest indecency in the royal household was the juicy bit of news now circulating among the people. Folks are not fools. They are quite capable of collecting on what is going on. It is not easy to hide things from people. Those given to evil suspect and look for evil in God's people as well. And being evil, they know what to look for. They know how to read the indicators. Therefore God's counsel to us, not only to abstain from evil but from all *appearance* of it as well;

- *"Provide things honest in the sight of all men"* (Rom. 12:17).
- *"Providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men"* (II Cor. 8:21).

11:12 *And David said to Uriah, Tarry here to day also, and to morrow I will let thee depart. So Uriah abode in Jerusalem that day, and the morrow.*
11:13 *And when David had called him, he did eat and drink before him; and he made him drunk: and at even he went out to lie on his bed with the servants of his lord, but went not down to his house.*
11:14 *And it came to pass in the morning, that David wrote a letter to Joab, and sent it by the hand of Uriah.*

- *"Give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully"* (I Tim. 5:14).
- *"…that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you"* (Titus 2:8).

Vs. 12-13 – Uriah's loyalty ran so deep that he clung to it even drunk. Consider the further evil of David here, acting now as a tempter, even attempting to use alcohol to force or manipulate this man to act against his conscience. It was desperation moving David to obscene actions!

11:14-25 – Uriah's Death on the Battlefield

Vs. 14-15 – David actually sent Uriah back to the battle carrying his own sentence of death. Never so low as in this moment do we see this man. He made this man carry his own death order to the place of his death, as Jesus carried His own cross to the place of His death.

11:15 *And he wrote in the letter, saying, Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die.*
11:16 *And it came to pass, when Joab observed the city, that he assigned Uriah unto a place where he knew that valiant men were.*
11:17 *And the men of the city went out, and fought with Joab: and there fell some of the people of the servants of David; and Uriah the Hittite died also.*

Vs. 16-17 – Now why did God allow their treacherous plan to work?

- Uriah was actually killed rather than only being wounded.
- David did get Bathsheba.
- David was not stoned, nor did he need to flee to a city of refuge.
- He ran into no legal battles with Uriah's family.
- No *"avenger of blood"* or assassin came for him.
- No inconveniences.

God often allows men to succeed in evil without stopping them; as Eve and then Adam, as Ahab with Naboth, as Judas with Jesus. Because He has purposes He is working. What are His purposes here?

- To show a godly example of repentance and

11:18 *Then Joab sent and told David all the things concerning the war;*
11:19 *And charged the messenger, saying, When thou hast made an end of telling the matters of the war unto the king,*
11:20 *And if so be that the king's wrath arise, and he say unto thee, Wherefore approached ye so nigh unto the city when ye did fight? knew ye not that they would shoot from the wall?*
11:21 *Who smote Abimelech the son of Jerubbesheth? did not a woman cast a piece of a millstone upon him from the wall, that he died in Thebez? why went ye nigh the wall? then say thou, Thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.*

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the completeness of His forgiveness upon repentance.

- To provide the occasion for the writing of Psalm 32 & 51.
- To display the courage of godly Nathan.
- To show that God does not miss our evil or fail to deal with it.
- To show the beautiful scene of *"a wise reprover upon an obedient ear"* (Prov. 25:12).

Vs. 20-21 – Do you know who this Jerubbesheth was? Gideon began his career as a judge over Israel when the Lord told him to tear down the altar of the false god Baal in his city and build an altar to the Lord in its place (Judges 6:25-26). In the morning when it was discovered what Gideon had done the men of the city wanted to kill him. But Gideon's father, Joash, stood in his defence, making the very good point that if Baal was really a god then he

should be quite capable of contending for himself. As a result, on that day Joash gave his son another name, Jerubbaal, meaning "Let Baal contend". The name Baal just means lord or master or even husband. It was a word used of God;

- Isaiah 54:5 – *"For thy Maker is thy husband* (baal); *the LORD of hosts is His name".*
- Jeremiah 3:14 – *"Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married* (baal, verb form) *unto you".*

But somewhere along the line it fell out of fashion to have the name Baal in one's name, perhaps wanting to avoid any connection with that false god. And so Baal was replaced with "bosheth", meaning "shame" or "idol", as that which disappoints and leaves worshippers shamed at the last. Thus,

- Jerubbaal became Jerubbesheth, meaning "let the idol contend".
- Eshbaal (man of Baal) became Ishbosheth (2:8; I Chron. 8:33).
- Meribbaal became Mephibosheth (4:4; I

11:24 *And the shooters shot from off the wall upon thy servants; and some of the king's servants be dead, and thy servant Uriah the Hittite is dead also.*
11:25 *Then David said unto the messenger, Thus shalt thou say unto Joab, Let not this thing displease thee, for the sword devoureth one as well as another: make thy battle more strong against the city, and overthrow it: and encourage thou him.*

Chron. 8:34).

This perhaps suggests a principle that we cannot use filthy words and ways and things (rock music, Halloween, etc.) as vehicles to carry God's things.

Abimelech was a son of Gideon through a concubine. After Gideon's death Abimelech rallied popular support for his rule and then killed 70 sons of Gideon (Judges 9). Then he just ran amok in dealing with resistance. Thus when trying to get to the people of the city of Thebez, who had taken refuge in a tower, a woman inflicted a fatal wound by dropping a rock on Abimelech's head from the tower. So getting too close to the wall cost Abimelech his life. This seems to have become a proverbial warning against being drawn too close to the wall of a besieged city. It was likely a common effort for those inside to come out and attack their besiegers (11:17), and then pull back into the city trying to draw the enemy to follow close enough to the wall for the archers to score (or rock throwers).

11:26 *And when the wife of Uriah heard that Uriah her husband was dead, she mourned for her husband.*

11:27 *And when the mourning was past, David sent and fetched her to his house, and she became his wife, and bare him a son. But the thing that David had done displeased the LORD.*

Vs. 25 – David's response was insipid, heartless, and frankly sickening. He was actually inwardly quite relieved and delighted in Uriah's death, one of his finest men!

11:26-27 – David Takes Bathsheba

Vs. 26 – *"And when the wife of Uriah heard…"* – I wonder about Bathsheba's thoughts concerning her husband's death so soon after their adultery. Did she think it coincidence? Did she ever suspect David responsible? Did she rather think it God's judgment for her sin?

Vs. 27 – Why the hurry? Was anybody led off the trail of their adultery by such a hasty marriage? Perhaps many would not know that Uriah never went to his house when called home from the battle. Perhaps there was a more thoughtful element involved. Maybe it was for the preserving of Bathsheba's life that David quickly made her his wife, taking her under his protection. We never hear of any expression of family upset on Uriah's side. Such is life under a monarch, who is quite able to

do as he pleases without suffering the questioning of his subjects. Only that it certainly did not escape God's eye.

Was David still reading his Bible and spending time with God? We can fairly safely assume that this had gone by the wayside. Therefore his weakness against temptation. Such a great and strong warrior David had been in years gone by. And yet his son would one day write through the Spirit's inspiration, *"He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls"* (Prov. 25:28).

It is the ugliest image of David we are left with coming out the end of this fateful chapter. We have seen;

- David's grave disloyalty to loyal men in failing to keep himself from Uriah's wife.
- His wicked attempt to coerce and even drug Uriah into acting against his good principles.
- His cold-hearted instruction for that faithful man's death, with the added treachery of sending it in Uriah's own hand, when the man had already been so badly wronged. As if two things so very wrong would make it right…for David. Such complete selfishness!

- The king successfully pulling Joab into the plot against Uriah's life.
- David's disgustingly false words of sorrow and encouragement with the very convenient battlefield losses.
- David's improper and revealing haste to marry the pretty, pregnant widow.

All for a momentary thrill. A flash of forbidden pleasure, followed by undying guilt and anguish and loss and shame!

It is good tonic for us to see this, that though we be good and godly, yet this is *no immunity* from falling to the very lowest pit of evil if we fail to keep our guard up, if we cease to watch and pray. One thing can lead to another until it comes to this. It is why Jesus commands in Matthew 26:41, *"Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing but the flesh is weak".*

Yet how interesting that such gross sin did not void a man's inspired work from God's Book. How strange to our way of thinking that through the following decades the Lord would still hold David up as an example of godliness. How marvellously significant before God is true repentance. It really

does set a sinful soul right with Him.

Consider Bathsheba's pregnancy as a death sentence for her according to God's unbending law, but for the protective intervention of the king. It is a picture of our condition as violators of God's law, and this making us worthy of death, but for the King of kings embracing us as we embrace Him.

Chapter 12

12:1 *And the LORD sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him, and said unto him, There were two men in one city; the one rich, and the other poor.*

12:1-14 – Nathan's Rebuke

Vs. 1 – *"The LORD sent Nathan unto David. And he came unto him"* – This was not as immediate as it appears here, for David describes in Psalm 32 a time of mental, spiritual, and even physical torment, under strong conviction before he finally bowed in repentance. It was God patiently waiting for David, working in him, seeking to move him to put his heart right. During those months David endured the uncleanness of his evil and longed for purity (Ps. 51:7, 10). He had lost the joy of his salvation (Ps. 51:8, 12). He had lost his ability to speak to sinners of their sin or to sing God's praise (Ps. 51:13-14). But more, he had lost the sense of God's presence and fellowship (Ps. 51:9, 11). Such severe chastening was proof that David was indeed God's child (Heb. 12). It was God dealing with His son, for his profit, that he might be a partaker of God's holiness (Heb. 12:10).

It is an interesting thought whether God's resulting judgments on David would have been different if he

12:2 *The rich man had exceeding many flocks and herds:*
12:3 *But the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up: and it grew up together with him, and with his children; it did eat of his own meat, and drank of his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was unto him as a daughter.*

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had just turned back to the Lord on his own, before the need for a word of reproof. Compare Reuben (Gen. 35:22; 49:3-4). Perhaps results in the kingdom would have been different for him.

Understand how the task to which Nathan was called was a bit like walking into a lion's den. How greatly Nathan risked for God and David, and us. David had already shown his willingness to kill in seeking to cover his tracks. How many others of God's men faced a king's wrath, and even death, in similar circumstances. Compare the unnamed man of God with Jeroboam (I Ki. 13), Micaiah with Ahab (I Ki. 22), Hanani with Asa (II Chron. 16), Zachariah with Joash (II Chron. 24), the unnamed prophet with Amaziah (II Chron. 25), Jeremiah with Jeconiah (Jer. 36), Daniel's friends with Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 3), and Ananias sent to speak to converted Saul (Acts 9:10 ff). Yet because David responded with a right heart in repentance, not only did he hear Nathan's reproof, he loved him for it! It is the difference with a repentant heart. And how very interesting that David later named

12:4 *And there came a traveller unto the rich man, and he spared to take of his own flock and of his own herd, to dress for the wayfaring man that was come unto him; but took the poor man's lamb, and dressed it for the man that was come to him.*
12:5 *And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man; and he said to Nathan, As the LORD liveth, the man that hath done this thing shall surely die:*

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one of his sons through Bathsheba, Nathan (I Chron. 3:5), apparently after this courageous man of God who showed himself a true friend.

Vs. 1-4 – *"There were two men in one city"* – Nathan told his story as if it were an actual situation. His parable was clever and well-spoken, playing on David's shepherd background and his sense of justice. It was brief and yet thorough enough to get just the reaction he wanted.

Vs. 3 – Not only was this lamb the man's only possession, but a greatly cherished pet as well.

Vs. 5 – *"And David's anger was greatly kindled against the man"* – The king was utterly enraged with such selfishness, such an ugly violation of simple fairness. The wealthy man did not need the tender lamb of the other when he had so many of his own. How great David's sense of justice, except where it applied to himself! It is always easier to see sin in another. How much greater was David's own crime in fact, involving the death of a *man* over a

mere lamb. The judgment of death David pronounced was more severe even than God's in such a case. David was angry but still not convicted. Sometimes the anger of a man must be aroused before his conscience can be stirred. So David was led from condemning the other to condemning *himself.*

Vs. 6 – *"And he shall restore the lamb fourfold"* – Interesting that this was according to the specifications of the Law of Moses. We are told in Exodus 22:1 that if an ox was stolen and killed or sold and the thief was discovered, then he was to return 5 oxen to the owner for the one lost. But in the case of a stolen sheep, he was to return 4 for the one. Was David beginning to venture back into the Book in those days? Seeking the Lord? It is interesting that when David was strong or returning to strength we get these subtle indications of his browsing in the Book.

"No pity" is exactly what David showed to Uriah. He condemned himself with his own words. Again, how much easier it always is to see sin in another than in ourselves.

12:7 *And Nathan said to David, Thou art the man. Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I anointed thee king over Israel, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul;*
12:8 *And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things.*

Vs. 7 – *"Thou art the man"* – As soon as Nathan had David speaking judgment he went straight for the heart, making application of David's condemnation to himself. There was no feeble softness in Nathan. Oh how these words must have cut right to the core of David, like lancing a great ugly, throbbing boil, so painful, yet the beginning of healing.

Vs. 7-8 – *"I…I…I"* – Do you hear? It was all about how good the Lord had been to David in all that He had blessed him with. Compare the Lord's similar approach in Ezekiel 16, and when rebuking Saul (I Sam. 15:17). Obviously He could say the same with you and me.

Vs. 8 – *"I would moreover have given…"* – God was prepared to give David even more if he asked. He stands ready to give us more if we ask of Him as well. *"Ye have not because ye ask not"* (James 4). Therefore we ask the world for God's glory!

Vs. 9 – *"Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD"* – Here was the *primary*

evil, more than the wicked crimes done against men. Compare when Saul was rejected in I Samuel 15:23 & 26. Though David was a king who actually heard God's words yet when he fell it was through failure to hear, heed, and honour what God had spoken.

"To do evil in His sight" – In spite of David's great trouble to hide his evil before men, all of his efforts came to nothing before the only One who really mattered. *"The eyes of the Lord are in every place beholding the evil and the good"* (Prov. 15:3).

"Thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword" – Though it was an Ammonite sword that took Uriah's life, it was David who killed him. Though David used an involved ploy to throw men off his trail, the Lord saw it all and He did not fail to weigh blame fairly and correctly, putting the fault precisely and fully where it belonged, calling it the murder it was. We do not need to worry that God will come short in any way in putting fault where it is due. Nothing will be missed or mishandled. *"Be not deceived, God is not mocked"* (Gal. 6:7).

Vs. 10 – *"Because thou hast despised Me"* – To despise God's words is to despise Him. The degree to which we ignore or fail to act on His words, to the same degree we have chosen to ignore Him.

"And hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife" – This is the second time the Lord said this (vs. 9). To follow through and take Bathsheba for his wife was much of the blame against David. Yet though it was a part of David's crime, see how the Lord did not demand that the marriage be ended. In fact He later honoured their union (after David's repentance) with their son Solomon becoming king and their son Nathan also involved in Messiah's line (Lk. 3:31). Though a marriage be wrong in God's sight, the way forward is repentance, not to end a wrong marriage in divorce.

Vs. 10-14 – God's four-fold judgment on David;

- Vs. 10 – *"The sword shall never depart from thine house"* – For his use of the sword against Uriah, God would bring the sword against David's house. These words were fulfilled in the deaths of David's sons, Amnon (13:38-

12:11 *Thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house, and I will take thy wives before thine eyes, and give them unto thy neighbour, and he shall lie with thy wives in the sight of this sun.*
12:12 *For thou didst it secretly: but I will do this thing before all Israel, and before the sun.*

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39), Absalom (18:15), and Adonijah (I Ki. 2), together with Amasa, Joab, and Shimei, as well as the many who died in the civil war that later developed around Absalom.

- Vs. 11 – *"I will raise up evil against thee out of thine own house"* – Fulfilled in Amnon's lust and rape of Tamar (13:11-14), Absalom's murder of Amnon and conspiracy against David, and Adonijah's effort to take the throne before Solomon (I Ki. 2).

- Vs. 11 – *"I will take thy wives before thine eyes"* – What David committed secretly God would allow upon David publicly, in broad daylight. There is emphasis here (twice stated). And do not miss the multiplied manner, involving his *"wives"*, not just his wife. Fulfilled in several of David's women publicly molested by Absalom (16:21-22).

- Vs. 14 – *"The child also that is born unto thee shall surely die".*

Because David abused Uriah with the sword and

involved himself in sexual sin therefore David also would be troubled with the sword and sexual sin. Again, *"be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap"* (Gal. 6:7). God became Uriah's avenger of blood (I Thess. 4). The remaining account of David's life is the story of his troubles through the sword and sexual sin, where there had been internal peace before. And do you see how David sowed to the wind and repeated the *whirlwind!* (Hos. 8:7). What he sowed (immorality and murder) came back in kind, but increased, as if the multiplication of a planted seed. This principle works both ways, both positively and negatively, both in the good we sow for God and in the evil we sow for self against God and others.

Vs. 13 – *"And David said unto Nathan, I have sinned against the LORD"* – Here was David's strength and the key to his preservation. His repentance and confession were complete and immediate and therefore God's forgiveness was complete and immediate. The wise are not wise because they are faultless. They are wise because they hear and repent when God's fair reproof arrives.

"The LORD also hath put away thy sin" – How brief David's words, yet sincere. And for this simple, genuine expression of his repentant heart he had God's pardon! There was no need for tears or a long, drawn-out confession. There was no need to "earn" forgiveness through word formulas often repeated or acts of penance. No "proper" form or formalities. There was only the simple *agreement* with God concerning the sinfulness of his sin, and God's immediate forgiveness was his!

See as well how this acknowledgement did not have to be dragged out of David as with Saul (I Sam. 15). How things might have been otherwise for David without this right response. But for this he was allowed to live and even to remain king. Compare again the end of Saul's reign in I Samuel 15:23 & 26. There was an honesty in David to freely confess, that was not in Saul. Compare 24:10; Psalm 32:5; 51:4.

Consider how David *might* have responded, with the finger-pointing that always comes with an unrepentant heart;

- *God* is too harsh in His punishment. Compare how Cain acknowledged nothing, only complaining about God's punishment (Gen. 4), as if it was unfair, making God out

to be the bad guy.

- *Nathan* came with a deceptive method, a "lie" even, thus tricking David.
- *Nathan* did not come at the right time or in the right way or with enough tenderness or tact.
- *Bathsheba* was dangling her fascinating form before his eyes. How could he help but to be enticed. As Adam's complaint that "the woman You gave to me made me do it", blaming the woman and the God who gave her.
- *Uriah* just would not go down to his house, so David was left no choice but to take his life.

But there was no resentment in David toward God or his messenger. No blame-shifting. No sharing of his guilt with others. No attempt to justify his actions. He saw only His own fault, and saw it clearly.

What if David had *not* repented with God's reproof through Nathan? It would seem obvious that he would not have been forgiven, and that he would have soon been dead. Remember how when a man will not hear fair reproof he is always on his way

out. Compare Ahab's death at Ramath-Gilead, Asa's end the next verse after he imprisoned the prophet (II Chron. 16:7-11), Joash (II Chron. 24:23-26), and Amaziah (II Chron. 25:27). As with these, it seems David's term would have been finished.

Consider that though David repented when reproved and God forgave his sin, yet still he had to suffer God's judgments for his crimes. *"Thou wast a God that forgavest them, though Thou tookest vengeance of their inventions"* (Ps. 99:8).

Vs. 14 – How we fuel the filthy vengeance of the evil one by our fall to sin. How we adorn the word of God and the God of the word when we live for Him (Titus 2:7-10; I Tim. 6:1).

It seems the baby's death was for the sake of those who knew of David's crimes, that God's displeasure and righteous judgment might be made evident to all. It could not be left to seem as though God just ignored David's sin. God very publicly testified of His great displeasure with David's sin, even displaying it to the world and every age by recording it in His Book.

12:15 *And Nathan departed unto his house. And the LORD struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick.*
12:16 *David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth.*

12:15-23 – The Baby's Death

Vs. 15 – Interesting that God still referred to Bathsheba as *"Uriah's wife"*, though now married to David.

Now I want you to notice something here. Though David of course so greatly troubled his house with his choice to fall into sin, yet I want you to notice with me the larger picture of the way of the righteous man displayed here. Notice the nature of his love, the atmosphere of his house, the way of his servants, etc. And then note the contrast with life in the house of the ungodly. Notice how;

- David displays genuine care for this child (vs. 15-16). God did not just take the child suddenly, but allowed its life to linger for a week, perhaps that David's heart of love might be displayed. There might have been in David a secret, selfish approval that this child of his adultery should be swept away in death. But his concern was real. When we get close to God, as David had lived, He puts real care in us. He turns our natural

12:17 *And the elders of his house arose, and went to him, to raise him up from the earth: but he would not, neither did he eat bread with them.*

12:18 *And it came to pass on the seventh day, that the child died. And the servants of David feared to tell him that the child was dead: for they said, Behold, while the child was yet alive, we spake unto him, and he would not hearken unto our voice: how will he then vex himself, if we tell him that the child is dead?*

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selfishness to sincere, sacrificial love.

- David's servants sincerely cared for their master (vs. 18). Compare Naaman's servant girl (II Ki. 5:2-3). Godly children of godly parents should sincerely care for their parents and vice versa.

- The servants felt free to enquire about David's odd actions and got straight answers (vs. 21). David was an approachable leader with his servants. There was no high and mighty way in him with those under him, permitting no enquiries. He simply explained. See the friendly, family atmosphere here.

The mood of the home (or palace) and the comfort level in living there has much to do with the character of the people involved. A man who loves God loves others. A man at peace with God loves peace and creates this environment around himself. On the other hand a man who is selfish cares only for himself, and this eventually develops into a selfish, troubled, bitter home. Remember the

12:19 *But when David saw that his servants whispered, David perceived that the child was dead: therefore David said unto his servants, Is the child dead? And they said, He is dead.*

12:20 *Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the LORD, and worshipped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat.*

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lessons from Proverbs that describe turmoil generated around the proud and fools and scoffers;

- 13:10 – *"Only by pride cometh contention".*
- 15:18 – *"A wrathful man stirreth up strife: but he that is slow to anger appeaseth strife".*
- 28:25 – *"He that is proud of heart stirreth up strife".*
- 15:16-17 – *"Better is a little with the fear of the Lord, than great treasure and trouble therewith; better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a stalled ox and hatred therewith".*
- *"Godliness with contentment is great gain"* (I Tim. 6:6). Godliness generates contentment.

Now remember the way of godless King Saul's house;

- His irrational mood swings set his house on edge. When the evil spirit was upon him, folks were dodging his javelin (I Sam. 18:10-11; 19:9-10; 20:33). This evil spirit seemed to

be related to his own evil responses preceding it, as when he was rebuked for his sin by Samuel (I Sam. 15), and when he was jealous over the women singing David's praise (I Sam. 18:7-9), and when jealous over David's further victories (19:5, 8).

- His foolishly rash vow caused his own men to stand up against him (I Sam. 14:45).
- His unreasonable hatred of David put his own children against him. As in Michal's deceptive trick to deliver David (I Sam. 19:12-17) and Jonathan's anger (I Sam. 20:31-34).
- He began to suspect everyone, and was forced to revert to rewards and moaning and brow-beating to coerce folks into following him (I Sam. 22:7-8).

Saul was never right with God and therefore his was such an unhappy home and administration. Compare Jacob's deceptive ways leading to his summary statement to Pharaoh, *"few and evil have the days of the years of my life been"* (Gen. 47:9). Compare other examples in Laban, Rebekah, and

12:22 *And he said, While the child was yet alive, I fasted and wept: for I said, Who can tell whether GOD will be gracious to me, that the child may live?*
12:23 *But now he is dead, wherefore should I fast? can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me.*

Nabal. Contrast Christ's administration of righteousness and peace.

Vs. 23 – *"I shall go to him"* – David was a righteous man, a child of God. He knew he would be with the Lord in death. Did his confidence that he would be with this child upon death indicate his belief that a child who dies before an accountable age goes to the place of the redeemed? Was David talking generally of sharing death with his child, or more particularly of his soul being in the place of the righteous dead where David would surely go? Though we understand that all are born dead in our sin nature, even before we express this in the practice of sins, yet David's words of expectation here might suggest some hope that those who die in infancy will not be condemned before God.

The Lord has seen fit to leave little illumination concerning the eternal condition of infants who die. We rest only in the assurance that God is faithful in all His works.

Scattered Observations;

12:24 *And David comforted Bathsheba his wife, and went in unto her, and lay with her: and she bare a son, and he called his name Solomon: and the LORD loved him.*
12:25 *And he sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet; and he called his name Jedidiah, because of the LORD.*

- Do not miss the fact that David saw no need to do anything in behalf of one who is dead. In fact he immediately stopped pleading with the Lord upon word of the child's death. There is no encouragement here to pray for the dead or to be baptized for them. No indulgences or burning of candles or other such nonsense. No effort to secure the eternal wellbeing of those dead.

- Consider David's great confidence in the Lord to do right, even when He allows death. David did not respond in anger for the Lord's refusal to hear his pleading. There was no demand in him for his own way. In spite of the dark spots in David's character, his was a mature and stable faith.

12:24-25 – Solomon's Birth

Vs. 24-25 – Jedidiah means "Loved by Jehovah" (Jedid = Beloved or friend, Jah = Jehovah). This name marked the Lord's great love for this child from his birth. It is quite remarkable and unusual that such a special point would be made of this,

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perhaps comparable to the Father's words concerning Christ, His beloved Son in whom He was well-pleased? Perhaps we see indication here of Solomon as a type of Christ, the Son of David, in His wisdom and One bringing peace and fulfilling the Davidic Covenant. Yet as well, that the Lord loved Solomon and later so gifted him and appointed him king, the beginning of the fulfilment of His covenant with David, is one of the great Bible expressions of His grace, a clear indication of the *completeness* of His forgiveness of sin upon sincere repentance and confession.

See the Lord of all creation delighting in a little child. The Lord of glory is not aloof toward children. Remember Jesus holding and blessing little children. This was no facade, no heartless politicking, but God's genuine joy in the little people.

12:26-31 – Ammon Destroyed

With David's confession he was forgiven (vs. 13) and put right with His God, in spite of the darkness of his evil. And being put right with God he was then

12:28 *Now therefore gather the rest of the people together, and encamp against the city, and take it: lest I take the city, and it be called after my name.*
12:29 *And David gathered all the people together, and went to Rabbah, and fought against it, and took it.*

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fit and ready again to fight God's battles and see victories. Do you see? The Lord forgave David, He marked His forgiveness with His blessing on Solomon, and then David was called back into the battle. Both the blessing on Solomon and David's call back to the battlefront served to express the completeness of God's forgiveness upon repentance.

The way forward in the context of Christian failure is to repent and go on, not to sit and stew over our perceived uselessness. We get right with God through His appropriate means, we get back on His side and He by ours, and we get right back out there and busy with His conquering work on this earth. It is the work of the evil one to attempt to side-line us with a "woe-is-me" attitude. This is not where God would lead us or leave us. It may be that there are might-have-beens that will now never be as a result of our evil choices, doors of opportunity now closed to us, but many still are the possibilities for God and the good of others.

Vs. 30 – At a talent weight (34 kgs) this was a lot of crown! It was probably too heavy for a man to

12:30 *And he took their king's crown from off his head, the weight whereof was a talent of gold with the precious stones: and it was set on David's head. And he brought forth the spoil of the city in great abundance.*

12:31 *And he brought forth the people that were therein, and put them under saws, and under harrows of iron, and under axes of iron, and made them pass through the brick-kiln: and thus did he unto all the cities of the children of Ammon. So David and all the people returned unto Jerusalem.*

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actually wear on his head without props. It has been suggested that it would have been suspended over the king's head. Perhaps a touch ostentatious to have a crown too heavy to actually wear? It is interesting to note the tremendous wealth of the Ammonites.

Vs. 31 – This appears on the surface to be nearly a complete massacre of the nation, but in the most shocking manner. *"Harrows"* is a Hebrew word meaning "sharp", particularly sharp threshing instruments of some kind. Was this gruesome severity in response to the cruelty of the Ammonites? (Amos 1:13; I Sam. 11:2) Was David making a fearful object lesson of them for the benefit of others who might consider rebelling? The NIV translates *"…consigning them to labor with saws and with iron picks and axes, and he made them work at brickmaking"*, suggesting that it is not that he put the people *"under"* these instruments in the sense of chopping them up but in the sense of under forced labour. But the Hebrew word behind *"made*

them to pass through" is a good translation in the KJV, in the sense of made them to suffer. This word cannot be twisted into the NIV idea of "made to work at". It seems the NIV has made an interpretive decision here, requiring some twisting of the text, rather than just translating the words (NKJV as well). It gets more interesting when we compare the parallel account in I Chronicles 20, where we read, *"And he brought out the people that were in it and cut them with saws, and with harrows of iron, and with axes"* (vs. 3). The verb behind *"cut"* is to *saw*. They sawed them with saws. But again the NIV interprets to cut or saw as "he consigned them to labour". Give them an A for consistency, but an F for integrity in translation. It is a bit of an interpretive dilemma. If a bloodbath, as it appears in the KJV, it was of the most gruesome nature, perhaps executed only on the Ammonite soldiers rather than the whole race. But why use these tools of the farm (saws, harrows, and axes) instead of the weapons of war they carried? These things would not have been carried by Israel to the battle, but must have been collected from the Ammonites. As if they were purposely using their own instruments of industry to put them to death. Difficult questions indeed, the answers for which we must wait on the Lord, rather than taking liberties with the text of His eternal words.

Chapter 13

13:1 *And it came to pass after this, that Absalom the son of David had a fair sister, whose name was Tamar; and Amnon the son of David loved her.*

With this chapter trouble now begins for David's house, in accordance with Nathan's prophecy (12:10-11). The interesting factor is that this trouble was a variation of the same pattern of David's crime; sexual immorality leading on to murder, but now all within David's own family.

13:1-22 – Tamar Raped

Vs. 1 – *"And it came to pass after this…"* – We do not know the timing, but we are given the impression it was not long after. Certainly it was the next important event on God's calendar after the events of chapter 12.

Tamar was the full sister of Absalom through David's wife, Maacah (Mā′ ăcäh). Amnon was David's oldest son, through Ahinoam the Jezreelitess, making him a half-brother of Absalom and Tamar. That Tamar was a *"fair sister"* means she was an attractive girl, which in itself carries a certain danger, making her more a magnet of the lusts of men, even as we see here.

Vs. 2 – *"Amnon thought it hard for him to do any thing to her"* – He wanted to have his way with Tamar, but he could not figure out how to arrange it. Thus he was frustrated in his plotting of evil against her, with things and people in the way. It was as the psalmist describes the wicked man with *"no fear of God before his eyes"*, who *"deviseth mischief* [meditates fraud] *upon his bed"* (36:4). In focus here is the vital matter of how we choose to think. Amnon worked himself up (or down) into such a lust-sick condition through his choice to *think* and *think* and *think* on how to abuse his sister for his own pleasure. Even to entertain such thoughts was a violation of God's law. For it is written in Leviticus 18:11, *"the nakedness of thy father's wife's daughter, begotten of thy father, she is thy sister, thou shalt not uncover her nakedness"*. In light of such a command, Amnon's decision should have been an obvious one, "OK, then I simply cannot have her that way!" And so we move on. Lusting and visualizing the fulfilment of fleshly desires, wickedly plotting how we can manage to get our way and get away with it, is *a choice*, a matter of the will. And of course it is so very much the opposite of the meditation on God's things advised

in His Word. This man gave himself over to wicked lusting after Tamar to the point of sickness, and *he was soon dead* because of this choice!! Look well! Every sexual pervert or adulterer or rapist began with the same. We are confronted here with the tremendous power of sexual desire, even causing physical, noticeable results (vs. 4). This especially in men, and more especially in young men, and most especially when such interests are dwelt upon. A woman expects the context of love and commitment with a man. But a man often does not need this to float this boat. God's answer for us is found in portions like;

- Philippians 4:8 – *"…think on these things"* (command).

- I Corinthians 10:13 – *"There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it"* (promise).

- II Corinthians 10:5 – *"Bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ".*

- Colossians 3:1-2 – "Be seeking and setting your affections on things above, not on things

on the earth" (commands).

It is the question of how we choose to think, and how we choose to think in our relation to others, how we choose to respond to our God-given role. These two men wickedly chose not to think upon this young woman as her *protectors*, but as *molesters*. Any time we look upon a woman to lust after her we are making the same wicked choice! As men, as those who are stronger, God has made us to be *protectors* of women. This remains true even if a woman is fool enough to willingly make herself available in some inappropriate way, draping her form before us in suggestive pictures perhaps. Still we are meant to be the guardians of her integrity, whether she wants such keeping or not. What we see here is a wicked conspiracy against one who was weaker, conspiring how to get her away from the normal protections or safeguards around her (people, family, distance, etc.). But we must recognize that those frustrating obstacles in Amnon's way were *God's* obstacles! When you find yourself frustrated and hindered in your evil intent, understand that it is *God* standing in your way, like the angel of the Lord frustrating Balaam, standing in his way as he ran headlong and heedless after his lust. And remember also that God is gracious to make a way of escape that we may be able to endure

temptation (I Cor. 10:13). What was His way of escape for Amnon in this situation?

- Choose to think right. Flee from such evil lusting.
- Get to work, get busy, get occupied.
- Avoid evil company, counsel, counsellors, pictures, films, etc. Stop fanning the flame.
- Ask God to help in finding a good wife you can love, a valid expression of sexual desire (I Cor. 7:9).

This was an evil purpose not only against Tamar, but against her parents and her brothers and her future spouse. And perpetrated by men who were family members. Jonadab was a cousin, the son of David's brother. These were men who would be expected to be more protectors than molesters. Would we be wise to collect a warning here? I wonder just how often this sort of treachery happens, even within families, perhaps especially there, because it is least expected there. We are wise to see and understand the nature of the beast, even family beasts. Be warned, be aware, be wise! Those we expect to be protectors can become molesters.

13:3 *But Amnon had a friend, whose name was Jonadab, the son of Shimeah David's brother: and Jonadab was a very subtil man.*
13:4 *And he said unto him, Why art thou, being the king's son, lean from day to day? wilt thou not tell me? And Amnon said unto him, I love Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister.*

Tamar quite naively walked into this trap. Where were those with an understanding heart to speak straight to her of such dangers in life? It is not that we should be always assessing others or suspicious. It is not that we should fall to the self-centred extreme of paranoia, thinking always that others are out to get us. But on the other hand there is a place for discretion and awareness. We must be aware of the depth of the sin nature within man.

Perhaps this was something of a repetition of David's earlier failure. We get the impression Amnon had a good deal of spare time on his hands in which to saturate his soul in his carnal interests, as David when he fell to adultery (II Sam. 11:1). Being daily pressed with the need to work goes a long way toward keeping us off somebody's hit list.

There is a lesson here on the nature of our friends as well. Jonadab is described as Amnon's *"friend"* in vs. 3. But he was a *"friend"* Amnon was a fool to have for a friend. What was he doing hanging around with a sly dog like that, even if he was family? The very suggestion of such evil coming

13:5 *And Jonadab said unto him, Lay thee down on thy bed, and make thyself sick: and when thy father cometh to see thee, say unto him, I pray thee, let my sister Tamar come, and give me meat, and dress the meat in my sight, that I may see it, and eat it at her hand.*

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from this man's mouth marked him as one worthy of death. Yet the really unfortunate factor is that Jonadab, after making his evil suggestion, walked off into life scot-free, while within a couple years Amnon's body was lying cold in a grave for this, through the carnal counsel of this crafty cousin. How sad! But worry not, for God is the Avenger of all such. Oh we are wise to give careful thought to the kind of company we keep, to the kind of counsel we are willing to receive. Bad company not only helped to further corrupt already corrupt morals in this circumstance, it brought on an early grave! Among so many other things, the Bible is an amazing and instructive study in the critical turning points of human life, so often turning around the little word *"but"*. *"<u>But</u> Amnon had a friend"* (vs. 3). A very unfortunate "friend", who became his undoing. Hear the warning!

Vs. 5 – *"And dress the meat in my sight, that I may see it"* – Perhaps the thinking in this idea of his sister actually preparing food in his sight had to do with the threat of poisoning? See the focus on *"in his sight"* and *"before him"* in vs. 8-9. Amnon was

13:6 *So Amnon lay down, and made himself sick: and when the king was come to see him, Amnon said unto the king, I pray thee, let Tamar my sister come, and make me a couple of cakes in my sight, that I may eat at her hand.*
13:7 *Then David sent home to Tamar, saying, Go now to thy brother Amnon's house, and dress him meat.*

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the heir to the throne as the oldest son of the king, making him a potential target. Be glad for your lowly status in life, for it frees you to live without such suspicions.

Vs. 6-7 – David himself was used in this evil scheme. He was deceitfully coerced into sending Tamar to her abuse! Therefore he should have handled this with greatest severity if he had any hope of not being further deceived by his children. Because he failed in this regard he was later abused again in a similar way by Absalom, working treacherously behind his back. It is the same weakness we have seen in David before, with his failure to exercise fair and firm discipline on Joab later coming back on his own head. Consider how far-reaching in its effect his weakness, as with Eli and sons. This again contributed to the same leaning toward national division as did David's earlier weakness with Joab. Our evil and compromise never fail to impact others as well, the reach of that impact always going farther and greater than we expect. Look for the results in this

13:8 *So Tamar went to her brother Amnon's house; and he was laid down. And she took flour, and kneaded it, and made cakes in his sight, and did bake the cakes.*
13:9 *And she took a pan, and poured them out before him; but he refused to eat. And Amnon said, Have out all men from me. And they went out every man from him.*
13:10 *And Amnon said unto Tamar, Bring the meat into the chamber, that I may eat of thine hand. And Tamar took the cakes which she had made, and brought them into the chamber to Amnon her brother.*
13:11 *And when she had brought them unto him to eat, he took hold of her, and said unto her, Come lie with me, my sister.*
13:12 *And she answered him, Nay, my brother, do not force me; for no such thing ought to be done in Israel: do not thou this folly.*
13:13 *And I, whither shall I cause my shame to go? and as for thee, thou shalt be as one of the fools in Israel. Now therefore, I pray thee, speak unto the king; for he will not withhold me from thee.*

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context of folks who failed to respond according to God's law.

Vs. 7 – David knew his own nature with fair women. Therefore it seems he should have been more aware and cautious here with his son.

Vs. 9 – *"Have out all men from me"* – Should this not have been a warning light for Tamar? And the others? It seems no questions were asked. Perhaps the king's son was not to be questioned. Did heads later roll among the servants for their failure to pick up on what was happening? Again, we are wise to not be naive, but heads-up and perceptive people, for our good and the good of others.

Vs. 13 – Tamar's counsel was astute and well-spoken, though fruitless. She pointed out how

serious a crime it would be among their people. She suggested what a mess would be made of her reputation and his. Was her suggestion of appealing to the king an indication of her willingness to give love a try? More likely it was a ploy, an attempt at escaping the heat of the immediate threat?

Vs. 14 – *"Howbeit he would not hearken unto her voice"* – Amnon is twice described as refusing to listen to reason (vs. 16). Compare Nabal, the fool no one could speak to (I Sam. 25:17). Beware the refusal to hear good counsel.

One interesting question is whether Tamar screamed when she saw that her efforts at persuasion failed. If not, why not? When Amnon later called for his servant he was there (vs. 17). Thus some were within ear-shot to hear. Portions such as Deuteronomy 22:23-27 suggest that a woman should cry out in violent protest of the wrong being done to her, and that the failure to do so might in a sense suggest her consent to the evil deed. If it could be proven that brother and sister were consenting partners in sexual involvement

both might be put to death (Lev. 20:17). So it certainly would have been to Tamar's advantage to make her protest known to more than only Amnon. It does seem that when Tamar could not persuade Amnon, she resigned herself to the possibility that she would be made fully his in becoming his wife, according to Deuteronomy 22:28-29. We see in vs. 16 an indication of this expectation in her. We cannot be sure, for all the details are not given. But if Tamar failed to resist as fully as she could have or should have, in failing to make public her protest, she received nothing for such a concession.

A girl or woman is wise in any such circumstance to fight this kind of abuse tooth and nail with everything in her. She is not to entertain any thought of protecting an abusive family member. She must not allow herself to be threatened or persuaded into silence. She must refuse to be beaten into submission, short of actual threat on her life perhaps. We must not allow ourselves to be easily forced to tolerate wickedness of any kind in society, lest we be found actually helping it to continue. We may even have to give our life in the battle for right, but as much as we are able there must be no compromise with evil!

The loss of a girl's purity was a serious concern in

13:15 *Then Amnon hated her exceedingly; so that the hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love wherewith he had loved her. And Amnon said unto her, Arise, be gone.*

13:16 *And she said unto him, There is no cause: this evil in sending me away is greater than the other that thou didst unto me. But he would not hearken unto her.*

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their society. It made her less marriageable, and it could be cause for her death, certainly if she presented herself as pure upon marriage (Deut. 22:13-21).

Vs. 15 – *"Then Amnon hated her exceedingly"* – He was quite brusque with her (*"Arise, be gone"*), expressing his sudden aversion. It is an interesting emotional swing here. A response perhaps partly driven by his shame and guilt and fear of exposure, the sense of Tamar's plea at last coming home to him, that by his act he had put himself among *"the fools of Israel"* (vs. 13). Certainly it is that there was no true love in Amnon for her, only lust. Any feelings in him for her all dried up with his gratification, proving that it was only lust.

Vs. 16 – *"There is no cause"* – It seems Tamar's concern was that he did not really want her as a person, only as an attractive warm body for his abuse. And then he would discard her and leave her to desolation. "You desired me and took me and used me. In what way have you been disappointed

in me, that you would now despise and discard me?!" She did not understand his radical mood swing. The fact is he really despised her before, but his hate was masked by his passion or lust. Once his passion was stripped away he was left with only his contempt for her as a person. Had there been any respect involved there would at least have been some remorse, some expression of sorrow. But there was none.

Interesting that there was not even any pleading from Amnon that she keep his heinous crime a secret. It is as if he was completely without fear of any significant punishment. No fear of his father, even as there was no fear of God in him. There was no respect for anybody in Amnon, not for Tamar nor for David nor for Absalom nor for God nor for himself. As Eli's sons, he was blatant about it (and they too died for it, and died young).

Do not miss the skip of the generations. David and Samuel were the godly answers to godless Saul and compromising Eli. And now behold this evil son of David! It is the same we saw in the sons of godly Samuel (I Sam. 8:3). See how true godliness does not come by inheritance. It does not run in the blood. It only comes through an individual, personal response of faith in the words of God.

13:17 *Then he called his servant that ministered unto him, and said, Put now this woman out from me, and bolt the door after her.*
13:18 *And she had a garment of divers colours upon her: for with such robes were the king's daughters that were virgins apparelled. Then his servant brought her out, and bolted the door after her.*

"When thou saidst, Seek ye my face; my heart said unto thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek" (Ps. 27:8).

Vs. 17 – Notice the impetuousness or impulsiveness of Amnon, son of David. How given he was to hasty extremes. Not just admiring his pretty sister, but lusting himself sick over her, to the extreme of forcing his way with her. And then demanding her immediate removal, even bolting the door! Extremes! How like his father in this, yet taken much further down the road of shame. (Note the degree of Tamar's refusal to leave, requiring the servant's intervention. She was not just walking out, but had to be ushered or forced out, perhaps in her determination that Amnon now take her fully as his own wife). See the lust of this son of David, attracted to a fair woman like his father, and even when it is a forbidden, evil desire, pursuing it anyway, instead of forsaking or fleeing from it, again as David with Bathsheba, yet now taken a good many steps further downward in the next generation in this son acting against his *own family*. See the deceptive act of this son of David. How like

13:19 *And Tamar put ashes on her head, and rent her garment of divers colours that was on her, and laid her hand on her head, and went on crying.*

13:20 *And Absalom her brother said unto her, Hath Amnon thy brother been with thee? but hold now thy peace, my sister: he is thy brother; regard not this thing. So Tamar remained desolate in her brother Absalom's house.*

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his father when playing the mad man before the Philistines and lying to the priest at Nob. Yet again, now taken many steps further down, practiced against his own father and family. *How like his father*, yet further, and without the vital difference, for David sincerely knew and loved the Lord. And so with the same energy with which he ran to excesses he would run back to the Lord with sincere love. But not so Amnon! It seems he inherited only the darker side, without his father's sincere love for God. Without the Lord's gracious work intruding into a life, this is the direction things tend to go. The sins of the parents surfacing in the children, but so often descending a few degrees into greater corruption. Only by a special, individual work of God's grace in a soul is the vital change made! Unless you personally embrace Christ in complete sincerity and honesty, unless you are personally saved, you will likely take the weaknesses of your parents the step further, to your shame and sorrow. The out, the answer, the avenue is only you in Christ and Christ in you.

Vs. 20 – *"Regard not this thing"* – Why be silent about it? Why not take it to their father? Was Absalom thinking immediately of making it a cause to be rid of the heir to the throne? He certainly did not practice what he preached in encouraging Tamar to not set her heart on this thing, to not dwell on it. He quietly hated Amnon (vs. 22) and began planning his death, which of course led ultimately to Absalom's own death. His counsel was good, in a measure, though the legal channels should have been pursued. Had both he and Amnon responded this way they would have lived. You do not nurture this kind of hatred in your heart without inviting death.

"So Tamar remained desolate" – The Hebrew word behind *"desolate"* is a word meaning *wasted, destroyed, or solitary*. A second meaning is *appalled* in the sense of shock with some desolating event. It is a word Jeremiah used often in Lamentations as the prophet looked with horror upon the complete ruin of Jerusalem and Judah. It speaks of some measure of ruin, of the lasting effects Amnon's abuse brought upon Tamar. But perhaps lasting emotional trouble is suggested as well. Her remaining unmarried is implied by her dwelling in her brother's house. Did Absalom's protective move, in taking Tamar into his home, suggest anger

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at David for failing to shield her from this, or for failing to bring proper justice? Was this perhaps involved in his later actions against his father?

13:21-29 – Amnon Murdered

Vs. 21-22 – Responses

"He was very wroth" – "And…?" We naturally expect something more, do we not? We expect to read of David punishing for such treachery within the family. But it seems he did nothing. How is it that Amnon knew this would be the case and thus did not fear?

David raged, while Absalom just went quiet. The rage was less the danger than the sullen quiet that watched and awaited its opportunity to kill. David failed to do the hard thing as the law required (Lev. 20:17), and he failed to force the lesser penalty as well, in demanding their marriage (Deut. 22:28-29). God's law proclaimed Amnon cursed (Deut. 27:22), but David rebelliously failed to administer any of that divine curse upon his son. Therefore the responsibility of avenger fell to Tamar's older

brother.

When we foolishly harbour one who brings the curse of unrepentant sin upon himself there is a sense in which we bring that curse upon ourselves as well, for failing to deal properly with it. Paul was scolding the *church* at Corinth in I Corinthians 5 for their failure to act against the immoral one among them. Compare King Asa, who removed his own mother for her idolatry, thus keeping God's blessing and pleasure in days of revival (II Chron. 15:16-19). Compare Solomon's hard discipline, with his kingdom established as a result (I Ki. 2:42-46). David's administration was cursed in a measure for this. See well how it led only to greater trouble and unrest and death.

What should Absalom have done? He should have appealed to his father, demanding justice according to the law. It was a matter for the judges. Yet there would have been a very difficult element involved. For of course it might have looked like he was just clearing his own way to the throne. But it was the right thing to do. Regardless of whether there might appear to be selfish motives in doing right, we are to do right, regardless of the accusations. We do what is right before God for the right reasons and leave appearances to Him.

13:23 *And it came to pass after two full years, that Absalom had sheepshearers in Baalhazor, which is beside Ephraim: and Absalom invited all the king's sons.*
13:24 *And Absalom came to the king, and said, Behold now, thy servant hath sheepshearers; let the king, I beseech thee, and his servants go with thy servant.*
13:25 *And the king said to Absalom, Nay, my son, let us not all now go, lest we be chargeable unto thee. And he pressed him: howbeit he would not go, but blessed him.*

Vs. 23 – *"Absalom had sheepshearers in Baal-hazor"* – Absalom waited 2 years, perhaps to give David the chance to do something. When it became clear he would not, it was time for Absalom to act.

As we saw in I Samuel 25 at Nabal's house, the time of sheepshearing was like the time of harvest and the joy of the threshing floor. It was a happy festival time when the profits for the year were realized in the form of wool. For Absalom this event took place in Baal-Hazor, about 20 kms north of Jerusalem, within the mountainous region of Ephraim.

Vs. 24-27 – Absalom first invited David to the festivities. But when David declined he was reluctantly persuaded to allow Amnon to attend with all the rest of the king's sons. Maybe there was in David a hope that this might contribute to unity among his sons. Yet Absalom's request, particularly for Amnon, stirred suspicion. Maybe David's reluctance stemmed from his fear of the very trouble that happened. Perhaps David had been protectively holding Amnon close.

13:26 *Then said Absalom, If not, I pray thee, let my brother Amnon go with us. And the king said unto him, Why should he go with thee?*
13:27 *But Absalom pressed him, that he let Amnon and all the king's sons go with him.*
13:28 *Now Absalom had commanded his servants, saying, Mark ye now when Amnon's heart is merry with wine, and when I say unto you, Smite Amnon; then kill him, fear not: have not I commanded you? be courageous, and be valiant.*
13:29 *And the servants of Absalom did unto Amnon as Absalom had commanded. Then all the king's sons arose, and every man gat him up upon his mule, and fled.*

Yet see how Absalom came with kindness on his tongue, a smile on his lips, an invitation to celebration in his words, but with murder in his heart. It was much like the kiss of Judas. Do you see how Absalom made himself the very same that Amnon was with Tamar?

As David was conned by his son, sending Tamar to her rape, so again he was now conned by his son, sending Amnon to his death. Does David not pray about his decisions anymore?

Vs. 28-29 – Absalom had conspired with his servants to kill Amnon at an appropriate moment. And with their brutal deed the happy event turned to horror, with royal sons scattered everywhere in haste, apparently fearful it was an effort to massacre the whole lot of them. All seemed more concerned for their own necks than any noble thought of defending others. But then Amnon, by his evil act, had made himself vile among his

13:30 *And it came to pass, while they were in the way, that tidings came to David, saying, Absalom hath slain all the king's sons, and there is not one of them left.*
13:31 *Then the king arose, and tare his garments, and lay on the earth; and all his servants stood by with their clothes rent.*

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brothers and not one they would likely be interested in protecting.

It makes me wonder what Absalom's point was in inviting David? Did he plan to have David killed at the same time if he could? Was this only a revenge thing, or did Absalom have his sights on the throne even at that point? Did he give the dirty work to his servants rather than handling matters himself in order to keep his own hands clean with an eye to the throne? David's second-born son, Chileab (3:3) or Daniel (I Chron. 3:1), never features as potential heir to the throne after Amnon's death, either through his untimely death or some other disqualifying factor.

13:30-39 – Absalom Flees

Vs. 30-31 – Somebody ran fast with a totally twisted message. Compare Joab's runner who beat the other to David, yet without a full report (18:19ff). Make sure the message is true, and that you have the full story before you run with it, or all is thrown into the confusion of misunderstanding we see here

13:32 *And Jonadab, the son of Shimeah David's brother, answered and said, Let not my lord suppose that they have slain all the young men the king's sons; for Amnon only is dead: for by the appointment of Absalom this hath been determined from the day that he forced his sister Tamar.*
13:33 *Now therefore let not my lord the king take the thing to his heart, to think that all the king's sons are dead: for Amnon only is dead.*
13:34 *But Absalom fled. And the young man that kept the watch lifted up his eyes, and looked, and, behold, there came much people by the way of the hill side behind him.*
13:35 *And Jonadab said unto the king, Behold, the king's sons come: as thy servant said, so it is.*
13:36 *And it came to pass, as soon as he had made an end of speaking, that, behold, the king's sons came, and lifted up their voice and wept: and the king also and all his servants wept very sore.*

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in David as he collapsed with grief.

Vs. 32-33 – Sly Jonadab was the one to bring clarity to David. So he knew of Absalom's plans and did not say anything? Obviously nobody else of David's house knew. Thus it seems Jonadab must have been one Absalom could confide in as well. Did Absalom even know of Jonadab's subtle role as Amnon's co-conspirator in the rape of his sister? Could it be that Absalom's successful plot to kill Amnon was also the suggestion of this sly uncle? Did David ever discover the treachery of this man? Jonadab comes across looking squeaky clean before men, even appearing the sane one in this context of the muddled messenger and David's resulting hysterics. But the record of Jonadab is here in the Book, with the obvious suggestion that regardless of how he appeared before men, God saw and remembered it.

13:37 *But Absalom fled, and went to Talmai, the son of Ammihud, king of Geshur. And David mourned for his son every day.*
13:38 *So Absalom fled, and went to Geshur, and was there three years.*
13:39 *And the soul of king David longed to go forth unto Absalom: for he was comforted concerning Amnon, seeing he was dead.*

Vs. 37-38 – Absalom fled to Geshur, east of the Sea of Galilee, because that was his mother's homeland. He sought refuge there with his grandfather, Talmai (3:3). We can probably assume he found sympathy there for his actions. For of course it was Talmai's granddaughter who was raped and never avenged. Perhaps Absalom even attained something of a celebrity status out there for his bold action against one of David's sons.

Vs. 39 – Again David was too soft on crime, even in gradually letting Absalom off the hook. And again his failure to respond according to God's law would come back to bite him. The law required death for pre-meditated murder (Num. 35:20-21). By refusing to do the hard and right things David in a measure lost God's protection, shared in Amnon's curse, and laid his people open to much greater damage. It is always the price we pay for failure to appropriately discipline.

"But in all Israel
there was none to be
so much praised as Absalom
for his beauty:
from the sole of his foot
even to the crown of his head
there was no blemish in him"

(II Sam. 14:25)

Chapter 14

Over the next 3 years David had become reconciled in his heart toward Absalom (13:39), but he had yet to take the step of actually restoring his son to his people or to himself. There were complications. The Lord had spoken in His law concerning the handling of a murderer. What should David do with a man who was in effect a murderer, but who was his own cherished son? With the result that David did nothing one way or the other. The demand of God's law was for impartial justice upon any and every murderer;

- From as early as Genesis 9 the Lord had said, *"Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed"* (vs. 6). It was all very clear.

- Exodus 21:12-14 – *"He that smiteth a man, so that he die, shall be surely put to death…if a man come presumptuously upon his neighbour, to slay him with guile; thou shalt take him from Mine altar, that he may die".*

- Leviticus 24:17 – *"He that killeth any man shall surely be put to death".*

- Numbers 35:30-31 – *"Whoso killeth any person, the murderer shall be put to death… Moreover ye shall take no satisfaction for the*

life of a murderer, which is guilty of death: but he shall be surely put to death". No excuses, no concessions, no ransom, buy-out, or pay-off.

- Deuteronomy 19:21 – *"And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot".* There was to be no haven available in any city of refuge for one who was known to hate someone, and laid wait for him, and killed him (Deut. 19:11-13). This portion describes exactly what Absalom did.

Every book of the law of Moses spoke plainly to David of God's requirement concerning a murderer. With Joshua, King David was called upon to meditate in God's Book of the law and to *"observe to do according to <u>all</u> that is written therein"* (Josh. 1:8). Remember how the Lord, through Moses, had spoken concerning the conduct of a king in Deuteronomy 17. He was to have his own copy of God's law, *"and he shall read therein all the days of his life: that he may learn to fear the LORD his God, to keep all the words of this law and these statutes to do them: that his heart be not lifted up above his brethren, and that he turn not aside from the commandment, to the right hand, or to the left: to the end that he may prolong his days in his*

kingdom, he, and his children, in the midst of Israel" (vs. 19-20). Mark carefully the trouble David fell into precisely because he did not simply do what the law proclaimed, certainly concerning Amnon. In some ways David's situation was like old Abraham's when God called him to sacrifice Isaac, that son of his love (Gen. 22). Abraham never even hesitated in the greatness of his faith and devotion to his God. He of course proved there that he loved God more than any earthly thing, and I believe God was impressed. Oh but it was so complicated in David's case! His previous failures made things very difficult. What did the law require in the case of Amnon in his rape of Tamar? Death! Or forced marriage at the very least. How could David now strictly follow the commands of the law with Absalom when he had failed to do so with Amnon? And there was the other factor that Absalom, in a sense, actually performed the execution David himself should have handled, as Tamar's avenger. Or even taking it back a bit further, what was the law's requirement with David's murder of Uriah? Death! What was the law's requirement for his adultery with Bathsheba? Death! God had given David pardon because that is God's prerogative, but man under the law did not have the prerogative to pardon such violations! How could David now strictly follow the commands of the law with

14:1 *Now Joab the son of Zeruiah perceived that the king's heart was toward Absalom.*
14:2 *And Joab sent to Tekoah, and fetched thence a wise woman, and said unto her, I pray thee, feign thyself to be a mourner, and put on now mourning apparel, and anoint not thyself with oil, but be as a woman that had a long time mourned for the dead:*
14:3 *And come to the king, and speak on this manner unto him. So Joab put the words in her mouth.*

Absalom when the law's requirements were not demanded of *him?* So David's own evil choices tended now to tie his hands. How sin complicates things! It seems David was caught between his feelings for his sons and his responsibility to uphold the law. He was caught between the law's demand concerning his son and the history of his own failure to execute the law's demands. It just gets more confusing with our every failure to do right. Once you set the precedent it is hard to get back to a right footing.

14:1-20 – Woman of Tekoah

Vs. 1-3 – Joab coming on the scene now, with his earnest efforts in behalf of Absalom, seems strange. What was Joab's interest in Absalom? It could only be that he saw in Absalom the obvious successor to David's throne. David was getting older. It was a time to be grooming someone to take his place. The question of who was up in the air. Absalom seemed the obvious choice (compare vs. 25). Perhaps Absalom had even begun to be cast in a heroic light

14:4 *And when the woman of Tekoah spake to the king, she fell on her face to the ground, and did obeisance, and said, Help, O king.*
14:5 *And the king said unto her, What aileth thee? And she answered, I am indeed a widow woman, and mine husband is dead.*
14:6 *And thy handmaid had two sons, and they two strove together in the field, and there was none to part them, but the one smote the other, and slew him.*

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among the people for his bold murder of a royal rat like Amnon. But this division that stood between David and his 3rd son must first be reconciled if there was any hope for Absalom to succeed. So when Joab discerned that David's heart was actually *for* Absalom, rather than still enraged and wishing his death, he took action to bring about a reunion.

For some reason Joab did not use a direct approach with David, adopting instead Nathan's more subtle method, and calling on a woman who was particularly clever, from the city of Tekoah several kms to the south. He needed one with enough subtlety to pull it off, and from far enough away to avoid anyone checking on her story.

Vs. 4-7 – The unnamed woman presented Joab's made-to-order story before the king, that she was a widow, and then one of her two sons killed the other, and now the extended family was demanding justice with the death of the killer.

14:7 *And, behold, the whole family is risen against thine handmaid, and they said, Deliver him that smote his brother, that we may kill him, for the life of his brother whom he slew; and we will destroy the heir also: and so they shall quench my coal which is left, and shall not leave to my husband neither name nor remainder upon the earth.*
14:8 *And the king said unto the woman, Go to thine house, and I will give charge concerning thee.*
14:9 *And the woman of Tekoah said unto the king, My lord, O king, the iniquity be on me, and on my father's house: and the king and his throne be guiltless.*

Vs. 7 – *"So they shall quench my coal which is left"* – Her concern was that to kill the last of her men would take away all means of her support, and it would cause the name of her dead husband to not continue, having no remaining son and heir.

Vs. 8 – *"Go to thine house, and I will give charge concerning thee"* – David's initial answer was rather vague. He offered no clear judgment on the case, only the general statement that he would do something. It sounded a bit like he was putting her off. This was not an easy case since her point seemed a good one, suggesting the appropriateness of pardoning that living son, though he was a murderer. Yet of course the law demanded the killer's death. It seems David was fearful of making a judgment against the clear statement of God's law, fearful of bringing guilt upon himself by that means. But of course that is exactly where he was already living in his failure to act against Amnon and Absalom. And so, sensing his fear, the woman quickly assured David in vs. 9 that if any blame

14:10 *And the king said, Whoever saith ought unto thee, bring him to me, and he shall not touch thee any more.*
14:11 *Then said she, I pray thee, let the king remember the LORD thy God, that thou wouldest not suffer the revengers of blood to destroy any more, lest they destroy my son. And he said, As the LORD liveth, there shall not one hair of thy son fall to the earth.*

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were assigned in the case, due to his favourable judgment, she insisted that all blame should fall upon her. Do you see how they were playing around the edges of simple obedience to God here, rather than simply doing what God had said in such a case and letting the chips fall where they may? N.B. the general departure from the details of God's law in this era of David's life.

Her point, and the place to which she was attempting to bring David, was that if there are good reasons to not strictly obey God's law, well then we should feel free to side-step it. But even to enter into that kind of thinking is to cast oneself into the confusion of situation ethics, the confusion in which David even then had become mired, making judgments according to the merits of each individual case, rather than simply according to what God has said.

Vs. 10-11 – Through her persistent urging she at last led David to grant full protection in the case of her living son, even authorizing her to bring to him

14:12 *Then the woman said, Let thine handmaid, I pray thee, speak one word unto my lord the king. And he said, Say on.*
14:13 *And the woman said, Wherefore then hast thou thought such a thing against the people of God? for the king doth speak this thing as one which is faulty, in that the king doth not fetch home again his banished.*
14:14 *For we must needs die, and are as water spilt on the ground, which cannot be gathered up again; neither doth God respect any person: yet doth he devise means, that his banished be not expelled from him.*

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any who needed to hear it from him. Thus David was subtly moved to apply the principle that he would actually waive God's law if the motivating reasons were deemed sufficient; in this fabricated case, because the woman needed a provider and heir; in Absalom's case, because Amnon needed killing, and so there was a measure of justice in Absalom's action.

Vs. 12-14 – The woman then applied David's judgment in her case to the case of his own son. Absalom's crime was more justifiable than her son's, and thus so was his sparing.

Notice how action against Absalom she considered to be *"against the people of God"*, suggesting that Absalom was thought by the people to be a good choice as David's successor and the nation's leader.

Vs. 14 – *"For we must needs die"* – What is her point here? David's day of death was unavoidable and drawing closer. It was time for him to be giving

14:15 *Now therefore that I am come to speak of this thing unto my lord the king, it is because the people have made me afraid: and thy handmaid said, I will now speak unto the king; it may be that the king will perform the request of his handmaid.*
14:16 *For the king will hear, to deliver his handmaid out of the hand of the man that would destroy me and my son together out of the inheritance of God.*
14:17 *Then thine handmaid said, The word of my lord the king shall now be comfortable: for as an angel of God, so is my lord the king to discern good and bad: therefore the LORD thy God will be with thee.*
14:18 *Then the king answered and said unto the woman, Hide not from me, I pray thee, the thing that I shall ask thee. And the woman said, Let my lord the king now speak.*

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thought to an appropriate successor to his throne, and who more likely to benefit the nation than Absalom.

Vs. 15-17 – The woman quickly turned her attention back to her own (fabricated) situation, perhaps in a further effort to lead David from suspecting the truth, that her whole purpose in coming had more to do with David and Absalom than with she and her son.

Vs. 17 – She ended with flattery, suggesting the king to be God's own messenger *"to discern good and bad"*. But her decoy did not succeed.

Vs. 18-19 – David by then had become suspicious. In fact he figured it out. So she was quite correct in her closing flatteries of his good ability to discern. Not only had David discerned the falseness of her story, but he somehow picked up on who was behind it as well. Perhaps her words in vs. 15-17

14:19 *And the king said, Is not the hand of Joab with thee in all this? And the woman answered and said, As thy soul liveth, my lord the king, none can turn to the right hand or to the left from ought that my lord the king hath spoken: for thy servant Joab, he bade me, and he put all these words in the mouth of thine handmaid:*

14:20 *To fetch about this form of speech hath thy servant Joab done this thing: and my lord is wise, according to the wisdom of an angel of God, to know all things that are in the earth.*

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were the result of the light she saw dawning in the king's eyes, the knowing look of suspicion showing there in that moment. Obviously David must have been aware of Joab's keen support for Absalom. And maybe after Nathan's successful method David was more leery of such a backdoor approach.

Vs. 19-20 – *"None can turn to the right hand or to the left"* – There was no way out for her, no escaping. David hit the nail straight on the head. Being caught in the lie of her story she had no choice but to fully admit her conspiracy, again pouring on the flattery in vs. 20. When folks turn on the flattery it is time to prick up the ears. Perhaps she was a bit worried at that point about how David would respond to her deceiving approach.

Do you see the principle, the puzzle, the challenge? What do you do when it becomes really hard to do right, as if even wrong to do right? What do you do when it becomes hard to just stand by what God has said;

- When all around you are pushing for you to lighten up on the homosexual issue, insisting it is not really that wrong, creating stories of genuinely affectionate love relationships of an alternative nature, making it very difficult to just stand by your position that such is wrong and evil and *"vile affections"* (Rom. 1).

- When the media, together with your friends, insist that it is ok for an unmarried couple to live together. You upset them when you insist it is wrong and use that offensive word "fornication". It really hurts when they scorn you, suggesting you are so old-fashion.

Do you begin softening in your heart toward the "new morality"? Do you begin to falter in your straight-up-and-down perspective, and think that maybe there are situations where the lines blur? Do you see how subtly and relentlessly Satan works on us. Is it *always* wrong to lie? What about Rahab's situation in Joshua 2? It seems like she would have been wrong to just refuse to lie, compromising the hiding spies. She could not even say nothing, for that would be an admission. Compare Job, who just responded right under intense pressure to respond wrong, and was greatly rewarded in the end.

14:21 *And the king said unto Joab, Behold now, I have done this thing: go therefore, bring the young man Absalom again.*
14:22 *And Joab fell to the ground on his face, and bowed himself, and thanked the king: and Joab said, To day thy servant knoweth that I have found grace in thy sight, my lord, O king, in that the king hath fulfilled the request of his servant.*
14:23 *So Joab arose and went to Geshur, and brought Absalom to Jerusalem.*
14:24 *And the king said, Let him turn to his own house, and let him not see my face. So Absalom returned to his own house, and saw not the king's face.*

14:21-24 – Joab Collects Absalom

Vs. 21 – *"Behold now, I have done this thing"* – David had come finally to a decision concerning Absalom. He was forced to pardon his own son as he had the woman's, forced by his own words spoken to her. And perhaps forced as well by his realization that his decision was really consistent with what he had already been living anyway. It seems Joab's craft drew out David's words, settling his resolve and direction. But was David right to issue this judgment in either case?

Vs. 24 – Though David would reconcile Absalom to his nation, he still would not fully reconcile him to himself. Again David took the middle road. It was still a ja-nee with him. In view of 13:39 it does not seem that there was reluctance in David. But perhaps he feared how his people would look upon his easy pardon of a murderous son.

It seems David's personal denial cut deep with

14:25 *But in all Israel there was none to be so much praised as Absalom for his beauty: from the sole of his foot even to the crown of his head there was no blemish in him.*
14:26 *And when he polled his head, (for it was at every year's end that he polled it: because the hair was heavy on him, therefore he polled it:) he weighed the hair of his head at two hundred shekels after the king's weight.*

Absalom. Rather than seeing the blessing of his preservation with a thankful heart, we soon discover arrogance in this son of David. Rather than humble appreciation for a chance to live, Absalom was offended that he was not immediately and fully reinstated to David.

14:25-27 – Absalom's Merits

Absalom was a very attractive man outwardly, but the Lord knows the heart. There was none so much praised for his beauty in all of Israel as Absalom. Sound familiar? Obviously physical beauty ran in David's family. David himself was a fine-looking man (I Sam. 16:12). And he obviously had an interest in pretty women. Absalom's sister, Tamar, was a pretty girl, and his own daughter, apparently named after his sister, was also a pretty young lady. Thus Joab, in looking upon Absalom, apparently thought he saw kingly calibre, one who could easily win the following of the nation, which of course he soon treasonously began to do in chapter15!

Again we are confronted with the danger of judging

a man by his outward appearance. Remember the words spoken concerning Saul, that he was *"a choice young man, and a goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people"* (I Sam. 9:2). He was the tallest and finest looking young man in all of Israel. Saul was considered a fit king because he looked the part. But of course he proved to be a spiritual wash-out, and even a national tragedy in the end. In the same way David's older brother, Eliab, looked like king material to Samuel, he thinking "Surely this is the one", when visiting Jesse's house with his anointing oil (vs. 7). But the Lord had to talk to him there, saying, *"Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart"* (I Sam. 16:7). Without reading history carefully, men tend to fall into the same ditches in each new generation. The example of King Saul was not so far before Joab's time. He should have collected on that important lesson. He should have understood that appearance does not make the man.

Vs. 26 – Absalom's head produced 200 shekels of hair each year. A shekel was 11.4 grams or about

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0.4 oz. This multiplied by 200 = 2.28 kgs or 5 lbs! That somebody even took note of this and that Absalom went to the trouble of weighing it suggests it was a point of great interest and admiration, indicating an inappropriate attention to appearances and self. When David was Absalom's age he was too busy conquering his nation's enemies to be concerned with checking the weight of his hair!

14:28-33 – Reconciled to David

After 2 years Absalom had had enough of his internal exile. He wanted an audience with his father. Not that he was concerned about being restored to his father's friendship, for his following actions reveal that he had further treachery, even treason, in his heart against David. But it seems Absalom wanted David's endorsement, that he might begin from a platform of official approval his purpose to win the hearts of the people away from David. And since Joab was the one who initiated bringing him back, it was to Joab that Absalom sent to organize a meeting for him with the king. But Joab did not respond to his request. In fact it was

14:29 *Therefore Absalom sent for Joab, to have sent him to the king; but he would not come to him: and when he sent again the second time, he would not come.*
14:30 *Therefore he said unto his servants, See, Joab's field is near mine, and he hath barley there; go and set it on fire. And Absalom's servants set the field on fire.*

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obviously a refusal to respond, for Absalom was twice ignored. So Joab had backed out of involvement or interest.

How do we read Joab's response here, when he seemed so keen for Absalom before (vs. 22). What changed? Maybe Joab heard of Absalom weighing his hair! These were men of war, of blood, and this sweetheart was weighing his pretty locks! As well, Joab had done Absalom a favour in bringing him back (in confirming his life in fact). Yet Absalom now comes across rather presuming, expecting further favours, expecting Joab to jump at his call, even demanding favours. Joab was likely not a man to be handled in this way, or to appreciate being pushed. So Joab was doing some serious second-thoughting concerning Absalom, probably wishing he had never gotten involved at all. Whatever was happening in Joab, his cooled interest in this son of David was his deliverance. Had he remained keen on Absalom he would likely have died with him.

Getting Joab's unwilling attention and action, however, turned out to be no problem at all for

14:31 *Then Joab arose, and came to Absalom unto his house, and said unto him, Wherefore have thy servants set my field on fire?*

14:32 *And Absalom answered Joab, Behold, I sent unto thee, saying, Come hither, that I may send thee to the king, to say, Wherefore am I come from Geshur? it had been good for me to have been there still: now therefore let me see the king's face; and if there be any iniquity in me, let him kill me.*

14:33 *So Joab came to the king, and told him: and when he had called for Absalom, he came to the king, and bowed himself on his face to the ground before the king: and the king kissed Absalom.*

Absalom. He just sent his servants to set Joab's barley field on fire (these servants of Absalom are beginning to look like a bunch of thugs). And where have you seen this fried field story before? It was a page out of Samson's history book (Judges 15). Makes me wonder about Absalom's heroes. We even see the long hair thing on him as well. Yet Absalom was missing the vital ingredient Samson had with the Spirit's presence and power. And Samson of course was lined up against his nation's enemy, rather than against his own people.

So Joab got his grain field destroyed, and began to understand the bad medicine this pretty boy was. Knowing Joab, I suspect he would have quite gladly run Absalom through for this selfishly obnoxious gesture. Ah but this was David's son, and David was a doter, and Joab would not dare do to him as he did to Abner. But we can understand how irresistible the temptation for Joab when Absalom was later hanging helplessly from a tree before him.

He had a score to settle with this royal brat.

So what do we discover here about this man Absalom?

- He was proud. Again, rather than being humbly, earnestly thankful for the opportunity to live, the man was expecting more favours. Though rescued from death, Absalom seemed to feel himself untouchable now. Apparently he was deeply offended by David's refusal to speak to him. He would not be handled that way, nor would he tolerate any resistance from Joab! He reckoned he deserved better treatment than this. He was not acting like an as-good-as-dead man who was pardoned. He was arrogantly expecting and demanding of Joab, rather than going hat-in-hand to Joab asking for his help.

  Consider how we can be this way with the Lord as well.

- He was disrespectful. Joab was a man who had earned the nations respect for his military leadership. In spite of his shortcomings, he was a champion in Israel, with proven courage and ability, deserving a measure of honour. What was this son of David to so treat the captain of the army like

his messenger boy?

- He was subtle. His torching of Joab's field was a sly, bold move. As was his crafty invitation to his sheep-shearing, with murder in his heart. Makes me wonder again if he did not have ol' Jonadab for a counsellor, on how to get Joab kick-started.

- He was thoughtless and cruel. His burning of the field constituted theft in causing Joab such loss. Are we not seeing in him the same thoughtless impulsiveness through which he killed his brother?

- He was unruly. Demanding his own way, refusing "no" for an answer, and impatient in his demand. Again, how like his dead brother, who was demanding and impatient in having his way, when and how *he* wanted.

Clever, handsome, royal, but another royal rat! There was just no humility in these sons of David. Yet it was the difference in Solomon. Compare Solomon's humbly wise response to the Lord in I Kings 3:5-14. Where did Solomon's tender heart come from? Nathan's influence perhaps? It was as the difference between Eli's carnal sons and the sweet spirit of young Samuel. Compare young David as well. After he had proven himself a hero

in Israel several times over, yet still David referred to himself before Saul as a dead dog and a flea and a partridge in the wilderness (I Sam. 24 & 26). God was blessing David with success in those days of his humility. God blesses and uses those who are sweet of spirit! He blesses the one who walks before Him in a spirit of humility, unpresuming and thankful, rather than the proud and carnal and cruel and unruly. God in fact takes out the sour soul, to replace him with the sweet spirit, as Eli with Samuel, Saul with David, Absalom & Amnon with Solomon.

Consider the weakness of the whole dynasty concept of the sons of kings inheriting the right to the throne from their fathers. It presumes that one could be qualified solely on the basis of heredity without any other qualifying factor, though he be a monster in fact. Where there is need for a nation to maintain military might a succeeding son could be clueless as to matters of war, or a coward. It was the advantage in the days of the Judges, for a man came to authority then only through proven leadership ability, rather than through heredity. What was Absalom's qualification to reign, except that he was David's son, and a pretty man, and persuasive of tongue to move men to thuggery? Did he have any experience of war or ability to lead men

(apart from rogues)? You will search in vain through David's catalogue of mighty men (chapter 23) to find even *one* of David's sons listed there. These were not sons of valour, only sons of David. David arose by an entirely different and refreshing set of standards, through his proven valour and his personal dependence on God, through his loyalty to his father/Father. Jonathan was one notable exception. It seems he would have been a suitable, heroic, loyal, manly, yet tender successor of Saul were it not that God had turned from Saul for his stubborn disobedience. It is a heartache to consider the might-have-beens with Jonathan, what he never became because of what Saul refused to be. And do we not have the same impact on the outcome of our own children, both positively and negatively?

So Absalom set about to win the hearts of the people away from David. It speaks of bitterness toward his father. This was a man given to selfishness and festering hatred. Having exercised treachery against his brother for his treachery against Tamar, Absalom now turned his treacherous designs on his father. Having obtained his father's kiss, he now turned his attention to stealing his father's popularity, people and position. Yet it was David's due for his failure to be a stronger father with his sons.

"And the conspiracy was strong;
for the people
increased continually
with Absalom"

(II Sam. 15:12)

Chapter 15

15:1 *And it came to pass after this, that Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him.*
15:2 *And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate: and it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city art thou? And he said, Thy servant is of one of the tribes of Israel.*

Absalom on the Campaign Trail

Vs. 1 – *"And it came to pass after this"* – Understand the significance of this opening phrase. In 13:1 the same phrase opened the account of Tamar's rape. In 13:23 it began the record of Amnon's murder. Now it heads the story of Absalom's treason. Tolling out the fulfilment of God's words through Nathan in chapter 12. Event by following event, God was doing just what He said He would do, just as He always does!

"Chariots and horses" – Absalom began by gathering around himself a lordly look of importance, as Adonijah later did when also making a bid for the throne (I Ki. 1).

Vs. 2 – Would you have time to do this? Absalom was a young man with too much time on his hands. His rising up early to speak to any who came with a

controversy suggests purposeful intent. He was on a mission. Again it was the behind-the-back approach, as in his dealing with David and Amnon. He did not trust in God to bring him to power if and when He wanted. Contrast David, who waited on God to bring Saul down;

- Though David was anointed to be king.
- Though Saul was twice in his hands.
- While performing acts of genuine care for his people.

In fact we have no indication of any relationship with the Lord in Absalom. We have not heard mention of the Lord's name from him even *once* yet. The Lord only features on his lips in vs. 7-8 as a false front, using David's love for God in deceiving his father again. Here is certainly a form of using the Lord's name in vain, in a cheat. Consider how we can do this too, using the Lord in the way we present ourselves to people when our true relation to Him is not as it seems.

Where were those sympathetic to David to see what was happening and warn him? With Absalom standing beside the way in this manner, why was it not obvious to folks that he was a usurper? Perhaps there was enough discontent with David among the

15:3 *And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee.*
15:4 *Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice!*

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people that they were willing to be easily turned to another?

Vs. 3 – *"See, thy matters are good and right"* – Using a kind of flattery, Absalom agreeably proclaimed everybody's matters *"good and right".*

"There is no man deputed of the king to hear thee" – Not only was he pandering to the people, he was slandering the king as well, implying no concern for the people in the king, in contrast to Absalom's suggestion of great care for their plight. His slander would seem to be a lie, for David had personally heard the unknown widow woman from Tekoah in chapter 14. Why did David not become suspicious when none were coming to him for judgment anymore?

Vs. 4 – *"I would do justice"* – Hear the campaign promises. Oh sigh! If only *he* were in a position of judge, he would be available and fair and would care. If only this important appearing son had authority to act in behalf of the people. Do you see how he subtly dangled the need to empower him like

bait before the people? He did not ask it of David, he asked it of the people, avoiding the proper channels. As if his only concern was for them. As if his only motivation for power was to bring justice to all. See how this one talks justice, while doing his own father injustice, and with no true interest in the welfare of the people he was cooing over. Many of Israel died for the selfish cause of this showy charlatan! Compare how David came to power through protecting his father's honour and sheep, while Absalom the exact opposite! Yet with a look of importance, and quickly agreeing with all in their cause, there was a growing feeling among the people that they needed to get this guy appointed. Absalom was a suave, positive, personal, affirming, persuasive *rat!* This, combined with his attractive appearance, soon made him a popular figure. It was similar to the days of young David's rising popular support when serving under Saul. But in this case unscrupulous, in contrast to David's honest rise through his wisdom, humility, and courage.

Consider how Absalom was using his outstanding gifts to his own advantage. He was using what his father gave him against his father. Again, we can do this too, using against our Father the mind, eyes, hands, feet, mouth, etc. that He gave to us. It is the

great danger or hurdle of those who are exceptionally gifted. There is so great a temptation to pride in them. We should thank God with every remembrance that we are plainer types. See it as more protection than misfortune. Do not pine with envy wishing to be or have what others have. Say thank you Lord that you do not.

Absalom was a fancy, friendly fraud! Look with greater care when it is so pretty and promising and flattering. Let the warning bells be ringing! Things coming with such an approach very likely involve false hope; the stroking words of somebody wanting to use you, the hug of hurt rather than help, the enemy's embrace, the traitor's kiss. It is not that we must forever be sceptics. But we will be con-magnets if we fail to be realists and aware. Real life and real love is usually much plainer than the glitz and glitter and glib tongue of an Absalom-type presentation.

Vs. 5 – With time Absalom developed a following, but he insisted on no special honours. Hey he was such a charmer! Probably kissed babies too. Yet again, the truth of it is that he did not really care for

the welfare of the sheep as a good shepherd. He was only a thief, plying his trade, paving his launching pad. And the people were the rocket fuel, to be burned up and spit out in his lift-off. He was merely using the sheep, as he had used his father, their popular support the avenue to his own exaltation and his father's demise. Again, many of Israel died with this man. Compare the good shepherd in John 10, whose crowning quality is that he gives his life for the sheep. Compare the heart of the true spiritual leader, saying "take me, hurt me instead of them", as Moses, Judah, Paul, Jesus.

It seems to me that David should have been more aware and proactive. Where he so deftly handled every outward threat, the more subtle internal threat, with emotional strings involved, proved to be the real danger to David. There is warning here for us. We must be hard against the enemy of sin, both the external and internal threats, even when our emotions are involved. Lest we be as the invincible fortress compromised from within. Compare Paul's warning to the elders at Ephesus in Acts 20 of wolves from without and within (vs. 29-30). We must be watchful, aware, vigilant, sober.

Compare Joshua at Ai. No obstacle proved too great for Israel in the conquest, except the obstacle of

15:6 *And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.*
15:7 *And it came to pass after forty years, that Absalom said unto the king, I pray thee, let me go and pay my vow, which I have vowed unto the LORD, in Hebron.*

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internal evil.

Vs. 7 – *"After forty years"* – This *"forty years"* here in the King James Version presents a problem. The KJV simply, faithfully translates the Hebrew text, which reads "forty", while most other versions (and commentators as well) presume a copyist error in the Hebrew and translate it rather as "four years", after the Septuagint and Josephus. *"Forty years"* is difficult because;

- It cannot refer to the years of Absalom's treasonous practice, because David only reigned for a total of 40 years (5:4). Four years would seem to make more sense.
- It cannot refer to Absalom's age, because Absalom was born in Hebron during the early years of David's 40-yr reign (5:5; 3:2-3). He could only have been about 30 years old at this point, with David in his early 60's.
- It cannot refer to David's age because he began having children only after he was 30 (5:4), and at this point he had grandchildren.

If the number is indeed meant to be forty then the date from which the four decades were counted is unknown, some unspecified starting point, which admittedly is strange but it must be. One commentator suggested that the 40-year period could look back to David's anointing to be king at Bethlehem. The timing would fit. I struggle with the copyist error story. We will know the truth of it one day, and I am willing to wait until then. For now, our Bible doctrine is not affected.

"Let me go and pay my vow…unto the LORD" – Absalom suggests that he made a vow to the Lord, something like Jacob's at Bethel, that if he should return from Syria to Jerusalem he would offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving. How sweet! Yet always it was the fraud or false front on this one, now even bringing the Lord's name into it. And whispering from the distant past comes the word of the Lord, saying *"the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain"* (Ex. 20). Should David not have been more cautious or suspicious, he having been taken by Absalom before? Had he seen any evidence of the Lord as a sincere part of this man's life? We certainly have not! Should we be making such judgments concerning people? Yes, of course we should. It is part of discernment. Certainly such observations or concerns should set us to praying

15:8 *For thy servant vowed a vow while I abode at Geshur in Syria, saying, If the LORD shall bring me again indeed to Jerusalem, then I will serve the LORD.*
15:9 *And the king said unto him, Go in peace. So he arose, and went to Hebron.*

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for God's direction (watch and pray). Why Hebron, 25 kms to the south? Why not right there in Jerusalem, the centre of national worship, if it was a vow to God? Should David not have been asking the same questions of this one? Again, he comes across as very naive. Except that Absalom was gifted of tongue and a charmer, and David's heart was involved. Again, it is a warning to us. Often when our heart is engaged our head is sidelined. May the Lord give us grace to never allow a foolish heart purpose to overrule a valid head concern.

Absalom took advantage of David's feelings, using his father's emotions against him. He took advantage of David's devotion, and natural desire to see such develop in his son. He cleverly used what he knew would move his father. Again, he was a sly thing. But not too sly for God (Gal. 6).

It seems Absalom just wanted distance to be able to work his purpose while out from under the eyes of David and those loyal to him. It can be the same reason folks leave a sound church.

15:10 *But Absalom sent spies throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, As soon as ye hear the sound of the trumpet, then ye shall say, Absalom reigneth in Hebron.*

Vs. 10 – *"But Absalom sent spies"* – These were probably like campaign managers; carefully, discreetly assessing the attitude of the people, talking Absalom up and David down, and preparing supporters for the change-over as soon as they heard Absalom proclaimed king. But again, where was the loyalty to David? All must have known this would mean death for David, one who had so proven his ability to take care of his people. What had Absalom proven? It is easy to lose track of blessing and benefit when there are no more threats or wars, only peace. Perhaps it is the most dangerous time. It was not just a matter of loyalty in the people, but of character. It seems nobody went to David to confirm what the true story was, partly because Absalom's effort was to poison folks against David. Yet still simple integrity would insist that we confirm the truth of reports before making judgments. *"He that answereth a matter before he heareth it, it is folly and shame unto him"* (Prov. 18:13). *"A man that is first in his cause seems just…"* (Prov. 18:17). In the end it was the people themselves who were hurt and shown to be foolish for their failure here. They were the ones getting taken, and never checking the facts with their

rightful leader. The right and mature way is always to be upfront and open about all things with all involved.

Vs. 11 – Apparently this large group included leaders and important people of Jerusalem. They were perhaps handpicked, knowing their support of Absalom or their unhappiness with David. Perhaps these were people personally touched and displeased by David's failures;

- Those, as Shimei, who still felt David had wrongly usurped Saul's dynasty.
- Those, as Ahithophel (vs. 12), aware of sensitive details, being personally impacted by David's adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah.
- Those grieved with David's failure to discipline his delinquent sons and Joab.

Their attendance served to swell the appearance of popular support for Absalom, bringing the more on board. Yet Absalom was forcing their hand in a sense, in failing to inform them that this invitation

15:12 *And Absalom sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counsellor, from his city, even from Giloh, while he offered sacrifices. And the conspiracy was strong; for the people increased continually with Absalom.*

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was not really about a religious vow at all. Again, the false front. Always misrepresentation with this one. Be careful to check out what looks too good to be true, because it probably is! Again, suggesting the people rather gullible and thoughtless, like David. But we must remember the great gifted attractiveness of this charismatic leader. How often throughout history crowds have been moved to follow, even to their *death*, a gifted, stirring leader. It suggests the celebrity status to which Absalom had arisen, that all would respond to his invitation, knowing nothing. They failed to ask the question of what it was about. Do not let anybody's popularity, or any popular movement keep you from asking appropriate questions. Folks with nothing to hide have no problem with questions.

Consider what a wonder Absalom might have been had his heart been right, had his gifts been harnessed for good, rather than used only for his own selfish ends. It is the great tragedy of parents who failed to bring their children to discipline.

Vs. 12 – Absalom was aware of those nursing secret

discontent. Ahithophel was one of David's close counsellors, yet it seems he was a secret despiser of David, perhaps because of the Bathsheba/Uriah affair. This counsellor may have been the grandfather of Bathsheba (11:3; 23:34). Thus he was likely fully aware of David's evil adultery and resulting "cover-up" through the death of a good man of exceptional loyalty. *"Behold your sins will find you out".*

Consider how this man, Ahithophel, lived out a role similar to Judas Iscariot with Jesus. And he came to a similar end as well, in suicide by hanging. Compare Psalm 55:12-15, perhaps referring to this man, and more widely, to all who show themselves no true friend in the dark days of rejection and infamy.

Many are the traitor hearts, who are happy to be aligned or associated with Christ and Christianity, when it is popular. But as soon as Christ becomes uncool or unnecessary or unsafe or not advantageous, they drop Him like a hot potato.

Vs. 10-12 – Absalom's purpose of course was treason, and punishable by death if his effort failed. Under normal circumstances Absalom would have been risking his life. But what has he learned? He

knows now that David is too weak to deal with him as harshly as his sins deserve. And because the king would not kill him he had nothing to lose and everything to gain in this. It is the way selfishness responds to the failure to take harsh measures in firm, loving leadership and discipline. It is what David did not understand, and yet Joab did understand. It was probably part of what moved Joab to later kill Absalom, even against David's earnest desire. David, by his weakness, had empowered Absalom, against his father and to the hurt of the entire nation. Had Absalom lived he would only have been more strengthened to try it again under the protection of David's refusal to deal hard with him. Perhaps if Joab were here and we could hear his reasons for killing Absalom in the battle that followed, we would discover more than revenge behind Joab's action. Maybe we would find there was actually a sacrificial aspect in his execution of that selfish son, knowing that he might land up in serious trouble with David for taking Absalom's life against the king's clear instruction, and yet knowing there would never be peace for the kingdom as long as David foolishly allowed his son to live. Somebody had to deal with that menace. And if David was too weak then Joab would be strong.

15:13 *And there came a messenger to David, saying, The hearts of the men of Israel are after Absalom.*

15:14 *And David said unto all his servants that were with him at Jerusalem, Arise, and let us flee; for we shall not else escape from Absalom: make speed to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly, and bring evil upon us, and smite the city with the edge of the sword.*

Vs. 13 – This messenger was late by a few years.

Vs. 14 – How immediately David grasped the magnitude of the threat and responded. Though his reaction might have appeared overboard, yet it was his salvation. His concern as well was for the people and fixtures of Jerusalem. Consider some things suggested by David's response;

- That David believed the report, feeling no need to first explore the truth of it, suggests some awareness in him of what had been developing. He was not completely ignorant.

- That David fled immediately, not presuming his son would show him mercy suggests that he really did have a fair measure of Absalom's character.

- That he fled, expressing the desire to preserve the city, suggests his awareness that Absalom would have no regard for the people and all that had been built there. David did care for the sheep, enough to deflect the attack away.

15:15 *And the king's servants said unto the king, Behold, thy servants are ready to do whatsoever my lord the king shall appoint.*

The crisis revealed David's gut awareness of things he perhaps refused to admit before. As Joab, David was coming to understand the ugly truth about his son.

From vs. 15 a very interesting and instructive development begins to unfold before us. We begin to discover who David's true friends were, in the context of those now showing themselves his enemies. We in fact are exposed to the heart of true loyalty or faithfulness. Though we have heard nothing of friends before, we find them now. Understand it. While David was strong, those who disapproved of him could say or do nothing. But with the general consensus now swinging the other way strongly enough, the secret haters and nay-sayers felt free to come out of hiding and join the cause of popular dissent. So it became a time of discovery for David as to who his true friends really were. In the context of most people easily following the enemy, *"the King's servants"* remain obedient.

It is what we all discover in our dark valley times of life. It is in our low times, in our times of defeat and disgrace that our true friends are revealed, and our

enemies as well. *"A friend loveth at all times, and a brother is born for adversity".* When you take a fall in life, when you are feeling disgraced and defeated for some failure, some inability, some embarrassment, some whom you thought to be your friends may in fact walk away. For their loyalty is not sufficient to suffer with you in your hurt. But your true friends will not leave you at such times. They will be there to side you. Even perhaps those you did not know to be your friends, and those you did not even know to be your secret enemies. Folks display their true character at such times. Maybe God in fact allows such times of defeat and disgrace partly in order to sift out and expose our associates.

Oh there are mighty lessons for us here, for it is the very same that the Son of David is currently discovering among those called by His name. Do you remember the interesting response of Joseph of Arimathea, how he and Nicodemus honoured Jesus in seeing to His burial? They may not have stood as strongly for Jesus as they should have while He was alive, but the revealing moment for them was in His death, in the hour of His apparent defeat. Then they came forward and stood with Him and honoured Him. That is when they showed themselves to be His friends; secret friends before, but not anymore. The gross mistreatment of Christ was their coming-

out, their crossing of the floor. There is a sense in which they illustrate all believers in this age. Perhaps God allows the apparent defeat of Jesus Christ in this current age in order to sift *His* associates. When Jesus shall be here in His return, and obviously alive, and fearfully powerful, and ruling with a rod of iron, it will not be such an easy thing to discern the true nature of hearts. For all will be forced to obey outwardly then, out of fear or for personal advantage, though there be no inward faithful love and grateful adoration. But the time of Christ's disgrace and exile is the revealer. *Today is the revealer!!* How do folks handle the Son of David when He appears weak, when He is *not* the world focus and reigning in unquestioned power, when He is as it were exiled from the earth, when the evil one and his people hold the upper hand. How folks handle Jesus now displays their true heart toward Him, even as with David in his time of weakness. His true friends will love Him and remain loyal to Him regardless of His current circumstances, indeed in every circumstance. It will be easy to show love for Jesus when He is victoriously reigning as supreme Sovereign over heaven and earth in the coming kingdom age, just as it was easy for Judas to show love for Jesus when all was popular and promising. But when it was all going down and defeat was imminent, that is what shook Judas out.

It is what shakes out traitor hearts, sifting friends from enemies.

It is the same display that will take place at the end of Christ's 1000-year reign on earth (Rev. 20), when Satan is released from his bondage for a little season. All who will have been forced, through Christ's presence and reign with a rod of iron, to show *outward* loyalty and obedience throughout that era, yet harbouring the inward *dis*loyalty of faithless hearts, shall rise to join Satan against Christ, as they did Absalom against David. Jerusalem will be surrounded. Christ's final defeat might seem imminent then, as with Hezekiah before Assyria. And yet it will be the final fall for traitor hearts.

How *you* handle Jesus now, when He is under it, in His exile from this earth, is the key! Are you brazenly loyal, or quietly ashamed? Are you thoughtless concerning Him, or watching? Are you flying His flag, or wishing to attract no attention to your Christianity?

We see many parallels between David and Jesus in this event;

- They were both rejected for a time by their own nation. Understand Hebrews 13:11-13.

- They were both sold out by traitorous comrades.
- They were both driven out of Jerusalem.
- They both eventually return from the east.
- And they both reward and punish on their return, based upon the way folks treated them in their exile.

Notice how we find the majority of Israel like sheep. Most just dumbly followed the popular interest, essentially oblivious to what was happening, and asking no questions. They responded in the way the crowd, the mass of humanity, always tends to respond, mindlessly following along with whatever's happening and popular and easy and makes the least waves. Just going with the flow, not daring to fight the current, wearing what others wear, saying what others say, drinking what others drink. Yet, as is always the case, a few understood and stood with God's anointed. Which will you choose to follow, the crowd or the Christ, the "in" thing or the King?

Vs. 16 – As the church was left to occupy till He

15:17 *And the king went forth, and all the people after him, and tarried in a place that was far off.*

15:18 *And all his servants passed on beside him; and all the Cherethites, and all the Pelethites, and all the Gittites, six hundred men which came after him from Gath, passed on before the king.*

15:19 *Then said the king to Ittai the Gittite, Wherefore goest thou also with us? return to thy place, and abide with the king: for thou art a stranger, and also an exile.*

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comes (Lk. 19:13).

Vs. 17 – As Jesus has done, being driven out of the world and going to a far place. His people are to follow after Him only later, in the rapture of the church at the end of this age.

Vs. 18 – As we considered in chapter 8, the Cherethites and the Pelethites may have been David's personal guard (I Ki. 1:38; I Chron. 11:25). The Gittites were from Gath, and therefore must have been Philistines. They were a group of 600 men (foreigners) who had committed themselves, together with their families (vs. 22), in loyalty to David.

Vs. 19-22 – Ittai's loyalty – Ittai apparently was the leader of this band of Gittites. It is not clear why David sought to turn Ittai and his men back to Jerusalem when he did not do this with all of his followers. Perhaps David suspected confusion in them. Maybe the man just thought this was what

15:20 *Whereas thou camest but yesterday, should I this day make thee go up and down with us? seeing I go whither I may, return thou, and take back thy brethren: mercy and truth be with thee.*

15:21 *And Ittai answered the king, and said, As the LORD liveth, and as my lord the king liveth, surely in what place my lord the king shall be, whether in death or life, even there also will thy servant be.*

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they were supposed to do, without any real commitment. And so, with David's firm nudge in pushing him back, Ittai was given an out, the open door to return with the king's full blessing. Undoubtedly to return would have been the safest choice. But of course David discovered no confusion in them at all, but only crystal clarity. He found no wavering, but only sincere devotion. The man fully knew what they were about, and they would remain faithful to David whether in life or death. Compare Ruth's words to Naomi. This is the expression of the loyalty God delights in rewarding. Such a powerful influence Ittai's unwavering devotion had on his followers, for it seems they were all with him in this.

Consider the devotion of these foreign Gittites. We might wonder what caused it, but no reasons are given here in the text, highlighting the point that what led to this response does not matter or we would have it. What matters is what we *are* given, their example of unwavering devotion when it came to the crunch. The important issue is not what the

man and his followers *had been*, but what they had come to right here, the settled decision they made to stand with God's choice in David.

It is the same with you and me. The deciding factor for us is not a matter of our background, what we have been, or the choices or mistakes we have made in the past. It is all about what we choose to do with Jesus Christ right here and now, right at this moment; whether we by faith choose to stand with Him in His time of weakness, whether in life or death, loss or gain.

Consider as well David's push, in seeking to send them back to Jerusalem and the new "king". How often we see this same approach in the Lord in His dealings with us. He often tries to do just what David attempted here, to push a man away from some display of devotion in order to see just how deep it runs. When Jacob wrestled with the Lord at Peniel in Genesis 32 it was the Lord trying to get away, demanding that Jacob let Him go. But Jacob refused and clung with everything in him, even when his leg was put out of joint. The result was that Jacob received God's special blessing right there for his tenaciously stubborn hold on the Lord. It was there that he was named "Israel", a prince or wrestler with God.

Elijah had a servant he left somewhere in his flight from Jezebel (I Ki. 19:3), and we never hear of that servant again. But when he later tried to do the same thing with his next servant, Elisha, the man would have none of it (II Ki. 2). The direct result of Elisha's stubborn resolve to stay by his master's side was that he was there to receive the blessing of the prophet's office when Elijah was taken up. The difference? One servant was willing to be left behind, pushed away. But not this one! The moral of the story? God is looking for those who cannot easily be put off or pushed away by trials, difficulties, threat, or pain. Those are the ones He is able and willing to put into His service. For those are the truly faithful ones. As David with Ittai, the Lord sometimes checks the strength of our resolve or hold or devotion to Him, to see if He can chase us away from His side. If He can easily push you away from Himself or from His ministry through some hardship, fear, threat, suspicion, frustration, then He knows you did not really want it (Him) in the first place. Ittai *would not be pushed away*, expressing fullest awareness of exactly what was involved. It is the hold or grip of faith and faithfulness.

Even so Ruth knew fully well what she was doing in refusing to be sent away from Naomi and her God. She was aware, and yet she refused to allow any

potential difficulty to discourage her. The cost had been counted and she had made her decision. And what a wonderfully fortunate decision it proved to be, as with Ittai. By faith she knew God's promises to be greater treasure than all that the world had to offer. Such informed devotion does not go unnoticed by the Lord, nor does it go unrewarded. Such unreasonable loyalty is a refreshing thing, in contrast to Orpah, who was willing to be persuaded by a perfectly sensible argument…persuaded *away!* And she of course was promptly dismissed from God's record of history, like Elijah's first servant. We live in a day when the kind of friendship and faithful commitment described in such true heroes is largely unknown, in friendship, in marriage, in ministry. It is a loyalty that has no connection to or dependence on circumstance whatsoever.

Compare the example of Ebed-melech in Jeremiah 38:8-9. When the prophet Jeremiah was cast into a dungeon by the leaders of Judah, Ebed-melech, the Ethiopian eunuch, insisted to the king that he be lifted out, and he was given freedom to do it. Again, the *foreigner* (as Ruth & Ittai) was more concerned and faithful to God and His man than those of his own nation. Sometimes the pressure God brings upon us is just an awareness of the need, raising the question of what we are going to

do about it. As with Ebed-melech, the chance to do something or nothing is passed before us to see what we will do for the Lord. So with Esther. The same principle applies to our response to lost souls around us.

All such examples of faithful foreigners illustrate believers in Jesus, we who have come from a far country to faithfulness to that man from Galilee; we who have come to loyalty to God's Son, while His own nation hates and rejects Him; we whom the Lord planned to find and use from the beginning; we who were not His people (Loammi), but who have become *ammi*, My people. Compare Romans 9:23-26. *Foreigners turned family and friends!*

We do well to not lose sight of the rewards! For their faithfulness;

- Ittai was rewarded with leadership.
- Ruth was rewarded with marriage and children and honours.
- Ebed-melech was rewarded with God's protection when Babylon came (Jer. 39).
- We will be rewarded as well for faithfulness to Jesus. If we, as Ittai and Ruth, refuse to be persuaded away from loyalty we will be

15:22 *And David said to Ittai, Go and pass over. And Ittai the Gittite passed over, and all his men, and all the little ones that were with him.*

15:23 *And all the country wept with a loud voice, and all the people passed over: the king also himself passed over the brook Kidron, and all the people passed over, toward the way of the wilderness.*

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granted leadership in the coming kingdom of Christ (Rev. 20). It is not a matter of our being exceptionally gifted servants, but *faithful* servants.

"And behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Rev. 22:12).

The Lord still looks for faithful foreigners who will decide for Christ and stand for Christ and confess Him before men, who will show their loyalty to Him though surrounded by the disloyal. Everyone who stood with David in his shame and distress was blessed in his return to his kingdom.

Vs. 22 – Consider the valuable picture here of faithful men who will take their whole families along with them in their loyalty, even though it might bring them to greatest risk of danger and death.

Vs. 22-23 – Notice the great focus on *"passed over"* here. These faithful followers were leaving comforts and security, heading out into the wilderness of

15:24 *And lo Zadok also, and all the Levites were with him, bearing the ark of the covenant of God: and they set down the ark of God; and Abiathar went up, until all the people had done passing out of the city.*

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uncertainty. The easiest and least threatening way would have been to just sit tight. But they were doing the right, hard thing. Even so it is with the step of faith into salvation, or in following God's call to true devotion or ministry.

Vs. 24 – *"Lo…"* – As if with surprise. Again, it was a time of discovery for David of those who were unreservedly with him. Notice how Zadok is named first here, *"with his men"*. Abiathar's attendance is given as if an afterthought. It seems Zadok had stepped into the leadership role between them, though Abiathar came first to serve David as priest. Remember the significance of Zadok and the import of this interesting shift, as discussed earlier on pages 166-168. Zadok remained loyal to David through both Absalom's and Adonijah's treasonous efforts. Therefore he and his descendants served as priest through the rest of the O.T. era. Trace the theme in this context. Those who remain loyal to the Lord's anointed are rewarded with service, as Ittai, Zadok, and Solomon, while those who do not are removed, as Amnon, Absalom, Abiathar, and Joab.

15:25 *And the king said unto Zadok, Carry back the ark of God into the city: if I shall find favour in the eyes of the LORD, he will bring me again, and shew me both it, and his habitation:*

15:26 *But if he thus say, I have no delight in thee; behold, here am I, let him do to me as seemeth good unto him.*

Could this placing of Zadok first here mark a hidden leaning in Abiathar even then, that will later manifest itself when he joined with Adonijah? Is he in two minds here? Compare Christ's awareness of the leaning in the heart of Judas from the beginning (Jn. 6:70-71).

Consider the larger image we find in this chapter. David and the people were stripped of all pretentions, resulting in the true heart of all now showing. Thus there is a sense in which it was a good service Absalom provided in his rebellion. It is another example of God's positive purpose in a negative turn of events. It just put everything out in the open for all to see. And we see as well in what follows David's genuine heart of dependence on his God.

Vs. 25 – David's trust was not in the ark of the Lord, as in Eli's day, not in religious relics or ceremonies as many today. Instead he simply placed himself wholly in the hands of the living God, to deal with him as He saw fit. No items or procedures or "holy

men" were required. Compare in chapter 24 when he did the same under threat of God's judgment (vs. 14). It is a measure of David's trust that he would so completely resign himself to the Lord's will, whether it meant good news or bad for him. He would not take any unreasonable measures after his own understanding or man's reasoning. He would not put any faith in things, no matter how sacred they might seem to be. He simply stood before his God in complete dependence on Him, and it was the right thing to do! When David was stripped of all props his faith in God was unshaken and shone through.

It is never a matter of some particular place that gives us greater power with God. It is never some particular procedure or word combination or formula. There is no hocus pocus or superstition involved with the true religion of God. Some folks look for some special feel about a place or people. But this too can be an untrustworthy guide, shades of human tradition. Show me that in the Word! Perhaps we too must be careful about Christian "talismans" and sanctified superstitions, in the special ways we come to God for our needs. Like when there is really a big and bad trial that we are facing, well then we need to get *more* Christians involved in praying. The more people involved, and

from the more countries we can manage the better, because this makes for stronger "medicine". Does it? Says who? Show me that in the Word. Jesus said, "Where 2 or 3 are gathered there am I in midst". Or some tend to believe that if the pastor prays, the "holy man", then there is special force going up and power coming down. Is there? Or because we are getting no answer in some hard case we must pray this one through the night if we want results. Is that so? Jesus prayed through the night because He felt compelled to, *alone*. There may be times in our lives when we too will feel compelled to the same. But are we led to such a Christian formula or method to use for the really hard cases? We must be careful that we do not do as the Jewish people had done by the time of Jesus day, adding unscriptural, man-devised notions to God's words, after the traditions and teachings and expectations of men and not after God. David would just make his request known to his God and leave himself in God's hands to do as He saw fit. Yes it was a very hard situation to face, but he put no demands on God, whether overt or covert. Yes it was a very humiliating situation to endure, but he knew he deserved far worse. There was not the least hesitation in David's thinking, that maybe they should bring the ark along anyway, just in case its presence might make a difference for them.

15:27 *The king said also unto Zadok the priest, Art not thou a seer? return into the city in peace, and your two sons with you, Ahimaaz thy son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar.*
15:28 *See, I will tarry in the plain of the wilderness, until there come word from you to certify me.*
15:29 *Zadok therefore and Abiathar carried the ark of God again to Jerusalem: and they tarried there.*
15:30 *And David went up by the ascent of mount Olivet, and wept as he went up, and had his head covered, and he went barefoot: and all the people that was with him covered every man his head, and they went up, weeping as they went up.*

Vs. 27 – Do not miss the fact that it was those who came out of the city with David, those who stepped out for him, who were the ones he could trust in his service. Consider the principle suggested here. It is no different with Jesus today. It is the ones who go out to Him, who step out for Him, outside the camp, bearing His reproach. It is those who come out of hiding, out of their "shyness" or other defences. These are the ones He is able and willing to honour and entrust in His service.

Vs. 30 – Notice the humility, even humiliation David wore before all. There is such a freshness and sincerity about him here. He put on no airs, no brazen front, no attempt to save face, or to preserve the morale of his few followers, no empty bluster. He was wounded and wearing his wound. He openly wore his shame and heartache, showing his complete dependence on the Lord. And there was no slandering, no attempt to preserve his own image by running Absalom down. Contrast just the

15:31 *And one told David, saying, Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom. And David said, O LORD, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness.*
15:32 *And it came to pass, that when David was come to the top of the mount, where he worshipped God, behold, Hushai the Archite came to meet him with his coat rent, and earth upon his head:*
15:33 *Unto whom David said, If thou passest on with me, then thou shalt be a burden unto me:*
15:34 *But if thou return to the city, and say unto Absalom, I will be thy servant, O king; as I have been thy father's servant hitherto, so will I now also be thy servant: then mayest thou for me defeat the counsel of Ahithophel.*

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opposite in Absalom; all false front and misrepresentation.

Vs. 31 – The news gets worse, sending David to prayer. Yet consider how God answered this prayer, even though Ahithophel's counsel carried greatest weight among the men of his day (16:23). Despite man's perceived greatness, God's purpose stands.

Vs. 31-32 – David was openly praying and worshipping God though he was in flight. Again, when David was stripped of all pretension we see the gold in him;

- Trusting only God (vs. 25-26).
- Wearing his shame openly (vs. 30).
- Praying and worshipping (vs. 31-32).

Vs. 34 – David set up a fifth column, a system of surveillance and communication. Was David wise

15:35 *And hast thou not there with thee Zadok and Abiathar the priests? therefore it shall be, that what thing soever thou shalt hear out of the king's house, thou shalt tell it to Zadok and Abiathar the priests.*
15:36 *Behold, they have there with them their two sons, Ahimaaz Zadok's son, and Jonathan Abiathar's son; and by them ye shall send unto me every thing that ye can hear.*
15:37 *So Hushai David's friend came into the city, and Absalom came into Jerusalem.*

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or ethical to advise Hushai to deception? And God even honoured it, and used it! Was this wisdom, or an arm-of-flesh method? It seems David was not trusting God alone to bring Ahithophel's counsel to nothing? Is there a touch of ol' Jacob in David here? We see his trust in God, yet his humanness as well.

Vs. 37 – Hear how significantly Hushai is called *"David's friend"* (also 16:16). Can the Son of David, in His current banishment from earth, call you and I the same? Compare John 15:13-15.

Chapter 16

Comparisons

Note the difference between David and Saul. David openly wore his humility or humiliation before his people and the Lord, while Saul, though caught in disobedience, was concerned only that his image be propped before the people (I Sam. 15:30). David showed a humbled, repentant spirit, while Saul only cover-up.

Parallels

As David's own son and people refused loyalty to their father and king, so Christ's own people of His day refused to recognize and receive the King of kings. As David's selfish son treasonously sought to destroy his own father and thrust himself forward in his place, so the Jewish leaders sought to destroy Jesus in an effort to hold onto leadership over the nation. In both cases they did not keep the lead for long. Even so Judas sought to advance himself through his Master's defeat. As David's fall from power revealed people, exposing those loyal to him regardless of his status and those really disloyal at heart, even so the same is true with Jesus today. His seeming defeat and banishment from earth, His

16:1 *And when David was a little past the top of the hill, behold, Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth met him, with a couple of asses saddled, and upon them two hundred loaves of bread, and an hundred bunches of raisins, and an hundred of summer fruits, and a bottle of wine.*

16:2 *And the king said unto Ziba, What meanest thou by these? And Ziba said, The asses be for the king's household to ride on; and the bread and summer fruit for the young men to eat; and the wine, that such as be faint in the wilderness may drink.*

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current unpopularity as a whole among the people of earth, has a way of sifting people, the loyal from the disloyal. It is a measure of our faith and courage to remain loyal to Jesus and to show it in a rejecting world. We can be sure of heavenly reward for such loyal courage.

16:1-4 – Meeting with Ziba

Vs. 2 – *"Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth met him"* – Ziba, the head servant of Saul and then Mephibosheth, was first off the mark to be mindful of the physical needs of those fleeing, bringing food and drink and transport. It was not much among so many, but sometimes it is the thought and effort and encouragement of it that is bigger than the actual contribution. As Ruth, so starved for an encouraging word and meeting the praise and help of Boaz. As Jacob meeting that vision of angels at Mahanaim. Not much actual help in evidence, but a critical time when a bit of encouragement went a long way.

16:3 *And the king said, And where is thy master's son? And Ziba said unto the king, Behold, he abideth at Jerusalem: for he said, To day shall the house of Israel restore me the kingdom of my father.*

Vs. 3 – *"And where is thy master's son?"* – Here was the crucial question at that time. What was the attitude and response of individuals in that time of disgrace? Certain times and circumstances require certain responses to demonstrate the heart. In the coming Tribulation era it will be the question of how people respond to God's people (Matt. 25). In the wilderness with Moses it was the question of how folks chose to vote with the returning spies. In our current era it is the vital question of how folks respond to Jesus Christ.

Ziba was perhaps a bit too quick, too willing with his answer. He showed no hesitation or effort to protect his master. And what he suggested of Mephibosheth did not make sense, with the hearts of the people of Israel so wholly after Absalom (15:13). When Mephibosheth later met with David in his return, he comes across as the more honest one (II Sam. 19:24-30).

So Ziba took of his master's goods to ingratiate himself to the king, while incriminating his master. Compare Jacob using his father's sheep to deceive

his father in getting the blessing. Yet as well we see courage in Ziba's continued support for the exiled king. Such a response could prove dangerous. Perhaps it was indication of his expectation of Absalom's failure and David's return.

As David asked, so the Lord might ask of us, where are you at such a time as this? Even as He asked of Adam in the Garden at the very beginning of man's rebellion. In rebellion we tend to hide. Do you fall among those with Him or those against? Indeed, where are you at such a time as this? It was the essence of Mordecai's query with Esther. Are you willing to take what God has given you and make it available for Him in His cause when there is real risk of real loss? Where are you when;

- A bold voice is needed?
- The pastor needs to be encouraged with a little help in outreach efforts? He does not need much. Just a couple donkey loads. Just so he does not feel he is all alone.
- We are meeting to pray together?

Vs. 4 – *"Behold, thine are all that pertained unto Mephibosheth"* – Just like that! The prerogative of kings. No bumf, legal tangles, or court decisions. Just the word spoken and it was done! Though of course it could just as easily be *un*done as well.

As Ziba, so David was a bit too quick with his response, rashly failing to wait until he could hear *both* sides of it and so seek to discern the exact truth. Again, remember the wisdom of Proverbs 18:13 & 17. Compare in Deuteronomy 19:15-21 David's failure in that;

- He accepted the testimony of only one witness (vs. 15).
- He held no proper hearing with both standing together before him (vs. 17).
- He made no *"diligent inquisition"* (vs. 18).
- He made no effort to follow through and thus put away evil in the execution of justice.

Because God's word and way was not followed therefore justice was not served.

Jesus will not be so easily fooled at His judgment seat. With penetrating eyes and searching enquiry He will deftly discern the thoughts and intents of

16:5 *And when king David came to Bahurim, behold, thence came out a man of the family of the house of Saul, whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera: he came forth, and cursed still as he came.*
16:6 *And he cast stones at David, and at all the servants of king David: and all the people and all the mighty men were on his right hand and on his left.*

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hearts, as illustrated in the wisdom of Solomon's judgment of the two prostitutes (I Ki. 3).

16:5-12 – Meeting with Shimei

Vs. 5 – Bahurim was a city within the tribal land of Benjamin, along the road from Jerusalem to Jericho and just to the east of the Mt. of Olives. Shimei, a resident of Bahurim, came out to meet David and his party as they made their way to the city. He was a man of the tribe of Benjamin, the same from which King Saul had come. In fact he was *"of the family of the house of Saul"*, related to the previous king in some way.

Vs. 6 – Shimei came as a self-appointed defender of Saul's house. But in his actions and attitude this strange fellow shows himself an absolute moran! He comes across as somewhat insane, certainly not smart. Like slapping at a wounded bear with a fly swatter, pleading to be eaten! There were soldiers among David's followers, and we can be pretty sure not one of them left his weapons at home on this occasion. And here this twit was hurling dirt,

16:7 *And thus said Shimei when he cursed, Come out, come out, thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial:*

16:8 *The LORD hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul, in whose stead thou hast reigned; and the LORD hath delivered the kingdom into the hand of Absalom thy son: and, behold, thou art taken in thy mischief, because thou art a bloody man.*

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stones, and cursings at them, with no army to back him!

David's followers protectively closed around their king with this threat, while Jesus' followers denied Him and scattered in fear. How many of the Lord's followers are still fearfully denying Him.

Vs. 7-8 – Shimei's words were harsh to the extreme! By referring to David as a *"man of Belial"* he was calling the king a worthless person! "Belial" is a Hebrew word combining a word meaning "not" or "without" with one meaning "worth" or "benefit" or "profit". Thus the meaning is worthless or good-for-nothing. Could this fairly be said of David?

- With all foreign threat removed through him. He was a good *protector* of his people.
- With much spoil or tribute. He was a good *provider* for his people.
- With prevailing national peace. He was a good *shepherd* or leader.

- With victory on every side. He was a good *captain* and strategist.

Shimei seemed to feel David's reign was against God's will, that he had stolen the kingdom away from the house of Saul, that a descendant of Saul should rightfully still be reigning and not David at all, and that the things now coming upon David were God's judgment for usurping the throne from the house of Saul. Consider how utterly uninformed this man was;

- He called David "a man of bloodshed", implying him guilty of violence against the house of Saul. But whose blood of the house of Saul did David ever shed? David had done nothing but honour Saul's house, sincerely loving Saul's son Jonathan, refusing to raise his hand against the Lord's anointed king even when given opportunity and sorely provoked, and later bestowing highest honours on Jonathan's son Mephibosheth.

- He seems unaware of David's anointing by God and appointment by the people of Israel.

- He suggests mischief or improprieties in the way David acquired power. Yet how patiently David waited for power to come to him in God's timing, only advancing as the Lord and

the people advised.

Shimei was completely ignorant of the history of David's rise to power. He was completely unmindful of the benefits David brought. And he was obviously one who had never inwardly submitted to David's leadership. Pride blinds one to the truth and makes for ignorance. Humility is the way to wisdom. Outwardly Shimei had no choice but to show submission before. But what he had been forced to show before when David was strong was not what was inside of him. And now, in David's weakness, he finally felt free to express what had been burning in him all those years of David's reign. And what poured out of him was *absolute rubbish!!* And so convinced of his gross errors he was, pouring them out without the least hint of query, such that he was willing to risk his life to say it, and to say it in the most emphatic manner possible, with stones and dirt! This man was perhaps the most complete idiot revealed in the Bible!

Compare the prominent theme and progression in Proverbs, applying so well to this man;

- 12:23 – *"A prudent man concealeth knowledge: but the <u>heart</u> of fools proclaimeth foolishness"* – What is eventually on the

tongue is first in the heart. Only foolishness in the fool, while good knowledge within the wise. And the wise are not so given to revealing it as the other.

- 15:2 – *"The tongue of the wise useth knowledge aright: but the mouth of fools poureth out foolishness"* – What is inside comes out with time, both for the wise and the fool. The wise both acquire good knowledge and learn how to use it.

- 15:14 – *"The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge: but the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness"* – Here is where it begins. What one is willing to hear and feed on and hash over with others is what will fill the heart. Those who are understanding of heart feed on good knowledge. Those who are fools feed on foolishness. What you *are* determines what you feed on. As with animals so with people.

- 19:3 – *"The foolishness of man perverteth his way: and his heart fretteth against the LORD"* – Here is where it ends up, in the perversion of one's way. And with a faulty view of the reasons why, blaming the Lord for the mess the fool brings upon himself.

As we follow the Lord and walk in His wisdom He sees to it that we come to good understanding. The fear of the Lord, with a heart of humility, is the beginning of a walk in wisdom. On the other hand pride blinds, perverting the heart, mind, mouth, way, etc. Shimei was showing a heart very wrong before God through his utterly twisted view concerning David. He was showing himself a fool!

Upon David's return, Shimei tried to undo his folly (II Sam. 19:16-23). But he had exposed his heart. And so David's final words of instruction to Solomon when he came to the throne were against Shimei (I Kings 2:8-10). Shimei's rebellion was judged by Solomon with restricted movement (I Kings 2:36-38). And then he was eventually put to death when he violated those restrictions (I Kings 2:39-46).

Vs. 9 – *"Let me go over, I pray thee, and take off his head"* – Abishai wished to remove the offending item. Like, "I will only remove the part that is bothering us". But he received David's reproof, for it was not the right spirit for the moment. Compare James and John, *"the sons of thunder"*, wishing to call fire down upon the rejecting Samaritans, with

16:10 *And the king said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah? so let him curse, because the LORD hath said unto him, Curse David. Who shall then say, Wherefore hast thou done so?*

16:11 *And David said to Abishai, and to all his servants, Behold, my son, which came forth of my bowels, seeketh my life: how much more now may this Benjamite do it? let him alone, and let him curse; for the LORD hath bidden him.*

Jesus turning to rebuke them as well (Lk. 9:54-56; Mk. 3:17).

Vs. 10 – Again there seems to be no concern in David for the morale that such an incident might hurt. He saw no need to keep things upbeat. David was just waiting on God, without any positioning or consoling of his followers. He expected them to simply wait on the Lord as well. Even so, is it the responsibility of church leadership to keep folks pumped up and upbeat, with building projects and lively activities and busy plans and promotions and such?

Vs. 11 – Why did David see this as from the Lord? Perhaps he saw it as a part of God's payment for his past sins. Perhaps it was David's guilty conscience moving him? If David's own son was after his life, a cursing Benjamite was a comparatively small concern.

David displays marvellous humility and patient endurance before the Lord in his refusal to answer

this insult. Jesus commanded us to consider ourselves blessed, insisting on a response of joy when facing hatred and insults and false accusations;

- Matthew 5:11-12 – *"Rejoice, and be exceeding glad".*
- Luke 6:22-23 – *"Leap for joy".*
- Acts 5:41 – *"Rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name".*
- Hebrews 10:34 – *"Took joyfully the spoiling of your goods".*
- James 1:2-3 – *"Count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations".*
- I Peter 4:12-16.

Yet again we see the mixture in David of his waiting on God, together with his very human impetuousness. He showed greatest patience here, yet with his knee-jerk response against Mephibosheth with Ziba's accusation.

Vs. 12 – *"It may be that the LORD will look on mine*

16:13 *And as David and his men went by the way, Shimei went along on the hill's side over against him, and cursed as he went, and threw stones at him, and cast dust.*
16:14 *And the king, and all the people that were with him, came weary, and refreshed themselves there.*
16:15 *And Absalom, and all the people the men of Israel, came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel with him.*
16:16 *And it came to pass, when Hushai the Archite, David's friend, was come unto Absalom, that Hushai said unto Absalom, God save the king, God save the king.*
16:17 *And Absalom said to Hushai, Is this thy kindness to thy friend? why wentest thou not with thy friend?*

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affliction" – For enduring the unfairness of this hardship the Lord might repay him with good? Perhaps David was remembering the blessing through Abigail's counsel in his right and patient handling of Nabal, followed soon after by the blessings of marriage to Abigail through Nabal's death, and the throne through Saul's death. In both cases there would have been terrible loss and great regrets with a hard response.

There is a lesson on rage here. Our angry response may bring immediate gratification. We may feel better for our fuming. But there will be long term losses, both from man's side and from God's side.

Vs. 14 – They rested and refreshed themselves in the city of Bahurim.

Vs. 17 – *"Is this thy kindness to thy friend?"* – Is Absalom not a fine one to be asking such a question of Hushai?! Obviously he fully understood his own

16:18 *And Hushai said unto Absalom, Nay; but whom the LORD, and this people, and all the men of Israel, choose, his will I be, and with him will I abide.*
16:19 *And again, whom should I serve? should I not serve in the presence of his son? as I have served in thy father's presence, so will I be in thy presence.*
16:20 *Then said Absalom to Ahithophel, Give counsel among you what we shall do.*
16:21 *And Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Go in unto thy father's concubines, which he hath left to keep the house; and all Israel shall hear that thou art abhorred of thy father: then shall the hands of all that are with thee be strong.*

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disloyalty. Who should be more a man's friend than his own son? Hear what his question implies. It seems Hushai was so especially noted for being David's friend that he now stood out in the enemy camp. We do not hear him asking this of others. Even so we should be so especially noted for being a friend of the Son of David, so much so that we stand out as odd and suspect in worldly haunts.

Vs. 18-19 – It should have been a warning to Absalom that he was dealing with traitors. Yet Hushai suggested his devotion to the Lord's choice and to the people's choice was greater than his own personal interests. By this seemingly plausible argument he managed to convince Absalom of his sincerity. Seems the deceiver was open to a bit of deception himself. How fitting that God allowed deception to be a part of Absalom's undoing.

Vs. 21 – *"Go in unto thy father's concubines"* – What strange and outrageous advice! By Absalom putting himself wholly against David in the deepest possible

16:22 *So they spread Absalom a tent upon the top of the house; and Absalom went in unto his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.*
16:23 *And the counsel of Ahithophel, which he counselled in those days, was as if a man had enquired at the oracle of God: so was all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom.*

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way this would put all others against David as well? Seems more a case of taking the moral low ground. Ahithophel's counsel was wise perhaps only in the sense of Absalom showing himself to be fully committed to this treasonous course, in with both feet, fully and openly breaking with his father in the clearest possible way, with all hope of restoration removed, so that none would be in doubt where he stood. Ahithophel's principle; Decide, and make your decision known! Show that you are in. If you are going to do this, then take it to the limit with no hint of vacillation. Compare Christ's similar counsel to would-be disciples;

- Luke 9:61-62 – *"No man having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit to be My disciple".*
- Luke 14:27-33 – The cost of discipleship.
- I Kings 18:21 – Elijah – *"How long halt ye between two opinions?"*

It was an action bringing greatest public disgrace and insult to David. Yet was it really necessary?

Could this counsel carry a measure of revenge as well for this grandfather of Bathsheba?

Vs. 23 – Ahithophel's wisdom and words were esteemed as the very words of God in his day. Therefore we understand the miraculous nature of Hushai's counsel prevailing over his in the next chapter. Yet it was all of the Lord, simply in answer to David's prayer (15:31).

Ponder Points

Consider how the loyalty of all who did not go out with (or at least to) David was suspect, while the loyalty of all who did was rewarded. Compare Mephibosheth's possessions halved, in spite of his seemingly valid excuses. Consider the application to our own day. We may have what appear to be valid reasons why we fail to leave the securities of world acceptance and ease and popularity, why we do not forsake the enemy camp to "go out" to Jesus, but He knows the heart. Those who just make the decision and go, to step out regardless of costs or losses, are remembered among God's faithful. Moses refused every excuse that might have kept him from leaving the comforts and honours of Pharaoh's house, though he could easily have come

up with many good reasons to remain an "Egyptian";

- He might have been able to more greatly benefit his people from a position of power.
- He might have had access to great finance and resources to this end.
- He might have been in a position to veto any proposed moves against his people.

Yet he walked away from every such security and comfort, with all of the plausible arguments and promise that these might suggest, and he just went out into the wilderness of uncertainty and poverty and reproach with God's people, casting himself, together with them, upon the Lord for protection and provision and significance. And how wonderfully God did supply and protect them. How greatly He rewarded the commitment of Moses with leadership. How greatly He has crowned that decision with true and lasting honours. See Hebrews 11:24-27. True leadership for God does not tend to lead from *within* the comforts and securities and easy acceptance of the world, if it has the option. It does not look for power and position and prominence among pagans in order to preserve the people of God. It leaves or forsakes the city of man to stand with Jesus and the faithful outside

the camp (unless a godly leader is in a place of captivity, such as Joseph and Daniel, and thus has no choice). Even so it was with Abraham, in leaving the comforts and securities of his home country and people. And for his faithful obedience God made Abraham the *"father of many nations"*. Always God rewards this kind of hard decision for Him. Even so with Ruth, Joseph of Arimathea, Nicodemus, Paul, and those refusing the mark of the beast in the coming Tribulation period.

"Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels" (Mk. 8:38).

"Then David arose,
and all the people
that were with him,
and they passed over Jordan"

(II Sam. 17:22)

Chapter 17

17:1 *Moreover Ahithophel said unto Absalom, Let me now choose out twelve thousand men, and I will arise and pursue after David this night:*

Answer to Prayer in the Making

<u>17:1-4</u> – Ahithophel's counsel

Vs. 1 – *"I will arise and pursue after David this night"* – Ahithophel insisted on going after David immediately (*"this night"*). There was a measure of urgency riding this man. With our view of things from God's angle, there can be little doubt that Ahithophel was correct in his call for an immediate strike, for David was in complete disarray and utterly vulnerable at that point. The most effective blow would have been to hit him before he had a chance to organize, and before the people had a chance to recognize the import of what was happening. Had they elected to follow Ahithophel's counsel (short of God's direct intervention) Absalom's forces would likely have found and killed David on their way down to the Jordan, and Absalom's power would have been secured. We can well imagine the kind of massacre of the king's sons that would have followed, and likely of Saul's house

17:2 *And I will come upon him while he is weary and weak handed, and will make him afraid: and all the people that are with him shall flee; and I will smite the king only:*
17:3 *And I will bring back all the people unto thee: the man whom thou seekest is as if all returned: so all the people shall be in peace.*

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as well.

Vs. 2 – The scenario Ahithophel paints made it appear so easy, but in fact it was quite an idealistic picture. He suggested that all with David would quickly scatter when attacked, as the disciples when Christ was captured. But would this have been the way of things with David's men? Men such as Joab and Abishai and Beniah and Ittai? Would not men of such calibre and commitment more likely have fought by David's side to the death? And how many on Absalom's side would have met their end with them!

Vs. 3 – *"And I will bring back all the people unto thee"* – Note his great focus on *"all the people"* united under Absalom. His point here was perhaps that it was really only one man who stood in the way of all the people returning in peace to Absalom. All they had to do was get David out of the way and all would come together nicely. As David was now "in the way" of the foolish elders of Israel, even so the Son of David was later "in the way" of the blind leaders

of Israel. They too had similar thoughts of Jesus Christ being in the way of their peace, making His death a necessity.

Vs. 4 – *"And the saying pleased Absalom well"* – Behold the heartless treachery in this son, that he would be so pleased with the hope of terror and death upon his father! What had David ever personally done to Absalom to warrant such pleasure in the prospect of his father's wearied flight, terror, and violent death? See how unrestrained selfishness tramples all natural, reasonable affection in a soul. Selfishness loses a handle on reason somewhere along the way. Logic gives way to passion in a kind of insanity.

Behold those spineless, mindless *"elders of Israel".* Seems whatever pleased Absalom they were dully nodding their heads as well. They were men without conviction in a situation where men of firm principles were so desperately needed. Do not ever be found in such a situation. Keep your heart with all attentiveness, and speak your heart with all earnestness. It may be that at this point there were serious dangers in resistance. But if folks had

spoken their misgivings soon enough it might not have gotten to the point where it was dangerous to speak out. Act and speak before the momentum overwhelms all opportunity.

Ahithophel's willingness to actually assemble and lead the force may again express something of a score to settle. There may have been wisdom in this offer as well. Perhaps he sensed a bit of slowness or reluctance in Absalom to fully follow through in leading a move against his own father's life. Therefore Ahithophel's willingness to quickly assume this role himself, to ensure that it happened, that the job was finished. This seems to be the main concern riding this counsellor, to *make good* on their coup, to get the job completed and quickly. To hesitate at this point could give folks a chance to wake up to the real significance of sudden events. It might provide time for David's numbers to strengthen, as in the old days of Saul's pursuit when people gathered to David, strengthening his hand. Absalom certainly did not hold the moral high ground in attacking his own father, and all with him would sense this. And against a king and father who had actually been so beneficial for his people as a whole. How easily sentiment could swing to David's favour at this critical moment of actually plunging the knife. Ahithophel could see

17:5 *Then said Absalom, Call now Hushai the Archite also, and let us hear likewise what he saith.*
17:6 *And when Hushai was come to Absalom, Absalom spake unto him, saying, Ahithophel hath spoken after this manner: shall we do after his saying? if not; speak thou.*

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that for their purpose to work decisive action was required, and required immediately. If they could quickly remove David from the picture, there could be no going back, with the door of return closed, the bridge burned. And all would be forced to move forward with Absalom, whether with reluctance or not. Do you see the wisdom of Ahithophel's counsel? Again, finish the job and do it immediately, difficult though the task might be, before there could arise any significant second thoughts.

17:5-13 – Hushai's counsel

Vs. 5 – *"Call now Hushai the Archite"* – With all so delighted with Ahithophel's words it was a work of God that Absalom even thought to ask Hushai as well. Compare King Ahasuerus on a sleepless night randomly calling for the records to be brought and read before him, and finding there the account of Mordecai's good deed unrewarded (Esther 6:1-3). *"The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water; He turneth it whithersoever He will"* (Prov. 21:1).

17:7 *And Hushai said unto Absalom, The counsel that Ahithophel hath given is not good at this time.*

17:8 *For, said Hushai, thou knowest thy father and his men, that they be mighty men, and they be chafed in their minds, as a bear robbed of her whelps in the field: and thy father is a man of war, and will not lodge with the people.*

Vs. 6 – Hushai was obviously not in the inner circle with Ahithophel and the elders, thus the need to call him. Perhaps he was still on a kind of probation, still a bit suspect. Compare Daniel called in to Belshazzar's undoing in Daniel 5.

Vs. 7-8 – *"Thou knowest thy father and his men"* – From his first words Hushai dismissed Ahithophel's notion of so easily taking David, with all the men with him scampering off in fear. And the fact is he was absolutely correct in this observation. For all who were there listening, this point would certainly have rung true, for the nature of those men with David was well known. Those were indeed seasoned *"mighty men"*, not the trembling school boys Ahithophel suggested. The Hebrew word is gibbor, "mighty man", or plural gibborim, "mighty men". The gibborim were the valiant heroes among their military (also 23:8). These were not just soldiers, but champions. The victories of David's mighty men against incredible odds were legendary, catalogued in chapter 23;

- Vs. 8 – Adino the Eznite – 800 at one time

killed with his spear.

- Vs. 18 – Abishai – 300 killed with his spear.
- Vs. 20-21 – Benaiah – 2 lionlike men killed, and a huge Egyptian killed with his staff.

Hushai made a very strong point of this aspect (also vs. 10). He won the day by taking Ahithophel to task on the one glaring weak point of his counsel.

"And they be chafed in their minds" – Not only were those men out there skilled warriors, but they were also as grouchy *"as a bear robbed of her whelps"*. They would not be an easy lot to tackle by any means, even though small in number. Are we sure 12,000 would be enough?! They were mighty, and they were angry, and they were wily, presenting a much more challenging foe than did Ahithophel. Not only would they be fighting against the very best, but against thoroughly aggravated men with their backs against the wall, with *everything* to lose. While those with Absalom would have no such desperate motivation pushing them, especially to fight their own countrymen.

So it was not just that Absalom was led by God to follow Hushai's advice. It was that Hushai actually presented a more accurate picture of David and his

men, and everybody knew it the moment they heard it. And they knew in the same moment how ridiculous the image Ahithophel presented. So God actually did just as David asked, causing the wise one to blunder badly in this aspect. His general approach of an immediate strike was correct, and certainly would have been most likely to succeed, but he failed to understand, or at least to present accurately, the true nature of those men out there on the run. Do not miss the tumble, from 16:23, his words as if the very words of God, to vs. 2, speaking genuine "foolishness". *Just as David had prayed!!*

Hushai's counsel better suited Absalom's natural tendency to drag his feet in attacking his own father as well. Could he look his father in the eye as he took his life?

Hushai could see the certainty of success in Ahithophel's plan, and therefore the imminent danger it would mean for David. So his main purpose was simply to gain a bit of time for the king. Perhaps as well he sought to get Ahithophel out of the lead. He was too clever a man and too determined, and therefore much too dangerous. And he wished to get Absalom himself in the saddle, for it seems he was a man with no experience in war.

"Thou knowest thy father and his men" – Notice any other interesting features in Hushai's words? Do you see how he never referred to the king as *"David"* or *"the king"*, or even as Ahithophel's vague reference to *"the man whom thou sleekest"* (vs. 1-3)? He referred to David only as *"thy father"* (vs. 8[twice], 10), subtly sending an arrow to the heart of all, highlighting the treachery involved in the entire purpose of a son rising up against his own father; a *rebel* son in fact, making him more worthy of stoning than enthroning, and putting all with him in the wrong as well. Compare the command in Exodus 22:28 against cursing the ruler of their people. Is this not exactly what Absalom did in building himself up over his father?

As well, in making much of the military expertise of David and those with him, that they were *"mighty men"* and *"a man of war"* (vs. 8) and *"a mighty man"* and *"valiant men"* (vs. 10), Hushai was playing the *national hero* card, lifting the lofty calibre of the men they were aiming to kill. The subtle point was that these were men who had gained such known status among them through courageously risking their lives for their nation. And perhaps as well he was subtly floating the question of what Absalom had ever done of any valiant nature. Perhaps this was the thought as well behind the suggestion that

17:9 *Behold, he is hid now in some pit, or in some other place: and it will come to pass, when some of them be overthrown at the first, that whosoever heareth it will say, There is a slaughter among the people that follow Absalom.*

17:10 *And he also that is valiant, whose heart is as the heart of a lion, shall utterly melt: for all Israel knoweth that thy father is a mighty man, and they which be with him are valiant men.*

Absalom himself should lead the attack. It was time the people saw what kind of a warrior *he* was, a matter carrying heavy importance in their culture. It was time they saw what they were getting in the "bargain" of this new regime. For none could doubt the legendary courage of David and his mighty men.

Vs. 9-10 – *"There is a slaughter among the people that follow Absalom"* – With a few on the conspirators' side falling at the outset of conflict, how easily the tide of confidence could turn. Even those normally noted for bravery would panic. One failure could threaten the success of the whole conspiracy. After all, throughout all of his long history among them, how much in the way of defeat had David ever known? There was certainly need for due warning and caution before they went off half cocked. Perhaps Hushai was even subtly suggesting the response of those who know they are in the wrong fleeing when no man pursues, while those standing for right are bold as a lion (Prov. 28:1).

17:11 *Therefore I counsel that all Israel be generally gathered unto thee, from Dan even to Beersheba, as the sand that is by the sea for multitude; and that thou go to battle in thine own person.*

17:12 *So shall we come upon him in some place where he shall be found, and we will light upon him as the dew falleth on the ground: and of him and of all the men that are with him there shall not be left so much as one.*

Vs. 11 – *"Therefore I counsel that all Israel be generally gathered"* – In view of the dangers involved it was no time for half measures. The whole army must be mustered, that they might go with full strength and thoroughly overwhelm David and company.

"And that thou go to battle in thine own person" – A key aspect of Hushai's counsel was to insist before all that Absalom himself lead the attack. Otherwise it might look like he had no stomach for the hard tasks, giving his dirty work to be handled by others, as the killing of Amnon and the burning of Joab's field given to his thug servants. They have not seen a sword in this man's hand yet. Did he know which end to hold? Again it was time Absalom proved himself to be of the same valiant class as those they pursued. Hushai's counsel was far more suited to play upon Absalom's pride and vanity than Ahithophel's.

Vs. 12-13 – Hushai closed with bold, expressive imagery, a touch dramatic even, skilfully suggesting

17:13 *Moreover, if he be gotten into a city, then shall all Israel bring ropes to that city, and we will draw it into the river, until there be not one small stone found there.*
17:14 *And Absalom and all the men of Israel said, The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel. For the LORD had appointed to defeat the good counsel of Ahithophel, to the intent that the LORD might bring evil upon Absalom.*

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success through his approach, all the while hoping his words would prove untrue.

Vs. 14 – *"The counsel of Hushai the Archite is better than the counsel of Ahithophel"* – Hushai's counsel was unanimously voted wiser than Ahithophel's. Their expression here seems to carry a note of surprise, suggesting Ahithophel's counsel was *always* considered best prior to this dark moment in his career when all turned to another.

"For the LORD had appointed to…bring evil upon Absalom" – It was the Lord causing Absalom and the elders to reject the counsel that would have been most effective against David, and to accept the plan that gave David needed time to put his defence together. And in the background we quietly hear the prayer of David, *"O LORD, I pray thee, turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness"*. It is all the Lord, all a matter of His intent, every eventuality the outworking of His perfect purpose. Yet according to the *"effectual fervent prayer"* of the righteous.

17:15 *Then said Hushai unto Zadok and to Abiathar the priests, Thus and thus did Ahithophel counsel Absalom and the elders of Israel; and thus and thus have I counselled.*

17:16 *Now therefore send quickly, and tell David, saying, Lodge not this night in the plains of the wilderness, but speedily pass over; lest the king be swallowed up, and all the people that are with him.*

17:17 *Now Jonathan and Ahimaaz stayed by Enrogel; for they might not be seen to come into the city: and a wench went and told them; and they went and told king David.*

17:18 *Nevertheless a lad saw them, and told Absalom: but they went both of them away quickly, and came to a man's house in Bahurim, which had a well in his court; whither they went down.*

Notice that the Lord called Ahithophel's counsel *"good"*, not morally good, but the wisest course to accomplish David's demise.

"If God be for us, who can be against us?" And if God be against us, odds and advantages are not nearly enough. None will have greater odds or advantages than Satan and Antichrist at Armageddon. Yet all will come to nothing in a moment. Compare Proverbs 21:31; 20:7; Psalm 33:16-18.

Vs. 15-16 – *"Lodge not this night in the plains of the wilderness"* – Do not even rest for the night this side of the Jordan. It seems Hushai did not trust that his counsel would be followed, having heard Ahithophel's purpose of an immediate strike.

Vs. 17-18 – Divided loyalties

"Now Jonathan and Ahimaaz stayed by Enrogel" – Enrogel apparently was a spring in the Kidron Valley, to the south and east of Jerusalem. Jonathan and Ahimaaz of course were the sons of the two priests. This was the system of communication David set up with Zadok and Abiathar the priests in 15:27-28. Their arrangement was that David would wait for word from Hushai through the priests before crossing the Jordan. It might be that things would fall to David's favour in Jerusalem before any conflict was necessary. David did not yet know the true extent of Absalom's following or support. So these two sons were positioned in this out of the way place, yet close to Jerusalem, ready to run immediately to David with any message from their fathers.

"Nevertheless a lad saw them, and told Absalom" – Absalom would know by this lad's report that something important was carried to David, and therefore that there was likely an informant within his close counsel.

Questions

This observant lad only saw them go. It was not about what he overheard. How did he know these

men were on a mission for David and against Absalom? Were these sons of the priests under suspicion already? Was this lad assigned to watch them? We get the same indication of watching eyes in Bahurim as well.

Why the need for these sons to hide in Bahurim? They had a good lead and were young men? One of them, Zadok's son, Ahimaaz, later outran Joab's messenger when carrying word of victory back to David, in spite of the other in the lead (18:23). So we know he was certainly a fit fellow. Was Abiathar's son, Jonathan, a fat fellow then, thus slowing their progress? Was it a tight fit in that well perhaps?

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Do you see how the peace and unity they once had among them as a nation has now turned to suspicion and spying and malicious intent? Eyes and enemies everywhere, with all the people now polarized to one side or the other. Pride is at the root of all such. It was all because Absalom would honour himself instead of happily serving his king, setting up divisions and conflicts. *"Only by <u>pride</u> cometh contention".*

Compare the Tribulation period where the majority
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17:19 *And the woman took and spread a covering over the well's mouth, and spread ground corn thereon; and the thing was not known.*

17:20 *And when Absalom's servants came to the woman to the house, they said, Where is Ahimaaz and Jonathan? And the woman said unto them, They be gone over the brook of water. And when they had sought and could not find them, they returned to Jerusalem.*

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will be on the enemy side as well. Yet, as David, the King will return in victory anyway, with the usurper destroyed.

Vs. 20 – *"Where is Ahimaaz and Jonathan?"* – It is obvious by the question of Absalom's servants that they knew the young men were there or had been at this house. Again it is indication of some there in the city loyal to Absalom, who had seen the young men arrive and had seen which house they entered. Thus they were able to point Absalom's servants to this particular house.

How would you answer their direct question? As with Rahab, God again "blessed" a lie spoken in a good cause, without the least negative results in evidence. As lies go, it was a good one, pointing elsewhere and suggesting a lead and the need for speed to catch them. Had she even hesitated or claimed ignorance it might have led to a search of their home. The problem here is that situation ethics is the world's way. If the situation demands that God's standard be denied, then go for it, and

17:21 *And it came to pass, after they were departed, that they came up out of the well, and went and told king David, and said unto David, Arise, and pass quickly over the water: for thus hath Ahithophel counselled against you.*

17:22 *Then David arose, and all the people that were with him, and they passed over Jordan: by the morning light there lacked not one of them that was not gone over Jordan.*

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do a good job of it. But this makes us the judge of the situation, or of the ethics. Lying is against the way of our God *"who cannot lie"*. Yet it is interesting to see how God is able and willing to use wrongs as well as rights in accomplishing His purposes.

Vs. 21-22 – So what was spoken in the privacy of Absalom's counsel became public knowledge before the king. Even so what we speak in our private counsel, things we might think to be spoken in confidence, can often tend to find their way to the public ear as well. *"Curse not the king, no not in thy thought; and curse not the rich in thy bedchamber: for a bird of the air shall carry the voice, and that which hath wings shall tell the matter"* (Eccl. 10:20).

The young men came to their camp in the evening or night time with the urgent message to keep moving. David's party had already travelled about 30 kms (as the crow flies, much farther in actual ground covered), from Jerusalem down to the Jordan Valley. Yet though exhausted they began immediately to cross the Jordan, taking the rest of

the night in the process. They had at least another 40 kms of travel to go, up the Jordan and Jabbuk to Mahanaim.

Vs. 23 – *"When Ahithophel saw that his counsel was not followed…"* – Consider the reasons or meaning behind Ahithophel's suicide. Commentators tend to suggest that with the rejection of his counsel he could foresee Absalom's failure, that in failing an immediate attack, given time, he knew David would return to power. But if this was Ahithophel's main motivation why would he not wait for the report of David's victory before taking his life? He would have plenty of time before David actually returned and began dealing with dissenters. In fact he would be clever enough to recognize that David was not hard on rebels anymore (Joab, Amnon, Absalom). Absalom simply fled across the river into exile. This also might have been considered as an option.

It seems though that Ahithophel was quite a sensitive creature. I am thinking his actions here more likely express the tremendous blow to his pride his rejection brought. As Simon the sorcerer

at Samaria, it seems this man had enjoyed his status as *"some great one"*, speaking *"as the oracle of God"*. Now it appeared his shiny bubble had burst, he having been bested by another man. Such a drastic response gives the impression that this man's image was his very life, his honoured place before men all-important to him. Lose the handle on this and he had no purpose for living! Such an intense pride and vital self-image in fact suggests a pretty shallow existence! A supremely *selfish* focus is at the heart of any suicide.

So it would seem this man was not actually very wise at all, though esteemed so by men; not with the unselfish, noble ways and wisdom of God anyway. His great wisdom was only a mirage really, a surface thing, as the "wisdom" of many considered worldly wise among men. How much the wiser choice to live for the One above the sun, than for the empty hope of honours below the sun, before men.

As well, if this was the first time Ahithophel's counsel had ever been bettered, as the surprise in vs. 14 might suggest, then perhaps he could see *God's* hand against him now. The moment he turned from David to Absalom his counsel was refused, showing the one with whom *the Lord* stood. But there was a way back! It seems Ahithophel

17:24 *Then David came to Mahanaim. And Absalom passed over Jordan, he and all the men of Israel with him.*
17:25 *And Absalom made Amasa captain of the host instead of Joab: which Amasa was a man's son, whose name was Ithra an Israelite, that went in to Abigail the daughter of Nahash, sister to Zeruiah Joab's mother.*
17:26 *So Israel and Absalom pitched in the land of Gilead.*

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could never stoop to repentance before David or the Lord. Was David not shamed before Nathan? And yet he was restored. Abraham was shamed before Pharaoh for lying about his wife, and then again before Abimelech, and yet he was restored. Moses was shamed for his failure to circumcise his sons in that interesting circumstance at the inn (Ex. 5:24). Peter was shamed for his denying of Christ. And yet what is our view today of all these men? Are they not great men in our eyes? Shame and repentance should not be an ending of life, but the beginning of real living and even honour.

Vs. 25 – Nahash seems to be Jesse, David's father. See I Chronicles 2:13-17 where Amasa seems to be the son of David's sister, displaying the tragedy of this civil war, with brother against brother. Was Absalom checking loyalties by granting this assignment to such a one? Note how there was such a great deal of military ability among Jesse's offspring.

Vs. 27-29 – Here is displayed the quiet groundswell

17:27 *And it came to pass, when David was come to Mahanaim, that Shobi the son of Nahash of Rabbah of the children of Ammon, and Machir the son of Ammiel of Lodebar, and Barzillai the Gileadite of Rogelim,*

17:28 *Brought beds, and basons, and earthen vessels, and wheat, and barley, and flour, and parched corn, and beans, and lentiles, and parched pulse,*

17:29 *And honey, and butter, and sheep, and cheese of kine, for David, and for the people that were with him, to eat: for they said, The people is hungry, and weary, and thirsty, in the wilderness.*

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of support for David, which needed time to show itself and gather and organize. Such support would not have been without knowing why David was on the run or without due consideration of the great significance of helping him, with potential results. Again, things were not looking good for David at that point. Therefore the actions of these men were more a declaration of their support for David, more a courageous stand for what was right with expectation of death, than joining the side expected to win. Compare those who refused to help Gideon when he was pursuing the fleeing Midianites (Judges 8:6-8).

Do you remember Machir of Lodebar? His house was where Mephibosheth had found refuge when David came to power (9:4). David graciously honoured Mephibosheth rather than killing him as might have been expected. So it was payback time now, with Machir quite willing to help David for honouring his friend.

Vs. 29 – God meets our needs in the wilderness, even from unexpected sources such as Shobi of Rabbah. As the miraculous manna from heaven. As the ravens that fed Elijah. As David when running from Saul. As Jesus coming as the Bread of Life, in the most unlikely, unexpected way.

Absalom's grandfather was out that way. We see no help from him, though a vassal of Israel. And yet there is no indication that David ever held this against him, or any others who failed to help.

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Summary of Lessons from Chapter 17

David did nothing to warrant Absalom's pleasure in the prospect of his father's wearied flight, terror, and violent death. We see how selfishness tramples all natural, reasonable affection in a soul, leading to a kind of unreasonable insanity.

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The elders of Israel were dumbly agreeing with everything that pleased Absalom. But by that point it was probably a dangerous thing to stand in resistance. Keep your heart with all attentiveness, and speak your heart with all earnestness. If folks had spoken their misgivings soon enough it might not have gotten to the point where it was dangerous

to speak out. Act and speak before the momentum overwhelms all opportunity.

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Ahithophel's counsel failed because *"the LORD had appointed to…bring evil upon Absalom"* (vs. 14). It is all the Lord, always the Lord, all a matter of *His intent*, every eventuality the outworking of His perfect purpose, yet somehow according to the *"effectual fervent prayer"* of the righteous as well.

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The peace and unity they once had as a nation soured to suspicion and spying and malicious intent, with eyes and enemies everywhere. *Pride* was the cause of this, as it is the cause of all contention. Because Absalom would honour himself instead of happily serving his king.

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God again allowed the lie of the woman to succeed. But it is the way of the world, that if a situation seems to require that God's standard be denied, then go for it. The problem with this is that it makes *us* judge of the situation or of proper ethics. Lying is against the way of our God *"who cannot lie"*. Yet it is interesting to see how God is able and willing to use wrongs as well as rights in accomplishing His purposes.
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It seems Ahithophel's suicide was largely because of the great blow to his pride in the loss of his position as the great counsellor. Such a drastic response suggests the man's image or honoured place before men was his *very life!* Such an intense pride and vital self-image in fact suggests a shallow, selfish existence. Thus in truth the wise man was not truly wise at all, though esteemed so by men, as with many considered worldly wise among men today. How much the wiser choice to live for the One above the sun, then for the empty hope of honours before men. Perhaps Ahithophel saw God's hand against him in this. But there was a way back! The way of repentance is the way many great ones have responded, and by this means became great before the eyes of men. God's way to honour is back-to-front to man's proud way. Perhaps Ahithophel was upset with the seeming unfairness of David "getting away" with the devastation brought to their family through his adultery and murder. Perhaps he could not grasp the great significance of David's genuine repentance before God, not letting God handle the levelling of the score in His good time and way. Thus perhaps he was a man not right with God in himself. He did not see that *he himself* in fact brought devastation to his family as well, in selfishly leaving his dangling body for them to sort out.
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Machir of Lodebar was one of the men who helped David while in Mahanaim. Machir's house was where Mephibosheth had found refuge when David came to power decades before (9:4). Because David graciously honoured Mephibosheth, rather than killing him as might have been expected, it was payback time now, with Machir available for David's help. *"Give and it shall be given unto you…"*

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Absalom's grandfather, Talmai king of Geshur, was out that way. There is no record of any help coming from him, though his kingdom was a vassal of Israel. Yet there is no indication that David ever held this against him, or against any others who failed to help him in his time of exile. The godly man is *"gracious and full of compassion and righteous"*.

"And David numbered
the people that were with him,
and set captains of thousands
and captains of hundreds
over them"

(II Sam. 18:1)

Chapter 18

18:1 *And David numbered the people that were with him, and set captains of thousands, and captains of hundreds over them.*

18:1-18 – Absalom Defeated

Vs. 1 – *"And David numbered the people"* – We are not given the count of those with David, probably because it did not matter how many there were. The Lord gives victory, whether with many or with few. Remember Jonathan's simple confidence in the Lord, assuring his armourbearer that *"there is no restraint to the LORD to save by many or by few"* (I Sam. 14:6). Compare Asa's prayer when facing that million-strong Ethiopian army, *"LORD, it is nothing with Thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power"* (II Chron. 14:11).

We are told *"David numbered the people"*. Why was it allowable for David to number his soldiers here, when the same action was an evil worthy of great punishment in chapter 24? Perhaps this was more a direct dividing of the troops for battle, while in chapter 24 his count had no valid purpose. Only that David was seeking a feeling of comfort in earthly strength, rather than finding his security in God alone. There was certainly no temptation in

18:2 *And David sent forth a third part of the people under the hand of Joab, and a third part under the hand of Abishai the son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, and a third part under the hand of Ittai the Gittite. And the king said unto the people, I will surely go forth with you myself also.*

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this current circumstance to rest in their numbers as they organised for battle. See how the very same action can be either right or wrong, depending on the motive back of it. David was judged in chapter 24 for his wrong motive in a seemingly harmless action. Maybe there is a partial answer here to the question of the woman's lie in the previous chapter? Could it be that God's allowing the success of a lie has at least a little bit to do with the motive behind it?

Consider how David proceeded even in this circumstance in an orderly manner. To send so small an army into the field might have seemed quite hopeless, and therefore why bother with formalities. Yet still David saw the need for organized command, putting them into orderly ranks, apparently sending them out with some plan of attack.

Vs. 2 – David did not send the whole under Joab as before. He actually divided his small force into 3 separate units under 3 captains. Consider the blow this would have been to Joab. It seems David was

18:3 *But the people answered, Thou shalt not go forth: for if we flee away, they will not care for us; neither if half of us die, will they care for us: but now thou art worth ten thousand of us: therefore now it is better that thou succour us out of the city.*

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both rewarding Abishai and Ittai and at the same time removing a measure of command from Joab, limiting his influence. Does this suggest his lack of trust in Joab? It seems Joab was on his way out, for he would soon be replaced by Amasa.

With captains over hundreds and thousands the indication is that David must have had several thousand men at that point. The historian Josephus suggested 4,000.

Vs. 3 – Their point? What happened to them did not matter. But what happened to David was all the difference. Their cause would end with his death, just Israel's cause ended with Absalom's death. It is why Joab knew Absalom must die. It really was not a contest between the people, as in a normal war against foreigners, where their cause would stand even if the king was killed. For they would still continue to fight for their nation and freedoms. But this was a contest only really between father and son. As well it was better that they not have to think about David out there, that they might be free to move and to focus on the battle.

18:4 *And the king said unto them, What seemeth you best I will do. And the king stood by the gate side, and all the people came out by hundreds and by thousands.*
18:5 *And the king commanded Joab and Abishai and Ittai, saying, Deal gently for my sake with the young man, even with Absalom. And all the people heard when the king gave all the captains charge concerning Absalom.*

Vs. 4 – *"What seemeth you best I will do"* – This is an interesting response from David. Have we ever seen him persuaded by his people before this? Maybe it was that he was not the daring young fellow he once was. Perhaps it was only that he recognized the value of their point, that the other side would indeed be gunning mainly for him and all hinged on him.

Vs. 5 – *"Deal gently for my sake with…Absalom"* – Do not miss the obvious assumption of victory in David's request, breathing confidence into his little band of mighty men. And David was quite serious in this, not facetious.

Consider how Absalom was well pleased to see only his father killed, quite happy with Ahithophel's purpose to get only David (17:2-4), while David was anxious to spare only Absalom. David answered Absalom's treachery with grace. See the illustration of God in His dealing with us, perhaps as unreasonable and extravagant in a sense. Certainly God's grace toward us is as undeserved as David's

grace toward his rebel son. Compare Romans 5:8.

David's protective attitude toward his son was really a foolish and selfish thing in this circumstance. Thousands of his people would die that day, and thousands more would die if Absalom lived, for national division would continue to be fuelled. David was handling this purely on an emotional basis rather than thinking things through objectively or logically. When it came to David's sons, he just lost track of reason. He even seems to make a point of Absalom's youth (*"the young man"*), as if to excuse his son's actions on the basis of his immaturity? Absalom was certainly old enough to know better. He was old enough to be dealt with for his rebellion. Joab obviously had no intention of obeying this request if given the chance.

Vs. 6 – As man looked upon it, this endeavour was essentially suicide. What incredible courage in these mighty men, for so few to face up to so many! They in fact faced the undefeated champion army of the Middle East at that time, when they could so easily have simply crossed the floor. *But for their conscience!* What does convenience or cowardice

lead *you* to do against your conscience? These men were convinced that they were on the side of right, and were ready to die for it!

Question

How did they know friend from foe out there in the confusion of the battlefield, or battle*forest* in this case? Did one side wear blue arm-bands and the other pink?

Vs. 7 – Notice the very casual, matter-of-fact way the results were related, as if all spoken in the same sentence or breath. No battle details or movements are given. No accolades for clever strategy or stunning courage. No praise to man offered. It was simply the Lord handing victory to David, and defeat to the rebel son. The details on the ground did not matter, for it was all a question of the Lord's intent (17:14). And had these men of Israel ever before known such defeat or *"slaughter"*? Again, it was a graphic demonstration to them of where the Lord

18:8 *For the battle was there scattered over the face of all the country: and the wood devoured more people that day than the sword devoured.*

18:9 *And Absalom met the servants of David. And Absalom rode upon a mule, and the mule went under the thick boughs of a great oak, and his head caught hold of the oak, and he was taken up between the heaven and the earth; and the mule that was under him went away.*

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stood on the question of rightful reign. Under David they had known only victory.

Vs. 8 – In their flight before David's army the dense forest proved more dangerous than swords and spears. Thus it was more the Lord doing the killing than fellow countrymen. The point would be understood among them. It was a situation comparable to God taking the wheels off the Egyptian chariots in the sea. They too recognized supernatural involvement, crying *"Let us flee from the face of Israel; for the Lord fighteth for them against the Egyptians"* (Ex. 14:25).

Vs. 9 – Why was Absalom riding a mule? Were David or his men ever mounted in battle? Was this to give him the advantage of speed for running into battle, or away?

So Absalom was left hanging from the tree by his head. Josephus says it was in fact Absalom's hair that caught in the tree. We are not told this, though this has become the traditional opinion, perhaps

because of the irony it would involve with the great interest in his thick hair mentioned earlier (14:26). Seems like in such a life or death situation he would have just released himself by cutting his hair. The Hebrew word is "head", the same word used in 14:26 where distinction is made with *"the hair of his head".*

Absalom's interesting mishap would certainly suggest haste. He could only have been riding fast, probably not looking ahead but looking back. We are told he *"met the servants of David",* and then he was moving so fast he was taken by the oak. So we are talking of either a solo cavalry charge (on his mule), or a fast retreat into the trees. With his whole army mostly into flight that day it is likely Absalom was making tracks out of there when he was snagged.

Vs. 10 – Where were Absalom's men to gather around him protectively and rescue him from this aggressive oak? There either were none around him at the time or they all left him and fled. It does seem odd that their inexperienced captain/king would be doing mule manoeuvres on his own. Where were

his personal bodyguards or armourbearers? Had enough of him perhaps? Were all in general terror and flight? There appeared to be a great lack of organization on Absalom's side in contrast to David's men orderly arrayed. It seems those with Absalom presumed too much due to their overwhelming numbers.

We get the impression that poor Absalom never had a chance to show himself valiant (or even manly). He in fact went out like a fool. Was the Lord perhaps indicating by the nature of Absalom's end the law's curse upon one who hangs on a tree? *"For he that is hanged is accursed of God"* (Deut. 21:23). Perhaps it was God's curse upon the rebellion of this son on display. Those responsible in Israel would not deal with that rebel son as they should, so the Lord was forced to deal with him, and in such a way that it was obviously the Lord dealing with him. Compare Hophni and Phinehas taken out by the Lord because Eli failed to adequately deal with them (I Sam. 4).

Notice how only one man reported seeing Absalom hanging. He said *"I saw"*, not "we saw". Was Absalom actually fleeing from only one man? Remember that he was not a man personally experienced in war.

18:11 *And Joab said unto the man that told him, And, behold, thou sawest him, and why didst thou not smite him there to the ground? and I would have given thee ten shekels of silver, and a girdle.*

18:12 *And the man said unto Joab, Though I should receive a thousand shekels of silver in mine hand, yet would I not put forth mine hand against the king's son: for in our hearing the king charged thee and Abishai and Ittai, saying, Beware that none touch the young man Absalom.*

18:13 *Otherwise I should have wrought falsehood against mine own life: for there is no matter hid from the king, and thou thyself wouldest have set thyself against me.*

Vs. 12-13 – Here was a prudent man, who foresaw the evil and hid himself, while Joab was the simple man who passed on and was ultimately punished (Prov. 22:3; 27:12). Hear well the great lesson of wisdom from this unnamed, unknown soldier who escaped with his life for his prudence in this circumstance. Why?

- He heard the warning in the king's words and remembered, even in the heat of conflict.
- Though the king was not actually speaking directly to him, he heard it as if spoken to him, and he was proven wise to understand it that way.
- He refused to allow the mocking voice of rebellion, even from one so high-ranking and respected as Joab, to convince him otherwise. He suffered Joab's lashing scorn in vs. 11 and again in vs. 14, and yet he did not care!
- He refused to be persuaded by the promise of

reward from one of lesser power than the king who gave warning. Even the hope of much greater reward would not lead him to succumb.

- He trusted and feared the words of the king more than the highest ranking underling.

We see such wonderfully solid resolve in this man to stand by the king's words, and *it was his rescue!* He firmly defied Joab's suggestion without the least hesitation or uncertainty. This man had no need or wish to be the hero of the day. He was handed what might have looked like a golden opportunity for fame, but it was a *trap*, a death-trap! And he saw it clearly for what it was; *"Otherwise I should have wrought falsehood against mine own life"* (vs. 13). He was wise through the words of the king, to which he simply clung. We never learn the name of this wisely thoughtful man. No fame, *but he lived!* He walked away from this to live in peace, delivering himself from punishment and loss, because of his cautious resolve to just do the right thing, what the king said. In him we see the good fruit of David's early severity against assassins, while in Joab we see the bad fruit of David's later leniency.

The applications to us are obvious. Even so we are wise to trust and stand by the words of the King of

kings, more than those of any lesser, created being, in spite of;

- Any pressures here below, whether from the outside or from our own inward desires.
- Any belittling mockery, though the mocker be the most manly or famous or significant among men.
- Any tempting rewards here below.
- Any length of time since God's words were given.
- His words not actually being spoken directly to us. God's Book of books is all about what He said to others, yet meant for you and me as well. We show ourselves wise to understand it that way. *It is our <u>rescue</u>!*

Though temptation comes with belittling scorn for denying it, from the most significant of sources and with the greatest promise of rewards, yet stand resolute upon the Master's words and you will be blessed for it in the end. Be sure your reasons for standing are grounded in the King's words, and then just stay right there regardless of the seeming losses or hurts or heartaches, regardless of the "great", once-in-a-lifetime opportunities lost or missed.

Compare from Psalm 119 the preserving effect of God's words kept ever before our eyes;

- *"Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD. Blessed are they that keep His testimonies, and that seek Him with the whole heart. They also do no iniquity: they walk in His ways"* (vs. 1-3).
- *"Wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? By taking heed thereto according to Thy Word"* (vs. 9).
- *"Thy Word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against Thee"* (vs. 11).
- *"I have stuck unto Thy testimonies: O LORD, put me not to shame"* (vs. 31).
- Compare also vs. 51, 77, 80, 104, 115, 116, 155.

"And thou thyself wouldest have set thyself against me" – Do you hear the distrust in this man's words? His own captain he could not trust to stand with him, but in fact fully expected that Joab would have sold him out. So this obviously was known character in Joab, with the point further proven in Joab's following actions against Absalom, and against David. Joab was a great and brave soldier to be sure, but he was not a man who could be

trusted by either king or comrade. This he had shown with Abner and would show again with Amasa. Give the man an "A" for *Assassination*, triple AAA in fact; Abner, Absalom, Amasa. Only with Absalom here can we perhaps discern some noble purpose in Joab's killing.

Comparison

What do we have in Joab's words in vs. 11 but a suggestion of evil? He speaks as the tempter in Genesis 3, openly suggesting rebellion against the king's words, suggesting reward for rebellion. The unnamed soldier on the other hand wisely responded as Jesus in Matthew 4, saying "We all heard what the master spoke". He would simply stand with the king's words, to his own blessing. He was gracious yet forthright, as Michael in rebuking Satan, who *"durst* [dared] *not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee"* (Jude 9). For Joab was as Satan in this current age, still holding a measure of authority, though largely stripped and on his way out.

Could we perhaps see symbolism of Satan in Joab?

- He was the rebel, tempter, and strong fallen leader of David's servants, as Satan was

18:14 *Then said Joab, I may not tarry thus with thee. And he took three darts in his hand, and thrust them through the heart of Absalom, while he was yet alive in the midst of the oak.*

18:15 *And ten young men that bare Joab's armour compassed about and smote Absalom, and slew him.*

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originally over God's angelic host.

- He was discredited, stripped, and on his way out, yet still holding a measure of power, as Satan has been cast down but is not out of the contest for the hearts of men.

- His end came with the rise of David's son to rule, as Satan will be removed with Christ's return to His earthly kingdom (Rev. 20:1-3).

- He was allowed leadership over a third of David's host, as the dragon led *"the third part of the stars of heaven"* after him in his fall (Rev. 12:4).

Vs. 14-15 – *"I may not tarry thus with thee"* – "I have no patience for you and your silly conscience trip".

"And he took three darts in his hand" – Joab promptly thrust 3 javelins through Absalom's chest while he still hung from the tree. As Daniel's words concerning the end-times *"man of sin", "yet he shall*

come to his end, and none shall help him" (Dan. 12:45). How short-lived were the successes of this proud man, with none to help him in his end. For *"pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall"* (Prov. 16:18).

Again, though Joab disobeyed the clear instruction of David and was eventually killed as a result, it may be that he was moved by a desire for David's best and the health of the nation. David's personal interest in sparing Absalom was foolish and utterly emotional and simply could not work, either for David or for the peace of the nation. It was in fact a purpose that ran against God's law, for Absalom was certainly a rebellious son for whom the law required stoning to death (Deut. 21:18-21). Joab was presented with the opportunity and wasted no time in clearing that menace out of the way of David's peace, for David's own good. Again, perhaps Joab's action here was less that of a rebel and more a sacrifice of himself for the good of his king and nation.

Vs. 16 – *"For Joab held back the people"* – With Absalom's death all cause for further bloodshed was

18:17 *And they took Absalom, and cast him into a great pit in the wood, and laid a very great heap of stones upon him: and all Israel fled every one to his tent.*
18:18 *Now Absalom in his lifetime had taken and reared up for himself a pillar, which is in the king's dale: for he said, I have no son to keep my name in remembrance: and he called the pillar after his own name: and it is called unto this day, Absalom's place.*

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gone. Again, the conflict was really only between father and son. Joab's trumpet signal called back David's supporters from their pursuit of Israel (a bit like restraining a snarling hamster from further mauling a whimpering Rottweiler).

Vs. 17 – *"And laid a very great heap of stones upon him"* – Why the *"great heap of stones"*? David had said, *"Deal gently for my sake with…Absalom"* (vs. 5). But not only did they fail to *"deal gently"* with Absalom, they killed him, and it was not just an oops. And not only did they kill the king's son, they butchered him! Not only could they not bring back Absalom's thoroughly pin-cushioned body, for to do such would of course be the height of insolence and insult, they did not want it ever to be found. Yet the record is in the Book. As always before the Lord, they succeeded in hiding nothing. Every secret, shameful thing hidden in the closet of our existence is in God's book.

Vs. 18 – Absalom had constructed a memorial to himself somewhere in the Kidron valley. King Saul

did the same in Carmel when returning from his partial obedience against the Amalekites (I Sam. 15:12), apparently a monument to the great things accomplished to the south. But for Saul it was always more about himself than the Lord. Even so Absalom, in his pride and vanity, would leave a marker so folks might remember him, since he had no living memorial of sons. It was more about leaving a remembrance of himself than a remembrance of God, whom we never once see Absalom accessing. What kind of remembrance are *you* seeking to leave behind? Would you leave those who remember you, or those who know God because of you?

Vs. 19 – Ahimaaz was one of the two sons of the priests who earlier brought Hushai's warning to David, that they must keep moving (17:21). Zadok's son was keen for David's cause and quite anxious to run to him the good news of victory. The spirit of the parents is often caught by the children. They are more likely to be what we are in truth than what we wear on the surface.

Vs. 20 – It is unclear why Joab would not allow

18:20 *And Joab said unto him, Thou shalt not bear tidings this day, but thou shalt bear tidings another day: but this day thou shalt bear no tidings, because the king's son is dead.*
18:21 *Then said Joab to Cushi, Go tell the king what thou hast seen. And Cushi bowed himself unto Joab, and ran.*
18:22 *Then said Ahimaaz the son of Zadok yet again to Joab, But howsoever, let me, I pray thee, also run after Cushi. And Joab said, Wherefore wilt thou run, my son, seeing that thou hast no tidings ready?*
18:23 *But howsoever, said he, let me run. And he said unto him, Run. Then Ahimaaz ran by the way of the plain, and overran Cushi.*

Ahimaaz to run. It had something to do with the negative nature of the news to be carried, *"because the king's son is dead"*. Perhaps Joab wished to spare this keen young man in some way. Joab knew it was not going to be as happy on the other end as Ahimaaz seemed to think.

Vs. 21 – *"Then said Joab to Cushi, Go tell the king what thou hast seen"* – So the task was then given to this unknown Cushi instead. The name may indicate that this man was a Cushite, an Ethiopian servant. Perhaps a more expendable candidate? And so off the man sped to bring the news to the waiting king.

Vs. 22-23 – Joab could not understand the eagerness of the young man to also run since there was nothing to gain by it.

"But howsoever, said he, let me run. And he said unto him, Run" – The young man had no reasons to

18:24 *And David sat between the two gates: and the watchman went up to the roof over the gate unto the wall, and lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold a man running alone.*
18:25 *And the watchman cried, and told the king. And the king said, If he be alone, there is tidings in his mouth. And he came apace, and drew near.*

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offer for Joab's question of why. He only pressed Joab again, pleading for the freedom to run. And Joab, perhaps a bit embarrassed with the odd desperation and departure from protocol, finally said, OK! Run! And off the young man went.

"Then Ahimaaz ran by the way of the plain, and overran Cushi" – Cushi had the advantage of a lead, but Ahimaaz had the advantage of knowing what Cushi could not know, that it had now become a footrace. It seems Ahimaaz took a different route in this *"way of the plain"*, perhaps so that Cushi did not discover that it was a race. The result was that Ahimaaz won the race to David by a healthy length, driven by his earnest desire to be first to bring word of victory to the king.

Vs. 24-25 – David was seated at the city gate anxiously awaiting word. He would have expected to see either a single runner, in which case it would be news, and would likely mean victory, or Absalom's army surrounding the city bringing death for David. The watchman called out his sighting of a single runner approaching, whom David

18:26 *And the watchman saw another man running: and the watchman called unto the porter, and said, Behold another man running alone. And the king said, He also bringeth tidings.*
18:27 *And the watchman said, Me thinketh the running of the foremost is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok. And the king said, He is a good man, and cometh with good tidings.*
18:28 *And Ahimaaz called, and said unto the king, All is well. And he fell down to the earth upon his face before the king, and said, Blessed be the LORD thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the king.*
18:29 *And the king said, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Ahimaaz answered, When Joab sent the king's servant, and me thy servant, I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what it was.*

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recognized must be carrying some news from the battlefield. Behind *"tidings"* in the KJV is more than just the idea of news, but of *good* news. David expected to hear word of victory.

Vs. 28 – *"And he fell down to the earth upon his face before the king"* – A mixture of reverence and exhaustion perhaps.

"And said, Blessed be the LORD thy God, which hath delivered up the men that lifted up their hand against my lord the king" – There it was, the message that had so driven Ahimaaz, that he might get there first to bring word of the Lord's blessing in victory to his king.

Vs. 29 – *"Is the young man Absalom safe?"* – Perhaps Ahimaaz expected the king to leap and dance as he had years before when bringing the ark to

Jerusalem. I suspect he was not expecting this. It was a question that seemed to catch him completely off guard and set him to stuttering evasion. No shouting or leaping or embrace. No high-five or hearty handclasp. Just the king's intense gaze, enquiring concerning his rebel son.

"I saw a great tumult, but I knew not what it was" – Now what do you call this? An honest and forthright answer? No, it was a lie! A ridiculous lie in fact! Were David and Joab beginners at the business of battle? Was David to believe that Joab fired off a runner while there was still some *"great tumult"* taking place, apparently involving Absalom, yet before the outcome had become clear, when all knew how keenly interested David would be in Absalom's welfare? The fact is Ahimaaz knew fully well how *"the young man Absalom"* fared. *"The young man"* was not going to be getting any older, and this man knew it. There was no such *"tumult"* taking place when he was sent, for all was quite settled at that point. He could not honestly tell the king that he *"knew not",* for of course the fact that Absalom was dead and buried was all of the reason Joab hesitated in sending him, *"because the king's son is dead"* (vs. 20). This was lying evasion, a bumbling effort to preserve the king's feelings it would seem. Ahimaaz simply did not wish to tell

18:30 *And the king said unto him, Turn aside, and stand here. And he turned aside, and stood still.*
18:31 *And, behold, Cushi came; and Cushi said, Tidings, my lord the king: for the LORD hath avenged thee this day of all them that rose up against thee.*
18:32 *And the king said unto Cushi, Is the young man Absalom safe? And Cushi answered, The enemies of my lord the king, and all that rise against thee to do thee hurt, be as that young man is.*

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the king the truth about his son. He did not want to speak the whole truth, including the difficult parts. He wanted this to be a positive experience, not a negative. He did not wish to be a carrier of *bad* news. He wanted to carry *good* news to the king. He wanted to see the king's joy with word of victory. But alas, to his surprise and frustration he ended up lying to the king he so wished to bless!

Vs. 30-32 – So Ahimaaz was stood aside while Cushi made his breathless arrival. Again the announcement of the good news of victory over his enemies, and again the king's question concerning his son. We can well imagine the suspicious concern now rising in David's heart.

"The enemies of my lord the king…be as that young man is" – "He has been handled as an enemy of the king should be". Though spoken cautiously and courteously, Cushi answered David's question with plainness enough. And David turned and wept for the son he had lost so many years before.

We have considered previously the matter of lying. But I want us to see here the greatest caution communicated. See how Ahimaaz lied to the king in an effort to be a blessing; a good intent or end, yet an evil means. But we cannot accomplish a good purpose by an evil means. We cannot truly bless with a lie. Look well at the knock-on effect of this man's failure to simply speak the truth. He implied that Joab had sent a runner before the dust was even settled out in the field of battle, before the whole matter was even known. What kind of a half-baked meal was that to serve up from a man of Joab's experience? Messengers sent to shrug their shoulders before the king? Do you see how Ahimaaz could stain Joab's character by his lie?

We cannot help but to mess with somebody's honour by a lie, most likely our own. David had long experience with the nature of battle, and with Joab, who would never send a runner until able to bring a full report. Do you not suppose David was wise enough to immediately perceive this man's cover-up? Dishonesty is only ever effective with the unwise. It never works with a perceptive soul, not for long. Therefore to even try is an insult to such a one, suggesting the one lied to an idiot and easily fooled. Though David might appreciate the man's effort to pamper his feelings, no man appreciates

such pampering at such a time. "Concern" that shields a man from the truth is no true concern. Though we may not like bad news or reproof, or even the one who brings it, we will respect the one willing to faithfully speak what hurts, if we are wise.

Consider as well the pride in Ahimaaz. Yes, he was full of good purposes toward the king, but perhaps more toward himself. How could he think himself free to so tamper with the report sent from captain to king, between the leaders of his nation, except through pride? We heard what Joab commanded, "Tell the king what you have seen". How could such a man be trusted, who would not do what he was told, in simply reporting to the king what he had seen?

Now let me show you something rather painful, which likely resulted from this event. I Chronicles 6 gives a listing of *"the sons of Levi"* (vs. 1), and in vs. 8-9 we follow the priestly line from Zadok to his son Ahimaaz and to his grandson Azariah. Then in I Kings 4 we find a record of those serving under Solomon, after David's day, beginning with the priest in vs. 2. And there we read of *"Azariah the son of Zadok the priest"* who served under Solomon. But hold on, *Ahimaaz* was Zadok's son! Yes, but in the Hebrew idiom any descendant can be referred to

as a "son". So Zadok's grandson was also his "son" or descendant. But if it was *"Azariah the son of Zadok the priest"* who served under Solomon then what happened to Ahimaaz? Zadok served out his days under David and then Solomon, and then it seems his grandson, Azariah, continued in the office of priest under Solomon. No mention of Ahimaaz. We cannot know the details for sure, just an odd, quiet, conspicuous omission. Perhaps because the man would lie to the king? Perhaps because he brought question upon his faithfulness, and so he was quietly bypassed for priestly service when his father came to the end of his days, and opportunity passed to another? One moment of dishonesty regretted for the rest of his days on earth! *What a sadness!*

Oh consider the warning in the realization that the King of heaven might handle us after the same principle. *"Moreover it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful"*. May we be careful to be true to His words. May we be people of truth, though the air all around us be filled with lies. May we run with God's message, making sure it is the *whole* message, and spoken faithfully. It will always be easier to run with half a message, the happier half, a brighter, more positive message of victory and joy. It will always be difficult to say the hard

thing, to bring the bad news to others of fearful warning of coming judgment, words that may wound their heart and make them enemies though we long more than anything to keep their friendship. But we must be willing to hurt if we are ever going to help! We must be willing to say what may anger another if that one would ever come to peace and joy in believing. We cannot be speakers only of comfortable things if we would be true friends. If we will not speak faithfully and painfully to others then we in fact show ourselves no true friend. If we will not speak faithfully for the Lord then He may remove from us the opportunity to speak, quietly turning to someone else, passing us by.

I suspect Ahimaaz went to his grave wishing he had just spoken the truth that day, or that he had put it right while he had the chance. Seems he never did, for to do so would have been most difficult. And then David was gone, and opportunity with him!

Ponder Points

It has always been the way of false prophets, so commonly condemned by God throughout the ages, that they refuse to speak the hard things. These are liars as well. As Ahimaaz, they may often be good intentioned liars, but liars nonetheless. These are unfaithful messengers who prefer to deny or diminish the harsher aspects and dress up God's message considerably sweeter;

- Ahab's lying prophets said *"Go and prosper, for the Lord shall deliver it into the hand of the king"* (I Ki. 22:22), when death awaited Ahab across the Jordan. Though it was a positive, affirming message for Ahab to hear, it was a lie that led him to his ruin. So it is with all lying false prophets and teachers who lead souls to ruin.
- The false prophets and priests of Jeremiah's day;
    - Healed the hurt of the people only *"slightly, saying, Peace, peace; when there is no peace"* (Jer. 6:13-14).
    - Were promising no sword or famine but *"assured peace"* (Jer. 14:13-15).

    - Were speaking *"a vision of their own heart",* that *"ye shall have peace; and…no evil shall come upon you"* (Jer. 23:16-25). They were saying what they wanted God's message to be. Note the audience, those willing to listen to such self-appointed prophets of peace in vs. 17. Folks who despise the Lord and walk after the imagination of their own heart, who *hear* what they want God's message to be, are easily deceived.

- The cry of the prophets of Micah's day was *"Peace"* (3:5-7) and *"None evil can come upon us"* (3:11).

- Campus Crusade for Christ begins their "gospel" message with "God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life".

Brighter, happier words, requiring no repentance, no self-death. There is no getting around the obvious difference between God's true spokesmen and those who are false. The true speak plain, painfully plain. The false speak sweet, comfortably sweet.

Remember how godly Samuel was a man who had God's favour and presence and blessing throughout

the days of his life. Why? Because he always conveyed fully what God said, painful though it was to do so; with Eli (I Sam. 3), with the elders (I Sam. 8), and with King Saul (I Sam. 13 & 15).

Chapter 19

19:1 *And it was told Joab, Behold, the king weepeth and mourneth for Absalom.*
19:2 *And the victory that day was turned into mourning unto all the people: for the people heard say that day how the king was grieved for his son.*
19:3 *And the people gat them by stealth that day into the city, as people being ashamed steal away when they flee in battle.*

Vs. 1-3 – *"The victory that day was turned into mourning"* – It was the greatest victory these mighty men had ever experienced, against the most impossible odds they had ever faced, displaying the very greatest heroic courage. In fact, they had the joy of being a part of a miracle that day. For it was evident that God was on their side fighting with them, bringing death to more by the dense forest than by flashing swords. And yet they were made to feel that it was the greatest defeat they had ever known, through David's surprising response, failing even to acknowledge their good service, and only mourning the end of their enemy. The best they had ever done, with God's help, was made to appear as their greatest shame, as if they had done wrong in doing it, and the Lord wrong to side with them. Instead of the expected joy and celebration awaiting them in the city upon their triumphant return, they were forced to slink home as servants who had shamefully failed their king and country. Can you picture them all quietly drifting back into the city

like inconspicuous shadows? Faces down, collars up, trying not to be noticed, rather than hands held high in victorious salute, like an Olympic gold winner. All except for Joab that is! For Joab knew what they were about, and knew they were doing right and not wrong! Joab boldly denied the wrong influence of David's attitude and was right to do it, though a man of such tremendous sway as David. *Denied!* Joab refused to be implied in the wrong for doing right for his king and nation. He knew very well the great, commendable courage of those men, that they were heroes worthy of honour more than the humiliation they were feeling. Joab stood for his men, and would not let their glory be taken from them. He was a man with clear perception in this circumstance, unmoved by the sentiments of those around him, seeing straight, shooting straight. Joab shines here in my book. He was such an inconsistent specimen. Sometimes the dark demon, sometimes an angel of light. But he was certainly standing on solid bedrock here, with not the least bit of confusion or uncertainty or dismay or slinking in him.

There is a lesson here for us in Joab's response to David. Consider the back-to-front way of godless man in his view of spiritual things. Consider the hatred of cultural anthropologists for biblical

mission work. They bemoan the "intrusion" of the gospel message into a society, altering the natural, unique cultural and religious heritage of a people. Man thinks it the height of arrogance that biblical Christianity would seek to "impose" itself upon every culture. Yet the true Word of God comes to any people bringing potential for the greatest victory of salvation and eternal life! But this "invasion" is seen only as shameful defeat by the world. They would scorn and call it a kind of evil. Do we apologize? "Oh shame man, did we mess up the African's ancient ancestor worship and trample the Hindu's surplus of gods and idols?" Do we slink back to our home compound in disarray and uncertainty? No, I am afraid not! By faith we know what we are about. We know where lie the true rights and wrongs. By faith in God's truth we *deny* the world's foolish demand that we keep our views to ourselves, no matter how seemingly significant or highly educated the nay-sayers might be. *Denied!* We are men and women of courage, who carry the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, to the ends of the earth, indeed to *"every creature"* in every society of man. We are a people of clear perception, who see straight and speak straight. We deny the shushing attitudes around us insisting that we cower in shame for our "arrogant intrusions" into the rights and views of others. By faith we spurn

19:4 *But the king covered his face, and the king cried with a loud voice, O my son Absalom, O Absalom, my son, my son!*
19:5 *And Joab came into the house to the king, and said, Thou hast shamed this day the faces of all thy servants, which this day have saved thy life, and the lives of thy sons and of thy daughters, and the lives of thy wives, and the lives of thy concubines;*
19:6 *In that thou lovest thine enemies, and hatest thy friends. For thou hast declared this day, that thou regardest neither princes nor servants: for this day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well.*
19:7 *Now therefore arise, go forth, and speak comfortably unto thy servants: for I swear by the LORD, if thou go not forth, there will not tarry one with thee this night: and that will be worse unto thee than all the evil that befell thee from thy youth until now.*

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attitudes suggesting that we are wrong to press our beliefs on others, to proclaim the God of the Bible as the only true God or to call men to repentance before God. For we are most certainly *right* to press the truth upon our world, without apologies, without hesitancy. We are fighting the right battle, on the right side, against the true enemies of God and humanity. Joab did no slinking, no confusion. And in this circumstance he becomes a clear-headed example to us of a man utterly unmoved by the wrong thinking of significant people around us. *Thank you Joab!*

Vs. 4 – David was completely consumed in unreasonable hysterics. What he needed was a jolly good slap to snap him out of it and restore him to reality, and Joab was God's appointed hand for the job.

Vs. 5-7 – Joab did not wait even a moment, but

came immediately to face David (see focus on *"that/this day"*). His reproof was straight and blunt and hard-hitting, perhaps even a bit harsh. He offered no condolences or pitying. To his credit Joab spoke to the one responsible rather than to others. There were no subtleties as with the woman of Tekoah in chapter 14. He did his own talking, and did just fine. He took necessary risks, as we always do when we do the hard thing of confronting others. Yet it is the only way we can discover true wisdom in people, as we discover again in David here. Joab seems to shade things a bit over-dramatic in suggesting all the men would forsake David that night if he did not respond more appropriately to them. Remember that these men were ready to die for David. Surely they would have given him time to work through this odd emotional wobble (unless Joab was threatening to lead them in such a departure). Joab was certainly right that David's mighty men did not only save *his* life but the lives of all the rest of his family as well; wives, concubines, sons, and daughters. David was inconsolably distraught over the loss of this one useless son, but he would have lost them all in death if Absalom had won, as well as all of his true friends who had stood with him at risk of their own lives. We can well imagine the messy purge had Absalom come out on top. David, by his actions, was essentially declaring

regard for none but Absalom, a man who had lied to him and about him and had wished for his death! Compare Paul's rebuke of Peter for what he too was declaring by his actions in Galatians 2. We can proclaim a wrong message worthy of rebuke by our actions, lifestyle, dress, haunts, etc.

Oh do not miss the positive example of grace here as well, of David loving his enemies, even unreasonably so. For in the same way God has loved us.

Vs. 7 – This was no suggestion. Joab speaks boldly like a coach, demanding that David get out there and express an appropriate public thanks and well-done to his deserving men.

Vs. 8 – *"Then the king arose, and sat in the gate"* – That *"the king"* quietly did as he was told by his captain indicates his recognition that Joab was right. Among the most important things that made David a great man was his humble willingness to hear wisdom and positively respond to fair reproof, even from one such as Joab. Compare as well

19:9 *And all the people were at strife throughout all the tribes of Israel, saying, The king saved us out of the hand of our enemies, and he delivered us out of the hand of the Philistines; and now he is fled out of the land for Absalom.*
19:10 *And Absalom, whom we anointed over us, is dead in battle. Now therefore why speak ye not a word of bringing the king back?*

David's willingness to hear Abigail and Nathan.

David went out to sit *"in the gate"*. It was that place where public business was conducted. As the word went out his men gathered to stand before him that evening. We presume David spoke words of praise and appreciation for their courageous conduct that day and acknowledged their good service to king and country, lifting the wet blanket he had cast over Mahanaim with his emotional break-down.

Vs. 9-10 – NOW they were remembering the benefits they lost track of when so blindly enamoured with Absalom. The debate described in these verses indicates support for David was not unanimous among the northern tribes. Yet the words of the pro-David side here suggest the majority were now for restoring him to the throne.

That Absalom was *"dead in battle"* was perhaps putting it kindly. "Dead in flight" was probably the more accurate statement.

19:11 *And king David sent to Zadok and to Abiathar the priests, saying, Speak unto the elders of Judah, saying, Why are ye the last to bring the king back to his house? seeing the speech of all Israel is come to the king, even to his house.*

Vs. 11 – Israel is obviously a separate entity from Judah here. So this thing had accomplished a great deal of further fracturing of the nation. The division between north and south, that began with David's rise to power decades before, again showed itself still present, now with factions in the north as well.

Consider how David was wise to handle things cautiously, not presuming he would be reinstated as king with Absalom's death. He waited and worked for a return of popular support and official invitation. *"Put not forth thyself"* is the encouragement of God's wisdom (Prov. 25:6-7), *"for better it is that it be said unto thee come up hither, than that thou shouldst be put lower in the presence of the prince"*. Do not presume upon others. Take no liberties with folks you do not know until invited. David assumed nothing, but graciously, diplomatically allowed his people to lift him up, rather than lifting himself.

Word of the northern debate concerning him, with favourable feelings there and majority support, had gotten back to David. But as yet he had heard

19:12 *Ye are my brethren, ye are my bones and my flesh: wherefore then are ye the last to bring back the king?*
19:13 *And say ye to Amasa, Art thou not of my bone, and of my flesh? God do so to me, and more also, if thou be not captain of the host before me continually in the room of Joab.*

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nothing from the elders of Judah, his own people. They were likely ashamed of their actions against him, and unsure how to proceed. Perhaps they even feared David's anger should he return to power. Therefore it was David's place to make the approach to them. And they discovered he was waiting for them, for their invitation, rather than the attitude of scorn or disappointment they were perhaps expecting.

Vs. 12 – David showed largeness of heart, referring to them as his kith and kin. He did not disown them, but was willing to forgive in grace. Even so the Lord stands surprisingly ready to forgive and receive the penitent sinner who comes to Him in faith and humility.

Notice how they trusted David's words, that his heart was as his words. Unlike the treacherous way of Absalom, inviting David and sons to his sheepshearing with murder in his heart, and in his trip to Hebron to "worship the Lord" with treason the main item on the agenda.

Vs. 13 – Making Amasa captain of David's army was an effective bit of diplomacy, helping to swing rebel support more fully over to David, and serving as a further demotion for Joab as well. Yet there were serious drawbacks in this appointment. We can probably guess the attitude of David's mighty men toward Amasa. His debut as a military leader was both as a traitor and failure. Though he had all the odds in his favour, yet he accomplished nothing but effective flight before David's few. What is he going to do when facing a real army? They needed a leader who would stand. It is a valid question how David could expect his mighty men to easily follow such a leader?

Was David being entirely fair on Joab? Though he had most certainly disobeyed David in killing Absalom, yet Absalom needed killing. Though against David's will, Joab had forced the only acceptable outcome. Surely even David could see this. As well, Joab had then taken great risks in speaking faithfully the hard words David needed to hear. There can be no doubt that David's happy condition at this point was largely due to Joab's clear insight and decisive actions.

19:15 *So the king returned, and came to Jordan. And Judah came to Gilgal, to go to meet the king, to conduct the king over Jordan.*
19:16 *And Shimei the son of Gera, a Benjamite, which was of Bahurim, hasted and came down with the men of Judah to meet king David.*
19:17 *And there were a thousand men of Benjamin with him, and Ziba the servant of the house of Saul, and his fifteen sons and his twenty servants with him; and they went over Jordan before the king.*

Vs. 14 – David, through his tact, succeeded in securing his acceptance among the majority before actually returning. Unlike the northern tribes, Judah was united in their support of David.

Vs. 15-17 – Such a great show of support now. Yet all of these were among those actually uncommitted to the king in any kind of unconditional way. Shimei showed his colours more vocally, yet all the rest there as well had failed to stand with David when he was down. Now they were showing a "support" that depended on circumstance, support that carried a shallow, surface, unreal feel. David was gracious to not deal more severely with them since he was returning as the victor over them. Again, there was a clemency in David that is true of the Lord in His dealing with us as well. So now he was king of a people of mixed loyalties. He was before as well, but at least he now *knew* what he was dealing with. We might look upon this lot disapprovingly, but it is people. Indeed it is *<u>us</u>!* Compare Jesus in John 6 driving away the parasites

19:18 *And there went over a ferry boat to carry over the king's household, and to do what he thought good. And Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king, as he was come over Jordan;*
19:19 *And said unto the king, Let not my lord impute iniquity unto me, neither do thou remember that which thy servant did perversely the day that my lord the king went out of Jerusalem, that the king should take it to his heart.*
19:20 *For thy servant doth know that I have sinned: therefore, behold, I am come the first this day of all the house of Joseph to go down to meet my lord the king.*

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with His hard words, scraping away the barnacles.

19:16-23 – Shimei's Confession & Pardon

Vs. 19-20 – Shimei expressed his regret for his evil conduct. He fully admitted himself a sinner before David, and apparently before all. As public as the sin, just as public should be the confession. How very brave to so humble himself and plead for his pardon before all.

Yet compare his confession with the penitent publican in Luke 18:13, who would not so much as lift his eyes to God, and beat his breast crying *"God be merciful to me a sinner"*. He did not ask God to not impute or remember. What God imputed or remembered was His own business. The publican just knew he deserved death and pled with God for His mercy. Shimei's plea strikes me as a bit presumptuous, in suggesting David not impute iniquity or remember what was done or take it to heart because he already knew he was a sinner.

19:21 *But Abishai the son of Zeruiah answered and said, Shall not Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the LORD's anointed?*

19:22 *And David said, What have I to do with you, ye sons of Zeruiah, that ye should this day be adversaries unto me? shall there any man be put to death this day in Israel? for do not I know that I am this day king over Israel?*

Should he not rather be asking only for mercy to live? His words of cursing had been bitterly wicked, showing no true loyalty in his heart, a great deal of venom, and not a shred of wisdom. This appears more a case of force of circumstance pushing him. Why did he only trouble himself to speak to David with his return? Why wait until it was evident that David would survive and even be restored to power?

Vs. 21-22 – Again Abishai strongly advised death (16:9-10). And again his advice was rejected by David. Abishai was a bit of a fire-eater. Remember that he was the one who quickly volunteered to join David when they crept into Saul's camp at night, right to Saul's bed side. He was the one wishing to kill Saul there. The truth is that Abishai actually expressed David's heart in reality. For David knew Shimei should die.

Abishai, like his brother Joab, was a forthright fellow. But he lacked David's statesmanship. He failed to read or consider the situation here. We can understand the fear among the people, especially

the elders, at this point. There would have been secret concern that David would return to a purge of those who had been disloyal to him. Few on the traitor side would know of the severity of Shimei's words against David. So for David to begin doling out death on the day of his return would have sent a shiver of fear through all. It would have been inconsistent with the large-hearted attitude David had been expressing. Abishai's words here were probably spoken out such that Shimei and those with him could hear. Thus David felt it necessary to make a public show of firm resistance of such an idea, even as he had made a public show of mourning over Abner's murder, to distance himself from Joab's treachery.

So perhaps it is not that David was actually as upset with Abishai as it sounds, but only that there was a need at that time for a firm public show of clemency. Abishai and Joab had a much more simple and straightforward sense of right and wrong, unhedged by any subtleties of diplomacy. David understood the need for Shimei to die, but the time was not right. Just as the time was not right to deal properly with Joab, in the context of great victory.

"Because he cursed the LORD's anointed" – We see here the attitude of the mighty men toward David as

19:23 *Therefore the king said unto Shimei, Thou shalt not die. And the king sware unto him.*
19:24 *And Mephibosheth the son of Saul came down to meet the king, and had neither dressed his feet, nor trimmed his beard, nor washed his clothes, from the day the king departed until the day he came again in peace.*

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the Lord's anointed one. The law said in Exodus 22:28, *"Thou shalt not curse the ruler of thy people"*. David was not only appointed ruler by the people, but by the Lord. David himself had made a great point under Saul of the wrongness of touching the Lord's anointed.

Vs. 23 – So Shimei was granted life under David's rule, which apparently was only a temporary stay of execution, but no promise was made that David would forget or not take it to heart. Shimei's conduct was eventually reported to Solomon, with David even suggesting that he be held guilty and should in fact be punished (I Ki. 2:8-9).

19:24-30 – Meeting with Mephibosheth

Vs. 24 – In coming to greet David, Mephibosheth wore signs of genuine mourning. Because they wore open sandals they would normally trim their nails neatly, and they would keep their beards trimmed and their clothes washed. Mephibosheth had done no such personal grooming since the day of David's departure. See how God's record here makes a lie

19:25 *And it came to pass, when he was come to Jerusalem to meet the king, that the king said unto him, Wherefore wentest not thou with me, Mephibosheth?*
19:26 *And he answered, My lord, O king, my servant deceived me: for thy servant said, I will saddle me an ass, that I may ride thereon, and go to the king; because thy servant is lame.*
19:27 *And he hath slandered thy servant unto my lord the king; but my lord the king is as an angel of God: do therefore what is good in thine eyes.*

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of Ziba's words (16:3). It seems Mephibosheth could not have been looking to promote himself as Ziba claimed.

Vs. 25 – David simply asked why Mephibosheth did not show his support in joining him in his exile, why he failed to show himself a friend of David, as David had been to him.

Vs. 26-27 – Notice that Mephibosheth did not answer David's question. He talked only of intentions and obstacles, while David asked of his *actions*. Mephibosheth's fingers were pointing elsewhere, accusing Ziba of deceit and slander (diversions?). It was not Ziba's actions that David was asking about. Ziba did not pin his master down and keep him from action. Was David really to believe that without Ziba's help Mephibosheth was not able to come? And why did he mention his lameness? Was he offering his handicap as an excuse here, as handicapped folks often tend to do? Oftentimes the worst handicap the handicapped

have are those willing to be manipulated by them, those willing to swallow their sob story. Sure they may have a harder job of it due to their disability, but a man can still do what he really wants to do. Mephibosheth speaks of plans to join David, that for some reason fell short of execution. His words in vs. 26 lead to a "Yes, *and…*?" David was not asking Mephibosheth what he *said* to himself, but what he *did* for the king. Why only think of coming, and not do it? David pointedly asked why he did not *do* it, while Mephibosheth could only point to good intentions, and to others who made the doing harder for him. Compare Deborah and Barak in their war against the Canaanites. Israel was called to battle against their oppressors, but not all joined in the fight. In Judges 5 Deborah and Barak later sang in their victory duet, *"For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart. Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleating of the flocks? For the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart"* (vs. 15-16). That is as far as Reuben would go to help in their battle for freedom. And it is recorded in the Book! Even so with Gilead, Dan, and Asher (vs. 17). Some just never came. Others had only good intentions of coming to help with the cause but never actually did it.

Do not miss the import of the scene here. It is a man coming before the king upon the king's return, to give account for his actions (or lack of them) while the king was away in exile. With the result that this man lost half of his potential inheritance because he failed to actively side with the king when he should have had more than just good intentions! This is where most Christians will be someday I fear. They will stand before the Lord upon His return from "exile" offering to Him their good intentions, because that is all they have to offer, with fingers pointing to all the hindering people and obstacles that "kept" them from action. But the Lord, as David, will be asking in that day why they did not *do* anything. He has got a book of our *works* folks, not of our *wishes!* He will judge according to *"the things done in [our] bodies, according to that he hath done, whether they be good or bad"* (II Cor. 5:10). All of our baskets full of great intentions and difficult obstacles He will brush aside as the worthless chaff they are. The Lord will not fail, as David here, to know the whole of it (yet perhaps David acted more discerningly here than we give him credit for). The Lord will not fail to judge rightly, to the loss or gain of potential inheritance.

"Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling" (Ps. 2:11)

19:28 *For all of my father's house were but dead men before my lord the king: yet didst thou set thy servant among them that did eat at thine own table. What right therefore have I yet to cry any more unto the king?*
19:29 *And the king said unto him, Why speakest thou any more of thy matters? I have said, Thou and Ziba divide the land.*

Vs. 28 – Here is an expression of a proper heart of humility before the Lord, seeing one's worthiness of death, yet with eyes only to the Lord for His abounding grace. See the definition of grace here in this one gifted with blessing when death was deserved. Not that we live in the pit of gloom for our perceived worthlessness, but that in spite of ourselves we live on the bright mountaintop with our gaze ever upon our God of grace.

Vs. 29 – So David came back from taking all from Mephibosheth (16:4). For some reason he made the decision to split the inheritance rather than hearing the case properly as he should have. Perhaps, as Ahimaaz, he wished only to be the bearer of good messages that day? Perhaps he felt trapped by his rash decision in Ziba's favour in the heat of their departure? Perhaps he felt he could not later take it all back when he had already given his word to Ziba? Or perhaps he was in fact wisely perceiving Mephibosheth's failure to act on his intentions as he should have.

19:30 *And Mephibosheth said unto the king, Yea, let him take all, forasmuch as my lord the king is come again in peace unto his own house.*
19:31 *And Barzillai the Gileadite came down from Rogelim, and went over Jordan with the king, to conduct him over Jordan.*
19:32 *Now Barzillai was a very aged man, even fourscore years old: and he had provided the king of sustenance while he lay at Mahanaim; for he was a very great man.*

Vs. 30 – Mephibosheth sounds like his father Jonathan here. He expresses a proper attitude toward possessions. Even suffering injustice or theft does not matter when we have the King (Heb. 10:34).

19:31-40 – Meeting with Barzillai

Vs. 31 – The events here do not seem to run consecutively. The incidents with Shimei and Barzillai were at the Jordan crossing, while the meeting with Mephibosheth in between was later, in Jerusalem (vs. 25).

We can imagine the sacrifices endured by this old man in supporting David. Such risks he took, as David's mighty men, in choosing to do right and to stand by the Lord's anointed one. Yet how he was honoured in the king's return to rule.

Vs. 32 – Some, like David's mighty men, are gifted or empowered to help *fight* the king's battles, they being more effective than others in wielding the

19:33 *And the king said unto Barzillai, Come thou over with me, and I will feed thee with me in Jerusalem.*
19:34 *And Barzillai said unto the king, How long have I to live, that I should go up with the king unto Jerusalem?*
19:35 *I am this day fourscore years old: and can I discern between good and evil? can thy servant taste what I eat or what I drink? can I hear any more the voice of singing men and singing women? wherefore then should thy servant be yet a burden unto my lord the king?*
19:36 *Thy servant will go a little way over Jordan with the king: and why should the king recompense it me with such a reward?*
19:37 *Let thy servant, I pray thee, turn back again, that I may die in mine own city, and be buried by the grave of my father and of my mother. But behold thy servant Chimham; let him go over with my lord the king; and do to him what shall seem good unto thee.*

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sword of the Spirit. Some, like Barzillai, are gifted or enriched to help *finance* the king's battles. Supporters of a different kind they are, but important supporters the same. They do not tend to be up front men like Joab, whose name we know well. These are rather behind the scenes folks who want no public attention for their part.

Vs. 36 – Barzillai was honestly not giving with any hope of repayment or recognition for his contribution. He gave only out of appreciation and loyalty to his king. There is a lesson here in good giving. This man did not give to get. He just gave to the king's cause because it was the right thing to do, because it was something he could do for the king, out of simple devotion. And the king did not fail to recognize and honour him for it.

Vs. 37 – He so graciously declined David's offer, not wanting to in any way suggest that his offer was of

19:38 *And the king answered, Chimham shall go over with me, and I will do to him that which shall seem good unto thee: and whatsoever thou shalt require of me, that will I do for thee.*
19:39 *And all the people went over Jordan. And when the king was come over, the king kissed Barzillai, and blessed him; and he returned unto his own place.*

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small value to him.

Vs. 38 – Barzillai now had a friend in the king whenever he should need help. All he had to do was ask.

Vs. 39 – It is such a sweet picture here of mutual respect and love! David did not forget those who loved and honoured him, and was gracious and giving toward all such. So it is with the Lord, and so it will be. In that coming day when we stand before Him, when we see how the Lord so tenderly embraces and rewards those who honoured Him in this life, as David here with this man, how we will wish then that we had given more of ourselves for Him!

See in these three men encountering David upon his return;

- One who *cursed* him and was spared for his apology, receiving only his life.
- One with a mouth full of *excuses* for doing

nothing, losing half of his potential inheritance.

- One greatly honoured for just quietly, sacrificially *doing* for the king when he had the opportunity.

The first two were tolerated by the king. The third was cherished! Maybe it will not be so much a matter of tangible things received from the Lord then when we enter into His kingdom. Perhaps it will be this, more the surpassing joy of a warm, Barzillai kind of relation to the King of kings that will be all important to us then, rather than only His gracious tolerance of us there.

See how the question of the performance of his subjects was handled by the king immediately upon his return. Even so the judgment seat of Christ would seem to follow immediately upon Christ's return to His kingdom.

Vs. 40 – There was a full representation of Judah there to meet David, but only a half representation of Israel. Perhaps this was a reflection of the divided

19:41 *And, behold, all the men of Israel came to the king, and said unto the king, Why have our brethren the men of Judah stolen thee away, and have brought the king, and his household, and all David's men with him, over Jordan?*

19:42 *And all the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, Because the king is near of kin to us: wherefore then be ye angry for this matter? have we eaten at all of the king's cost? or hath he given us any gift?*

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opinion concerning David in the north?

19:41-43 – More Trouble with the North

It is difficult to discern just how this trouble developed on the day of David's return. David had heard of support for his return spoken among the northern tribes (vs. 9-10). He then approached the elders of Judah, winning their support as well (vs. 11-14). Apparently a day was then appointed when David and all with him would make their way over the Jordan and back to Jerusalem. Judah was there to meet him on the east bank, and they helped *"to conduct the king over Jordan"* (vs. 15). The northern tribes of Israel only came on the scene at the west bank of the Jordan, after the crossing, with only half of them there to help conduct the king up from the Jordan to Gilgal (vs. 40). The dispute then arose from Israel's side (vs. 41), demanding why they were not made a part of conducting David over the Jordan. It appears to have been a communication problem. We get the impression Judah and David left Israel out of the river crossing

19:43 *And the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, and said, We have ten parts in the king, and we have also more right in David than ye: why then did ye despise us, that our advice should not be first had in bringing back our king? And the words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel.*

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plans, with Judah then appearing to take the lead in bringing David home, and with the result that the men of Israel felt despised, left out, their input considered unimportant (vs. 43). It is a valid question why the others were not made a part of things when they had as much right to David as did the south, *more* right in fact from their perspective, they making up the lion's share of the nation. The south held up David's closer blood relation to them as giving them more right to David (vs. 42). The north pointed to their greater percentage of the whole (vs. 43). Both arguments had merit if all would really look at it with patience and maturity. Both sides were not thoughtful of the other. Such a time of great national division certainly called for the most careful consideration of all involved. The elders of Israel should certainly have been informed by the elders of Judah or by David of when the event was to take place, that they all might have equal part in this important national happening. David had been in touch with the elders of Judah, speaking to them words of comfort and camaraderie. It had made the difference, bowing *"the heart of all the men of Judah, even as the heart*

of one man" (vs. 14). We in fact hear now the echo of his words in their words (vs. 12, 42). So why did David not attempt the same with the elders of Israel as well? Perhaps there is a lesson here on the matter thoughtfulness and even-handedness. Inconsiderate failure to communicate is a very common cause of trouble among people.

Perhaps it was a case of foot-dragging on the part of those still reluctant in Israel. Only half of them were there at the Jordan. Could it be that the disenchanted side among Israel were simply finding cause to cast the blame for their dissension on the other side? It does seem a rather small issue to be so upset about on such an important day, as Judah demanded in vs. 42. There does seem to be a maturity failure on both sides. And oh there was a history of crabby attitudes in those northern tribes (with Gideon & Jephthah). Again it was always basically the same fault line of tribal division, which reappeared many times throughout their history, and would yet tear the nation apart after Solomon's day. If subtle rifts are not dealt with in a mature, thoughtful, and forthright manner they may eventually lead to complete division, and even the tragedy of hatred, separation, or war.

Vs. 42 – Notice that it was to David that the

northerners spoke. But the southerners quickly jumped in with their aggravated answer, and so an ugly nose-to-nose resulted. But it was to *David* they spoke. Where was David in this? Where was David's thoughtful, firm, gracious leadership here, to see the unfairness or fault on *both* sides, to speak a Gideon-type winning word to the north (Judges 8:1-3), thus defusing this explosive moment? "No, but it was word of *your* support that got the ball rolling in the first place. Do you not realize that it was you men who initiated this day? You are to be thanked for this! And oh my sincerest apologies for failing to keep you in the loop!" But David is strangely silent and retiring here when good leadership was needed. Was he still lost in his pining for Absalom, and thus disconnected and indifferent? He reminds me of Jacob at Shechem, quietly allowing his sons to unleash their rage on the Shechemites (Gen. 34). And in the flaming passion of their unguided youth they made an ugly hash of it, because their response was untempered by the gracious maturity that Jacob should have brought to the situation. It is the missing element here as well. Compare David's earlier failure (?) in2:12ff, when for the first time we saw Joab leading David's men instead of David. Things got ugly there as well, because Joab never had the wise patience and control of David. The result of it was this rift

between north and south deepened there as well. Indifference is not conducive to peace. Peace between people requires positive, wise input or action. Both *evil* involvement and *non*-involvement brought trouble for David.

So for us. Our way is ever to make the right choices and DO the right thing if we would have God's rest and best. Again, Mephibosheth's loss was an example of the same. The result only of failing to *act* on what was right.

Chapter 20

20:1 *And there happened to be there a man of Belial, whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, a Benjamite: and he blew a trumpet, and said, We have no part in David, neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: every man to his tents, O Israel.*

Vs. 1 – Nothing is known of this *"man of Belial, whose name was Sheba"* outside of this event. We are told here that he was from the tribe of Benjamin, the same as Saul, Shimei, Mephibosheth, and Ziba. Joab later said this Sheba was *"of mount Ephraim"* (vs. 21), living then north of the area of his birth. He must have been a man of some significance among them to pull such a following. Yet we are told he was a *"man of Belial"* or a worthless fellow, suggesting he was more mouth than a man of real character or worth. Not the kind of man the wise would so easily follow.

"Every man to his tents, O Israel" – This seems to be a call to united rebellion. Not so much *to* their tents, but *away* from David was the point. Almost the same words were later used when Israel rebelled from Rehoboam, son of Solomon, and Jeroboam became the first king over the northern tribes of Israel (I Ki. 12:16).

Vs. 2 – *"So every man of Israel went up from after*

David" – Again we are confronted with the mindless masses. *"Every man of Israel"* was turned from David there. They were folks not rooted in sound principles, just running according to the feeling of the moment. They were a people who did not know what they wanted. As Paul's words in Ephesians 4:14, they were as *"children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine",* with every new idea spoken loudly enough, rather than the mature man Paul holds up to us there. Contrast the fixed, steady way of the godly soul in Psalm 112.

What could they think they might gain by this? They must know this could mean war. How successful had they been against David? Had it not even seemed that God had been fighting for David against them? Would they forget so soon?

So David himself did nothing for trouble to arrive again with a vengeance, with his celebration day turned all sour in a moment. Except that it *was* in fact David's doing. Nathan had told David *"the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised Me"* (12:10).

20:3 *And David came to his house at Jerusalem; and the king took the ten women his concubines, whom he had left to keep the house, and put them in ward, and fed them, but went not in unto them. So they were shut up unto the day of their death, living in widowhood.*

How often folks become angry with the Lord for allowing difficult things into their lives they do not understand or think they do not deserve. Yet if they would do a bit of honest research into their own history, they may very well come up with fair reason enough. Consider how;

- The early death of Abraham's father was likely due to Abraham's incomplete obedience to God, staying in Haran rather than continuing on to the land God had promised (Gen. 11).
- The tragedy of Lot's losses with the destruction of Sodom were due to his own choices to get cosy with carnality.
- The horror of hell stems from man's choice for sin and Satan over God.
- Make anything more important than God in your life and you can expect Him to tragically take it away.

We are never in a position to fairly fault God for what befalls us.

Vs. 3 – *"And put them in ward"* – Literally in the Hebrew "a house of guarding", a guard house, in custody under guard.

"So they were shut up unto the day of their death" – The words used here do seem to express the idea of confinement. A kind of house arrest? Even kept from circulating or contact with the public? We do not have a lot of detail, though it does appear to be more confining than just a place to stay and a monthly stipend. Commentators tend to play down the situation, suggesting such confinement would not have been so bad since they would not be inclined to travel anyway. But surely they would want to be with family, at special events, at the shops, at worship times, out for walks, etc.

"Living in widowhood" – They were forsaken, as if widows who had lost their husband, as if Absalom's abuse made them his, and his death then made them widows? They were not divorced from David, apparently because their abuse was not their own fault, yet all marital connection to David was ended. They were cared for as those for whose lives David was responsible, yet it seems he had no further association with them. Compare Exodus 21:10-11.

Why this? David was not opposed to involvement

20:4 *Then said the king to Amasa, Assemble me the men of Judah within three days, and be thou here present.*
20:5 *So Amasa went to assemble the men of Judah: but he tarried longer than the set time which he had appointed him.*

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with the women of other men. He was willing for Bathsheba and Abigail. Yet he handles these concubines as if they were defiled or at fault in some way. Was there some shame involved for him? Was there no compassion for their feelings of shame as well? He did not just avoid physical contact with them. It is like he wanted it publicly known that he had put them away. Did he feel that they failed to protest sufficiently against Absalom? From our perspective it seems quite an unfairness in David. Yet again, he was a man after God's own heart (I Ki. 15:5, mentions only the matter of Uriah). It is another one of those things the Lord has put in His Word to challenge our hearts, whether we are willing to live with an angazi, convinced still that God's ways are perfect. The things we might think should disqualify a man from God's pleasure are not always as God sees things. No soul can fairly say he/she *deserves* better than the treatment David's concubines received.

Vs. 4-5 – Perhaps this was not entirely the fault of Amasa? It may be that the men of Judah were slow to follow his lead. Again, perhaps it was not best to

20:6 *And David said to Abishai, Now shall Sheba the son of Bichri do us more harm than did Absalom: take thou thy lord's servants, and pursue after him, lest he get him fenced cities, and escape us.*
20:7 *And there went out after him Joab's men, and the Cherethites, and the Pelethites, and all the mighty men: and they went out of Jerusalem, to pursue after Sheba the son of Bichri.*
20:8 *When they were at the great stone which is in Gibeon, Amasa went before them. And Joab's garment that he had put on was girded unto him, and upon it a girdle with a sword fastened upon his loins in the sheath thereof; and as he went forth it fell out.*
20:9 *And Joab said to Amasa, Art thou in health, my brother? And Joab took Amasa by the beard with the right hand to kiss him.*

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appoint a rebel, traitor, failure leader as captain.

Vs. 6-7 – David needed action and could not wait any longer for Amasa, so he sent his elite troops and mighty men under Abishai, by-passing his brother Joab.

Vs. 8 – The historian Josephus suggested it was Joab who dropped his sword, that he in fact purposely let it fall from its scabbard as he approached Amasa, making it appear accidental, as a ploy. By stooping to pick up his dropped sword he thus had reason for it to be in his hand without raising suspicion. He just had not put it back into its scabbard yet as he greeted Amasa. And as a result Amasa never suspected Joab's cleverly disguised intent until it was too late.

Vs. 9 – *"And Joab took Amasa by the beard"* – The form of greeting described, taking hold of the beard as they kissed, was apparently a normal way

20:10 *But Amasa took no heed to the sword that was in Joab's hand: so he smote him therewith in the fifth rib, and shed out his bowels to the ground, and struck him not again; and he died. So Joab and Abishai his brother pursued after Sheba the son of Bichri.*

20:11 *And one of Joab's men stood by him, and said, He that favoureth Joab, and he that is for David, let him go after Joab.*

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between friends. But for Joab it was no gesture of friendship. He, as Judas, kissed while he killed. He was a "friend" on the surface, with murder in his heart. Joab's approach was as treacherous as Absalom's in inviting Amnon to his sheep-shearing party, with the added treachery in that Amasa was Joab's cousin, being sons of David's sisters (I Chron. 2:16-17). Joab was a good leader turned bad, as Satan. He was clever and brutal. Amasa was not a bad man, just in Joab's way.

Vs. 10 – *"In the fifth rib"* – The point is that Joab struck a fatal blow. He stabbed to kill. And hitting the vital mark, he needed only to stab once. We are even provided with the delicate detail that Amasa was cut open so badly his insides fell right out!

Vs. 11 – It seems Joab and Abishai never even looked back. They just walked off with their followers, turning their attention immediately to the task of pursuing Sheba. *"One of Joab's men"* stayed behind, seeking to encourage the stunned men of Judah to join them, who stood transfixed with the

20:12 *And Amasa wallowed in blood in the midst of the highway. And when the man saw that all the people stood still, he removed Amasa out of the highway into the field, and cast a cloth upon him, when he saw that every one that came by him stood still.*
20:13 *When he was removed out of the highway, all the people went on after Joab, to pursue after Sheba the son of Bichri.*
20:14 *And he went through all the tribes of Israel unto Abel, and to Bethmaachah, and all the Berites: and they were gathered together, and went also after him.*
20:15 *And they came and besieged him in Abel of Bethmaachah, and they cast up a bank against the city, and it stood in the trench: and all the people that were with Joab battered the wall, to throw it down.*

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brutal murder of their captain and the messy scene of his body so suddenly spilled all over the road. Compare the same response to the body of Asahel in the same area decades before (2:23). It was Joab's aggressions involved there as well. After 30 years Joab was only worse!

Vs. 12-13 – Only when Amasa's body was dragged out of the road were the men of Judah able to proceed. Yet still all followed Joab, even under those circumstances.

20:14-22 – Abel Besieged

Vs. 15 – This city of Abel was at the very farthest northern extremity of the land of Israel, north of the Sea of Galilee, at the foot of the mountains of Lebanon. There obviously had been a great deal of wind lost from the sails of the rebel cause. All to the north had been quick to follow Sheba on the spur of the moment, but when it came to the crunch Sheba

20:16 *Then cried a wise woman out of the city, Hear, hear; say, I pray you, unto Joab, Come near hither, that I may speak with thee.*
20:17 *And when he was come near unto her, the woman said, Art thou Joab? And he answered, I am he. Then she said unto him, Hear the words of thine handmaid. And he answered, I do hear.*

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ended up quite alone at the last, now attempting to put himself as far away as possible. Maybe all scattered from him when they saw those fearful mighty men of David on the way. Yet what did they expect? Think well before you act or speak, before you choose your side.

Vs. 16 – This wise woman wanted to speak to Joab directly in order to ensure no misunderstandings. There was already misunderstanding enough in the way, needing to be clarified. How often conflicts, or continued conflicts, are the result of simply not getting all the facts of a case. Just a bit of simple, straightforward clarity won the day here.

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On the Side

Interesting how often women feature as wise counsellors in David's experience;

- Abigail.
- Woman of Tekoah.
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20:18 *Then she spake, saying, They were wont to speak in old time, saying, They shall surely ask counsel at Abel: and so they ended the matter.*
20:19 *I am one of them that are peaceable and faithful in Israel: thou seekest to destroy a city and a mother in Israel: why wilt thou swallow up the inheritance of the LORD?*
20:20 *And Joab answered and said, Far be it, far be it from me, that I should swallow up or destroy.*
20:21 *The matter is not so: but a man of mount Ephraim, Sheba the son of Bichri by name, hath lifted up his hand against the king, even against David: deliver him only, and I will depart from the city. And the woman said unto Joab, Behold, his head shall be thrown to thee over the wall.*

- Tamar's good advice (she was the only one talking sense in that situation).
- This woman of Abel.

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Vs. 20-21 – Joab apparently had asked no questions, assuming the city backed Sheba. This perhaps another example of Joab's typical thoughtless, strong-arm approach. No subtlety, no caution, all diplomacy aside, he would just plunge the knife, hammering away at the city walls. He was answering this matter before he heard it. The problem with such an approach is that good people are trampled in the process, which is exactly what this thinking woman sought to avoid. Abigail fulfilled a similar role to this unnamed woman in this regard. With just a few moments of face-to-face discussion things were found to be quite different than they at first seemed. Joab had his problem
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solved, and they kept their city preserved. Not only did Joab have Sheba's head, but he understood none there were backing the rebel leader as well.

Vs. 22 – This woman must have been known for wisdom or had a prominent position among them to be able to make things happen as she did.

So David sent out orders under Amasa and Abishai and yet all came back under Joab. Consider how Joab was for the king's cause, but against the king's will. He was a man who did things his own way rather than the king's way. And as a result he suffered the king's rejection and judgment for it! It did not matter that he was for the king's cause. He was judged for doing things his way rather than the king's way. He was like Cain in this, bringing his own sacrifice of what he expected the Lord should be happy with, rather than what the Lord had instructed them to bring. In fact, he is like so many of those involved in the Christian religion, who bring their own sacrifices in their "service" of the King. They bring to God what they expect He should be happy with. They do what they do for Him, but they

do things their own way, mingling with His pure religion their own ideas and philosophies and traditions and methods and message adjustments and…and…and… It is man in his pride, with a dose of religion for his conscience's sake, claiming to be the servant of God, yet really calling the shots himself, conceding a nod to God, but no bow, seated still on the throne of his own heart, saying in essence, "Ok Lord, Your cause, but MY WAY!!" See how folks can be serving the cause of the King of kings on this earth, can in fact be truly expert and effective at it, as was Joab, yet doing it in a way outside of the king's will. And they will be judged for their wilful disobedience, with loss and ruin. But this only at the last. Joab continued for a time. Even so, many "successful" ministries carry on, growing strong, writing books, giving seminars, widening their influence. Yet they will answer for their wilfulness at the last. The King's cause we must serve, yes. But in a manner consistent with the King's will and character as well, or there will be loss at the last. Our purpose must remain to glorify God, both in the end and the means, simply because this is *His* will and way for us, to glorify Him in our bodies and in our spirits, which are His.

20:24 *And Adoram was over the tribute: and Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was recorder:*
20:25 *And Sheva was scribe: and Zadok and Abiathar were the priests:*
20:26 *And Ira also the Jairite was a chief ruler about David.*

Vs. 23 – These closing verses demonstrate David's government re-established with his return to the throne.

"Now Joab was over all the host of Israel" – Though against David's desire, he found himself stuck with Joab as captain. It seems he just weakly overlooked Joab's murder of Amasa, and resigned himself to his inability to be rid of him.

Benaiah was the leader of the Cherethites and Pelethites, whatever was the particular function of this force. With Joab's execution, as Solomon came to power, Benaiah then took Joab's place as captain (I Ki. 2:28-35).

"And Adoram was over the tribute" – The word behind *"tribute"* here speaks of forced labour. This man Adoram was over those conscripted into the king's service. It was the very thing Samuel made such a point of describing in warning his people away from their demand for a king (I Sam. 8:11-16).

"These four were born
to the giant in Gath,
and fell by the hand of David,
and by the hand of his servants"

(II Sam. 21:22)

Chapter 21

21:1 Then there was a famine in the days of David three years, year after year; and David enquired of the LORD. And the LORD answered, It is for Saul, and for his bloody house, because he slew the Gibeonites.

21:1-14 – Famine for Unfaithfulness

Ryrie suggests these last 4 chapters do not follow chronologically, but are a kind of appendix listing a few other things taking place in David's reign. It certainly would have been rather strange for the Lord to respond in the way He does in this chapter over 3 decades into David's reign. The *"then"* beginning vs. 1 does not express time sequence (from the Hebrew). Perhaps the events recorded here took place soon after David's honouring of Mephibosheth in chapter 9. And perhaps it was the deaths of these descendants of Saul that was later the basis for Shimei's cursing of David in 16:7-8, when he suggested God was returning on him *"all the blood of the house of Saul"*. For what other blood of Saul's house could David have been thought responsible?

Vs. 1 – *"Then there was a famine…three years, year after year"* – Drought, and thus famine, was one of the things God had warned He would use against

His people under the law when they refused to walk according to His will (Deut. 28:23-24, heavens like brass and rain like powder). David recognized that there had been some violation and began praying.

"David inquired of the LORD" – The literal phrase in the Hebrew here is that David "sought the face of the LORD", with a touch of intensity in the seeking. These were no breezy, distracted prayers, but involved a measure of persevering earnestness. The Lord was clearly angry with His people over something, and David would know why. He did not expect that somebody else should be responsible to do something about it or find out about it. He did not leave the praying to somebody else. He did not give the assignment to the priests. He himself felt the responsibility and did his own inquiring. And the indication here is that it was through David's prayers that the answer came. God was still hearing and answering David's prayers, in contrast to Saul whom the Lord refused to answer. Do not miss the fact that rather than running across the border in such hard times to escape the ill effects of the nation's wrong, as Elimelech and Naomi to Moab and Abraham to Egypt, David responded as he should, turning to God to find the reasons. If only he had stayed there before the Lord until he had God's solution to the problem as well.

"Because he slew the Gibeonites" – There is no record in Saul's history when he sought to destroy the Gibeonites. Perhaps there is a clue though. Back in the days of Joshua, when he and the princes of Israel discovered the deception of the Gibeonites and confronted them, Israel's leaders wisely refused to go back on their words. Instead they *"made them that day hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation, and for the altar of the LORD"* (Josh. 9:27). So those wily Gibeonites were made servants of the people of Israel and especially of the tabernacle. This of course would mean that many of them would be living together with the priests and levites. So perhaps this violation of their vow took place around Saul's massacre of the priests at Nob (I Sam. 22), when his misplaced vengeance went far beyond only the "offending" priests. For we read as well, in I Samuel 22:19, that *"Nob, the city of the priests, smote he with the edge of the sword, both men and women, children and sucklings, and oxen, and asses, and sheep, with the edge of the sword".* Perhaps several Gibeonite servants were killed in that same event there in the city of the priests? Though vs. 5 seems to suggest Saul's effort was aimed more particularly at them, and more far-ranging than just the Nob massacre.

See how God held His people accountable for their words or vow;

- Though after several centuries.
- Though others actually spoke the words.
- Though it was a covenant acquired by deception.

The princes under Joshua understood this, refusing to touch the Gibeonites, *"Lest wrath be upon us, because of the oath which we sware unto them"* (Josh. 9:20).

Notice as well that though it was King Saul's foolish actions that brought this, yet the punishment fell upon the whole nation. All suffered from the resulting famine, even after Saul was long gone. Though the fault especially lay with that leader, yet the people were held responsible as well from God's perspective. It was theirs to protest bad government choices, to express their horror. It was God observing the responses of all, even as He recorded the reactions of the princes around King Jeconiah when he cut up and burned Jeremiah's scroll (Jer. 36:24-25). All the people of a land, including God's people, are responsible in a measure for the direction their nation takes. We should be ready to insist upon right and to speak against wrong, even

in a public forum. Though it be a fearful thing to stand in the way, yet it is God we must fear more than man. For we will be held responsible for doing nothing, saying nothing! And we will join in enduring the results of godless government.

Vs. 2 – *"Saul sought to slay them in his zeal to the children of Israel and Judah"* – Consider how Saul was as Joab in this, zealous for his people, but in his own forbidden, disobedient way. It was a good thing for Saul to be zealous for his people, but not by stepping over the bounds of propriety. It is a good thing to be zealous for the Lord and His work and people and for outreach and souls, but never by stepping over the boundaries in violation of God's holiness. Can God use ministries that adopt this free and easy approach? Can souls be won in this way? Absolutely! God used even Jonah's blatant rebellion to reveal Himself to pagan mariners. But still loss and heartache were the eventual result. Do not look to zeal as proof of the value of a ministry approach. Do not look only to results to validate a ministry. Look to the Word, and to God's nature revealed there. And be sure that both end and

21:3 *Wherefore David said unto the Gibeonites, What shall I do for you? and wherewith shall I make the atonement, that ye may bless the inheritance of the LORD?*
21:4 *And the Gibeonites said unto him, We will have no silver nor gold of Saul, nor of his house; neither for us shalt thou kill any man in Israel. And he said, What ye shall say, that will I do for you.*

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means are consistent with His character and glory. If the means is unholy, then heartache and loss will be met in the end, in spite of what appear for the moment to be good reasons and results.

Vs. 3 – *"What shall I do for you?"* – Why did David appeal to the Gibeonites, or to any man, in seeking the way to put things right? Who knows better than the Lord? David had already succeeded in finding from the Lord the reason for the famine. Why not further inquire of the Lord as to the appropriate response for their violation? Compare 24:10-11, where David expressed his sorrow before the Lord for wrong done and the Lord sent the prophet Gad with His answer. A far too pagan solution will be the result here of seeking the counsel of men (Amorites) rather than asking God.

Vs. 4 – *"Neither for us shalt thou kill any man of Israel"* – Listen carefully to the words of these Gibeonites. They express no interest in a money gift as payment for their losses. And they seem at first blush to wish that nobody be put to death. Their

21:5 *And they answered the king, The man that consumed us, and that devised against us that we should be destroyed from remaining in any of the coasts of Israel,*

21:6 *Let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us, and we will hang them up unto the LORD in Gibeah of Saul, whom the LORD did choose. And the king said, I will give them.*

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literal words from the Hebrew, "And not to cause a man in Israel to die for us". And so David assured them that whatever they should say he would do for them. I believe David was later sorry he said this. Did they draw him into this? Is this another example of the wily, deceptive ways of this people? David was responding according to their words, "Hey if you are not wanting gold or graves, then you name it and I will do it!" And in so speaking *he gave them his word!* Thus he must now follow through according to his promise. By assuring David first of what they would *not* ask, it seems they led David into another vow, as Joshua centuries before. And again, I believe David was as sorry for this one as was Joshua and the princes of old. For the Gibeonites then turned right around and spoke what they *did* demand, once they had David's word. They did not require that anybody should be put to death for them, but that they would do their own killing (vs. 6). The sense of a "thou" in vs. 4 (KJV) is perhaps implied by the very definite "we" in vs. 6. It seems what they subtly meant from the start was that they would not require David to put anybody to

death for them, but that *they* would do the killing.

Vs. 5-6 – *"Let seven men of his sons be delivered unto us"* – What choice did David have now? He had given his word, though perhaps unadvisedly. He of course had the good example of Joshua before him in this regard, did he not? And as well he had an obvious object lesson of the famine to confirm that he had better keep his words to these people. The whole point of the issue here was that God was holding His people accountable for their ancient promise. Therefore it seems David was caught by his own words, being forced to fulfil their demand, though according to the way of pagan Amorites. God's law would have no man punished for the sins of his father (Deut. 24:16).

Now another alternative is that perhaps there were in fact specific men the Gibeonites were targeting. Perhaps they gave to David a hit list of names of those who had been involved with Saul in his efforts against them. Therefore not innocent men at all. Perhaps this is why the specific number of 7 was given. Thus it may be that there was more justice or vengeance involved than appears on the surface. Compare in vs. 1 that this judgment was not just for Saul's actions, but for his *"bloody <u>house</u>"* as well, perhaps suggesting others of Saul's family were

21:7 *But the king spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, because of the LORD's oath that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul.*
21:8 *But the king took the two sons of Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, whom she bare unto Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth; and the five sons of Michal the daughter of Saul, whom she brought up for Adriel the son of Barzillai the Meholathite:*

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actively involved. We do not know the timing here, to know how old these sons were while Saul was alive.

"We will hang them up unto the LORD" – This did not refer to death by hanging, but that their bodies would be suspended in public exposure and disgrace after their execution.

Vs. 7 – *"But the king spared Mephibosheth"* – Perhaps Mephibosheth was on their vengeance list as well, also being involved against them? Is this why he is specifically mentioned here as spared by David?

Vs. 8 – *"But the king took the two sons of Rizpah"* – Rizpah was Saul's concubine. This Mephibosheth, son of Rizpah, was a different man than Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan, though with the same name.

"And the five sons of Michal" – Now there is some difficulty here. Saul's daughter Michal was never

the wife of this man Adriel. Saul's oldest daughter, Merab, was first promised to David, but then Saul later gave her to *"Adriel the Meholathite to wife"* (I Sam. 18:19). Saul's younger daughter, Michal, then loved David, and eventually he earned her hand in marriage. But we are told Michal had no children, due to her bitter attitude toward David when he brought the ark to Jerusalem (6:23). And we know of no children from the other man, Phaltiel, to whom Saul later gave Michal when David fell into disfavour (I Sam. 25:44; II Sam. 3:13-16). Scribal error as many suggest? The name "Merab" should have been written? The word "sister" perhaps missing, as in "Michal's sister" rather than "Michal"? Several Hebrew manuscripts have Merab here instead of Michal, with the LXX in agreement as well. Could the answer perhaps be in the way the King James Version phrases it, *"whom she brought up for Adriel"?* Did the untimely death of Merab, together with Michal's childlessness, result in Michal bringing up her sister's children, they thus becoming as her own sons? The same Hebrew word is used in this verse behind those Rizpah *"bare"* unto Saul and those Michal *"brought up"* for Adriel, and the meaning of the verb is certainly much more strongly the idea of bringing *forth* in birth than bringing *up* in child rearing. Angazi.

21:9 *And he delivered them into the hands of the Gibeonites, and they hanged them in the hill before the LORD: and they fell all seven together, and were put to death in the days of harvest, in the first days, in the beginning of barley harvest.*

21:10 *And Rizpah the daughter of Aiah took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest until water dropped upon them out of heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night.*

21:11 *And it was told David what Rizpah the daughter of Aiah, the concubine of Saul, had done.*

Vs. 9-11 – Rizpah, in her devotion to her dead, took the discomfort of a hard rock and made it even more uncomfortable with sackcloth. These were tokens of mourning. She would not rest from her mourning until her sons were buried. In her grief she stayed with those suspended bodies for seven months, from the beginning of the barley harvest in April until the rains began in October, keeping the birds and scavengers away from the bodies, until David at last had them buried. It was disgrace enough that the bodies were left hanging, but it would have been an even greater disgrace if their bodies should become animal food, their bones all scattered and mingled. It seems this was what Rizpah was determined to avoid. Her devotion was a kind of heroism, which eventually stirred David to action.

The law stated that those put to death for a crime should not even be left suspended over night, but should be buried the same day (Deut. 21:22-23). Again, what is described here was not according to

God's law, but according to the way of the Gibeonites, apparently according to their pagan, Amorite practice. Perhaps their purpose was to leave the bodies suspended as a kind of sacrifice until the "gods" were appeased, showing their pleasure in the rain returned.

Consider how the Gibeonites by that time had lived for centuries among God's people, and many even associated with the priests in their service in the tabernacle. Yet it seems these people were still practicing a mixture of true and false religion (as Zionism). How stubbornly folks hold to their religious traditions! How poorly these had been reached or instructed in the truth!

David allowed their pagan procedure, probably quite reluctantly, perhaps as a concession, until the first rain fell. And then he quickly saw to a proper burial.

Did you notice that the point is made that the rain *did* come? And the coming of the rain indicated an end of the drought. Is it not odd that God would allow it to appear as though their pagan way worked? See again how He allows rejecting man ample cause to deny His truth if man so wishes.

21:12 *And David went and took the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son from the men of Jabeshgilead, which had stolen them from the street of Bethshan, where the Philistines had hanged them, when the Philistines had slain Saul in Gilboa:*
21:13 *And he brought up from thence the bones of Saul and the bones of Jonathan his son; and they gathered the bones of them that were hanged.*

Vs. 12-14 – Saul and Sons Buried

Vs. 12 – This burial of Saul and Jonathan also makes more sense if taking place in the earlier days of David's reign. When David was first crowned king in Hebron over Judah he immediately sent his words of praise to the brave men of Jabesh-Gilead, for so risking their lives in honouring Saul and Jonathan (2:4-7). But being king only in the south, he could take no further steps in bringing their bones back to their tribal area to be buried in the tomb of Saul's father, Kish. But now with the need of this burial perhaps David was reminded? And perhaps now at this point this further action was a conciliatory effort by David, to counter such negative actions against Saul's house, that it might not look to the uninformed like David was clearing out all threat. It might have been easy for some to think David all too willing for this, when it really was just a matter of keeping his word. Having allowed such judgment and disgrace upon Saul, David would now honour Saul and Jonathan with a proper burial.

21:14 *And the bones of Saul and Jonathan his son buried they in the country of Benjamin in Zelah, in the sepulchre of Kish his father: and they performed all that the king commanded. And after that God was intreated for the land.*

"And after that God was intreated for the land" – The Lord allowed this to work even though there was much of man's way involved. The important issue is that the wrong done to the Gibeonites was sufficiently acknowledged, and that they were satisfied that justice had been done. For this God's blessing was returned. Violations must not only be put right with God, but also with man, or there is restricted blessing. Not only keeping our word or vows to others, but our interrelation with others is a matter of concern with the Lord. Remember Christ's encouragement that if you come to the Lord in worship and there remember that somebody has something against you, go and put it right first (Matt. 5:23-24). And as well Jesus said that if your brother has done something to offend you go and speak to him (Matt. 18). As much as lieth in you live peaceably with all men (Rom. 12:18).

21:15-21 – Philistine Wars

We find here how very determined an enemy the Philistines were. They were Israel's most difficult challenger in those early days of the kings. We get the impression at the end of chapter 5 that the

21:15 *Moreover the Philistines had yet war again with Israel; and David went down, and his servants with him, and fought against the Philistines: and David waxed faint.*
21:16 *And Ishbibenob, which was of the sons of the giant, the weight of whose spear weighed three hundred shekels of brass in weight, he being girded with a new sword, thought to have slain David.*
21:17 *But Abishai the son of Zeruiah succoured him, and smote the Philistine, and killed him. Then the men of David sware unto him, saying, Thou shalt go no more out with us to battle, that thou quench not the light of Israel.*

Philistines were thrashed a couple times and then did not cause any more trouble. But we discover here that their efforts were much more persistent.

Vs. 15 – It was a winning quality in David that he fought together with his men, until they finally had to advise him out of harm's way.

Vs. 16-17 – That David *"waxed faint"* seems to be due to his advancing age. Thus this event may have been somewhat later in his reign. The point that arises here, and continues through the following verses, is that it did not always need to be David slaying the giants. As his strength faded with age there were others to follow. But they followed after the example he set for his men! David's courageous defeat of Goliath through his faith in God and bravery in battle set the tone or pattern for those to follow. Thus from the time of David's brave entrance onto the stage of Israel's history we began to see something Israel had never seen before and has never seen since – *mighty men!* David's mighty

men arose after his example and encouragement. Compare bold Caleb and his bold followers (Josh. 15:13-19). Compare Joshua and his obedient followers. We have the same influence upon those who follow us.

"Sons of the giants" – The Hebrew term is "Rapha", plural "Rephaim". They were from a race of giant people living in the Palestine area prior to Israel's arrival, that test of Israel's trust in God. Compare Genesis 15:20 & Deuteronomy 2:10-11. Compare the sons of Anak and Nephelim in Genesis 6 & Numbers 13:33. They were called the Emims by the Moabites (Deut. 2:10-11). Og, king of Bashan, was of the Rephaim (Deut. 3:11, 13).

Ishbibenob's spear or spear head weighed in at about 5 kgs. This was only half the weight of Goliath's spear head (I Sam. 17:7).

"He being girded with a new sword" – The word "sword" is supplied by the translators. The original Hebrew just says he was girded or clothed with a new (thing). We are not actually told what new thing this Philistine giant carried. To make the point of mentioning a new *sword* seems a bit lame. Some new type of weapon or armour? Was this partly why the Philistines were back, encouraged to make

21:18 *And it came to pass after this, that there was again a battle with the Philistines at Gob: then Sibbechai the Hushathite slew Saph, which was of the sons of the giant.*
21:19 *And there was again a battle in Gob with the Philistines, where Elhanan the son of Jaareoregim, a Bethlehemite, slew the brother of Goliath the Gittite, the staff of whose spear was like a weaver's beam.*

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another try against Israel?

See how with the Philistines the focus was on their weapons and size and physical strength. For on such things man's confidence rests. But Israel's strength was in their God. David's men took out each new giant without any indication of how they succeeded or how big and strong they were.

Vs. 19 – The Hebrew text says this Elhanan killed Goliath. *"The brother of"* is supplied in the KJV in keeping with the parallel account in I Chronicles 20:5, which states this giant was *"Lahmi the brother of Goliath"*. Some scholars think Elhanan was perhaps another name for David, but there is no good biblical support for this idea. And it would not solve the textual difference between the II Samuel and I Chronicles accounts. Two different Goliaths?

It seems the Philistines were back to challenge Israel every time some new giant champion arose among them. But with every try their champion was put down. It almost seemed to become like a

21:20 *And there was yet a battle in Gath, where was a man of great stature, that had on every hand six fingers, and on every foot six toes, four and twenty in number; and he also was born to the giant.*
21:21 *And when he defied Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimeah the brother of David slew him.*
21:22 *These four were born to the giant in Gath, and fell by the hand of David, and by the hand of his servants.*

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national tradition or pastime for the Philistines to try again with each new champion, and for David's mighty men to plough him under time after time.

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Ponder Points

Do these many Philistine giants indicate that they were messing with genetics across the border? Were the Philistines purposely seeking to breed giants as mega-warriors? And why did David not do as with Ammon and others, in taking the battle fully to Philistine soil, so completely crippling their power that there would never be further trouble? Maybe he did and we are just not told. The Philistine threat seems to fade from the scene after this chapter.

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Consider the illustration of the Christian life here in these records of David's battles. When a soul is born again a new nature comes to existence within. But that is not the end of trouble, only the beginning of it. For the old nature still exists within as well,

as the enemies surrounding Israel. Old ways and habits die hard in us, because of that old nature. But some ways die harder than others.

Some of our old evil ways are like Toi king of Hamath, who readily submitted to David and never gave trouble afterward (8:9-10). Some old habits we just drop like old filthy graveclothes and we are never tempted go back.

Some of our old pre-Christian ways are like the Moabites (8:2). They need to be attacked and defeated, and that *thoroughly*. But once done they give no further trouble.

Some of our ways or habits are like the Philistines (and Ammonites), continually trying again to regain dominance over our lives, needing again and again to be hammered into submission as we seek to walk in the Spirit. Stubborn habits they are, determined like the Philistines. But once we know how to handle giants they are not an issue anymore. For we establish the habit of continual vigilance, developing the personal tradition of defeating them.

Then some aspects of our Christian experience are like the Gibeonites, who dwelt among them but just never bent their will to the Lord's way, even after

years of contact with the truth. Old pagan ways that are only really glossed over with a touch of token, surface Christianity. How many Christian wives are practically unsubmissive, and husbands unloving. How many Christians still battle with sins of the flesh and sins of passion. We perhaps use different terms for such and paint things up in more acceptable colours, but it is still the same old filthy, clinging grave clothes. It is our unredeemed ways dwelling in the midst of our redeemed soul, and we just do not really care enough to do anything about them.

Chapter 22

22:1 *And David spake unto the LORD the words of this song in the day that the LORD had delivered him out of the hand of all his enemies, and out of the hand of Saul:*

Vs. 1 – Now in this chapter we discover David's secret of strength and success, in his relation with and dependence upon the Lord. And this not just when he was in trouble (Ps. 107), but praising his God in the good times of deliverance as well, when many tend to forget the Lord. At the point of need we remember Him. At the point of receive we forget. Yet here is David, actually putting together a more permanent form of remembrance in a song to be publicly sung, expressing his joy and praise in the Lord. He did not forget, and he was not going to let anybody else forget either. This chapter is almost an exact duplicate of Psalm 18.

David said he was delivered from *"<u>all</u> his enemies".* And was this not indeed the story of David's life? What enemy ever prospered over him, from the time he killed Goliath, in fact from the time he killed the lion and bear in protecting his father's sheep. Not that he was without trouble or threat. In fact many times he was seemingly so close to death. This point was suggested even in the giant who almost got him

in chapter 21 (vs. 16). Yet there was always an Abishai to step in. The Lord through circumstance always preserved David, and he died an old man in peace. It is not that we will not face trouble in our walk with the Lord. Trouble will in fact be greater for the child of God walking close to God, even to the point where defeat may press right up close and at times seem a certainty. But then we later look back, as David is doing here, and we realize that we are still here, and actually better or stronger for the threat or loss. And we are even found singing our praise, as David does here, recognizing God was in fact our Deliverer throughout.

Consider the illustration of Israel from the time that little nation was planted back in their land over six decades ago. They were certain to be crushed by all of the hate-filled stronger nations surrounding them. But somehow they fought off their many enemies, and even acquired more land through their victory. And then again they were pressed, and against a more determined, more powerful, more careful union of enemies coming against them. And again victory, with their land enlarged even further through the spoils of war. The threats were great and terrible, impossible even. All assumed little Israel would be destroyed, they being pressed to the very brink. Yet they, like David, can

22:2 *And he said, The LORD is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer;*
22:3 *The God of my rock; in him will I trust: he is my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower, and my refuge, my saviour; thou savest me from violence.*
22:4 *I will call on the LORD, who is worthy to be praised: so shall I be saved from mine enemies.*

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look back and say "Wow! Look at what God did". Even so all who walk with the God of glory.

Vs. 1-3 – Here is where the remnant of Israel will one day be. They will cry to God in their distress at the last, and finally look to Him whom they have pierced, when the Lord comes to their aid at Armageddon (Zech. 12:10).

Vs. 2-4 – The first words out of David's mouth were "the Lord". He knew his deliverance was in the Lord and not in himself. This is a persistent theme throughout this chapter. In the near duplicate portion of Psalm 18 David's first words are, *"I will love thee O LORD my strength"*, expressing both his affection (*"love"*) and choice (*"I will"*) for God.

Compare Lamech in Genesis 4, boasting in his own prowess (vs. 23-24), arrogantly referring to the Lord's words, as if his purpose was greater than God's. Lamech represents man with no thought of God or dependence on Him, the very opposite of what we see in David.

Note David's many words expressing the Lord's strength and protection;

- *"My Rock"* (vs. 2).
- *"My Fortress"* (vs. 2).
- *"My Rock"* (vs. 3).
- *"My Shield"* (vs. 3).
- *"My high tower"* (vs. 3) – A high place out of the enemy's reach.
- *"My Refuge"* (vs. 3).

It is all about who *God* is, and all *"my…my…my".* It was all about the tower of strength the Lord was for David *personally.* David did not find his courage and encouragement in who the Lord was for somebody else. And this is no laid-back expression of God or His protection. David displays greatest excitement in his strong God with this great stack of terms.

See David's many words expressing God's saving work;

- *"The LORD had delivered him"* (vs. 1).
- *"My Deliverer"* (vs. 2).
- *"The horn of my salvation"* (vs. 3) – The horns

suggesting those hard, sharp points an animal uses for attack or defence. Tokens of power commonly used in the Bible to suggest strength.

- *"My Saviour"* (vs. 3).
- *"Thou savest me from violence"* (vs. 3).
- *"So shall I be saved"* (vs. 4).

Again all *"my…my…me"*. David was not as King Saul, who talked to Samuel of *"thy God"* (I Sam. 15:30). He talked only of "*my* God". Such a world of marvellous difference that little letter "m" supplies. As the saved queen who thanked God for the letter "m" in Paul's statement in I Corinthians 1:26 that *"not many mighty…noble"* are saved. Can you say "*MY* God"?

See David's many expressions of his calling on the Lord;

- *"I will call on the LORD"* (vs. 4) – Note his *"I will"*. It was not only a case of what he *did* do, but what he *would* do, his resolve or purpose.
- *"I called upon the LORD"* (vs. 7).
- *"I…cried to my God"* (vs. 7).

22:5 *When the waves of death compassed me, the floods of ungodly men made me afraid;*
22:6 *The sorrows of hell compassed me about; the snares of death prevented me;*
22:7 *In my distress I called upon the LORD, and cried to my God: and he did hear my voice out of his temple, and my cry did enter into his ears.*
22:8 *Then the earth shook and trembled; the foundations of heaven moved and shook, because he was wroth.*
22:9 *There went up a smoke out of his nostrils, and fire out of his mouth devoured: coals were kindled by it.*

- *"My cry did enter into His ears"* (vs. 7).

The Lord was not mythology for David, but the One to whom he really did run in times of trouble.

Vs. 4 – This is David now calling on the Lord when in trouble. But we have already seen him praising the Lord for His help in the good times. The Lord was there for him in his trouble because David loved Him and walked with Him in the good days. Compare in Psalm 91:14, *"Because he hath set his love upon Me therefore will I deliver him"*. Even so with us.

Vs. 4 is more an introductory or summary statement, while vs. 5ff gives more of the detail.

Vs. 5-6 – Trouble comes knocking – This is not a picture of death, but overwhelming circumstances. Compare Jonah in the fish quoting Psalm 42:7, *"All Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over me".*

22:10 *He bowed the heavens also, and came down; and darkness was under his feet.*
22:11 *And he rode upon a cherub, and did fly: and he was seen upon the wings of the wind.*
22:12 *And he made darkness pavilions round about him, dark waters, and thick clouds of the skies.*
22:13 *Through the brightness before him were coals of fire kindled.*
22:14 *The LORD thundered from heaven, and the most High uttered his voice.*
22:15 *And he sent out arrows, and scattered them; lightning, and discomfited them.*
22:16 *And the channels of the sea appeared, the foundations of the world were discovered, at the rebuking of the LORD, at the blast of the breath of his nostrils.*

Vs. 7 – David's cry to God.

Vs. 8ff is a description of the Lord's very adequate response to the cry of His child. The imagery here is suggestive of the Lord coming down on Mt. Sinai, with lightning, thunder, smoke, and voices (Ex. 19:16-20).

Vs. 8-9 – Heaven and earth shaken – A display of God's creative power moved in behalf of His child, with His whole creation affected.

Vs. 10-14 – The Lord coming.

Vs. 15-16 – The Lord's weapons of arrows and lightening and windy blasts. Compare the Lord's response in I Samuel 7:10 when He *"thundered with a great thunder on that day upon the Philistines"*. Compare Hannah's prayer in I Samuel 2:10. When the Lord rises up to respond in this way, who is able to stand?

22:17 *He sent from above, he took me; he drew me out of many waters;*
22:18 *He delivered me from my strong enemy, and from them that hated me: for they were too strong for me.*
22:19 *They prevented me in the day of my calamity: but the LORD was my stay.*
22:20 *He brought me forth also into a large place: he delivered me, because he delighted in me.*

Vs. 17-20 – The Lord's rescue. Note the many expressions of the Lord's rescuing actions. There is so much repetition in this account, expressing the Lord's strength and saving work with David's call and his most enthusiastic appreciation.

Vs. 20 – *"A large place"* – This describing freedom and relief, in contrast to his enemies pressing fearfully close before.

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Thoughts

The first half of David's song (vs. 8-20) expresses his deliverance from God's perspective. Because God was moved and responded so adequately therefore David found rescue. The second half is David's deliverance from man's perspective. Because David was made strong and fit and steady therefore he was enabled to effect his rescue. First and foremost all true deliverance is a matter of God's doing. First God is moved, carrying out His purposes and responding to prayer. Then man finds enabling and
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favourable circumstances to work his deliverance.

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See this portion as a prophetic description of the nature of the Lord's actual response in the Tribulation judgments of Revelation, rather than just some sort of melodramatic imagery;

- Shaking earth (vs. 8) – Compare Hebrews 12 and Revelation 6:12; 11:13; 16:18-20.
- Fire and smoke (vs. 8, 12) – Compare Revelation 9.
- Darkness (vs. 10, 12) – Compare Revelation 6:12; 8:12.
- Lightening & thunder (vs. 14-15) – Compare Revelation 4:5; 10:3; 16:18.
- His voice (vs. 14) – Compare Revelation 4:5; 10:3; 11:12; Hebrews 12:25.

Compare Isaiah 26:20-27:1.

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Vs. 20-25 – David's positional righteousness before the Lord he gives as the reason for his rescue. He is not talking about a works salvation here, but about God available for a man who is available for

22:21 *The LORD rewarded me according to my righteousness: according to the cleanness of my hands hath he recompensed me.*
22:22 *For I have kept the ways of the LORD, and have not wickedly departed from my God.*
22:23 *For all his judgments were before me: and as for his statutes, I did not depart from them.*
22:24 *I was also upright before him, and have kept myself from mine iniquity.*
22:25 *Therefore the LORD hath recompensed me according to my righteousness; according to my cleanness in his eye sight.*

God. Again it is the idea of benefits through faithfulness. Contrast in Deuteronomy 32:15-20 benefits lost for unfaithfulness.

Note the many reasons David was rewarded with God's good help;

- *"My righteousness"* (vs. 21 & 25).
- *"The cleanness of my hands"* (vs. 21) – More than just positional righteousness.
- *"Kept the ways of the LORD"* (vs. 22).
- *"Not wickedly departed"* (vs. 22).
- *"All His judgments before me"* (vs. 23).
- *"Did not depart from…His statutes"* (vs. 23).
- *"Upright before Him"* (vs. 24) – The Hebrew word behind *"upright"* conveys the idea of innocence or simplicity, the complete absence of hateful or hurtful designs. Compare in Proverbs 10:9 & 29 the steady strength of the

upright in their God. The wicked may consider the upright a weak and easy prey due to their simplicity or lack of subtle craftiness, but it is their unseen Defender they need to worry about. Compare in Proverbs 11:20 how the Lord despises a twisted heart (the sense of the Hebrew word there), while delighting in the upright. Compare Absalom's twisted way with David that did not prosper, though with every reason why he should have prospered, while David, appearing so simple and naive and weak at times, died in peace.

- *"Kept myself from mine iniquity"* (vs. 24).
- *"My cleanness in His eye sight"* (vs. 25) – Before God, not just visible to man.

Again, there is great repetition here. That David does not refer to every moment of his life is evident from his Psalm 51 cry for cleansing (Ps. 32). Yet compare Psalm 139:24 where he prayed *"see <u>IF</u> there be any wicked way in me"*. It seems David tended to walk with the Lord without any conscious awareness of unconfessed evil.

Vs. 26-28 – The Lord responds in kind according to our ways. Compare in the Lord's Prayer, *"Forgive*

22:26 *With the merciful thou wilt shew thyself merciful, and with the upright man thou wilt shew thyself upright.*
22:27 *With the pure thou wilt shew thyself pure; and with the froward thou wilt shew thyself unsavoury.*
22:28 *And the afflicted people thou wilt save: but thine eyes are upon the haughty, that thou mayest bring them down.*
22:29 *For thou art my lamp, O LORD: and the LORD will lighten my darkness.*
22:30 *For by thee I have run through a troop: by my God have I leaped over a wall.*

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us our debts as we forgive our debtors" (Matt. 6:12).

Vs. 27 – *"And with the froward Thou wilt show Thyself unsavoury"* – The point is God will be contrary to those who are contrary. He will oppose those who oppose Him. And none can oppose better than God!

- Nobody does a flood like God did in the days of Noah.
- Nobody does a storm like God stirred up against Jonah.

  Nobody can so flatten and scatter a nation as God did Israel after their stubborn rejection of their Messiah.

We are always wise to remember that our God knows how to oppose opposers. It is part of what the fear of the Lord means.

Vs. 30-49 – The invincible righteous – Compare

22:31 *As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is tried: he is a buckler to all them that trust in him.*
22:32 *For who is God, save the LORD? and who is a rock, save our God?*
22:33 *God is my strength and power: and he maketh my way perfect.*
22:34 *He maketh my feet like hinds' feet: and setteth me upon my high places.*
22:35 *He teacheth my hands to war; so that a bow of steel is broken by mine arms.*
22:36 *Thou hast also given me the shield of thy salvation: and thy gentleness hath made me great.*
22:37 *Thou hast enlarged my steps under me; so that my feet did not slip.*
22:38 *I have pursued mine enemies, and destroyed them; and turned not again until I had consumed them.*
22:39 *And I have consumed them, and wounded them, that they could not arise: yea, they are fallen under my feet.*
22:40 *For thou hast girded me with strength to battle: them that rose up against me hast thou subdued under me.*

Samson, untouchable as long as the Spirit of God was upon him. See in this portion the mingling of David's power through God's power (vs. 34-35). Note the interchange of *"I"* and *"Thou"* in vs. 38-41. Compare Philippians 4:13, *"I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me".*

Vs. 36 – *"Thy gentleness hath made me great"* – The word behind "gentleness" here has the root idea of being put down or becoming low, expressing the idea of God's condescending clemency (Ps. 18:35; 45:5). Though God is transcendent in splendour, yet in His willingness to come down to us we are lifted from the miry clay with our feet set upon a rock (Ps. 40). Compare the command to us in Romans 12:16 to *"condescend to men of low estate".*

Vs. 42-43 – David's enemies looked to the Lord for

22:41 *Thou hast also given me the necks of mine enemies, that I might destroy them that hate me.*
22:42 *They looked, but there was none to save; even unto the LORD, but he answered them not.*
22:43 *Then did I beat them as small as the dust of the earth, I did stamp them as the mire of the street, and did spread them abroad.*
22:44 *Thou also hast delivered me from the strivings of my people, thou hast kept me to be head of the heathen: a people which I knew not shall serve me.*
22:45 *Strangers shall submit themselves unto me: as soon as they hear, they shall be obedient unto me.*
22:46 *Strangers shall fade away, and they shall be afraid out of their close places.*
22:47 *The LORD liveth; and blessed be my rock; and exalted be the God of the rock of my salvation.*
22:48 *It is God that avengeth me, and that bringeth down the people under me.*
22:49 *And that bringeth me forth from mine enemies: thou also hast lifted me up on high above them that rose up against me: thou hast delivered me from the violent man.*

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help as well, but He would not hear them because He was on David's side. Instead He allowed David to completely destroy them. Again, the Lord often describes Himself as having no time for those who have no time for Him, except when they are in trouble (Prov. 1:24ff; Isa. 1:15; Jer. 11:11). He does not hear all who call (selective deafness), only those who are His, those calling in true humility. Be wise to fairly examine yourself whether you are one who truly listens to God.

Vs. 47 – *"The LORD liveth"* – In contrast to lifeless idols, such as the Philistine god dagan.

Vs. 50-51 – *"Therefore will I give thanks unto Thee"* – With David's clear view of who his God is, and who He was for him personally, therefore his heart and

22:50 *Therefore I will give thanks unto thee, O LORD, among the heathen, and I will sing praises unto thy name.*
22:51 *He is the tower of salvation for his king: and sheweth mercy to his anointed, unto David, and to his seed for evermore.*

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mouth were full of thanks and praise *"for evermore"* (note how David presumed eternal conscious existence with the Lord after death).

Paul quotes vs. 50 in Romans 15:9, as indication that God always meant to take the revelation of Himself to the Gentiles through His people, even through Israel's conquering power. It is what helped to win Rahab's heart, in her fear of Israel's powerful God (Josh. 2). David becomes that representative of the Son of David to follow, coming ultimately to conquer. And the Lord's greatest harvest will come out of the horror of the Tribulation judgments, when man is at his weakest before God. Whether Israel was conquering or conquered, the world was won.

"The Spirit of the LORD
spake by me,
and his word was in my tongue"

(II Sam. 23:2)

Chapter 23

23:1 Now these be the last words of David. David the son of Jesse said, and the man who was raised up on high, the anointed of the God of Jacob, and the sweet psalmist of Israel, said,

23:1-7 – David's Last Psalm

Chapter 22 was David's exuberant testimony of the God who made him great. Now in chapter 23 we are going to see the *men* who made David great. Even in the 2nd half of chapter 21 there was focus on David's men as well, with the list of giant-slayers given there. It is always a combination of both heaven and earth. It is God, the One responsible for all outcomes, making a man great, yet working through earthly circumstances and advantages and helpers. Do not miss the Lord's central place (chapter 22) sandwiched between these records of David's great earthly helpers (chapters 21 & 23).

Vs. 1 – *"Now these be the last words of David"* – These first seven verses are David's final inspired contribution to God's Book of books. And again see how his final words are all about his God.

"David the son of Jesse said" –David gives a brief summary in this verse of his rise from commoner to

king, how it all began with his anointing by Samuel when he was only the young shepherd of his father's sheep. And see how David *"was raised up"*. He writes not about how he lifted himself from obscurity to royalty, but about how God did the lifting of one who simply delighted in Him. *"All my desire"* as he says in vs. 5. David's father, Jesse, was just a Bethlehem sheep-herder, yet we seem to see some greatness in him. What was it about that unknown man that resulted in such greatness in his children and grandchildren? His son David was victorious over Goliath and rose to reign. His grandsons Joab, Abishai, and Asahel, through his daughter Zeruiah, were among Israel's greatest warriors. Two of them among David's mighty men and the other was captain of the army. His grandson Jonathan, through his son Shimea, was among the giant-slayers (21:21). Even his grandson Amasa, through his daughter Abigail, served as captain under Absalom and David (17:25). There was some amazing military greatness and courage in Jesse's line. Yet all were led out to show that greatness after David's bold example, as he walked with his God. Again, we all lead a following in some sense. Make the hard decisions to make bold moves for God, and it cannot help but to have an impact on those who follow, with ripple effects into the following generations.

"The sweet psalmist of Israel" – It is a reminder of how David first came to celebrity under King Saul through his musical ability, and went on to become God's psalmist or praise singer/leader, establishing an instrumental and vocal tradition in the temple worship. Much of the tradition of singing in worship comes from David. About half of the psalms are attributed to him, with many of them untitled. It is a reminder as well that David was first a man of praise. First he was a young man singing his praise to God. Then he became a man of power and importance among men. First privately and then publicly. True greatness starts in the heart, in the closet. God then does the more public work of lifting one's influence according to His purpose.

Vs. 2-3 – *"The Spirit of the LORD spake by me"* – See the great emphasis here on the Lord speaking *through* and *to* David. He knew it was the Lord actually speaking through him. Compare Acts 4:24-25. Compare I Peter 1:20-21, II Timothy 3:16-17 on inspiration. So it actually was the Spirit of God expressing all of the passion and praise and emotion and trust and love for God's words (119) and call for justice and speaking prophecies in the

psalms. The Spirit of God is no cold indifferent bystander. He is full of passion and praise and love for God and the good things of God.

Vs. 3 – *"The Rock of Israel spake to me"* – *"The Rock"* is such a common term for God (22:2-3). Not "the Marshmallow" or "the Pillow", but *"the Rock"*, suggesting the firm footer the Lord is to all who trust in Him.

Notice the great repetition of the idea that it was the Lord speaking through David in vs. 2-3, in order to then relate the qualifications and benefits of a godly leader (vs. 3-4), making the strong point that such thoughts are in fact from the Lord. This is obviously a matter of great importance to the Lord, and these final words David would leave with us. For everything rises or falls on leadership. Remember the lessons from the book of I Samuel concerning the same. Such national trouble under the poor leadership of Eli and Saul. Such national blessing under the good leadership of Samuel and David. As well, such a national mess resulting from David's turn from the Lord and fall to sin in the Bathsheba/Uriah incident. Again, *national* impact.

As well Uzzah died when they were bringing up the ark because David only read the instructions after their tragic failure, because he failed to fear the Lord in hearing His words. To fear is to hear. How well David understood the importance of this truth from his own experience.

The Lord gives two basic requirements for His leader over men. He must be righteous and he must be God-fearing. Compare Exodus 18:21 and Micah 6:8. Consider how the world looks for such very different traits in a good leader.

Vs. 4 – *"And he shall be as the light of the morning"* – The Lord describes the beneficial effects of a godly leader upon people, and it is a beautiful thing to behold. Such a one is as clear morning sunlight over the land after the rain. The perfect environment for the growth of all things. Not a high, hot, scorching, noon sun, but a gently warming and beneficial morning sun. A godly leader is as the sun's light, that very centre of what makes all good things happen. Light and warmth and the food making process of photosynthesis all come of the sun's light. In fact behind the phrase *"the tender*

23:5 *Although my house be not so with God; yet he hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure: for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although he make it not to grow.*

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grass" is a word speaking particularly of the *greenness* of new growth. The same word is used in Psalm 23:2 as an adjective, *"green pastures"*. As the marvel of chlorophyll, the green in the leaves of plants, and the wonder of its potential for producing food, even so is the potential in people for great things, great works, much fruit. But it takes the shining of the sun's light to make it all happen. Even so it takes bold, godly, faithful leadership to lead people out to achieve the potential of what they can be, to lead them beyond their natural fears, to lead them to trust in God too for His working in and through them. Of course human "greatness" is all of God. Yet God uses the shining light of human example to lead others out and up to their very best.

Vs. 5 – Though David knew he was far from a perfect specimen, yet all of his delight and desire was in the God of grace, who had entered into covenant with him, a covenant eternal and sure. God's special grace of His covenant with David resulted from David's humble heart and response to God. Even so it was with God's covenant with Abraham, *"the friend of God"*. Even so we have entered into

23:6 *But the sons of Belial shall be all of them as thorns thrust away, because they cannot be taken with hands:*
23:7 *But the man that shall touch them must be fenced with iron and the staff of a spear; and they shall be utterly burned with fire in the same place.*

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covenant with the God of grace in Christ, an unconditional covenant, sure and eternal. Not through what we do, but through our humble heart response of repentance and faith, desiring His pleasure.

Vs. 6-7 – All who stand against God and His people shall come to their end. Though they be too strong for man to touch, yet God will handle their burning, as if clearing His pastures of useless thorns. Here is the patience of the saints, who live by faith in the promises of God (Rev. 13:10). With David, we are wise to simply cling to God's ancient promise to Abraham that He will bless those who bless God's people, and He will curse those who curse them (Gen. 12:3). As the prophet warned the world concerning the nation of Israel, *"thus saith the LORD of hosts…he that toucheth you toucheth the apple of His eye"* (Zech. 2:8). Compare John 15, with every fruitless branch burned. Consider the ultimate fulfilment of this in Armageddon.

23:8-39 – David's Mighty Men

23:8 *These be the names of the mighty men whom David had: The Tachmonite that sat in the seat, chief among the captains; the same was Adino the Eznite: he lift up his spear against eight hundred, whom he slew at one time.*

This portion is an honour roll of the greatest of Israel's warriors serving under David. Again, after David's good example, bravery became the way of the day and "mighty men" the result. And therefore such prominent focus on the men who became notable in this regard. It was not only a matter of their bravery, but bravery together with loyalty. As the parallel portion of I Chronicles 11:10 says of these, they *"strengthened themselves <u>with</u> him* [David] *in his kingdom",* not against him. Perhaps this is the reason why Joab is conspicuously missing here, whose loyalty to David was often lacking, though his courage was unquestioned. Yet Joab's two brothers and even his armour-bearer are listed. It is not enough to bravely do great things. Our heart attitude in doing what we do is the other side of the same coin. It takes both sides for the coin to be authentic. Joab did great and brave things, but because his heart was not loyal he also therefore did evil things against his king.

Vs. 8-12 – The three greatest

- Vs. 8 – Adino – The NASB gives his name as Josheb ["sitting"]-basshebeth ["in the seat"].

23:9 *And after him was Eleazar the son of Dodo the Ahohite, one of the three mighty men with David, when they defied the Philistines that were there gathered together to battle, and the men of Israel were gone away:*

23:10 *He arose, and smote the Philistines until his hand was weary, and his hand clave unto the sword: and the LORD wrought a great victory that day; and the people returned after him only to spoil.*

The parallel portion of I Chronicles 11:11 gives Jashobeam ["the people turn/return"] for his name. He killed 800 men with his spear in a single encounter? I Chronicles 11 says 300. "Lifted up his spear" is supplied here in the KJV, the phrase being imported from I Chronicles 11:11. Behind "whom he slew" is the adjective "slain". Perhaps 800 were slain in the encounter, 300 of whom Adino himself dispatched. Only by God's strength could a man so perform.

- Vs. 9-10 – Eleazar – The threat of some Philistine attack was actually great enough to frighten off all of his fellow soldiers. But Eleazar stood and single-handedly defeated the Philistine army (perhaps a regiment). Numbers are not given. How many did he kill? *<u>All</u> of them!* The great intensity and endurance of his amazing feat is revealed in the detail of his hand needing to be pried from his sword when it was over. His mates missed all the honours, returning only to help collect

23:11 *And after him was Shammah the son of Agee the Hararite. And the Philistines were gathered together into a troop, where was a piece of ground full of lentiles: and the people fled from the Philistines.*
23:12 *But he stood in the midst of the ground, and defended it, and slew the Philistines: and the LORD wrought a great victory.*
23:13 *And three of the thirty chief went down, and came to David in the harvest time unto the cave of Adullam: and the troop of the Philistines pitched in the valley of Rephaim.*
23:14 *And David was then in an hold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then in Bethlehem.*
23:15 *And David longed, and said, Oh that one would give me drink of the water of the well of Bethlehem, which is by the gate!*
23:16 *And the three mighty men brake through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem, that was by the gate, and took it, and brought it to David: nevertheless he would not drink thereof, but poured it out unto the LORD.*
23:17 *And he said, Be it far from me, O LORD, that I should do this: is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives? therefore he would not drink it. These things did these three mighty men.*

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the spoil. I hope Eleazar got a double portion, at least.

- Vs. 11-12 – Shammath – Similar circumstance against a similar foe. He stood when all others fled, succeeding in defending a piece of ground single-handedly.

Vs. 13-17 – Three who sacrificed for David – This situation may have taken place during the battle described in 5:17ff. The Philistines were camped in the valley of Rephaim south of Jerusalem, with an outpost stationed at Bethlehem 5 kms to the southwest. It was harvest time or summer, and therefore hot. And in the midst of the battle David grew thirsty, expressing his longing for a drink of the good water from the well at Bethlehem. We are

23:18 *And Abishai, the brother of Joab, the son of Zeruiah, was chief among three. And he lifted up his spear against three hundred, and slew them, and had the name among three.*

23:19 *Was he not most honourable of three? therefore he was their captain: howbeit he attained not unto the first three.*

23:20 *And Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, the son of a valiant man, of Kabzeel, who had done many acts, he slew two lionlike men of Moab: he went down also and slew a lion in the midst of a pit in time of snow:*

23:21 *And he slew an Egyptian, a goodly man: and the Egyptian had a spear in his hand; but he went down to him with a staff, and plucked the spear out of the Egyptian's hand, and slew him with his own spear.*

23:22 *These things did Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and had the name among three mighty men.*

23:23 *He was more honourable than the thirty, but he attained not to the first three. And David set him over his guard.*

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given here a glimpse into the enthusiastic devotion of David's men to their king, ready to gratify his smallest wish at risk of their own lives! Again loyalty was a key attitude in these mighty men of David. The Philistine outpost at Bethlehem had to be penetrated in order to get water from the well there, yet these men did just that. And David was so moved by the self-sacrifice of these three valiant men in his behalf that he refused to drink of the water. If they would so sacrifice for him then he would match their sacrifice by refusing that water in his hand that would so wonderfully quench his thirst. And so instead he poured it out as a sacrificial offering to the Lord. He would not slack his thirst with that which had cost his men so much, considering the water as if it were the blood of those who so risked for him. Something of so great a value (as if the blood of those men) could

23:24 *Asahel the brother of Joab was one of the thirty; Elhanan the son of Dodo of Bethlehem,*
23:25 *Shammah the Harodite, Elika the Harodite,*
23:26 *Helez the Paltite, Ira the son of Ikkesh the Tekoite,*
23:27 *Abiezer the Anethothite, Mebunnai the Hushathite,*
23:28 *Zalmon the Ahohite, Maharai the Netophathite,*
23:29 *Heleb the son of Baanah, a Netophathite, Ittai the son of Ribai out of Gibeah of the children of Benjamin,*
23:30 *Benaiah the Pirathonite, Hiddai of the brooks of Gaash,*
23:31 *Abialbon the Arbathite, Azmaveth the Barhumite,*

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only be given to the Lord. David felt too unworthy to drink it. And so it was mutual acts of honouring each other, between loyal servants and their king. It is the kind of action that made David so great in the eyes of those great men. And so their deed went down in history as a demonstration of courage and loyalty to their anointed king, putting them (though unnamed) on the list. This for an earthly, human king. And what have we bravely sacrificed or sweated or suffered in seeking the pleasure of our heavenly King of kings? It is an illustration of the kind of loyalty that should be ours toward Jesus Christ.

In fact consider how the Lord in His grace has actually turned the image right around. It is as if He has made us the kings and He the Servant, sending His own Son as the Servant of our need, actually pouring out the precious blood of Christ that our greatest need might be met through His sacrifice of Himself, a need far greater than mere

23:32 *Eliahba the Shaalbonite, of the sons of Jashen, Jonathan,*
23:33 *Shammah the Hararite, Ahiam the son of Sharar the Hararite,*
23:34 *Eliphelet the son of Ahasbai, the son of the Maachathite, Eliam the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite,*
23:35 *Hezrai the Carmelite, Paarai the Arbite,*
23:36 *Igal the son of Nathan of Zobah, Bani the Gadite,*
23:37 *Zelek the Ammonite, Nahari the Beerothite, armourbearer to Joab the son of Zeruiah,*
23:38 *Ira an Ithrite, Gareb an Ithrite,*
23:39 *Uriah the Hittite: thirty and seven in all.*

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thirst. It is what we remember together at the Communion table, as if actually drinking in symbolic form of His precious blood poured out.

As David nobly met sacrifice with sacrifice, even so we must meet Christ's great sacrifice with our own sacrifice of self. How much more should we refuse to satisfy our own needs (certainly evil desires) at the expense of the Lord. How much more should we refuse to indulge in sin, the very enemy for which He died. How much more should we refuse to value passing things above things surpassing.

"Neither will I offer
burnt offering
unto the LORD my God
of that which doth
cost me nothing"

(II Sam. 24:24)

Chapter 24

24:1 *And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah.*

<u>24:1-4</u> – Census Demanded

Vs. 1 – *"And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel"* – The issue involved here was the Lord's anger at the people of Israel as a whole. We are not told why He was angry with the nation at that time. Perhaps it was due to their foolish turn against David, God's anointed choice, in their joining with Absalom and later with Sheba. In that He was angry *"again"* with them may refer back to their trouble in chapter 21, when the Lord brought years of famine upon them for Saul's violence against the Gibeonites.

"And He moved David against them" – The parallel passage in I Chronicles 21:1 tells us that it was Satan who *"provoked David to number Israel"*. But the two statements are not really contradictory. Was it Satan who moved David? Yes, he was the actual instigator of the spirit of faithless fear behind David's action. Was it God who moved David? Yes, He unlocked the door, granting Satan freedom to proceed. In the same way it was God allowing

Satan's actions against Job in order to fulfil His purpose in showcasing the character of His servant. In the same way it was an *"evil spirit from God"* sent to torment King Saul (I Sam. 16:14; 18:10). God is not a tempter. He does not move people to sin, for *"God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man"* (James 1:13). But He is willing to unleash the tempter's evil work toward His own righteous purposes. So the two accounts are two sides of the same motivation.

David's sin in this circumstance was not in the actual numbering of the people. Making a count of people, and even of men eligible for war, was a common practice. Remember how we saw David do the same when preparing for battle against Absalom in 18:1, without suffering any penalties for evil. In fact it was the Lord instructing Moses and Aaron to number *"all that are able to go forth to war in Israel"* in Numbers 1:2-3. Joshua knew the actual figures per tribe that he brought to the battle for the land as they crossed the Jordan (Num. 26). So there was something else involved here with David. It seems David's sin was in turning from his trust in God for victory, resting rather in earthly strength or numbers or military power. Even Joab, with the other military leaders, could see the folly of David's misplaced trust (vs. 3-4). See well how a perfectly

24:2 *For the king said to Joab the captain of the host, which was with him, Go now through all the tribes of Israel, from Dan even to Beersheba, and number ye the people, that I may know the number of the people.*

24:3 *And Joab said unto the king, Now the LORD thy God add unto the people, how many soever they be, an hundredfold, and that the eyes of my lord the king may see it: but why doth my lord the king delight in this thing?*

24:4 *Notwithstanding the king's word prevailed against Joab, and against the captains of the host. And Joab and the captains of the host went out from the presence of the king, to number the people of Israel.*

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acceptable practice can become sin when done in the wrong spirit. It is always a matter of the heart motivations.

Vs. 3 – *"Now the LORD thy God add unto the people"* – I always have misgivings about a man who says *"the LORD <u>thy</u> God".* As Saul talked to Samuel of *"thy God"* (I Sam. 15:30). Why could Joab not speak of "the LORD <u>my</u> God". Joab seems to be repeating something of the blessing of Moses on Israel in Deuteronomy 1:11, *"The LORD God of your fathers make you a thousand times so many more as ye are, and bless you, as He hath promised you!"*

Vs. 4 – *"Notwithstanding the king's word prevailed against Joab"* – To David's shame he would not listen to sound counsel, partly perhaps because it was coming from Joab. Joab would have been wise to see his own fault here as well. Had he proven a more loyal subject prior to this event David might have been more inclined to hear his good counsel

24:5 *And they passed over Jordan, and pitched in Aroer, on the right side of the city that lieth in the midst of the river of Gad, and toward Jazer:*
24:6 *Then they came to Gilead, and to the land of Tahtimhodshi; and they came to Danjaan, and about to Zidon,*

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now. Oh how our godless choices and failures have such power to rob us of a world of opportunity, and to bleed our words of believability.

See in David here how even the most saintly of saints can fall to stubborn rebellion against the Lord and those speaking wisdom. It should have been warning enough to David that the whole of his military leadership was advising against him. This at least should have turned him to greater caution and sincere prayer asking the Lord's counsel. Any resistance we face should at least be a reminder to pray. Had David been walking in dependence upon God he would never have fallen to this.

There is warning here. We never outgrow the danger of falling to stubborn rebellion against our God, until the day we stand glorified in His presence. Until that day we have never "arrived" at any kind of plateau or place of safety, no longer subject to the temptation to deny God the glory due unto His name.

24:5-9 – Census Conducted

24:7 *And came to the strong hold of Tyre, and to all the cities of the Hivites, and of the Canaanites: and they went out to the south of Judah, even to Beersheba.*
24:8 *So when they had gone through all the land, they came to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days.*

Vs. 5-7 – They crossed over the Jordan and began at the extreme south of the tribal area of Reuben, just north of the Arnon River. They moved north along the trans-Jordan side. They then turned west into the area of Dan and began working their way south to Beersheba, the southernmost area of the western portion of the land.

Vs. 8 – The task took nearly 10 months to complete. And all of those many months were David's opportunity to repent of the sin of his misplaced trust. But only later did he finally turn. Would God's judgment have been avoided had David called this off before the task was complete? Though David was a man who as a rule walked with God throughout the years of his life, there were just too many months of his life, as these 10, when he lived out of fellowship with his God. Yet see again how God is ever gracious to give time to turn back to Him.

Vs. 9 – They reported 800,000 men in Israel and 500,000 in Judah. Did you notice that? It was Israel and Judah. Why maintain the line of division

24:9 *And Joab gave up the sum of the number of the people unto the king: and there were in Israel eight hundred thousand valiant men that drew the sword; and the men of Judah were five hundred thousand men.*
24:10 *And David's heart smote him after that he had numbered the people. And David said unto the LORD, I have sinned greatly in that I have done: and now, I beseech thee, O LORD, take away the iniquity of thy servant; for I have done very foolishly.*
24:11 *For when David was up in the morning, the word of the LORD came unto the prophet Gad, David's seer, saying,*

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between north and south in this report? (vs. 1) Odd how that national fault line had become a fixed reality in their thinking.

<u>24:10-14</u> – Confession and Consequences

Vs. 10 – *"And David's heart smote him"* – David characteristically came at last to recognize his sin, confessing freely before the Lord *"I have sinned greatly…I have done very foolishly…I have done wickedly"* (vs. 17). Here is true confession, true agreement with the Lord concerning the ugliness of his sin. This was no heartless, "Oops! Sorry Lord! My bad." David's words are strong! His response here was comparable to the penitent publican beating his breast and crying out to God his deep sense of shame. Maybe it was through the Lord pressing strong conviction upon David's heart in the quiet hours of the night (*"when David was up"*). Perhaps it was the result of his reading the Word of God. Or maybe it was only with Gad's confrontation that David at last turned, as with Nathan many

years before. The *"For"* of vs. 11 seems to connect Gad's ministry with David's confession in vs. 10. The crucial point is that David heard and responded appropriately and wholly to his God. Again it is a reminder of David's strength in his sensitive heart toward the Lord. It is all the difference. David was one of history's truly great ones before God and men. Not because he was a faultless specimen, but because for the most part he was willing to hear and repent when fair reproof arrived.

Vs. 12 – Why did the Lord give David a choice? And why three options? Are there other examples of such an offer of options in the Bible?

See again how the Lord ever holds in reserve the potential for great tragedies, of famine, foe, and infirmity, of menacing microbes, all right at His fingertips, ready to bring into action at any moment. Compare the enemies the Lord held in reserve and then brought into action with Solomon's fall (II Ki. 11). We are all so utterly dependent upon Him at every moment, whether we wish to be or not, either to bring blessing or to withhold cursing or trouble.

24:13 *So Gad came to David, and told him, and said unto him, Shall seven years of famine come unto thee in thy land? or wilt thou flee three months before thine enemies, while they pursue thee? or that there be three days' pestilence in thy land? now advise, and see what answer I shall return to him that sent me.*
24:14 *And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let us fall now into the hand of the LORD; for his mercies are great: and let me not fall into the hand of man.*
24:15 *So the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan even to Beersheba seventy thousand men.*

Vs. 13 – I Chronicles 21:12 gives this first option as *three* years of famine. The LXX makes the change here in II Samuel, and so does the NIV. But the Hebrew text here says *"seven"* [shĕvă], and there is no mistaking it for "three" [shälōsh]. Three might seem to make more sense with the other options involving three, yet no translator has the right to deny the text.

Vs. 14 – Knowing the merciless nature of men, David cast himself upon the Lord's mercy, choosing *"the sword of the LORD"* over the sword of men (I Chron. 21:12). So David never actually chose an option among the three. He only opted out of the 2nd option.

<u>24:15-17</u> – People Plagued

Vs. 15 – The Lord then went with the 3rd option of 3 days of pestilence, and He began immediately, that morning it seems. Again, no need for time to

develop the culture of noxious microbes. And over 5% was quickly clipped from the count of men so important to David.

Note the comparisons between this situation and David's earlier fall to adultery and murder;

Bathsheba/Uriah	Census
Sin – Fleshly lust and treachery in cover-up	Sin - Failure to trust the Lord alone for victory
Sin of the flesh	Sin of the spirit – A matter of full trust
Sin of passion	Sin of pride (arm-of-flesh, self-sufficiency)
Acted on impulse	Acted in deliberate resolve over several months
Confessed he sinned (12:13)	Confessed he sinned *"greatly… very foolishly"*
Uriah and child died	70,000 died!

It seems stubborn sins of the spirit are the more

24:16 *And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, It is enough: stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD was by the threshingplace of Araunah the Jebusite.*

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serious crime before God, bringing a greater judgment than sins of the flesh? We might tend to see sins of the flesh as most serious, tending perhaps to overlook sins of the spirit such as the prideful self-sufficiency and stubbornness and neglect of God evident in David here. But there is great warning here of the danger of both sins of flesh and spirit. In *"perfecting holiness in the fear of God"* we must *"cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh* ***and*** *spirit"* (II Cor. 7:1).

Consider as well the warning that the greater the responsibility and awareness, the greater the consequence. Because David was in a place of leadership, with long experience and awareness of the Lord and His truth, he should surely have known better. As a result so many thousands were touched by his choice to sin. The principle traces back to Adam, who as the head of the race plunged all of humanity into the tragedy of sin and its consequences through his choice for rebellion.

Vs. 16 – Now we discover it was an angel behind the pestilence or plague, spreading disease and death

to the people. Again see the great tragedies we face as God working through His angels, both for blessing and cursing. Even so the Black Death of bubonic plague in Europe and Asia in the 1300's, when a quarter of Europe died? Even so the HIV/AIDS epidemic? We tend to think such things quite random rather than direct acts of God administered through His angels.

After touching all points of the land with this plague the angel of the Lord at last turned to Jerusalem. And as the death angel stretched out his hand to bring the same deadly plague on the city of David as well, it was at that point that the Lord turned from His purpose, calling off His destroyer.

It is significant that God stopped judgment upon man at that particular site, and made substitution there with David's sacrifice. It was the pointing finger to what He would later do through Jesus Christ at that site. For this was in fact the same mount where Abraham nearly offered Isaac (Gen. 22:2), that place where the Lord provided a ram as a substitute for Abraham's cherished son. It was the very same mount on which the Father *would* sacrifice his own beloved Son for the sin of the world.

24:17 *And David spake unto the LORD when he saw the angel that smote the people, and said, Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house.*

Vs. 17 – None were actually innocent. All were/are worthy of death.

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Intriguing Comparisons

Compare the hand of this angel stretched out over Jerusalem to destroy it, with the hand of Abraham stretched out to kill his beloved son Isaac so many centuries before (Gen. 22:10).

Compare the Lord relenting here to His similar turn there in Genesis 22, when He stopped Abraham from killing Isaac at the very same place. Stopped in the same way and place.

Compare David's sacrifice at this threshing floor with the ram the Lord provided in the place of Abraham's son on this same mount (Gen. 22:13). See the principle of substitution so strongly associated with that particular point on the map. See how the Lord relenting from His destroying purpose at this special place pre-figures His relenting from His purpose to destroy condemned
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24:18 *And Gad came that day to David, and said unto him, Go up, rear an altar unto the LORD in the threshingfloor of Araunah the Jebusite.*
24:19 *And David, according to the saying of Gad, went up as the LORD commanded.*
24:20 *And Araunah looked, and saw the king and his servants coming on toward him: and Araunah went out, and bowed himself before the king on his face upon the ground.*

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mankind at this place, again bringing a sacrifice in man's place. So the same place where both Abraham and the angel were stopped from striking their deadly blow is in fact the place where God's deadly blow against condemned mankind would be stopped through the sacrifice and substitution of Christ. And this because God the Father would *not* hold back His hand in striking death upon His own Son in our place. It is that one place upon earth that has become the place of sacrifice or substitution. Marked so by God, long before Jesus came. That place where the sin of man would be dealt with through Christ's death, and his redemption won, and God therefore satisfied.

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24:18-25 – Sacrifice Made

Vs. 18 – Sin put right through repentance and sacrifice – David's sin caused it and David's sorrow and sacrifice stopped it. Did the people ever know of David's part in their great suffering?
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24:21 *And Araunah said, Wherefore is my lord the king come to his servant? And David said, To buy the threshingfloor of thee, to build an altar unto the LORD, that the plague may be stayed from the people.*

24:22 *And Araunah said unto David, Let my lord the king take and offer up what seemeth good unto him: behold, here be oxen for burnt sacrifice, and threshing instruments and other instruments of the oxen for wood.*

24:23 *All these things did Araunah, as a king, give unto the king. And Araunah said unto the king, The LORD thy God accept thee.*

Vs. 22-23 – Araunah's response was a marvel in graciousness. He *"as a king"* (?) would gladly give all, without hesitation. In the II Chronicles 21 account Araunah's (Ornan's) purpose to freely give the threshing floor to David is related more clearly (vs. 23). But David would not have it. He was resolved to give sacrificially to the Lord. It must hurt, it must cost, it must be according to his own personal sacrifice or loss. He would not give to the Lord the sacrifice of another man. He must make the sacrifice his own.

The principle of personal sacrifice for the Lord as an expression of worship is a crucial Christian lesson. God sees and understands just how much it hurts to give what we give for Him. He marvels and rejoices in the widow's mite given in sacrifice, but not in the rich man's mite, dropped with a tinkle into the pot. He rejoices in sacrifice that is indeed *sacrifice*, that gives to Him what we might dearly wish to keep for ourselves. The Lord has always despised cheap, easy religion. For He would have

24:24 *And the king said unto Araunah, Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing. So David bought the threshingfloor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver.*

24:25 *And David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings. So the LORD was intreated for the land, and the plague was stayed from Israel.*

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only our best. Compare Malachi 1:8.

Consider how this principle of personal sacrifice for the Lord is behind all honesty as well. When I am quite sure I could get away with some cheat, but refuse to do so out of devotion to the All-Seeing One, this is a form of sacrifice and worship. And this the Lord sees and understands for the devotion to Him that it is, and He blesses accordingly.

This incident was necessary in preparation for the coming of David's son Solomon, coming right up. For he would soon build the temple on this very site of sacrifice (I Chron. 22:1; II Chron. 3:1). The place of this threshing floor was in fact Mount Moriah, the mount just to the north of the Jerusalem of David's day on the southern mount of Zion.

See how deftly the Lord is able to turn curse to blessing, to turn a cause of judgment to an occasion for true worship, establishing through this great tragedy the place of the coming temple. *"All things* [whether dark or bright, cursing or blessing] *work*

together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according His purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

Vs. 24 – It seems David paid 50 shekels of silver for the threshing floor and oxen. But we are told in I Chronicles 21:25 that he paid 600 shekels of gold. This was perhaps the fuller price for the larger property that included the threshing floor, all of which would eventually become the temple mount.

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What a wonderful study is this book of II Samuel, of a man walking with God; not walking in perfection, often stumbling morally and spiritually in fact, not earning salvation, but living it out by faith through the press of difficult circumstances. Here is the way of a godly man showing the reality of God's genuine work in his soul through a readiness to respond for God in repentance, love and service.

I am so impressed with the degree to which David faltered and failed throughout this biblical account of his life. Yet we must not forget the marvellously contrasting record of his heart's devotion in the Psalms. These express his passion and purpose to find God's pleasure, to live in His bosom. We would not be wise to think less of these psalms of praise because of the faltering psalmist, for again *"the*
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sweet psalmist of Israel" has affirmed that *"the Spirit of the Lord spake by me, and His word was in my tongue"* (II Sam. 23:1-2). It was God Himself speaking through David. Such a glorious record of the Lord of glory working in and through a sinful soul saved by His grace, cleansing that seeking soul, shaping him, waiting for him, calling him back, fitting him again for service. Oh the amazing grace and patience of the Lord!

It is never too late in this life to find a right relation to God by faith in Jesus Christ. Never too late to call upon God in sincere repentance and faith. He stands ready to help you put your sin behind you and walk with Him in fruitful service.

God's apostle said it clearly in the New Testament book of Acts (4:12). Speaking of Jesus there, Peter proclaimed;

"Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved".